

Week 16 - How to Live the Good Life - 1Peter 3:8-12

Scripture Reading: Psalm 34:1-22

Introduction

How do you define “the good life?”

That’s one of the oldest philosophical questions plaguing humanity, and it has been answered in many different ways. The great philosophers such as Epicurus, Aristotle, and Socrates all had different ideas of what the good life consists of. Entire books have been written in an attempt to answer the question of the good life, and yet no consensus has been reached, and the problem of defining the good life still plagues mankind today.

Statistics tell us that there are some 7.3 billion people on this earth, and we might expect that there may be about that many opinions of what constitutes “the good life.”

And because what people view as the good life tends to be based on their circumstances and perspective at any given moment, we might reasonably expect that each individual’s definition would be variable over time.

But, still, we all aspire to the good life, so it behooves us to know what the good life consists of.

For the Christ-follower, it only seems logical that we would look to see if the God who created the universe has told us in his written Word what constitutes “the good life.”

And that’s the issue that Peter addresses in the passage before us today.

In chapter 3, verse 10, Peter quotes from Psalm 34, saying:

“Whoever desires to love life and see good days...” showing that he is writing about the good life as God sees it.

Then he lists certain things we must have and do in order to experience the good life as God defines it.

As we begin, we see that Peter opens this section of his letter with the word “finally,” indicating that he is concluding something and what he is summing up is his survey of the principal duties of the Christ-follower that he began in 2:13.

In that list, we saw him move from general application - for all Christ-followers to obey governing authorities - to specific application in the submission of slaves to masters, wives to husbands, and how husbands should relate to their wives.

And now, he moves back to the general as he addresses the attitudes of a Christ-follower that will ordinarily result in living well and enjoying God’s favor.

And in the verses before us, what we will see is that the good life for a follower of Jesus Christ is found when their lives are characterized by certain attitudes and actions.

And we are going to see that the attitudes and actions we are to possess and demonstrate are primarily concerned with our relationships with others.

In verse 8 [1Peter 3:8], we see that the Christ-follower who desires to live a good life should possess five attitudes.

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

I. The good life is defined by our attitudes

At first glance, the attitudes or virtues that Peter lists here appear to be somewhat random, but upon closer inspection, we see a pattern emerge.

The first and last attitudes are mental, the second and fourth are emotional, and love stands at the center.

In fact, we are going to see that the three in the middle are all facets of love.

And all of these attitudes have a social dimension as they serve to keep relationships healthy.

So let’s dig in and explore the five virtues that Peter lists in turn.

A. Unity of mind

Strong relationships begin with unity of mind

The original Greek here says “being all of one mind,” but being of one mind or having unity of mind doesn’t mean that we all have to think alike

It doesn’t mean that all Christ-followers need to have identical opinions but that they should think *harmoniously* while allowing others to think *differently* on most disputable matters

An old quote that has been falsely attributed to Augustine remains applicable when considering unity no matter who said it first: “On essentials, unity; on non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

It’s the mindset we find in **Acts 1:14**, where we read that the disciples were “*with one accord devoting themselves to prayer.*”

And in **Acts 2:1**, where being “*all together in one place*” means more than occupying the same space - they were unified in their thinking as well as together physically

Of course, there are biblical absolutes that cannot be compromised, but life consists more of matters of preference where we have plenty of room for a variety of opinions

In the church, we must be committed to growing in our knowledge of and obedience to God’s Word as our source of authority that governs our interests and goals

So that, even when we might disagree on exactly the best way to achieve them, we know that we are unified under God’s Word and mutually submissive to it; moving together toward fulfillment of those interests and goals

B. Sympathy

The next trait or virtue that Peter says leads to the good life is sympathy

To be sympathetic means that one’s feelings correspond with the feelings of another and to be affected by those common feelings - it’s a compound word that means “to suffer with”

We read about sympathy demonstrated in **Romans 12:15**, where Paul writes:

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep

And again, in **1Corinthians 12:26** where we read:

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together

Then in **Hebrews 4:15**, we are informed that our Great High Priest, Jesus Christ, sympathizes with our weaknesses

Peter is saying here that we should be aware of the feelings and emotions of others and then respond in the manner that corresponds with their feelings and emotions

A modern way of putting it would be to put ourselves in the other person’s shoes and so take their feelings into account in our interactions with them

C. Brotherly love

Brotherly love is the next trait that leads to the good life, and it represents the affection Christ-followers are to have for one another

Sometimes, we make too big a deal about the different words for love in the Greek language when they have a measure of overlap and were often used interchangeably in the Bible

But this love, *philadelphos*, is exclusive love that is the result of human affection

As Peter uses it here, it is meant to indicate a special bond and relationship between believers

Of course, love is central to Christianity, as Jesus commanded his followers in **John 13:34** –

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have loved you, you are also to love one another.

And love is the second greatest commandment as Jesus taught in **Matthew 22:39** and one of the marks of being a follower of Jesus as he taught in **John 13:35**

As sojourners, we have the opportunity to be a testimony to those around us simply by the way we interact with one another

D. A tender heart

Peter next mentions a tender heart which means to be caring and compassionate

The only other New Testament usage is found in **Ephesians 4:32**, where we read:

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Interestingly, the root word translated as “tender-hearted” has to do with a person’s inward parts - their internal organs

A tender heart leans more toward being empathetic than sympathetic because we feel what the other person feels down in our guts

So what is in view here is more than fulfilling a duty of compassion but caring that reaches down to the gut-level of our feelings and emotions

We are to be so inclined that others would sense that we care for them from the bottom of our hearts

Some people are naturally compassionate and sympathetic while others need to work at it

However those are attributes of Christ as we saw in Ephesians 4:32 and God desires that we be conformed to the image of his Son [**Romans 8:29**] so work at it we must if it doesn’t come naturally

E. A humble mind

Peter finishes his list of virtues that define the good life with a humble mind - the attitude of humility

And it’s easy to see how humility corresponds to unity and therefore completes the list

In Peter’s day, just as it is in our day, humility is not a virtue that is held in high esteem

It’s difficult for us to suppress our desire to be important and to put our interests first

And we struggle with the idea of being humble largely because we don’t truly understand that it means to have a humble mind

What it doesn’t mean is that we must have a lowly opinion of ourselves and we dare not equate humility with having a poor self-image

It comes as somewhat of surprise to many to realize that a person can be humble and also be confident and even assertive because the problem isn’t assertion; it’s *self*-assertion that’s the problem

Look with me at **Philippians 2:5-8** where we see Paul’s description of Jesus as our supreme example of humility

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Jesus didn’t fail to have an accurate sense of who he was or doubt his worth

What makes him humble is his willingness to take the lower place, to perform lowly service, and to put the interests of others ahead of his own

Having a humble mind doesn’t mean to think less of oneself but to think of oneself less and being willing to let others have the place of prominence and privilege

The good life revolves around having proper relationships and those relationships have their genesis in our attitudes - in who we are on the inside because who we are inside will determine how we act

And Peter turns to our actions next in verse 9 and then quotes extensively from Psalm 34 in showing how our actions define the good life

II. The good life is defined by our actions

Look with me at verse 9 [**1Peter 3:9**]

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

The first action we see is stated both negatively and positively but basically means the Christ-follower shouldn't engage in retaliation

A. Non-retaliation

The idea here is to make a payment, with the implication that such a payment is in response to an incurred obligation

Hardly anyone in the United States can hear the name "Hatfield" without automatically thinking of the name "McCoy"

The Hatfields led by "Devil Anse" and the McCoy's led by "Ole Ran'l" McCoy began a feud in 1863 that lasted for the next 28 years

Although the reasons for the feud are somewhat hazy, the cause of its longevity was rampant retaliation where each side felt it necessary to repay every evil perpetrated by the other side

And during the feud both families suffered loss of life and property

A popular saying these days, even among Christians, is "I don't get mad, I get even" and that's our nature isn't it?

Of course, most of the "evils" in the church are in the form of speech and only rarely do we start shooting at each other

Still, when we are wronged, our first impulse is to repay the wrong and when someone hurts us by word or deed we instinctively want to hurt them back

But Peter says that mustn't be the response of a Christ-follower

I like the way the Contemporary English Version renders this command:

Don't be hateful and insult people just because they are hateful and insult you.

But Peter doesn't stop with simply stating the negative he replaces the negative response with a positive response and says that when someone harms us or insults or slanders us, we are to bless them

The Greek word Peter uses here is *eulogeo* which means literally "good word"

It means to speak well of with praise and thanksgiving - it means to invoke God's blessing upon them

And Peter uses the present tense indicating that this is to be our normal, continual practice

Paul also writes about blessing those who do us harm in **Romans 12:14** and sheds a bit more light on what this means

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

We see that Paul introduces the prohibition against cursing those who do us harm

And to curse means to wish them harm - to say, "I hope he gets what's coming to him"

Or to speak ill of them to others telling others just how badly they treated you

Instead, we are to speak positively about them and desire for good things to come their way

That's a difficult thing for us to do and we are aided greatly by recognizing that God is in control and surrendering ourselves to what God is doing through the incident even when we don't fully understand what that is

Peter concludes verse 9 with the reason for behaving in this way

For to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

Peter says that Christ-followers have been summoned by God for a purpose and the purpose of suffering evil and reviling while blessing in return is the receipt of a blessing

Christ-followers are to bless those who do them harm so that God can bless them in return

Proverbs 20:22 says –

Do not say, “I will repay evil”; wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you

The fact that our future blessing is dependent on our present conduct should incentivize us to bless others and especially those who aren’t easy to bless

Next, in verses 10-12, Peter uses a lengthy quote from Psalm 34 to bring up two further actions that concern the good life [**1Peter 3:10-12**]

For

“Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

The first thing we see from this quotation is that the good life is dependent on honest speech

B. Honest speech

There are two aspects of honesty in speech that Peter mentions and both of them are negative commands

If you want to live the good life, *“Keep [your] tongue from evil and [your] lips from speaking deceit”*

James speaks of the power of the tongue in **James 3:1-12** and indicates that the danger of the tongue far outstrips its size as a bit is smaller than a horse but is used to control it and a rudder is a relatively small part but steers the ship

And he says that the tongue is a small fire like a spark that kindles a forest fire

You’ve likely heard the World War II slogan, “Loose lips sink ships” meaning of course that what is said can have outsized consequences even when the words are said innocently

But here, Peter particularly speaks of keeping one’s tongue from evil

Meaning speech that lacks honorable qualities or is malicious, degrading, or shaming toward the one spoken of

It would be to slander someone

In legal parlance to slander is to speak falsely of someone but the biblical use of slander varies from the legal definition

Slander in the Bible is simply evil speech - speech that is meant to harm another - even if it’s true

And Peter is saying that the person who truly desires to live the good life will refrain from speech that tears someone down even if that speech is true

Next, Peter says that the good life is dependent on refraining from *“speaking deceit”*

We first saw Peter use the word “deceit” in chapter 2 verse 1 and we determined that deceit literally referred to a baited trap or a fishhook

Deceit involves trickery or falsehood that harms someone else

You engage in deceit when you are selective with the facts of a matter in order to gain some advantage

Here’s the thing, every word you say can be true while engaging in deceit if your intent is to give a wrong understanding- it’s a clever form of deliberate dishonesty for personal advantage

And Peter makes clear that the person who desires to live the good life must stop speaking evil and engaging in deceit and the inference is not that the person ceases from speaking at all but instead that they will engage in honest speech that builds up

We see that displayed in verse 11 where we see Peter tie right behavior to living the good life

C. Right behavior

Let him turn away from evil and do good

Tells us that we should not merely avoid doing evil but we should move ourselves away from evil

In order to live the good life we must put distance between ourselves and evil removing even the possibility of falling into evil

And then be proactive in doing that which is good or positive in nature

The best way to leave no space for evil actions is to fill our lives with good actions

Let him seek peace and pursue it

We should not merely prefer peace but engage in searching it out and striving, by careful investigation, to find the way of peace and then press for it

We read in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God*" [Matt. 5:9]

What Peter is indicating here is that, when the general tenor and direction of our lives is toward doing good and seeking peace, we will find that our lives are good and enjoyable

Make no mistake; Peter isn't describing a trouble-free life or a life without conflict or temptation

After all we see the need to turn from evil meaning that we will face evil and the need to seek and pursue peace which tells us there will be conflict

But that the life of the person who cultivates the attitudes and who takes the actions mentioned will be characterized by contentment and satisfaction with the life God has given them - regardless of their outward circumstances

Conclusion

I find it interesting that, by quoting extensively from Psalm 34, Peter reveals the relatively unchanging nature of man

The psalmist long ago observed pretty much exactly what Peter was seeing in his day and what we see today

The heart of man hasn't changed even with the passing of millennia

But God also hasn't changed and the Lord's eyes are still on the righteous and his ears are still open to the prayers of the righteous

And the face of the Lord is still against those who do evil

It's interesting that Peter stopped his quotation of Psalm 34 in the middle of verse 16 which says in full [Ps. 34:16]

The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth

God is not neutral and he is equally determined to see the godly prosper and the ungodly fail and he sets himself and his might against them

Are you comforted or convicted by the knowledge that God sees how you live?

Strive to live in harmony and sensitive to what others are going through, have genuine affection for your fellow believers with compassion, be humble and put others first, and don't be vindictive but seek the best even for those who hurt you

Then strive to do well and promote peace in all situations

If you do your part, God promises to see and to answer your prayers and you will enjoy the good life

Let's pray

Psalm 34:1-22 (page 463)

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.

Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!

I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears.

Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed.

This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!

Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!

The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good?

Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.

Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry.

The face of the LORD is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth.

When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.

The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.

He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.

Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.