



## The Good Life

### What for You Would Be a Good Life?

The watch my oldest son gave me tells me at specific times in the morning and evening to take time and breathe. The message instructs me to give myself a minute to decompress. Who doesn't need that? I wonder though if that is all it takes to have a life of peace and joy. Practice mindfulness and all will be well for you. We have been in the middle of moving and going through escrow and trying to coordinate between the seller and her time schedule of moving out of the house and us being able to move our things into the new place. It has been super stressful for me in particular and I must say I have needed much more than a minute of mindfulness at the bookends of each day to get me through this sanely. I have not always done well and have said some things and acted in ways at times that I regret. It has been a good time for me to come upon the passage in James we are going to examine today. It has great insight into me, and I would guess you also. We all want "the good life". James gives us the tools we need to work on developing that today.

He writes, **Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.** (James 3: 13-15 NIV) We typically think of a good life as one where our careers are fulfilling, the family is happy and unified, and there is plenty of time to do fun and exciting things. Yet, James insists the good life is much more than what you do and have, it is who you are. I have been in contact with people around the world due to having posted sermons and 2 minute video devotionals on YouTube and I have several times been told by viewers that wealth solves all problems and that those who walk with God will become rich. This is of course an odd take given what the Bible has to say about money but one thing I have seen is that riches do not produce a good life. Something much more profound and valuable to you does.

James contends that there are two huge mistakes people make. One is that they harbor bitter envy in their hearts. The Greek terms used could be rendered, "fervent jealousy" that leads to harsh disliking of those who have more than you. Sarai, the wife of Abraham, the ancient man of faith who was the grandfather of the founding father of Israel had a real problem. She suffered from high levels of bitter envy. She couldn't have children and the realization was devastating. Being wily, she came up with a plan. Sarai pushed her husband Abraham into sleeping with her servant Hagar. The plan worked too well as Hagar got pregnant and Sarai lost her mind over the joy of Hagar having a child on the way. **When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me."** (Genesis 16: 4-5 NIV) Sarai saw it as Hagar despising her. Hagar probably had a different take on it. Nonetheless, it was Sarai who ran the household and her reaction to Hagar's pregnancy did not go well for Hagar. ...**Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.** (Genesis 16: 6b NIV)

It's not just jealousy that takes you down, it's also what the NIV translates as selfish ambition or could be rendered a "contentious disposition". The gist of this expression is the "it's all about us" attitude. You see this

in countries that practice hyper nationalism as with Russia and the whole Z bluster. Neighborhoods possess it and so do families and churches. Individuals who live by the “it’s all about me” approach to life can be miserable people and tough to be around. It comes on us subtly, sometimes even self-righteously. Usually it stems from a wounded personality, the feeling that I’m not loved enough or taken seriously. The selfish ambition approach to how we do things will crush the life in us. A girl who grew up in a village was quite beautiful but none of the young men paid attention to her because of how poor she was and the shabbiness of her clothes. One day her father, noticing the despair in his only daughter told her that the next week she could take a pail of milk that the family cow produced and sell it at the market to buy some eggs that would hatch into chickens. The money she earned from selling the eggs they would produce she could use to buy new clothes. All week the girl dreamed of her coming fortune, the little business she would create with the chickens and how the boys would finally love her. Finally, the day came for her to bring the milk to market to sell and begin her new life in the world. She carried the pail of milk on her head as she trekked down the brown dirt path into town. As she happily strutted along, she imagined what a fabulous fortune she would make and the joy she would have as she walked into town with her beautiful new skirt and blouse. All the boys would stare at her with pleasure when she sashayed past them. Handsome young men would trip over themselves trying to win her affection. She firmly decided though that she would not even glance their way. “I will hold my nose up just like this” she thought as she pictured the crowd of young men gazing lovingly at her. She pointed her nose up in the air just as she imagined she would when her chickens made her wealthy and as soon as she did so, the girl’s pail of milk toppled from her head and spilled down onto the dusty trail. Shocked, by the terrible misfortune, the poor young woman, wept bitterly as she returned home.

James insists that if we grouse about the fortunes of others and put ourselves first we are doing so because of the influence of the devil upon us. Satan can and does manipulate your personality. When he shapes your thinking and your behavior, you put yourself first and feel jealous when others succeed. I have thought much about Thomas the disciple who is more often known as “Doubting Thomas”. Why would he question the veracity of the statements by his fellow disciples and several women that they had seen Jesus raised from the dead? It is rather astounding. Even today we are expected to believe that Jesus is resurrected and many of us do so without even personally knowing those who were eyewitnesses. But Thomas, who was close friends with the ones who gleefully recounted their moments with Jesus Easter Sunday rejected outright their stirring testimonies. Perhaps, and I have been this way too and maybe you also, Thomas, could not psychologically stand the thought that he was the only one of the group who didn’t get to meet up with resurrected Jesus. Perhaps, he could not bear the possibility that Jesus left him out of them all and rather than face this possibility, Thomas rejected altogether the resurrection event. We can be like that. Jealousy can color the way we see things, alter our perception of reality. James insists that this is of the devil, a Satanic implant into our thinking. Always be careful how you take the success, the accolades, the affection others receive when you are left out of it.

James gives us the model for how to live. It really is rather simple. **Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.** (James 3:13 NIV) The term translated humility is “prautais” and speaks of forbearance, gentleness, and kindness. Perhaps you have known others like this who is wonderfully kind and understanding. They pick up the spirits of those who are troubled, overlook the flaws of others and stand up for those who are unwanted and rejected. Before the Apostle Paul became the leading missionary of the early church, he was Saul, the murderer and persecutor of Christians. However when Jesus Christ Himself came to Saul on the road to Damascus, Saul was born again and converted. Full of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, Saul returned to Jerusalem to meet the Apostles and the leaders of the Church, but they didn’t want to have anything to do with him. It was Barnabas, whose name means “Son of Encouragement”, who stood up for Saul and vouched for his true conversion and faith in Christ. Picture this great man walking with Saul into the assembly where the Apostles were and grinning ear to ear over his excitement of what Saul would do for them. We each need someone who believes in us, who encourages us and stands with us and for us. More than that, we need to be that very same one. Pick someone God has put in your life and be the encourager that person needs to rise in triumph and joy.