

THE GOOD LIFE MAKES YOU WORTH SOMETHING

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Sermon Study Guide

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Sometimes it's frustrating to see someone wasting their life. When you try to talk to some people about God, Jesus, and salvation, they shrug you off by saying, "You have your belief and I have mine." Or, "I won't tell you how to live if you won't tell me how to live." You just wish you could get through to them on how to enjoy the Good Life.

How do we live the Good Life? How do we tell others that they are worth something in the Kingdom? By telling them and showing them that our belief in Christ makes sense. It gives life meaning now and for eternity.

In the book *Papillon*, the main character dreams that he is on trial. The judge says he is being charged with the most terrible crime that a person can possibly commit. When Papillon asks what it is, he is told, "The tragedy of a wasted life." "Guilty!" says Papillon, weeping. "Guilty."

There are people all around us whose lives have no meaning or hope. They're caught in the web of sin, living "in the futility of their mind" (Ephesians 4:17). Our role, as followers of the Lord Jesus, is to demonstrate that the life of faith does make sense. In the midst of a world of aimlessness and despair, we are to live with purpose and hope.

When we show people the difference Jesus has made in our lives, they will see that life can have meaning and purpose. Then, if they turn to Jesus, they too will avoid the tragedy of a wasted life.

A life that is not GOOD is a WASTED LIFE.

We are being restored to God's image. This also means we are being restored to His goodness. Look at Genesis 1:26-28:

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, ^[a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

**²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.**

²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

The serpent planted a doubt in Eve's mind about whether God had been good to her and had her best interest at heart. He said, "God knows that in the day you eat of [the fruit] your eyes will be opened, and you will be

like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5). Satan tried to convince her to believe that God was holding out on her and not giving her something really good—more knowledge.

Do you feel as though God isn't answering your prayers? Are you tempted to doubt His goodness? When I feel this way, I have to remind myself that my circumstances aren't the barometer of God's love and goodness—the cross is. He has shown how good He is by giving His only Son Jesus to die for our sin. We can't rely on our feelings. But day by day as we choose to trust Him more, we learn to believe with confidence that God is good—all the time.

We were created in the image of God – in His likeness. What is His likeness? It's found in His GOODNESS.

Here are some scriptures on God's Goodness:

"Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He teaches sinners in the way." - Psalm 25:8

"For I am the Lord, I change not....." - Malachi 3:6

"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." -James 1:17 NIV

"God is not a man. He will not lie. God is not a human being. He does not change his mind. What he says he will do, he does. What he promises, he keeps." - Numbers 23:19 the Everyday Bible)

Why were we created in His Goodness? The answer is found in Genesis 1:28 – **a responsibility to servant dominion**. We weren't just given the charge to subdue the earth and multiply. If we were created in God's goodness, we must be servants as well. We must become servants who have dominion. That's extremely different than the world's view of dominion. The world says take it by force and hurt anyone in your way. The Word tells us to be Christ-like at the same time we are walking in His power and might.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. – Mark 10:45 NIV

THE BIG QUESTION

WHAT IS THE GOOD LIFE?

So what is the good life? Read: Ecclesiastes 1:14, 17 NIV, Ecclesiastes 2:11 NIV, Ecclesiastes 4:4, 6 NIV, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 NIV.

Solomon saw injustice to the poor (Ecclesiastes 4:1-3), crooked politics (Ecclesiastes 5:8), incompetent leaders (Ecclesiastes 10:6-7), guilty people allowed to commit more crimes (Ecclesiastes 8:11), materialism (Ecclesiastes 5:10), and a desire for "the good old days" (Ecclesiastes 7:10). It sounds relevant for us, too, doesn't it? Solomon has put the key to Ecclesiastes right at the front door:

² *"Meaningless! Meaningless!"
says the Teacher.
"Utterly meaningless!
Everything is meaningless."*

³ *What does man gain from all his labor
at which he toils under the sun?*

-Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 NIV

(Just in case we missed it, he also put the same key at the back door (Ecclesiastes 12:8). But don't assume he is cynical or pessimistic: that would miss his real point! Whether he considers his wealth, his works, his wisdom, or his world, Solomon comes to a sad appraisal: all is "vanity and vexation of spirit" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). However, this is not his final conclusion, nor is it the only message that he has for his readers. In spite of his painful encounters with the world and its problems, Solomon does not recommend either pessimism or cynicism. Rather, he encourages us to be realistic about life, accept God's gifts and enjoy them (Ecclesiastes 2:24; 3:12-15, 22). After all, God gives to us "richly all things to enjoy." (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:9-10) [Words related to joy (enjoy, rejoice, etc.) are used at least 17 times in Ecclesiastes.]

Solomon does not say, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die!" Instead, he advises us to trust God and enjoy what we do have rather than complain about what we don't have. Life is short and life is difficult, so make the most of it while you can.

Solomon initially opens with three bleak observations: nothing is really changed, nothing is really new, and nothing is understood. After experimenting and investigating "life under the sun," he initially concluded, "No, life is not worth living!" And he gave four arguments to support his conclusion: the monotony of life, the vanity of wisdom, the futility of wealth, and the certainty of death.

But being a wise man, Solomon, in Chapters 3 to 10, reviewed his arguments and this time brought God into the picture. What a difference it made! By reexamining each of these impressions more carefully he realized that life was not monotonous but filled with challenging situations from God, each in its own time and each for its own purpose.

He also learned that wealth could be enjoyed and employed to the glory of God. Though man's wisdom couldn't explain everything, Solomon concluded that it was better to follow God's wisdom than to practice man's folly.

And as for the certainty of death, there is no way to escape it; it ought to motivate us to enjoy life now and make the most of the opportunities God gives us. Solomon asks his readers to take into consideration time, eternity, death, and suffering: these four factors God uses to keep our lives from becoming monotonous and meaningless. In essence, he pleads for us to not waste our lives on material possessions, money, power and knowledge.

Genesis 1:9, 21, 25, and 31 tell us that when God created, he said everything was GOOD. When He created man, He said man was “very good”. This means we were created to experience the Good Life. We were created to live like the Lord – displaying His goodness by serving mankind and making Christ known.

QUESTION: “What is salvation for?”

ANSWER: “Salvation is for the RESTORATION of all CREATION to God’s original GOODNESS.”

God has never given up on his original creation. The words *reconcile, redeem, recover, return, renew, resurrect, restore, regenerate* all begin with the prefix “re”. This implies a return to the original intent – to recover what was lost. God always sees us through salvation’s lenses. God seeks to restore His creation to its original design. He hasn’t given up on us.

God refuses to abandon the work of His hands. In fact, He sacrificed His Son Jesus to give us a second chance at becoming He intended. We are given another chance to become God’s managers of Earth. God could have scrapped His original creative work and started over. He could have sent the original Adam and Eve to Hell and started new ones, but He didn’t. He chose to redeem what He started with and bring them back to their original intent.

The hymn “Hallelujah What a Savior” says God’s purpose of salvation was to “reclaim ruined sinners.” This means they are His in the first place. Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.” God has never surrendered His title deed to the earth. He will not relinquish it to the enemy. God freed us from the shackles of sin and evil and began the reinstatement of His creative intent for mankind. God restored us through salvation, making us whole once more.

TWO QUESTIONS I MUST ANSWER

1. WHAT IS MY IDENTITY?

If I asked you for your ID, you’d probably pull out a card from your purse or wallet. We also have spiritual identities that describe who we are and what we possess in the spiritual realm. I’m sure you’ve seen the ads on TV and in magazines for weight loss products with the “before and after” pictures of the person who lost a whole bunch of pounds in a short amount of time and now looks great. Well, the Bible contains several “before and after” contrasts of who we were before and who we are after being “in Christ.”

Here’s a sample gallery of some of those “photos.” You were dead but now alive, were lost and now found (Luke 15:24); were dead in sin but now alive to God (Romans 6:11); were in darkness, now a light shining in a dark place (2 Pet 1:19). In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, there’s an exceptionally unflattering set of photos. On the left, in the “before” photo, there are the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers. The photo on the right side shows a person who has undergone an amazing transformation; it’s a photo of us with our new identity. We are now washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Those are wonderful pictures, but the most disturbing one is found in 1 John 3:10 (read it when you get a chance). It also shows the

two pictures --and we all are found in one or the other of them. On the one side are children of God, and on the other are children of the Devil!

When Christ is invited into a person's heart, a metamorphosis begins to take place. God refers to it as becoming a new creation in Christ. It's like the caterpillar changing into a butterfly.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

"The old has gone" is talking about the person who stood condemned under the law --dead in his sins. God doesn't count our sins against us anymore because Jesus took them off of us --every single one of them-- "He became sin for us." And He paid for each and every one of them --in full-- leaving no remaining balance to be paid. "The new has come" describes a new person; one who is in good standing with God --righteous! That's when God put His own Son's righteousness (His goodness) on us. He gave you and me a brand new identity! We have "become the righteousness of God."

The butterfly isn't a caterpillar with wings; it is a new being with a new identity. The caterpillar was known for crawling on the earth with its many feet and eating leaves. The butterfly is known for being able to fly in the air --on wings of beauty and drinking nectar from flowers. That old being is gone and so is its identity. The caterpillar had no part in that process of change; its Creator did it all. And so the butterfly can never be a caterpillar again because God did away with the old creation and made a new creation. That same process of change occurs to every person who is "in Christ."

From God's view point, that change from being "out of Christ" (dead) to being "in Christ" (alive) took place instantly. But it takes much longer for a Christian to learn about it --and even longer for him to accept what he has become. Our old identity was very dependent on how our attitudes and actions measured up on God's standard of good and bad works. But our new identity is not based on us --it's based on Him --His grace --His acceptance.

2. WHAT IS MY VOCATION?

"For grace you have been saved through faith...not a result of works. We are created in Christ Jesus for good works which he prepared beforehand that we might walk in them." Ephesians 2:8-9

Don't put the cart before the horse! You are redeemed by salvation, not works. Significance is big to everyone. While we are created for works, this does not imply that our pre-Christian days were works-free. There were plenty of works—things we did before Jesus to obtain significance—relationships, sports, shopping, work. The crazy thing is that after Jesus we sometimes live pre-Christ and pre-gospel. We still let our works form the basis of our identity.

Significance by works is deadly. When I mistake my vocation for my identity, it's a kind of spiritual suicide. I kill off the new creation in favor of the old. I participate in old ways of thinking about work and identity and abandon the new ways.

As a pastor, I can subtly replace identity in Christ with my vocation. If I honestly state my heart belief in those moments, it might go something like: "My vocation is pastor and my identity is as pastor." Perhaps your heart belief would be: "My vocation is a professional and my identity is professional." But the gospel tells us: "My vocation is pastor/professional and my identity is disciple." The challenge is not to put vocation before identity. We are disciples first, then pastors and professionals.

God in Christ through the Spirit has given us a new identity, that of a disciple—a Spirit-led follower of Jesus Christ. Because of God's work in us to make us new creatures in Christ, we have a new identity based on acceptance in Jesus, not acceptance by our vocational peers. As a result, we work from our significance and not for it. This is the freest place to find our identity.

- Genesis 1:26, 28 NKJV

Key Scripture

Micah 6:8 NKJV says this:

**He has shown you, O man, what is good;
And what does the LORD require of you
But to do justly,
To love mercy,
And to walk humbly with your God?**

QUESTION: *“What is a Good Man/Good Woman?”*

1. A person who DOES JUSTICE

The Pharisees of the New Testament were obviously not the first Jews to believe that the letter of the law outweighs the spirit of the law. The Pharisees' form of "checklist godliness" was obviously being practiced by the hearers of Micah's prophecy.

Micah 6:8 reminds us of the conditions God set on His promises to Abraham, namely to do righteousness and justice (Gen. 18:19). Additionally, the directions for Israel from God (via Moses) come to mind: And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good? (Deuteronomy 10:12,13)

Both Samuel and Hosea emphasize God's preference for obedience, knowledge, and mercy over sacrifice and burnt offerings. (1 Samuel 15:22; Hosea 6:6.)

For man to do justly, he must give unto everyone that which is due to them according to God's will.

We must also give God what is due Him. God is deserving of our heart, body, soul, and spirit; our wisdom, understanding, judgment. Jesus tells us (Mark 12:28-30) that the first commandment is to "love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." Because He created us in His own image, God rightly and justly deserves all of our worship and adoration. "This is the first commandment."

We must give our neighbor what is due to them. Jesus continues (Mark 12:31) His discussion of the greatest commandments with the second, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Can we sin against someone we truly love? Perhaps we might momentarily sin against a loved one, but not continually. True love desires to bless and not to hurt. Note however that we are not to give that which is due to God to any man - neighbor or self.

To give to yourself what you are due. According to Paul, we are not our own but instead our bodies are the Temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). So what we have coming must be tempered by what we must avoid. Paul reminds us first of all to "flee sexual immorality." Elsewhere Paul gives us lists of characteristics to avoid and attain (Gal. 5:19-25)

2. A person who LOVES MERCY

God realized what man has come to know justice. This by itself is cold and heartless. (Micah 7:18.) To do justly alone is not sufficient for a child of God. We must love mercy and do what it requires. Mercy comes from characteristics that include kindness, goodness, generosity, and charity. Part of what mercy requires is to be willing to forgive the sins of others as God is willing to forgive our sins (Titus 3:5).

3. A person who WALKS HUMBLY WITH GOD

But how are we to do this? We must first acknowledge our sins and then be willing to submit to God's mercy. It is only through a humbling of ourselves that we will be allowed to walk with God. "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (1 Pet. 5:5.) Paul points out that it is self-exaltation that leads to unbelief and lack of faith in the power of God (Rom. 11:20; 12:3). The humble attitude required by the Lord will make itself manifest in a life of prayer and service.

What Then, Is Good?

Homer Hailey suggests that "the 'good' that [God] requires is the doing of His will." To accomplish that lofty (yet necessary) goal man must act toward God and man according to the divine standard of righteousness revealed in God's will; he must show every man a compassionate warm-heartedness; and walk humbly in recognition of the absolute holiness and righteousness of God by submitting to God through obedience to His desire and will. (Hailey, A Commentary on the Minor Prophets, p. 214.)

There is no "Christian To Do List." It is just not that simple. And yet we know that living Christ-like is not impossible (Matthew 11:29,30). But we must be mindful it is a "life" and not a series of accomplishments.

