

When is life worth living?

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Health and wellbeing › Life Issues

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Many people nowadays speak about “quality of life”. What is meant by this word? And does the Bible agree with today’s common view?

A definition

Let’s start by consulting the Encyclopaedia Britannica to see what “quality of life” means. This encyclopaedia states:

“ Quality of life , the degree to which an individual is healthy, comfortable, and able to participate in or enjoy life events. The term quality of life is inherently ambiguous, as it can refer both to the experience an individual has of his or her own life and to the living conditions in which individuals find themselves. Hence, quality of life is highly subjective [...] Within the arena of health care, quality of life is viewed as multidimensional, encompassing emotional, physical, material, and social well-being. ”

“Quality of life” and the value of human life

The concept of “quality of life” tries to express a person’s level of well-being. This is for example used as a parameter to monitor and optimize medical care. In some ethical discussions, people see a certain quality of life as a prerequisite for a life to be valuable.

If prenatal testing shows that a baby will be severely disabled, in some countries parents might be encouraged to consider whether the quality of their child’s life will be sufficient, or whether it would be better to abort the baby .

Elderly people who experience a loss of life quality might doubt whether they want to continue their life or would rather prefer to die .

This view does not consider human life intrinsically valuable, but make its value dependent on its “quality”. This has huge consequences for countless ethical discussions and for the appreciation of life in general. It is no longer taken for granted that life is a gift and that it is worth living.

Human life = created life

The view that life's value is dependent on life's quality, is strongly contradicted by the biblical statement that all human life is created and planned by God (see e.g. Psalm 100:3, Psalm 139:16).

Human worth is grounded in the fact that we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 9:6). Human worth is not dependent on health, economic value, or emotional well-being.

Having compassion

This is not to say that someone's "quality of life" is unimportant. The Bible makes very clear that we should be compassionate (Colossians 3:12), just like Jesus had compassion for people with physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

The New Testament contains many records of Jesus healing and caring for people who were suffering – see for example Matthew 14:14, Mark 1:41, and many more Bible

verses. We are encouraged to follow His example and to try our best to relieve people's suffering.

Fearing God gives real "quality of life"

But however important it is to care for people's well-being during their earthly life, the focus of the Bible is on something else.

Real quality of life is to be found in God. "For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:8).

This quality of life is already experienced on earth, as poetically expressed in Psalm 1:1-3:

"Blessed is the man

who walks not in the counsel of the wicked [...]

but his delight is in the law of the Lord,

and on His law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree

planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.

In all that he does, he prospers. ”

The Bible calls this “walking in the light” (Isaiah 2:5, John 8:12). People who live like that, experience fullness of joy even in the midst of ups and downs (Psalm 16:11, Psalm 37:39).

God offers eternal life

But there is more. God gives hope beyond the grave. Even if our life here on earth is difficult, there is the comfort of Jesus’ promise: “ I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die ” (John 11:25-26).

God promises eternal life , which does not just mean that it will never end, but also that it has the highest “quality” we can imagine – or even higher than we can imagine.

We get a glimpse of what this eternal life will look like on the new earth: “ Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away ” (Revelation 21:3-4).

God gives your life the highest quality

Your “quality of life” is thus not primarily dependent on earthly circumstances like health or wealth. Nor do these factors influence your life’s value. Real “quality of life”, eternal life, is to be found in God alone. And the best news is: it’s freely available for anyone who believes in Jesus Christ!

Source: <https://www.biblword.net/when-is-life-worth-living/>

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