

Living the Good Life

Christianity 101, Part 2

1 Peter 3:10-12

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

Christians have a tendency to shy away from talking about the enjoyment of life on earth. We understand very clearly that we are aliens and strangers in this world because our citizenship is in heaven. The interesting part about this life is that Peter says we are actually supposed to live a good life. This doesn't necessarily mean that life is meant to be filled with pleasure and comfort, but there are ways to live a good, successful life that honors God and glorifies Christ.

Discussion Points:

It might seem strange at first that Peter is trying to address the people in his audience that want to "love life and see good days". These descriptions seem to be in contrast to the warnings of Jesus that this life will be filled with trouble and the life and writings of Paul where we see that even with obedience to God we still face persecution and difficulty.

- What is your first reaction when Peter starts to instruct those who want to live a good life and love it?
- What comes to your mind when you hear about loving life?
- Why is it difficult for Christians to admit they want to enjoy life?
- Is there anything inherently wrong with enjoying life on earth?

In 1 Peter 3:10, Peter says that those who desire to love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil.

- What are some examples of people in the Bible who were not able to keep their tongue restrained?
- What are some examples of Biblical characters that were able to tame their tongue?
- Why is keeping yourself from speaking evil or damaging words so difficult?

Discussion Guide cont.

Peter says that a person desiring to love life must turn away from evil. The Bible uses many different descriptions of sin from the “desires of the flesh” to “earthly passions”. These definitions refer to some level of fleeting enjoyment.

- Why does Peter say that those who desire to love life must turn from evil things if they seem to bring a bit of enjoyment for a time?
- How do you think the joy of turning from evil compares with the indulging of the sinful nature?

Peter says next that believers should be *brotherly*.

- What are some characteristics of being brotherly to others?
- What Bible passages refer to Christians in familial terms with God and with others?

Being *kindhearted* is something that can be difficult for strangers, but the within the church there is always one major commonality that unites everyone.

- What is the uniting factor for everyone in the church?
- How can this uniting relationship give a model for us to follow for tenderhearted compassion?

Having a *humble spirit* can change relationships between people and allow God to be at the center.

- How does humility help build up a church body?
- How does humility glorify God?

Peter continues in verse 9 to say that Christians are not supposed to return evil for evil or insult for insult. This is not the natural thing to do for humans in their sinful nature, but he even goes a step further by instructing them to give a blessing instead of the natural reactionary slander.

- How does this relate to Paul’s teaching in Romans 12:21 of overcoming evil with good?
- How did Jesus demonstrate this attitude during his life on earth?
- What kind of witness will this refusal to unleash the tongue at others build?

Discussion Guide cont.

Gospel Connection:

The Christian life is not easy. It consists of constantly fighting the flesh and striving to live for Christ because his blood has bought us to be invited into his family. We have been “called out of darkness into His marvelous light.” He has redeemed us and is continuing to mold us by his Holy Spirit to demonstrate his love and character to others in a way that glorifies Him.

Practical Implications:

- Think:** Does your life reflect the Christianity Peter is describing? How do you need to change?
- Pray:** Ask God to continue to mold you into the image of Jesus Christ so you can live up to the title of Christian.
- Do:** Strive to follow these 5 uncommon virtues Peter lays out in verse 8. Be uncommon yourself and bring God glory through your life that is lived for Him.

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Christianity 101, Part 2

1 Peter 3:10-12

Author Dave Freeman popularized the expression, “The Bucket List”, in his bestselling book entitled *100 Things to Do Before You Die*. Following an accident, he passed away at his home in Venice, California. He was only 47 years old at the time of his untimely death.

Ironically, his book begins with the words that “life is a short journey – so how can you make sure you fill it with the most fun and that you visit all the coolest places on earth before you pack those bags for the very last time?”

In Dave Freeman’s personal bucket list, he included things like attending the Academy Awards ceremony and running with the bulls in Spain.

This was how he intended to live the good life – and these were the things that he believed would fill his life with the most meaningful things.

According to comments from his father, Dave had only made it halfway through his bucket list before dying.

Ask the average person on the planet what it is that makes life fulfilling and meaningful and what brings you the most happiness and you will hear a variety of answers, but most of them will have to do with doing something fun or experiencing something exciting or visiting a lot of places around the world – or maybe all of the above.

This is what makes for the good life! So write out your list and go for it.

If you ask the average Christian, what the Bible says about living the good life, they will probably think you are either unspiritual or you have been reading too much prosperity theology.

You don’t talk about life in those terms. Those more educated in scripture will be quick to tell you that the Bible talks about holiness, not happiness, right?

The Bible doesn’t tell you how to live the good life, it tells you how to live the godly life. And most evangelical, God-centered, Christians would agree and give a hearty, “Amen!”

But in this next installment in our series of studies through the letter of First Peter – we are calling it, Christianity 101 – Peter, the Apostolic Professor, goes to the chalkboard and essentially says, “Now our lesson for today is,” and he begins to write surprising words on the board which read, “How to Live the Good Life.”

I mean, here’s the bucket list for you if you really want to live the good life. And he’s dead serious.

Turn with me to the formula he presents to us – you’ll find it in *1 Peter 3*, where we left off in our last study. Let’s begin with just the opening line of *verse 10. For the one who desires life, to love and see good days* – for the one who desires life, to love and see good days.

You could translate it, as the ESV, which I prefer here, *Whoever desires to love life and see good days* (ESV); one paraphrase renders it, “Whoever wants to embrace life and see the day fill up with good (MSG); another reads, “If you want a . . . good life (TLB) here’s what you do . . . Really?”

The Bible actually uses the phrase that is clearly understood in terms of how to live the good life? Absolutely.

But be careful – you’ll notice in this lesson that Peter doesn’t refer to the good life as a trouble-free life or a pain-free life, but a good life.

In fact, he's about to drop into his letter a long quotation from Psalm 34 – a Psalm where David is hiding in a cave on the run from King Saul facing discouragement, tribulation and great stress, and yet he begins this Psalm by writing, “I will bless the Lord at all times.” Even in this cave, it can be a good life. How?

Notice again how Peter begins his quotation – ***For the one who desires to love life . . .***

In other words, the good life is a decision and a mindset; a decision you have to make every morning when you get out of bed.

You could translate this opening phrase – “the one who desires” – literally, the one who wills – or, “the one who makes up his mind to love life and see good days.”

Peter is referring to a mindset of faith that sees the best that God might be doing in every situation, whatever it is.

He is referring to a person who is choosing by faith, then, to view life as something to love.

Which is the opposite of Solomon's perspective where he writes, “Therefore I hated life” . . . why? Solomon adds, it is all meaningless and vexation of spirit.”

So right away, the scriptures describe different perspectives on life. You can choose to hate your life or love your life.

Warren Wiersbe writes on this opening verse in First Peter 3:9 that we can choose to *endure life* because it is filled with burdens; we can choose to *escape life* by running from difficulties; or we can choose to *enjoy life* because we trust God is in control.ⁱ

So are we making up our minds that we have to endure life or to try to escape life or to enjoy life?

Wiersbe clarifies by adding, Peter isn't suggesting [some kind of unrealistic power of positive thinking] or psychological gymnastics that refuses to face facts. Rather, he is urging the Christian to take a positive approach to life and, by faith in God's control, make the most of every situation.ⁱⁱ

So Christianity 101 includes a lesson on how to live your life to the fullest.

In fact, the word Peter uses here for *life* – is the word *zoen*, which describes all the experiences and richness of living life to the fullest.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Greek word *zoen* gives us our transliterated English word, *zest* – to live with zest. Peter isn't talking about the length of life, but the quality of life. And to the one desiring to love life – to live life with purpose and meaning – he is about to give you the bucket list.

And it has nothing to do with running with the bulls in Spain, although that would be pretty cool if you survived it.

It has nothing to do with where you get to visit and sites you get to see, although that can definitely add a lot of interest and fun to life.

Living the good life has nothing to do with the size of your financial portfolio or your house or your biceps for that matter.

Peter writes on the board a list of pursuits, or principles you could call them; some are negative and some are positive, but they will lead you to living the good life.

For the sake of an outline, I have broken down Peter's comments into 6 principles.

1. Principle #1: Put a muzzle on your mouth

Peter writes in verse 10, ***The one who desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil . . .***

This is an imperative, one Greek scholar wrote, that implies energetic restraint.^{iv}

In other words, put everything you have into keeping your mouth closed in regards to evil.

The word for *evil* is a general word that includes any kind of profane, slanderous, impure, or degrading speech.

The truth is, before we even read this command, we already know that most of our problems are created by our mouths.

How many of you had to stay after school or were sent to the Principal's office for talking in class? Look, you never got into trouble for listening in class.

I spent many hours in the corner of my elementary grade school classrooms and I was never sent there for listening too much, but for talking too much.

Just this past week I found out that my third grade teacher has been listening to our daily radio program; she wrote a note – “I was Stephen’s third grade teacher.” Imagine the irony now that my job is talking.

I wonder if she realizes that all those times in third grade, God was actually preparing me for the ministry!

I wonder if she feels bad for all the times she sent me to the back corner. You should! We’ll have to edit that out later.

No, the truth is, she was right and I probably deserved more than she dished out.

The tongue is oftentimes nothing but trouble. In fact, James informs us that the tongue sets on fire the course of our lives (**James 3:6**)

Let me repeat that – *the tongue determines* – it sets on course – *the direction of our lives*.

More than anything else in your life, it is your tongue that determines whether or not you will live the good life.

It is your tongue – not your bank account, not your wardrobe, not your job description – your tongue will make the greatest impact on the *direction* of your life.

No wonder the Bible spends so much time warning us and instructing us on the use of:

- A proud tongue (Psalm 12:3)
- A perverted tongue (Proverbs 10:31)
- A destructive tongue (Proverbs 17:4)
- A gossiping tongue (Proverbs 25:23)
- A flattering tongue (Psalm 5:9)

And on and on.

Listen to Solomon delivering this categorical, overarching warning as he penned the proverb, ***Death and life are in the power of the tongue*** (**Proverbs 18:21**).

He had already heard his dad, David, praying, ***Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!*** (**Psalm 141:3**)

Now that’s a prayer worth praying every morning before a stray word has a chance to slip out!^v

But even deeper still, it is a matter of the heart, right? Jesus said in **Matthew 12:34**, that the mouth speaks the things that are in the heart.

In other words, if there is bitterness in your heart, bitterness comes out of your mouth. If there is hatred in the heart, hatred comes out the mouth. If there is lust or greed or pride in the heart, lustful and greedy and proud things come out of the mouth. Words happen to be windows . . . into the heart.^{vi}

So when Peter says to muzzle your mouth in order to live the good life, he is effectively telling us to live a life that confesses the sin in our hearts.

So principle #1 is this: with great energy and intentionality and daily determination, muzzle your mouth.

Now with this second principle, Peter makes a parallel statement that specifically address dishonesty.

Notice, he ***must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit***.

2. Principle #2: Don’t defend dishonesty

You could rewrite the principle positively by referring to a believer who is absolutely committed to telling the truth!

My father used to tell us boys often when we were growing up that it is always so much better to tell the truth because then you don’t have to remember what you said.

When you tell a lie you have to remember that lie so that when you add to it another lie, you have make sure you don’t contradict any earlier lies.

You want to live the good life? Don’t defend dishonesty; simply put, tell the truth.

I couldn’t help but laugh at this illustration I came across recently about a pastor who was determined to tell the truth. There were two brothers that had basically terrorized his small town for decades, causing trouble, being abusive to people, and dishonest in business. Everyone

in the town knew to have nothing to do with either one of these two brothers or you would get scammed or insulted or ripped off.

The younger brother died unexpectedly. The surviving brother went to the pastor of this town's local church and said, "I'd like you to conduct my brother's funeral," to which the pastor agreed. But then the older brother added, "Listen, it's important to me that during the service, you tell everyone my brother was a saint."

The pastor said, "He was anything but a saint! I won't do it." The wealthy brother pulled out his checkbook and said, "Reverend, if you promise me you'll say my brother was a saint, I know you are a man of your word, and I'll write your church a check right now for \$100,000." The pastor agreed and accepted the check.

Word got around and the funeral home was packed with nearly the entire town. The pastor began his eulogy by saying, "Everyone here knows that the deceased was a wicked man; a swindler; ungodly and evil. He caused so much trouble in the town, mistreated his employees and cheated on his taxes. But as evil and sinful as this man was, compared to his older brother, he was a saint."

I think it is wonderfully ironic that Peter will be the inspired Apostle to make such a strong demand for the believer to tell the truth.

Why? Because Peter is the Apostle who is known for telling the worst of lies. He is the Apostle who was known by all the believers in the church, even as he writes this letter, for that night in the courtyard where Jesus had been arrested and now stood on trial. And Peter, in the courtyard, began to swear – to use his tongue to use vulgar and dishonorable language – to try and mask the fact that he had been one of Jesus' disciples.^{vii}

And then three times he was questioned about knowing Jesus. Not once, not twice, but three times he told a lie – and it was the worst of lies because he said he didn't know who Jesus was.

And the Gospel records that after his third lie, a rooster crowed – reminding him of the

warning Jesus had given him. And so he rushed out of the courtyard *and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62)*.

Peter knew what it was like to have the direction of his life altered and ruined and grieved because of lying.

Peter knew all about what it was like to leave the good life behind. The good life was there in the courtyard where he ran from: a truly rewarding, fulfilling life of association with the Savior.

So 1 Peter 3:10 is just one more testimony of grace and growth in the life of Peter.

This foul-mouthed fisherman who had lied under pressure wasn't kicked to the curb by Christ. Peter was repentant and Christ was forgiving and Peter is later recommissioned in the work of the church.

And the man who now writes this letter – no doubt still very aware of his own failure and sin and with, perhaps, greater clarity than ever writes – whatever you do, if you don't want to take a wrong turn, if you want to live a life worth living, muzzle your mouth and never defend dishonesty. Confess it as quickly as you can.

The third principle involved in pursuing the truly good life comes next in *verse 11. He must turn away from evil*. Let me put it in principle form this way:

3. Principle #3: Steer as far away from sin as possible

Turn away from evil.

That sounds obvious doesn't it? But the verb he uses for *turning away* involves an intensely strong rejection of what is sinful.

Literally, it means to bend out or to lean over.^{viii}

We have changed this expression a bit today but use the same idea to refer to bending over backwards.

"Man, I had to bend over backwards to finish that project." "I'm having to bend over

backwards to make ends meet.” “My job is making me bend over backwards these days.” The phrase defines excruciating effort and perseverance.

Peter effectively says, “bend over backwards to stay away from sin.”

The verb also carries the idea of swerving to avoid a collision.^{ix} So Peter is referring to taking every kind of evasive action in order to limit as much temptation as possible.

If you don’t stay alert and see it coming, you are going to have a collision with sin; you are going to end up in a ditch or in a spiritual dead end.

Peter implies that we can see most of it coming our way.

The truth is, we most often don’t stumble into sin, we run toward it. We make an appointment for it. We leave our business card and invite it. We lock the door and make a phone call to it. We open the computer and click on it or turn on the television to watch it.

Peter says to run from it, to swerve out of the way of it! Watch out for it. You want to live the good life? Change lanes or choose a different road entirely, and then watch out because, more than likely, you will need to steer clear all over again.

The good life is not only pursued in that which you *resist*, but in that which you *persist* – notice the last part of that phrase in *verse 11* – ***He must turn away from evil*** – now notice – ***and do good***.

Frankly, engaging in goodness is a fairly effective method of avoiding badness.^x

Would you notice that Peter doesn’t just say to stop something? He also tells us to start something else.

Resisting isn’t enough; replacing what you are resisting with the right things is incredibly important in pursuing the good life.

Christianity isn’t just negative, it’s positive. Let me put it this way:

Principle #4: Make positive memories as often as you can

Someone says, “What’s the point of my life?” Peter answers, “You are here to do good to others.”^{xi}

So make as many positive, constructive, self-sacrificing memories as you can. This is one of the critical ways you pursue the good life.

But the world out there will say, “Oh no, no, no! The good life is when others do good things for you.” Peter reverses that logic in Christianity 101 and essentially says that the good life is when *you* do good things to *others*.

The model of course is Jesus Christ our Lord, who didn’t sin (***1 Peter 2:22***) but also went about doing good (***Acts 10:38***).

And here you have these twin principles for us to imitate as well – although imperfectly, we pursue the same – we turn away from evil – and we look for something good to do for others.

- Paul wrote to Titus to tell the church ***that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men (Titus 3:8)***;
- ***Hebrews 10:24*** challenges the believing assembly to encourage one another on to love and good deeds;
- James asks the question, ***Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior (James 3:13)***;
- Peter has already challenged the believer to ***keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that . . . they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God (1 Peter 2:12)***.

Have you ever thought about the fact that one of the most significant things you can do with your life is to make as many positive memories in the lives of others as you can? And in doing good deeds in the lives of others, you will be living a life that is fulfilling and rewarding and enriching.

And it sounds like it’s going to be tiring too!

At times it will be, because doing good deeds requires doing. But those who are committed to *doing* are on their way to *living* the good life here and now.

But get ready to expend even more energy with this next principle:

5. Principle #5: Chase after peace at every chance

You are going to run *away from* something (evil) – at the beginning of *verse 11*; and now you are going to run *after* something – at the end of *verse 11*.

Notice that Peter writes at the end of *verse 11*, *seek peace and pursue it*. Keep in mind this is in the context of relationships with unbelievers. And Peter uses intense verbs for *seek* and *pursue*. They carry the idea of seeking diligently – pressing forward – hunting down.^{xii}

The Apostle Paul wrote in the same vein, *so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men (Romans 12:18)*.

Christians should be known in the world, one author wrote, as peacemakers. Not troublemakers, not rioters, but peacemakers.

Jesus Christ preached, *Blessed are the peacemakers (Matthew 5:9)*

By the way, He didn't say, "blessed are the peaceful" or "blessed are the undisturbed" or "blessed are the peace lovers."

No, *blessed are the peacemakers* and peacemakers often have their own peace interrupted.

Jesus Christ is the greatest peacemaker in history – *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)*.

Did Jesus live an undisturbed life? Far from it! He made peace through His blood, shed on the cross (*Colossians 1:20*)

He was a peacemaker and what did it cost Him? Everything.

Living the good life and pursuing peace with those who do not believe just might cost you something.

I'll give you one practical illustration. I came across this article recently – the author writes; "Tom Wiles served a stint as university chaplain at Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, Arizona. A few years ago, he picked me up at the Phoenix airport in his new Ford pickup and whisked me away to keynote a leadership conference at the university. Since I was still mourning the trade-in of my Dodge truck, we immediately bonded, sharing truck stories and laughing at the fact that there's nothing like a man and his truck. As I climbed into his new pickup for the ride back to the airport a day later, I noticed huge dents and scrapes on his passenger door. 'What happened?' I asked. 'My neighbor's basketball goal fell over into my driveway and made those dents and all those scars,' Tom replied.

" 'You're kidding! How awful,' I commiserated. 'Your truck is so brand new!' Tom added, 'What's even worse is my neighbor refuses to take any responsibility for the damage.'

Rising to my newfound friend's defense, I said, 'He's wrong. Did you contact your insurance company? What about contacting an attorney? How are you going to prove you're in the right and make your neighbor pay for the damages?'

"Tom replied, 'Frankly, this has become a huge spiritual challenge for me. And after a lot of soul-searching and prayer and discussion with my wife about hiring an attorney, it finally came down to this: I can either be in the right, or I can be in a relationship with my non-Christian neighbor. Since my neighbor is going to last a lot longer than my truck, I decided that I needed to be in a relationship with him much more than I needed to prove I was right.' »^{xiii}

I wonder if there would be more peace in our lives as Christians, if we were willing to be in a relationship with the lost around us rather than always being proven right.

To choose the relationship without compromising the truth of the gospel, but perhaps compromising our own personal rights

– like Jesus Christ – who gave up the right to being treated like God.

For us to be peacemakers – to create a place where the gospel can continue to flow in the direction of your neighbors – who, by the way, are in the process of chasing after the good life, but going in the wrong direction.

Now, it’s as if Peter anticipates the reaction of many in the first century who are struggling in a culture that is turning all the more hostile toward them.

They’re probably thinking, what if the Christian wants peace, but the rest of the world wants to start a fight? What if the good life gets harder and more difficult?

6. Principle #6: Remember you are never, ever alone:

Verse 12. For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer

Literally, Peter reminds them that His eyes are open – and His ears are open, literally *into their prayer*. In other words, it’s as if God bows down to catch the faintest prayer addressed to Him.^{xiv}

Peter says, “It might not seem like God is aware of what you’re going through, but He sees everything and He has heard every prayer. And He is also aware of those who are against you” – notice, ***But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*** He doesn’t miss anything.

Which is another way of encouraging the believer that you are never, ever alone.

And because of that, you are – even if you are in the cave of young David surrounded by trouble – you are actually in the middle of living the good life; the best life; the fulfilled, meaningful, rewarding life that glorifies God and chooses to say, with David and Peter from Psalm 34 – “I’ve made up my mind today – I will bless the Lord at all times.”

In the meantime, as you:

- muzzle your mouth
- and refuse to defend dishonesty and
- steer clear of evil and
- you make as many positive memories as you can
- and you chase after peace at every possible chance

In the middle of it all, you are mindful that God sees and hears everything about your life. You are never, ever alone –

So fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
For I am thy God, I will still give thee aid;
I’ll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by my gracious omnipotent hand.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all Hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never – no, never – no, never forsake.
How Firm a Foundation, John Rippon–1787

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ⁱ Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Hopeful: First Peter* (David C Cook, 1982), p. 94

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- ii Adapted from Wiersbe, p. 94
- iii John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 193
- iv D. Edmond Hiebert, 1 Peter (BMH Books, 1984), p. 216
- v Charles R. Swindoll, Insights: James, 1 & 2 Peter (Zondervan, 2010), p. 196
- vi J. Allen Blair, Living Peacefully: 1 Peter (Kregel, 1959), p. 167
- vii Adapted from John Phillips, Exploring the Epistles of Peter (Kregel, 2005), p. 148
- viii Hiebert, p. 216
- ix Hiebert, p. 216
- x Adapted from Hiebert, p. 217
- xi Adapted from Michael Bentley, Living For Christ in a Pagan World (Evangelical Press, 1990), p. 128
- xii Paige Patterson, A Pilgrim Priesthood (Thomas Nelson, 1982), p. 121
- xiii Leonard Sweet, Out of the Question (Waterbrook Press, 2004), p. 91: from preachigntoday.com/illustrations/2006/june/1060506.html
- xiv Hiebert, p. 217