

As we approach Scripture I offer a prayer Dallas Willard prayed in his recently published book, *Life Without Lack*.

*Lord Jesus Christ,
we are so thankful to You that You have said,
"Fear not, little flock,
for it is your Father's good pleasure
to give you the kingdom."*

*We are thankful for the ease with which You walked upon this earth,
the generosity and kindness You showed to people,
the devotion with which You cared for those
who were out of the way and in trouble,
the extent to which You even loved Your enemies
and laid down Your life for them.*

*We are so thankful to believe that this is a life for us,
a life without lack, a life of sufficiency. It's so clear in You, the sufficiency of Your Father
and the fullness of life that was poured through You,
and we're so thankful that You have promised that same love,
that same life, that same joy, that same power for us.*

*Lord, slip up on us today.
Get past our defenses, our worries, our concerns.
Gently open our souls, and speak Your Word into them.
We believe You want to do it,
and we wait for You to do it now.
In Your name, amen.*

I begin with this prayer as we pick up in chapter 6 of the first letter to Timothy. Paul speaks of the life God gives- a life of sufficiency, without lack.

Remember Timothy is the young leader in the equally young church in Ephesus which was planted by Paul. So you know the context, we know from the larger letter that there are false teachers claiming that faith should lead to riches. An ancient version of the "Prosperity Gospel" peddled today. In order to correct that teaching, Paul addresses money and stuff in this portion of the letter. Listen for the word of God.

1 Timothy 6:6-19

6:6 Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment;

6:7 for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it;

6:8 but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.

6:9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

6:10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

6:11 But as for you, man of God, (woman of God, Child of God) shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.

6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

6:13 In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you

6:14 to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

6:15 which he will bring about at the right time--he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

6:16 It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

(and a final warning)

6:17 As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

6:18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share,

6:19 thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Proclamation of the Word

The Letter to Timothy and to us offers us a choice. We can choose the life that is really life, or the good life- a godly life, a life of contentment or greed. We will read the gospel in a few minutes.

To help us see what constitutes a truly good life I thought of hastags on Instagram like #goodlife and my favorite, #livingmybestlife.

So first I searched Instagram for #goodlife, you can imagine what the photos showed up:

beautiful people, sports cars, cigars, yachts, piles of cash, more cigars, travel to famous cities, and the obligatory puppy photos.

And usually most of the photos had just a single person in them.

No photos of families, friends, couples really. Mostly just me!

And it was clear that the good life is about- ME, and stuff, and money.

A similar, very popular hastag is #livingmybestlife (lil Duval)

In fact, you can see over 2.2million posts with this hashtag on Instagram.

Again, images of beautiful people and places- people at their best, not their worst.

Today the life that is really life is described by Paul.

The good life is not about money, stuff, or meⁱ

Paul warns us about the lust for money.

The desire for wealth can lead to a false reality, even pain.

And that pain, according to Paul, is self-inflicted.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Let me point out that money is neutral.

It is the love of money- or even the idolatry of money that is a root, among others, of evil.

And a truly rich life is one in which we find contentment in having enough, being satisfied in God. As we prayed, "We are so thankful to believe that this is a life for us, a life without lack, a life of sufficiency."

Sufficiency- that's the realest life there is.

It is a life of abundance and fullness.

Sufficiency is not found in the lust for money.

Sufficiency is found in God.

Or the word used for Timothy is contentment.

As an aside, I looked up #contentment- not as popular only 20% posts compared to the #livemybestlife. That's telling.

The Apostle Paul wrote these words about contentment to the Philippians,

Philippians 4:11-15 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹¹ Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹² I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

I wonder how many of us have repeated those words, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," without knowing that Paul is actually talking about God's sufficiency. God's grace is sufficient.

All we have needed God's hands have provided, but God intends that we share. In fact, we read in 1 Tim. 6:17-19 from *The Message*.

Tell those rich in this world's wealth to quit being so full of themselves and so obsessed with money, which is here today and gone tomorrow. Tell them to go after God, who piles on all the riches we could ever manage—to do good, to be rich in helping others, to be extravagantly generous. If they do that, they'll build a treasury that will last, gaining life that is truly life. (The Message, 1 Tim. 6:17-19)

The father of the Methodist church, John Wesley, preached on the use of money; that sermon is widely paraphrased by its three main points:

"Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can."

However, it's easy for these truths to be twisted for ulterior purposes, making Wesley's subpoints as equally important as the main ones.

We make all we can in honorable professions that do not bring harm to ourselves or others and allow for a balanced life.

We save all we can by not buying things we (or our dependents) do not need, thereby wasting our money on earthly pleasures.

By saving all we can, we'll have more to give away.ⁱⁱ

Money is a tool.

Money is a gift of God to serve godly purposes.

I know a disciple at Fort Hill who believes so much in tithing (giving 10% of her income to Christ's church) all that she has, that when she bought a fancy new sewing machine, she promised herself she would tithe her talent to the church by making choir stoles and burp clothes and such. And she does.

Even better than Paul or John Wesley, we have the words of Jesus to guide us in our relationship with Money.

And Jesus just cannot get any clearer with us than he does in the Parable of Lazarus and the rich man. How we use God's money to care for our neighbors is just as important to Jesus.

Listen now to the Gospel reading from

Luke 16:19-31

16:19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.

16:20 And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,

16:21 who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would

come and lick his sores.

16:22 The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.

16:23 In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side

16:24 He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.'

16:25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.

16:26 Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.'

16:27 He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house--

16:28 for I have five brothers--that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'

16:29 Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.'

16:30 He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

16:31 He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Money in its proper place, should serve the will of God.

And God cares most about people, especially those in need.

The sin of the rich man in his earthly and after-life is his lack of seeing Lazarus as a person, a child of God, rather than a *persona non grata*.

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof spoke at Calvin University.

Here is the first part of that intro:

"Jesus told upwards of 40 parables in the New Testament. Each had a small cast of characters: waiting fathers and prodigal sons, women baking bread and laborers in a vineyard (and last week, a shrewd manager). But only once did Jesus assign a character a name: it was the poor man, Lazarus. Jesus knew that if we treat people only by categories like "the poor," it is too easy to mistreat them, to forget who they really are. But Jesus knew that each such person has a name, a family, a story. Giving Lazarus a name brought forward the humanity of "the poor."

For decades Nicholas Kristof has been doing exactly this for victims of war, poverty, and genocide. The ethnic cleansing in Darfur was not about nameless groups of victims. It was about 2-year-old Zahra Adbullah beaten to death in front of her mother Fatima Omar Adam. The Saudi-led war in Yemen is starving not faceless millions of children but specifically 12-year-old Abrar Ibrahim—the photo of her

emaciated body was so searing, it basically was the entirety of Mr. Kristof's column a couple weeks ago.

In short, sometimes we need names and faces to put to otherwise faceless, anonymous categories of people. It makes all the difference in what we see. No, in WHO we see.ⁱⁱⁱ

This week, we hosted families that are homeless and trying to get back on their feet. If you helped us host this week by serving, please stand up. We thank you.

You provided hospitality and shelter to persons with names and faces.

You helped our church serve: Natrise, Jaevon, Juelz, Tyris, Travis and Rylee-Anne.

This is where I have seen Fort Hill Church serving and giving as Jesus does.

I had the pleasure to attend the Clemson Community Foundation dinner where gifts were given to local agencies, most of which we support as a congregation through our regular offerings.

Some Fort Hill Disciples are leading this effort: Bo Crader, Debbie Vaughn, Harold Cheatham, Katherine Sosebee, Marcia Barker, Adam Artigliere, and Lee D'Andrea, are those I saw present- faithful disciples who are helping serve Lazarus.

I should also share with you, that we sat at table with members of the Chinese Christian Church who have met next door for 20 years.

We met Maple and two of her fellow church goers.

They are building their first church building.

And with their grant, they will build a playground to share with the neighborhood children.

Guess where they got the idea of sharing their playground?

From us!

She said they have been enjoying our playground on Sunday when they gather.

I felt contentment and joy at the ways Fort Hill shares God's gifts.

And in light of reading this Scripture, I experienced the awards being given through the lens of Jesus' words.

When I hear that 30 students at Daniel High school are homeless, but attend and are trying to receive an education, I imagined their faces, their names. That could be my child, your child. They are Lazarus.

When I heard that a gift had been given to Safe Harbor shelter for domestic violence I pictured my grandma Hallie Wearmouth. For safety reasons, those who go to the shelters are nearly invisible, but I see Grandma's face, my mother's face. When my grandfather would drink heavily, he would become abusive, so she saved \$20 bills until she had enough to get her children out of that situation. There was no Safe Harbor in Greenville in the 1940s. These women and children are Lazarus.

You may feel connected to other situations,
because of what you have seen, no WHO you have seen.
We cannot help everyone, but we can each help someone.

The good life, friends, is really about the here and now life.
So while it is certainly a warning not to overlook those around us in need due to God's eternal judgment,
Jesus invites us to live into fuller, more meaningful, and more joyous life by sharing
ourselves – our time, talents, and certainly our wealth –
with those around us here and now.
For when we do, we live into the good life and kingdom God teaches in the law of Moses, clarifies in the prophets, and makes manifest and available to all in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord.
That, my friends, is living our best lives!

ⁱ Chelsey Harmon, the Lectionary Epistle, Sermon Starters, Calvin Seminary, September 23, 2019.

At the time that Paul was writing this letter, the false teachers—who make up the bulk of the reason that Timothy was on site and Paul wrote to Ephesus—had shown their true colours regarding money. Not only was their doctrine off, but their lifestyle goals were too. They were leading members of the community astray for their own personal financial gain, most likely charging people for passing on their “wisdom.” (It’s important to keep in mind that Paul wasn’t opposed to ministry workers being paid for their work or service. What he did oppose was both the why and the how of these false teachers. Some scholars argue that the false teachers were using young widows in the church community to do their dirty work, taking advantage of a disadvantaged and vulnerable sector of the community. Instead of guiding these women to faithful living in their present circumstances and helping them make an honourable and god-pleasing way in the world, the false teachers were doubly taking advantage of them—charging them money the women didn’t have to waste on bad ideas and information they didn’t need, AND getting the women to spread their teachings to other parts of the church in the city as they visited and gossiped their way from house to house.)

Paul was concerned that greed had such a foothold in the church almost as much as he was angry about the bad doctrine being spread. It seems that the false teachers were twisting good truths to meet their needs, including connecting their financial prowess and success to God’s pleasure and acceptance of their group (and therefore undermining Paul and Timothy)

ⁱⁱ sermon 50 available online at <https://www.whdl.org/use-money-sermon-50>

ⁱⁱⁱ Scott Hoezee, “The Lectionary Gospel,” Sermon Starters, Calvin Seminary, September 23, 2019.