

Love—“the perfect bond of unity”

FRIDAY - Colossians 3:9-16

God offers us a new nature that changes the ways we relate for the better. God can help us relate to all the people we worship with, rub elbows with, see at the market or pass as we walk the dog with “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.” This letter calls us to forgive one another the same way God has forgiven us. That may be hard when you need to forgive someone else—but what a blessing it is when someone else extends that treatment to you!

- This is pretty radical language: take off the “old human nature,” put on a “new nature.” Can you see elements of your “old nature” that you and God are in the process of “taking off”? Which of the beautiful “new nature” qualities named in these verses do you see thriving? Which ones do you want to ask God to grow in your life in the next six months?
- “Autoimmune” diseases happen when our body “turns against” itself. They can cause a great deal of suffering. Colossians said we need to live in peace because we are members of one body, the body of Christ. What steps can you take to make sure you aren’t the source of any “autoimmune” problems in Christ’s body?

Prayer: Holy Spirit, I’ve learned the hard way that even when I manage to change an outward behavior, too often the inner struggle remains. Keep changing and growing me from the inside out. Amen.

Living in love—the good life at all times

SATURDAY - 1 John 4:7-11, 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

Loving God and other people is much more than just being “nice.” Loving one another (both in giving and receiving) aligns us, like nothing else, with the heart of the God of the universe. God loves us, John wrote—and that is the reason that we can love God and one another. The apostle Paul drew on a theme from Scripture passages like Psalm 13:5-6 and Psalm 40:1-2. God’s loving presence, he affirmed, makes it possible for us to experience the good life even amid circumstances which, from a human perspective alone, might look like a terrible life.

- Most of us know the words: “God is love.” But are there life experiences and inner messages that make it hard for you to rely on God’s love? In what ways do you perceive and experience God as loving? What helps you trust God’s love more? Which people do you find it hardest to love as God loves them? In what ways has God’s love, and the love of other people you know, helped you to keep living the good life even at times of trouble, confusion, harassment or being knocked down by life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are the ultimate source of love, and the awe-inspiring model who shows me the lengths to which love went to reach me. Keep growing my ability to love you and others, to lead the truly good life in all circumstances. Amen.

[Sermon Notes: pleasure, pain, popularity, profit, prosperity, happy, popularity, success, people, relationships, alone, relationships, success, human, community, God, Life]

Sermon Notes

May 07, 2017 -- Matthew 22:35-40

The Good Life: Success

Hedonism - We live the good life when we can maximize _____ and minimize _____.

SUCCESS is defined as the accomplishment of an aim/purpose, the attainment of _____, _____ or _____.

- At the heights of their careers we find many people who are not _____.
- So _____ and _____ in your field do not really lead to the Good life.

Keys to finding success and the good life:

Key #1: You need to invest in _____ and _____.

- “It is not good for the man to be _____. I will make a helper suitable for him.” (*Gen 2:18*)
- you can have all the toys/money in the world, but without _____, you will not find true _____.

Key #2: Investing yourself to be a part of the _____.

It is in our relationship with _____ where we will find true and genuine _____.

This week's devotions are from Adam Hamilton's "The Good Life"
(*cor.org*)

Great commandments: God and neighbor

MONDAY - Matthew 22:35-40

In the first two weeks of this series, we've looked at Gratitude, Purpose, Simplicity and Generosity as keys to the truly Good Life. This week we focus on loving relationships as keys to the Good Life. Jesus said that loving God (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5) and loving people (cf. Leviticus 19:18) were the greatest commandments in the Hebrew Scriptures, pivotal expressions of how God defines the Good Life.

- Jesus told a story (cf. Matthew 25:1-12) that said we cannot borrow loving relationships. Have you ever wished you could “borrow” the love your devout grandmother or your pastor has for God? Doesn't work. God wants a love relationship with you, and like any love relationship, that means relating to God yourself. In what ways, if any, are you trying to let someone else relate to God for you? How can you make that vital relationship your own?
- Loving your neighbor as yourself can be challenging. God calls us to love others the way God loves us—never giving up, no matter what. Our humanity makes it very hard for us to fully love as God loves—unwarranted love with no hesitation. But God calls us to move toward that, for our own sake as much as for the sake of others. What has stopped you from loving someone relentlessly? How might you love them more fully today and tomorrow?

Prayer: Lord, your love for me is always there, even when I forget it or try to tune it out. Help me to love you back, and to extend that same kind of love to all the people in my life. Amen.

“Everything we need for life and godliness”

TUESDAY - 2 Peter 1:3-8

Peter said that God's forgiveness and divine love give us the inner power we need to escape the world's immorality. Verses 5-7 listed the positive virtues God offers us. Let God build these things into your life, Peter said. They will bring you a good life, shielding you from an “inactive and unfruitful” existence.

- Peter made the sweeping claim that God “has given us everything we need for life and godliness.” Have you ever felt that “I could live my life with God if only God would _____?” Which of the qualities Peter listed in verses 5-7 do you long for the most? How can you more completely open yourself to God's spiritual power to add these things to your life?
- Peter called on us to have these positive qualities “growing in you.” Which of these qualities do you find already present in your life? Thank God for them! Then ask God to guide you to see clearly which of the qualities are missing, or not growing. As you become aware of those places, work with God to grow an increasing measure of that virtue, making your life ever better.

Prayer: O God, please add your divine power to my efforts, so that my life may continually grow in the positive qualities that you have promised will give me the truly good life. Amen.

Giving with joy and gratitude for what God gives us

WEDNESDAY - 2 Corinthians 9:5-15

The apostle Paul was gathering funds from Gentile believers, in Corinth and elsewhere, to take to Jerusalem, where the Christian community was impoverished and suffering. That traveling Christian preacher (who had, as far as we know, no real estate, life insurance or retirement plan) wrote: “God has the power to provide you with more than enough of every kind of grace”! That heartfelt exclamation gave us a look at the heart of a man focused on what he did have much more than on what he did not have. It gave us reason to think about how he defined “more than enough.”

- God-given love, the apostle said, leads all believers to care about each other. He told Christians in Corinth that the Jerusalem believers “will also pray for you, and they will care deeply for you.” He saw giving not as just a material act, but as a two-way street even if it took different forms. What helps you to think of your giving, whether you are able to give much or little, as participation in the life of God’s big family, not just another bill to pay?
- Paul did not invent the idea that God’s people should give freely without pressure (whether in money or in time, talent and encouragement). In Exodus 25:2, the call for offerings to build a desert sanctuary was “Receive my gift offerings from everyone who freely wants to give.” What reasons would God have for wanting us to give from free, grateful hearts without coercion or pressure? When have you felt the joy of giving freely from a grateful heart filled with love?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, guide my heart. Help my gratitude for your “outstanding grace” to overflow in my giving of whatever funds, time and talents I’ve received from your hand. Amen.

Loving one another

THURSDAY - Romans 12:5-10, 13:8

We know, as a matter of history, that there were no Christian church buildings in Rome when Paul wrote this letter to the Christians there. We also know, from the content of his letter, that disputes over how to live out their faith divided Roman Christians (cf. Romans 14:1-10). Even without impressive buildings, Paul believed that building stronger relationships could make them stand out in that cutthroat city: “Be the best at showing honor to each other.”

- For Paul, loving others was not just something to be done with gritted teeth. “Whoever loves another person has fulfilled the Law,” said the former Pharisee, who once thought of the Law very differently (cf. Philippians 3:4-7). Honest love (“without pretending”) reshapes our life, and fills it with meaning and joy. When have you found in your own life, and in the lives of people you know well, how genuinely loving people makes all of life better?
- John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, asked in one of his best-known sermons, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?” Who has lovingly helped you in your personal journey to “know, love, and serve God,” without trying to make your journey into a clone of their own? How can you best extend that same kind of supportive, generous love to others?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, sometimes it seems so much easier to pretend to love certain other people than to genuinely love them. Teach me that “pretend” love impoverishes my life, and keep leading me to your kind of genuine love. Amen.