

LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

390

Dearest grandchild,

Today's letter will deal with basic human needs. There is an old joke about the man who told his preacher that the sermon seemed like only five minutes . . . under water. This joke underscores our basic need for air. Some say that after only 3 minutes without breathing we start to suffer brain damage. The world record for holding your breath under water is 11 minutes and 35 seconds set by Stephane Mifsud in 2009. Usually we don't think about our need for air until we are deprived of it. After only a few minutes without air, however, it quickly dominates our thinking and becomes the most important thing in the world.

Our ability to survive without water varies. Strenuous exercise in the hot sun can cause you to sweat 1.5 liters of sweat in only an hour. In a comfortable environment, however, man can live a week or more without water. In 1979, an 18 year old Austrian named Andreas Mihavec was accidentally left in a holding cell for 18 days. He stayed alive by licking condensation off the walls of the prison.

Our ability to go without food also varies. Jesus, as you know, fasted for 40 days and 40 nights (Matt. 4:2). Mahatma Gandhi's longest fast was 21 days. The longest recorded hunger strike in history happened in 1920 when Irish political prisoner Terence MacSwiney starved himself for 74 days before dying.

Our need for sleep is also necessary. If we go too long without sleep our ability to think falls apart. Some credit a 17 year old high school student with a non-sleep record of 264 hours achieved at a science fair in 1965. If we do not sleep, however, ultimately we will die! At some point it is possible that sleep becomes our # 1 priority.

Everyone experiences physical needs. In order to survive we can plan ahead to meet these needs. We can survive under water if we prepare in advance and secure scuba diving equipment. It is common to carry a canteen when hiking, and a lunch pail when going to work. Since we spend approximately one third of our lives sleeping it is wise to invest in a good mattress. Preparing for earthly needs is obvious, but our preparation to meet God requires even more diligent thought. Jesus said: **“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (Jn. 6:29)**. Casual thinking does not produce conversion.

Take C. S. Lewis, for example. This brilliant man was born in Belfast in 1898 and spent the first part of his life as an atheist. When he concentrated his thinking on God he became a Christian and wrote his autobiography “Surprised by Joy”. Lewis passed away in 1963 but is remembered by many as the foremost defender of the Christian faith in his century. In the final analysis Lewis concluded that Jesus was more important than the air we breath, the water we drink, or the food we eat.

In his classic work “Mere Christianity” Lewis wrote: *“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must take your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else he was a madman or something worse.”*

Consequently, Lewis reasoned: “Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important”.

There is an old joke about the man who jumped off the top of the Empire State Building. He was quoted as he passed the 35th floor: *“Everything is all right so far!”* The humor of the joke is in its absurdity. The Empire State Building was completed in 1931 and at that time was the tallest building in the world. It has 102 floors and is 1,280 feet high. A person leaping from the top of that building will fall at the rate of 32 feet per second. This means that the whole trip will last only 40 seconds. The person who cannot think 40 seconds into the future is to be pitied!

Pontius Pilate was the governor of Judea when Jesus was on trial for his life. Since it was a custom to grant clemency to a prisoner at the Passover, Pilate asked the mob to choose between two prisoners, Barabbas or Jesus (Matt. 27:17). The word “Bar” means “son” and the word “Abba” means “father”. Both prisoners apparently claimed to be the “Son of the Father”. Barabbas, however, fought for a physical kingdom and was in prison for committing murder in an insurrection (Mk. 15:7). The Kingdom of Christ was both real and eternal, but was much more difficult to see because it was not of this world (Jn. 18:36).

The people foolishly chose Barabbas. How sad! Barabbas left no lasting legacy. His 40 seconds of fame have vanished like a vapor. Barabbas is dead and those who placed their confidence in him are dead too! In retrospect, we can now see clearly that choosing Barabbas was an eternal mistake.

After Pilate granted clemency to Barabbas he asked this haunting question: **“What shall I do then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” (Matt. 27:22)** This is the decision we need to make!

If Jesus is not God, it isn't important what you decide. If Jesus is God it is infinitely important what you decide. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important!

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce