

Talk 11: How can I make the most of the rest of my life?

By way of introduction, here are a couple of cameos:

- A friend recently attended a job interview with a large commercial law firm. He was applying for a post as an assistant in the corporate department - “doing deals”, mergers, acquisitions of companies, injection of finance, that sort of thing. He was interviewed by two slick partners. The questions were going quite well until the younger partner, looking at my friend’s CV, said, “I see you’re not married. That’s good: then, there’ll be no distractions from your work...”
- Another true story I love to recount is of a trainee lawyer who, the week before he began his new job at a prestigious law firm, went to the trouble of popping in to the receptionist just to check the details of the inner-city car-park space he understood the firm had allocated him.

We can smile at these stories, but each of them actually says a lot about what is seen as normal in today’s business environment.

Over the past weeks we have listened a lot and then discussed a whole host of issues that people often run away from. We have had time to think about the life of a man who 2000 years ago offered quite a radical departure from the norms of his day. We have thought about the idea of this gift that those who follow him claim he gives for free: **fullness of life** – including forgiveness and freedom, cleansing and reconciliation, fruitfulness now and eternal life too.

Part of that gift involves accepting a strange kind of freedom... a freedom not to follow what is seen today as the norm, a gift not to conform to the patterns that our society so willingly goes along with.

A way of thinking about this is to liken God to a **venture capitalist**. He comes along and offers to inject capital into your business. But unlike a banker he doesn’t say, “Right, I’m now in charge and you’ll play by my rules, thank you very much.” Rather, he says, “You’ve taken the gift, but now it’s up to you to make the most you can of it.... Oh and by the way, if you want to use my consultancy services, just call. In fact I and my two other co-directors will be happy to help, day or night, weekends, the lot - just call. All I ask is that your business does one thing: it follows **our business plan**. Now, this is admittedly a bit radical. You might have to think about things other than just profit, like consistently treating your staff right, and always paying your bills on time. Oh, and declaring all that VAT and keeping your hands to yourself at the Christmas party... It’s somewhat alternative, but it works... We just ask that you trust that we know what we’re doing. It’ll all work out well.”

The Bible says something along these lines, so much more elegantly, in Romans chapter 12:

I urge you, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Put simply, if you’re willing to buy into the Christian message, then to make the most of the rest of your life, there is going to have to be a bit of **application**. You are going to have to be different. Being different can often be associated with being odd. After all, according to television the great icon of Christianity these days seems to be Farther Ted! But actually, when I read the Bible, I find the opposite is true: far from becoming odd, it seems to me that the more people become like this Jesus, the more normal and the more truly and fully human they become.

Just have a think about life in the office:

- I wonder if a Chamber of Commerce has ever commissioned a survey into the time taken up in business by character assassination
- What about the conversations you’ve had to listen to where people do nothing but grumble about petty things in the office? – things that with a little bit of positive effort could in fact be remedied
- And the unfortunate ways employers can treat their staff sometimes

These regrettable attitudes and examples of poor practice, which frankly are too often the norm, are merely symptoms of lives being lived in spiritual overdraft, i.e. lives lacking spiritual resources. What Jesus offers,

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however, is a new start, a chance as it were to put that big pile of worthless paperwork in the shredder and go forward with a clear desk policy.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed... Yes, but how? By the renewing of your mind, says the Bible.

But you may ask: how in practical terms am I to go for the clear desk? How do I get rid of the clutter?

Offer your body as a living sacrifice, is the answer. That means taking the whole of your everyday, ordinary life – including all you do in your work – and presenting it before God as an offering. Think about the following things. Can you possibly present them to God?

- your time
- your ambitions
- your possessions
- your money
- your ears
- your mouth
- your hands
- your body
- your work to-do list
- your problem solving
- your planning for meetings
- your cooperation with colleagues
- your report writing

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed...

Giving the above things over does involve sacrifices, but if there is something in this Christian process of transformation, you'll soon see that it involves sacrifices that lead to a far more fulfilling life than the one you will have had and so many people appear content to live out.

How can I make the most of the rest of my life?

Romans 12 goes on to list several things Christians can strive for. Think about how these things might be applied in the world you work in:

- live in harmony
- be generous
- be hospitable
- be forgiving
- empathise
- live in peace

Taking that approach to doing business, and to the way you live your life in general, is certainly not conforming to the pattern of this world. If you strive to live this way, Jesus Christ's promise is that you'll be making the most of the rest of your life.

And very happily for us all, he gives us his help to live his new way – by his Holy Spirit. We just have to ask him to help us, and to be continually filled and refilled by the Spirit.