

# The good life

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Take a moment to think about the following questions:

- A. When you think about your life, are you happy with how things are going?
- B. Would you say that you are living the good life?
- C. If not, what would you need to add, remove or change about your present life to live the good life?
- D. From where do you get your definition of “the good life”?
- E. Would you say your definition lines up more with the world’s definition of “the good life” or the Bible’s definition of “the good life”?

In John 10:10 Jesus said, *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”* Jesus is the source of the true “good life”. Before we look at scripture’s idea of the “good life”, let’s think about the world’s.

A story is told of a large, multinational company that was looking for cheap labor and large profits. The company built a factory near a small, poor village, in an impoverished country. They hired the villagers to work in the factory. The first couple of months everything went well, but after the fourth month fewer villagers were coming to work each day. By the sixth month almost all the villagers had stopped working. Frustrated and confused, the supervisor from the factory went into the village to find his employees and see what had happened. Their answers went something like this: “We made enough money to buy what we needed. Why should we keep working?” The company thought about it and came up with a strategy. They started sending catalogs and advertisements into the small village. Eventually all the villagers came back to work because they had looked at the catalogs, become discontented with their lives, and now had become aware of all of the things that they supposedly “needed”.

The same is happening to us today. The meaning of “need” is being re-defined and it is pushing contentment farther and farther out of our reach. It is as if someone has come and changed all the price tags. Things that God says are precious, the world is discarding, and the superficial novelties of the world, many people are now pursuing with all of their hearts.

We are bombarded every day with many messages of what we really need to experience the “good life”. Television, radio, movies, internet, billboards, metro walls, signs on the street, signs on the bus stops, advertisements at sporting events, Youtube ads, Facebook ads, and email ads are smothering us.

According to Menmood Hanif, Senior Digital Marketing Strategist of PUREVPN, the average Internet user is confronted by 11,150 ads per month.<sup>1</sup> David Raab, a marketing consultant and founder of the Customer Data Platform Institute, reports that 80 billion pieces of advertising mail were delivered this year.<sup>2</sup> And this does not even include the influence that the people we relate to have on us. We see the newest headphones on the person sitting across from us on the metro and we covet them. We see the newest cookware while we are having dinner at a friend’s house and we want it. We see the name brand shoes or purse that our coworker has, or that amazing new appliance that is advertised on the sales channel on the television that we can buy for an amazingly low price, and even get two for the price of one . . . and we are saddened because we do not have them.

This new definition of “need” drives us to want more, buy more and covet more so that we can be “happy”. *Psychology Today* reported on a study finding 62 percent of shoppers made purchases, not because they really needed it, but to merely cheer themselves up. They now even have a name for it. It is called “retail therapy”<sup>3</sup>. It is just another way to pursue the “good life”.

We are not that much different than the villagers in the story. Our “wants” have become our “needs”. Our desires and ways of life have been so influenced by the culture around us that many times we have wandered away from the “good life” of God that is available to all believers.

Jeremiah 2:13 describes this same idea in a different way. ***“For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”***

This verse is the picture of one who, instead of drinking from a pure, unending spring of water, has decided to build a receptacle that catches runoff rainwater from the street. They have turned from the true source of life and instead trusted in their own faulty strategies to drink stagnant, poisonous water that lead to death.

Our desire of the world’s version of the “good life” will result the same way. It will bring brokenness and regret. This is what Jesus is talking about in John 10:10. ***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*** The prince of this world is wooing our

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/how-to/marketing/2017/09/do-we-really-see-4-000-ads-a-day.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://customerexperiencematrix.blogspot.com/2015/09/how-many-ads-per-day-do-you-see-fewer.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/how-to/marketing/2017/09/do-we-really-see-4-000-ads-a-day.html>

hearts with all of the messages of the world, but Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost. He has come to expose the lie, to set the captives free, and to offer an abundant life to all who will believe.

We often dream of the future when life will be better, believing that “the grass is always greener on the other side”. We believe that once we are richer, more popular, more loved, more comfortable, more pain-free, or more entertained, we will have the “good life”, but that is not true. In the Christian life the true riches are at our fingertips every day. They are right in front of us. The truly priceless, precious things of life are always within reach.

The world breeds discontentment in us. We long for deep things like love, joy and peace. We try to take hold of them through money, materialism, popularity, pleasure and ease of life, but God’s Word already promises these blessed things of life. It is all found in Christ. We don’t have to bow to the world’s methods to experience the truly “good life”.

In John 10:10 Jesus said, ***“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*** This is a description of the battle for our hearts and our minds. Satan has come to destroy life, and Christ has come to save it. Christ has come to offer us the “Good Life” that no longer depends on money, comfort, success, or circumstance. As we trust, forgive, serve and give our lives away for the sake of others, we find the depth and goodness of life that God intended for us. Only in Him will we ever be truly contented, for we were made for Him.

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment, He responded, ***“To Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”*** (Matthew 22:37-39).

This is our starting point as we seek “the good life”. We love God. We then are empowered to love our neighbors. Any other self-centered goals of life will prove to be empty and vain.

Let’s now turn our attention towards several passages that will help us better understand this abundant life which Jesus has for us.

One reason we often turn to the world to find the “good life” is because we don’t believe that God can meet our needs. We doubt His ability to provide. This lack of faith drives us towards the counterfeit solutions of the world, but Jesus’ words turn our hearts back towards God, our Provider.

In Matthew 6, Jesus teaches His followers how to pray. In verse 11 He uses this phrase, ***“Give us this day our daily bread.”***

As we examine this verse it helps if we start at the end. We all understand the literal meaning of “daily bread”, but in this context it means much more. It is more than bread, or even food. Jesus is communicating the idea of daily sustenance. It is asking God for all that we will need to sustain us today, without even knowing for sure what the day will bring. For the poor, it may mean providing them with the food and the shelter that they will need to sustain them physically. For those with a marriage on the verge of divorce, they will need the grace and forgiveness that will hold them together for another day. For those who are facing important career decisions, it may be wisdom and peace. It will be different for

every person, but our God, who is intimately aware of all of our life situations, can be trusted to meet us in the midst of our need. Even as we see in the life of the Apostle Paul, in the midst of his need the Lord said to him, ***“My Grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness”*** (2 Corinthians 12:9).

This request for daily bread is also a call to a life of contentment and simplicity. A life of contentment that only requests the basic needs instead of our covetous wants. Needs that are essential to allow us to live a life that serves God and serves others. How often are our hearts drawn away by desires for the things of the world? Whether intentional or not, we find ourselves lured by the promise of comfort, pleasure, security or prestige. In turn we begin to long for and even pray for things that have no significance in the kingdom of God. Our lives become so complicated and cluttered as we accumulate so many things and pursue so many others. At times we get so taken in by our desires that we even believe that they are needs. We begin to lose contentment in Christ and begin to covet the things of the world. We have the blessings of God all around us, yet we turn our attention to earthly things and are drawn away from Christ, the only true source of abundant life.

The Apostle Paul’s words are helpful at this point: ***“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me”*** (Philippians 4:11-13).

What is Jesus saying as He teaches his disciples about prayer? To all those in need, He is not just the bread, or the food, but the sustainer of life. Paul echoes these words in Philippians 4:19, ***“And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.”***

As a child stays near to his father, he receives all that he needs. In the same way, as we stay near to Christ, our every need will be met. We no longer must turn to godless strategies to meet our needs.

Another characteristic that accompanies a person who is experiencing the “good life” of God is gratitude. Would you say that you are a person of gratitude?

The difference between a grateful heart and an ungrateful heart can be traced back to how we view the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is a matter of the heart. We can see it more clearly in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

In 2 Corinthians 4:15, Paul wrote these words: ***“All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.”*** The Gospel of Jesus Christ was spreading, and more and more people were finding salvation in Jesus Christ. Two things were resulting from their salvation: thankfulness and glory to God.

Thanksgiving is connected to grace. It is a natural result of a heart that has believed in Jesus Christ. At salvation we come face to face with the full extent of our sinfulness (Romans 3:23). At this humbled place we encounter the overwhelming grace and mercy of Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23). We then realize

that the only thing that we truly deserve is condemnation and death, but instead we have been given salvation.

As children of God, we should live in this position of spiritual humility and indebtedness for God's grace for the rest of our lives. It should result in a mindset that realizes that we do not deserve anything. Because of this, everything in life is an added bonus and a blessing. The gospel births a heart of thanksgiving.

If one does not know Christ, or if a believer has drawn away from Christ, the opposite will occur. Spiritual humility, which comes from remembering one's sinfulness and God's grace, will be replaced by a sense of self-righteousness or entitlement: "I deserve better!" The focus goes from what God has done to what man can do. It will go from pleasing God to pleasing self and others. We will think more about the present than eternity. We will be desensitized to our sin and begin to think more highly of ourselves than we should. This ushers us into an unstable way of life. We are now prone to listen to the world's opinion: "You deserve better!" Our mind begins to focus on our own desires: "I want!", "I must have!", "I cannot live without!" We will "need" more and demand more. We will complain more. It will result in self-centeredness that will pursue the "good life" of the world like a thirsting man pursues a mirage of water in the desert. We will seek the "good life" with our whole hearts, only to realize that once we grasp it, it is worthless to us.

We see these characteristics in the Apostle Paul's life. In his younger years, Paul had put his confidence in who he was and what he had accomplished (Philippians 3). After Paul became a follower of Jesus Christ, everything changed. He now recognized His sin. He now had experienced the endless grace of God and He found contentment. He then wrote these words, *"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things"* (Philippians 3:7-8).

Knowing that he deserved nothing, through Christ he now found contentment in every circumstance (Philippians 4:11). Paul is not one who talked of contentment while living an easy life. He was very aware of difficulties, but yet had been granted contentment. Paul had been in prison, flogged severely, and exposed to death time and again. He had been beaten, stoned, whipped, shipwrecked, without food, without sleep, and been cold and naked (2 Corinthians 11:23-28).

Paul, this man of suffering, also penned these words, *"Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"* (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Paul had known a difficult life, but he described it with words of contentment and joy. He had found the truly "good life" that was more precious than life itself.

Paul was not alone in this way of life. In Acts 5 we see the apostles beaten by the religious leaders of their day and ordered not to speak any more in the name of Jesus. In response, they *"rejoiced for they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ."* In the midst of the pain they had found the "good life" that was truly priceless.

We see this throughout scripture: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Esther. David. Moses. People willing to risk everything for the sake of loving God with their whole hearts.

As we seek to love God and love others, our lives will take on a different direction. We will carry out selfless acts of kindness. We will generously meet the needs of others. We will forgive others who have sinned against us. We will love our enemies. We will encourage those who are broken. We will give a listening ear to one in need. We will submit to others. We will apologize freely. Those acts of love that we at first dreaded, we now will enjoy.

As we live out the “good life” in this way, we will enjoy the promises of God. We will know the provision of God as we seek Him first. We will experience the peace that passes all understanding as we present our needs to Him in prayer. We will bask in the joy found in His presence. We will receive His wisdom when we ask for it. We will be covered by the unconditional love of God the Father. We will rest in the freedom from sin found in Christ. This is the “good life” that the world cannot provide.

As we walk in the “good life” of God, we no longer have to listen to the tempting voices of the world, because we have found something better. We belong to Christ, who ***“is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us”*** (Ephesians 3:20-21).

In Christ our deepest needs are met, so we no longer need to turn to the world in search of the “good life”. The voice of the temptress has lost her power and its appeal. We are now free to experience life to its fullest, every moment of every day, as we walk with the One who is Life.