

CONTENTS

Foreword	9
Acknowledgments	11
1. Getting the Most Out of Life	13
2. Making Wise Choices	17
3. New Testament Discipleship	27
4. Paying the Price	35
5. The Critical Decision	43
6. Pursuing a Life of Purpose	53
7. Understanding Our Marching Orders	61
8. The Mission and the Command	69
9. The Power Source	75
10. Under His Control	83
11. The Path to Significance	93
12. A Plea for Perspective	105
Study Guide	113

1

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF LIFE

Monuments to Materialism vs. Prominence of Christ



Darryl Hicks is thirty-five years old. He is respected as a loving husband and father, a faithful church member, and a successful and honest attorney.

At sixteen he invited Christ into his life and began to grow immediately. He developed a consistent spiritual discipline, spending an hour each morning in Bible study and prayer. He started praying fervently for his family and his non-Christian friends. He consistently made time to go out with the church youth group every Thursday evening to share Christ with others.

Even in college, despite the demands of his challenging courses and a heavy work schedule, he made time for his personal spiritual nurture and ministry opportunities. He attended the weekly meetings of one of the Christian groups on his campus and went with them to several conferences throughout the year. He dropped out of college for a year after his mother died and he found himself needing time to research and pray about some questions he had, but he returned with his faith stronger than ever.

The guy was incredible. He even found time for a social life, and he and Margaret Bailey began dating occasionally in their sophomore year. By the end of their junior year things got serious between them. They became engaged and two weeks after graduation they were married.

Throughout law school Darryl continued his service for Christ. He and Margaret joined a local church in their commu-

nity and became very active. Darryl served as youth adviser and chairman of the outreach committee.

Things were “working” for Darryl and Margaret. During Darryl’s time at law school Margaret gave birth to the first of their three children, a boy. Financially, things were tight, but as a couple they were very happy.

Darryl graduated from law school with honors, passed the bar examination the first time around, and was recruited by a prestigious law firm. Because of his brilliance and diligence, Darryl became successful in a relatively short time. In fact, after only four years with the firm he was asked to become a partner. Finally, the years of sacrifice and hard work were paying off, and in a big way.

The success, in a strange way, was bittersweet. It is true they were well off financially—they bought a beautiful, spacious home; they owned two late model cars; they even bought a condominium in the mountains. But Darryl often would be in the office by seven in the morning, and he seldom left before seven or eight in the evening, including some Saturdays. With three children, the endless pressures of his law practice, his civic commitment, and the growing need to spend quality time with Margaret, Darryl began to feel squeezed. He felt it particularly strongly in his spiritual life. In the past he had known a refreshing sense of joy and an endless supply of spiritual energy. Now, where there was once a burning desire to obey God and minister to the needs of others, he experienced dryness. His was a cold, mechanical Christianity.

One evening, Darryl and Margaret invited their best friends, a couple from their church, over for dinner. As their time together drew to a close, Darryl told of his spiritual struggle. “I am not experiencing the same passionate commitment to Christ that I once had. Although I still read my Bible and pray,” he said, “I have lost my sense of mission and purpose as a Christian.”

One friend asked, “Why do you think that has happened?”

“I don’t know; I guess I’m just consumed by all the demands of the present.”

As their friends were leaving, Darryl commented, “Although I’m thankful for my success, I know there is much more to life. I know God wants much more from me.”

SPIRITUAL APATHY

I wish I could say Darryl's struggle is unique. It is not. He suffers from the same spiritual paralysis that grips much of contemporary Christianity. Many wonderful people outwardly have a fine Christian life. They go to church every Sunday, perhaps even attend prayer meetings, give their money to the church and other Christian ministries, have nice families, read their Bibles, and pray. Yet, underneath all the Christian activity there is a coldness and, at times, a confusion about the place and prominence of Jesus Christ in their inner lives.

It is a painfully sad and all too familiar reality that the pressures of life and the apathetic materialism in our society have caused the world to be more "salt and light" to us than we have been to the world. I deeply believe that these are the most threatening times in terms of impact for the cause of Christ that have been known in the history of the church. Admittedly, that is a strong statement. Take a look around you, though. Even as I write these words several of our prominent Christian leaders have had to leave the ministry in disgrace. Others have preached a gospel of self-indulgence and personal prosperity, and they have led thousands down this trail of perverted Christianity. No wonder some of their "ministries" have been plagued with financial impropriety, donor scams, and a legacy of monuments to materialism, to say nothing of the moral offenses—all done in the name of the Lord!

What about the crucified life?

What about being conformed to the sufferings of Christ? No, you can't have your cake and eat it too. That spells worldliness in the truest sense. We may be on our way to becoming the apathetic students of Satan's discipleship program.

And that's the point.

The self-centered apathy of our culture has produced a compromised Christianity, which has in turn produced a directionless Christianity—a Christianity that only responds, but does not initiate.

As we look at Darryl, and as we examine our own lives, we see clearly how compromise (which is usually subtle) will eventually produce fruitlessness. Darryl represents a Christianity that

is in the vicinity, but not really at the right location.

CHRISTIAN ASSUMPTIONS

A few years ago my wife, Karen, and I were invited to a friend's house for dinner. We had been to their home before and I was familiar with the area, so I thought there would be no problem finding the house. Wrong! We drove around for more than an hour, frustrated because we knew we were only a few blocks away, but we couldn't find the place. Not only were we lost, but I also had to deal with Karen's I-told-you-so's. This experience is a reminder that assumptions can get a person into trouble. A quick phone call before we left the house would have saved us from all that hassle and stress.

Assumptions have gotten many Christians into spiritual hot water. Jesus Christ came to give us an abundant, fruitful Christianity, filled with specific direction and purpose. Although we have a general sense of direction, many of us have assumed either that somehow we can work out the details or that everything will fall into place. We fail to realize that we do not live in a favorable or even a neutral environment. Every day our commitment to Christ is assaulted by the world, the flesh, or the devil. Therefore, our Christianity must take the *offensive*—it must be *intentional*.

I am convinced that many of us have a general sense of purpose, but, in terms of the internal direction of our lives and the peace that comes from submitting our wills to God's, we're confused. We suffer from the same problem Darryl has. We outwardly conform to what we say we believe, but inwardly there is coldness. We privately confess that we know God wants and deserves more from us.

The critical question is: How do we recapture our sense of purpose? That's what this book is about. I am a fellow pilgrim with you in the struggle to maintain my sense of mission and direction in the Christian life. I want to assure you that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will help us to see clearly the direction in which we need to go. He will reveal to us the critical ingredients needed to recover a sense of freshness in our Christian lives and, thus, a sense of mission.