

ENJOYING THE GOOD LIFE

I Peter 3:8-12

NEED: To develop healthy relationships with others.

PROPOSITION: The blessings of the Lord are enjoyed by those who develop good relationships with others.

OBJECTIVE: To lead Christians to work on the way they relate .
to others.

INTRODUCTION:

God wants you to enjoy the good life. In the Bible the “good life” is described as the “blessings of the Lord”. Through the Apostle Peter the Lord gives emphasis to how important healthy relationships with others are in enjoying the good life. He first lists some of the qualities that you must cultivate in your life if you are to have good relationships, and then he supports this with a lengthy quotation from Psalm 34.

If you are plagued by some unhappy relationships in your life, you might just find the cause as we go through this list. The unhappy relationships may be in your family, or in the church, or in the community, or even on the job.

If you develop these Christ-like qualities in your life, the benefits will show up in all of these different circles of life.

Is it not safe to say that most of the unhappiness you have known in life has been caused by unhappy relationships? If this be true, then you will never find the good life until you improve these relationships. You must not wait for others to make the change---you must assume that it is up to you to make the necessary changes. These are the imperatives for good relationships.

I. SEEK UNITY WITH OTHERS.

The Apostle begins with the admonition to give priority to being unified in perspective with others. Literally it is a call to be of the “same mind”. The focus is on our relationship with other members of our family and especially other members in the body of Christ.

There are two things that will help in seeking to be in harmony with others. First, you must look for and give emphasis to the things on which you agree. If you will check on the things that create the breach in relationships, they are often not the central things of the life, or the primary things in the body of Christ. If the two of you would take the time to sit down and explore the

things on which you agree, you would be surprised. Why continue to create problems by emphasizing secondary things? If you want to enjoy the good life, you will find ways to come to harmony with the person.

The second thing you can do is attempt to see things from the perspective of the other person. Do not assume that you know where they are coming from and how they feel. You might be surprised if you really listened to them tell their side of the story. Since enjoying the good life hinges on your ability to have a happy relationship with the person, it is worth the time and effort required to gain understanding. You need to be prepared to take the first step in seeking this required oneness of mind.

II. CULTIVATE SYMPATHY.

Our English word sympathy is actually a transliteration of the word used by Peter in this admonition. It is made up of two words---a preposition that means “with” and a word that means “to suffer or to feel”. So it means to be able to enter into the feelings of another person understandingly, whether the feelings be feelings of sorrow or of joy.

It may seem strange that Peter would make this a part of his list. A little reflection will reveal the wisdom of it. Have you ever noticed how difficult

it is to allow another person to share their joys with you? It may be that they have just received a promotion---if you are not careful you begin to wonder why they have received a promotion and you have not. Instead of rejoicing with them, you begin to resent the good things that has happened to them. It may be that their child scored twenty points in a winning effort in basketball last week while your kid sat on the bench---can you rejoice with them and share their excitement?

I have found it is also difficult to really enter into the sorrows of others. If you are not careful you are thinking of someone who has had something worst happen to them, or you are remembering your own problems. Our sinful self-centeredness makes sympathy difficult---so that only the grace of Christ at work in our lives can make it possible.

Have you ever noticed, however, how good it makes you feel when someone does relate to you with real feeling and understanding? You enjoy being around people who like to listen when you tell your story. If you want to enjoy the good life, then you must become that to others. There is so little of this in the world, that you will become a standout rather quickly.

III. DEVELOP BROTHERLY LOVE.

Whenever the pastor emphasizes love from the New Testament, he usually indicates that it translates the Greek word agape, the highest kind of love, God's love for us. However, this is not the word used here. You already know the word that the Apostle uses: it is the word philadelphia. We have cities that have this word as their name. The word means "brotherly love". The emphasis in this word is on warmth and affection. It is the kind of love that you expect to find in a family. It is the kind of affection that sisters feel for each other. It is the kind of feelings that brothers have for each other. Our culture is really short on this kind of love. It is getting rare even in the families. Everyone seems to feel that it is better to stay detached, not get too close. So many have been scared by broken family relationships that they have determined to not get close to anyone. They want to keep a safe distance. This will not be acceptable if you want to know the good life. The kind of relationships that make the good life possible are built on brotherly love, warm affection.

IV. BE TENDERHEARTED.

This is one of the great words of the New Testament. The verb is used only of Jesus in the New Testament. It was commonly used in the Gospel to describe the response of the Lord Jesus whenever he was confronted with

human need. It is usually translated “compassion”. It again is made up to two words in the Greek language. The prefix is the word for “well”. The other word is the word for the internal organs that are associated with emotions or mercy. We would ordinarily associated these emotions with the heart, but the people of the first central world actually associated them with the bowels or the entrails of a person. The verb of this word used in association with Jesus literally has the idea of the internal organs being turned over. When Jesus was confronted with human need, something inside of him responded in such a way that he was moved to act in an appropriate way to meet the need in the person.

Tenderhearted is a good translation of the word for us. The idea in the word is the opposite of indifference or cold-heartedness. To respond to a person with a need in such a way that you kindly do what you can to meet their need will go a long way in forming healthy relationships with others. To turn a cold shoulder to some evident need will make healthy relationships impossible.

The sobering truth is that almost all of us have a need that others could help with. Unfortunately we have been ignored so many times in our time of need that we are very reluctant to expose our need. Or some of us have bought into the idea that it is not appropriate for us to have a need if we are

truly the children of God so we surely keep our troubles hidden from the eyes of others. But instead of being concerned about others meeting our needs, we need to school ourselves to be tenderhearted whenever a need comes before us.

Have any of your friends accused you of being tenderhearted recently?

V. MAINTAIN A MODEST OPINION OF YOURSELF.

Again we have a word that Jesus used of Himself. He said, “I am gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29). “Humble in heart” is the same word that Peter uses here. Again the word is made up of two words. The word was formed by combining the word for lowly or base with the word for mind. It is to have a lowly or humble mind.

The opposite of the lowly mind is pride or arrogance. No one wants to be related to a person who manifests a proud or arrogant mind. You want to avoid persons who are constantly making you feel inferior, or putting themselves up at your expense.

How do you maintain a modest opinion of yourself? Worship! Humility is produced in the human heart when the worshipper bows before the Eternal

and Almighty. When you become aware of who he is, and you begin to see yourself as He sees you, you will have a modest opinion of yourself. This will make others feel comfortable in your presence. It will also put you into a position to serve others. This will put you on the way to enjoy the good life.”

VI. PRACTICE FORGIVENESS.

Actually Peter may intend for us to understand that the other five qualities actually prepare us for this one. You can be sure that without a commitment to seek harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion, and humility you will not be inclined to extend forgiveness to those who wrong you. Rather you will be prone to seek to retaliate against those who do you wrong.

Peter actually states this quality negatively. “Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing.” He must have had in mind what Jesus said to His disciples on the mountain. He had taught them to love their enemies, and to bless those who cursed them. Forgiveness is the positive expression of this

Again this had been obvious in the Lord Jesus. He Himself prayed for those who mistreated him unjustly, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Without forgiveness healthy relationships are impossible. All of us are sinners, and if we live in close relationships this sinfulness will become painfully obvious. We will sin against one another in some unkind word or inappropriate deed. This is especially true in the family and in the church. We walk so close to each other that it is almost impossible to avoid offence. What do you do when offence occurs? If you are the offender, then you must be quick to seek forgiveness. If you are the offended, then you must be ready to extend forgiveness. This is the only way to really enjoy the good life of fellowship with God and fellowship with others.

Has the Word of God uncovered a need in your life? Let me urge you act on the light that God has given to you. You can and should know the good life. It is for you if you will become serious about relating to others like Jesus taught and showed us to do.