

MAGNOLIA MINDS: You can always choose your quality of life

By Tony Martin
Associate Editor

A couple of weeks ago I had eye surgery. I won't say a whole lot about the nature of the surgery itself. I'll say that it hasn't been pleasant, but it wasn't risky. I'm doing well and I'm back at work.

I was homebound while recovering, which for an introvert isn't the worst thing that can happen. What was challenging, though, is that for the first few post-op days I had to restrict screen time – very limited computer, television, iPhone, all that. Nor could I read.

Any of these activities made it feel like my eyeballs were melting and running down my cheeks. (There's an image for you. Reference the climactic opening of the Ark scene in the movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.)

Thank God for Audible. There is nothing wrong with having someone else read to you.

What's been interesting, and at times downright bizarre, is how aware I've been of time. I never get bored. Seriously. I can always find something to do. Boredom seems to equate to time in that the more time you have on your hands, the more likely boredom becomes.

And yet, time rushes by. It doesn't matter the state of your health, what you find to do with yourself, or how busy or idle you are. *Time is time.* Our perception of it is what makes it real to us.

It doesn't matter if you're cleaning the bathtub or composing a symphony. It moves at the same pace, regardless of my request to speed things up or slow things down.

Laying on the couch with cold compresses over my eyes in self-imposed darkness, I got to thinking about where the time has gone, and I'm talking about 67 years of time.

The usual thoughts crop up. Watching our kids grow up and start families. Experiencing body parts wearing out. Thinking about places I've lived, churches I've served, people who have crossed my path that made indelible impressions on me, and watching the seasons change.

To use a shopworn phrase: "It is what it is." Time, I mean.

Know what I can do, though? In spite of the flow of time, I can make choices as to how to use it. Things around me change all the time. I just need to make wise decisions in the midst of all that change. I am not powerless. *I can choose.* I have the *power* to choose.

You do, too. You can absolutely choose the quality of your life even if you can't control the outcome of what's happening around you. What I'm seeing in these days are so many people yearning for a return to what once was, whatever that is to them. They don't want to change unless it can take them back to a perceived better place.

Well, pilgrim, things do change, sometimes rapidly, *and there's plenty that we'll never be able to go back to.* We have to grapple with that.

I'm not exempt from how life keeps moving in me and around me, and there's a conclusion that is certain: unless Jesus delays his return (and I'm so ready for that!) then I am going to pass away. You too.

While that sounds grim, it's really not. Our deaths should be

a healthy consideration, because it helps us determine what we need to be about in the meantime.

It's simple, really. We need to make wise choices. I can't spend my life paralyzed thinking about how awful things are. I mean, we live in a fallen world. Should we expect anything other than awfulness?

What are we supposed to do, then?

Slow down a bit. (I've been forced to do that, and it isn't all bad.) We live in the midst of chaos, and it will continue relentlessly. *Try standing still.*

You know what the end game is. I get the picture of storm-driven ocean waves crashing against a rock. When the waves part, the rock has stood firm.

Beloved, you can actually choose to be the rock. Read that again. It's absolutely true. Don't play the victim. Don't bemoan how awful things are. My mantra: Actively and earnestly restrict your intake of social media and the 24-hour news cycle.

Think in terms of what actions you can actually take on. Ask yourself, "Am I a better person for having watched or read 'this?' Do I feel worse than I did before taking this in? Am I spending as much time in Scripture and prayer as I am absorbing media?"

In other words, guard your heart. You don't want your soul darkened. There are positive reasons to be informed about the world around you but count the spiritual, mental, and emotional cost it demands from you.

Yeah, there are changes that need to be made. I'm not advocating abdicating your responsibilities as a parent, son, daughter, friend, citizen, church member, or anything like that. There are things to be improved, values to embrace and

defend, and priorities to set.

Know this: If we're going to make any changes, it's time to do *it right now* because time is limited. You have to choose, and you're supernaturally equipped to do just that. Life is a gift, and a long(er) life isn't guaranteed.

How you choose to spend precious time will impact your present and shape your future. In October of 2016, I made the decision to stop wasting time with worrying since it didn't seem to help a single situation in which I found myself. I recommend doing that.

Don't let yourself get overwhelmed. Maybe just "whelmed."

Ancient script has some good stuff to encourage you:

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil (Ephesians 5:15-16 ESV).

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom (Psalm 90:12 ESV).

As always, believer, I feel obligated to share this: Whatever you're facing, it's gonna be alright. It always has been, and always will be. Without fail. Easy? Probably not. The ultimate victory? It's all yours.

Choose wisely and make things more fulfilling and rewarding for yourself.