



Proverbs 3:1-8 - My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, ² for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you. ³ Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man. ⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. ⁸ It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.

Some time ago, I listened a radio commentary on “the Good Life.” The speaker was an older man, a retired journalist, who was kind of disillusioned about ever finding the so-called “good life.” He said that when he was young, he thought that the good life would start when he got out of school and got a job of his own. When he finally did get out into the working world, though, it wasn’t as great as he thought it would be. “Well,” he figured, “the Good Life will come when I get promoted and make more money.” But even after several promotions, and even on a fat salary, he still wasn’t quite living what he thought of as “the Good Life.” “Retirement!” he said to himself. “That must be when the Good Life starts!” But now that he has been retired for several years he’s worried, because he still hasn’t found it. He’s not even sure anymore of what it was he was looking for in the first place.

You and I get some of the same feelings from time to time, don’t we? You might think to yourself, “Well, things aren’t so hot in my life right now, but it’s going to get better—someday!” In fact, that emotion is so common and so strong that there are even entire businesses aimed at making money off it. We get these flyers in the mail every week: self improvement plans, investment schemes—all kinds of do-it-yourself programs designed to lead us to a magical place called “the Good Life.” Needless to say, they usually fail to get us there. But our text for this morning offers us some great news: the Good Life isn’t a fantasy—it’s real, and it is ours for the taking! That’s why our theme for today is:

THE GOOD LIFE

Scripture Shows You How to Obtain:

- I. The favor of God and man
- II. A level path in life
- III. Physical and spiritual health

You may or may not be familiar with the Book of Proverbs. Do you know who it was written by? Who it was written for? Actually, most of the book is a message from wise King Solomon to his son. But we’re allowed to eavesdrop, because as part of God’s Word to all believers, it’s written for us, too. Proverbs is a message about one broad subject: *Wisdom*.—Not the kind of wisdom

that the Greek philosophers knew—not the kind of wisdom our university professors have. According to the Book of Proverbs, the highest kind of Wisdom a person can have is the wisdom which knows and reveres the true God! In chapter 9:10 Solomon says, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”* Prov 9:10. Acknowledging God, fearing God, trusting God—that is the very foundation of real Wisdom. And Wisdom, according to our text for today, has its rewards.

“My son,” Solomon says, **“do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments, for length of days and years of life and peace they will add to you.”** You want the Good Life? The real Good Life? “Listen to what I’ve got to say,” says Solomon, “and I guarantee you the Good Life!”

Respect is one thing we’ve all got to have. Psychologists tell us these days that one of the most important factors in an individual’s personality is his “self-image.” People with a low self-image are often depressed, but people with a high self-image are usually confident and well adjusted. And the most important factor in what we think about ourselves, is what *others* think about us. That’s why I think most people’s idea of the Good Life includes respect. We want to “find favor in the eyes of” the people who live around us. Even more important, for us Christians, is finding favor in the eyes of God.

How do we do that? Solomon tells us: **“Let not steadfast love and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck; write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.”** There’s something very interesting about that phrase, “steadfast love and faithfulness.” Sometimes it’s translated, “mercy and truth.” It’s used very often in the Bible, but you know what? -It’s almost always used to describe *God*, not man! *God* showed his mercy to sinful human beings by giving us a way out of our hopelessly lost condition, by promising a Savior from sin. *God* showed His truth, His faithfulness to that promise, by sending His own beloved Son to earth that first cold Christmas Eve some 2,000 years ago. It was *God’s* “mercy and truth” that brought us forgiveness of our sins and salvation. And that’s the same kind of “mercy and truth” that Solomon says we should imitate. And he’s not the only one; John said it, too, in his first epistle: **“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”** (1 Jn. 4:10-11)

We should adopt for ourselves the same “mercy and truth” that God has shown to us! And not just on Sundays either, or not just when we happen to be talking to the pastor. No, Solomon tells us to tie mercy and truth around our neck like a necklace, to write them in permanent ink on our hearts and minds! Make them a permanent part of your personality, so that every move you make reflects the same mercy and truth of God! When you do that, he says, your personal stock will skyrocket. You’ll gain the favor of God and man, and my Christian friends—that is a big step toward living “the Good Life!”

What’s the next step? **“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”** One thing a lot of people don’t realize is that “believing in God” means not just

believing God exists, but trusting in Him. When we talk about “faith” in confirmation class, I always tell them a true story I once heard: several years ago a daredevil high wire artist stretched a wire across the top of Niagara Falls. As a huge crowd gathered to watch him, he rode a bicycle on the wire all the way across the falls and back. One man in the crowd said, “That’s the most amazing thing I’ve ever seen!” “That’s nothing,” said the daredevil, “I can do the same trick over again, with a person riding on the handlebars.” “I really believe you could,” replied the man. “Good!” said the daredevil, “Get on!”

“Having faith” means going out on a limb. “Believing in God” means not just knowing He can forgive us, but trusting Him to actually do it! It means not just knowing He can provide for us and care for us in this life, but actually trusting Him to do it, day by day! If you want something solid to lean on, Solomon says, don’t lean on your own understanding—lean on God. And let *others know* you’re leaning on Him. **“In all your ways acknowledge Him,”** Solomon says. What does that mean? We don’t spend all our time in church worshipping, and God doesn’t expect us to. But He does expect that, whatever paths our lives lead us into—in our work, our leisure, sports, whatever—we acknowledge Him. That in every activity we show ourselves to be His children, **“...that God in all things may be glorified,”** as Peter says in 1 Peter 4:11.

The result? The “Good Life!” God will “direct our paths;” in the Hebrew that literally means God will “make a level path” for us to walk on. I’m sure you’ve known the difference there can be between traveling on a curvy, windy gravel road, and traveling on a nice, level, asphalt surface. If you have a choice, the latter makes for a lot easier driving! Well, here God promises to do the same kind of thing in our lives. If we can learn to trust in Him, and acknowledge Him in all our ways, He’ll make a level path for us to walk on. He’ll take obstacles out of our way and straighten things out in our lives. In our increasingly complex world of today, the Lord is giving us a sure-fire way to uncomplicate our lives—simply by making God central, and by witnessing His grace in everything that we do.

Finally, Solomon says, **“Be not wise in your own eyes.”** Solomon’s been giving us advice all this time on things we should do; now he tells us something we shouldn’t do. “Do not be wise in your own eyes,” he says. Don’t be conceited! Nothing throws a wrench in the Good Life faster than thinking that you know it all, that you’ve got all the answers, that you *don’t need* the Wisdom that’s contained in the Bible. God’s ways are higher above our ways than the heavens are above the earth, and the day we stop needing the Wisdom of His holy Word—that will be the day He ushers us from this life into the next! Until then, each of us needs to get up in the morning with an attitude of abject humility toward our God, and of humble love toward our fellow Christians. Paul says, **“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.”** (Romans 12:16)

Still, it’s a problem we all have to grapple with to some extent. And nothing cures that problem better than a good healthy dose of the fear of God! Solomon says, **“Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.”** Now, when some people hear the phrase “fear of God,” they picture trembling

in fear like the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion quaking in fear before the Wizard of Oz! But when it's used of us Christians, the Bible word "fear" has a completely different meaning. We're certainly not "afraid" of God—how can we be, when we are His dear children by faith in Christ? No, we "fear God" when we show a reverent awe of Him. We fear Him when we offer the loving respect and gratitude that He deserves from us. And this is another essential element in our quest for the "Good Life," because when we fear the Lord and depart from evil, Solomon says, ***"it will be healing to your flesh, and refreshment to your bones."***

When I was in Latin class at school, I remember staring for long time at a poster on the wall that said, "Mens sana in corpore sano." I wasn't too good at Latin, but it finally dawned on me that this was nothing more than the old Roman proverb, "A healthy mind in a healthy body." Everybody knows that proverb, but not too many people know how to get it. Well, here in our text God promises that those who fear Him will get just that—physical and spiritual health! The meaning of the expression ***"healing to your flesh"*** is obvious. The phrase ***"refreshment to your bones"*** was used in the Bible to indicate strength in a person's innermost being. "A healthy mind," if you will. Does that mean that no "God-fearing" believer will ever suffer mental or physical illness? Obviously not—Job, for instance, was a man who "was blameless and upright, who feared God and shunned evil." And yet Job suffered some terrible mental and physical anguish. So we see that God may have an overriding purpose in sending illness into the lives of some of His believers, but the general principle is here for us, plain to see: ***"Fear the Lord and depart from evil. It will be health to your flesh, and strength to your bones."*** This is one key to "the Good Life." And the peaceful faith of many a believing senior citizen is proof that it works!

Have you been searching for the Good Life? Waiting and hoping for things to get better in your life? Looking forward to the day when your "ship will finally come in?" Maybe you've been searching in the wrong place! If you agree with me that the good life is having the favor of God and man, a level path in life, and physical and spiritual health, then the Good Life is no further away from you than your family Bible. It's no further away than this church on Sunday mornings. Let us live as Christians, washed in the blood of the Lamb, and trusting in the Lord for everything. In short, **let us live the Good Life! Amen.**

"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:7) Amen.

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