

THE GOOD NEWS

OF ETERNAL LIFE





When baseball great Ted Williams died in July of 2002, instead of cremation or internment of his body his son John-Henry chose to have him cryogenically frozen in the hopes that one day there would be technology available to resuscitate him.¹ Beyond the ethical questions one might ask, pragmatically speaking, who would want to come back as an eighty-three-year-old man?

James Taylor echoes this same sentiment in his song “Frozen Man.” It is the story of a character named William James McPhee who was born in 1843 and drowned in the ocean. He awoke to find himself miraculously brought back to life. Unfortunately, he was still the same man he was when he died.

At one point the character says,

*“It took a lot of money
to start my heart
To peg my leg and
to buy my eye
The newspapers call me
State of the art
And the children,
when they see me, cry.”*

I don’t think anyone would want to come back as a broken version of themselves. It would be like a modern-day version of Mary Shelly’s Frankenstein. At the same time no one wants to die. All of us long for immortality; prophets, philosophers and poets have weighed in for millennia on the search for eternal life.

Shakespeare said of this yearning to escape the bonds of death while at the same time recognizing the sobering reality of our mortality:

“By medicine life may be prolonged, yet death will seize the doctor too.”

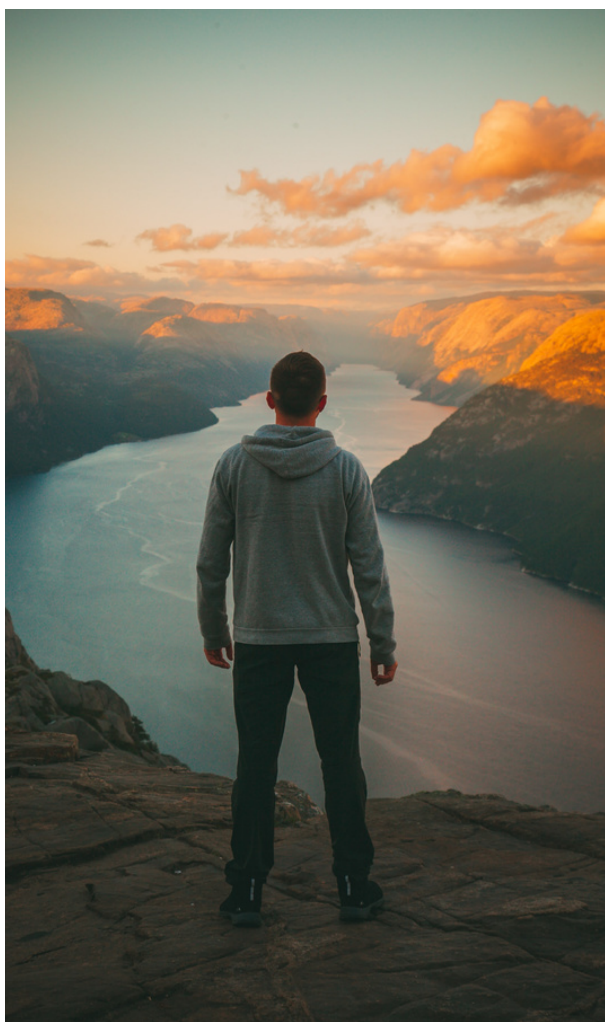
Everyone has seen this played out in front of us. Some of the healthiest people you have known have succumbed to disease and death. Even the people that have the latest research about longevity can't escape the inevitability of their demise. Death is like a ravenous, charging wolf that will one day overtake us all.

With all of this in mind, why do we even care about living forever? Wouldn't it be easier just to exist as if this life is all that we have? The Epicureans, a famous group of ancient Greek philosophers, seem to endorse this perspective in their famous dictum, *“Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.”*



"...WHY DO WE EVEN CARE ABOUT LIVING FOREVER?"

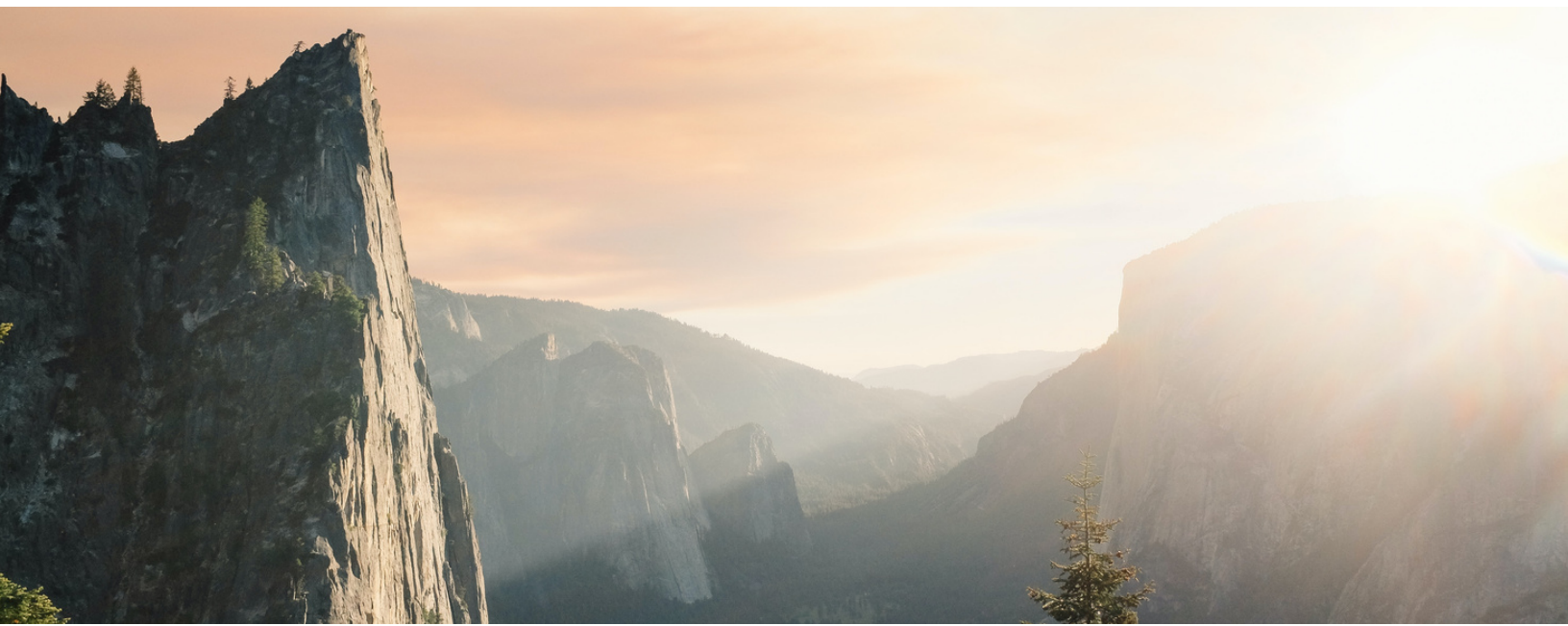
This sounds a lot like college spring break in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida! Such living might seem to be initially freeing but we have too many examples of people who have made their lives into colossal train wrecks and have done incredible damage to others by following some version of this self-absorption. But whatever means we use to numb us to this deep longing, the majority of people you run into have sincere questions about a life that could never end.



So pervasive is this desire that the search for immortality is no longer just the stuff of religious dogma, philosophical meanderings or pleasure-seeking pursuits. Science is now moving beyond basic gerontology, which essentially focuses on obtaining quality of life as we age.

This new wave of research involves serious discussions about reversing the aging process and even cheating death. Ponce de Leon would be proud. In fact, more than a few gerontological prognosticators think that with the integration of Artificial Intelligence, we could see within twenty years people living until one hundred and eighty years of age. That sounds crazy, I know, but people are working hard at prolonging life.

Not only is the field of life-extension fascinating science, it is also big business. Entrepreneurs are getting involved. Such famous billionaires as Peter Thiel and Jeff Bezos are investing in research firms that are looking intently into the field of longevity. Some financial analysts see the market value of this new arena of research at around fifty billion annually. The hope to live forever touches every aspect of our society.



THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

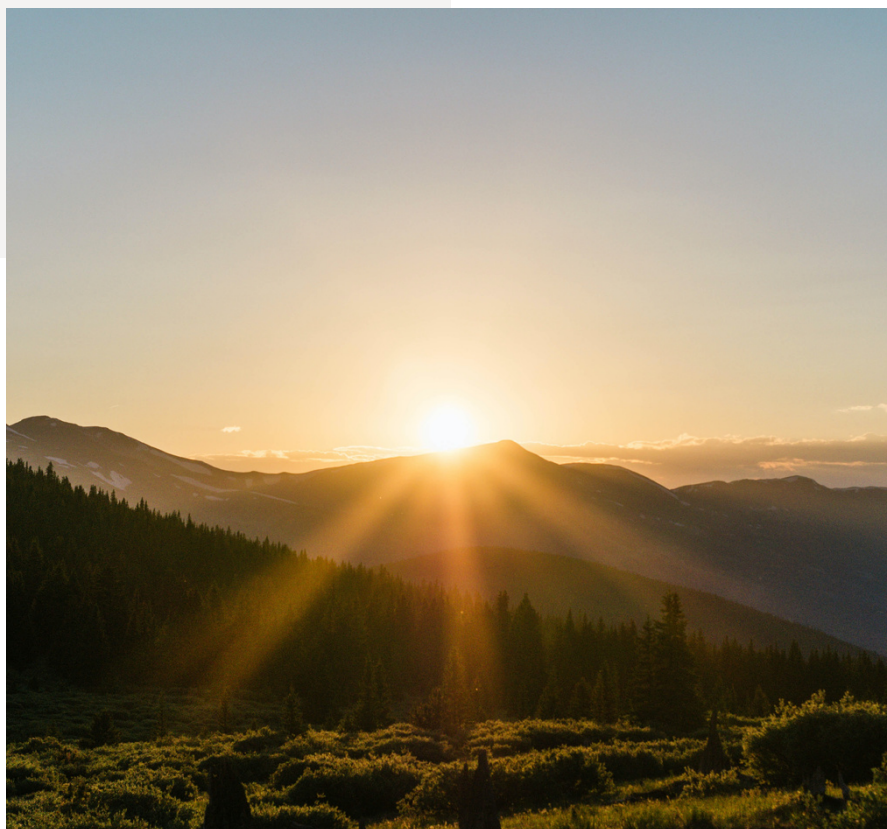
Whether you are a cynical scientist, a hard-nosed capitalist, a carefree hedonist, or a normal, everyday citizen you have thought about immortality some time in your life. But where does this desire come from? Solomon, whom some believe to be one of the wisest men who ever lived, spoke about these kinds of issues.

Some 2,900 years ago he said this in Ecclesiastes 3:11

“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”

Solomon is saying (among other things) that life has an intrinsic beauty to it that can be observed. It is like watching a beautiful flower start as a seed, expand its roots, push through the soil as a seedling, swell into a larger plant, and eventually blossom. Anything that is beautiful takes time to develop. You can see how something moves from normal and perhaps even initially unattractive to something exquisite. This reality is all around us.

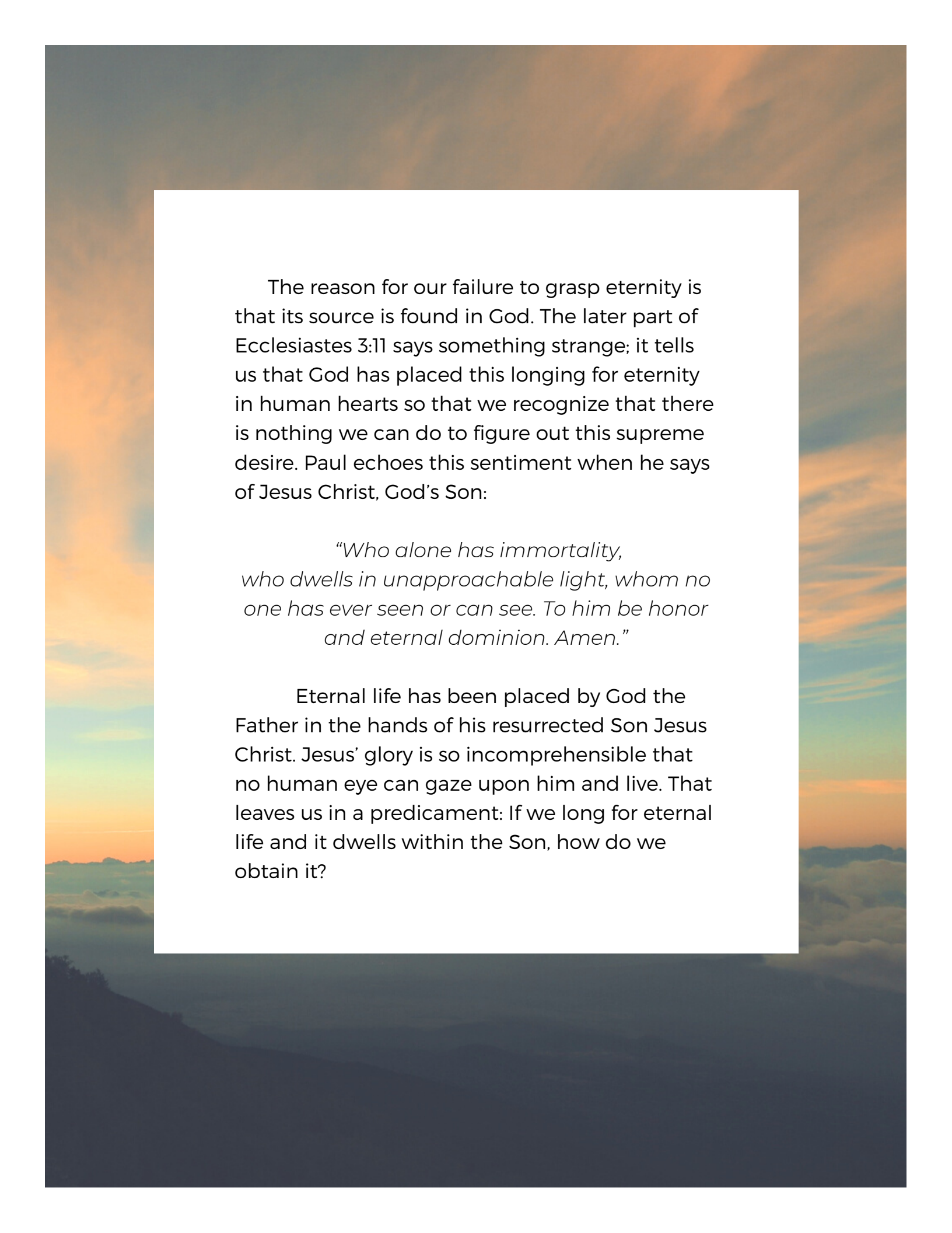
For instance, a painting is a blur of colors before it takes on outlines to represent something that is pleasing to the sight. A few pieces of wood seems rough and unrecognizable until it is shaped into a valuable piece of furniture. A gangly teenaged-girl is awkward at the end of one school year and is transformed into a radiant beauty by the start of the next. In other words, every moment of transcendent pleasure or awe-inducing inspiration is not abnormal to the human experience, but common, and at some level, ordinary.



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The problem is that beauty is enjoyed for a short time before it fades. Flowers wilt, pieces of art lose their luster and even the most beautiful of women get wrinkles and gray hair. But this does not lessen our love of beauty. The appreciation of beauty in all of its manifestations awakens a deeper longing for something that lasts. Solomon explains this as essentially an imbedded desire in the human soul for eternity.

Human being's passion for lasting beauty has its source in God. Mankind cannot manufacture what only God can offer. We may try with cutting-edge medical treatments, cosmetic camouflage, various surgical interventions, strict diet regimens, religious asceticism, and unrelenting exercise routines, all to no avail. We all long for something that is beyond our reach.



The reason for our failure to grasp eternity is that its source is found in God. The later part of Ecclesiastes 3:11 says something strange; it tells us that God has placed this longing for eternity in human hearts so that we recognize that there is nothing we can do to figure out this supreme desire. Paul echoes this sentiment when he says of Jesus Christ, God's Son:

*“Who alone has immortality,
who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no
one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor
and eternal dominion. Amen.”*

Eternal life has been placed by God the Father in the hands of his resurrected Son Jesus Christ. Jesus' glory is so incomprehensible that no human eye can gaze upon him and live. That leaves us in a predicament: If we long for eternal life and it dwells within the Son, how do we obtain it?



THE WAY OF ETERNAL LIFE

The good news of eternal life is that it is available to anyone who believes in the Son of God, trusting in him for their salvation. The most famous verse in the Bible is found in John 3:16:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that that whoever believes in him will never perish but have eternal life.”

God loves everyone beyond imagination and wants humanity to repent of their sins, believe in his Son and experience eternal life. But beyond popular misconceptions, eternal life is not just about heaven. It indeed includes life that never perishes, but it involves more than that.

For example, to possess eternal life means that I begin to experience in the present tense the blessings of knowing Christ. In John 17:3, Jesus prays a prayer right before his crucifixion in the presence of his disciples where he reminds them,

“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

Eternal life begins the very moment you trust Christ as your Savior and Lord. It is definitively marked by the foundational experience of coming to know and therefore follow the risen Jesus. This is not about a transactional event through which you believe and wait on something to occur for you in the distant future. It is a totally new way of life whereby you feel, think and act differently as a result of encountering and believing in Jesus.

Jesus taught this in a discussion with a woman in the heat of a Middle-Eastern day. He requested a drink of water. The conversation then moved from there to ethnic differences and religious beliefs. At one point she wanted to debate with him about religious traditions, and he told her,

“EVERYONE WHO DRINKS THIS WATER WILL BE THIRSTY AGAIN, BUT WHOEVER DRINKS THE WATER I GIVE THEM WILL NEVER THIRST. INDEED, THE WATER I GIVE THEM WILL BECOME IN THEM A SPRING OF WATER WELLING UP TO ETERNAL LIFE.”



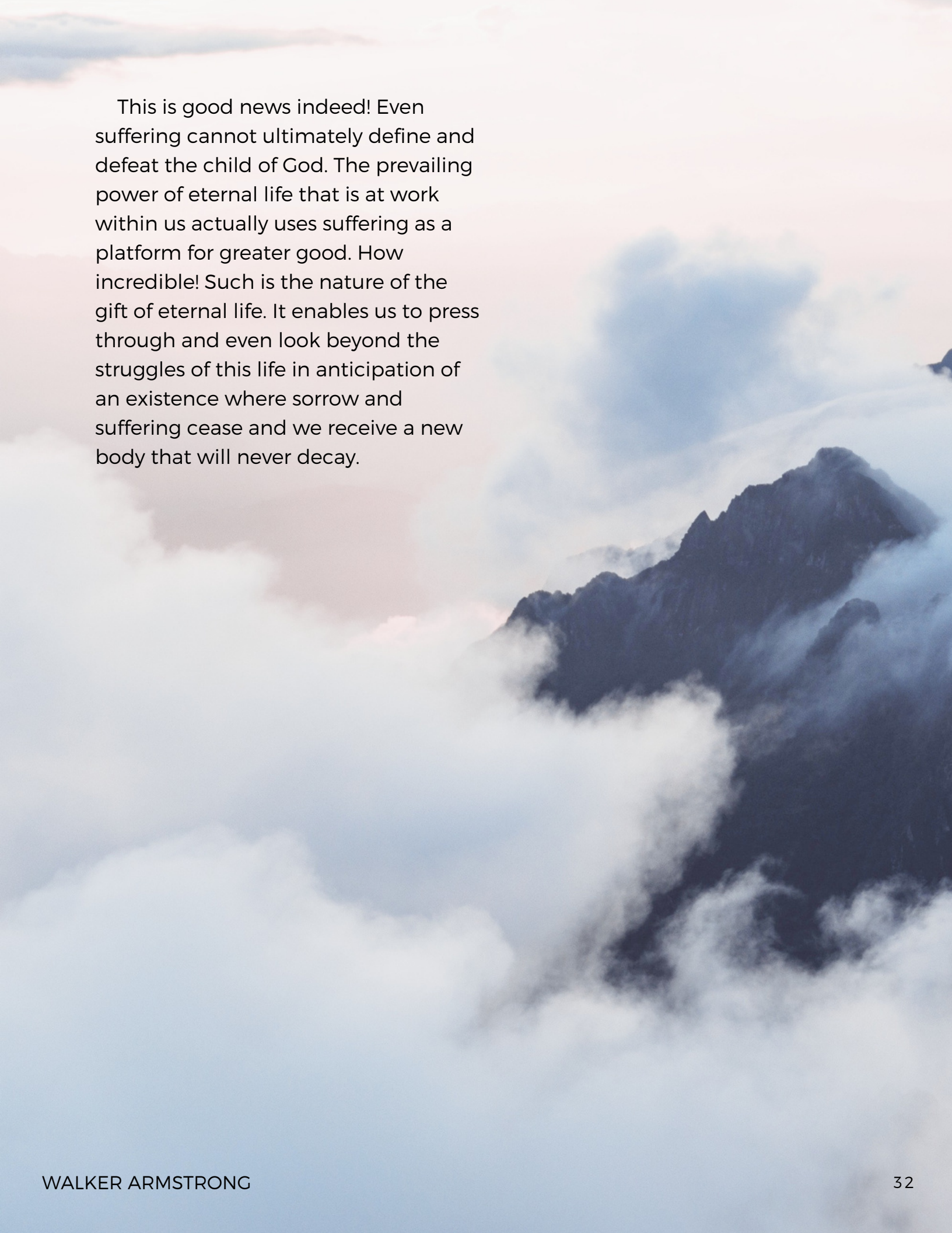
What was Jesus sharing with her? It is pretty amazing when you think about it. Imagine an artesian spring that comes out of the ground and issues forth the cleanest, coldest, best tasting water you have ever had. This, Jesus said, is a drop in the bucket compared to what he was offering. His water was living water. Or to put it another way, this is water that gives overflowing, unending life.

This means that the Christian life is not merely a set of beliefs that we embrace. It is in essence a vital, life-expanding reality. To know Christ is to walk in the power of his forgiveness, experience the depth of his peace, grow from the dispensation of his wisdom, and live a life full of purpose and meaning. It is to live in union with him, resulting in an upward-moving progression of life.

A final aspect of what it means to possess eternal life is that we can have courage and hope in suffering because we know that there is more that awaits us. Suffering is inevitable in this life. Since that is the case, how should we respond? We can become cynical and try our best to muddle through. We can, as mentioned earlier, simply live for now and hope that there is no final accounting for our life and how we spent it. Or we can operate with a deep assurance that the struggles we experience now pale in comparison to the glories we will experience in God's presence on that day.

Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

“THEREFORE, WE DO NOT LOSE HEART. THOUGH OUTWARDLY WE ARE WASTING AWAY, YET INWARDLY WE ARE BEING RENEWED DAY BY DAY. FOR OUR LIGHT AND MOMENTARY TROUBLES ARE ACHIEVING FOR US AN ETERNAL GLORY THAT FAR OUTWEIGHS THEM ALL. SO, WE FIX OUR EYES NOT ON WHAT IS SEEN, BUT ON WHAT IS UNSEEN, SINCE WHAT IS SEEN IS TEMPORARY, BUT WHAT IS UNSEEN IS ETERNAL.”



This is good news indeed! Even suffering cannot ultimately define and defeat the child of God. The prevailing power of eternal life that is at work within us actually uses suffering as a platform for greater good. How incredible! Such is the nature of the gift of eternal life. It enables us to press through and even look beyond the struggles of this life in anticipation of an existence where sorrow and suffering cease and we receive a new body that will never decay.



A SOBERING ALTERNATIVE

Taking all of these things into account, it is important to see that while all of the blessings of eternal life are the birthright of every child of God, it is equally important to note that there is an opposing reality. For those who don't repent of their sins and believe in Jesus, eternal judgment awaits.

This truth runs counter to what we would typically wish to be true. We would want God to grade on a curve, and in fact a very generous one at that. Most of us would like for God to take certain extenuating circumstances into account when it comes to our misdeeds and then to put more weight on the positive side of our good deeds ledger as compared to the wrongs we have done.

But this is not what Jesus taught. It is not about being bad or good but about whether we have fully placed our trust in Christ.


“FOR GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT TO SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH HIM. WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM IS NOT CONDEMNED, BUT WHOEVER DOES NOT BELIEVE STANDS CONDEMNED ALREADY BECAUSE THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED IN THE NAME OF GOD’S ONE AND ONLY SON.”

JOHN 3:17-18

That is the how Jesus describes the real choice at hand. But why would anyone reject the free gift of salvation? Why would we not want to live forever in a state of glory and blessing? Jesus has the answer in the next few verses:

“THIS IS THE VERDICT: LIGHT HAS COME INTO THE WORLD, BUT PEOPLE LOVED DARKNESS INSTEAD OF LIGHT BECAUSE THEIR DEEDS WERE EVIL. EVERYONE WHO DOES EVIL HATES THE LIGHT, AND WILL NOT COME INTO THE LIGHT FOR FEAR THAT THEIR DEEDS WILL BE EXPOSED.”

JOHN 3:19-20

A misty, golden-hour landscape with a path leading through a valley. The scene is bathed in a warm, yellowish light, suggesting sunrise or sunset. The path is a thin, winding line that disappears into the distance. The surrounding hills and trees are shrouded in a soft, ethereal mist, creating a sense of depth and mystery. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

We reject Jesus' offer of eternal life because we love darkness. We are more content to play in temporal mudholes than to dine at a heavenly banquet because we love the dirt so much. The Gospel not only shows us the splendor of the offer of eternal life, it also shows us the squalor of our own souls. It is that self-condemnation that drives us to the darkness. We claim to be happy in our sin, but run from the light when it shines on the depth of our depravity.

What is the result of this condemned state? It is both sobering and simple. For anyone who rejects Jesus there awaits eternal separation from God in a place of final judgment.

“THEN I SAW A GREAT WHITE THRONE AND HIM WHO WAS SEATED ON IT. THE EARTH AND THE HEAVENS FLED FROM HIS PRESENCE, AND THERE WAS NO PLACE FOR THEM. AND I SAW THE DEAD, GREAT AND SMALL, STANDING BEFORE THE THRONE, AND BOOKS WERE OPENED. ANOTHER BOOK WAS OPENED, WHICH IS THE BOOK OF LIFE. THE DEAD WERE JUDGED ACCORDING TO WHAT THEY HAD DONE AS RECORDED IN THE BOOKS. THE SEA GAVE UP THE DEAD THAT WERE IN IT, AND DEATH AND HADES GAVE UP THE DEAD THAT WERE IN THEM, AND EACH PERSON WAS JUDGED ACCORDING TO WHAT THEY HAD DONE. THEN DEATH AND HADES WERE THROWN INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE. THE LAKE OF FIRE IS THE SECOND DEATH. ANYONE WHOSE NAME WAS NOT FOUND WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF LIFE WAS THROWN INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE.

REVELATION 20:11-15

At the final judgement every human that has ever existed will appear before Jesus Christ and will have to give an account of their lives. The ultimate accounting will be whether or not people have received the gift of salvation and thus are recorded in the Book of Life. If they are not, then they will experience the second death or eternal punishment. The real question will not be about your religious affiliation, your accomplishments or even your moral discipline.

It will all rest on what you have done with Jesus.

What will be your answer?

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questions



1. What aspect of the story of Ted Williams intrigued or horrified you?
Why do you think you feel that way?

What is the source of eternal life?
How does the appreciation and longing for beauty reflect the deeper realities of eternal life?

2.



3. How do we obtain eternal life? Why is this good news?

How does the declaration that the alternative to eternal life is eternal death create great sobriety in your soul? What can you do about this?

4.



REFERENCES:

1. Sandomir, Richard . "BASEBALL; Williams Children Agree to Keep Their Father Frozen." NY Times. 21 Dec. 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/21/sports/baseball-williams-children-agree-to-keep-their-father-frozen.html>