

An Ancient Recipe for a Happy Life

by Albert N. Martin

Edited transcript of [message](#) preached July 4, 1999

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Now as I've already indicated, our study in the Word of God this morning will find us in our consecutive expositions of 1 Peter at 1 Peter 3:10-12. But as we prepare our hearts and minds to consider this portion of the Word, I would ask you to follow as I read chapter 2, verses 11 and 12. And then I will read the entire paragraph within which our text is found.

"Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your behavior [honorable] among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

Chapter 3, verses 8-12:

"Finally, be ye all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted, humbleminded: not rendering evil for evil, or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing; for hereunto were ye called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For, he that would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: and let him turn away from evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears unto their supplication: But the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil."

There are some things which the average man of the world will not tolerate, and one such thing is phoniness among those who profess to be Christians. While they may mock, taunt, speak evil of real Christians who are living authentic Christian lives before them, they inwardly recognize their genuineness and may even and often secretly admire them for their consistency with respect to their life and their profession. However, when there's the slightest inconsistency between the profession of attachment to Christ and the manifested pattern of life, the worldling is very, very quick to make it plain that he will not tolerate such inconsistency. Furthermore, he'll use that inconsistency as a semblance of a reason to reject the claims of Christ and of the Gospel. It is for this reason that the Apostle Peter is also greatly concerned that there be no phonies among the believers in the five Roman provinces of Asia Minor to whom he writes this letter.

One of the prominent concerns of Peter's pastoral and apostolic counsel in this letter is the concern that believers live an authentic Christian life before the closest scrutiny of the unconverted who behold their life pattern. We see this emphasis in the verses I read to you from chapter 2. ¶As Peter writes that they should abstain from fleshly lusts and have their behavior honorable, he said it is with this end in view: that, though nonbelievers accuse them of evil-doing, they actually see their good-doing,

their good works, and they inwardly know that they are authentic Christians regardless of what they're saying. So in the day of God's visitation, whether in grace or judgment--that's not the issue--what was really in there will come out. They will glorify God: "I've seen the real thing. That is the real thing. That is authentic Christianity."

Now as he brings to a close this second series of pastoral directives that we might call Peter's directives for authentic Christianity as he brings this second series of pastoral directives to a conclusion--and we know he's doing that from the language of verse 8: "finally," not finally with respect to the whole letter, but finally with respect to this section--he is concerned to give this general directive to God's people as they relate to one another (verse 8), God's people as they relate to those who are doing evil to them and speaking evil of them (verse 9). And then he buttresses the exhortation of verses 8 and 9 with this lengthy quote from Psalm 34.

Now I hope those who were here will remember what he does in verse 8 is to give us a very kind of shocking verbal twist, where he's been using imperatives and participles to give his exhortations. Here, when he turns to lay out how the people of God are to relate to one another, he gives us what I call this string of five pearls, all as adjectives, describing God's people and their relationship one to another, saying if you want to be an authentic company of the people of God, anyone should be able to describe you with these five adjectives. You are a like-minded, sympathetic, brotherly-loving, tender-hearted, humble-minded company of God's people." And then in verse 8, turning again to participles, he recognizes that, though by grace and power of Christ, they may grow in those graces that mark their life together, they are yet living before their unconverted neighbors and work associates and relatives, and that they will receive from them both evil in deed and evil in speech. And so assuming that some are doing evil to them and speaking evil of them, he gives what I call this very unnatural duty in verse 9: "not rendering evil for evil [no tit for tat-ism], or reviling for reviling [but that's not enough, the negative]; but contrariwise blessing [the most unnatural thing in the world]...." The natural thing is, "You hit my shoulder, I hit yours. You stick your tongue out at me, I stick mine out a quarter of an inch further. You speak evil of me, I'll give you back in spade." And Peter says, "No"--no rendering evil for evil, no rendering reviling for reviling, but contrariwise, to pray and to wish and to desire good upon the very head of those who do evil to you and who slander you and who revile you. You are to bless them. You are to have a disposition of heart that does not desire to take into your hands what is in God's hands ("Vengeance is Mine. I will repay, says the Lord.") No evil is to be done for evil, no reviling for reviling. That's the unnatural duty enjoined.

But then, in the last part of the verse, we have the unnatural duty justified. He says you were called to such a life of authenticity. Why should you do this? Notice the text: "...for hereunto were ye called." Unto this very thing you were called. When God laid hold of you in grace, called you out of darkness into union with His Son, He called you to walk in the way of His Son. And in the person of His Son, we see embodied this unnatural duty: "...not rendering evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but contrariwise blessing." He could pray from His cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And furthermore, he says if you want a reason for this unnatural duty, it's not only that this is that to which you were called, but you were called into such a life that you might inherit blessings, not a blessing, but blessings. That you might inherit as the free gift of God's grace yet further blessing from God as you live out a life of blessing, even blessing your enemies. You've been called into

such a life, and in the way of that life, God unfolds even greater blessing upon His own.

Now that is a brief review, and now we come to verses 10 through 12, beginning with a little word, "for". Peter now is going to answer a question that was raised by his readers. It's as though his readers would say,

"Peter, why pursue the graces of like-mindedness, sympathy, brotherly love, tender-heartedness, humble-mindedness in relationship to my brothers and sisters in Christ? Why commit myself in the strength of Christ and out of love to Christ to seek to perform this unnatural duty of not rendering evil for evil, reviling for reviling, but contrariwise blessing? Yes, you told us we were called to this, and in the way of fulfilling that calling, greater blessing. But Peter, can you give us a more fulsome, a more expansive, Biblical rationale for all of this?"

Peter says, "Yes, I'll be glad to accommodate you. And I will accommodate you by referring you to Psalm 34 and to that which David found in his own experience. David found a way in which one could so live as to love life, to see good days, to live with the confidence that God's eye was upon him in favor, and God's ear was ever open and bent to hear his cries. Is that reason enough to entice you more fully into living such a life in the strength of Christ? And in these verses quoted from Psalm 34, one of the old commentators said, "What we have in reality is an ancient recipe for a happy life." I like that. Sometimes what I read in the commentators doesn't stick, but that has stuck. I hope it has as much stickability with you.

Would you like an ancient, well-proven recipe for a happy life? You say, "Uh oh, while he was off to the conference, the pastor must have gone to a seminar on the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. He's actually entitling the sermon, 'An Ancient Recipe for a Happy Life'." Yes, I am. I'm hiding behind that old commentator because he's hiding behind the text: "...for he that would love life and see good days..." I didn't write it. The Holy Spirit through Peter wrote it. And the Holy Spirit wrote it through Peter, taking his clue from David. And taking some liberties under the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he even changed some of the wording of the original Hebrew text and the Greek text that was the working Bible of Peter and others at that time. And he sets before us a formula for a kind of life that's worth loving, a life made up of units of days that are good. And so what we have as the Biblical basis for these directives of verses 8 and 9 is indeed an ancient recipe for a happy life.

Now in opening up the text, I can do no better than to use the headings that I found in Edmond Hiebert, who has been a constant exegetical companion throughout this entire series. And he says the text breaks down under these three very natural headings: the dominating desire ("he that would love life and see good days"), the demanding activities ("let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: and let him turn away from evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it"), and then the divine response, first of all, to the one pursuing that life ("For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears unto their supplication") and the divine response to all others ("But the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil"). You see why I couldn't do any better than to borrow Hiebert's outline. So rather than strain my brain and waste time trying to come up with a better outline, I spent my time working on the nuts and bolts and meat and bones of the sermon. So we take up the text under those headings.

First of all, the dominating desire. As Peter brings forward a Biblical rationale for this kind of authentic Christian life in which God's people are marked by those five adjectives, marked by this unnatural response to evil done to them and railing against them, recognizing that this is the life to which they were called, and it puts them in the way of further blessing, the Spirit of God wants us to know that there is even more Biblical substance beneath the pursuit of such a life. And it is described, first of all, in terms of the dominating desire. We could render this part of the text as follows: "The one who is continually desiring to be loving life and to see good days...." Peter, under the guidance of the Spirit, took liberties with the original text. And some of the commentators do exegetical back flips and say, Peter didn't really alter the text. No, under the guidance of the Spirit of God, which was the unique province of an apostle, he could take the text of Scripture and alter it to give the mind of God to His people. And Peter is saying, "For anyone who has a continual desire to be loving life, I have a formula for a life that is worth loving. And the use of this word "he that would" or "he that is continually" or "the one continually desiring to be loving"--the way I can best describe it is in common, current sports jargon. Peter says, "the one who's focused upon loving life."

You guys involved in sports at all, you know when they interview someone between important games and say, "What are you planning to do with game five coming up?", the response is, "We've got to stay focused." And what they mean by that is, "We've got to cut out all secondary and tertiary issues and keep our minds on what we need to do to win the next game." Peter is saying the one who is focused--and focused upon what? The text says, "he that is focused", "he that is willing to be loving life". Now what in the world does that mean to be loving life? It means to have the kind of life that is worth loving. And the word he used for love means to love with intelligence and with purpose. "And he that would love life" with open eyes, considering all that life really is and all that life holds before the face of God and with reference to myself, with reference to time, with reference to eternity. He that would love life, not he that would love mere existence. There's all the difference between mere existence and life. Hell is eternal existence. It's not eternal life. There's a difference. And Peter says, taking his clue from Psalm 34,

"Do you want to know why I'm setting before you this kind of life? Would you have Godly incentives in the strength of Christ to live such a life? Here is my rationale. This dominating desire, which I trust all of you the people of God have. I'm going to set before you the kind of life that is worth loving, the kind of life which if lived will enable you to love life with a passion.

And then he says, "...and to see good days [to experience life as comprised of units of days that are good, good as defined by God, good in relationship to a life worth living and a life worth loving]." In the context of Psalm 34 and in the context of 1 Peter, it obviously does not mean a life without clouds and without thorns. Remember what Peter's already said in chapter 1 and verse 6: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials." He's already assumed that they are receiving evil, that some are speaking evil of them, doing evil to them. He's going to go on in this chapter and say, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake..." (verse 14). In chapter 4, he's going to tell them, "Whatever heat you've already experienced, there's more heat coming." "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial among you, which cometh upon you to prove you, as though a strange thing happened unto you."

Think of the context of Psalm 34, when David writes about seeing good days. Here's a man in a cave away from family, seemingly cut off from the promise of God that's he's going to be king in Israel. He's being chased around the wilderness of Judea like a mad dog by Saul. And he says, "I have experienced such good days. Come on in the cave you children and I'll teach you the fear of the Lord. You want to know the good days I'm having? Come and sit down and I'll tell you." I don't know about you, but I get the goose bumps when I read something like that. That's what David is saying. "How's it going David?" You expect some mournful tale, and he says, "O, these are good days."

Now you see, that's entirely contrary to the mentality of 1999 America. I don't watch a lot of television. I try to watch very discriminately, not only the programs I watch but the commercials I allow my eyes to see. But I have seen, and maybe you have seen that beer commercial in which there are a bunch of buddies who've gone off for a fishing trip. And it's the end of the day, and they're sitting on a porch, and they've got their feet up on the railing. And the sun is going down, and there's some coals over which they've placed the fish they caught that day. And one says to another, "It doesn't get any better than this." That's the world's idea of a good day. But David is in a cave with the riff raff of Jerusalem gathered around him. And you say to him, "David, how are things going?" And he says, "It's been a good day." We're going to find out why he could say it's a good day. He tells us in Psalm 34. And we're told here in this passage quoted by Peter. But do you long for good days as God defines good days; to have such a view of life and of reality, that if you were in David's setting, you could say, "Hey, I have experienced such a measure of good days I want to tell you how to know good days."?

Think of Paul and Silas there in a prison, feet in the stocks, backs laid open with wounds. You come to them and say, "How are you doing, guys?" They would say, "It's been a good day, so good that we're singing songs of praise to God at midnight."

Would you really love life, and would you really see good days? Now does that strike a note in you? I hope it does. And I believe the reason David originally penned those words by the guidance of the Spirit, and Peter quotes them, is every single one of us by nature desires his own happiness. You can no more deny that than you can deny your existence. By the time you unconsciously cried for your mother's breast or the bottle to this hour, everyone of us by nature desires passionately his own highest happiness and good. And it is that reality embedded in the soul of man to which the Word of God is appealing here and saying, "Do you want God's formula for a life worth loving and for days that are truly good even in the midst of suffering, in the midst of people bad mouthing you and doing evil to you?" Peter says, "The formula I've set before you is a formula that will bring about a life worth living and truly good days."

Now having considered the dominating desire in the text, now we come to what Mr. Hiebert calls the demanding activities. Now as we come to these verses, remember these are not verses telling you how to enter into life, how to obtain the forgiveness of sin and enter the kingdom. This is not a formula for conversion. He's writing to people whom he described in chapter 1 as those who heard the Gospel with the Spirit of God attending the preaching. They are described in chapter 1 as those who have purified their souls in obedience to the truth. He describes them as having been born again by the living seed of the Word of God. He describes them in chapter 2 as those who are continually coming to Christ, as those who have been called out of darkness

into marvelous light. He's writing to people who are in a state of grace by the grace of God working through the Gospel, sovereignty imparting divine life, leading them to repentance and faith. I don't know how to state it more plainly. This is not an answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Peter is answering the question, "Why ought I to live such a life and what is the nature of the blessing that is in store for those who by the grace of God live this way?" Well, he's going to answer now in these demanding activities.

Now I want to say a word about the structure here. As you look at your Bibles, you will notice that these verse are printed in the form of poetry. That's because in Psalm 34 they are Hebrew poetry. And most of you know that in Hebrew poetry you have parallelism. You have a statement and a second statement that will contrast with it, amplify and enlarge upon it. And the second often throws light upon the first or is more fully understood in light of the first, etc. This is Hebrew poetry, and we might expound it accordingly. But what would have struck the first person who opened up the parchment sent by Peter and would have looked at the text with a view to reading it the next time God's people gathered together--what would have struck him is not so much the structure of the Hebrew poetry, but the five aorist imperatives (five words--all imperatives), everyone ending with the letters, when we transliterate them into English, end with ato. And I labored to try and bring it over to five English words to give you the sense someone would feel the minute they opened up the manuscript and began to read it. Those five imperatives would jump out. And when whoever would read the letter to the assembly would read it, those sitting there would hear standing out, palsato, ecclenato, poesato, zatasato, deasato. Five times ato, ato, ato, ato, ato, and you go away saying, "What were the five atos?" The same way the reader would have been impressed with Peter's use of the five adjectives to describe what I call that five pearl necklace of graces to adorn the life of God's people in their relationship to one another. Anyone reading and listening to that letter read would be struck with these five aorist imperatives (for you Greek students, third person singular aorist imperative). He is saying by the guidance of the Spirit, would you live a life worth loving and see good days? Here is the demanding set of activities. And if the five adjectives can be likened to five pearls that are to adorn the neck of God's people as they relate to one another, these five imperatives are the stones that pave the path into additional blessing from God. Would you be in the path that brings additional blessing from God? Here are the five stones that must be laid in the path on which you walk.

Now, what are they? Look at the text. The first is, "For, he that would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile." The verb "refrain" has reference to the activity of the tongue and also to the lips. The first stone laid in the path of the way of additional blessing from God has to do with the organ of speech (tongue and lips). The verb is a vigorous verb. It means to hold something back. You are to hold back the tongue from evil. And the word "evil" is anything base or degrading in nature. It can refer to something profane or slanderous or merely unprofitable speech. In the context--for remember context--what would evil tongues do? They would return reviling for reviling. Even though the people of God are reviled and sinned against (they're not imagining this), it is evil for them to return reviling for reviling. Would you have a life worth loving and filled with truly good days, you must, in the language of James, place a very stiff, firm bridle upon this unruly member called the tongue. "Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile."

What is guile? It means saying one thing while meaning another in order to lead someone astray. And sadly, we've had grievous examples of guile in the highest office of the land. Staring into the camera with conviction and pointed finger, "I never had blah, blah with that woman, Miss Lewinski." Saying one thing, technically true in terms of what he thought, calculated to lead a nation astray. That's guile. If you want to be in the path that brings and continually unfolds a life worth loving and days that are truly good, not only must you refrain your tongue from evil, but your lips that they speak no guile. Your yes is yes; your no is no. When you greet someone and shake their hand and say, "It's good to see you my brother; it's good to see you my sister", when inwardly you don't mean that, you're guilty of guile. Do you want to be in the path of blessing? Refrain the tongue from evil and the lips from speaking guile.

Now to respect Hebrew poetry, we'll take two and three together. Look at the text: "...let him turn away from evil, and do good." The meaning of the word "to turn away" is the picture of a boulder in the highway, and you're driving at 60mph. You come around the bend; the boulder's there, and you swerve to miss it. You take an evasive action. Perhaps you're walking down the street and you see on the sidewalk the local gang of bullies. And you walk over to the other side. You swerve, you turn aside, you take evasive action. I hope you do. I hope you've got enough sense to do it. You're not going to take them on all by yourself. Or if you've got some bigger guys on your side, and then you go walking down. But otherwise you do evasive action. That's the sense of the verb. "Let him turn away [let him engage in the evasive action in the presence of evil]." Same word again--what is base, what is degrading, anything contrary to the Word of God.

In the context, the moment you're tempted to be indifferent to wearing your five-pearl necklace, why bother to labor at cultivating the graces of one-mindedness, of sympathy, loving as brothers, tenderheartedness, humble-mindedness? It's difficult given my remaining sin and the sin of my brethren. Why back off? Because to do so would be evil. You must turn away from that impediment to cutting a straight course in the cultivation of those graces. And when you are tempted to return evil for evil and reviling for reviling, or you're tempted to say, "Well, I've done that much, but I'm not going to pray God's blessing on them", that's evil. Anything contrary to the Word of God, and you are tempted to it, is evil. We must turn away from evil.

But that's not enough--"...and do good." This is the positive side of the previous imperative. It's not enough to evade and turn away from evil. There must be active pursuit of that which is good. The same word is used in verse 10: "He that would love life, and see good days...." If you want to see good days, then fill your days with good. Pretty simple formula, isn't it? How can you expect to fill your days with evil and then see good days? You fill your days with good and you will see good. And here again is the emphasis of the Word of God. It's not enough to deal with the negative. Isaiah says, "Cease to do evil; learn to do well." And Romans 12:9 is a very helpful parallel text. The Apostle says, "Abhor that which is evil." And that Greek word is a vigorous word: "Detest it. Treat it like an abominable thing worthy of being vomited out." But that's not enough. He says, "Cleave to that which is good." And the word "cleave" is the very word that is used in 1 Corinthians 6: "He that is joined to a harlot is one flesh with the harlot." What is the cleaving of sexual intimacy? God says that's the way you're to be with good. Abhor the evil; cleave to the good. Hold it with a death grip.

It is the devil's lie that to have a life worth loving and to see good days, you've got to turn away from that which is good and cleave to that which is evil. Wasn't that his lie in the garden? God said to Adam and Eve, "I know your love life. You want to see good. Here's the way of a life worth loving and the way of the good life: of all the trees of the garden you may eat, but the tree that is in the midst of the garden, you shall not eat of it. For in the day you eat of it, you shall die. Good days will end; a life worth loving will end the day you choose evil." God was saying in essence to Adam and Eve, "Abhor the evil; avoid that tree. Cleave to the good. Of all the trees you may freely eat." The devil came and said, "No, the only way to have a life worth loving and to see really good days is to choose evil. God doth know in the day you eat, that is, do evil, your eyes will be opened; you'll receive good." Do you see it? That's his ancient lie. He's been telling it for thousands of years. And he'll whisper it in the ear of the most mature Christian, let alone some of you naive young people who still think-- thank God you're the minority--

"Mom and Dad and pastor and these old fuddy duddies, they really don't know where it's at. What I see dangling out there of the devil's bait--that's the life worth loving. The good days are out there when I can buck the traces of Mom and Dad's do's and don'ts and no's. And I can get away from curfews and rules and regulations and church and all the nonsense. It's out there. I know it's out there. I can't wait to drink in the life worth loving and the days that are truly good."

My dear precious young person, in the name of God and of His truth, listen to His Word. Would you have a life worth loving and see good days? Then come in the way of abhorring the evil and cleaving to the good. God is not a celestial killjoy. It's the devil who tells you He is. Don't believe him. Believe Him who is the truth and validated He is truth by going to a cross and dying under the wrath of God and the scorn and the spittle and the jeering of men to show you that God is no celestial killjoy. He knows that He made you to love life. He knows that He made you to see good days. But He's telling you the way to have a life worth loving and to know good days is not the way spawned by the devil's lie. It is the way that God has given us in a Psalm given by a man being chased around the wilderness like a criminal gathered with the rest of Israel and says, "It's been a good day. I'm living a life worth loving," because he was turning away from evil, and he was doing good.

And then the last two imperatives, four and five, are put together: "Let him seek peace, and pursue it." Now again, the words "seek" and "pursue" are vigorous words. Peter uses the word seek again in chapter 5, verse 8: "Your adversary the devil goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." When a prowling lion hasn't had a kill for a few days and is hungry, he doesn't go about just lazily looking, "O, there's something over there; I might get it." You've seen the National Geographic films. When a lion's on a kill, he's a determined creature. "Seeking"--that's the word used. It's a beautiful use of it in Luke chapter 2 when Joseph and Mary discovered Jesus wasn't with them. It says they went back to Jerusalem seeking Him. You get the feel of the word?

In preparation and thinking of that word, I couldn't help but think of an incident very recently in our own family life. After Heidi, Gord, and Landon went back to Michigan less than two weeks ago, Gord took Landon to an air show in a nearby airfield, and there were approximately five thousand cars parked for this air show. And Gord's dad was with him (quite an elderly man). And after the air show, they went back to find the dad's car that they had used to get there, and Gord said to his dad, "You keep an

eye on Landon, I think your car is over here." (They were looking in the wrong place.) So Gord found the car and went back then to his dad, and Landon wasn't there. He said, "Dad, where's Landon?" He said, "I thought you were watching him." Can you enter into what my son-in-law must have felt when their only son, a little 7-year-old guy, might have been lost in a sea of five thousand cars and all kinds of people. And as Gord described what he did over those next moments, frantically searching for his son, our text says you want to be in the way of blessing; you want to see that next stone paved in that way of blessing, then you seek peace. Seek it like the devil seeks his prey, like Mary and Joseph sought their Son. Seek it like my son-in-law sought my grandson.

But then the next verb is even more vigorous: "...pursue it." This the word most frequently translated in the New Testament for persecute. Now what do you do when you're persecuting someone? You put your eyes upon them and track them down. They go out of sight; you go after them. They hide underground; you go down to get them. It's a picture of seeking peace, and you're about to lay hold of it. And it's like my grandmother said to me as a boy, "Albert, if you can ever put salt on the tail of a bird, you'll be able to catch it." And I believed her. And I used to run around on our vacation in her backyard with a saltshaker. You know what would happen. And I'd come in and say, "But grandma, I can't get the salt on its tail." She'd say, "Well, if you do, you'll be able to catch it." And in my naivety, I believed, and they would sit inside and see Albert running around after a bird with a saltshaker and laugh their heads off. Well, sometimes peace among brethren is like the bird. And what this text says is, when it flies away, you go after it. And when it flies some more, you go after it with a zeal to track it down and to lay hold of it. That's what he says. Would you have a life worth loving and seek good days as God describes them? Then the last two stones in that path are the stones of seeking and pursuing peace. And here again are two parallel texts: Roman 12:18 "As much as in you lieth, live peaceably with all men." And Hebrews 12:14, the same vigorous verb: "Follow after peace with all men and the holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Now I must bring in the qualifying word of our Lord Jesus. In Matthew 10:34, He said, "Do not think that I came to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace but to cast a sword." And there is a whole Biblical doctrine of the non-peaceful relationships that come in allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I'm aware of that doctrine. I live with the reality of it. I have blood relatives with whom I do not have the measure of peace that I desperately desire. But my Lord takes full responsibility for that sword. And there can even been among brethren, implacable brethren, whom you pursue with a disposition to reconciliation, and their disposition is "no." People will leave churches and will never even meet you and have the decency to tell you what their gripe is, but feel free to speak their gripe all over the Christian public wherever they get an ear. But what our disposition must be is one of even yet pursuing them, communicate when we can; let them know that our hearts are toward them and that there is no barrier in our disposition towards righteous reconciliation.

You want to have a life worth loving and see good days? Here's the path: five massive stones laid in the path originally queried out of the experience of David and put in Psalm 34, shaped a little differently, altering a word here or there and bringing them over. And Peter lays them out for all of the believers in the five provinces of Asia Minor undergoing opposition and disappointment and feeling the pressure that came from their attachment to Christ. And he says after telling them, "Here are the graces that mark your relationship to one another,"

"Here's how you're to relate to those who oppose you. And if you need any further incentive, I set before you this wonderful path to additional blessing: he that would love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: and let him turn away from evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it."

Now we come thirdly and briefly, having considered the denominating desire, the demanding activities, now look at the divine response first to the child of God who's walking that path and then to the evildoer. Verse 12: "For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears unto their supplication: But the face of the Lord is upon them that do evil." In a real sense, this passage gives flesh and blood to what is the heart of a life worth loving and truly good days. These words describe God's response to the persecuted child of God who is determined to respond in God's way to opposition. And God says two things will be true of him. His response to the believer's determination to walk in the path first is, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears unto their supplication." What's that mean? It means that they are the objects of God's constant loving, intimate, eternal concern and care.

Here's a couple with a little one. The man has to go off to something and says to his wife, "While I'm gone, keep your eye on our child." What's he mean? He means, "Let your whole person be turned in loving concern and protective attention to that child. Keep your eye upon him", the eye being an index of the soul, and the soul being, as it were, the monitor of the concern and activity of the whole person. And now Peter says, quoting from David, who in the midst of very adverse circumstances describes the life worth loving and the good life as this kind of life, a life in which you know the eyes (plural) of the Lord are upon the righteous. With all that God has to do to keep His universe in order down to the farthest galaxy, down to the subatomic particles in your body, this God's eyes will be constantly upon you. Beautiful image! You will be the object of His constant paternal love and care. You will be the object of all that He is as God turned toward you in loving paternal favor and compassion. And furthermore, as you're in circumstances as David was, and as you Christians there in Asia Minor are, and as many of us are in circumstances that cause you to feel deeply your need (and one of the three or four major words for prayer and its particular nuance is it's the prayer with a sense of need, often translated "supplication"), we are told that God's ears (plural) are unto his supplications. It's a picture of a tender mother who bends over to listen to the slightest intimation that the child is in distress.

Now do you begin to see what the life worth loving is and what the good life is. It all has to do with the nature of your relationship to God. And David says the good life, the life worth loving is the life in which you have the kind of relationship to the living God in heaven and earth in which you can be confident that no matter where you are and what your circumstances are and what is being done to you and what is going on around you, the eyes of the Lord are upon you in love and concern and favor. And furthermore, His ears are unto your supplications. This is indeed a life worth loving; these are indeed good days. My Father sees, my Father cares, my Father hears my cry for help. One of the commentators expressed it beautifully, and I want to just read this paragraph to you:

"What a picture of condescending majesty and love. Behold, He who inhabits eternity and spreads out the heaven as a tent to dwell in with unswerving and most loving regards watches over the most humble saint, follows him in every step of his pilgrimage, marks every good purpose and aspiration of his heart as well as all the

outward perils and temptations that he faces. The eyes of the Lord his God are upon him from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfect toward Him. As they are ever within sight, so also His ear is unto their prayers to hear. He bows down His ear to listen. And no cry of distress, no spontaneous cry of filial faith and hope, no inward sigh even of bruised and weary and longing soul fails to find entrance there. O, the blessedness of those for whom the almighty and omnipresent God doth care. 'I am poor and needy said one of His saints. yet the Lord thinks upon me.'"

You see, that's the life worth loving and the life marked by good days. It's the life lived in that kind of confidence of God's Fatherly care, His eye upon us, and of His hearing ear. And if that's not enough to entice you more fully into the way described by Peter as the way of authentic Christian experience, cultivating those five graces of our interpersonal relationship; by the grace of God, not rendering evil for evil, reviling for reviling, but contrariwise, blessing, then I really wonder, have you ever tasted and seen that the Lord is good? Remember that early in Psalm 34? "O taste and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him." And the one who has tasted and trusted is the one who knows that there is no greater good in life than to know, "My Father watches over me, and my Father hears me. I live before His face. I live in communion with Him, and all because of His grace and kindness to me in the Lord Jesus."

But then I must hasten to just speak very briefly on God's response to those described in the last part of the text: "The face of the Lord is upon them that do evil." The preposition is not "against"; it is "upon them". "As the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous with a view to giving them His Fatherly care, so the face of the Lord (all that God is in Himself) is upon them that do evil, not with a view to blessing, but with a view to venting His righteous and holy wrath unless they repent. And isn't it interesting that Peter didn't quote the whole of verse 16 from Psalm 34. I'm sure he knew it. I'm sure he could have looked it up if he needed to, but he stopped short. The last part of that verse is this: "The face of the Lord is against them that do evil to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth." Peter stopped short of that because the day of grace was still open and the offers mercy still go out to sinners, sinners who are believing the devil's lie, that to find the life worth loving and to know true good days you must do evil. And God extends His mercy in the call of the Gospel saying, "Turn from your folly, turn from your notions and the devil's prescription and recipe for the good life. And throw down your weapons of rebellion and go and plead for mercy and grace in the way of God's appointing."

We come around full circle to where we began this morning. Here is an ancient recipe for a happy life. Reread Psalm 34, and read that happy man in a cave. He had many troubles, but he said the Lord delivers him out of them all. But he continues to have them, and he continues to be delivered. And again and again in Psalm 34, David underscores the blessedness of having a God who hears his prayers, and a God whom he knows cares for him. Hence, he can tell us and lecture to us about a life worth loving and what truly good days are. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this is counter cultural, but this is authentic Christianity. May God give you grace; may God give me grace to think again and again of the five pearls with which we are to adorn ourselves in our life together, and to think of those five stones that are the path to additional blessing from our God, as by His grace, we are enabled to walk in that way.

On the contrary, there's something truly awful in the bare simplicity of the general announcement that while God sees the righteous and listens to their prayers, He is at the same time looking at evildoers. They may think to hide themselves in their wicked courses and counsels in darkness and in the shadow of death. But even there God, though unseen, confronts them still, gazing direct and full on all their ways and their most secret as yet unuttered devices. They would fain turn their backs on God, but God's face is always toward them. And what more is needed to ensure their ultimate destruction and meanwhile to guard the righteous from their assault? This is truly an awful word from the mouth of God.

And then this writer quotes from Amos: "I will set my eyes upon them for evil and not for good." May God help you if His eyes are upon you; His face is upon you with a view to your destruction, that you would flee from the wrath to come and find refuge in the Lord Jesus and come join this happy band and on to heaven go where there are joys celestial forever.

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