

THE GOOD LIFE

1 PETER 3:8-17

How would you define “**the good life**”?

An early retirement and a beach house on a Caribbean Island?

A new home on the 18th fairway and unlimited golfing privileges?

A country estate and a herd of horses you could ride any time?

When someone says “*the good life*” what comes to your mind?

The expression, “**The Good Life,**” is actually a philosophical term.

It originated with Aristotle, the Greek philosopher. It’s the life you’d live if you were all powerful, and had the ability to arrange any circumstance.

And apparently, *everybody* is dreaming of *the good life...*

Hip-hop artist, *Kayne West* sings the lyrics, “**I go for mine, I gots to shine...**” He talks of his Ferrari, his girls, his booze, his piles of money, his champagne, his trips to Vegas... He belts out, “**Welcome to the good life.**”

Hanna Montana sells her version of *the good life* to little girls... “**This is the good life, have anything you want. - Gucci bag, Prada shoes; take my credit card it’s all for you. - Can’t slow, never stop; fill those bags up to the top.**”

- Slide the plastic, flash the cash, ring it up, it's such a blast." Obviously, Hanna isn't the person who pays the bills when they come due.

Even the rock group, Weezer, sings, "I got off track... I wanna get back... to the good life." Everybody wants a piece of *the good life*.

Here's how Peter frames this morning's text. In verse 10, "For 'He who would love life and see good days..." In short, "if you want *the good life*..."

Peter offers us *the good life*, yet a different version. God's idea of *the good life* isn't about money, or amusements - or *happy places*, with *happy people*, in *happy situations*. In fact, it has nothing to do with circumstances.

Recently, ABC's 20/20 did a report, "The happiest place on the planet."

When we think of the ultimate destination our minds conjure up a tropical paradise with soft sands and gentle breezes - like the island of Fiji.

Yet Fiji ranked 50 spots below cold Iceland in the list of happiest places.

You might think the happiest place would be the wealthiest or most powerful, yet the USA with all its money and muscle ranked just 23rd.

The happiest place on earth was Denmark of all places.

Apparently, the source and cause of happiness can be deceptive.

Think back a few years ago, you probably had more money, more job security, more toys and stuff - *but were you any happier than you are now?*

Rather than rely on the opinions of Kayne West, and Hanna Montana, and Weezer – we need to discover God’s definition of *the good life!*

And 1 Peter 3 paints for us a picture of what *the good life* looks like.

Peter mentions seven components of *the good life...* *We’ll walk through the passage and pick them out*, but let me give them to you in a list... *The good life* consists of *good company, good comebacks, good conversations, good courage, a good case, a good conscience, and good conduct.*

And this may surprise you, but according to Peter you can live *the good life* even in *tough times*. *The good life* can still be had in rough conditions.

Remember, Peter’s readers are targets of persecution. Their faith in Jesus had put a bulls-eye on their back. These were believers acquainted with suffering, and ill-treatment. They weren’t the kind of people you’d normally consider to be candidates for *the good life...*

But *the ideal life* Peter describes is within everyone’s reach. It isn’t purchased with riches, or obtained through

privilege. It's not necessarily comfortable or successful – *the good life* is **a life lived pleasing to God.**

Don't forget the theme of 1 Peter... **Life is a test – it is only a test.**

Your days on earth are preparation for eternity. *What makes our days, good days – what makes a life, the good life* – is the willingness to redeem every minute and make it count for God regardless of the situation.

In fact, certain lessons we learn only through hardship. Peter is writing to persecuted Christians, and he's telling them *how to live the good life...*

He begins in verse 8, **“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous...”** Notice immediately, Peter speaks **NOT** to *“you,”* but to **“all of you.”** He's not addressing individuals. He's talking southern - to *“all ya'll.”*

And here's the first ingredient of *the good life...* **Good company.**

God never envisioned *Lone Rangers for Jesus.* He didn't create us and save us to live solo. He desires that we live connected lives. In fact, some of life's highest meaning is found in relationships with other people.

The good life is all about **good company.**

Being a Christian in the Wi-Fi age is sometimes too easy - why even bother with church? *To hear a Bible study* - just log on to the website... *to worship* - download

a song from I-tunes... *to fellowship* - check out some Facebook friends... You don't even have to take off your pajamas!

Just pop open the laptop, and you can have church... *or can you?*

I say, "No!" *Cyber-church* isn't *real church*. If your spiritual life is traveling down the high-tech, low-touch path say good-bye to *the good life*.

You're headed for a crash. A spiritual virus is in your future. *Reboot while you still can!* There are no apps to *replace face to face, hand to hand, shoulder to shoulder, blood to blood, sweat to sweat, tears to tears fellowship*. Peter's prescription for a fulfilling life is a physical connection.

It's not just "you" it's "*all of you.*" When Christians gather it's as if we pass germs. I'm not talking literal germs, but spiritually speaking, stuff rubs off. If you're around folks who take risks for Jesus – and stretch their faith – and serve Him at every turn – it's contagious. *You feed off their example.*

But if you stay isolated from the community of faith you can forget what it even looks like. We're *physical* beings - alive in a *material* world – that's why we need help from each other to grasp the *spiritual* realities around us.

Christians are like redwood trees. They grow best in groves. A redwood's roots grow out rather than down. An

enormous redwood tree gains its strength by interlocking with the roots from other trees nearby.

This is true of Christians. We grow best in clumps, rather than alone.

Yet church life – or living in a clump of Christian – can be a challenge.

Good company requires the right attitude toward one another. The good life is about people living with people, and treating each other the way Jesus treats them. Peter instructs us, “**be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous...**”

And perhaps this first instruction is the hardest, “**be of one mind.**”

Look at the diversity in this room. If I wanted, I could splinter us in a few seconds. I’d just mention **football**, Bulldogs or Jackets - or **politics**, Obama or Palin – or **grits**, sugar or butter... and we’d be forming cliques.

With all our differences in upbringing, and ethnicity, and education, and life-experiences - *how can we possibly come to a meeting of the minds?*

There’s only one way. *The more diverse the group the more determined* we have to be to keep our focus on Jesus. He’s the main thing! We’ll have little disagreements, but if we shift our emphasis off Jesus we’ll fracture into a thousand pieces. It’s Jesus that keeps us strong and together.

Let's be of "one mind." Let's also "have compassion for one another..."

Here's the irony, on the surface we're very diverse, but underneath it all we're amazingly similar. We articulate in different accents, but our hearts speak one language. The soul comes in only one shade – the color human.

We might come from different neighborhoods, and have different backgrounds - but as human beings we have the same basic needs.

Even as Christians, though we all have our own gifts and callings we face the *same devil* - deal with *same temptations* - fight the *same flesh*. There's plenty of reason for each of us to have compassion on one another.

I've heard it put, "Compassion is your concern in my heart." It's your feet in my shoes. It's your burden on my shoulders. *Show some compassion...*

That's exactly what happened at the Madison, Ohio Livestock Sale.

Katie Fisher, age 17, put her lamb up for sale. She was hoping to get a good price. Katie was battling cancer. She'd been in and out of the hospital for several rounds of chemo... Before the auctioneer started the bidding, he announced Katie's condition to the buyers, hoping to bump up the price of lamb chops. It worked. Her lamb sold for an inflated \$11.50 per pound.

But that's when the buyer decided to give the lamb back to Katie.

He suggested the auctioneer sale it again - which started a chain reaction. Before the day was done Katie's little lamb had sold 36 times and raised \$16,000 for the family. Her mom said, "The first sale is the only one I remember. After that, I was crying too hard." The Ohio livestock buyers showed the kind of compassion that needs to exist in the body of Christ.

When we show compassion toward each other we're living *the good life*.

Christians talk a lot about compassion, but what's equally important is "*courtesy*." Peter says, "*love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous*."

A little politeness and respect goes a long way. It's been said, "Apply a drop or two of the oil of courtesy, and it'll cut down on the friction."

Here's some good advice, "Be courteous to everybody. You never know who might end up on your jury." For some of us, it's wise to think ahead.

Every person you'll ever meet bears the image of God, and for that reason alone deserves your respect. But in addition, every person you'll ever meet was purchased by the blood of God's own Son. He must really love them... *so what are you doing cutting them off in traffic - or stiffing them for the tip - or being rude on the phone*. Hey, show a little courtesy!

You cultivate *good company* by showing compassion and courtesy.

But *the good life* also includes **good comebacks**. As a Christian you'll be tested. Your parade will get rained on. Life won't always go according to your plan. And you'll react. In fact, the rest of your life depends more on your *reactions* – than *actions*. Your *comebacks* reveal your true character.

Verse 9 tells us how to react, “**not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.**” Blessed people respond to evil with good.

Remember who's writing this letter – *the king of inappropriate reactions!*

Peter had learned a lot about comebacks! Peter was the disciple who took out his sword and lopped off a man's ear. “**Malchus**” was the unfortunate fellow who came to arrest Jesus. And when he pulled out the handcuffs, Peter pulled out his sword. He tried to split Malchus' head open like a watermelon, but Malc swerved, and Peter's sword clipped his ear.

Jesus had to pick up the ear and reattached it to Malchus' head.

The Lord cleaned up Peter's mess. And it wasn't the last time Jesus has had to heal a wound inflicted by one of his servants. We also retaliate wrongly. Our tendency is to fight violence with violence – insult for insult.

By the time Peter wrote this letter, he'd had time to change his tune. I'm sure Jesus' mercy toward Malchus caused Peter to start to re-think.

Then at the cross Peter witnessed the power of love. He saw Jesus return cruelty with compassion. He took all the hate and venom and barbarism Rome could muster, and responded with love and forgiveness.

Peter had always wanted to follow Jesus – *that's all he'd ever wanted to do*. But now he'd learned the path Jesus takes goes through the cross. He reacts to evil and insult with blessing – and He asks us to do the same...

When someone does evil against you, let me encourage you to retaliate!

I'd never suggest you just roll over, or take it lying down – *have a comeback!* When your enemy attacks don't ignore it or be a coward. Fight back - just do it with love! Retaliate with righteousness. Fight evil with good.

It's true, "To injure an enemy puts you below him. Take revenge on an enemy makes you even. But forgive your enemy, and you rise above him."

During the tumultuous days of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln often commented, "The only way to destroy an enemy is to make him your friend." You're living the good life when you turn your enemies into friends.

Peter tells us in verse 10, "For 'He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil,

and his lips from speaking deceit...” Here’s another quality of *the good life* – **good conversations**.

Think about it, nothing makes life more burdensome than a wagging, cutting, biting tongue. If you’re always spewing pessimism, criticism, lies, false truths, gossip, even profanities – it creates a drag on your life.

Understand words are like roadwork. **You’re paving the path in front of you with what comes out of your mouth**. If you speak encouragement, and kindness, and blessing, you uproot obstacles, and stumbling stones - you smooth out the relationships in front of you... But if sarcasm, and negativity, and criticalness spill from your lips – you’re creating a rocky road from the start. You set the stage for *the good life* by what comes out of your mouth.

It might be entertaining to some folks to hear Simon Cowell mock and make fun of the want-to-be singers who audition for American Idol. Why is it we like his *bluntness*, his *bite*, his *ruthless disregard for everyone else’s feelings*? I know if Simon were judging me, I’d appreciate a little kindness.

Loading up and saying whatever you think is callous and destructive.

The old saying, **“Sticks and stones will break your bones, but words will never harm you”** - is just not true! Marriages break apart – kids get wounded - churches split – scars result... because of misspoken words. Here’s a truth, get control of your tongue or you’ll miss out on *the good life*.

Have conversations that *build people up*, rather than *tear them down*.

Verse 11 tells us, “**Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.**” *The good life* comes to people who seek peace.

This needs to be the aim of our *conversations*. Why be combative, and always argumentative? For some people, the goal of every conversation is to *prove their point!* But is your point always what needs to be proved?

Conversations can also communicate love and encouragement – they can foster understanding – they can find common ground. Are the words that fly from your mouth *heat-seeking missiles*, or *peace-keeping missiles*?

The person who prides himself in never losing an argument *may never lose an argument* - but he'll lose some friends, and respect, and influence.

The fellow who can't stand to lose usually ends up sad and lonely.

If you want to live *the good life* you need to learn not every battle needs to be fought – not every hill is worth dying on. Here's my all-time favorite quote, “**A bulldog can whip a skunk, but is it really worth the effort?**”

The good life involves *good conversations*... with people *and with God*.

Read verse 12, “**For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the**

face of the LORD is against those who do evil." As Christians we seek peace, but there comes a time when we have to *deal with confrontation* – and our first line of attack is prayer!

Hey, God is on the side of the righteous. That means in the game of life make sure you're on God's side. You don't want to line up against God.

Here is a wonderful truth – the Almighty God monitors the cries of the righteous. His eyes and ears are attentive to your prayerful conversations.

Several years ago, New Yorker magazine published Bill Gates' personal email address. Overnight the Microsoft chief was swamped with messages.

Afterwards, Gates armed his computer with filtering software that now reads his email. It sends through important stuff, and dumps the junk mail. Bill Gates can only handle so many messages at a time - *but not God*.

God is never swamped with mail or calls. He personally answers all requests, and corresponds to every petition He receives from believing lips. *The good life* belongs to folks who keep an ongoing conversation with God.

And I love the rhetorical question Peter asks in verse 13 **"Who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?"** I'm sure some of Peter's persecuted readers could've answered him with a list of names...

But here's Peter's rationale, if God monitors the righteous and opposes evil doers who is there to really

fear? Peter wants his readers to be brave-hearts. He knows they'll be denied *the good life* if they lack **good courage**.

Today, high-tech security is big business. People invest thousands of dollars in their personal safety. Yet here's the only sure-fire protection... *follow what's good!* Just do the right thing and you'll avoid lots of trouble.

Peter says, *"Who will harm you if you follow what is good?"*

Some will try, a few might succeed, but God allows nothing to get to me, that don't first pass through Him - *and it arrives with His purpose attached.*

Be aware *the good life* doesn't just include **God's protection**, it also can include the **world's persecution**. God allows it at times. *The good life* is independent of circumstances – *good or bad*.

Peter adds, *"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake (and there's that possibility...still), you are blessed."*

Three decades had passed since that spring morning in Galilee when Peter heard Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. But His words were still ringing in Peter's ears. *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* At first those words didn't make much sense to Peter. Back then, he lacked the perspective he had now...

He was on the wrong side of the cross. He'd yet to see Jesus' suffer.

But in the years since, Peter learned the hard way, if suffering was part of God's will for His only Son, how could Jesus' followers escape a similar plight? Everybody who follows Jesus is destined for some persecution...

It could be a *severe scourging* or *subtle snicker* – a *cross* or a *cross word* – a *physical drubbing* or *social snubbing* – they'll *sock you* or *mock you*. Yet Peter's own experience taught him, happy is the man who is so closely associated with Jesus that he's allowed to suffer for His Lord's sake.

The highest form of fellowship with the Savior is to share His sufferings.

Make no mistake about it, without *good courage* you won't live *the good life*. Peter adds, "**And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.**"

If your home is with Jesus... if your treasure is laid up in heaven... if your citizenship is in the Kingdom of God... if your life is hid with Christ in God... then what can any one on earth do to really, truly harm you?

Once I received a fax from a friend of mine. In big bold letters it read, "**Your stock in heaven is rising. Invest everything!**" *What a great stock tip!*

The good life is a life that's lived with heaven and eternity in view.

And *the good life* involves being prepared to present **a good case**.

In verse 15 Peter tells us, “**But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear...**” Part of living *the good life* is being certain that you know *what you believe* and *why you believe it!*

If you were stopped today, and asked why you’re so hopeful about going to heaven, could you give that person a compelling and accurate explanation? How well can you articulate the basic tenants of Christianity?

And why is this so crucial to *the good life*? *Well, just wait until you get asked and don’t have an answer.* There’s not a worse feeling in the world.

Years ago, my brother and some friends decided to go downtown to the old Omni Arena to do some street witnessing and share their faith.

That night Ken approached a guy who was wearing a turban and a robe. It was obvious he was involved in some cult. Ken started to tell him about Jesus. Yet this cultist was prepared – *more prepared than my brother.*

The guy started quoting Scripture – he twisted it and took it out of context - but he painted Ken into a corner. That’s when the man pulled out a pocket NT and waved it in my brother’s face. He asked, “**How did David kill Goliath?**” He answered his own question, “**He killed him**

with his own sword.” That’s when he said to Ken, “And that’s what I’ve just done to you.”

Those words so haunted my brother that shortly thereafter he went to seminary. He never wanted to get caught again without an answer.

And let me say I don’t want *you* to get caught without an answer. This is where some of you need to catch up – some remedial work is in order.

Your parents never took you to church. You were an adult before you opened up a Bible. Until just recently, you were drinking beer and getting high, and weren’t really thinking about God... Since coming to Jesus everything has changed, yet there’re some gaps in your Bible knowledge.

You know Jesus changed your life, but you’re no so sure *why* or *how*.

Here’s good news, you don’t have to go to seminary to get caught up. Sandyadams.org is a library of messages available at the click of a mouse. The Essentials series is a good place to start. Along with the Bible and the Holy Spirit... we can get you started building *a good case* for your faith.

But *the good life* also includes two more necessities. He mentions them in verse 16, “**having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.**”

The good life requires **a good conscience** and **good conduct** - a *good conscience* toward God - and a *good reputation* in the eyes of the world...

Even if you live in a beach house, or on a country estate you'll never enjoy the lush digs if you go to sleep each night with a guilty conscience.

It's been said, "A clean conscience makes for the softest pillow."

And no amount of money can buy a clean conscience. It's one item in life that's not for sale, yet it's the most valuable commodity on the planet.

Who cares what people say about me, if I know that my conscience is clean and pure before God? *The good life* will include *a good conscience*.

As it will a long track record of "*good conduct*" - or a *good reputation*.

Peter encourages us to live a life that's unassailable - that can't be accused. *A life that when people lie about you, nobody believes them!*

Well, how do you define *the good life?*

Peter says it's a life lived in *good company* - that reacts with *good comebacks* - it spreads *good conversation* - shows *good courage* - makes *a good case* - keeps *a good conscience* - and strings together a few decades of *good conduct*. But notice again, it has nothing to do with *good*

times, and good pay, and good treats, and good places, and good games...

The good live has nothing to do with good or bad circumstances.

Peter says it this way, verse 17, “**For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**” Even if I’m innocent of any wrongdoing, yet *I’m called to take one for God’s team*, it’s still *the good life!*

According to Peter not all suffering is created equal. You can suffer *shamefully* or *honorably*. If I suffer for my own *sinfulness*, there’s no value in that! *Getting a speeding ticket isn’t being persecuted for Jesus’ sake!*

Right now, I’m suffering... but it’s not for *righteousness’ sake*... it’s for *stupidity’s sake*. I was in a hurry, and careless, and I mishandled a knife.

What pleases God - and what witnesses to men - is to “**suffer for doing good!**” When your godliness causes folks to be jealous and accuse you falsely... when your commitment to Jesus convicts them of sin, and they attack you in return... then you know for sure, you’re living *the good life!*

Here’s the point, *the really good life* isn’t a day at the beach - or a bed of roses – there are times when *the good life* includes some *rough stuff*.

Remember, “**Life is a test. It’s only a test.**” In the end, **what constitutes the good life is what prepares us for heaven** – even if it includes some injustice and

unpleasantness. *It's whatever it takes... this is the good life!*