

## CORINTH: RULES FOR LIFE!

***“God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.”***

***1Cor 10:13***

What pearls of wisdom! Having moved on to Ephesus, Paul wrote this letter with great care, concern, and love to the conflicted people of the Church in Corinth. This church held a very special place in his heart, for it was the church he himself had founded during the three years he resided there, a dozen or so years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

To visit a place where a story is set – whether the rugged terrain of Scotland in reading Macbeth or the windswept Scandinavian countryside of Elsinore as the backdrop for Hamlet – brings the words to life! It is what I experienced in the Holy Land as I followed in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and it is what I experienced more recently as I wandered amidst the ruins of Ancient Corinth in Greece.

What came to life for me during this brief yet memorable visit, was what is familiar to anyone who has dabbled in real estate: location, location, location!

Throughout its history, but especially in Paul’s lifetime, Corinth was a prosperous and cosmopolitan centre at a major East-West crossroads for trade. Not only did this generate great wealth, its rebuilding as a Roman colony under Julius Caesar in 44 BCE brought in people from different walks of life, a virtual cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic mosaic. A place of luxury and, reportedly loose morals, it was an ideal place from which to proclaim the Gospel and Paul’s decision to use it as a base was no doubt a wise and strategic move that acknowledged the benefits of location!

The place from which Paul would have preached was within the hearing of those visiting the large Agora – the biggest shopping mall of the times for miles around. As I stood at the podium from which he would have preached, with sunshine pouring down, I could see the remnants of the Temple of Apollo in the distance, and the shadows cast from the surrounding mountains of the Acrocorinth. I could sense the excitement that must have been experienced by Jews and Gentiles alike as they came together to experience this new and revolutionary way of life that Paul was advocating based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

But, as so often happens, when Paul left his beloved Church in Corinth, divisions set it amongst the people and it must have been with a heavy heart that Paul reached out to them not only once, but four times – although two letters have been lost - to help restore some sense of common purpose, harmony, and community. His words of wisdom went to the heart of their challenges as a community and as individuals and they continue to serve us well today. [Repeat words of wisdom]

Rules for life are a recurrent theme in Christian living. Some are familiar to us – the Golden Rule and the Rule of St. Benedict. And, in this time of Lent, it is helpful to remind ourselves of ways in which we might adopt some of these rules and adhere to them in our quest for better ways to live.

For his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday last September, Jean Vanier, a great Canadian theologian whose life has been devoted to putting his Christian beliefs into practice through service to the disadvantaged and marginalized as well as through his writings, issued a 21<sup>st</sup> century version of rules of life on YouTube.

In an edited clip that you can access easily, he outlines **Ten Rules for Life to Become More Human** and I would like to share these with you. Some of them may sit well with you, some may disturb you, and some may challenge you. I have taken some liberties in their interpretation, as you might do as well.

**Rule 1: Accept the reality of your body** – Conscious of his age, Vanier focusses on the aspect of ageing. We become more fragile as we age. Acceptance of this reality while maintaining a healthy life style can lead us to the conclusion that it is “good to be myself”! But this message might apply to younger generation cohorts, fed as they are on images of the body perfect.

**Rule 2: Talk about your emotions and difficulties** – In a world where we strive for perfection, exposing our weaknesses, our disappointments, and our sorrows can be difficult yet to do so is liberating – it is to embrace and love the reality of life. The challenges on our life’s journey are opportunities for growth.

**Rule 3: Don’t be afraid of not being successful** – This is indeed a challenging rule for a world that idolizes and prizes success – whether professional, financial, or social. The path to a healthier being is to accept ourselves and to acknowledge, in Vanier’s own words, that “you are beautiful as you are”.

**Rule 4: In a relationship, take time to ask “How are you?”** – We tend to be so preoccupied by our own lives, that we sometimes miss out on inviting those we love to share their stories, what is happening in their lives. Being more “other-oriented” nourishes a relationship. It moves us from being consumers of love to generators of love!

**Rule 5: Stop looking at your phone; be present!** – Vanier recalls a gathering with young people who were more present to their phones than to each other. But this phone addiction has spread to other generations as we connect online more easily than engaging with each other.

**Rule 6: Ask people, “What is your story?”** – Listening is a long-lost art in our contemporary society. While respecting the privacy of others, we can learn so much about

others and about life and its varied experiences by asking them to share a bit about themselves, what brought them to this point in their lives, what is important to them.

**Rule 7: Be aware of your own story.** – This is the flip side of rule 6. What is our vision for ourselves? What are our fears? What are our dreams? Being on auto-pilot may be comfortable, but it quickly becomes boring.

**Rule 8: Stop prejudice.** – Meet people who are different than you are or whose situation in life may be radically different than yours. Experience “the other” with greater objectivity and without categorizing them in any way. Stop judging others. Bring respect into conversations and discussions. What can we learn from others? From the lives they lead? From their sense of limitations?

**Rule 9: Listen to your deepest desire.** – I love the quotation, “Be still and know that I am God.” It is in the quiet part of our soul that we encounter our deepest desire, that spiritual depth that we crave, that hunger and thirst for the cry of the infinite within us. When is the last time that you spent time alone with yourself, listening for that inner voice? Even five minutes a day can make a great difference to your inner peace!

**Rule 10: Remember you will die one day.** – It is a painful reminder and one that clearly was on Vanier’s 90 year old mind. With great humility, he reflected that we are passengers on a journey that will continue long after we have left this earthly realm. This is not to be morbid, but rather to place ourselves in the context of the reality that we are here for a time and for a purpose and that we too shall pass. It puts everything else in perspective!

Paul’s wisdom was meant to transcend differences, to provide encouragement, and to nurture a sense of community. These rules of life are also means of doing so and are God’s way to help us endure whatever challenges may be part of our lives.

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