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The Good Life

"The Good Life." Have you ever heard that phrase? Do you have a mental picture of what it would mean if you could live "the good life"?

Probably for most people, if "the good life" has any meaning at all, it has to do with being healthy, not being afraid or in want, and having enough money to be able to do things that provide enjoyment and pleasure. In other words, a life that is peaceful, comfortable, and with a decent amount of pleasure.

There's a Kanye West rap song called "Good Life" that achieved "double platinum" sales—more than 20 million copies. I'm not into that style of music, but I looked up the lyrics and read them. It seems that, for Kanye West and his fans, "the good life" means mostly having sex often and getting high on booze and maybe drugs. Well, that certainly describes "the good life" as imagined by a large number of people in our troubled society today.

A more conventional concept of "the good life" involves working diligently for thirty years, saving a nice amount of money for one's retirement, then moving to somewhere with a nice beach and enjoying the fruits of those years of labor.



And, of course, there are all kinds of other mental images of "the good life" that appeal to some people. But most people, if they think about "the good life" at all, will think of it primarily in terms of physical, emotional, and financial well-being.

The Bible tells of a man who certainly had a good life, in those materialistic terms. King Solomon was the King of Israel. He had power (he was the king); he had fantastic wealth; and he had 300 wives and 700 concubines, so he wasn't lonely or sexually deprived. He also had wisdom—the Bible says he was wiser than any other man before or since.

The book of Ecclesiastes is attributed to Solomon, and it seems likely that he did actually write it. I'll summarize what it says briefly—if you are able, go read it for yourselves. It's quite interesting.

"The Teacher" (Solomon) says that *"Everything is meaningless."* (Other translations may use different words that mean the same thing.)

Solomon used his great wisdom to try to understand the meaning of life, but he concluded that it's a pretty boring business. Nothing new happens; nothing worth remembering happens, and it's useless to work hard because nothing comes of it.

Solomon tried pleasure in every form he could think of, but he gained nothing from it all. He also decided it was useless to be wise, because the wise man and the fool end up the same way. And he tried work, and again found it not meaningful.

Solomon offered this conclusion: *I have seen the task that God has given the children of Adam to keep them occupied. He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also put eternity in their hearts, but no one can discover the work God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and enjoy the good life. It is also the gift of God whenever anyone eats, drinks, and enjoys all his efforts.* (Ecclesiastes 3:10-13)

When Solomon looked for meaning in life he couldn't find any, until he added God to his search. Then he saw that life is a gift from God, and that God *"has put eternity into man's heart"*—in other words, God made us so that we might desire, and have, an eternal relationship with Him.

When God gives us material blessings or pleasant circumstances, He means for us to enjoy them and be truly thankful for them. But note these words of Jesus: *"Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."* (Luke 12:15) Speaking of food and clothing, He said, *"... seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* (Matthew 6:32) What you have, or how much pleasure you can get, does not determine whether or not you are living "the good life."

When I first thought of the subject of this lesson, I remembered a Bible verse that I believe sums up the good life, in God's terms. *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?* (Micah 6:8)



This, I believe, is God's "recipe" for "the good life":

- Do justice.
- Love mercy (or kindness, in other translations).
- Walk humbly with your God.

What do these phrases mean for us today?

Do justice. I think this simply means "Do what is right. Don't do anything that is wrong." Don't make excuses; instead, take responsibility for your actions and your attitudes. Don't steal from anyone; be generous and help others to have what they need. Don't murder or even hurt anyone; instead, help those who are hurting. Don't lie; always tell the truth. Especially stay far, far away from sexual immorality, including pornography and all sex outside of God-sanctioned marriage.

The Apostle Paul had something to say in this regard. *"I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment ... Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor."* (Romans 12:3,9-10) (Read all of Romans 12 and 13 for more of Paul's inspired insights about this.)

But probably the best summary of "Do justice" is given to us by Jesus, in what has become known as the Golden Rule: *"Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets."* (Matthew 7:12)

Love mercy (or kindness).

I think this has mainly to do with being a person who chooses to relate to others with love, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness, rather than with selfish cruelty, impatience, and vindictiveness.

A merciful person extends mercy and forgiveness to others. A kind person is kind to others. A person who loves mercy and kindness is someone who chooses to be kind and merciful even when he or she may have reasons to be something less than that.

Consider more of Paul's words from Romans 12: *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ... Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far*

as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Here Paul quotes Proverbs. By "heap burning coals on his head" God's word could mean that God will punish this enemy, or it could also mean that God will make him so uncomfortable about his sin that he will come to repentance. There are also other interpretations, but let's not worry about it; let's just do what it says.

For the first two of God's three requirements I think we might substitute this: Don't be selfish. In fact, go out of your way to be unselfish—be as loving, kindhearted, gentle, helpful, generous, patient, and forgiving as you possibly can be. Never put others down; instead, do all you can to lift them up and build them up. (Take a look at Galatians 5:22-23.)

Walk humbly with your God.

Aha. There are two parts to this, of course. Number one is humility. Letting God be God. After all, He is God, and I am not, and you are not. But we humans often don't want to leave it at that. We want to be in control. Rather than our doing what God wants, we want Him to do what we want.

King David knew this when he wrote, *"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"* (Psalms 8:3-4)

When we look at God's creation, we have to agree with David—compared to God, we are totally insignificant. We know nothing and we can do nothing. Why should we suppose that we can tell God how things ought to be, or what He should do? We can't even properly manage our own lives. And yet we want to be in charge of everything that we care about.

No. We need to recognize, and admit, and accept as fact, that the Lord alone is God.

That's part one of this two-part requirement. The other part is walking with God. We are not meant to go it alone; we are meant to walk with God. Our sins separate us from God; but Jesus, by His death and resurrection, makes it possible for us to come near to God and walk with Him.

What does it mean to walk with God? It simply means to have and enjoy an ongoing, active relationship with

Him. Don't turn away from Him in order to do our own thing. Spend time with Him, reading His word; praising His truth and goodness and mercy; telling Him of our needs and our concerns for others; and also, perhaps most importantly, listening quietly for whatever He wants to say to us. We may never hear Him speak with an audible voice, but if we will take the time and quiet ourselves and listen, He will very often speak His truth into our minds and our hearts.

Jesus said to His disciples, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." God is saying the same thing to us. "You are very precious to me. Come, walk with me; don't turn away. Let me bless you with the gift of myself, my fellowship, my love." That is what our God is saying to each one of us.

Do justice. Love mercy. Walk humbly with God.

That's the good life that God intends for each of us. Can you do these three things? Yes, I believe that you can if you choose to. You'll make mistakes and commit sins that will need to be forgiven. But, even though God's word tells us to be perfect, I don't think He expects us to achieve it in this life. Remember this: *"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."* (1 John 2:1) Also, *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.* (Phil. 1:6)

Peace and Joy—

Brother Roland

How to Walk With God

A devotion from <https://www.intouch.org>

When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. (Genesis 5:21-24)

Enoch had such a close walk with the Lord that Scripture says, "and he was not, for God took him" This means that Enoch did not die, but was taken directly into the presence of the Lord. What a wonderful testimony!

As we seek to follow God with passion like Enoch's, let's learn some specific steps that will help us grow in our walk with the Lord.

Reconciliation. This term essentially means "God moving toward us." The joy of this step is that we bear no responsibility; it's all up to Him. Through the cross of Jesus Christ, God has already made His move in our direction. (See 2 Cor. 5:18.) When we place faith in the Savior, we immediately take part in that reconciliation.

Trusting God. Our heavenly Father wants us to know He is concerned with our spiritual growth. He also wants us to trust that He has, through Christ, provided the means by which we can walk intimately with Him.

Agreement. To appreciate the closeness God wants to have with us, we must agree with what His Word teaches about His Son, the church, and our problem with sin.

Fellowship. Just as our human relationships fall apart without regular contact, our intimacy with the Father weakens when we do not spend time with Him.

Walking with God is not an impossible mission, but it does require careful attention to the details of our Christian life. When we set our course for God, He will always be there to direct our path (Prov. 16:9).

**Send Bible questions or updated address information to
Brother Roland, PO Box 14, Fayetteville PA 17222**

Inmates -- include name, DOC No., and SID with address.

First John, Chapters 1 and 2

What a good message 1 John gives us about the relationship God means us to have with Him!

Puzzle:

E P J E S U S C H R I S T X F N A N D T H E W H O L E W O R L D
U W A C U Z R J I S U S U S E J F O D O O L B E H T W R Y C E N
U H D D J D N I S T O N Y A M U O Y O S B G O Q Z E S N T K A K
C S R E Z T H A T W H I C H W A S Z K R G X Q N H A V J O E L F
Q G U G M F S B H C J U Q F A Y V C F P I T L A X S N U L E R N
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F B G W A S O E F S W S A D Q W Z M V A H A K R O U D Y E A U K
D F S V I H P E K G H Z C L E A N S E S U S F R O M S I N F U X
P A E N G L S E Z K V V Q Y U P D Y Q U H W G L C H S P H T N K
S Z S D C S C W Q Q J J J O I J R E H T A F E H T H T I W Z N A

Words:

THAT WHICH WAS
FROM THE BEGINNING
WE HAVE HEARD
SEEN WITH OUR EYES
TOUCHED WITH OUR HANDS
THE WORD OF LIFE
MADE MANIFEST
ETERNAL LIFE
WAS WITH THE FATHER
WE PROCLAIM TO YOU
YOU TOO MAY HAVE
FELLOWSHIP WITH US

WITH THE FATHER
WITH HIS SON
JESUS CHRIST
JOY MAY BE COMPLETE
GOD IS LIGHT
NO DARKNESS IN HIM
IF WE WALK IN LIGHT
WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP
THE BLOOD OF JESUS
CLEANSES US FROM SIN
IF WE CONFESS
HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST

FORGIVES OUR SINS
MAKES US CLEAN
MY LITTLE CHILDREN
I WRITE THESE THINGS
SO YOU MAY NOT SIN
IF ANYONE DOES SIN
WE HAVE AN ADVOCATE
JESUS CHRIST THE RIGHTEOUS
HE IS THE PROPITIATION
FOR OUR SINS
AND THE WHOLE WORLD