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FOR THE LONG HAUL

Do you tend to prioritize the moment or the future?

What is an example of that working well? Poorly?

How might you prioritize both? What will be the signal
when to prioritize one over the other?

Psalm 16:11 – You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

I) A Lifetime...

We live in the moment and within a lifetime. Living in the moment without regard for future consequences leads to disaster. Making every choice for the sake of an uncertain future is disabling. This tension is a critical target for Satan's attacks. He is crafty and does not push us to the extreme. Not at first. He steadily tempts us to move further and further off balance. Momentary pleasures that set us up for hard times. Present misery and poor behavior for the sake of a big prize later. Jesus looks after our wellness. He leads us on the narrow path that bisects the tension. He goes after good moments that culminate in great lives.

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♦ **Jesus' view**: Jesus' view is neither short nor long-term. It is eternal. Eternal includes the moment. It includes our future. It integrates this moment within our lifetime and beyond. He clearly enjoys the moment, pausing to connect with individuals in unexpected ways. He rebukes us when we presume He has more important things to do than be with someone undeserving. Yet, He accepts momentary discomforts for the sake of His best future. He masters now and not yet. If we want joy for the long haul, we will ask Jesus to "show me (Psalm 16:11)" the way.

♦ **Stretches out**: We are grateful when He shows us the path integrating now and forever. His view begins here and stretches out beyond the horizon. His wisdom guides us to joyful moments now without sacrificing all that tomorrow offers. He shows us "the path of life (v11)." Satan tries to convince us it is one or the other. Live for today and disregard the aftermath. Be miserable today for fame and fortune tomorrow. Both lead to regrets and resentments. Only Jesus' path is free and good.

II) Of Joy...

The world tempts with thrills, excitement, ecstasy. Power, fame, adulation. Relief, escape, isolation. Each is temporary and, usually, costly. Joy is fulfilling of one's purpose regardless of the accompanying emotions. It is sustainable through the ups and downs of life. It enhances happiness. It diminishes sadness. The world's temptations attempt to replace joy. They eventually fade leaving a hole where joy was. Accept Jesus' offer of joy and be filled forever.

♦ **Being good**: The world suggests those fleeting emotions are too good to pass up. Everyone else seems to be having such a good time when experiencing those. We imagine those moments as if they are a nonstop way of life. They aren't. The cost to be good is to not give up a sustainably great lifestyle. It is avoiding the roller coaster that leaves us dizzy and exhausted. Being good allows us to be "in your presence (v11)," including the joy of getting the most out of each moment with a view to our best life. Goodness now and to be.

♦ **To be well**: Being good is the way we stay connected to Jesus. It's His love language. Jesus is not a miser. He seeks the most enjoyable path of life that fulfills His purpose. He keeps us from mistaking mirages for the real thing. He leads us to be well for a lifetime. That's the "fulness of joy (v11)," of His presence. He eliminates any need to doubt ourselves. He finds meaningful moments for us. He navigates us away from danger. He leads us to sustainable wellness. He is the embodiment of life well lived.

III) And Contentment...

Joy and contentment go hand in hand. A life of joy creates hope in more to come, which produces contentment and gratitude in what we have received. This virtuous cycle of godliness is the path of life. The alternative ups and downs lead to despair. The ups need to increase to match yesterday. The downs become more depressing every time. The world's ways are insatiable desire that eventually cannot be satisfied.

♦ **The good times**: Satan deceives us to believe we are our own source of joy. When we have nothing, or the things we have don't produce joy anymore, we pay the price to get more. Living with Jesus, we learn that joy is "in your right hand (v11)." We don't have to pay the price of our character, goodness, contentment to get more. He freely gives it to us. He is our guide to the good times now and forever. Life is more gratifying when we sense we are as we should be, expressing the generosity and kindness of our God.

♦ **Never end**: With Him, the good times never end. Moments of laughter and peace feel good. Those of hardship and pain reveal our strength. There is joy, that inner sense of fulfillment, we can only discover through endurance. It informs us that we can love sacrificially and be well. Life is not a zero-sum game despite what the world says. With Jesus are "pleasures forevermore (v11)." What is good is good. What is meant for evil is converted to our good. It's all good. And it will be for the long haul.