

The Starter Life

The Right Perspective Can Make All the Difference

Recently my wife and I went through the tiring process of purchasing a new home. We looked at a thousand homes and drove a million miles—or so it seemed. If you've ever purchased a pre-existing home (as opposed to building one), you understand the frustration in finding the perfect house. There is always something not quite right. Unless one can afford to build the exact house he wants in the exact location of his choosing, purchasing an existing home can be quite frustrating—that is until my wife had an epiphany. She said, "You know, we're just going to have to realize this house will likely be a starter house." Right, a starter house! We don't have to live in it forever. In fact, we can just plan to live in it for a few years—gain some experience on the ins and outs of home buying and home ownership—then once we've outgrown it we can sell it (hopefully for a profit) and move into something more long term. Once we came to that conclusion we were more than willing to settle for something less than ideal and felt completely at peace about it.



In many ways our life here on earth can be much the same—frustrating. Life doesn't always turn out the way we had hoped, dreams left unfulfilled, goals left unaccomplished, fond memories replaced with regrets. We struggle with the ravages of age, disease or debilitating injuries. We carry around the grief of loved ones lost to death far too soon or the guilt of children who have wandered from the faith. In the end, living life in a fallen world can often make it difficult to get out of bed in the morning, to make it through another day.

But Jesus never promised life would be easy if we followed him. Rather, he promised us just the opposite. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NIV). This is evidenced by the fact that—according to Church tradition—all the apostles (John excepted) were martyred for their faith. James was stoned to death;

Paul was beheaded; Peter was crucified upside down. Throughout Church history many of the famous saints suffered from unbearable medical conditions. Yet they managed to maintain their faith, pursue their calling, and exude a joy that was a mystery to the watching world. How was this possible? They understood one simple truth—*this life is not an end in itself, but a means to an end.*

In his letter to the church in Rome, the apostle Paul wrote: "And we know that God works all things together for good for those who love him, for those who are called according to his purpose" (8:28). There is great comfort in knowing that for those who love God, for those who have been called according to His purpose, He works all things for their good. Nothing befalls the believer by chance. Nothing is the result of mere circumstance. Even the consequences of our own sinful actions have been orchestrated by God so that we can say with confidence, "I am where I am today because God has placed me here for a purpose." What purpose might that be? Unquestionably there is always some temporal purpose for God having placed us in our current situation. Sometimes these purposes are revealed to us in this life—as was the case with Joseph—while other times they remain a mystery—as was true of Job. However, the eternal purpose of our current state of affairs has been revealed. Notice the following verse: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (ESV, emphasis mine). The good that God is working in the lives of believers is designed to transform us into the image of his Son. Paul then rounds out this wonderful passage in the following verse: "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified *he also glorified*" (emphasis mine). The final glorification of believers is so certain in the mind of God, Paul writes it in the past tense.

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In his second letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle wrote these words of encouragement: "So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal" (4:16-18 ESV). Whatever we are going through in life—whatever difficulties, sufferings or disappointments—they are designed by God to do one thing—*prepare us for the next life.* We must not be near-sighted. We need to learn to look beyond the here and now.

Peter uses similar language in his effort to encourage a church that was being persecuted for her faith: "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:6-7 ESV, italics mine). Peter eloquently reminds us that all we experience in this life, all that God permits us to endure is designed with an eye toward the "revelation of Jesus Christ."

In the end, it would do us well to remember that this life is just a starter life. This life was never designed to be permanent but a training ground to prepare us for next one. This is not to say we shouldn't take seriously our role as salt and light in this world nor that we shouldn't take seriously God's command to "pursue holiness" (Heb 12:14). But as we wrestle with demons and angels, as we fumble our way toward the Celestial City, we must always keep before us that this life is not an end in itself but a means to an end. That end being the glorious presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ where we will worship at his throne for all eternity.

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