

Living The Good Life

1 Timothy 6:11-21

Slide 1

For the Millennial celebration in 2000, New York City decided that the “time-ball” needed to be redesigned, so Waterford Crystal was contracted to renovate this famous “time-ball.”

A geodesic sphere, six feet in diameter, weighing approximately 1,070 pounds, and covered with a total of 504 crystal triangles that vary in size was constructed.

Each of those triangles has a special designation: Hope for Fellowship, Hope for Peace, Hope for Wisdom, Hope for Unity, Hope for Courage, Hope for Healing, etc. The Name of the ball itself? The Star of Hope

This was a nice touch, but on this New Year’s Eve, it’s time to ask ourselves more probing questions about our lives.

So, as you celebrate this New Year, instead of focusing on the “Star of Hope,” I want you to ask yourself one question: *“Am I living the good life?”*
“Am I living the life God intended me to live?”

Of course, the question assumes that you know what the good life is; a question people have pondered for centuries.

Greek philosophers said the good life was the examined life. In fact, Aristotle said that an unexamined life wasn’t worth living.

The ancient Epicureans concluded the good life was a life that maximizes pleasure. Existentialists decided that the good life was a self-made, individually chosen life.

So, what is the good life? Is it having lots of money? Is it having a powerful job that influences lots of people? Or is it just being happy, whatever that is?

On this last day of 2023, I want us think through a Christian definition of the good life.

Because, when we're able to define the good life from a Christian perspective, we'll be in a better position to evaluate whether we're living the good life or not.

When we're able to define the good life from a Christian perspective, we'll know what kind of changes and adjustments we need to make to enjoy the kind of life God intends us to live.

In the sixth chapter of Paul's first letter to Timothy, we find four insights into the good life from a Christian perspective, and how we can better embrace it in 2024.

Slide 2

1 Timothy 6:11-12a, *"But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith."*

In the previous ten verses, Paul warned Timothy about the seductive danger of greed. Here Paul's directly addressing Timothy and challenging him to live the good life, a life that really counts.

Building on his warning in verse 10 of how the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, Paul cautioned Timothy that a passion to get rich usually plunges people into ruin.

So, Paul encouraged Timothy to run for his life, to run as fast as he could from a life that's obsessed with getting more.

Which is true for us today. We're to run, not walk, because greed can easily hook us with its empty promises and ruin our spiritual lives.

Once we get away from greed, we're free to pursue the good life or as Paul defines it, a life of *"righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness."*

This word *"pursue,"* that Paul uses in verse 11, is a strong Greek verb that means to chase after something with intense effort.

When I studied this word, I thought about that 1984 movie, *The Terminator*. He was relentless. No matter how hard anyone tried to stop him, he kept getting up and coming for more, like the Energizer Bunny.

This is the pursuit about which Paul's talking. A life of seeking after the virtues of "*righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.*" But what do these words mean?

Righteousness is simply a life of integrity. *Godliness* is a God centered life, a life where God is the center focus.

Faith is a lifestyle of trust in God. *Love* is a life of caring for people, especially people outside your circle of friends and family.

Endurance is bearing up under difficult and painful circumstances and finally, gentleness. *Gentleness* is a life that lacks harshness, that's tender and caring in its treatment of other people.

The implication is that none of these character traits just show up in our lives without effort, but like *The Terminator*, we must pursue them with intensity.

After which Paul tells Timothy to "*Fight the good fight of the faith.*" This phrase has become part of our language and culture. Today it means to hang in there in, to strive to continue whatever you're doing.

But to Paul it was directly connected to Timothy's faith. The word translated "*fight*" is the same word from which we get our word "*agonize*," to agonize the struggle of faith.

Here we find our first insight into the good life. We live the good life by focusing our energy on our spiritual progress.

We only have so much energy each day, and we pour that energy into our jobs, our kids, working out, answering email, investing our money, fixing up our house, going to school, and so forth.

At the end of the day, you're tired, drained from all the energy you've poured out. Yet, how much energy are you investing in your faith?

We're fighting the fight of success, the fight of upward mobility, the fight of raising our kids, but are we fighting the good fight of faith, the good life we were intended to live?

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying we're to neglect our jobs or our kids, but when we put our energy into our spiritual progress it's amazing how that energizes us to take care of all the rest of life's struggles.

It's like the illustration that was used in VBS a few years ago. The kids were given a small container, some rocks, and a pile of sand. They were asked to get all the rocks and sand into that small container.

After several failed attempts by the children, it was explained that if you put the sand in first, you don't have any room left for the rocks. But if you start with the rocks, then you can pour the sand in and have room for more.

This holds true for our lives today. The rocks are the big things, the important things in our lives, while the sand represents the least important things.

So, if you'll just focus on the rocks each day, you'll find that you'll have plenty of room for the sand.

This is why I want to challenge you to focus on your spiritual progress in one very specific area this next year. I want to challenge you to read through the entire Bible in 2024.

In your bulletins I have included a plan to help you accomplish this goal. You can use this, or you can get a One Year Bible or download a different type of *Through the Bible in a Year* schedule off the internet.

Regardless how you do it, focus your energy on your spiritual progress this next year by reading the Bible from cover to cover. That'll help you live the good life of fighting the good fight.

Which brings us to our second description of the good life: Giving the good confession.

Slide 3

1 Timothy 6:12b-16, *“Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever.”*

Although Timothy already had the gift of eternal life, because of his faith in Jesus, Paul encouraged Timothy to grab hold what he already had, to utilize eternal life because it already belonged to him.

Paul traced this back to Timothy's *"good confession."* Most Bible scholars agree that Timothy's *"good confession"* took place at his baptism.

At that time, Timothy publicly confessed his faith in Jesus Christ before witnesses and was immersed in water as a symbol of his identification with Jesus.

The New Testament church challenged every single person, who came to faith in Jesus Christ, to publicly affirm their faith by public baptism.

The New Testament Scholar F. F. Bruce claims that the idea of an unbaptized Christian was not something any of the writers of the New Testament could've pictured.

Not that baptism saves us or is anything more than a symbol, but the writers of the New Testament assumed that a genuine follower of Jesus would be eager to give a good confession through baptism.

Now remember, when Paul wrote these words, confessing your faith in baptism was a potentially dangerous thing to do. The very act of baptism was considered politically subversive by the Roman government.

By being baptized, you were aligning yourself with a group that was considered by the government to be fanatical and dangerous.

So, a good confession carried a risk of losing everything, even being killed for your faith. In fact, this is exactly what happened to Paul a few years after he wrote this letter.

So, to encourage Timothy to keep his good confession, Paul gave him some reasons to give a good confession.

First, he directed Timothy to the example of Jesus, Who gave a good confession before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

Remember, Pilate was the hostile Roman ruler who interrogated Jesus by asking him, "*Are you the king of the Jews.*"

Jesus didn't hedge or waver, he didn't say, "*It depends how you define the word king.*" Jesus' confession cost him his life, yet He was true to the confession God had given Him to make.

When we give a good confession at our baptism, we follow the example of Jesus.

Paul also reminded him of the second coming of Jesus in verse 14, explaining that the appearing of Jesus will bring reward to those who make and keep a good confession.

Those who've lived their faith publicly in Jesus won't shrink back in shame or embarrassment when Christ returns. Paul also directed Timothy's attention to the character of God.

When a Christian stands before a political ruler who threatens him with death for his confession of faith in Jesus Christ, the Christian remembers that God's immortal and possesses the path of immortality for us.

We're eventually going to die anyway, so if it must happen, what better reason than for our good confession.

Now it's unlikely that any of us will face those kinds of circumstances, but the reality is that Christians around the world face this danger frequently.

Remember that God lives in unapproachable light. No creature can stand before God's incredible holiness and spender without being shielded by Christ.

The awesomeness of God is yet another reason to keep our good confession.

Slide 4

This good confession also gives us a second insight into the good life. We live the good life by swearing our allegiance to Jesus no matter the cost.

This begins at our baptism and continues throughout the rest of our Christian life as we seek to live by that public vow we made.

If you're a Christian who's never confessed your own faith through baptism, I want to encourage you to do this.

Some Christians are held back by fear but think about your Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who face death when they take this step, yet they still take it.

Think about Jesus himself, standing before His executioner, Pontius Pilate, giving his good confession.

Think about Christ returning at the end of the age and finding you, not with a real faith in Him but a hidden faith. Think about the awesome character of God, the only true Ruler.

If that's not enough to help you face your fear of being baptized publicly, nothing is.

If you've expressed your faith in baptism, consider how you can continue to keep that baptismal vow. Is your allegiance still to Jesus alone, or is it split?

The good life consists of giving and keeping a good confession, which brings us to laying a good foundation.

Slide 5

1 Timothy 6:17-19, “*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*”

In the previous ten verses of this chapter Paul addressed his attention to those who wanted to get rich, but here he addresses his attention to those who're already wealthy.

Now, I believe this section applies to all of us. Because, from a global perspective, all of us are wealthy. We're the world's elite, even if you're on welfare.

The phrase "*rich in this present world*" suggests that in heaven there's a different standard of wealth, and those who're wealthy today won't necessarily be the wealthy in heaven.

If a person's "well off" financially, Paul says, "*not to be arrogant.*" In other words, they're not to look down on those who're less "well off" than they are.

Some people tend to think they deserve more because they have more. They tend to think that they're smarter, better, or wiser than people who are less "well off."

They believe that wealth is a sign of God's favor and poverty a sign of God's curse.

Because of this they think God likes them better than He likes people with less. But the Bible tells us to be humble instead of arrogant.

Second, Paul warns Timothy not to find security in possessions. Wealth can be here today and gone tomorrow, as anyone who invests in the stock market can tell you.

A fire can burn down a nice house, a thief can steal a new car, and an economic collapse can sink a business venture.

Instead of finding security in what we have, we're told to remember that God's the one Who gave us what we have. He gave it to us for our enjoyment, but it still belongs to Him.

Finally, Paul instructs those who have more, to share with others. The command in verse 18 to "*do good*" is pretty vague, so Paul explains it with the command "*to be generous and willing to share.*"

In other words, doing good in this context is using our money and our possessions to bring blessings to other people. It's investing in what God's doing.

This echoes the words of Jesus in His sermon on the mount, when He told His followers to lay up treasures in heaven by giving away what they had to bless others.

This also lays a good foundation for us in heaven, because it translates what has earthly value today into something that has value for eternity.

Laying this kind of foundation helps us live the good life, the life that's truly life. It's here we find the third insight into the good life: We live the good life by investing our resources generously in God's work.

Slide 6

On January 1, 2002, twelve European countries officially switched their currency over to the euro. The German government used shredding machines to destroy its old banknotes.

The Austrians turned their schillings into compost. People, who didn't exchange the current currency into the Euro before the grace period ended, were left totally broke because their old currency was worthless.

Well, another currency is going to switch one day. One day, when we're face to face with God in heaven, our currency will switch from our earthly currency to heavenly currency.

Heavenly currency isn't the euro or the dollar, but it's what we've invested in God's work. Those who're rich in this world, who don't begin exchanging currency now, will find themselves poor in heaven.

I'm not saying our giving earns us our salvation, but that God calls us to live a life of giving here on earth, especially if we're "well off."

Now apparently most American Christians don't really believe this part of the Bible. We say we do, but our actions betray us.

The Barna Research Group researched this and found that the average church member in 2023 only donated a total of \$649 to his or her church, down from \$806 the year before.

That amount is significantly less than the average American spends on pet food each year.

One out of four Christians didn't give any money to the ministry in 2023 and only 6% of Christians tithe their income.

Now I'm not talking about this because we have some special need or we're not meeting our church budget. I'm sharing this because a life of giving is a key to living the good life God intends.

Which brings us to guarding the good deposit.

Slide 7

1 Timothy 6:20-21, *"Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith. Grace be with you."*

The word "*guard*" means to hold something that doesn't belong to you; to hold it in close custody so you can keep an eye on it.

The thing entrusted here refers to the Gospel, the Good News about Jesus Christ that's been entrusted to every follower of Jesus.

The Gospel is the Good News that God sent His only Son for us, the great news that He died for our sins, the wonderful news that He rose from the grave to conquer death.

God entrusted this message to us to keep close to our hearts, so we can share it with others.

Then Paul warns Timothy about those who've wandered away from the truth of the Gospel. They've become enamored with godless chatter, which is controversy and speculation.

They've embraced "*ideas of what is falsely called knowledge.*" Ideas that are opposed to the Gospel and, as a result, they've wandered away from the Gospel.

Therefore, we are to live the good life by paying close attention to what we believe.

Slide 8

Conclusion

Are you living the good life? Are you fighting the good fight, giving the good confession, laying a good foundation, and guarding the good deposit?

Are you focusing your energy on your spiritual progress, swearing your allegiance to Jesus Christ, investing your resources generously in God's work, and paying close attention to what you believe?

This is the good life, the life we were intended to live. May 2024 be another step toward living this kind of life.