

+ 1 Timothy 1:16-19 + Live the True Life + 10th Sunday after Pentecost + 17 August 2014 +

“Someday I’m going to live the good life.” “I’m doing this so you and I can live the good life.” What is “the good life”? It’s this idea that if I just work long enough and hard enough, someday I’m going to live a life free of worry and concern and sleepless nights and piling bills. It’s going to be a life where I can finally relax and take it easy and enjoy myself and no longer have to work so long and hard. I won’t have to scrape together whatever I can to make ends meet because I won’t have to worry about money anymore. It’s going to be great. It’s going to be a “good life”.

So how do you get that “good life”? Well, most folks would tell you that you have to do whatever it takes to climb the ladder to success, to get yourself out of debt, to make life better for yourself and your loved ones. That usually means spending many long hours at work and making lots of sacrifices. If you can get a break here or a promotion there, that’s even better. Now you may have to step on people or sacrifice your integrity to get there, but doesn’t the end justify the means? Don’t you need to do whatever it takes to get that “good life”?

Why would you want that “good life” so bad? Why work so long that you strain your relationships with family and friends? Why work so hard that you cause long-term health problems? Why be willing to sacrifice your integrity to get farther up that ladder to success? What is so alluring about the “good life”? Well, there’s this idea that I can actually pull myself up by my bootstraps and obtain for myself and my loved ones a life of comfort and ease, of freedom and success and wealth. Right alongside that idea is another more treacherous idea that if I just acquire enough wealth I won’t have any worries or if I just acquire enough stuff, then not only will I find fulfillment, but people will like me too.

...But what does God want me to do? Does God want me to seek that kind of life? Is that kind of life really, truly “good”?

You might be thinking, “Pastor, I don’t have a lot of money. I don’t have a lot of stuff. Shouldn’t I try to gain more if it helps me and my family?” There is nothing wrong with wanting to provide for your basic needs and for the needs of your family. There’s nothing wrong with honestly gaining wealth and certainly not with wanting to be able to enjoy God’s gifts. However, with the gaining of wealth and stuff no matter how much or how little, there are always a couple dangers that can threaten you spiritually. The first is arrogance—the temptation to look down on others who don’t have what you have or to look at yourself as someone who’s really made it unlike those other struggling fools. Arrogance leads to foolish decisions and to forgetting where your wealth or stuff came from. It makes you think that you have nothing to worry about. Really such arrogance leads to the other, more dangerous pitfall—putting your hope in wealth. “If I just build up that nest egg enough...if I just earn enough money...if I just invest enough money, then I will be set for life. I can take it easy and enjoy the rest of my days.” That’s all well and good until a costly illness or an economic crash or a white collar crime wipes out all that certainty in a moment.

Then what happens to the “good life”? It’s lost. It doesn’t last. What you have is never enough or never good enough, and guess what? Those worries and concerns and fears that you thought would disappear only come back in a different form—and what’s left of your trust in the God who gave you all those gifts? So often that disappears too.

Arrogance and hope in the uncertainty of wealth is practically the air we breathe in American society—a society so financially and materially blessed compared to the rest of the world. To be honest, we’re all naturally selfish, so seeking the “good life” comes naturally. Even as Christians, no matter how much money or how little stuff you have, you and I buy into that lie far too often and end up with worry and a weakened faith.

So the Apostle Paul’s instruction to Pastor Timothy really strikes home because we know God is speaking to us too. **“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain ...”** His words cut each of us to the heart, but he has healing to come. God doesn’t want us to seek the “good life”, but to **LIVE THE TRUE LIFE**. So how do we live the “true” life?

Paul continues, **“...But to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”** This is where the “true” life starts. It starts with **“hope in God”**, with confidence, with certainty, with security in him. It means depending on the One who will never fail you or be lost or disappear or come up short. This is hope in the One **“who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment”**. Rather than put your hope in creation that passes away in this mortal, sinful world, put your hope in the One who provides everything you have in abundance. God provides everything from the clothes you wear to the food you eat to

the games you play to the car you drive to the education you receive to the job you serve to the Savior you need. Really that last one is most important of all.

Paul encourages us who have been blessed so richly in so many ways to put our hope in the One who provided us with the one thing we need the most, the one thing that you and I will never be able to earn or deserve or merit. He provides us with eternal life through a Savior whose priceless blood shed on the cross cleanses us of the guilt of our sins of selfishness and arrogance and false hope. He provides us with a life full of abundant grace here and a life eternal beyond our wildest imagination. With that in mind, God also provides a changed attitude. I can't take all this earthly stuff with me when I die and it will all pass away. So then how am I going to use what God has so richly and graciously given to me in this life?

The Apostle instructs Pastor Timothy about that too. **“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”** First of all, God wants you and me to **“do good”**, to do that which benefits others. Now that sounds rather simple, but what does that actually look like? How does that actually impact what I do with what God graciously gives me? Look no further than Christ himself who said, **“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) It's my opportunity to serve the One who saved me. Using God's gracious gifts to do good for the benefit of others will then lead me to think differently about how I spend my money or what stuff I buy or how I spend my time or use my talents. I will use them to **“do good”**.

Secondly, God wants you and me to **“be rich in good deeds”**. This is one of those commands where we see that the “true” life really has nothing to do with how much money you have or don't have. You don't have to have great earthly wealth to be wealthy towards God with your life. Here we see that the “true” life is a God-pleasing life full of works of thanksgiving for what Jesus did for you. The Apostle Peter reminds us, **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ...”** (1 Peter 1:18-19) Knowing your own life, how can you live that “true” life full of God-pleasing works?

That “true” life is demonstrated in that final command to be **“generous and willing to share”**. This isn't just giving donations or handouts to those in need. This is a matter of the heart that shows itself in action. That generosity of heart comes from Christ's generosity towards you. Did you ever realize what Jesus gave up so you could have the “true” life? Paul tells us, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”** (2 Corinthians 8:9) With a heart overflowing with thanksgiving for Christ's generosity, you share your blessings with those in need, with those who are struggling, even with those taking that generosity of Christ to other places.

So if that's the “true” life God wants you and me to have, what's the result of all that? Where's it going to lead? Paul writes, **“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.”** Living the “true” life leads to laying up treasure in heaven. Paul's not talking about earning God's favor or gaining merits with God to get you into heaven. No, he's talking about building on the firm hope that you have in the God whose grace has made you who you are in Christ. You can appreciate that new, eternal, spiritual life that you have been given in Christ. You can understand that Jesus is your greatest and most precious treasure.

Therefore you can seek to put your God-given gifts to use so that others can join you in the glories of heaven, so they too can enjoy the “true” life that you have in Christ. You, therefore, seek to put your gifts to work serving as God's hand of blessing to those in need, to those who are suffering, to those who are hurting, to those who are struggling, to those who are guilty, to those who are caught up in the rat race trying to get the “good life”.

In so doing, you may have the opportunity to tell that person whom God blessed through you about the real hope that you have, about the “true” life that you live, about the living Savior that you follow and the heaven he has waiting. Why? Because that's what God in his grace did for you in Christ and that's what the “true” life truly is. Then on the Last Day when the Lord tells you, “What you did for the least of these, you did for me”, you'll realize how great God's grace really is and how he used even you to bless others.

You and I don't have to wait to live the “true” life. God's given it to you in Christ right now. So rather than chase after what is uncertain and littered with pitfalls for your soul, **“take hold of the life that is truly life”**. Live that “true” life with joyful generosity in thanksgiving for God's grace, and don't ever let it go for that life in Christ will last for eternity. Amen.