



Learning Life's Lessons

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Have you ever heard the old saying “Live and Learn?” There's a lot of wisdom in that. I believe there's value in formal education, of course, but there's no substitute for experience when it comes to learning many of the lessons that we need to know. You learn how to be a good husband or wife, for example, by being married for a while. How do you learn to be a parent? Well, you have a child. You learn **most** jobs by doing them, don't you? You get good at working on cars by working on cars - preferably with someone who knows what they're doing. Live and learn; life can be a great teacher, a resource-filled classroom, a well-equipped lab. When it comes to many things, you can learn simply by living.

“Live and learn” is certainly true when the subject under consideration is faith. We tend too much to think of faith as stuff we know - facts to be memorized and believed. Churches do more than anyone to perpetuate that idea; we conceive of ourselves as classrooms where the great lessons of faith are taught and learned and remembered. We tend to think and act as if the majority of the growing and maturity of faith happens within the context of the church, within its walls or at least within its circle of direct influence. We seem to communicate the idea that Christians limp through the week, maybe get a little boost on Wednesday, and then stumble in the door Sunday morning to be refreshed and energized and encouraged for the long week ahead.

Now I certainly believe learning takes place at church and within the church. I certainly have been energized and encouraged and refreshed in my faith by meeting with the church. But I disagree that faith only grows and matures in the church. Or even that it grows and matures best there. Faith is a matter of living and learning. It is tested most during our daily activities.

That's because faith isn't primarily what you know, but who you know. Faith is putting your trust in God, placing your life in His hands. It's hard to put your trust in a collection of facts. A body of knowledge has no substance in which to place your life. The teaching and proclamation functions of church doctrine at their best remind believers of just who this God we believe in really is. The church can certainly teach believers that this God can be trusted. It can help Believers take the first steps of faith and equip them to take further steps. But the steps still have to be taken. Trust has to be placed. And the true growing and maturing of faith happens as believers begin to actually walk on the Word in the day-to-day unfolding of life. You live and you learn.

Hebrews tells us, Jesus learned obedience. Sounds wrong, doesn't it: Jesus, needing to learn obedience? But apparently He did. Before He could be the sacrifice for our sins. He had to learn how to trust a God, yes His own Father. He had to learn how to live His life on God's terms when the world in which He lived couldn't and wouldn't understand. He had to hold onto His belief that God was in control when He was faced with sickness, poverty and injustice, when He was misunderstood and hated, when the people who were created through Him called Him a criminal and drove nails through His hands and left Him to die. He had to learn to obey when the heavens were dark and silent and the only Scripture that would come to His mind in His anguish was, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

If He had to learn obedience that way, what makes us think we'll learn it sitting in a church pew? Or reading a computer screen, for that matter? No, we'll learn faith and obedience, if we learn it at all, from the same teacher who taught our Lord. Life. Experience. We'll learn it in our families, schools, and office buildings. We'll learn it in hospitals and funeral homes. We'll learn it as we take refuge in God when people we love hurt us. We'll learn it as we see Him faithfully care for us during hardship. We'll learn it as we struggle and pray about paying the bills, as we fight against temptation, as we live with our spouses and children and friends and churches. We'll learn it when we look in the mirror and see nothing we like, and yet somehow find

a kernel of belief that God's eyes can still see our value. We'll learn it as we take responsibility for our sins and kneel before Him in confession and repentance. We'll learn it as we pray for a loved one's healing or maybe an end to their pain. We'll learn what Jesus learned: God is worthy of our trust and will vindicate our faith in Him.

We live and learn that God is faithful and that He can be trusted, but we only learn it through living. You can learn why you should trust Him in a church building, but you'll only learn to really trust Him when you live with Him and see His faithfulness in the unfolding of your life. Often that means uncertainty. Sometimes it means outright suffering. And no, no one wants uncertainty or suffering and God does not cause either. But it's exactly in those moments, when our resources are exhausted and any control we might have is gone, that we learn just how boundless are God's resources and just how limitless His control.

So live and learn. Whatever life brings you, keep your eyes and ears open. Look at each day of your life, whatever it may bring, as a chance to examine another facet of God's love, know a little more about who He is, and see another example of His faithfulness.

Live and learn.

One of these days someone will ask you: "How'd you get so smart?"