

THAT ALL MAY HAVE LIFE IN FULLNESS



Millions of people do not know meaningful life in Jesus Christ. Millions of people live in poverty, amidst conflict, fleeing from one country to another. There is much in our world that compromises the spiritual and material qualities of life. The church is called to witness to a fuller life in Jesus Christ for those to whom it is denied and to those in search of meaning.

WHAT IS THIS LIFE?

A YOUNG MAN IN AFRICA

I received a bachelor's degree in science from a good university two years ago. I expected to get a job immediately, but here I am at twenty-five years old, with a degree and I'm unemployed. I know there are many like me all over Africa. What kind of life is this? My Christian faith took on a new meaning at university when I joined the Presbyterian student union. Through Bible study and fellowship meetings, I grew in faith and learned to see in every situation what God is calling me to do. I try to be a witness for Christ in my community. This gives me a sense of fulfilment – of enjoying life in fullness.

These days, I am more in touch with my joblessness. At interviews I am told that the structural adjustment programmes imposed on my country because of its debt are part of the problem – people who have worked for years are being laid off, so new graduates have no chance to get a job. Meanwhile, the high costs of food and living make the situation worse. A lot of my friends are planning to leave the country. What is a Christian called to do? I am confused. Does God care about this situation? About the hundreds of thousands like me? About African countries? About the poor and those who suffer unjustly while others get richer?

DO I HAVE A FULL LIFE?

A YOUNG WOMAN IN EUROPE

I was baptized in the Reformed church when I was a baby. My parents didn't care much about church attendance. When I was a teenager a lot of my friends were confirmed but I didn't see any good reason to go through all that. Just a few years out of university and my life is great! I am married, enjoying my work and we are planning to have children. We have everything we need. But somewhere deep inside, I keep wondering about my Reformed roots and this thing called faith.

A Korean woman joined my office last year. I am amazed by her enthusiasm about the church. She is surprised by how few people in Europe go to church. She has values I wish I had. Our growing friendship continues to raise questions. Do I have the "fullness of life" she talks about? Is material happiness all there is to life? How does faith make life more meaningful? Can the church help me to take my faith more seriously?

CHOOSE LIFE!

(JOHN 10.1-11 AND DEUTERONOMY 30.15-20)

In John's Gospel, Jesus refers to himself as the good shepherd (Jn 10.11). In contrast to the impostors and thieves who come to steal and destroy, the good shepherd brings fullness of life. Jesus protects life in the midst of death and destruction. Life in the 21st century comes with systems and realities that on the surface seem to offer life for some, but could be destroying life for millions of others.

Christians are called to review critically the modern phenomena of materialism, globalization and reliance on military might for security. To what extent do these contradict the life in fullness offered by Jesus? What is God's will for our



response in light of these phenomena? Our critical review does not lead to a simple judgement of right or wrong, rather it points to a choice – a difficult choice.

In Deuteronomy, Moses' farewell words call for a clear choice, "Choose life so that you and your descendants might live" (Deut 30.19). It was a statement first addressed to the Israelites who were in a new land facing new situations. Their temptation was to follow the easiest path, which meant not challenging the unjust and idolatrous ways of the people among whom they lived.

Choosing not to challenge evil and the destructive forces around us may seem to be the easiest way, but in fact it endorses evil and thereby we are cursed. We are called to choose life, to follow the path of the good shepherd who gave his life so that we might have life in fullness. Such a choice involves risks – to be an advocate for life and to speak out against the forces of death is a risk. The Christian call entails a commitment to make this choice, no matter what risks are involved.

QUESTIONS

1. WHAT ARE THE SIGNS THAT PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY LACK FULLNESS OF LIFE?
2. IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU AND YOUR CHURCH MADE A CHOICE FOR LIFE SO THAT PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY MAY HAVE FULLNESS OF LIFE?
3. WHAT DIFFICULTIES DO YOU EXPERIENCE IN LIVING OUT AND COMMUNICATING A CHOICE FOR LIFE?
4. WHAT MISSION ACTIVITY IS GOD CALLING YOUR CHURCH TO ENGAGE IN?

PRAYER

Lord our God, we thank you that you came to this world in human form, so that we may have life in

fullness. We acknowledge that many people in both poverty stricken and affluent communities do not experience the fullness of life for which you came. We pray that Christians will have the courage to proclaim the good news and to be your fearless instruments in bringing life to challenge and replace the forces of death. We pray the member churches of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and participants in the 24th general council will courageously work towards fullness of life for all. Amen.

AUTHOR

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ABUNDANT LIFE IN JESUS CHRIST

*Abundant life in Jesus Christ
That is the life for me;
Offered on the Cross by Christ for all,
That's you and me.*

*What is this life you talk about,
When poverty abounds;
When people here just disappear,
And eyes are full of tears.*

*Can you that have, live simply please,
So that others can simply live;
And fight the ills that evil brings
Then we will join with you and sing:*

*Abundant life in Jesus Christ
That is the life for me;
Offered on the Cross by God for all
That's you and me.*

All Africa Conference of Churches' 6th Assembly Hymn. Words by Alem Seged Herouy (Ethiopia).