

## THE GOOD LIFE

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If New Zealand is the *Land of the Long White Cloud*, Australia must be the *Land of the Long Weekend* which is a part of the Australian Good Life. I found 3 TV series, 4 movies and umpteen songs called The Good Life. Ch 7 had a show called *Guide to the Good Life* now a website which gives expert advice on food, travel, health, gardening and even pets. The sorts of good things associated with the Good Life as well as those mentioned include freedom and relaxation, family and friends, wealth, prosperity and peace which are all very good, good things to have.

God is also very interested in his children living the Good Life. <sup>Rom 8:28</sup> In all things God works for the good for those who love Him, who have been called according to His purposes. <sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. The Good that God has planned for us is the likeness (Lit: image) of Jesus. The process of being like Jesus is called discipleship which is the 3<sup>rd</sup> of God's 5 purposes for our life.

God's purpose is that we become like his Son which is a lifelong process that is never completed for we will only be perfectly like Jesus when we're raised to new life in God's heaven. But just because we will never be perfectly like Jesus in this life, being anything like Jesus is still better than anything else in this life which is why God works for that Good purpose in all things. There is nothing that God will not use to bring about this Good. all things includes good things *and* bad things.

Surely we have all asked at times what divine purpose could there be in life's ups & downs, twists & turns, disappointments & disasters. What is God's plan for me in life's vagaries? Answer: our Good to conform to Jesus' image. God has predestined us for this purpose. Ok, predestination & free will *is* a conundrum but unless we can take on faith that almighty God is in control of our life, then we will never be comforted in the reality of God's working all things for our ultimate good.

1. God uses TROUBLE to teach us to **trust** Him. We've all had troubles; maybe you're having them right now. The apostle Paul had his share but he makes this extraordinary statement. <sup>Rom 5:3-4</sup> ... we also rejoice in our sufferings (troubles), because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. It's unnatural to rejoice in troubles; it's more natural to be miserable and to assume God hates you and to hate him back! Yet Paul knew that God's purpose for him was to become like Jesus. Understanding that God's purpose in this life is for the sake of the next life will help make sense of this life's troubles.

God used all things in Jesus life to perfect his character as our Saviour, so God will use all things in our life to help us be more like Jesus. <sup>Heb 2:10</sup> In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation (Jesus) perfect through suffering. When things are going great, our character is neither tested nor strengthened. So, God allows trials to stretch us and to help us to grow like Jesus. God values good character far more than good things or good times so our character is tested so we can pass the ultimate test of character. <sup>Rom 14:10</sup> For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

It's helpful to keep this eternal perspective on our temporal troubles. God's ultimate purpose for us is to be in a place where there is no trouble, or suffering or crying or pain or death, i.e. heaven where we'll enjoy billions of years of comfort! <sup>2Cor 4:17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. If we expect to have heaven on earth, we'll be disappointed and disillusioned. This is not yet the time for comfort but for character development.

Every problem has a purpose, whether we cause it, somebody else causes it, or the devil causes it. No matter who causes the trouble, God will use it for our good. Even though we won't know exactly, we must trust God that in his sovereign power, he will use our trouble for our good and to make us more like Jesus.

2. God uses TEMPTATIONS to teach us to **obey** Him. Temptations are designed by Satan to harm us but God uses them to help us become like Jesus who always obeyed his Father. The Bible is very clear that God never tempts us, but God is able, because of the greatness of His power, to use Satan's temptations for good. Temptation always provides a choice, and when I choose to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit rather than choosing to follow Satan's temptation, it strengthens my maturity as a disciple of Christ for that's what Jesus did when tempted by the devil.

Just as Jesus' suffering far outweighed ours so the temptations he faced were far worse than anything we'll face. Thankfully Jesus didn't give in once otherwise he would have been just as much under Satan's authority as the rest of humanity and his death on the cross would have been worthless as a sacrifice for our sins. Thank God Jesus didn't give in and because he resisted 100% he sure knows what it's like to be tempted, so he understands our struggles. <sup>Heb 2:18</sup> Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Jesus never sinned, yet He was tempted, so it is not a sin to be tempted. Martin Luther said, *"You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair."* Another fact about temptation is that whatever you are confronting, someone somewhere has faced it before, and is facing it now, and will face it in the future. We are not alone in our temptations. <sup>1Cor 10:13</sup> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

Satan can trick us by making us feel our temptation is worse than anyone else has ever suffered; that it's so awful that it's impossible to withstand; our only option says Satan is to give in. Rubbish! Jesus probably faced it himself under the direct attention of the Great Tempter himself and heaps of others have faced it too!

You *can* withstand whatever it is because God will not permit the devil to tempt us beyond the point we can bear. It's never impossible to withstand a temptation. God knows we can reach the point of defeating it, so keep resisting.

God always provides a way out. There'll be an escape hatch; a fire exit; so look for the way out God has provided. Here's 2 tips: **1. Thinking is the key.** Temptation comes through the mind and that's where to tackle it. Think godly, positive thoughts or images using a scripture like Phil 4:8 ... whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Think, 'OK what's something true I have experienced? Or what noble act have I done before or would like to do? What's something worth praising God about?' Something like that.

**2. Don't fight on your own:** share with your sisters and brothers in Christ. None of us like to talk about our struggles, but one way to defeat them is to be open, to bring them out into the light with trusted Christian friends. Jam 5:16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

If you succumb to temptation go to straight to Jesus in confession. Don't let the devil keep you in guilt. 1Jn 1:7 ... the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

**3. God uses INJUSTICE to teach us to forgive.** Jesus taught us to pray Mat 6:12 Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors...<sup>14</sup> For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. On the cross Jesus died not only for the sins we have committed but also for the sins others have committed against us. 1Pet 2:22 He himself (Christ) bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. The healing is double edged.

Some are overwhelmed with the guilt of their own sin, and God wants to teach them the awesome truth that Christ took upon himself all our guilt and suffered the wrath of God for our sins in our place. God wants us to confess these sins to him with the promise that we will be forgiven. To refuse to let go of our sin in confession and receive God's absolution by the blood of his Son is to reject Jesus.

On the other hand, we might be overwhelmed by the sins others have committed against us. We're consumed by a sense of injustice and bitterness can rule our hearts. God wants to teach us that on the cross Christ bore that suffering and hurt and injustice in his own body. God does not condone the injustice against us and he doesn't want us to condone it either. In fact God will want us to confess the sin committed against us but then to release the judgment on that sin to Christ.

After all Jesus has paid for the sin of the world so he has a right to expect us to release it to him. God will want us to release the person who committed sin against us into our forgiveness. Whether the person is forgiven by God will depend on their own repentance but that's between God and them. <sup>Eph 4:32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

God's Good Life is not the childish self-indulgence of the world. God's Good is to be conformed to the image of his Son. God loves us and he only wants what's good for us so let's follow Jesus as true disciples: trust God in trouble, obey him in temptation, and forgive as he forgave us. In that way we will fulfill God's 3<sup>rd</sup> great purpose for this life on earth; to be disciples of Christ. Amen.