

10 For,

*“LET HIM WHO MEANS TO LOVE LIFE AND SEE GOOD DAYS
REFRAIN HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING GUILE.*

*11 “AND LET HIM TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD;
LET HIM SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.*

*12 “FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE UPON THE RIGHTEOUS,
AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER,
BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO EVIL.”*

What could a preacher possibly preach on that every single member in his audience has a deep and penetrating interest in? What all encompassing topic would it be that every person, without exception, young, old, and anywhere in-between has a deep rooted connection to? We embark on one of the most remarkable passages in all of the Bible this morning. **The good life.**

Who is there that doesn't have some formula of what encompasses what we would define as "the good life?" It's something we all think about constantly. It is universal among humans. Our deepest desire is for something that is somewhat indefinable. The good life.

We want to be happy. Happiness. But even that becomes shallow. OK, joy. We want to have a deep joy. Still ill defined. Wellness. A word we hear often these days. Wellness encompasses many of the ideas that form our definition of the good life. Wholeness. Satisfaction. Inner peace. All of these words describe components of the indefinable.

I've quoted Pascal more than once in this pulpit as I have tried to investigate and describe the deepest root cause of human motivation. Here is his famous quote:

“All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.” Blaise Pascal

The desire for this indefinable "something" that drives every man, woman, and child is the core motivator for every decision we make. You say, even for a root canal? Yes, even for a root canal. We will often choose severe pain in order to arrive at our goal. This indefinable wellness that we can't quite put our finger on. We know that sometimes the way there, in fact often the way there is through pain.

Every decision is based here. What will make me happiest? In Pascal's quote, even the shocking motivation for self murder is happiness. In some troubled minds, and often I believe with demonic intervention, since Satan is in the business of the culture of death, the only route to happiness is self murder.

Pascal mentions the will. That thing within us that drives our decision making machine. Every fork in the road, from the most insignificant decision to the greatest ones is driven by our free will. Every fork in the road has a decision based in . . . what will make me happiest.

Our founding fathers of this nation were extremely wise men. What if we could form a society based in this one motivation. Life. Liberty. (and) The pursuit of happiness. If we could do that, every person would be on board. That's what every human wants.

So they formed a government that has laws based in this Book we're studying this morning. Just the basics. Property rights. Basic protections from evil. And turn them loose to pursue; life, liberty, happiness.

Over time that has eroded into complexities of where the barriers that keep me from stepping on you and you from stepping on me should be. And we have a group of people in government that earnestly believe I'm

too stupid to pursue these things for my own benefit, and they need to make all my decisions for me. But that's another topic.

The good life. What is it. We're back to that indefinable something. We stumble bumble around grabbing at words to define this thing we're looking for.

Even Peter couldn't get it done in a single word. And he's quoting David who wrote the words.

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That's what we're after. A complex, rich life, full of experiences of depth and satisfaction. And love, the richness of all of the fullest possible kinds and types of love. Deep friendships that are lasting and mutually enjoyable. Love that plumbs the depths of human capability and capacity. And good days.

And so we say; *what if*; What if I had such and such . . . or what if I achieved such and such . . . or went someplace else, almost anyplace besides here. What if . . .

I hope you realize that about 95% of the TV you watch is based in virtual realities of exploring those two words. What if? What if I had talent and made it to the top of the America's Got Talent pile and won the million dollars? Then my life would be complete. I'd have it all. I'd find this indefinable thing, this happiness.

Or what if I sold everything and quit my job and bought a villa on the coast of Italy, or some tropical place where the sun and rain are a perfect mixture and life is good. Endless good days. We watch that on TV.

What if I abandoned my current spouse and ran off with some gorgeous, perfect in every way person like the people on Hallmark Channel and lived blissfully happily ever after.

Or what if I was Mike and Frank and traveled around buying neat junk.

Really neat junk. Porcelain signs and antique cars and 110 year old priceless motorcycles. Having stuff would make me happy.

What if I won the lottery and could buy a villa in a perfect place with a runway for my vintage airplanes and 3 hangars to put all my antique cars and motorcycles and porcelain signs in, and of course everything Pam dreams of because she needs to be happy too.

I could bid stupid money numbers on Ebay and buy every antique camera and lens that all the camera guys are dreaming about. Add that to my collections. Maybe Ireland or Scotland is the place with the coast. Too much sun might get old. Green waving grass. The Emerald Isles. Then I'd be happy.

Or what if I could travel to all of the Barrett Jackson auctions and buy dozens of antique cars. Hot rods. I could be Jay Leno. Feel like steaming up the Stanley Steamer this weekend. But keep a muscle car or two handy in case we need to make a gourmet food run.

Or what if I could buy one of those gorgeous vineyards on the Columbia River. One that didn't burn up last week. I could make fine wine and people would come from all over the world to have a taste . . . and wish they were me. What if?

A couple of lives well lived have fascinated me.

What if you could be Pa Pa Hemingway. A brilliant mind. A handsome presence. The whole world knows your name. You've traveled the entire world. Sometimes for the sport of hunting and fishing, and sometimes creating political mayhem.

J. Edgar Hoover would have people assigned to watch what you're up to. Radical revolutionaries would come to your house to dine and drink. Long evenings of drunken debauchery, tumbling women, or plotting to overthrow countries. And money galore to do what you please, because of the books that came out of your rich living.

A fascinating life. No one could argue that he was shallow. The depth

of the experiences and the money to do it. Answer to nobody. Surely he had more than his share of this indefinable something we're trying to get at.

He only had one problem. One limitation. His own mortality kept creeping up on him. He wore his body out living large and drinking with the strongest. When he was 62, three years younger than I am now, he took his favorite shotgun and blew his brains out.

We have another account of a man who had everything. Actually we don't have to play "what-if" because this man systematically did everything we've only dreamed of doing, and reported back to us in this very book we're studying. His name was Solomon. He is **THE** case study for all time.

He had fame. He had houses. Everybody knew his name. He was King. He had more wealth than perhaps anyone else in the world at that time. He had a brilliant mind, and when he was a young man, God offered him one of those genie in the bottle kind of deals, and Solomon asked for wisdom. He was the richest, wisest, most important man on earth.

People came from other countries just to look at what he had, and were speechless. Talk about what if?? And since he was brilliant, and wise, he decided to be the one person who would get to the bottom of what this indefinable thing we're all craving, is.

He was the guy. He had the resources. And he wrote a book to let us know what he discovered. No need to sit around wondering what if? No one before or since had a better shot at figuring out what we want. What our hearts crave. Where the happiness and joy and wellness and wholeness and contentedness actually is. Listen to his report;

Eccl. 2: 1 I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility. 2 I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could

see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.

9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. 10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

12 So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done? 13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both. 15 Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity." 16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die! 17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.

All is vanity. Emptiness. Getting a grip on this indefinable something is like grabbing ahold of the wind. Read the book of Ecclesiastes. He goes on and on. Finally in chapter 4 Solomon says;

1 Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being

done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. 2 So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. 3 But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun....

The man who had everything says it's better to be dead than alive and even better than that to have never existed in the first place. Mercy!

He says the oppressors and the oppressed are both miserable and have no one to comfort them. Better to have never been born into this evil place.

Now we're closing in on the problem. This world is hopelessly broken. This world is ruled by Satan. Men are his slaves. Hopelessness and emptiness is what the worlds wisest man discovered.

Have you turned on the news lately. Millions of people have their hope invested in a better tomorrow. They're doing without today piling up money for retirement. Then the good days will come.

Meanwhile, a madman across the ocean is going to send a nuclear bomb that will explode in outer space and break all the computers. The computers that give us the electricity to pump the water and cook the food and flush the toilets. All broke.

And all those ones and zeros in the computers. All that money you thought you had stored for good days, is just gone. Vanished. It never was really there. It was just pixels that formed numbers in accounts and pixels that formed your name and said you owned it. Poof.

And then what? Anarchy? The guy with the biggest guns wins.

Solomon did solve one riddle for us. The answer to what we crave, the love and life and good days doesn't originate in this evil world. It has to come from another place. He was absolutely right that if this is all there

is, better to have never been born. But we have further information. We have revelation from God that hadn't been written when he came to his conclusions.

Blaise Pascal must have been incredibly wise. A Solomon type person but with more information than Solomon had available. Listen to another of his quotes. Also famous. You've likely heard it before.

“What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace?”

This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself”

We are created with a God shaped vacuum. That indefinable something that we're trying to describe is God Himself. God fills that void inside us. God is the answer to the craving.

Jesus said, *I came that they might have life, and have it in abundance.*

It's about time that we circle back to Peter's words. David's words really. David was Solomon's father, and David had found what God in His wisdom allowed Solomon to search for. Peter is quoting Psalm 34.

It's valuable for us to take a moment and look at that beautiful Psalm. Not the whole thing, but I'll pick it up in verse 7;

*7 The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him,
And rescues them.*

*8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;
How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!*

*9 O fear the LORD, you His saints;
For to those who fear Him there is no want.*

*10 The young lions do lack and suffer hunger;
But they who seek the LORD shall not be in want of any good
thing.*

*11 Come, you children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the LORD.*

*12 Who is the man who desires life
And loves length of days that he may see good?*

*13 Keep your tongue from evil
And your lips from speaking deceit.*

*14 Depart from evil and do good;
Seek peace and pursue it.*

*15 The eyes of the LORD are toward the righteous
And His ears are open to their cry.*

*16 The face of the LORD is against evildoers,
To cut off the memory of them from the earth.*

*17 The righteous cry, and the LORD hears
And delivers them out of all their troubles.*

*18 The LORD is near to the brokenhearted
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.*

*19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous,
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.*

*20 He keeps all his bones,
Not one of them is broken.*

*21 Evil shall slay the wicked,
And those who hate the righteous will be condemned.*

*22 The LORD redeems the soul of His servants,
And none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned.*

Peter's formula for life and love and good days is within this Psalm that would have been so very familiar to his Jewish readers.

Do you want life, and love, and good days? Foolish question. Everybody does. *8 O taste and see that the LORD is good;
How blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!*

Some of you are familiar with John Piper's ministry and preaching. Piper has based his ministry around this very craving we all have. He says when it comes to having more and more of God, be a hedonist. Keep going after more and more and more. You can't get too much of this God that fills that void of happiness.

He has a famous slogan for his ministry. *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.*

In other words, the more you go after the contentedness and happiness and good life found in this relationship with the creator, the more you dwell here, filling up this void with Him, the more you will in turn reflect his glory. *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.* John Piper

The life and love and good days are not to be found in the world that Satan rules over. They are only found in a God who purchased lost sinners out of this world and has translated them into His. I take refuge in Him. He dwells in me.

Peter has covered all of that in previous verses. We are the elect. A chosen race. Purchased by God for His own possession. But Peter's purpose here is a reminder. This is who we are, therefore, this is how we live.

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Peter goes to the portion of that Psalm that talks about righteous living. He reminds us; Want life? Want love? Want good days? Those things are not purchased by righteous living. He isn't saying go and live like a pharisee. Go and be a self righteous person and the blessings will come.

It works the other way around. In fact without the indwelling Holy Spirit, all of my righteousness is like what? A filthy rag.

But the conundrum is; The life and love and good days doesn't happen independent of those things either. Good days, contentedness, deep satisfaction, joy all are the result of living a righteousness that God has empowered us to live by His indwelling Holy Spirit.

Paul says simply: *16 Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?*

Good days are found in righteous living, and righteous living is found in the indwelling Christ. Good days are possible. Good days are available. But good days are defined differently than how the empty world defines them.

Good days for the elect of God are independent of this world. Kim Jong Un can break our stuff and send the world into anarchy and I'm sure we'll have some difficult moments, but even in the worse case scenario

possible, our good days are held for us in a heavenly account. No man or series of events can take that away from us.

MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.

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Keep your tongues from evil. Don't let your lips spread lies and deceit. Turn away from evil. Choose to do good. Seek peace, as much as it depends on you. Pursue peace.

If we do those things, the eyes of the Lord will favor us. His ears will give attention to our prayers. He promises to meet our needs.

But if we choose to do evil; The Lord's countenance will be toward us the same as it is toward His enemies. No good days there. No love. No life. It's a simple formula.

I often think to myself as I'm praying the Lord's prayer about that line; *give us this day our daily bread*. It's sort of meaningless to us just now. Put that in the bank instead of numbers in computers. We don't know what we'll need before He calls us home.

We do know that a deep seated joy and satisfaction of excellent living blessed with real love is available to every christian. And those things are not tied to the circumstances, whatever they may be, of this world. Those things are blessings to God's elect, from above.

