

Living the Good Life!

Psalm 128

God wants us to ‘live the good life.’ Jesus called it “abundant life.” New Testament paraphrases call it “far more life than before” and “a rich and satisfying life” (John 10.10). Through all the ups and downs, that should describe Christian homes, marriages, and families. How can it?

1. **Basic Principle:** Secret of ‘the good life’ (1)

Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways.

2. **Family Portrait:** Prosperity and Progeny (2-4)

You will eat the fruit of your labor; you will be blessed...

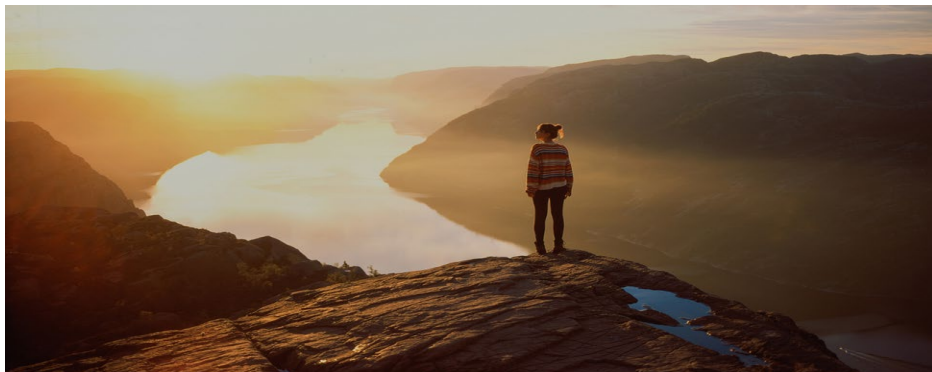
Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house...

Your children will be like olive plants around your table.

3. **Wider Influence:** Peace and Longevity (5-6)

May you see prosperity...and peace...

May you live to see your children’s children.



Digging Deeper

1. Psalms 120-134 are each designated as “A Song of Ascents.” These are ‘pilgrim songs’ Israelites sang as they “ascended” the road from Jericho – more than 900 feet *below* sea level! – to Jerusalem, almost 2500 feet *above* sea level! It was an arduous trip: Wadi Qelt Canyon had dangerous cliffs; there were wild beasts and robbers. Take time to read the Psalms of Ascents. As you do, imagine you’re a pilgrim facing those dangers. What prayers for protection, and expressions of faith, do they contain? Are you facing uncertainties and dangers in your life? What psalms resonate with you the most?
2. The ‘theme statement’ of Psalm 128 is found in verses 1 and 4: All who fear the Lord are blessed. What does it mean to ‘fear the Lord’? The Hebrew word for “fear” is יָרָא (yā·rē); this is the same root as in Prov. 1.7: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.* What *attitude* toward God leads to knowledge and wisdom? How does it lead to blessing? The psalmist explains in v1 that a person who fears the Lord “walks in His ways.” What does this say about the lifestyle of a person?
3. The psalmist enumerates some of the ways that God blesses the man who fears the Lord in vv2-3. These expressions describe results for a person’s life work, marriage, and family. We tend to limit our focus to temporal or material blessings, as though this is a magic formula to guarantee wealth and status in life. Can you see deeper meaning in these words? Have you observed the life of someone who ‘feared the Lord’? How were they blessed in the work of their hands? How were they blessed in their home?
4. Verses 5-6 are a prayer – that through the faithfulness of the godly man, God will prosper God’s people, and extend blessing to future generations. How might we pray today for God to extend blessing to our nation, and our world, through our faithfulness?

Psalm 128

A song of ascents. How blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways. You will eat the fruit of your labor; you will be blessed and it will be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; Your children will be like olive plants around your table. Thus is the man blessed who fears the Lord. May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel.

Since the beginning of recorded history, people have been seeking 'the good life'. In a way, this sums up the course of human history according to the Bible: We started out with an absolute 'good life' in the Garden of Eden, and ever since the fall, we've been trying to recover that experience.

According to the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Plato said the good life required introspection and doing good deeds. Aristotle said the good life required contemplation and learning. Immanuel Kant said the good life involved gaining virtue and happiness at the same time. Everyone has their own idea.

We'd all like to live 'the good life,' but what does that mean? Positivenesspsychology.com says it includes material comfort, wellbeing, meaningful work, loving relationships, and having a community. But then they add, "With more than 8 billion people on this planet, there are just as many opinions about what the good life entails." What matters to me is what the Bible says about the good life.

It might surprise you to learn that God wants us to experience 'the good life' – whatever it is. In John 10.10, Jesus said He came that we might have life, and "have it abundantly." The Greek word translated "abundantly" is περισσός (*perissos*). It means extraordinary, profuse, superfluous, unnecessary! J. B. Phillips paraphrased it as having "far more life than before." The New Living Translation called it "a rich and satisfying life." However you word it, Jesus wants us to experience it! And I submit that since Jesus said that He came that we might have this 'abundant life,' it should describe Christian homes, marriages, and families. But how can we pull it off?

To answer that question, you can read books forever. I looked up Christian books on how to live the good life, and got hit by a flood. *Live Well in Health and Wealth. Hope for You: God's Plan for Your Health and Happiness. God's Plan for Your Wellbeing. The God Prescription: Our Heavenly Father's Plan for Spiritual, Mental, and Physical Health. God's Master Plan for Your Life.* And probably the best known of all: *Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to Living at Your Full Potential* (Joel Osteen).

If I were one of those motivational speakers who get paid to tell you how to have the good life, I'd come up with my own list and get rich. Instead, today we're going to look at a psalm that lays out God's simple plan for living the good life.

Psalm 128 is designated as "A Song of Ascents." It's one of 15 'pilgrim songs' (Psalms 120-134) that Israelites sang as they "ascended" the road from the Jordan River, about 1000 feet below sea level! – to Jerusalem, about 2500 feet above sea level! It was a difficult journey, with dangerous cliffs, wild beasts and robbers. As the Jews made this journey, they

sang songs about trusting the Lord, and the good life that God had in store for them.

1. **Basic Principle:** Secret of ‘the good life’ (1)

The song begins with a theme statement, expressing the basic principle for living the good life: *Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways*. Just to make sure we don’t miss it, the psalmist repeats it in v4.

I expect many of you know that the word “blessed” means “happy”. If the psalmist worked for Madison Avenue, he’s show pictures of romantic sunsets, lounging by the pool on a cruise, dining at an expensive restaurant, or enjoying quiet time with a friend by the fire. A “blessed” person is enjoying the ‘good life.’ It’s the kind of life you and I want.

This life is experienced, the psalmist writes, by *everyone who fears the Lord*. Don’t get derailed by that word “fear”: It’s true that God is holy and all-powerful, and Scripture speaks of His wrath – Heb. 10.31 says that it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But that’s not what this verse is talking about. This verse is talking about following God, not being judged by Him. In this case, the word ‘fear’ means to ‘reverence’ or ‘honor.’ The parallel statement in v1 explains that the person who ‘fears’ the Lord is the one “who walks in His ways.”

Don’t let the pseudo-spiritual killjoys tell you that ‘walking in the Lord’s way’ means following a bunch of rules and going through life with a frown on your face. We’ve got too many legalistic lemon-sucking Christians who think being spiritual means being unemotional and rigid and somber, and for pity

sake, *never have any fun!* When I read about worship in the Old Testament, it was lively and joyful and exciting! We’ve already seen that Jesus wants us to have ‘abundant life’.

But at the same time, don’t let the world sell you its cheap counterfeit to God’s happiness. It’s just sin wrapped up to make it look good. It promises joy, and delivers misery. To walk with the Lord means to obey His word. Like the great old hymn puts it,

*Trust and obey, for there’s no other way,
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

Before I was married I spent two summers in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, leading a ministry of high school and college students whose parents worked for Aramco Oil Company there. These kids had it all. Their parents made a good living, and they had just about anything they wanted. One of the most popular guys was named Jeff. He liked hanging out with the group, even though he wasn’t a Christian, and didn’t attend the Bible studies. After all, we did fun things, and the girls were good-looking. One day I sat with Jeff on the bus going into Khobar, and asked him, “Jeff, if you could do anything with your life, what would you do?” I’ll never forget his reply: “I don’t know what I want to do, but whatever I do, I want to be happy.” He was chasing happiness. He was still chasing it a few months later when he was killed instantly in a car wreck.

A lot of people are pursuing happiness in this life, and trying to find it without God. You never will. You might as well look for a pot at the end of a rainbow! But God guarantees a life of happiness if you walk in His ways.

“Great!” I can hear you thinking. “I’m all in! But what does this blessed life God promises look like?” When God describes the blessed life, He focuses on the family: Dad, mom, and kids. That may sound boring to you, but in a culture where “till death do us part” is ignored, where divorce is gutting marriages and families, perhaps we need to take another look at what real happiness is.

2. Family Portrait: Prosperity and Progeny (2-4)

I call this God’s ‘family portrait.’ It starts with a husband and father. And in God’s family portrait, it clearly positions him in the role of a provider.

You will eat the fruit of your labor; you will be blessed and it will be well with you.

How does God bless a man who lives for Him? He gives him a fruitful labor. Every man in Israel knew that God had the power to multiply their labor, or make it come to nothing. If the Israelites disobeyed God, He got their attention by taking away their crops. Locusts would devour them, or drought would destroy them.

My Bible says that “I, the Lord, do not change!” (Mal. 3.6). It’s still true today. One man works himself to the bone and never has enough. A godly man always seems to be content. That’s what Jesus meant when He said, *Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you* (Matt. 6.33).

God’s blessing is not measured first by your bank balance, but by your priorities. If you put God first, the rest of life is

going to come good. As v2 ends with the phrase, “You will be blessed and it will be well with you.”

The second way God’s blesses us focuses on the home:

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house...

Two factors are highlighted: God’s blessing of *fruitfulness*, and that this happens *within your house*. A fruitful vine is cultivated. It doesn’t just happen. Neither does a happy home just happen: It is cultivated by intentional care. Show me a husband who fears the Lord and walks in His ways, and I will show you a happy wife who flourishes in her home. Show me a wife who fears the Lord and walks in His ways, and I will show you a happy husband who lovingly leads his family.

It is important to read the blessing of fruitfulness in historical context. In an agrarian society, having children to help on the farm was vital. They worked in the fields, and carried on the family name and business. Scripture is clear – children are a gift from the Lord (Ps. 127.3), but that isn’t the only fruit that God blesses those who fear Him and walk in His ways. God gives those who are childless wonderful fruit when they pour their lives into other people’s children.

Mr. and Mrs. MacFarlain were a childless couple when I was in primary school. They would often lead junior church, and when they did, they made the Bible come to life. We learned the books of the Bible in song. I can still sing them the way they taught us today. They acted out the stories, and taught us truths that guided our lives years later. They feared the Lord and walked in His ways, and were like a fruitful vine.

And this leads to the third evidence of God's blessing:

Your children will be like olive plants around your table.

Anyone who's traveled to Israel has seen olive trees: They aren't large, but they produce for centuries. A man planted an olive tree next to his home in hopes that it would provide for his offspring for generations. Often, new trees would sprout from the roots of the tree, and these could be planted to grow into more trees. Do you see the picture? The happiness God provides is evidenced in children who thrive like olive plants. They are the promise of good things for generations to come.

The application is for dads and moms, and by extension, for anyone who invests children's lives. The children's ministry is a place where those who fear the Lord and walk in His ways can 'plant' and 'nurture' children like olive plants, that will affect others for generations to come.

3. Wider Influence: Peace and Longevity (5-6)

This song ends with a prayer in vv5-6:

May the Lord bless you from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel.

Simply stated, having affirmed that God blesses the person who fears the Lord and walks in His ways, the psalmist prays for God's blessings to extend beyond us to our society, and to our children's children. Satan wants to spread his misery and death. God wants to spread His blessing.

It's deflating to focus on the decay in our culture, so this morning, I'm instead going to give you the hope that this psalm provides. The theme of our teaching this summer is 'Fighting For Our Families,' and what this psalm is telling us is that the best way we can do that is by fearing the Lord and walking in His ways.

That may not sound especially astute or insightful, and it won't sell any books. But take all the advice in all the books on how to live the good life, and I'd trade it for what God says in Psalm 128.

It's the good life. It results from fearing the Lord and walking in His ways. It shows itself in God's blessing in the home and in families, and it has a ripple effect that touches our world, for generations to come. It's there for the taking.