

With the changes in banking regulations, we hear a lot about minimum investment and maximum return. That is appealing to most of us because we like the maximum from the minimum. We want to get the most from the least amount of input. And that is true of our spiritual lives. Jesus Christ has saved us. And we can now live at the minimum or maximum level. He gave his maximum; but he leaves to us the amount we'll put in, and, in the long run, the amount we'll get out. There is a minimum level and there is a maximum level of living.

L. Consider the minimum level. Let me personify the several levels of minimum living. The first level is the level of Ricky Reluctant. He is the one who always raises the question: "Do I have to" or "What can I get by on?" In other words, "What is the least I can do and still come out all right". You see what happens - the minimum becomes the maximum. What is least required becomes the most that is done. The question becomes not "What can I do?" but rather "What must I do?"

This is true of all of life. As children we were told to wash our face. So we dabbed a little water on our cheeks, neglecting the ears and neck..because that was the least we would do and still get by. Or as students when the teacher assigned a term paper we ask: "How long does it have to be?" "Are those 20 pages single spaced or double spaced?" "Does that include the footnotes?"

The life of Ricky Reluctant is nearly always filled with drudgery, seldom with fun. There is little excitement or adventure in life. He is too busy doing what is expected, and no more. It is like pleasing the law until it becomes a burden. ^{We} long to be free and can't understand why we are not. Ricky Reluctant lives at the minimum level.

2. Then there is Marty Material. His goal in life is to gain and multiply possessions. Now there is nothing wrong with that necessarily, but Marty is pre-occupied with it. He never says "what can I give?" but he says "What can I get out of it" He says: "What does it pay?" "What's in it for me?"

The Bible has many examples like Marty Material. Take the steward in today's gospel lesson. But he was afraid to lose ^{it all} and in the end lost out. Or there is the farmer who had some banner crops, and built bigger granaries. And there was a rich young ruler who came to Jesus, and who after the encounter ^{with} Jesus ~~went~~ away sorrowfully.

But Marty Material is not limited to the Bible. We see it nearly every day. According to the IRS, the average person gives 2% to charity. That is all it takes to be average. ^{We} haven't yet learned the lesson of the writer of Eccl who, ^{as he} looked at life from man's perspective, came to the conclusion: that all we do is pile up and store what we earn only to realize that we will have to leave it. Paul wrote that we came into this world with nothing, and we take nothing out of it.

That was a radical THOUGHT FOR THE early Christians, and
it is for us too even after 2000 years of the Christian exper-
ence. Marty Material sees things and life as ends in them-
selves; there is not final joy in life. There is only a rude
awakening when it is over.

3. Ricky Reluctant and Marty Material live at the minimum
level of life. Yet, there is still another. It is Noel Narcissus
named after Narcissus who fell in love with his own reflection
in the pool/ Noel's concern is to favor those who love him or
can help him in life. His question is not "Who can help" but
always "who can help me?" When he discovers who can help him
those are the ones he caters too. Someone has called this the
medicine dropper approach to life. We calculate our relation-
ships. We evaluate persons and we decide on the one who can
help us a little and we give him a little drop of love; and
the person that can help us a lot we give him a full dropper
full. Harriet Beecher Stowe once went to a party where she
said it seemed everyone had left himself at home. We have had
that experience. No one really wants to relate...because there
is nothing in it for them. They calculate no drops and leave
their love at home.

Even scripture recognized this lifestyle. Luke says that
anyone can love those whom they know will return it. And anyone
can ^{lend} lend to those who will pay it back. But, says Jesus - the
task is to "Be merciful, even as your heavenly Father is
merciful" - (Luke 6:36)

Jesus key statement is this one, verse 31, "And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them". Treat all ⁽⁴⁾ men as you want them to treat you and they will. Otherwise life narrow and lonely because in the end there is only Narcissus himself, who lived life at a bare minimum.

The real trouble with these levels of living is that end in deadness/ There is something exciting about boiling water. When water is boiling the bubbles dance around and bounce and burst as tho they were enjoying boiling to the fullest. So, we have not lived at the maximum level if we haven't let ourselves bubble and burst in life. If we don't bubble we become like the dead sea which for centuries has taken all it could but never given any away . . . and it is stagnant and dead. That is where minimum level of life leads us.

4. There is however a maximum level.

A. We see it in the life of Jesus. Jesus never said "I done enough". Oh, he did take time to go apart and pray, but when the crowds came again he was ready. He didn't quit on them but loved them to the end. He gave life the maximum. You recall the reaction of Jesus when the lady broke the expensive bottle of perfume and poured it on his feet? He was ecstatic. They complained about how foolish she was. But Jesus was joyful because someone had spontaneously responded to him with the maximum of what she had and he knew that that is what life is all about.

A man once spent some time in Nova Scotia. When he returned he said that the most exciting thing he saw was the rising tides. He said "You could hear it coming, you could see it coming, you could smell it coming. The tides swept into the bay and lifted boats that had been careened on their sides and set them off on a new level". Isn't that what the life of Christ does? When he approaches he lifts up lives, picks up those who have been knocked down and lying their sides. He gives them the offer of new life. He offers them life at the maximum.

B. What is the maximum for us? It is really quite simple . . . it is the level of total commitment. And to have total commitment we must first have a spiritual commitment. Listen to Jesus:

"Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and don't do the things I say? . . . Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my Father. Many will come and say 'have we not prophesied, cast out devils, and done many wonderful works in your name?' (Yet Jesus will say . . . I never knew you". Matt 7:21-23

They were only doing thru the motions, with no spiritual commitment, doing things for what they could get out of them.

What did Jesus tell Nicodemus: "You must be born of the Spirit from above," He told Zaccheus that he would have to receive a new spirit if he wanted to change. He told the disciples *to receive the Spirit into their lives so that Jesus could live in them.*

Commit yourself and use the Spirit God gives you. 11
believe that Jesus says love, then love. If you believe that
Jesus says forgive, then forgive, no matter what. If you believe
he calls you to witness, then witness. Our problem is that we
sit back and wait for some mystical experience to happen when
it has already happened out side of Jerusalem on a cross.
Receive the Spirit now and do. Too many have died already.

Some of you have read a delightful book called "Hope for the
Flowers". It is an allegory of a caterpillar, one who has
become a butterfly and the other who wants to. Finally the but-
terfly says to the yearning caterpillar, "You must want to fly
so much that you are willing to give up being a caterpillar"
Commitment is spiritual.

But if one's spiritual commitment is spiritual it is also
economic. The pocketbook is affected. In first John it is
written that if we see those in need and we have the world's
goods and do not help, then the love of God is not really in
us. We cannot give at the minimum level and still love God
Notice that the good Samaritan not only provided healing for
the injured man, but told the innkeeper to get what was needed
and that he would pay for it. And what of Zacchaeus. Immediate-
ly after his conversion he promised to restore fourfold and
to give half of what he had to the needy. His stewardship was
affected by what was in his heart.

LeTourneau the great industrialist said that the question ^{not} of how much ^{of what} God gives ~~us~~ ^{to} us do we give back to him, but how much of what God gives to us do we really need to keep for ourselves God gave himself and yet offers us even more. Luke 6:38 says: "Give, and it will be given you; good measure, pressed down, & shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back". The image here is of the tunics people wore when they came to get grain. Their skirt formed a basket and what is being said is when Jesus pours in grain, he'll shake it to settle it and then give you more than a full load.

Ricky Reluctant, Marty Materila and Noel Narcissus cannot know the blessings that Christ can give. But you and I can. We can ask his help in living life to the maximum. We can by taking the one talent, or the 2 talents, or the 5 talents he has given to us and using them for his glory.