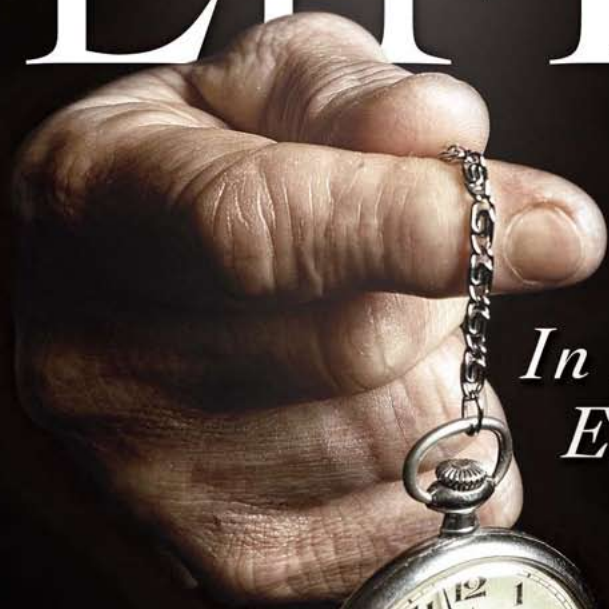


The TIME *of*
YOUR
LIFE



*In Light of
Eternity*

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THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE:

In Light of Eternity

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to Adam, Dave, Greg, Jeff, Jim and Tom who were there for me in my time of need. May God richly bless each of you for what you mean to Kathy and me.

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In Light of Eternity

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INTRODUCTION

There is one commodity that every living being has been granted: Time. Although the amount may vary, we have all been given enough time on earth for our hearts to be tested, our lives to be judged and our eternities to be determined. This entire probationary process occurs within the great realm of Time.

Time is both objective and subjective. On one hand, it operates as an unseen measuring tool as God unfolds His grand, all-encompassing purposes for earthbound mankind.

And yet on the other hand it is something that is very personal to you and me. Our past existence and future hopes are distinctive to ourselves. The Lord has granted each of us a specific period to live out the life He has given to us. How will we use this valuable resource? What kind of fruit will it bear in our lifetimes? What lies ahead for us after we transition from “this present age” into “the age to come?”

Man is immortal and therefore the subject of Time is of enormous importance. It affects every aspect of our lives. It is vital that we understand its value, utilize it wisely and prepare for its long-term existence. In one of His parables, Jesus used

the monetary term “talent” to illustrate the spiritual resources available to the believer which he is expected to employ on behalf of his Master’s interests on earth. Certainly time must be one of those resources.

I believe that a study on such a subject as time must be done wholly from a spiritual standpoint; after all, when it’s all said and done, nothing else will matter. I know of one Christian philosopher who wrote a book on the subject; but it seems to me to be an awkward attempt at aligning biblical concepts he has embraced with the godless logic of the scientific community. He even suggested that anyone wishing to learn about the subject of eternity would be better off studying the writings of a Christian philosopher (such as himself) than those of theologians. Personally, I would rather hear from a man who has been touched by the Eternal than one who approaches spiritual concepts merely through his mental acumen—whether his study is built upon a philosophical or theological foundation. Joseph Parker said it this way:

He who does not know God has no key with which to open anything; he is in the midst of ten thousand cabinets each of which contains gold and rubies and all manner of gems, but he has no key. To understand God through love is to understand everything else; then like God we take up the hills as a very little thing and handle constellations as if they were mere toys.¹

Be that as it may, I have done my best to tackle the subject and to present my findings in (hopefully) a concise and readable form. My hope in this book is to offer the reader a fresh peek into the unseen realm to discern God’s mysterious ways at work in our lives; to diminish the value we place on the temporal and enhance the importance of the eternal; to alleviate the fear of death and to instill hope and even excitement about the hereafter.

This book addresses the twin subjects of Time and Eternity along the lines of a typical, Christian life. The first section describes the temporal realm in which sinful mankind lives and out of which the believer is saved. The second describes the Christian's challenge of maintaining an eternal perspective while living in a temporally-minded culture. The third part of the book addresses the spiritual laws that determine a believer's rewards—and even quality of life—in heaven. The last section contemplates what that life in heaven must be like for all who are allowed to live there.

As part of this project, I felt it necessary to provide the reader some additional study material in the form of two appendices.

The first appendix is an attempt to help substantiate certain books written by people who have had visions of or out-of-body experiences in heaven—a subject not addressed until the final section. I definitely encourage you to read it before proceeding into Part Four.

I have also provided a list of quotes and Scriptures that relate to the subjects of Time and Eternity that one can study and meditate upon.

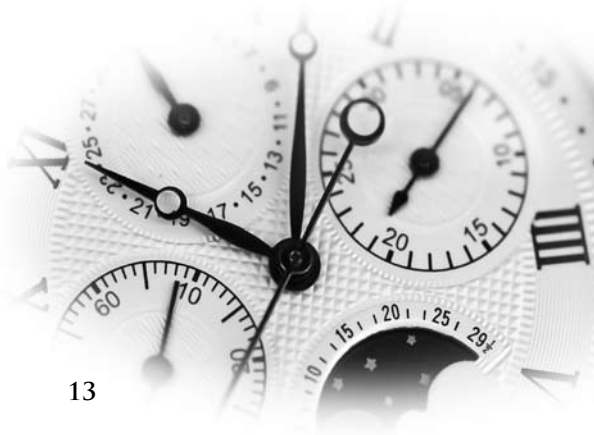
This book is meant to be an enjoyable examination of a subject that deeply affects us all. I trust that you will be provoked in your thinking, challenged in your lifestyle and encouraged about your future as you consider *The Time of Your Life in Light of Eternity*.

*"We've traveled too far, and our momentum
has taken over; we move idly towards eternity,
without possibility of reprieve or hope or explanation."*

–Tom Stoppard¹

*"I've been out of step with you for a long time...
God, make a fresh start in me, shape a Genesis week
from the chaos of my life. Bring me back from gray exile,
put a fresh wind in my sails!"*

–David²



GAINING MOMENTUM TOWARD ETERNITY

After several disappointing seasons, the Oakland Raiders thought their fortunes were about to change when they were awarded the very first pick of the 2007 NFL draft. This is an annual event when the best college football players are scooped up by professional football teams in need of fresh athletes.

After months of anticipation in the football world, the day finally arrived. The commissioner stepped up to the podium to announce the number one pick of the draft. “The Oakland Raiders pick JaMarcus Russell from Louisiana State,” he proclaimed grandly.

Nearly every football pundit thought picking the young quarterback was a great choice. ESPN’s Mel Kiper predicted that Russell would “immediately energize” the Raiders’ entire franchise. He also thought it was possible that within three years he could be “one of the elite top five quarterbacks in the league.”

There were plenty of reasons for all the optimistic hype. Russell’s abilities and arm strength were considered to be “off the charts” for a quarterback. Everyone agreed his potential was enormous.

During his stellar college career, JaMarcus Russell had led LSU to 25 wins against only four losses. His thrilling Sugar Bowl victory over Notre Dame should have propelled him into a successful career in the NFL. As a talented star quarterback, he was expected to provide dynamic leadership to his new team.

Unfortunately, things started to sour immediately. Rather than accept the generous contract the Raiders offered, he refused to show up at training camp unless he received more money. The negotiations drug on for several months before he finally agreed to accept a contract that would pay him \$68 million over six years. By the time he entered his rookie year, it was too late to properly prepare himself for his first season.

The following two years proved to be just as disastrous. Both years JaMarcus showed up at training camp physically out of shape. He began developing a reputation for binge eating and having a halfhearted commitment to winning. There were also rumors that he was abusing codeine-enhanced cough syrup. One of his teammates saw him nodding out during a team meeting and asked himself, “Is that the guy who’s going to lead us?” Someone else said, “It wasn’t that Russell was a divisive presence in the Raiders’ locker room. He was just there, sucking the life out of the room with his lack of work ethic, desire and inspiration.”

At the end of the 2009 season, JaMarcus was finally released. A blog entry from a fan sums up the results of the young man’s short career: “For the rest of his life he has to live with the label of being the biggest NFL bust of all time and that’s how people will always remember him. All the money in the world cannot erase it either.”

How did this young man go from being one of the most gifted, budding quarterbacks college football has ever produced to being considered “the biggest NFL bust of all time?” He began his career making one poor choice after another until

he found himself sliding down a slippery slope from which he couldn't recover.

His story also provides a fitting illustration of a spiritual principle that plays a very important part in our journey toward the hereafter. The apostle Paul shares this unavoidable law of the kingdom of God:

Don't be under any illusion: you cannot make a fool of God! A man's harvest in life will depend entirely on what he sows. If he sows for his own lower nature his harvest will be the decay and death of his own nature. But if he sows for the Spirit he will reap the harvest of everlasting life by that Spirit. Let us not grow tired of doing good, for, unless we throw in our hand, the ultimate harvest is assured. Let us then do good to all men as opportunity offers, especially to those who belong to the Christian household. (Galatians 6:7-10 PHP)

The fact of the matter is that we are constantly living in the fruit of yesterday's sowing. Likewise, today's lifestyle is setting the stage for the conditions we will face tomorrow.

Paul employed a metaphor in this passage that an agricultural community would easily recognize. Those who have been around farming operations understand that Nature operates under certain strict guidelines. For instance, if a person buys cheap grass seed, or even sows good grass seed sparingly, he will end up with an unhealthy lawn prone to a takeover by weeds.

Paul said that this dynamic also applies to our behavior. Each thought, word and action carries with it a germ that will come to life later. This is a basic formula of life. It doesn't mean that God doesn't love a person because He allows the person has to face the consequences of his actions. There is nothing arbitrary about it. It is simply the law of causation at work. In

spite of the fact that Paul began by saying, “Don’t be under any illusion...,” there are those people who are determined to believe that they can flout this law under the guise of grace.

One of the reasons some people ignore this spiritual principle is that the harvest for one’s actions often doesn’t come into fruition until much later. They reason that since the bad crop is delayed there won’t be one.

Actually, the spiritual law Paul presented that day was simply a new way to express what Moses had told the Hebrews some 1,200 years before: “...if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, all these blessings will come upon you and overtake you...But if you do not obey the Lord your God...all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.” (Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15-16) And so it is that people have blessings or curses following them all the days of their lives.

LIVING IN DEFEAT

There is a form of Christianity that is incredibly dull and meaningless. It is the lukewarm mentality that Jesus found so nauseating with the Laodicean Church. It is the person who is neither on fire for God nor utterly given over to the devil.

It was this kind of lethargy that destroyed the career of JaMarcus Russell. He wanted the pay and glory of being an NFL player without putting forth the effort. His outstanding feature was his lazy, defeatist attitude. He never gave any indication that he saw himself leading his team into a winning season. He was content to float along with the vague hope that somehow things would improve. When a person is stuck in this type of rut, every effort he puts forth seems like an enormous taxing of his strength.

Halfhearted Christians don’t typically entertain a proper perspective of their lives. In their minds, every effort takes on exaggerated proportions. If they could only take a seat in the

grandstands and view themselves from Another's perspective, they would see that for every step they have taken toward God, they have taken a couple of steps backward.

They sow a seed or two in the Spirit and wonder why their efforts produce so little. What they don't understand is that for every healthy seed of corn they have planted, they have thrown a handful of thistle seeds into the garden of their lives. The cornstalks may be real, but they have become overwhelmed with weeds! No wonder they feel so hopeless!

One of the reasons such Christians remain stuck is they have never experienced Christianity on a level any higher than what they currently live. They flatter themselves that they are walking in the Spirit, but when a godly saint begins to explain what that life is actually like, a blank look comes across their faces.

Life in the spiritual realm very much moves by the force of momentum. When a person walks in the flesh, he tends to become buried by carnal thinking and an infatuation with worldly allurements. The law of sowing and reaping dictates that a defeated person is going to continually be setting himself up for more defeat the next day. Every time a person gives over to some worldly temptation, it smooths the way for the next. Before one knows it, he is in a freefall down the side of that mountain and he cannot seem to slow his momentum.

I touched on this dynamic once in a sermon about the Apostasy—the great falling away from God predicted in Scripture for much of the end-times Church. As part of that message, I offered the audience the following self-examination. I invite you to take a seat in the grandstands and try to take an objective viewpoint of your own spiritually.

MOMENTUM TEST

Anytime a person physically falls, gravity acts as a force which drives the person to the ground. Once set in motion, this momentum is not easily reversed.

So it is with the “Great Falling Away” predicted for the Last Days.* Scripture gives every indication that many professing Christians will move in increasing velocity away from the things of God and toward the things of the world. The closer we come to the end, the more difficult it will be to swim against this powerful current.

The following list is provided to allow people to examine which direction their ongoing lifestyles are taking them:

19 SIGNS YOU ARE BECOMING
A PART OF THE GREAT APOSTASY:

1. Prayer is either nonexistent or mechanical
2. You know the Word but you don't really live it
3. Earnest thoughts about eternal matters no longer grip your heart
4. You can indulge in inward and outward sin without feeling devastated
5. A longing for holiness is no longer a predominant passion of your life
6. The pursuit of money and possessions are an important part of your life
7. You can sing worship songs without really meaning what they express
8. You can hear people treating eternal issues flippantly without becoming upset
9. Your main concerns are of your temporal, earthly life
10. Conflicts in your relationships with others are not a major concern to you
11. You no longer hunger for a deeper life in God
12. You don't live with a full and grateful heart

* See Matthew 24-25; II Thessalonians 2; II Timothy 3:1-4:4; II Peter 2-3; and Revelation 17-18.