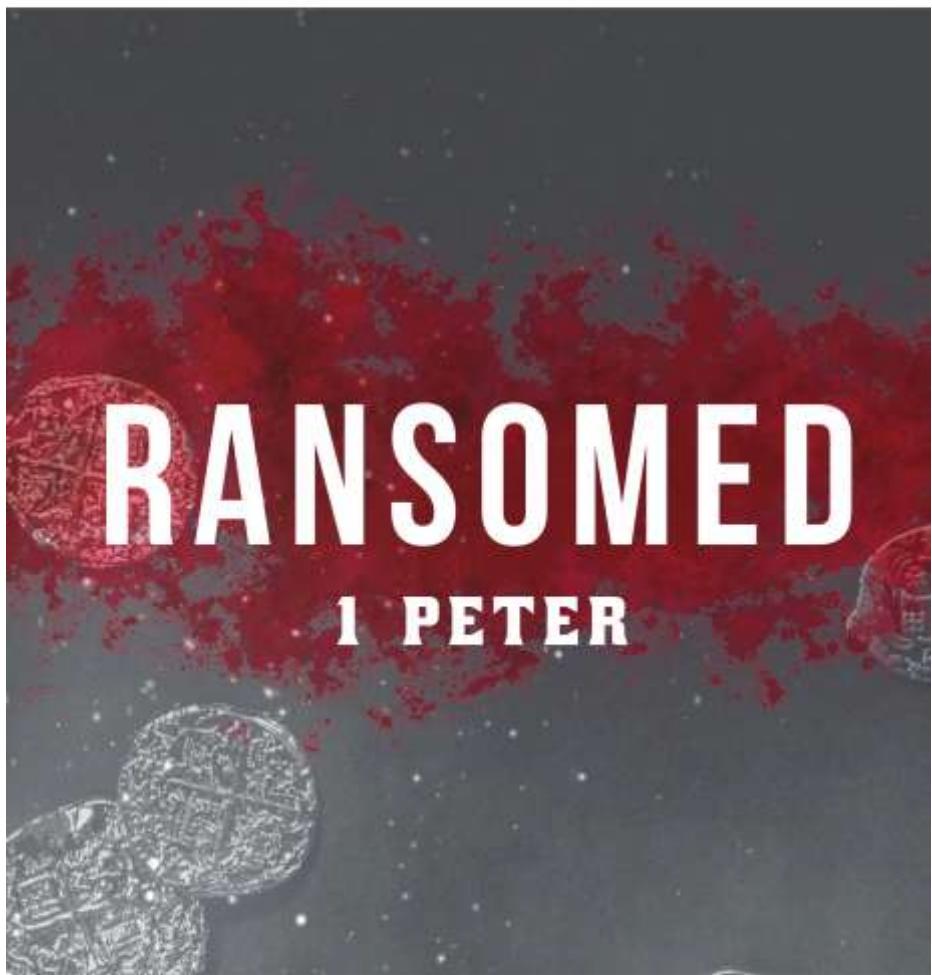


COVENANT PULPIT



The Good Life

1 Peter 3:8-18

Sunday, January 25, 2026 | Pastor Trent Casto

What is it that keeps us healthy and happy as we go through life? When millennials were asked about 10 years ago what their most important life goals were, 80% of them said that getting rich was one of them. 50% said that becoming famous was a major goal. Still today parents and their children are driving and striving to achieve and accomplish with the underlying conviction that if we can get the best grades and do the right activities, we can get into the right schools, and get the right internships, to get the right jobs, to one day be successful and therefore, happy. In full disclosure, I'm very sympathetic to that view! But is it true?

Wouldn't it be nice if there was a scientific answer to the question: what is it that keeps us healthy and happy as we go through life? It turns out there is an answer, and it's not what many people think. The Harvard Study of Adult Development is likely the longest study of adult life that has ever been conducted. It began in 1938 and followed the lives of 724 men asking them year-after-year about their work, their relationships, and their health. These men were from one of two groups: the first group were sophomores at Harvard College when they began the study. The second group was from Boston's poorest neighborhoods, usually tenement housing, chosen because they were from some of the poorest and most disadvantaged families in 1930's Boston.

The men entered this study as teenagers who went on to participate in all walks of life, becoming doctors, lawyers, factory workers, brick layers, and one became President of the United States. Some became alcoholics, a few developed schizophrenia, some climbed from the bottom to the top of the social ladder, and others went the opposite direction. After following these men for all these years, what did the researchers discover makes for a good life? It's not about wealth, fame, or working harder. Instead, here's what they found: "Good relationships make us happier and healthier."¹

But while this had not necessarily been scientifically proven, basic wisdom has been suggesting this for millennia. Why do more of us not invest in relationships? Because they can be hard, and they don't necessarily feel satisfying. Dr. Robert Waldinger, the director of the study said, "Relationships are messy and they're complicated and the hard work of tending to family and friends, it's not sexy or glamorous. It's also lifelong. It never ends." But the evidence is there. If you want to live a good life, the key is relationships. He shares his primary takeaway from the study here: "Our main takeaway is that if you were

going to make one investment in your wellbeing, probably the best investment you could make long term is to take care of your relationships, to be more active and making sure you stay connected with the people you care about. Close friends, relatives, anybody who you want to make sure stays in your life. Don't just leave it to chance. Be proactive.”ⁱⁱ

Do you want to live a good life? Of course you do! And what the Harvard Study of Adult Development found through decades of research is precisely what we find written in the pages of Scripture. But the Scripture goes further than the Harvard study. The Bible teaches us that a good life is a godly life. Here we find not only the importance of relationships, but how to be godly in relationships, how to be godly in our speech, how to be godly even when we suffer for it, and how to become the kind of people who have healthy relationships, even amid circumstances like suffering and persecution. So as we turn to 1 Peter 3 today, we are going see how godly people live in Christian community, how godly people pursue the good life, and how godly people suffer well.

I. How Godly People Live in Christian Community.

With verse 8, Peter begins to bring this section to a close. He writes,

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

First of all, Peter is talking to Christians. These are great characteristics for anyone to exhibit, but it is through a relationship with Christ that these traits can come to their most robust expression. The traits he describes are not just for men or women or servants or masters but for everyone. As we look at these five adjectives, the first and the last have to do with how a person thinks, and the second and fourth adjectives have to do with how one feels, and at the center is an adjective that brings it all together.ⁱⁱⁱ What exactly do the particular terms mean?

Unity of mind speaks to living in harmony with one another. It does not mean that everybody in the church agrees on everything. Unity of mind is not uniformity of mind. But as C.E.B Cranfield writes, “...it is to be a unity in which powerful tensions are held together by an overmastering loyalty, and strong antipathies of race and colour, temperament and taste, social position and

economic interest, are overcome in common worship and common obedience.^{iv} Inside the church, the things that divide us in the world are overcome by what unites us in Christ. We may disagree on points of politics, society, or even theology. But our greater commitment to Christ and his cause allows us to be at one.

Unity of mind or harmony goes very well with the fifth adjective *"a humble mind."*

Because the primary threat to having unity of mind in a body of believers is pride and self-assertion.^v When we insist on our own way, when we refuse to listen to others, when we are unwilling to see things from another's point of view, we are not exhibiting the humble mind of Christ. Christians in relationship with one another should be basically agreeable and willing to consider when our point of view may be wrong. Our common confession of the gospel, which includes an acknowledgement that we are sinners and without hope except for God's mercy, puts us on very firm ground for being humble in our viewpoints.

The next word is "sympathy," and it corresponds well to the fourth term which is "tender heart." Sympathy and tender-heartedness both have to do with being willing to step into the experience of other people. In the words of Paul,

"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep,"

(Romans 12:15)

and

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

(1 Corinthians 12:26)

Are you a person who is willing to step into the experience of the people around you? Do you share in the joys of others? Are you willing to step into their suffering? The opposite of being sympathetic and tender-hearted is to be unfeeling and hard-hearted. In its lowest expression, it is a heart that rejoices when a brother or sister fails and weeps when something good happens to them. It's a very self-oriented way of living that may give lip service to the experiences of those around us, but we are not truly willing to enter into their experience as a way of loving them well. I think

the biggest issue for many of us in this area is that stepping into the experience of others requires time.

At the heart of all of it is brotherly love. This is suggested not only logically, but also by the chiastic structure of these words where the first and fifth terms correlate (unity of mind/humble mind), the second and fourth terms correlate (sympathy/tender heart), and the third term is highlighted (brotherly love). As Christians, we are to love one another like family. Peter already said this in 1 Peter 1:22,

"Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart."

At the heart of being a person who has responded to the gospel is brotherly love. This entails not only being concerned for one another's spiritual needs and well-being, but physical, emotional, mental, and every other sort. Without this love, we cannot say that we are Christians. One of the things this list does is remind us that unless our hearts are transformed by the gospel of grace and the radical love of God shown to us in Christ Jesus, there is no way we will live like this. We might go through some of the external motions of these things, but we won't genuinely *feel* these ways and *want* to live like this. It is through living in the kind of Christian community that the gospel produces that we can experience relationships as they were meant to be. Not every person we are in relationship with is a Christian; at least, I hope we all have meaningful relationships with non-Christian people. And because they are made in the image of God, some of them may exhibit some of these qualities better than some of your friends at church. Praise God for that. But whether we are in relationship with those inside or outside the church, these are the kind of people the gospel is shaping us to be as we grow in the grace of God given to us in Christ.

II. How Godly People Live the Good Life.

The next verses go on to focus on how we should live if we want to live the good life. We have already seen that the good life involves a focus on relationships and relational health, but these next verses include some more specifics that are quite practical. First, in verse 9 Peter explains how they are to respond to people who harm them because they are Christians:

"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."

Each of us at some point will likely encounter what the Christians Peter was writing to encountered. They were verbally maligned or reviled on account of their association with Jesus. Whenever we experience people talking bad to us or about us, our gut reaction is to respond in one of two ways depending on our temperament. Some of us are inclined to fight back and try to hurt them as they hurt us. Others of us are inclined to simply flee the situation. But Peter tells us to respond in a way that reflects the transformation we have experienced through our relationship with Jesus. He tells us not to fight back, not to take flight, but rather to do good. Fight or flight is the normal human reaction. Blessing those who do evil to us or say evil to us is generally the effect of Jesus transforming our hearts, and it is powerful. But sometimes, non-Christians do this better than we do.

Patton Oswalt is a comedian and improv actor. While I'm not a fan of his work, and I'm pretty certain he claims no affiliation with Jesus, he is a great example for us in this respect. Several years ago, when X was still Twitter, Oswalt tweeted a sarcastic message to President Trump. A Trump supporter named Michael Beatty took offense and tweeted back in response with some accusations and insults at Oswalt. Out of sheer curiosity, Oswalt began scrolling through Beatty's Twitter timeline and learned that the man who insulted him was suffering. Instead of reviling him further, Oswalt tweeted, "Aw, man. This dude just attacked me on Twitter and I joked back but then I looked at his timeline and he's in a LOT of trouble health-wise ... He's been dealt some [terrible] cards—let's deal him some good ones. Click and donate—just like I'm about to." The link that followed was to a GoFundMe account dedicated to help cover the costs of care for Beatty's health condition. Because of Oswalt's donation and promotion, the campaign began trending on social media and exceeded several times over Beatty's initial goal of \$5,000.

Beatty was understandably touched and humbled. He tweeted to Oswalt: "You have humbled me to the point where I can barely compose my words. You have caused me to take pause and reflect on how harmful words from my mouth could result in such an outpouring."^{vi} What a beautiful picture of how powerful our

testimony as Christians could be if only we would take the path of this non-Christian Patton Oswalt and bless those who do evil to us and revile us. The political climate in our country encourages attacking those who attack us, insulting those who insult us. But as Christians, that's not how we are to engage in conflict either in person or on social media. What would it look like for you to bless the one who does evil to you or reviles you? When Jesus was reviled on the cross, he did not attack people back. Instead, he prayed for their forgiveness. When we did evil to him, he did good to us. How can we do any less toward those who mistreat us? There is a blessing in living this way and the blessing is to share with Jesus in his sufferings that we might also share with him in his glory.

Then Peter goes on to quote from Psalm 34 which has some very specific instructions for living the good life. He writes in verses 10-11,

"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.'"

In other words, Peter's call to do good to those who do us harm is not his own idea. This comes straight out of the Old Testament scripture. It is incredibly practical. Do you want to *love* life? What a great question! Do you want to see good days during your time on earth? Then here's a pro-tip: watch your mouth. Don't use your mouth to do evil by gossiping, slandering, or maligning people. Don't use your mouth to deceive people. In fact, turn away from evil in every part of your life and work on doing good to others. Look to live in peace with people, and where you're not at peace with people, pursue peace. If you will live your life by this guidance, you will undoubtedly love life more than if you live the other way. How much time do we spend being miserable over the foolish things we've said or the ways we've gotten ourselves into trouble with our mouths? How much of the misery we experience in our lives is related to relationships that have somehow ended up on the rocks? I don't know about you, but when I'm experiencing conflict in a relationship, it tends to be all-consuming. So Peter says, "Watch your mouth to avoid being in those messes as much as it depends on you. And when you are in those messes, do what you can to make peace as soon as possible."

Then he gives two further reasons to pursue this way of living, one positive and one negative. He writes in verse 12,

"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."

On the positive side, God's eyes are open to those who do good and his ears are open to our prayers. On the negative side, if you are doing evil, you can be sure the Lord opposes you. Which kind of life do you want? We know of course that all of us are guilty of evil and that none of us deserves God to show us favor. But through faith in Christ alone, even we sinners can be reconciled to God. As such, we increasingly want to leave behind evil and pursue good just as our Lord Jesus pursued the good all his days.

III. How Godly People Suffer Well.

This final section is very important because if Peter didn't write these verses, we might assume that if we just live a righteous life, we won't suffer. In these verses, Peter makes it clear that this is not the case. At the same time, suffering is not antithetical to the good life. Look what he says in verse 13,

"Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?"

On the surface of it, he's saying that generally if we are passionate to do what is good in the way he has been describing, people won't have an interest in harming us. Those who love their neighbors well, who speak well of people, who share in the joys and pains of others, who are humble-minded and tender-hearted, they are usually beloved members of any community. At the same time, Jesus was the epitome of all these characteristics and they nailed him to a tree and drove a spear through his side.

So Peter goes on to acknowledge the reality of life in this fallen world when he writes in verses 14-15,

"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy..."

The reality is that sometimes we will suffer for righteousness' sake. The even greater reality is that when we do, we will be blessed. This is exactly what Jesus promised in the Beatitudes:

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

(Matt. 5:10)

When we suffer on account of our association with Jesus, we should not be discouraged because the Bible says we are blessed! Consequently, we are not to be afraid of people nor are we to be troubled by what they might do to us. Instead, we should honor Christ the Lord as holy. In other words, if we fear Jesus rightly as the holy God who has the ability to bless no matter what men might do to us, then we need not have any fear of people and what they can do.

Then he continues in verses 15-16,

"always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame."

As we live the good life as Christians, we may at times be reviled or attacked. When that happens, we will continue to do good and bless even those who want to do us harm because we are Christians. The effect of that is that some people watching the exchange will be blown away, and they will want to know why you are so filled with hope that you would bless those who revile you. When they ask, you need to be prepared to tell them the reason. "The reason I bless when cursed, the reason I do good to those who do me harm is because of what Jesus has done for me. When I was God's enemy, he loved me. When I was rebelling against God, he gave his only Son for me, to die on the cross and take away my sins so that I might experience the blessing of eternal life. He did that for me! Now others may mistreat me, but no one can do worse to me than what I did to God. And because I love him so, and because he has promised to bless me so, it is my joy to do good to those who harm me, even as Jesus did for me. I know Jesus has risen from the dead and he will one day return to make all things right and that he is more than able and willing to repay his faithful servants."

Now, as we make our defense of our hope, we need to be careful to do it with gentleness and respect. There is not place in the Christian life for the kind of harshness and lack of civility that

characterizes so much of our public discourse. When Christians speak, we should sound different because we are different. Jesus has changed us and that change should be evident in how we speak to those who oppose us. Additionally, we need to be sure that our behavior is in alignment with Christ so that when people make accusations against us, our record of doing good will speak in our defense.

Peter concludes in verses 17-18,

"For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God..."

In short, we are a people committed to doing good because we know that's the path to the good life. But there are times when we will suffer for doing good. When that happens, we should not be discouraged or think that perhaps we should become like the world. Instead, choose to suffer for doing good. And in this, we have the most beautiful example in Jesus. Jesus was the righteous one, the only righteous one, and he suffered for us, for our sins. Why did he suffer? So that we unrighteous people could be reconciled to God. We cannot die for anyone's sins. Yet, when we suffer for doing good, we may be the means God uses to point people to Jesus whose suffering can take away their sins and bring them to God. But only if we follow Jesus in suffering the way he did, and we'll only be willing to do that if we grasp how he suffered for us.

Brothers and sisters, do you want to live the good life? Science tells us to focus on relationships and that's great advice. But the Bible offers more than good advice; it gives us good news. In Christ we have everything we need to live in peaceful relationships of love with everyone. Moreover, even when we might suffer for living that way, we are promised a blessing that no amount of suffering can ever take away. And finally, when we suffer in relationships in the same way Jesus did, we might even be the means Jesus uses to bring those who persecute us to God.

Sermon Discussion Questions:

1. Which of the qualities in 1 Peter 3:8 do you find most difficult to practice in Christian community, and why? How might remembering Christ's love toward you help you grow in that area?
2. How does this biblical vision of "the good life" challenge our culture's (and perhaps our own) assumptions about what leads to happiness? What practical changes might that truth call for in your relationships this week?
3. Peter instructs us to bless those who revile us rather than repay evil for evil (v. 9). Can you think of a current relationship where you're tempted to "fight or flight" rather than bless? What might it look like practically to bless that person this week?
4. Why is it so hard to see suffering for doing good as a *blessing*? How does Jesus' own suffering "the righteous for the unrighteous" reshape our understanding of the good life and give us courage to endure?
5. When people see your life, what do you hope they notice that might make them curious about your faith? How can gentleness, respect, and integrity make your witness more compelling?

ⁱ Robert Waldinger, *What Makes a Good Life?* Ted Talk Transcript accessed at: https://www.dailymotion.org/story/1196/what-makes-a-good-life-robert-waldinger/?sso_checked=1.

ⁱⁱ "The Good Life: an interview with Robert Waldinger" in *Harvard Medicine* published Autumn 2022 and accessed at: <https://magazine.hms.harvard.edu/articles/good-life>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 124.

^{iv} C.E.B. Cranfield, *The First Epistle of Peter* (SCM Press, 1954), 75-76.

^v Thomas R. Schriener, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Broadman & Holman Publishing, 2003), 164.

^{vi} Anika Reed, "Patton Oswalt feuds on Twitter with Trump supporter, then pays his medical bills," in *USA Today* published January 25, 2019 and accessed at:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/people/2019/01/25/patton-oswalt-feuds-twitter-trump-fan-pays-his-medical-bills/2676052002/>.