

MONDAY MANNA

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BUT WHAT ABOUT THE 16TH SECOND?

By Robert J. Tamasy

Recently I watched a video of a high school valedictorian's graduation speech to his class. He talked about the elation he felt when, after years of hard work and personal sacrifice, he had achieved his goal of being named valedictorian, the number one-ranked student in his class.

But then he made a sobering observation: That feeling of euphoria lasted "about 15 seconds." He said he had expected to feel much more – fireworks maybe, or much more excitement. But no. When the reality of receiving the academic honour had settled in, he felt "nothing." As quickly as the surge of emotion came, the feelings subsided. Within about 15 seconds.

So, he cautioned his fellow students to set goals and dreams but keep them in perspective. He warned, "Have no regrets in the 16th second." What the scholar said was reminiscent of the haunting Peggy Lee song of years ago, "It That All There Is?" We can pour our time, talent and energy into accomplishing a certain objective, only to find that after it has been achieved, it is not as fulfilling as we had imagined.

For most, if not all, of us, high school is a distant memory. As is college, if we attended. Instead, you are probably in the midst of a career and you set goals, both professional and personal – some for that day, others for the week, this year, for your entire career. "When I achieve that (whatever it is), then I will be happy," we reason. We forgo other priorities in our lives – relationships, health and fitness, the ability to enjoy and appreciate the moment. Because our goals and objectives are all that matter.

Then, as the valedictorian noted, we hit the target. We reach our goal. And for about 15 seconds, we revel in euphoria, the overwhelming satisfaction of accomplishment. But then comes the 16th second, and we find ourselves wondering, "That's it? Is that all there is?"

So, we would be wise to heed the advice of the stellar student: "Have no regrets in the 16th second." This is not a 21st century problem. It is one that existed thousands of years ago, as we learn in studying the Bible. We find different words, but the same message – do not focus on the wrong things.

Why strive for the temporary when we can gain the eternal? What do you have today, what are you working for, that you can take with you when you die? *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves can break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:19-21).

Concentrate on those things that will endure. A wise person once said, "When all is said and done, only two things will last: the Word of God, and people." If that is true, it is unwise to devote ourselves to other things, at the expense of a growing relationship with God, as well as relationships with people we love. *"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever"* (Isaiah 40:8)

Realise this temporal life will soon be over. The Scriptures talk about our earthly lives as "a vapour" (James 4:14). All too quickly, they are gone. But then we confront eternity – what will happen then? *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"* (Mark 8:36).

Postal Address:

PO Box 8168,
Woolloongabba, QLD, 4102

ABN: 42 005 622 515

Office Address:

Suite CBMC,
Sung Do Lawyers,
14 Annerley Road,
Woolloongabba, QLD 4102

Email:

admin@cbmcaustralia.com.au

Phone:

07 3172 9365

© 2020. Robert J. Tamasy has written numerous books, including *Marketplace Ambassadors: CBMC's Continuing Legacy of Evangelism and Discipleship*; *Business at Its Best: Timeless Wisdom from Proverbs for Today's Workplace*; *Tufting Legacies*; *The Heart of Mentoring*, co-authored with David A. Stoddard; and has edited other books. Bob's biweekly blog is: www.bobtamasy.blogspot.com.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

Have you ever dedicated huge amounts of time and energy toward achieving a specific goal, only to discover the happiness of accomplishing it fades quickly – as the high school valedictorian discovered? What was that experience like for you?

Why do you think “the thrill of victory” can be so fleeting, often being replaced with feelings of discouragement or emptiness?

What are some of the consequences – negative results – of becoming totally immersed in a challenging goal or objective, beyond discovering that the sense of satisfaction can fade surprisingly quickly?

What in your view, does it mean to maintain an eternal perspective in all we do, both professionally and personally, rather than an earthly or temporal perspective? How would you evaluate yourself in this regard?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages:

Job 7:7

Psalms 39:4-6, 144:4

Proverbs 27:1

Ecclesiastes 1:2-4, 2:1-11, 21