

“Why Am I Still Here”

I can remember sitting with Grace Martin years ago a couple of years before she was called to the Lord. When I met Grace she was a widow of many years and by her own admission advanced in years. Grace struggled with back issues that left her hunched over her walker and her mobility was always a struggle. Yet whenever I would go to visit her home was always in order and I would always find her in her front room ready to go with a smile. Once a month she would ride with Pastor Kischnick or myself to see her dear friend Vivian Hoffman. We would pick her up and she would ride along and we would chat about anything and everything. Often the conversation would steer toward what she had been reading in her Bible that week. She was one who would read her Bible through and then start over and read it again. She loved the Lord and her faith was very deep. Grace was a joy to be around. When we would get to the nursing home in Corydon she would smile at me and in her gentle voice remind me not to leave her there. And we would laugh.

At one point her health had diminished severely, so much so, that Grace began preparing herself to be with the Lord. One could tell she was more than ready and longing to see her Savior. However, she recovered and I saw a side of Grace I had not encountered. She was frustrated and actually disappointed. And then the words came that I have heard so many times as a pastor also fell from her lips. “I don’t know why I am still here.”

I’ve heard this before from others often from those who are alone, those who’s bodies have diminished, or from those who have grown tired. The question implies that in the mind of that person they have nothing left to offer. But I would like to offer a different perspective in order to respond to this question that I often hear.

Please consider Philippians 1:18b-26. Paul is sitting in prison as he writes to the Philippians who have encouraged Paul. “Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

None of us remain in the body forever. But as long as Paul was in the body something good was happening. This is the first thing I notice. Something good happens when we are still here in the body. For example, recently we had a widow in GriefShare share her story about her husband’s poor health. He had been in a nursing home for many years. He was in decline for a long time and could not get out of bed. Yet she saw him many times each week for several hours caring for him and enjoying his company. He was incapable of doing much of anything for himself and yet she went. She was always glad to see him. When he passed she clearly missed him dearly. Remaining in the body was for this widow a blessing for her. At the time of the class this widow was still very emotional.

Paul had no family of his own. He was never married. At one time he was feared because he persecuted the church violently. However, to the believers in Philippi, Paul was loved and thought of as part of a family. And even though Paul sat in prison in less-than-ideal conditions it gave the Philippians great comfort that Paul was still in the body. In fact, we see it to be more necessary for Paul to be with them.

Grace was not an Apostle. She was not a figure that the world would come to know. She mostly lived a quiet life. She was someone we loved and those of us who knew her were always glad to have her with us. Her presence was a joy and a blessing. And one can never underestimate how much that matters.

One other thing that is spoken by Paul that I find interesting. “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain...It is far more necessary for you that I remain.” Could you be an avenue for the grace of God for someone? Could you in some way be necessary for the sake of someone else regardless of your condition? Could it be that someone benefits by you being there? A family member or a nursing staff person?

I can't tell you how many times I have been to a funeral home for a visitation only to meet several of the staff members from a nursing home also visiting. Some of those folks take care of people for years. Some grow close to their residents and miss them like losing a family member. Just being present was a blessing. Knowing those residents blessed them in ways that the Lord may only know.

Years ago, I can remember sitting down at lunch with Frieda Ruhlow's family after her son, Robert's funeral. Robert was severely developmentally disabled and needed daily care for most of his life. One of the staff members at his group home got close to Robert and with Frieda. He made it a point to be with the family. Can the Lord work through those like Robert and leave some impact on others? Absolutely.

However, can we always weigh that blessing? Do we always see the fruits of being among others? Not always. Especially if we spend most of our attention looking ourselves as diminished, disabled, broken, in some sense of imprisonment. Paul was in prison when he wrote Philippians. And yet the Lord worked out some amazing things while Paul was in prison.

What is the answer then to the question: "Why am I still here?" Only God knows. But for the time being you may be necessary for the sake of another for the time that you are here for the Lord to work something out in His wisdom.

More importantly let's also remember that we are called "human beings" not "human doings". The Lord does not weigh your life on your abilities but values where your heart is. Out of love for human beings like you, like Grace, and Like Robert Jesus died on a cross and rose again. No one earns that kind of love. Jesus cannot help Himself. His love for you and me is eternal. The value of a person is intrinsic in the eyes of Jesus even when we have a hard time loving ourselves.

Perhaps if we know someone who is asking this question, "Why am I still here?" we may offer an alternative thought. Simply admit we don't know. But perhaps offer a prayer asking for the Lord to bring His grace through that person so that we may be an instrument that blesses someone else. "Lord help so-and-so to be an instrument of Your grace today." Or if one is still able, give people a call to encourage them and pray for them as one of our shut-ins has decided to do. Instead of trying to discover the wisdom of our condition perhaps look for the grace that can come from it. I hope that these thoughts help.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

Pastor Matt Woods
John 3:30