

The Shape of the Good Life

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Preacher: Roger Cryan

[0 : 00] And so this morning, we take up the next chapter in the book, Jonathan Edwards, On the Good Life, the title of which is The Shape of the Good Life.

And I've just selected, well, three points from this chapter, two of which we'll deal with this morning. And then the last one we'll take a look at next week in our last class together that deals with the good life.

But it's something that Jonathan Edwards really wanted his people to understand. What is really the good life? What does it look like? What is the shape or form that it takes?

And even just from the lessons we've looked at in the past, there's many different directions that we go to and we've shared. I've shared a variety of ideas of what the good life consists of.

And so we'll just take another look at it this morning. First of all, taking a look at the good life, understanding that there is a definite shape, a definite form that the good life has.

[1 : 06] What characterizes the good life? And Edwards didn't believe that God saved people by his grace through faith just to let them go on and set their own path, their own agenda of what the good life would be.

No, God had a definite plan and a definite shape that the good life takes. It would be a brand new way of life. The person is a new creation in Christ.

Old things passed away. Behold, all things become new. So life takes on a brand new shape or form, as Edwards would put it.

And that direction would be the way of holiness and godliness. That's the direction that God is taking the repentant sinner. That's the shape or the form of the good life, holiness and godliness. God is actually shaping the individual into the holy likeness of his son, Jesus Christ. We're familiar with a few verses that direct us to that purpose of God for us.

[2 : 20] And so let me read a few for you. 2 Corinthians 3.18. We heard this one, I think it was last Sunday morning. And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory.

So it's a process, definitely. There's that sense in which we are sanctified once for all, set apart unto God, made holy. But there's also that sense of progressively what we are inwardly in our position in Christ Jesus is actually becoming part of who we are practically every day.

And it's something that we're growing into more and more with ever-increasing glory or splendor. These are terms that really describe beauty and wonder.

And so we have to remember that's the direction that God is taking us. He's taking me in the direction that is good for me. It's a beautiful direction, a beautiful shape or form that he's working in me.

And that ever-increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. In Romans 8, 29, for those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.

[3 : 42] It's not something that might happen. It's something he's predestined will come to pass. That gives us hope that this good thing that God is directing us toward will come to pass.

And we'll take a look at a little bit more of that last week and how that expectation can really shape how we live in the world today.

Hebrews 12, 10, God disciplines us for our good. And what is that good that we would share as holiness? It's a good thing for us to be headed in that direction of holiness.

Is that how we start our day? Oh, man, good. I look forward to how God is going to shape me into the likeness of Christ and help me share in his holiness today.

I wonder how that will look. But it's going to be a good thing. He's going to work that in me. And then Ephesians 4, 22 through 24.

[4 : 46] You were taught with regard to your former way of life to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires. You see how he describes that former manner of life and living.

You know, the futility of their thinking, their mind. And in verse 18 is how it was expressed there. But here he's helping them understand that what we were in the past, our old self, is something you don't want to carry on into your new life as a new creation.

It's not anything that's characteristic of true righteousness and holiness. So it's our ambition to put it all off. It's being corrupted by its deceitful desires.

But instead, head in this direction. Be made new in the attitude of your minds. Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

So this new self has this shape, has this form, true righteousness and holiness. In fact, that's how Adam and Eve were designed to be in the beginning.

[5 : 52] That was the good life for them, was to be apart from sin and living lives of righteousness and holiness. And that would be good.

That would be the blessed life for them. So now in the recreated life, that life transformed by faith in Jesus Christ, heads us back in that direction as well.

That which is good for us. So we're always bringing this truth to bear in our minds, our thinking, especially when we're faced with temptation.

That's telling us, like Satan did with Eve, no, go this direction. Life will actually be better. It won't be better. And it proved to be that way.

So any thinking in our minds that we're going through in those times of temptation, we have to bring the truth to bear. Is this actually going to lead me in that direction of true righteousness and godliness, holiness, the likeness of Jesus Christ?

[6 : 55] Well, if the answer is no, then it's not going to be good for you. It won't lead you in that path of the good life. And that's what the Apostle Paul is helping these believers understand.

Then Titus 2, 11 through 14. For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

That which is good. He saved us again to draw us out of that manner of life to ungodliness and worldly passions, passions that were distorted by sin, passions that can be expressed in a way that would be holy and honorable.

passions that would be a characteristic of true righteousness and holiness. No, instead go that way and be eager to do what is good.

[8 : 12] So holiness, righteousness, godliness, that's the shape of the good life. I have to admit that I have not seen a commercial on TV that would communicate the good life, and then all of a sudden the doors open up, the screen goes up, and there are the words holiness, righteousness, and godliness.

No, it's usually found in other things. Other things that are good and of themselves, that can be useful, that others will comment and say that these are good products, they will help you.

But so far, who is it, J.D. Power and Associates haven't said, that righteousness, godliness, and holiness is the thing to buy and the thing to go after.

And yet God of grace and compassion and wisdom and goodness is directing us that way, helping us to see that's the shape of the good life that we need to pursue.

Well, Jonathan Edwards understood this. He wanted to communicate this to his people, and he repeatedly emphasized that the path of glorifying God, the path of holiness, righteousness, and godliness, didn't squelch true happiness or the pleasure that one could enjoy in life, but rather produced it, enhanced it.

[9 : 46] One of the quotes in the book, All of the God-centered life is calibrated to bless the people of God as they glorify the Lord in all they do.

Those who seek the Lord and live to magnify him will know his communicated excellency and happiness, even as they participate in the great work of glorifying him in all they do.

And it's not just limited to our times here in church. There's a glory, there's a joy, a rejoicing that we experience here. There's a time of rejoicing and joy you can experience in your time of prayer, your time of Bible reading.

But that same glory, that same joy and rejoicing can take place as you're at work, as you're dwelling with your wife and your husband, your children at home.

What other practical life experiences are there? Flying kids with your, kites with your grandkids, going sledding now that you have snow, skiing, whatever, getting together in all of these activities that can be enjoyable, fun, happy experiences can be experienced to a heightened glory and joy when you experience and participate them in an attitude of holiness and godliness.

[11 : 22] And that's what Edwards is communicating to his people. That's how we want to understand and approach really the good life and holiness and godliness.

God's glory and man's happiness are not at odds with one another. Far from it. The two ideally work hand in hand. So God is really expressing his goodness to us as he forms us into that shape and likeness of Jesus Christ.

There's nothing better that God could be doing for us than shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. That is what will lead us down this path of the good life in these different areas of life that we can experience and live out here.

So again, what we want to try and remember is that is what is good. That's the direction that I want to go in. When the temptations are there for us to live out life in a different way that the deceitful desires are trying to get us to go in, those are those times that we want to help ourselves understand, no, that's not the direction to go.

That will actually work against my joy and happiness in life. In fact, that's one of the things you want to help your children understand. Again, as you're nurturing them in the Lord, that as they choose to do right, there's blessing in that, there's happiness in that, there's joy in that.

[12 : 54] But when they choose to do what is wrong, there's sorrow in that. We'll get into that a little bit more later on in the lesson as well. So the holy likeness of Jesus Christ is the shape of the good life.

And we see really the specifics of that shape revealed in the Word of God. And so this is where Edwards made that shift. As he focused on the shape of the good life, of course you're wondering, well, what does that shape look like?

And so he directed his people to the Word of God. It's in the Word of God, the Bible, where we can see what this, the specifics of this shape, what really is true righteousness and godliness.

Well, look into the Word of God. It's here that we can understand the specifics, the outworkings of that in daily life. As Edwards understood it, the Bible's not merely a textbook or rule book, but rather a living document that communicates the heart and the mind of the Lord of the universe.

It does not simply help us to sharpen and hone our lives or merely teach us content about God. Although it does that, the Bible opens to us the character of God.

[14 : 16] It presents God and the things of God to us. From every corner of the Bible, we gain wisdom, instruction, encouragement, and an understanding of the magnificence and beauty of Christ.

So it's a treasure chest that God has for us of all those things that we need for life in this world today. As I was reading that quote and reviewing that, another set of verses that won't be on the notes or on the screen, but that often comes to my mind, that I've written down here in my notes, Deuteronomy 32, 46 and 47.

As Moses received instruction, went back to the people of Israel and told them, he says, take to heart, take to heart all the words I've solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of the law.

They're not just idle words for you, they are your life. By them you'll live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You know, it's just one of those phrases that really strikes you. These aren't just idle words for you. They are your life. And so that's the approach that we take to this treasure chest that God has given us.

[15 : 47] We want to understand life. We want to understand how to live life in this world, as Moses was telling them. Listen, you have a land set before you, a land of rich blessing.

You've got a good life set before you. So take to heart, all the words I've solemnly commanded you today, that you might command and teach your children, all the words of this law.

Why? Because you want your children, you want the best thing for your children, you want the best thing for your grandchildren, people that you love. Direct them to the word of God.

That's what they need for life. In fact, if we're not taking them to the word of God, we're denying them the very thing that will grant them life.

Not just spiritual life, eternal life, which is enough in and of itself, but the wisdom, the instruction they need for life in this world.

[16 : 47] By them, you'll live long in the land you're going to possess. So as we consider the life that, that is ours in Christ Jesus, the glory of that life and knowing God, the wisdom, the goodness that it brings to us, even in a fallen world, we need the wisdom of God that's contained in the word of God to lead us into this life and to enjoy it to its fullness.

So if you're struggling with really enjoying the good life, take a look at your, the amount of time you're spending in the word of God. Are you in the word of God consistently, drawing from it all that you need to pursue life on a daily basis?

It is your life that we all need. Well, that, that was the passion that Edwards had. God was good to give and preserve his word for us.

And all that we need to know him and enjoy him and life by his design is contained in the scriptures. Again, you want to know what family life is to be like, how to, how to be the husband that you want to be, you need to be for your wife, you have what you need to know to be the wife that you need to be for your husband.

What will really produce that, that glory in that relationship? Well, it's knowing the scriptures, knowing God's design for how you are to love your wife, how you did lead your wife, how you to, how you are to learn and dwell with your wife according to knowledge.

[18 : 28] And we just keep going on and on with that, with the relationship of the wife to her husband, children to, to parents, how you do your work, your finances, how do you deal with your finances?

What about worry? Do you tend toward worry? What do you do when you're having to, to go through times of stress at work or at home or whatever?

God has his counsel that we need. for those kind of life situations. And as we look into the word of God and draw that word out, then we can enjoy what God has designed for us.

We need to do, what we need to do is search the scriptures. And Edwards regularly encouraged his people to pursue the treasures of the wisdom in God's word.

Another quote from Edwards from the book, these things are so excellent and worthy to be known, the things of God's word, that the knowledge of them will richly pay for all the pains and labor of an earnest seeking of it.

[19 : 38] Is it going to take you time? Yeah, it's going to take you time to get into the word of God. Is it going to mean that you might have to get up early? Yeah, and miss a little sleep?

Well, it's going to take some effort as well, or at night, or whatever it is. But Edwards was encouraging his people that it will be worth all that you have to pay in the labor, in earnest seeking of it.

When God has opened a very large treasure before us for the supply of our wants, and we thank him that he has given us so much, if at the same time we be willing to remain destitute of the greatest part of it.

You know, every one of us would give testimony of the treasures that are in God's word. But what do we do with it? Do we just sit back and don't even open the treasure chest?

Well, Edwards was dealing with that in the lives of his people. But if we be willing to remain destitute of the greatest part of it, because we're too lazy to gather it, this will not show the sincerity of our thankfulness.

[20 : 52] We're now under much greater advantages to acquire knowledge in divinity of God than the people of God were of old, because since that time the canon of scripture is much increased.

But if we be negligent of our advantages, we may be never the better for them and may remain with as little knowledge as they.

So the challenge, the shape of the good life in the word of God, for us to just open it up and to dig out from the word of God those treasures, what are we going to do with it?

Edwards continued on. He said, well, he knew that many of the Christians wanted to grow spiritually, they wanted to know God and to go to heaven.

But far fewer believers worked hard to deepen their faith and subsequently their enjoyment of God to see what we're missing out on. And I think that a little bit more sleep or a little bit more activity over here or over there would really be much more benefit to me.

[22 : 00] It won't be. His encouragement to his people was that there are great riches there, opportunities to deepen their faith and subsequently their enjoyment of God.

Again, you know, you think that, why don't I really get that enjoyment in my heart about God? And I've asked myself that question at times as well in the past when I read these Psalms and think, man, these people just were thrilled about God.

They had a wonder of God and like their soul's desire was for God. Even Paul said, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

And I've looked at my own heart's desire at times and seen, I just don't have that. Why don't I? Well, part of it is probably because I'm not in the word enough and digging in and seeing God in all his glory, in all his beauty.

Let's see. We should, where did I leave off here? We should travel on as a way of obedience. No, let's see. But let that search and discovery be united with obedience to what we discover.

[23 : 18] And so the word of God has this great treasure. We start looking into the word of God and the spirit of God begins open, begins to open up to us in our understanding, the glory and the beauty of God, the beauty of his counsel.

So now what do we do with it? Well, it needs to be combined with obedience. And so Edwards, again, encouraged his people as they dug into the word of God and found the beauty of God's counsel and wisdom.

that they would continue on in it in faithful obedience. They would conform their lives to that truth of God's word. And so he says, we should travel on as a way of obedience to all God's commands, even the difficult as well as the easy commands.

We should travel on in a way of self-denial, denying all our sinful inclinations and interests. We should follow Christ in the path that he has gone.

The way that he traveled in was the right way to heaven. We should take up our cross and follow him. And at the same time, he would encourage them that even though this was our path to follow in order to be shaped into the likeness of Jesus Christ, it was not a path that we should follow along grimly, like, okay, I'll go ahead and be holy and godly.

[24 : 47] No, it was a good path to pursue. And we should understand that the glory, understand that there is a glory in pursuing obedience to God's commands.

As we take up our cross and follow Jesus and obey his commands, we grow in godliness and godliness brings us joy, far more joy than the sinful path would take us.

As I said earlier in the class of principle, we need to help our children understand. As they've done something sinful and given in to sin, whether it's in disobedience to mom or dad or the way they've communicated and acted toward a sibling, and now they're having to face the consequences of that.

They're not usually jumping down, jumping up and down with gladness and happiness. No, there's a sad face. There's a sad, their experience of real sadness for what's to come.

What had, what, what, the way they've been thinking and acting based on, say, those sinful desires has produced things that are not good for them.

[25 : 59] And we see that in the scriptures. And so we're going to help them understand that. And when they, when they say that they, they can't, they have a hard time doing that, then we'll show, share with them the grace of God, that God stands ready to show them compassion in Jesus Christ and help them understand that you were right.

You can't do this. And God doesn't expect you to do this in and of yourselves. In fact, he sent Jesus Christ. And you know, the gospel, sharing the gospel with your children and giving them hope for the good life and knowing God and living at peace with the sibling and honoring their mom and dad. And now having a life that is full of joy and happiness. And so we see that in the scriptures over and over again. There's gladness and walking in obedience to God.

Psalms 119 verses 14 through 16. The psalmist says, I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

You see the commercials on publishers clearing house and they come to the door and it's revealed to the person that they've, they're the one that has won the millions of dollars and they're jumping

up and down and crying and all kinds of expressions of happiness.

[27 : 20] Well, what we have in the scriptures, the psalmist here is helping us understand. I rejoicing following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches.

So as you look at your life and as I look at my life, does that, does the way I, um, pursue the word of God and my weekly basis indicate that I'm rejoicing in that as I would rejoice if I had great riches? Well, that's what we need to, the attitude we need. We need to pray. If that's not our attitude, then we need to pray that God would help us have that attitude. Nurture within our hearts that greater love for his, his counsel and knowing him.

Well, the psalmist knew that he says, I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees. I will not neglect your words.

So all these phrases that he's using in, in this verse are, are showing us that here's an individual that is enjoying life. He's enjoying the good life and he's enjoying it because he's, he's, he's digging into the resources of God's word, knowing God and God's counsel for life.

[28 : 37] Again, when the temptation comes in our minds that really, I don't need it. I'm doing just fine without it. we need to understand that really you're living with far less.

You may think that you're at the ultimate of, of goodness of life, but you don't even see the good that you're missing out on. By not going to God, calling upon God, looking into his word, you certainly wouldn't want to deny your children that.

the goodness of life and knowing God. In John 13, 14 and verse 17, John writes, now that I, or Jesus is speaking here, now that I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. So the blessing, the joy, the happiness comes in the doing of what we see is true in the life of Jesus Christ.

We're very contrary to what the kind of thinking that the disciples were operating at the time. They were thinking that the good life would have been to let somebody else do it for me. And Jesus is helping them understand, no, the path that you follow is the path that I walk.

[30 : 00] And the path that I walk and that I want you to follow is the path of blessing. That's the path in which you really will flourish. Now that you've seen me do this, you'll be blessed as you do the same.

There's greater blessing in serving others rather than expecting others to serve you. Very contrary to what the thinking of our world is today.

Luke 11, 28, it's another passage, a short verse that I always find interesting. After Jesus had given some great answers to the people who are questioning him and trying to trap him in some questions, there was a lady in the crowd that said, oh, blessed is the womb of the one who bore you.

You know, it's like, who wouldn't want to have a son like that? You know, would do a mother proud to have a son like that? And Jesus answers, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.

You know, the blessing isn't just limited to one person. The blessing is open and available to all who hear it, but then also obey it. So we consider the week ahead of us, the year ahead of us, whatever it is, the day ahead of us, the blessing, the flourishing life will be one that's characterized by knowing the word of God and walking in that way and doing it.

[31 : 28] When all your feelings are communicating to you, no, go a different way. Let the truth come to bear in your thinking at that time.

Go back to the truth. Believe what the word of God saying, what the spirit of God is drawing you toward, and that's obedience to the word of God. As you give yourself to obedience, there will be a deep, settled satisfaction and joy in your heart.

You may still have to go through difficult times with difficult people, but you are living and walking in the way of God's blessing as you know the truth and live by that truth.

Another verse, Matthew 7, 24 through 25. It's a set of verses that we learn from childhood and sing it. Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. So dig in the word of God.

[32 : 37] The shape of the good life is such that you're pursuing, you're understanding that the way of godliness, holiness, Christlikeness is the good life. And so we understand that that good life is laid out for us in the word of God.

So we dig into that word of God and see what God is expecting of us. And then we become, we orient our lives, we discipline ourselves in that direction of godliness.

Think about, well, how can I live this out? What do I have to put off? How has my life been characterized? What is, what has my life been characterized in the past? And how I deal with my wife or my husband, my kids or work or so on and so forth.

Things that bring, bring stress into my life. Well, none of that has really produced what I would say is a joyful, peaceful life.

And so as I learn the word of God and now orient my life in that direction, there's blessing in the doing. It brings a foundation in my life that I didn't have before. Now you can continue to pursue the old way of thinking.

[33 : 45] But you follow the rest of those verses there. As you build your house on that kind of thinking, there's going to come a time when it's going to fall flat. And you know, the kids, they clap their hands together to bring about that idea of how it collapses.

And that's the idea of the words there. It's a total collapse to a person's life, whether it's in this life. And it will be because you're always settling for less.

But ultimately when the end does come, the total collapse of being separated from God for eternity. So you want to see your friends, your family enjoy the good life.

Well, share the gospel with them. Teach them and model for them the blessing and knowing God and walking in his ways. We finish up this morning with this final quote.

The path to true joy is found in the contours of a life obedient to God's word. Indeed, it is not in leaving the path laid out for us by God that we find satisfaction, but in staying on it, following the way of life designed by almighty God to bless us.

[34 : 57] That is the shape of the good life. So as we look forward to this year that's ahead of us, it could be that we're going to have to make some changes in how we pursue what we're pursuing.

Understanding the shape of the good life is righteousness, godliness, the likeness of Jesus Christ found in his word. What changes will we make? Individually, certainly, in the time that we spend in God's word, we have the opportunities to come Sunday morning, Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, other times, personal Bible reading and study.

Maybe getting together one-on-one with somebody who's struggling in the same way. How can you help that person be a follower of Jesus Christ? It's going to take you some time, some effort, but would you come alongside a person like that this coming year to help them to get into God's word, to learn how to get into God's word, learn how to do God's word, and that way we all can enjoy more and more living the good life.

Let's pray. Father, this morning, we do thank you that, again, the good life is even possible in a fallen world like this. You are God who longs to be gracious, and you have been gracious.

You're God who stands ready to show compassion. You've been so compassionate to many of us here this morning. We pray that more and more the eyes of people around us would be opened up to your grace, your goodness, as found in Jesus Christ, so that those who have not yet repented and come to Christ, they would not waste time, Father, that they would do that even today, and that we who are your people, we wouldn't neglect the riches that are ours in Jesus Christ.

[36 : 49] Give us that real heart, yearning, and desire to look into your word, to know you, Father, to know your counsel for life, that we might truly enjoy life knowing you, and life lived by your counsel.

Thank you that you'll be faithful to do what you've begun, and we can look forward to, yes, the new year ahead, but even this day, Father, enjoying walking in the steps of Jesus Christ.

In his name we pray. Amen. Thank you.