

What leads to the good life?

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[0 : 0 0] And let me pray as we prepare ourselves. Father, as we just sung, we pray that indeed you will speak to us, that these words of power would indeed renew our lives, cause us to want to glorify you, and cause us to want to live the way that you want us to.

So Father, please work in our hearts now. Please open our hearts so that we are ready to receive. And Father, we pray that as we receive from you, we will be ready to live out in the power of your Holy Spirit what you want us to live, how you want us to live, and also to continue to praise and worship you and give you thanks for all that you have done.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. And now some of you might know Michael Ramston. He is a well-known apologist. And he tells a story once of meeting someone at something he was speaking at.

And it turns out that this guy works for the FBI. And so he got talking about why people might join the FBI. And not surprisingly, it turns out that lots of people do so because they want to help people.

They want to protect the innocent. They want to make the world a better place. They want to do good and be on the side of good.

[1 : 2 5] And I think that doesn't just apply to the FBI, does it? Generally speaking, we all want to do good. We want to be in jobs that allow us to do things that benefit everyone.

We want to be people who are good. I heard a speech once in which the speaker suggested that what men really want at the end of the day is for people to say at their funeral, he was a good man.

And did you know that the Bible also envisions such a life? You will find it in the Old Testament. You will find it in the New Testament.

Hebrews 13 verse 16 says, Now, that is the good life, according to the Bible.

And I want to suggest this morning that the book of Titus in particular is keen to set forth such a vision. Now, if you have not read the book as a whole yet, let me encourage you to.

[2 : 5 1] It is only three short chapters after all. And when you do, you will notice that the book is shot through with the language of doing good.

Now, turn with me to Titus 2 verse 14, for example. So if you close your Bibles, just open it back to Titus and come down with me to chapter 2 verse 14.

And there, we are told that Jesus has purified for himself a people that are his very own and then, notice, eager to do what is good.

That's where our sermon series gets its title from. Or look halfway through 3 verse 1. God's people are to be ready to do whatever is good.

Or look down to 3 verse 8. People who trust God are to devote themselves to doing what is good. Titus is to be a model of good works to the young man.

[4 : 0 7] Or notice the opposite in chapter 1 verse 16. You see, this eagerness, this devotion, this zeal to do good is meant to be characteristic of every follower of Christ.

From one perspective, a Christian is simply someone eager to do good to others. And wouldn't it be lovely if every single one of us at our funerals could be said to be such a person?

But let's come back to that FBI guy. I haven't yet told you one thing about him. Why was Michael Ramston so fascinated by him? Because, you see, when they introduced themselves and this guy handed over his business card, it didn't just say FBI on it.

It said spiritual director. And Michael Ramston asked him, is that really your job? Yes.

Yes, it is. So, of course, the natural follow-up question was, why? Why does the FBI even feel the need to employ a spiritual director?

[5 : 33] Well, this guy explained, it's quite simple. The biggest threat to FBI agents on the field is not from criminals shooting at them.

The biggest threat to them is from them taking their own lives. Why? Well, after having analysed countless suicide notes left behind by FBI personnel, they realised that the number one reason they did so was what they labelled as spiritual angst.

And basically what they meant was this. After years and years of serving, these people became jaded. They became cynical.

They saw so much bad stuff. They became wary of doing good. good. And in extreme cases, they took their own lives.

And that's why people like this spiritual director was employed. He was there to try to help the agents from descending into the dark side and to hold on to doing good.

[6 : 44] And that is basically what Titus is up to. You see, Titus is in a place called Crete, which is located on the Mediterranean Sea, just south of Greece.

At some point, the Apostle Paul, together with Titus, who is a trusted co-worker of his, had been on a mission trip to this island.

And clearly they had some success. There are now groups of Christians around the place. And as we will see next week in chapter 1 verse 5, Paul has put a appointing elders for these new churches on top of Titus' to-do list.

And the reason for that, as we will see in more depth next week, is to help these Christians truly be the kind of Christians Jesus wants us to be, those eager to do good.

So in one sense, Titus is to act as a kind of spiritual director. But it's going to be really tough. You see, what kind of place was Crete?

[8 : 00] Well, why don't we hear it from the locals? Look down at chapter 1, verse 12 with me. Chapter 1, verse 12. One of Crete's own prophets has said it, Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.

That was his reputation. Even the locals knew that they were a deceitful, self-indulgent society. Indeed, if someone called you a Cretan, it was not a compliment.

They were basically calling you a liar. That's how much lying was associated with Crete. Imagine that. Another Greek historian also rather sarcastically said, on Crete, there are no wild beasts.

We don't need them. The humans are the wild beasts. And it is exactly the kind of place that could easily turn one cynical.

It is exactly the kind of place that could make you wary of doing good. It is exactly the kind of place that could, in fact, turn you bad.

[9 : 14] And perhaps that is not a million miles from Malaysia. Think about it. Sometimes we might refer to our country as Boleh Land, and then we laugh cynically, and we comment sarcastically.

Yes, we memang very good at being corrupt. Malaysia Boleh. Or in our frustrations, we wonder whether we are just making excuses when we say Malaysians are laid back.

When really, we are lazy. And we say, oh well, nothing will ever change. Everything will always be the same. And as we see all the bad stuff, we grow wary in doing good.

In fact, we might decide just to go with the flow and not expand our energy. And that is true even in our individual lives, isn't it? You want to be an employee or employer who is godly, but sometimes your working environment seems to push you in the other direction.

You want to be patient and loving with your family, but sometimes you feel it's an uphill task just to remain civil for even an hour.

[10 : 35] And so that brings us to the big question for today. What leads to the good life? What can help Christians not grow wary in doing good?

And today Paul will show us in the first four verses of this letter. He's going to introduce us to the essence of his ministry and by doing so he is telling us how we can live the good life.

And what is his answer in a nutshell? Well initially if you look at your outline at this point I was going to tell you but I've decided to delay it a little bit longer so what we're just going to do is dive straight into these first four verses and we'll unpack them and then maybe a little bit later we'll find out what that answer is.

So let's go into these verses and let's look at verse 1. In verse 1 Paul tells us the purpose of his ministry. It is to further the faith of God's elect.

In other words he wants to nourish believers. He wants to sustain them. He wants to foster a deeper faith in them. That is his fundamental priority because what is faith?

[12 : 04] At his heart faith is simply trusting Christ. It is trusting what he teaches, what he pronounces, and what he has done on our behalf.

And all our lives, not just at the moment when we become Christians, we need to trust Christ. As the pastor Philip Riken once said on the screen, from start to finish, the whole Christian life is by grace through faith.

A new life in Christ commences with faith, with trusting him, continues by faith, continues by trusting him, and will be completed by faith, by trusting him.

And we can always grow in trusting Christ. As another writer puts it, though the object of our faith, Jesus Christ, never changes, our love for him, our knowledge of his goodness, our acquaintance with his ways, and our experience of his power may grow as our faith is strengthened.

So, as we trust Christ more and more, we will experience his goodness more and more. And when we experience his goodness more and more, we can be good to others more and more.

[13 : 37] Because we can only give what we ourselves have received. And that's why our faith needs to be cultivated and reinforced.

But how does this furthering of faith come about? Well, Paul tells us in verse 1 again, it is by furthering our knowledge of the truth.

By furthering our knowledge of the truth. Now, what truth is this? Well, it can't simply be truth in general. After all, truths such as the fact that I am 173 centimeters tall, or that Manchester City won the Premier League last season, certainly doesn't produce more faith.

And it is certainly not the kind of truth that Prince Harry talks about in his recent autobiography. For Prince Harry, what matters most to him is not the kind of truth found in objective facts that really happen, but truth as expressed in his current feelings based on his subjective memories.

It is not the truth, but his truth. But Paul here isn't talking about your subjective truth, or my subjective truth, but the truth.

[15 : 04] One that is for everyone, in every culture, in every city, in every age. he's talking about the truth that is so big, so deep, so all-encompassing that there is nothing that can compare with it.

And he's talking, of course, about the truth of the gospel. He's talking about the truth that out of his rich love and his abundant mercy, God sent his son Jesus to die on the cross for the ungodly.

He's talking about how God, despite affirming that we are sinners, despite being deeply opposed to our sin, did not act against us, but for us, on our behalf.

He's talking about how we have received a new identity, indeed a new life in Christ, one that is no longer defined by the bad things we have done.

And he's talking about the truth that in Christ, we can change. We are not stuck because the gospel says we are new creations.

[16 : 21] We can change. Because did you notice what this truth does? I mean, look at verse 1 again.

It is a truth that leads to godliness. It generates godliness. It produces godliness. In other words, this truth isn't static.

It transforms. That's how it works. And you can see its effects up close and personal. In Crete, it took habitual liars and turned them into honest truth tellers.

On the Damascus road, it took a murderer of Christians and turned him into an apostle to the Gentiles. In Malaysia, I've seen the gospel turn a God-hating man, one I never imagined could ever change, into a God-fearing one.

And I'm sure that if I ask you, some of you can tell me other stories as well. You see, the gospel is what transforms. And you might nod your heads because you've heard this said before, but think about what we do in practice.

[17 : 42] What do we often do when we want someone to do good? Do we say, let's give them gospel? No.

Instead, often we say, let's give them moral lessons. Let's give them religion. Isn't that why in our school curriculum, we have something called pendidikan moral or pendidikan agama?

Or we say, let's make people show compassion by introducing more legislation. I'm a member of Sorawak Club, and on my bill, there is a contribution to a monthly charity fund which you are automatically co-opted into.

So in a sense, that is helping me do good in a passive form. That automatic contribution means my money isn't going into drugs or tobacco after all.

But that automatic contribution or that moral or religious lesson cannot produce authentic godliness.

[18 : 54] godliness. Because what is godliness? Let's think about this for a moment. People often think of godliness in this way.

There is an early 20th century play written by an American playwright, Susan Gillespie, called Trifles. And in that play, on the screen, one of the characters says of another character, oh, they say so-and-so was a good man.

And the other person replies, well, I suppose he didn't drink, he generally kept his word, he paid his debts on time, he was good.

And sometimes that's what we think godliness is. Simply someone who doesn't get drunk, who doesn't swear, who doesn't do anything scandalous. And if we think that's what godliness is, then you can see why we might think moral lessons might work.

But that actually misses the essence of godliness. Because godliness is not the bare minimum of avoiding what is obviously wrong.

[20 : 07] As this character goes on to say, he was a good man, but he was a hard man. You can not be a drunkard or a scammer, and yet still be hard of heart.

Because what really is godliness? Well, godliness is god-likeness.

Let me say that again. Godliness is god-likeness. And because Christ is god, godliness is really christ-likeness.

godliness. And let's think about christ. What is he like? Let me just give one example. In mark chapter 6, jesus has been teaching from village to village, and he has commissioned his disciples to also preach and to cast out some demons.

And at this point, jesus has just experienced some disappointments. He has been rejected by his hometown. So it's been a long and hard day.

[21 : 21] But what's jesus in action? What does he do? When his disciples come back, he knows that they too have had a long day, and so he says to them, come with me to a quiet place and get some rest.

Now do you see jesus' heart here? He wants to do good to his disciples. He's not thinking about himself. But that is not all.

As he leads his disciples, a crowd follows, begging for more from him. And jesus could easily have said, hey guys, I've had a long day, my disciples have had a long day, come lah, leave us alone for a little bit, won't you?

But what does Mark 6 verse 34 say? When jesus saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and so he began teaching them many things.

He wanted to do good, not just to his disciples, but to the crowds. And that is just a little sampling of what Christ is like, isn't it?

[22 : 36] He is always wanting to do good. He could have gotten irritable, but he didn't. Rather, he's being godlike through his compassion and his thoughtfulness.

Now, that is godliness. Do you see how that is more than just avoiding what is obviously wrong? And isn't that attractive?

Isn't that what we wish we are like? And here is where Paul blows our minds. Because he says, it is possible.

Because we have the truth that leads to godliness. We have a godliness producing gospel. You see, what can the gospel do?

Well, let's take an example yet again. Let's think about how the gospel makes us godly at work. Without the gospel, we might be tempted to work purely for financial gain.

[23 : 47] And so we end up either overworking or we end up trampling on other people in our bid to get more financial success. Or, we might be tempted in the other direction to work purely for the weekend.

And so we do the bare minimum. That's without the gospel. But with the gospel, that changes. When we grasp that success is found not in more money, or when we have confidence that the Lord will provide all that we need because he has already sent his son to provide for our greatest need, we won't overwork.

we won't run over others. And instead, we want to show the goodness the Lord has shown us to others. With the gospel, we understand Jesus is our Lord.

And so we will work with him in mind. And because we know that he wants to bless the world through us, and so we work with that aim in mind, gospel truth leads to godliness.

And in fact, they should never ever be separated. Sometimes we do that, don't we? On the one hand, we can get very concerned simply with truth.

[25 : 19] We are very concerned about getting the gospel right, as we should be. We are concerned about orthodoxy. But we forget that the gospel is not just good news of gracious acceptance.

It is also the good news of changed lives. On the other hand, sometimes we can get very concerned simply with doing good.

We are very concerned about trying to be kind and loving to others to do what is right. But we forget that without the truth, godliness could soon degenerate into just trying to be moral on the outside.

And that would lead to disillusionment and exhaustion like those FBI agents. And so we need to keep both together.

And so we need to ask ourselves two questions. First of all, we need to ask ourselves how much does the truth of the gospel matter to me?

[26 : 27] How much does the truth of the gospel matter to me? Do I long to mine the riches of the gospel? Do I want to grow in understanding what it means to trust Jesus more?

Because if we think we can just do good and be godly without doing the hard work of knowing the truth, we are bypassing what God says will help us be good.

We are setting ourselves up to become wary of doing good. There is no shortcut. We need the gospel.

If we want to be eager to do good, if we want to be known for the good life, then we must want to know Jesus personally for ourselves more and more.

But second of all, we need to ask ourselves, how much does the gospel transform me? How much does the gospel transform me?

[27 : 34] Are sermons and Bible studies just there to fill my brain with more information? Or do I listen with the intention of saying, here is how I want to be godly in this coming week?

Here is what I know needs to change in my life. Is godliness what we care about? If not, then even if we call ourselves a Christian, perhaps we have not yet understood the heart of our faith yet.

Because you can never separate the gospel from godliness. The two go together. So, how do I not grow weary in doing good?

I hope you now have your answer in a nutshell. It is by hanging on to God's godliness producing truth. It is God's godliness producing truth that will help us not grow weary in doing good.

truth. That is the key element. But for the remainder of this sermon, I just want to point out two more things about this godliness producing truth.

[28 : 50] One to do with its basis and the other to do with the way it's communicated. So, first off, the basis. Why should we trust this truth and no other?

After all, there is no shortage of other self-help strategies on offer in the bookstore or on YouTube, each promising you ways in which you can change your life for the better.

So, why go for this truth? And the answer is found in verse 2. Because this truth comes from a god who does not lie.

This truth comes from a god who does not lie. lie. You see, why do you think Cretan culture was so accustomed to lying?

Well, it's because of who they worshipped. One of the chief gods they worshipped was Zeus, who, by the way, you shouldn't confuse with the one you see in the Marvel movies.

[29 : 54] Who was Zeus? Well, according to legend, he was born on the island of Crete. And so, he's like a man become god. And, he is someone who loves to seduce women by any means necessary, including deception.

One time, he was said to take the form of someone's husband to get that woman into bed. In a nutshell, Zeus is a liar and a womanizer.

And as the Bible says elsewhere, we become like what we worship. And it would have been easy for the Cretans, perhaps, to think that the Christian God was just like this Greek God.

But, hang on a minute, Paul says, he couldn't be more different. He is a God who does not lie. He never has, and he never will.

he tells what is true, always. And how can we be sure of that? Well, look at his track record. Has God not promised a serpent crusher, back in Genesis 3?

[31 : 13] Has God not promised a Messiah who will reign forever, in 2 Samuel 7? Has God not promised a suffering servant who would die for our transgressions, in Isaiah 53?

Has he not promised all this? Well, yes. And even more amazingly, Paul says, these promises were made, or they belonged, even before time began.

And now, has not all these promises been fulfilled? Because, verse 3, at the appointed time, God became man.

This promise was manifested in real time. at the appointed time, Jesus died on the cross. And so, the promise of Isaiah 53 is being kept.

But also, at the appointed time, Jesus rose again. His tomb is empty. All this can be historically verified.

[32 : 16] And, that is striking, because, the Cretans claimed that Zeus' tomb was on their island too. But, that was certainly a lie.

There's no evidence, no tomb. It was an empty word. But, not for us. Because, Jesus' tomb is empty, that shows God's word is not empty.

It is true. And, it is this truth that motivates post-ministry. If God's word is not empty, then, verse 2 again, we really do have hope of eternal life.

If God's word is not empty, then it really has the power to raise people from the dead. And, if God's word has that power, will not his truth have the power to produce godliness in us?

Will his gospel not have the power to lead us to the good life? If we believe Jesus rose from the dead, then the logical implication is we also believe his gospel can lead us to godliness.

[33 : 39] God's love to God. God's gospel gives us not just hope for the future. I mean, that's how we sometimes think, right? Oh, the gospel means I can go to heaven after I die.

But this gospel also gives us hope for the present. Because this gospel says, I can live how Jesus wants me to.

And so that is why this gospel is the one and only message that Paul wants to talk about. And why I only want to talk about this message.

For look at verse 3. How is this godliness producing truth communicated? It is brought to us by the proclamation of God's word.

Or put another way, how can we grow in godliness? It comes as God's word is proclaimed to us. Now, Paul is clear.

[34 : 44] That is how this godliness producing truth comes to us. Now, hear what I am not saying. I am not saying godliness comes simply as a result of merely listening to more sermons or buying more devotional material.

Those of us who are long-time church goers, know that very well, don't we? It doesn't work like that. I am also not saying that other things like prayer is not needed for us to grow in godliness.

We must pray. But I am saying that to live a life of goodness, it is a non-negotiable that we place ourselves under God's word.

That means not simply rushing through a devotion or half listening through a sermon. Rather, it means sitting with God's word. It means dwelling with God's word.

It means wrestling with God's word, calling out to God for insight, working hard to make sure that we are getting its proper meaning, filling our hearts with its truth truth, so that you have it when you need it.

[36 : 03] It means seeing what untruths God's truth is exposing in us. It means confessing to him when we know that we have gone against it.

But it also means turning to Christ and resting in him because he has told us about his gospel, that he has rescued us. and then asking him to help us live out this truth.

If the word is living and endearing, if the word acts and creates, if it is the means by which God reveals himself, then this word is astonishingly supernatural.

Do we believe that? And that's why at church we want to major on God's word. Now, sometimes this is misunderstood as just us being nerdy or bookish, can't it?

Why does it seem that we are so obsessed with learning Bible books, or how to better handle the scriptures, or knowing the Bible speaks story, and so on and so forth? Well, the reason for that is nothing to do with being nerdy or bookish.

[37 : 14] Rather, it is God's way of ensuring we do not grow weary in doing good. it is actually how we make the world a better place, because this is where God's godliness producing truth is to be found.

So let's do all we can to make sure that the word takes root in us. In a famous parable, Jesus likens the teaching of God's word to a farmer sowing the seed.

And seed, they look like small things that would never produce anything, wouldn't they? I mean, think of those papaya seeds that you have when you cut open a papaya.

What do you do with them normally? Well, I normally just throw them away. But now think of some of the most amazing trees you have ever seen. Perhaps you can think of that big tree by the old courthouse.

Or the one on Padang Medeca, the one facing St. Thomas' Cathedral. Where did they come from? They came from such humble seed.

[38 : 29] When you plant a seed, you can produce such a tree. And when the word is planted in us, when we nurture the right conditions for growth, we can produce giant trees of godliness.

God commanded and entrusted Paul with the preaching of his word. That is why Paul calls himself an apostle because an apostle is essentially a man with a message.

And that is why Titus is his true son in the common faith because he has entrusted Titus with that same word. So what leads to the good life?

What leads to people being more kind and patient and self-controlled, eager to do what is good? It isn't law. Legislation has a place.

It can restrain evil, it can promote justice, but it cannot produce godliness. But the gospel proclaimed to us in all of scripture can.

[39 : 40] And that's why we are gospel-centered and word-driven. And church today, I hope that today has also whetted your appetite for more of the gospel and more of the book of Titus, not just for more information, but so that we can become more and more eager to do good.

Shall we proceed then? with the expectation that in the rest of the series, God wants to make us good people. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the truth. We thank you that this truth has been revealed to us, chiefly through the Lord Jesus, the word made flesh, who at the appointed season brought light to us, brought forgiveness and made us alive.

And so Father, we just pray, Lord, that as we take hold of this truth, help us to remember that this is the truth that leads to godliness. And as we know the truth that is Jesus Christ himself more and more, as you grow our faith, we can be people who will do good.

So help us to keep looking to you so that we might be people who do good and be a blessing to the world around us. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ.

[41 : 13] Amen.