

ISSN: 0799-1711

PROFESSIONAL
THEOLOGICAL
JOURNAL FOR
THE CARIBBEAN
COMMUNITY

CJET

VOLUME
15

2016

Caribbean Journal of Evangelical Theology

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Book Review:
Geared to Live.
 Kingston: CLI,
 2014

Donovan A. Thomas
 and
 Faith Thomas (editors)

by
 Sasha-Kay Campbell
 (MA)

Dr. Donovan A. Thomas is the Founder and current President of Choose Life International (CLI), which is a member of the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP). Previously he served as a former National Director of Jamaica Youth for Christ

and Regional Director for Youth for Christ International in the Caribbean. Dr. Thomas holds a Doctorate in Ministry from the United Theological College (Kingston, JA)/Columbia Theological Seminary (Atlanta, Georgia). He is also the author of the book, *Confronting Suicide: Helping Teens at Risk*, and he has been working with suicidal persons for over 25 years.

Mrs. Faith Thomas, the wife of Dr. Donovan Thomas, is a co-founder and current Vice President of CLI. She has served as the Senior Counselor at the Stony Hill Human Employment and Resource Training (HEART) Academy, and continues to conduct seminars locally and internationally. She has also served as an adjunct Lecturer at the Jamaica Theological Seminary (JTS), as well as she has lectured at the International University of the Caribbean (IUC), the Mico University College and the Shortwood Teacher's College. She holds a M.A. in Counselling Psychology (Hons) from the Caribbean Graduate School of Theology.

The first article is written by Mrs. Thomas, who attempted to demonstrate how an individual can get over past hurts and pains and acquire happiness. She highlights the various challenges that a hurting individual needs to overcome in order to get past their past. Hurting individuals, she points out, need to get by the phases of entrapment as a result of emotional or physical pain, and unhealthy and negative responses before they can choose happiness. She highlighted several maladaptive ways of coping and the dangers they pose to an individual, and further challenged her readers to forgive and heal in order to overcome.

Surprisingly, in her attempt to demonstrate that unresolved anger can cause deep emotional distress and harm to oneself and others, she appears to misinterpret Paul's admonition in Ephesians 4:26;

“Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.”¹ She may have mistaken ‘anger’ here to mean the carnal emotion that one entertains when one is offended. Based on her understanding, she explains that “This means that if anger arises and is left unchecked, if a day passes and the hurt is not resolved, it begins to fester and develop and thus begins the downward slide into resentment....” Maybe Paul was not referring to natural emotion here, but to a permissible anger which arises in resentment to unrighteousness.

Is this ‘anger’ the same fleshy emotion that Mrs. Thomas was addressing, an unrighteous, destructive feeling of annoyance, displeasure or hostility towards someone or situation? Verse 26 however, may be referring to righteous anger, “the emotion of indignation directed against injustice, betrayal or other evil.”²

Evidently, Paul’s use of the term ‘anger’ in both instances was referring to two distinct emotions, the former being justifiable and the other detestable. In fact, the chapter as a whole speaks to the work of regeneration in the believer. Hence, Paul instructs the church to put away the mindset and dispositions of the ‘old self’ and to allow the Holy Spirit to complete his renewing work in them.

In addition, her claim that “the popular prevailing view of God as a judge with thunderbolts of fire . . . is made predominant, rather than the love of God,” does not necessarily hold true. If it were so then unrighteousness (probably) would not be so prevalent in the contemporary Church, not to mention the antagonistic issues that are prevailing in our society. It is rather the opposite of what she proclaims, because hardly is the wrath of God heralded from the pulpits anymore. From the look of things, with all that is going on in society today, there is no evidence of a predominant view of God as a Judge with thunderbolts as Thomas proposes.

The use of Jeremiah 1:5 and 29:11 are somewhat more understandable as it concerns her argument for the right perspective of self and God. Notably, 1:5 was a direct pronouncement from God to Jeremiah concerning him. Likewise 29:11 was meant for the remnant of Israel that were in exile, not humanity. However, on the basis that the Old Testament is our

¹ Faith Thomas, “Get Past Your Past,” in *Geared to Live: Twelve Keys to Happiness*, 9.

²James R. Beck and Bruce A. Demarest. *The Human Person in Theology and Psychology: A Biblical Anthropology for the Twenty-first Century*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2005), 227.

schoolmaster, as Paul informs us in Galatians 3:24, her point can be substantiated as this is the heart of God toward people. Scriptures such John 3:16 and other such which are directed toward a more general audience are more suited for her argument.

Her use of Romans 12:19 also seemingly contradicted her previous claim that we should emphasize God's love and forgiveness rather than his wrath.³ Here it would have been more effective to compel readers toward the compassion of God, and the forgiveness and mercy that they themselves have received from God. She chose however, contrary to the point she previously made, to emphasize the judgment of God. Essentially, her use of other Scriptures appeared to be appropriately employed, and her message clear and concise.

Beverly Stewart, an outstanding entrepreneur and philanthropist, Founder and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Jamaica Soul Vacations (JSV) follows with her article, "Establish and Re-establish Your Purpose." She skillfully encourages her readers to identify and execute their purpose by a proposed step-by-step approach. "Begin," she declares, by prayerfully inquiring of the Lord and by examining self in order to pursue "that which you were created to do." Scriptural references are rare, the only one being Habakkuk 2:2; she instructs readers to record their purpose as a simple vision statement. Of course, in the text God was instructing the prophet, Habakkuk to record the vision he had received as it was of great documentary significance. In the same manner, Stewart instructs her readers to record this important statement of purpose as a guide to fulfilling their purpose.

Correspondingly, Ms. Frances Yeo, the Vice Chair, Board of Directors of CLI, continues in the same vein with her article, "Align Yourself with Positive People." She accurately uses 1 Corinthians 15:33 to assure her readers that negative influences are indeed corrupting. Paul's admonition to the Corinthians here was that they not fall prey to the deception of false teachers, as evil communication corrupts.

Similarly, she uses Philippians 4:8 to demonstrate Scriptural recommendations for positive mental habits. Yeo suggests that in order to align ourselves with positive influences we have to "consistently choose to exercise the positive traits."⁴ Change inevitably has to begin with the 'man in the mirror,' as the late

³Ibid., 21.

⁴Frances A. Yeo, "Align Yourself with Positive People" in *Geared to Live: Twelve Keys to Happiness*, 57.

Michael Jackson heralded. Thus Yeo puts forward the recommendation that we think as Paul instructed the believers of Philippi to think. As she notes, there are numerous benefits of thinking positively that will eventually bring us closer to achieving a state of happiness. Not only will we experience a tremendous internal change but other positive individuals may gradually be drawn to us, as we shape a positive lifestyle.

Likewise, the fourth chapter entitled “Reject Negativism,” written by Dr. Raphael J. Thomas, echoes a similar message to that of Yeo’s, as the title implies. He asserted that negative self-talk is that common factor that fuels and accompanies unhappiness.⁵ With an impeccable amalgamation of Scripture and Behaviour Modification theories, he demonstrated to his readers how they can eliminate negative habits and thought patterns and rehabilitate themselves with positivity. One must radically reject negativism and actively engage in positive self-talk and reflection, he proclaims.

Incidentally, his use of 1 Corinthians 11:28 could be more suitably replaced with 2 Corinthians 13:5, as the latter has a more general application than the former. 1 Corinthians 11:28 is more suited to the occasion of the ‘breaking of bread’ or holy communion; whereas Paul warns that one should not engage in unworthily. Generally, self examination is vital to attaining and living a happy, purpose-driven life, not only for the avid Christian but to everyone. Miller postulates that it through such self-criticism that one begins to see her/himself as the Creator sees her/him, as he/she embarks on a journey to self actualization.⁶

Dr. David West, a professional Pharmacist, in his chapter “Express Gratitude” emphasized the need for us to develop a genuine attitude of thankfulness. His use of 1 Peter 2:12-13 is questionable, as the text does not seem to give the same impression that West expresses. Another reading of the text may demonstrate that Peter was not insinuating that we should not be “surprised by the testing”⁷ as West suggests, but that he was encouraging the believers to maintain a righteous life in a hostile world. He was not

⁵ Raphael J. Thomas, “Reject Negativism” in *Geared to Live: Twelve Keys to Happiness*, 66.

⁶ Paul Miller, “Spirituality, Integrity and Competence: Essentials of Ministry in Richard Baxter’s Reformed Pastor,” *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 69:4 (1997), 333-342, http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/1997-4_333.pdf (accessed August 3, 2015).

⁷ David West, “Express Gratitude” in *Geared to Live: Twelve Keys to Happiness*, 107.

so much issuing a warning, as he is encouraging the people to endure so that God will receive glory from their lives.

Significantly, Veronica Thomas Burt-Miller, a Registered Nurse provides the readers with some practical strategies that will help identify their strengths and gifts. There were two Scriptural references, which were quite appropriate as she used them to highlight the diversity of gifts that the Holy Spirit endows believers with. Likewise, The Psychiatrist, Dr. E. Anthony Allen, emphasized the need for and benefits of counselling. He particularly provides an illuminating description of the counselling process, which should certainly help to alleviate fears concerning counselling. His reference to Job 5:7 was well suited, as trouble is an inevitable part of man's fate.

Chapter eight, "Open Your Life to Spiritual Intervention" by Dr. Donald K. Stewart brought us right back to reality, as he put forward the necessity for spiritual intervention. His use of Scripture exemplified that of an expert hermeneut. He proficiently uses James 2:26 and Proverbs 20:27 to highlight the necessity for the spiritual health of the soul (spirit of man). Despite the fact that many deny the existence of the supernatural, Stewart argues that it is futile for one to pursue physical and psychological health, while the essence of their being, the soul perishes. This is what many fail to recognize, but thanks to Stewart here it is written and made plain for all his readers to understand and take heed. Only a life fully surrendered to God will experience the freedom and power to overcome one's troubles or pain.

Mrs. Jennifer Willie, a Professional Counselor, in her chapter, "Live With Less Worry" outlined the limitations of worry and provided some practical solutions to reducing worry. She specifically highlighted Matthew 6:25-34, one of the primary 'worry' Scriptures in the New Testament. Worry changes nothing, hence it is more suited to trust in the One who knows all and is Lord over all things. Additionally, Ms. Peta -Gaye Bookall, UNV Child Protection Officer with her article, "Involve Yourself In Service to Others" brings out another essential key to achieving happiness.

Essentially, humans are not solitary beings, as Yeo pointed out.⁸ Thus interacting and relating with others is a huge part of our happiness. Happiness is not attainable by living selfish and self-centred lives. Each of us should have some sense of community, as we cannot merely live for ourselves but live to serve others in love.

⁸Yeo, in *Geared to Live*, 47.

This will not only give us sense of fulfilment, but of receiving in similar manner the service of others. With the use of Romans 6:13, Acts 20:24 and Mark 8: 35, Bookall points her readers toward the underlying purpose of life. We were created by him and for him (Colossians 1:16), and likewise we exist for each other.

Finally, Mrs. Gay Ward-Foster on the topic “Value Yourself Highly” challenged her readers to do just that, value themselves highly. She illustrates the hindrances to having the right perspective of value and self. One cannot question her use of Scripture, because each was skillfully employed to emphasize her points. She also echoes some of the previous authors, as she highlights the relevance of positive thinking and influences to one’s happiness. More importantly, she emphasized that value is not found in appearance, external circumstances or life circumstances, but in the heart.⁹ Seeing ourselves as the Father sees us, is certainly a significant key to our own happiness.

In essence, *Geared to Live* does as the title suggests. It is truly designed to gear the reader to live a fulfilled life. The manner in which each chapter was structured, highlighting the major hindrances to happiness and providing clear and concise solutions, certainly makes this book worth having. It is not your regular self help book; it is an anthology that practically and spiritually prepares its readers to confront and deal with the struggles, hurt and pains of this life. One major positive about this book is the simplicity and succinct presentations in each chapter. It can easily be read by the expert academic, or professional, as well as a typical high school student.

⁹ Gay Ward-Foster, “Value Yourself Highly” in *Geared to Live: Twelve Keys to Happiness*, 231.