



WHICH of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? ²⁸ And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: ²⁹ And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? ³¹ Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. ³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:27-33)

The most important concerns of life are the ‘First Things.’ As the Chinese philosopher, Confucius, has said, *The journey of one thousand miles begins with the first step.* (Circa 500 BC) Beginnings are important since it places us on the path of our endings, or destination. Though it is important to finish our race strongly, we could never do so without training, planning and conditioning – and we must run with perseverance (and in the proper direction).

For almost forty years, I trained or supervised the training of military pilots. The first thing that I taught the new pilot involved the approach to the aircraft every day before preflight. I tried to instill in the mind of the young pilot-to-be that this aircraft could kill you if the first things are not observed. We must plan our flight, learn the capabilities and limits of the aircraft, be aware of whatever contingencies might arise, be alert, and observe every safety precaution. But the first step before flight was to conduct the pre-flight inspection. We must insure that the aircraft is flight worthy and safe. Life is the same way. Our learning curve begins at birth. From that point on until maturity, we are ‘pre-fighting’ our lives and preparing to launch off on our own.

The concerns of life are important and preparation must be made for the human needs of the individual. But life is short. It is written in the Book of James: *Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.* James 4:13-14) Life is only a blip on the radar screen of life compared with the eternity that follows. And again, we read of the brevity of this temporary existence on earth in Isaiah: The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the *flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.* (Isaiah 40:6-8) I do not quote these verses to create a feeling of despondency, but rather to awaken any who sleep.

There is a great deal of freedom in flight – unlike travel on the ground, in flight we have a three-dimensional freedom, no roads or highways to confine our movement to two cardinal dimensions. But the duration of our flight is limited by fuel available. Every take-off must have a landing. Hopefully, the number of landings are equivalent to the number of take-offs; however, we may crash and burn if we have not observed the proper preparations and conduct of the flight mission. Life itself is exactly like that. We must make preparation to live life in a manner that enables us to provide for our welfare and to be a benefit instead of an incumbrance upon our fellow man. In flight, we must constantly attempt to maintain precise headings, airspeeds and altitudes. We will never be able to perfectly achieve that perfect state, but we will miss the desired flight conditions by immeasurable proportions if we do not target the perfect. No man can perfectly keep the Law of God, yet, we must honor and obey God with all our heart, mind and body. We will certainly miss the line of perfection, but love for our Lord and fellow man will make up the difference.

In view of the brevity and vanity of life under the sun, how should we prepare our lives and for what duration? We all must consider our years of old age *2 While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: 3 In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, 4 And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; 5 Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: 6 Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.* (Ecclesiastes 12:2-6) Then falls the curtain of time, and earthly life is no more for us – then what? Have we made the most important preparation – that of our soul's eternity? How do we begin? What are the first things?

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever. (Psalm 111:10) Every human being born upon the earth must begin by fearing the offended Sovereign – the Lord Jesus Christ. If we were not fearful as children of fire or of water, we may perish in early life. Wisdom is a characteristic of the Christian true believer. He is compelled to *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.* (2 Timothy 2:15) The FEAR of the Lord is the beginning, but not the end, of wisdom. The first fears of a righteous Lord and a sinful man are rightly evoked at the thought of our mortality. But when we have come to know the Lord as Father and

Redeemer, the nature of our fear changes. Our fear becomes one of fearing to dishonor or bring shame upon our Father in Heaven more than any fearful trembling of His righteous judgment (of which we are no longer condemned).

Wisdom and knowledge are not the same though related. Knowledge is a matter of knowing facts, figures, outcomes, even biblical truth. But knowledge alone is no guarantor of eternal life. We must have MORE than knowledge – we must be able to employ the knowledge we have gained in wisdom. That is the object of daily Bible study and prayer. We learn of God, but then come to KNOW God as our Father by that study and knowledge through wisdom.

So, we must, first of all, be SEEKERS of wisdom which leads to the LORD. (Matt 6:33) Diamonds and gold must be mined. These treasures are not liberally broadcast across the earth. Knowing the geological conditions and the manner of cultivation of these resources is first and foremost in importance if we are seeking these. The same is true of the Kingdom of God. We must KNOW the WAY in TRUTH, and then we must EMBARK upon the WAY. If I have an urgent need to travel to Helena, Montana, it is not enough to know the directions of the map – I must reduce that knowledge to action. It is wisdom that will dictate my actions. If I love the Lord. That love is measured in my reverence, praise and worship of Him. It will also be manifested in how well I study of Him and His Word.

Wisdom and belief begin with preaching, but end in wisdom and learning through study of Holy Scriptures. *By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;* (1 Corinthians 15:2-3) I will never forget the wise counsel of Bishop Garth Neel at our convention many years ago when we were discussing the minutiae of our worship. It was an endless endeavor, but Bishop Neel said, *The first and most important thing is to keep the MAIN THING, the MAIN THING.* And so must we. Once we have been drawn by the silent working of the Holy Spirit through preaching, let us then go to that Spring of Living Waters and drink from the Source itself instead of downstream from the herds of men and animals who have dirtied the waters. We have an obligation to share that wisdom granted by study with others. Who would not warn his fellow travelers that the bridge is out ahead?

The most important consideration in personal hygiene is to eat or drink no contaminated elements. The heart itself is contaminated with sin. But God cleanses the inner vessel first, and at last, the outward man. *Purge me with hyssop (a purgative to cleanse the intestinal canal), and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow (the outward man will appear sparkling clean).* (Psalm 51:7)

Have you addressed the first, and most important, things?