

Restoration of the Good Life

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[0 : 00] Well, we continue our study this morning, week number three, on the good life, as presented in the book Jonathan Edwards on the good life.

And trust that it's been an encouragement to you. It's been to me as I've gone through the book and now I have had to put more thoughts together to present to you.

But there's much more in the book that I'm able to present in a Sunday school time. So if you want to get more out of this topic, get the book and read it.

It's not a real long book, but I have found really encouraging and helpful for me in my reading. So you can get that.

I meant to say, too, if you even want some of my notes, don't hesitate. Let Carol know. So give her your email address and I'll just send you my notes for reminders.

[1 : 02] But as we've been studying the good life, we started out with finding that the foundation of the good life is in God because God is good.

Perfect in all his ways. Anything that we can imagine that's good in the good life is good because it comes from God.

God is the good life. And it was his plan for people to enjoy his goodness, his many manifold perfections of who he is as God.

It wasn't just going to be enough that people would just simply recognize that there is an intelligent being, let's say. But they would truly enjoy what they're seeing in him and have their pleasures fulfilled in all who he was and is and continues to be.

And so he made man, woman in his image, made them with an awareness of God, setting them apart from the rest of creation.

[2 : 11] Rest of creation was there doing their job, glorifying God, manifesting that which was beautiful about God, his divine power, etc.

But made us different human beings so that with that awareness of his greatness, his beauty, there would be a real enjoyment of it.

And of course, as such, he would be glorified in that because there was nothing better that people could enjoy other than him.

And that's what he had been doing throughout all eternity, enjoying himself as God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Everything that makes up his character as God, his nature as God, they were just flourishing in that, if I can put it that way.

Enjoying all who he was because there was nothing greater to enjoy than himself. And so what else would there be for people made in his image to enjoy but himself?

[3 : 20] And therefore glorify him as we enjoyed ourselves in him. And showing indeed he's worthy of all this pleasure and this praise that's coming to him out of our joy in knowing him.

He created us in his image, created to love and to worship God, to enjoy him and the expressions of his goodness really in the world. Not that they would replace him, but we could enjoy them in light of knowing him.

Again, the relationship we had with him, the relationship Adam and Eve and others would have with each other. And the joy that they would have and the pleasure they would have in living in this beautiful creation that he had made for his glory and their enjoyment.

And so, of course, all of it was very good. And if we can stick with the title of the series, Adam and Eve were living the good life. There was no better life than what they were living at the time.

It takes me back to that Psalm 1611. You've made known to me the path of life. I mean, that's what Adam and Eve could have been writing and saying.

[4 : 36] Boy, can you make God has made known to us the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence. That's what they were experiencing.

The presence of God. Joy in his presence. And it says, closes with eternal pleasures at your right hand. That was what was before them.

Eternal pleasures at the right hand. It doesn't get any better than what they were experiencing.

Well, and actually, it is going to get better, as we'll see today and throughout all eternity.

But they were enjoying riches of God at that time. But as we saw last week, it didn't last. They lost the good life. The unblemished good Adam and Eve had in the garden was lost when they turned from a life of love for God and faith in him.

And what he told them about how to relate to him, how to live in the world that he had designed.

They turned from that. Turned from obedience to him, his wise and loving counsel.

[5 : 41] In reality, God had not changed. He was still worthy of their total love, faith, their obedience in an ongoing way.

But something else was presented to them, of course, through Satan, that became more attractive to them. Their view of God and themselves changed.

God was no longer going to be supreme, the loving provider of all that was good and necessary for life. Instead, his counsel was presented as unreliable.

It wasn't trustworthy. Remember in Genesis 3, verse 4, when Satan said, You will not surely die, the serpent said to the woman, For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be open, and you'll be like God, knowing good and evil.

So a real deception taking place there with Eve. I mean, yeah, she saw God as good, and here is this opportunity to be like God.

[6 : 45] Well, yeah, it didn't follow the same path that God had laid out for me to take, but what better goal could there be? And she fell to that and chose to go her own way and gave to Adam, and he knowingly disobeyed as well.

Now they could decide for themselves what was good and evil. Well, they turned their love away from God to themselves, and of course they sinned and disobeyed God.

And what happened? So we took a look last week. They lost a real sensitivity, a life toward God.

They lost the sense of his supremacy, his beauty, his wonder.

They lost that sense of loving God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. That love orientation of the heart was no longer toward God, but really toward themselves.

And again, they lost the good life. Just a couple quotes from last week, how Edwards described it. Remember the inferior principles and the superior principles?

[7 : 57] I can't explain if you weren't here. Go to last week's lesson. The inferior principles of self-love and natural appetite became reigning principles, having no superior principles to regulate and control them.

They became absolute masters of the heart. Man did immediately set up himself, and the objects of his divine affections and appetites as supreme.

So they took the place of God. And as a result, man was left in a state of darkness, woeful corruption and ruin, nothing but flesh without spirit.

All that was promised to them by Satan. Did it come to pass? No, it didn't come to pass. And as a result, the very opposite came to pass. They were in bondage now to sin and in darkness.

In this awful condition, he, Adam and Eve, they could glimpse at a higher, better way of life existed than that which he chose.

[9 : 02] But he could never lay hold of it. And he often did not want to. It was really showing, not just Adam and Eve after sin, but in the hearts of all people. They know there's a good life out there and are always striving for it, that sense of ultimate pleasure and happiness.

It's within the heart of every human being. And they're always making decisions based on that longing. What will bring me, really, the ultimate happiness in my life?

So there's something out there, but in this darkened condition, they really are unable to reach what is the ultimate of joy and pleasure in knowing God in and of themselves.

And that's what Edwards is talking about here. Instead of loving what was good and true and beautiful, he, man, humanity, ran wherever his sinful, selfish appetites drove him.

It was always a life independent of God. So even as we mentioned last week, it would be to the extremes of evil, which we would say are murder, et cetera, all these heinous sins over here, and

even include the morality of man that he would set up as the way of the good life, which is just as evil and terrible because it's at the exclusion of God.

[10:24] But again, they're both excluding God, but man in his darkness is going that direction, thinking that that will be what brings him that fullness and happiness in life.

But in reality, it doesn't. Romans 1, describing people, they're no longer glorified. They no longer glorified him as God, nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile.

Their foolish hearts were darkened. In exchange, the glory of immortal God for images, made to look like mortal man. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the creator.

That's what's happening. That is where we all were at one time in our lives. That darkness, that alienation for God, caused us to revert to a futility of thinking and ran after substitutes that we thought could really be the ultimate in our lives when they were.

They could not be. They were never designed to be and accomplish that. Sin distorted our affections, confused us, our inner man, our thinking, deceitful motivations where we began to love sin and hate God, forsake his good design for our lives.

[11:59] Some other scripture passages that show this extent and this, give this description of our condition prior to Christ.

One that's not in the notes, Carol. First Peter 1, 13, he said, don't conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. See all these descriptive terms.

Evil desires that were there when we lived in ignorance, not knowing God, not even knowing the true state of our own condition apart from God. He describes it in verse 18 as an empty way of life.

I mean, it may look differently. The unsaved people might think that this is the life. This is the good life. They don't understand that apart from God, it's an empty way of life. Ephesians 2, 1 through 3 describes the unsafe person when Paul's writing to these believers, as you know, as for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air.

I mean, you ask some person today who's not a believer, you know, what do you do in life? Oh, I'm a child of darkness. I follow the way of sin and the ruler of the air.

[13:20] No, they don't see that. They don't understand it, but that's their true condition. And God graciously is helping people understand that when they don't see it themselves, shining the light of his word, the truth about our true condition so that we can see.

And that's why this word is so precious and so needful for us. The end of those verses, he says, they were gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature, following its desires and thoughts.

I mean, a person, just like an animal, follows his nature of whatever animal he is. A human being, apart from Christ, without life in God, follows where his nature leads him.

And that's what this verse is describing here. Ephesians 4, 17 through 19, again, gives some descriptive phrases of the condition of man when Paul said, so I tell you this, Christians here, I insist on it in the Lord.

You must no longer live as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking. That's again, what is a descriptive phrase of the person who is apart from Christ.

[14:32] the futility of their thinking, again, darkened in their understanding, understanding, separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts, having lost all sensitivity.

That's what Edwards is trying to communicate to the people. They don't have this sense toward God any longer. and that's even in the Luke 15 when they were describing the father to his other son about the prodigal son who had returned, but you had, but we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and now is found. Isaiah 53, 6, we all like sheep have gone astray. Each one of us has turned to his own way. You see that?

The inclination of the heart was no longer toward God but to himself and going his own way.

Whatever seems right to myself, that's where I will go.

That's where we get this. Hey, what's true for you is true for you. What's true for me is true for me.

You know, we each can go our own way and that's what God is telling us was the condition of man apart from Christ as a result of sin.

[15 : 53] So is there any hope now for man? How is the good life to be restored? That's what we want to take a look at today. Of course, the first thing we have to come, the first conclusion we have to come to is from these readings from God's word the description of the condition of fallen nature of humanity indicates that mankind is not just unaware of his condition toward God but incapable of being and providing any solution to his deadness toward God.

You talk about a person, an individual that's without hope, without hope of finding their own way. It's not like some husband in the car with his wife and aren't you going to get directions? We're not lost. You know, we're okay. No. In our ignorance we think we're okay. We're not okay. We're lost.

And the same way with the condition of man apart from Jesus Christ, lost. no hope whatsoever of awakening himself out of his dead condition.

He doesn't even know he's dead. No, he is dead apart from the working of God. And so that's where our hope lies. The only solution for man's deadness toward God and the good life must come from God outside of himself.

[17 : 31] Talk about a God who is gracious and toward those, toward the undeserving, incapable of doing anything about it.

Yet God was capable. As God is the one who originally granted life, awareness, sensitivity toward him, he's the only one who has the right and ability to restore one's spiritual life toward him.

The restoration of life, spiritual life toward God is planned and granted from God. And he indicated such right after that time in the garden as he spoke to Satan, Genesis 3, 15, I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers.

He will crush your head and you will strike his heel. And as we just came through that time of Christmas in the fullness of time, Jesus was born.

God had a plan from eternity past that he would accomplish, he would carry out. And as it says in Galatians 4, 5, but when the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

[18 : 50] Enter once again the good life, relationship with God, God in his goodness and grace and mercy, moving in the direction of a man who is hopelessly lost and dead in sin.

That's where we all were, without hope, without God in the world. Well, Jesus didn't regard equality with God something that he would cling to that would keep him from coming to earth.

But he made himself nothing, took the very nature of a servant, we're familiar with those verses in Philippians, made in human likeness, he lived a perfectly righteous life, Hebrews 4, 15, having fulfilled all righteousness, then as an unblemished lamb of God he went to the cross and took upon himself the wrath of God and died in the place of sinners.

Just a number of verses that you could draw from that sentence. From the book, or not, this one isn't from the book, this quote from another article Carol and I read one morning this past week.

The writer Bradley Larson says, just consider on the cross, the perfect one was murdered, he suffered more than execution, he was humiliated and tortured until death.

[20 : 15] Jesus, the sinless one, God, the son, was pierced and mocked and spit upon and killed. If we were merely flawed people, then the cross would have been an extreme overcorrection.

If we were, let's see, if we were merely imperfect, then the cross would have been heavy handed. But when we remember sin for what it is, then what happened on Calvary was apropos for the offense.

Eternal treason requires eternal payment. So Jesus made himself that payment, paid that price, not with silver and gold, as it says in 1 Peter, but again, with his precious blood.

But the story again doesn't end there. Death could not keep its prey. He rose again and ascended to, as we heard from Pastor Martin last week, to the right hand of the Father, which is where he continues to be today.

So Jesus did all that was necessary for a sinner to have peace with God, to walk in newness of life, and to live the good life, a life that God really intended.

[21 : 39] Jesus truly is the way, the truth, and the life. No man could come unto the Father except through him, and Jesus paved that way.

But how is that work that Jesus Christ did applied to the sinner? Well, the grace of God just continues on in this path, this journey for the restoration of the good life.

God is still the one who grants life to those who are in need. The sinner, for the sinner, it's graciously initiated through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit through the gospel, all on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ for that individual.

I mean, all of this is information we've heard in the past. you know, my prayer is, as I put this together and think, these people already know this stuff, that the Spirit of God would reawaken it in our hearts with a greater joy and pleasure in what God has done in making it possible for us to come back to him in life.

life. Well, the Holy Spirit works through the gospel message, quickening and bringing life to the individual that was somewhat dead, no, completely dead toward God, lost all sensitivity toward God.

[23 : 13] And Edwards described the reality of this transformation as a work of the Holy Spirit, who, this is how he puts it, shone a spiritual light in the human heart.

He wrote that the person received a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them that was not there before.

You can think back even to your conversion. I mean, what was going on there? Well, as Edwards would describe it, there was a light that shone within your heart.

I mean, how else can we try and describe what's really going on there? As a work of God in the heart of a person who is dead, we're looking for temporal terms to describe a great work of God and somehow bring us some understanding of what God has done and accomplished, and in reality, it takes the Spirit of God to awaken us to the truth of that.

God's love. So a true sense of the divine excellency of things revealed in the word of God, all that was hidden to us before, that we didn't consider as wonderful, beautiful, excellent for me, for life, in knowing God and living for his glory, living in the world.

[24 : 43] That was all hidden to me. But now from the work of the Spirit of God through the gospel, there's a new sense, understanding of the divine excellency of these things, these truths in God's word, in not just the sense, but a real conviction of the truth and reality of them.

These things are true. What was I thinking before? I was not following these things whatsoever. Things I thought were foolish and unnecessary, now I can see, I can understand that this is the path of life.

I need this counsel. This is good for me in life, now. Titus 3, 5, and 6 describe that work of the Spirit of God.

As Paul was writing to Titus and wanted him to communicate to the people, he said, let them know that at one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

See, that's what we were prior to this work of the Spirit of God in our hearts. Deceived and ruled, enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.

[26 : 04] Whatever end of the spectrum you were at, really, we lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another, but when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us not because of righteous things we had done, because we weren't doing anything righteous, but because of his mercy.

He saved us through the washing of rebirth or regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generally through Jesus Christ, our Savior.

The whole work of the Godhead there, in accomplishing what we in ourselves had no hope of accomplishing. We would have continued to walk being slaves to sin.

Futility of our thinking, trying to make life, trying to make a good life out of distorted, sinful thinking, futile thinking. It just never would have been possible for that to happen.

Always would have been coming up short, falling short of the glory of God. But God worked graciously by his Holy Spirit through that gospel, quickening us, renewing us, and as a result of this work, there's a complete reorientation of conversion that takes place within the individual.

[27 : 32] Praise God! Glory! That now I no longer have to head this direction, and what I'm thinking is great and wonderful. I can see, I understand now.

And there's a complete reorientation in my life. A new sense toward God. And this is, again, where Edwards tried to explain this.

In his quote, he says, or in the book, it says, he, Edwards, argued that the soul takes its direction from the affections. Our deepest feelings, since that which we relish or take delight in, forms our

spiritual and intellectual target.

You know, without the Spirit of God, without this reorientation of love toward God, the love of our heart and our affections goes in all other kinds of places. But it's never really with God as the foundation for life.

As some people would even say, you've heard this phrase, oh, really, he's a good kid. I don't say it, you know, but what I'm thinking is, he's not a good kid.

[28 : 45] You know, basically, in his heart, he's lost, he's a rebel from God. He's not good. And out of that heart, all he targets in life, whether things that he thinks will give him life, I mean, spiritual things, his heart isn't targeted toward those things of God.

It'll be a substitute. He's still a spiritual being and must worship something, but it's not God. He sets his sights, spiritual sights, on other things.

And his mind follows. He makes plans for achieving and bringing those things to pass in his life that he thinks would grant him and bring him that fulfillment of life.

It's destitute. If we have a taste for sin, then we follow it, chasing it all the way to the grave. And as unbelievers, whatever our bent, we naturally indulge it with intensity, creating a lifestyle motivated by sin-tainted appetites and passions that lead us far from the blessing of God.

He thinks he's headed toward the good life. No, he's further and further away as far as the practical outworkings of that in his daily life, and such as it is with our loved ones who are yet out of Christ, apart from Christ.

[30 : 22] Christ. But for others, as the gospel is presented and accompanied by the work of the Holy Spirit, the individual is again quick and regenerated, granted life, has a new sense, a new love, a new awareness of God and the truth of God and the gospel and Jesus Christ as his only savior.

Edwards described it like this. There's a true sense of the divine and a superlative excellency of the things of religion, of God, those things that are true now.

A real sense of the excellency of God and Jesus Christ and of the work of redemption and the ways and works of God revealed in the gospel. There's a divine and superlative glory in these things, an excellency that is of a vastly higher kind and more sublime nature than in other things.

You know, other things are not, grace. And prior to our salvation, we were finding our joy and happiness in those things, our things created for us to enjoy, but not to replace God.

And so with the work of the Holy Spirit, now with this new sense of God, I'm aware of a greater excellency in God and the person of Jesus Christ and the things of his word.

[31 : 45] This is what Edwards is talking about. A glory greatly distinguishing them from all that is earthly and temporal. He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it or has a sense of it.

He doesn't merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. You could almost see Edwards, how do I explain this?

You know, because there's some people you can show them the gospel and things in the words.

Yeah, those things are great, you know, and have a rational understanding. Yeah, I understand that you're saying Jesus, this God came and was born of a virgin and died on the cross from Rosie.

I could understand those things. I wasn't born yesterday. But there's not a sense of the excellency of that. The greater beauty of those things, something that you now want to pursue and have as your own.

That's the difference that the Spirit of God makes in the heart of a person who's truly been quickened by the Spirit of God through the gospel. Where do I leave off?

[32 : 59] He doesn't merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart. There's not only rational belief that God is holy and that holiness is a good thing, but there's a sense of the loveliness of God's holiness.

People, unbelievers, if you start saying, oh, isn't it wonderful that I can pursue a holy life? Are you joking? I can remember that when I was working one of my last jobs.

You know, various ones, it was quitting time, we were just hanging around, people were complaining about work, da, da, da, da, da. And I said, oh, really, work is good.

And they looked at me and one girl said, what kind of drugs are you on? Okay. You know, there was a lack of understanding, a darkness about the glory of God in work that they were missing and as a result couldn't enjoy work.

Don't get me wrong, I had my bad days as well at work. But still, the greater truth is what they were missing because they were darkened in their understanding.

[34 : 06] Well, with this new life awareness toward God, the mind and the will of the person becomes positively active toward God in true faith and repentance and obedience. The person sees things differently and in a new light.

I mean, that's what, if I can briefly just share, Carol, when she gives her testimony, came from a family, nobody was saved in the family, never really had attended church, neighbor girl invited her to go to youth group and special meetings back then and evangelists preaching the message at church and Carol was crying at the end of this message and it wasn't because at that time she was under conviction, the evangelist told a sad story about a blind girl, a girl who had gone blind and everybody around her thought, oh, she's under conviction, you need to go forward.

So she went forward, the evangelist prayed with her and I guess declared her saved and went home and sitting in her room and all of a sudden the light went on.

Sorry. But that's the work of the Spirit of God, gave her understanding, life that she finally understood and just like we're saying here, there was a life and a light that now she had a greater apprehension.

that which is true of herself and of Jesus Christ. Thinking differently, thinking in a new light. What the person once rejected and suppressed and pushed away now accepts by faith as true, beautiful and good.

[35 : 53] Thinks differently about the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is God. He is the way, the truth and the life. thinks differently about his life and death and resurrection, even his coming again.

Thinks differently about himself as a human being, a creature made in the likeness of God, a sinner separated from the life of God, condemned, and the verge of receiving the wages of a sin and his rebellion and independence from God, which is the wrath of God.

That's an awareness that every person needs to have, a change of heart about himself and about the person of Jesus Christ. Well, through the Holy Spirit's work with the word of God, the inner being of the individual, his mind, his affections and will has been effectively and wonderfully and eternally changed.

And it's at this point that faith in Jesus Christ and love for Christ really, again, takes the superior place in the inner man. See? what was lost before now is there again.

He now can know God and have a new love orientation toward this one who is supreme and is good and now can head in that direction of really, truly, what is the good life?

[37 : 19] Man, we have got it good now. Amen. Well, this conversion and change and orientation of love toward God, this renewed thinking now motivates the individual to live with a brand new purpose, purpose to glorify God and to do so willingly, joyfully to do that, which is pleasing to God, now free to truly live the good life by God's grace.

just some concluding statements from the book. Edwards showed that the taste for spiritual things produce an unmistakably original way of life.

When a person came to living faith in the living Christ, they came alive. Others around them seemed alive, seemed to have it all as they pursued their natural appetites and gratified their inherent desires.

that's what it seemed like before we were quickened, but the Christian alone is truly happy, having discovered the taste, the undeniable passion for the things of God, which alone can satisfy the heart of mankind forever.

Alone. He alone, this yearning within the heart of man, can only be satisfied in that relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ.

[38 : 52] Over and over again, these stories play out, all with the same ultimate ending. The natural affections driven by sin do not lead to lasting happiness, but to a wilderness of confusion and pain.

Only one path, one way, one life offers eternity and eternal happiness. Scripture reminds us that there is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.

This is the inevitable end of following our natural passions, but those who have been reborn by the Spirit will taste the good life given us by a great God.

That's why we're here today, to celebrate this great God, to exalt him together and to know and experience even the pleasure and joy of offering up to him sacrifices of praise and sitting and listening to his word and singing songs.

In fact, why don't we do that right now? Let's sing a song. Jody, would you help me on the piano? This one's not in our hymnals, I don't think, but it's an old-time one, I'm sure.

[40 : 05] You've got to know this one, right? Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. You know, when we realize what God has done through Jesus Christ, the Spirit of God works in our hearts and we come to this new sense and realization and accept by faith and repentance all that he has done.

You know, a song like this takes on new meaning. It's the expression of what's really in our heart and this is what the writer of the song is trying to accomplish to express this new sense, this soul satisfaction that he has in knowing God.

So let's sing it together and end with this. Just one verse we'll sing.