

How to Enjoy Life

I Pet. 3:8-12

**A sermon by Dr. Calvin Warpula
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How do you feel about life? Do you detest it? Tolerate it? Or do you really love it?

To some, life is just a series of random events going nowhere but to the grave.

But to God's people, life can be joyful, exciting, life with a capital L, life that has peaks and valleys, tears, pains, and hurts, but life that is going somewhere. Every day is a journey with God.

Most of our biggest pains and disappointments, our hurts and sorrows in life, come not from physical things, but from our relationships with others. The greatest cause of worry in our homes and in our churches is in our relationships.

Everybody that is thinking sanely would like to enjoy life. We want to like people, and we want them to like us. We want to get along with one another in our families, on our jobs, in our schools, and in God's family, the church. In our passage today, the apostle Peter gives us an ancient recipe for a happy life.

In I Peter, chapters two and three, Peter has been writing about relationships. He has talked about citizens (2:13), about employees, (2:18), about wives (3:1) and about husbands (3:7). Now he talks to everybody. "Finally, all of you," he begins. This is the end of the discussion about the relationships he began back in 2:13. He addresses all of us now. His teachings here are for everybody in Christ, whether employed or not, whether husband or wife, or not even married. "All of you" includes all of us.

The first thing Peter does is to show us what kind of conduct God desires from us. This is in vs. 8 and 9. In v. 8, we are told how we are to act and react to one another. In v. 9, we are told how we are to react toward the world that is mistreating us.

For us as believers in our conduct toward one another, Peter encourages us to do five things. These five things are like the five digits of

our hand. The four fingers and the thumb all have different purposes, they are different, but they have one center and they work together. These five qualities are found together and work together in believers.

First, "Live in harmony with one another."

To live in harmony means that we have an inner unity that works together in an outward way. We are working together with one another, not opposing each other or working against each other. We have a unity in variety. A plant has many parts but is one plant. A human body has many parts, but is one body. A house has different rooms and materials but it is one house. A family has several members but it is one family. The Bible has many different books but they all cohere and work toward the same goal: the glory of God and the salvation of man. The unity or harmony Peter calls for here is not a uniformity of opinion. We are not mental clones of one another. We will never had that unless one of us is doing all the thinking. But, we can all be devoted to Christ with loyalty and love for each other.

This is then a oneness of heart for each other, a unity of attitude and disposition. We may not think alike on everything, but we can be of the same mind: the mind of Christ, the life of submission, the attitude of servanthood. This is the mind of Christ that we are told to have. When I walk with the Spirit and you walk with the Spirit, then unity is the result. This is what the Bible means when it says, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity. " This is what Jesus was praying about in John 17:20-23: [read it]

We as Christians sometimes don't have the best history in this regard. One historian wrote about the Christian religion: "Christians have always been a cantankerous lot, feuding, fighting and quarreling over theological questions that most people do not understand, much less care about." We know that history furnishes us with examples of religious wars. There is nothing as bad as killing each other in the name of Christ.

Roger Williams was right. When Roger Williams embraced the principle of religious liberty, the New England Puritans forced him to flee for his life. Williams found refuge among the American Indians, and many were converted to Christianity. When his former brethren invited him to return, Williams made this famous reply: "I would rather live with Christian savages than with savage Christians."

So Peter writes to us today and says, "Live in harmony with one another." Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers," not the troublemakers.

The second thing that Peter said we are to do is "be sympathetic."

This means to share common feelings. We rejoice with those that rejoice; and we weep with those that weep. Jesus shares our feelings with us. He is our high priest, the Bible says, that is sympathetic with our pains and hurts, and can be touched by our condition and our needs (Heb. 4:15). We want to be united by a common spiritual mind and sensitive to the same spiritual emotions.

We are to do good unto all people, especially those of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). Sometimes pain, trouble, tragedy, sorrow has a way of bringing people together. Total strangers will be on a boat or an airplane and hardly speak to one another, but let some trouble develop, and they all band together as brothers to help one another.

"Some years ago there was a very serious flood, along the Ohio river and its tributaries in Pennsylvania, which drove many families out of their home. Many homes were washed away in the torrential waters, everything in them lost. Flood victims took refuge in churches, schools, and city halls, while sympathetic citizens did everything possible to help in the emergency. A newspaper reporter asked some of the sufferers how they felt about it all, especially the loss of their homes, clothing, and furniture. One fourteen year old girl replied, 'Oh, it's wonderful! Everyone is so kind to everyone else. It doesn't make any difference what you wear, what your father does, or to which church you belong. They are just kind. I almost wish it would happen every year.'" [J. Allen Blair, Living Peacefully: A Devotional Study of the First Epistle of Peter. Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1959, p. 161].

We are there to help each other. I see this in your taking food to the sick, your taking care of the children of those in the hospital or facing surgery, your collecting money to help with a house payment or medical bills, your collecting food and clothing to give to a family in need. We are sympathetic. We care for one another.

The Bible says we are to comfort one another. (Isa. 40:1; 2 Cor. 1:3-4). The Pharisees dragged a woman in before Jesus, a woman caught in bed with another man, not her husband. Those men were ready to stone her, manipulate her, use her as an example, and a test case for their law. Jesus, however, deals with her tenderly and compassionately. Jesus is showing us how to treat sinners. We hate sin, but we love sinners. We treat people right no matter what they have done.

I think from this it can be said: if your religion does not make you more tender, kind, more sympathetic and forbearing, then it is not N.T. Christianity. It is impossible to be sympathetic and selfish at the same time. Unity and compassion will rise or fall together.

The third thing that Peter says is that we are to "love as brothers."

A mutual love is the bond of brotherhood of believers in Christ. A non-loving Christian is a contradiction of terms. Love, Jesus said, is the very mark of discipleship (John 13:34-35). No church can grow without love. We love each other as individuals, and then we love the whole. We cannot generally love the brotherhood without individually loving the brothers.

Love enables us to live and work together. "Love," Peter will say later, "covers a multitude of sins" (I Peter 4:8). Love is like oil that takes the friction out of relationships. I have often been working with metal or wood and trying to get something to fit together. Maybe I am trying to put an iron bar through a hole in a piece of wood. If I hammer harder, I will split the wood. But I can put oil on the bar and into the hole and it allows the bar to fit into the hole. Oil does not diminish the size of the bar or enlarge the hole in the wood. It only relieves the friction. I have learned that a few drops of oil are more effective than many blows of the hammer.

Often when we disagree with one another, we simply hammer harder. We hit blow after blow until the point is won. We win the argument but we alienate people. We bring sorrow and hurt feelings. The way of love is better.

The fourth thing Peter says to do is to "be compassionate."

This is to be tenderhearted. This is a warm and tender attitude, an affectionate sensitivity towards the needs of others. The Greek word here refers to the internal organs, visceral like the heart, lungs, liver, intestines. You might say that Peter is saying that we are to have healthy intestines toward one another. The Greeks thought that these organs were the seat of our emotions. This is the way we used the word "heart" or "gut" today in our language. Peter means here to have the deepest human emotions toward one another.

This word is used of Jesus when it is said of him several times that he was "moved with compassionate tenderness."

The fifth thing that Peter says we are to do is to "be humble."

We are not arrogant, full of pride and self, puffed up with our own importance. Instead we see our need and supply that comes from God. We do not brag and push ourselves. We instead follow the example of Christ in Phil. 2:5-8 who humbled himself even to the depths of a common criminal. He hanged on a cross. This is the pattern for Christian maturity.

We are to have this mind or attitude Paul says. It is hard to be proud while hanging on a cross.

Christians are not wimps who have no virtue or commitments. We do not lay down and let the world deliberately use us as a doormat. No, to be humble means that we make an active decision not to retaliate or pursue redress for personal grievance.

So Peter has told us five things we are to do in our conduct toward one another: Live in harmony with one another, be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate, and be humble. This is not only good spiritually, but it is necessary emotionally. Psychiatrist Jacqueline Olds says, "We've known for a long time that people who do not feel connected to something outside themselves feel a malaise, as if there's a hole in their souls." She adds, "Any situation where people meet regularly to work together on some common cause is likely to result in deepening relationships. It's good for the soul" [Brad Edmondson, "All the Lonely People," AARP.ORG/ Magazine, October, 2010, pp. 84-85].

Now he will tell us what our response ought to be to the hostile world that is afflicting us. Hear him in v. 9: [read it]

How do we respond to a hostile world? Peter was facing that very situation. The church was in the midst of suffering for their faith. The book of First Peter mentions their suffering for Christ about five times. Peter says we should not harm our enemies with word or deed. When it comes to personal hostilities and personal grudges and personal insults, here is what Jesus said to do: [read Matt. 5:38-48]

Both Jesus and Peter say to not return evil for evil. To do that only increases the wrong. It's hard to wash off dirt with dirt. The only way the cycle can be broken is for someone to endure evil without retaliation. We do what Jesus said. We act like Jesus acted. Otherwise, we grieve God's Holy Spirit in us. Paul wrote about this in Ephesians 4:30-32 [read it]

When we don't do what he says here we grieve the Holy Spirit. The spirit of Christ, the spirit that promotes peace, love, and unity is grieved when we act in a sinful way.

Peter even says that with our speech we are to not trade insults. We are to instead give a blessing.

This is a positive response to evil. We give the opposite of what we received. One man I heard of was known for his kindness. He never hurt anyone. One time an angry, resentful neighbor hurled false accusations at him and called him names. He listened, then he said, "Joe, if you offer something to a man he refuses to accept it, then who does it belong to?" Joe

said, "It belongs to the man who offers it." Then our brother said, "Well, Joe, those names you called me, I refuse to accept."

We are to refuse to engage in evil talk with others. Instead, Jesus says that we give a blessing. This means prayer for our enemies, kindness toward them, speaking well of them. If God treats people kindly, even those that do not believe in him, and even mock his name, then we can, too.

The reason we are to do this is because we were called to inherit a blessing. The blessing we pronounce upon another returns as an inheritance from God. The reason for this is that God bestows his favor on those who obey him. Hear what Jesus said: [read Matt. 5:10-12]. The blessings we receive are more spiritual, psychological and interpersonal, rather than physical and material.

God wants us to live as new creatures in Christ. He wants us to be loving, instead of hateful; generous, instead of miserly; gracious, instead of bitter; helpful, instead of hindering; and kindly, instead of mean.

So in these two verses Peter tells us how to conduct ourselves toward believers and toward the hostile world. Peter, like Jesus and Paul, is not speaking about justice and punishment legally for the wrongs we commit and do toward others. Some use these passages to teach that believers must not punish evildoers in courts of law, or penitentiaries, or use armed resistance like police forces or the military to punish evil. That is a misuse of Scripture. Nowhere in the Bible is there condemnation of just enforcement of laws that protect our rights and insure our survival against evil. In Romans chapter 12 Paul spoke of treating each other right in personal matters, yet in chapter 13 he speaks of law enforcement that rightfully punishes evil. In I Peter 2:14, Peter said that the government has the right to punish evil doers, yet here he tells us that personally in relationships we are not to be vengeful people. This is no contradiction. The writers are speaking of different realms and arenas. It is no contradiction of Scripture for a Christian to belong to the local police force or the national military and help preserve law and order and punish evildoers while at the same time having a personal, Christ-like heart of mercy and kindness in personal attitudes and relationships.

Now, Peter moves on to show us a confirmation of this lifestyle from the O.T. Scriptures. In vs. 10-12, Peter quotes from Psalm 34:12-16. The text in Psalms was a 1000 years old when Peter writes. Now this recipe for healthy living is 3000 years old, but it remains true and practical today. Here is an ancient recipe for a happy life.

Peter quotes the psalmist as saying, "if you would love life and see good days," then he gives you the recipe. Well, he has already caught my attention. Does he have yours?

To love life is to enjoy life, to live life with zest and meaning. Life is either endured and made a burden, or escaped and run from, or enjoyed because God is in control.

"Good days" are days that are beneficial, days that are full and meaningful. Remember Jesus said that he came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly (Jn. 10:10).

These Christians were living under persecution, but they could still find a life worth living.

Now Peter is going to quote this ancient recipe for a happy life. The recipe says that we should be careful of what we say, what we do, and what we think.

Now, please don't get the wrong idea. Peter is not saying that life is an easy journey with no problems or pains or disappointments. Go back to the original recipe he is quoting from and in Psalm 34 he speaks of fears (4), troubles (6, 17), afflictions (19) and a broken heart (18). So in the original recipe a good day is not one where we are pampered and sheltered but where we experience God's help and blessing because of problems and trials. In all these, we magnify the Lord (1-3), we experience answer to prayer (4-7), we taste the goodness of God (8), and we sense the nearness of God (18).

So now we come to the recipe for a good life. "The fear of the Lord" of Psalms 34:11 is explained in the next verses as obedience to God in speech and conduct, of speaking and doing.

First, is restraint of the tongue. The tongue gets us all into a lot of trouble. James said that the tongue is a restless evil, full of deadly poison (Jas. 3:8). Proverbs says, "Whoso keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles" (21:23).

I have been to the doctor because I was not feeling well. The doctor says, "Let me see your tongue." Now I suppose that by looking at my tongue the doctor can tell something about the condition of my body. Likewise, God says, "Let me see your tongue," because that is an index of your spiritual condition. Jesus said, "Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." (Matt. 12:34). When we have tongue trouble, we have heart trouble. The tongue merely expresses the inner man. When God changes our heart, then the tongue comes under more control.

David's prayer would help us: "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips" (Psalm 141:3).

Second, the recipe for happiness says to "turn away from evil." We must not think of evil things to say or do, we must resist the devil and he will flee from us. We must control our passions and emotions and turn away from evil ideas, words, and acts.

Third, the ancient recipe for happiness says that we must "do good." This is positive. We not only turn away from evil; we turn toward doing good. It is not enough to be against sin. The sum of a million zeroes is zero. A negative righteousness never replaces a positive service of doing good. The old gospel song says to "trust and obey." We trust God's promises. We live one day at a time with Jesus. But we also obey--we do good in the name of Christ.

The fourth thing in this ancient recipe for happiness is that we are to "seek peace and pursue it." We are aggressive peacemakers. We hunt for ways to make peace and we aggressively pursue it. Peace does not come automatically. We must pursue it; we must work at it (Rom. 14:19). God wants us to bring people together because this promotes healing in the body.

Now that we have been told what to do, what is God's response to a life like this?

This ancient recipe quoted by Peter has encouragement for the saints and a warning to the wicked.

First, God consoles the persecuted. The Lord observes our conduct, our purposes, our aspirations. "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous." The Lord observes our lives. He sees us, he knows us. The Bible says, "The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

Second, God hears our prayers. His ears are attentive to our whispers, like a father bows down to hear a child. My 15-year-old granddaughter, Kelsey, is a soft spoken child, quite small for her age. She was delivered at 26 weeks, and stayed in the hospital for 3 months after birth. I remember one summer when she was nine years old that when we had cousins camp. We were staying at a Branson, MO hotel that had a buffet fix-it-yourself breakfast. I asked Kelsey each morning what I could get for her, and in that soft, weak voice, she would say, "Waffles." I had to bend down very close to her and I would say, "What did you say, honey?" and she would repeat. "Waffles." Well, the imagery here of God is that he bends down to us to hear our prayerful whispers.

God's people are people of prayer. Abraham Lincoln well said, "When I don't know which way to go, I go on my knees." God hears our prayers and will take care of us.

Third, God warns the wicked. "The face of the Lord is against those who do evil." Just like God knows and watches over his people, so he also knows what the wicked are doing, but God is against them and their lives. God loves them, yes, but he does not approve of their lifestyles. There is a place for judgment in our preaching and teaching. Warnings are positive if they help us avoid dangers and evils. The railroad crossing has bells and flashing red lights and cross arms to warn us of approaching freight trains. A bottle with a skull and bones on it is a warning about poison that could kill us. This warning from God shows that God does not accept everything that people do, in spite of popular religion and popular thinking. To reject God ultimately results in rejection by God.

So here are the qualities that make a beautiful life. I encourage you now that you know these things to live by them. This is really what it means to "fear the Lord." To reverence God means to obey him.

So today what are you going to do? I hope you will enjoy the life God has given you by working on your relationships. When your relationships are right, your life will be enjoyable. Begin with a right relationship with God, and then let that work out into right relationships with others. If you are right at the center, the circumference will be right. If the center is not right, nothing is right. If you want to know what to do, here is the recipe right here in God's good book of life.

Today, we'll help you any way we can to respond to God's gospel. If we can assist you, come now for prayer, for confession, for church membership, for encouragement, for baptism--come, whatever your needs, and let us assist you now. Come, as we stand and sing.

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