

# LIVING ON BORROWED TIME

**J**ackie and I spent a week in our little cabin in western North Carolina in October. One rainy morning we got up to drive across the mountains to meet friends for lunch. Coasting slowly down the steep, wet driveway, I heard an inner Voice. "This could be your last trip. You could be killed on that slick mountain highway."

It was the same voice from two weeks before. I was at home in Florida, pulling on my sweatpants to play basketball on the half-court behind our garage. "You could drop dead on the basketball court tonight," the Voice said.

That time there had been a momentary flash of fear. I had just faced death during cancer surgery. It was my first time to restart exercising. I wanted to think life—not death. Yet I remembered that Pete Maravich, former professional basketball star, had died suddenly while playing with James Dobson. Later, Dobson also had a heart attack playing basketball. (Praise God, he recovered). Death, the Voice reminded me, is always a breath away.

I argued. "Surely you wouldn't allow that after just healing me."

His answer was gentle, but firm. "You now live on borrowed time—time is loaned by Me. *When* I call you home is my business. Your business is to walk humbly with Me and live in a ready position."

I remembered Jesus' words. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself" (Matt. 6:34, NIV).

James was more pointed: "You do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'" (James 4:13-15).

Oddly, the battle with cancer last summer was a mountaintop experience. Each moment during those months was spent in His intimate presence. As I slowly re-entered the real (or is it the *unreal* world), I longed for those days of special intimacy with the Lord. I resented having to get back to work, having to deal with other peoples' problems. Like Peter, James and John, I wanted to build a tabernacle and stay on the mountaintop—sequestered.

But that's not the Jesus way.

During that time, a Northern Ireland prison inmate, Steve Berry, wrote after having read my

September column. He reminded me that the true emphasis of Psalm 118:24 is on the word *this*. "This is the day the Lord has made."

"We have but today," he wrote. "Rejoice and be glad in it."

My first excursion, after my healing, was to teach with David Manuel in a writers' conference in north Arizona. David and I have been friends since we worked as editors for Logos Publishers in the early '70s. He continues to write from his home on Cape Cod.

On Friday, David and I returned to Phoenix as houseguests of John and Barry French. That night we joined the French family for dinner at a local restaurant. David, sensing my melancholic struggle with "re-entry," later wrote me a haunting observation on the evening.

"There we were with the French clan at Voltaire's (the only restaurant in all of Arizona where you really *do* need a coat and tie). The setting was elegant, the conversation convivial.

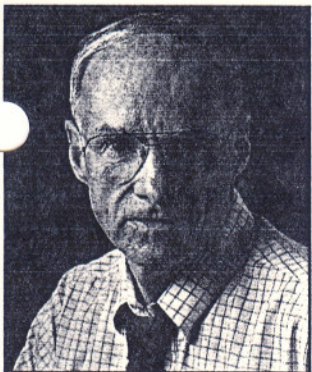
"I glanced over at you, and it was like looking at a 19th-century polar explorer who had been trapped in the ice for a year. Safely home in London now, he was the guest of honor at a dinner of the 'poobahs' of the Royal Geographic Society. He was dressed as they were, smiling and nodding...but from his eyes, he was still back on the ice-sheathed deck of his ship, gazing into the silent night at the endless jutting ice packs under the full moon.

"Don't be too quick to re-enter London society. The understanding that you have gained (*"I used to preach without Him, make decisions without Him—now I don't want to do anything without Him"*) is worth more than anything you were doing before.

"And don't be concerned about not fitting in. God has separated you unto Himself for a season. Pray for patience—and for the grace to be meticulously obedient. In due course He will reveal His plan; meanwhile, don't let well-meaning friends pressure you this way or that, no matter how worthy or urgent their request. As you said, you're not called to be a pastor or an editor or a communicator. You're called to walk with Him."

That, it seems, is what living on borrowed time means: walking with Him, one day at a time. ■

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