

## **“Echoes of the Heart”**

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

Contact Dr. Frantz on the web at [www.mlcchurch.com](http://www.mlcchurch.com)

**You can't have it all!** As the second of four children, I've often wondered what it must have been like for my older brother, the first born, before I came along. For a time, first born children are on top of the world. Can it get any better than having mom and dad all to ourselves?

And then when little brother (or sister) breathes his first breath—the one you've been hearing about for months on end—suddenly, in a moment, it all changes. Soon sibling rivalry is in full bloom and you learn a hard lesson you had hoped to delay indefinitely. Simply put: *you can't have it all.*

As children, early on, we're supposed to know this. The problem is, there is so much in our American culture that bends against it. After all, we're children of the American dream. Although it somehow resists tight definition, still, the American dream is *out there*. And whatever it is, it has to do with expectations and entitlement. And lots of both.

Think for a moment about what the average teenager has today compared to what he or she had thirty or forty years ago! The difference is more than startling. It's mind boggling. Cell phones, iPods, PlayStations, laptops and we're not just talking about run-of-the-mill stuff. What a modern cell phone can't do isn't worth doing. And of course every teenager has to have the most upscale, multi-faceted model to hit the market.

If you're a person between twelve and ninety in today's world and you don't have a cell phone, you're living a life of deprivation.

**Compromise and surrender.** The problem with our *gotta have it all* culture, is that in the day-in, day-out trenches of community living, clearly, we can't *have it all*.

In fact, when we fail to understand the role of *compromise* and *surrender* in human relations, we limit our ability to sustain meaningful relationships. In other words, we lose, and fail, and bang our head into the wall along the way.

Learning the art of compromise and the power of surrender are vital lessons in helping us navigate our way through this life.

In *compromise*, we meet people half way. Spouse, child, parent, colleague in the work place, whomever; we have to meet people somewhere in the middle, giving up things we'd prefer not to give up but giving them up, nonetheless, because that's what the relationship, to be healthy, asks of us.

*Surrender* is more tricky. It's letting go of stuff; it's yielding and getting our ego out of the way. It's the reminder that sometimes it's better to have *a serenity from within* than to have to win or *get our way* all the time.

**Meanings that last.** Our lives are not about *living the perfect life*. They're about being meaningfully connected in ways that, over the long haul of life, bring us joy and contentment.

There is no such thing as the perfect marriage, the perfect family, the perfect job, the perfect church or synagogue, or the perfect anything. Perfection is an illusion of Greek philosophy. It's also boring and uninteresting.

What life gives us, if we give ourselves to it with commitment and love, are meanings and the enduring feelings that shape them. *Having it all* needs to be redefined and understood afresh in this vein.

When we reflect honestly on our lives, the most cherished moments always have to do with family gatherings (or gatherings of close colleagues and friends) of some kind. Birthdays, anniversaries, baptisms, weddings, religious holy days, reunions, vacations, communal celebrations, and on and on.

Somewhere in there is a life. And somewhere in there, too—for that life to know joy and contentment—is a history of loving compromise and surrender to the wider needs of the family and to the enduring presence of God.