

But money can't buy us love. And neither power nor freedom can bring us the one thing humans need to thrive: We were created to love and be loved. We cannot be satisfied by earthly things alone. By creating us in his own image, God has given us a nature that is partly spiritual—an intellect, the capacity to know right from wrong, the free will to choose how to act, and the capacity to know and love him. Jesus' incarnation, life, and death revealed to us that God is Love. (1 Jn 4: 8) To love God and others fulfills our deepest needs, allowing us to have life "to the full."

Every person bears God's image and has an immortal soul. Yet many are viewed as being outside the circle of love—unborn children whose parents are tempted to eliminate them, vulnerable people with illnesses and disabilities who risk being abandoned or even killed through misguided "mercy," prisoners on death row, forgotten or despised long after they have repented of their wrongdoing.

Although it seems a paradox, the greater the sacrifices made out of love, the greater is our joy and peace. Whether it is the brave decision of a pregnant woman to reject abortion and allow a loving family to parent her child when she cannot, or the daily sacrifices of parents in raising young children, or the hard work of caring for an elderly relative with dementia, when we step up to these challenges, God can stretch our hearts and fill them to overflowing with his love, joy, and peace. With hearts so transformed, we can become living witnesses to the meaning of Jesus' mission: *I came that all might have life, and have it to the full!*



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I came so that all might have *life*
and have it to the full



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A brilliant litigation attorney, Martin worked 70-plus hours a week and demanded the same from the lawyers under him, whom he generally treated with contempt. Martin's only pleasure was in his great success as a trial lawyer and the fact that opposing counsel feared him.

He used to joke that spending one Sunday afternoon a month watching movie rentals with his two teen-aged sons was about all the "dad" time he could stomach. Martin's sons moved away after college, married, had kids of their own, but never visited and rarely called. They really had nothing to talk about, especially after Martin's wife died. A wealthy and successful man to his last breath, Martin died in a hospital alone and bitter to the end. No one mourned his passing.

Eileen grew up in a small town in Indiana and married her high school sweetheart, Tony. He worked in the family's hardware business, bringing in just enough money to make ends meet. Eileen was grateful to be a stay-at-home mom, especially because it allowed her to involve the children in all the community and charitable activities she did for their parish and school. Her quiet warmth and joy brought smiles to everyone she met. Eileen's life also had its share of challenges and suffering. One of their children was born with a fatal heart defect and lived only ten months after his birth, and she cared for both her parents for years before their deaths. She was always available to those in need, bringing food and comfort when someone in town faced illness or a death in the family.

Eileen grew old in the constant companionship of her husband and children, her grandkids and friends. She died as she had lived—surrounded by love, at peace with God and everyone who knew her.



Eileen never traveled to Europe, never ate in a 5-star restaurant or sipped mimosas poolside, and never made it onto a TV reality show. But wouldn't most agree that Eileen lived her life to the full? And that Martin's life, in contrast, presents a tragic case of missed opportunities?

Yet today, popular culture promotes a dangerous myth—exalting the freedom and glamour of the rich and famous, the powerful or "beautiful" people, whose public lives seem superficial and whose private lives feature a succession of brief and broken relationships. All too often they end up in treatment for drug or alcohol addiction, usually after injuring others or humiliating themselves publicly. But until then, in the eyes of the world, they have it all! And don't we often feel like we want it all? And we want it *now*!

According to this myth, money equals freedom. It makes us free to sample from the whole rich smorgasbord of consumer delights—the latest electronics and trendy fashions. We are invited to be constantly entertained by new places and new experiences, the latest music or latest video games. For some people, acquaintances pass in and out of their lives, but they rarely have the time to know and love them deeply, to know the longings of their hearts, the goodness of their souls.

When other people make demands on our freedom, we can choose to ignore or even eliminate them from our self-centered lives. Our culture gives us "permission" to turn our back on an ill-timed baby, a neglected spouse or a mother in a nursing home who pleads for a visit.