

1 Peter 2:11-12

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[0 : 00] Do you live a good life? Do you think of yourself as a good person living a largely good life?

Not perfect, but good. If that is how you see yourself, then you're certainly not alone. I reckon most people would consider, certainly would like to think that they live a good life.

And it is important to live good lives. Peter, in the passage that we are going to be looking at this morning, challenges believers to live good lives. We see that in verse 12 of chapter 2, live such good lives among the pagans, among unbelievers. Live good lives.

God thinks it's important that His people should live good lives. The problem that arises when speaking of the importance of living a good life is that each of us might have quite a different conception of what that is. We might all agree with the basic premise or statement that it's important to live good lives, but what is a good life? What does that look like? What characterizes a good life in God's estimation? And our text, verses 11 and 12 of 1 Peter 2, help us in answering those questions and discovering, from God's perspective, what is a good life? And why is it important for Christians to live a good life? There's really two questions that I want us to grapple with and to consider this morning. The first question is, how are we to live a good life?

What is that? What does it look like? How are we to live a good life? And the second question is, why bother? Why bother? Having established what it looks like, having discovered, as I would anticipate, we will discover that it's no easy thing to live a good life, in God's estimation, and why bother? Why put in all the effort that is involved in living such a life? So, these two questions we want to think about and answer this morning. What is a good life? How are we to live a good life? And then also, why bother to do so?

[2 : 45] First of all then, how are we to live a good life? In these two verses, Peter identifies two aspects of what a good life involves, what we might call the inward and the outward aspect of a good or a God-pleasing life. The inward aspect of such a life is captured in the exhortation that we have there in verse 11, where Peter urges his readers to abstain from sinful desires. The word desires especially is significant there as we identify this inward aspect of a good life. It involves this, it involves abstaining from sinful desires. The outward aspect of a good life is found in the call there in verse 12, to live such good lives among the pagans, among those whom you live around, among those who do not share the faith, live such good lives. That's evidently something outward, it's something visible, it's intended to be visible. So, you have the inward aspect that has to do with your desires that others don't see, that others aren't aware of, but it also has this outward aspect of the life that you live that is seen by those around you. Now, you'll notice that while I've used the language of a good life in introducing this sermon as the overarching challenge, Peter uses the language of living a good life to speak of one aspect of that God-pleasing life, namely the outward aspect, live such good lives among the pagans. But what of interest to us is that you have these two sides of the good life, the inward aspect of a good life. And let's examine each of these in turn, these two aspects. So, as we think of this first question, how are we to live a good life, what is a good life, we want to now think of these two aspects of a good life, the inward and the outward.

First of all then, the inward aspect, abstain from sinful desires. Peter begins with any serious description or discussion of a God-pleasing life must begin, in the heart. The heart, your heart, is the heart of the matter. In our text, this inward aspect, this central element is captured by one word, the word desires. Abstain from sinful desires. Now, this word they had in verse 11, and the word that is translated desires is one that we've encountered before some time ago when we were looking at what Paul has to say in Romans chapter 1, and we spent a little time considering this word. The Greek word is *epithumia*, and if you remember that, then you get lots and lots of brownie points because it was a long time ago that we were looking at this. But we re-encounter this word

translated desires.

And in Romans chapter 1 and verse 24, this word desires forms part of a phrase, the desires of the heart. Then in Romans 7, Paul explicitly introduces this idea of the heart, desires of the heart, desires of the heart. And that captures the sense of the word. Our heart desires, our deepest desires, those things that we most value, those things that we most treasure, those things that we most yearn for, our deepest desires. Of this, Peter is speaking here in his letter.

Peter, really the answer to the question, what do you most desire, is, if answered honestly, a profoundly revealing question. You could almost say, you are what you desire. And that's something maybe for you to just ponder on for a moment. What do you most desire? That tells you a great deal about who you are. Now, the word desires here, as Peter uses it in verse 11, the word in itself is morally neutral. It can refer to good or bad desires. Indeed, it's used in different ways in the New Testament.

So, it can speak of those things that are good to desire, good desires. But it can also, as is the case here, speak of desires that are wrong, bad desires, sinful desires. And on this occasion, Peter is very explicit in making it clear that he is concerned with desires that are sinful. He describes them, and the way it's translated here in verse 11 is sinful desires. Literally, what Peter says is desires of the flesh, of the fleshly desires, where that word is being used in that more general or broader sense of sinful desires. And it is these desires that Peter is warning us against. What are these sinful desires that we are to abstain from? Well, certainly, they include what we would readily identify as desires of the flesh, to use the literal language that Peter uses. Indeed, Peter comes back to give us some examples of such desires in this very letter. In chapter 4 and in verse 3, he reminds them of the life that they have come from, the life that they used to live, and he says to his readers there, for you have spent enough time in the time in the past doing what pagans choose to do, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. And he goes on. And these things, without going into a detailed consideration of them, clearly are activities, desires that come under this heading or this umbrella of desires of the flesh or sinful desires. But it would be important for us to realize that here in verse 11,

[9 : 24] Peter is not limiting himself to those more scandalous, if you wish, sinful activities. But really, within the category of sinful desires lies any desire for that which is contrary to God's will.

Now, that could be a consuming desire to secure material prosperity. Not that such prosperity in and of itself is a bad thing, but if that is what drives you, if that is what consumes you, then it has become for you a sinful desire that Peter says, abstain from. It might be a desire to get your own way in a relationship or in life generally to be the one who always gets his or her own way. Maybe a desire to enjoy power and influence for selfish ends. All of these things Peter is warning us that he's saying, abstain from sinful desires. And take careful note that though wrong desires will ordinarily break forth into wrong actions, they will not always do so. But even when they don't, even when sinful desires don't then lead into sinful actions, they are still displeasing to God and damaging to your soul. And we'll come back to that in a few moments. Of course, the usual pattern of what happens with sinful desires is identified by James. In James 1, just the previous book of the Bible, in James 1 and verses 14 and 15, James uses the same word that Peter uses, translated desire, when he explains the usual process, what usually happens with such desires. We read there in James 1 and verse 14, but each one is tempted when by his own evil desire, the same word, he is dragged away and enticed. Then after desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death. That's the usual pattern. But what I'm saying here is simply that even when that doesn't happen, even when the desire remains something entirely inward, it is still displeasing to God and still damaging to your soul. Well, what are we to do with sinful desires? What does Peter say that we are to do with them? Well, he tells us we are to abstain from them, abstain from sinful desires. We are to strenuously and decidedly avoid them. We are to keep our distance from them. The apostle Paul uses the same word when he urges Timothy in 2 Timothy 2 and verse 22 to flee the evil desires of youth. Flee from them, abstain from them, reject them, keep your distance from such desires. This is a battle that is fought in our hearts and minds, and it is a battle that we can win. And this is so important to stress. We can win this battle. So often we think that when it comes to our inward desires, we have no power. We are the impotent victims of our fantasies and of our desires. There's nothing we can do with them. The most we can do is try and restrain them that they wouldn't then become sinful actions. But that's not the case.

We can control such sinful desires. Your feelings, if we can use the language of feelings, your feelings, contrary to the popular view, are not a morally neutral given. It's not good enough to say, well, that's just the way I am. That's the way my mind works. That's the way my heart is. That's the way God made me. It's not my fault. No, Peter says, abstain from sinful desires. This is something that you must do, and it's something that you can do with God's help. Now, the importance of this inward aspect of a good life is reinforced by the language that Peter employs. He urges us to abstain from such desires. And this language of being urged there in verse 11, dear friends, I urge you. The language has the sense of an appeal, an urgent appeal, a heartfelt appeal. I urge you. I strongly urge you, dear friends, abstain from sinful desires. Indeed, the tense that Peter employs there in verse 11 is a tense that has the sense of continually abstain from sinful desires. Day by day, all the days of your life. This is what you must do.

Do you abstain from sinful desires? Will you abstain from sinful desires? Is your mind a playground where sinful desires roam and fester unimpeded? You've got it all under control, so you think. But from such sinful desires, as James makes very clear, are born sinful actions. So, a good life or a God-pleasing life involves this inward aspect, but there is also what we are calling an outward aspect. And the outward aspect is captured in the words of verse 12, live such good lives among the pagans. What can we say about this outward aspect? Well, I think we can do justice or certainly significant justice to what Peter is saying by using three words that speak of this life that we are being called to live. And the three words that I suggest can help us are the words quality, consistency, and visibility. Peter is urging

[16:00] Christians to live a life of moral quality or excellence. Indeed, the word translated good, there in verse 12, live such good lives can, according to context, be translated beautiful. And an argument could be made for employing such a translation here, live such beautiful lives. We are to live as Christians beautiful lives, lives that are attractive, lives that are winsome, lives characterized by integrity, by honesty, by kindness, by generosity, humble and unassuming service to others. Those are the kind of good, beautiful lives that we are being urged to live. Even in that very fleeting description of such a life, does that sound like anybody you know? Well, yes, we are to live as Jesus lived. Now, this is difficult. It's tough to live such a life. It is no easy matter to live a good life as described by the Scriptures. And Peter says, not just good lives, but he speaks of such good lives as if to lay further emphasis on the quality of such lives. Live such good lives among the pagans and so on. So, the word quality helps us to understand something of what we are being called to, but also the second word that I suggested is consistency.

The call to live is a call that speaks of our day-to-day conduct. Peter is not calling you to some occasional heroic gesture, but he is calling you to a life that is lived day by day with a God-pleasing consistency. And this is tough. This is maybe even more difficult to live such a life day by day, every day. We all have bad days. We have days when we struggle to serve our nearest and dearest, never mind others. But the call that is being laid upon us is a call to godly consistency. So, there's quality, but there's also consistency. And then thirdly, in this outward aspect of a good life, we have what we're calling visibility. We are to live such lives among the pagans, where we can understand that simply to be a reference to those who do not share the faith. We are not of the world, but we most assuredly are and must be in the world. We live among the pagans. We don't look on from a safe distance. We live among the pagans, where this reality is not to be viewed as a necessary evil, but as a God-given opportunity. We don't say, oh, I wish I didn't have to live in such an evil world with such terrible people surrounding me. No, we say, thank you, Lord, for placing me in this world, where I can live a life that is honoring to you. We are to be visible. Peter is very clear that this visibility is important. Now, this does not mean, of course, that we're to crassly draw attention to how good we are, but it does mean that we are to live such good lives among our colleagues and neighbors and friends that they will see the quality and consistency of our lives. And this is difficult. You know it's difficult. You know that it's tough to live such a life.

So, we've seen, at least in some measure, what a good life is all about, what a God-pleasing life is as described or at least as suggested by what Peter is saying here. Such a life in both its inward and its outward aspects. And it is a big ask. It's difficult and it's demanding. And that very reality leads us, rather helpfully, into our second question. And the second question, maybe even as I posed it at the beginning, you thought, well, that's a bit of a strange way of putting it. But our second question was, why bother? You know, why bother to live such a life? It is difficult. It is tough. It's a big ask.

Do we struggle to live a life like this? Why bother? You know, why put in all the effort to live such a life? Why should you resist your desires? They're your desires. Why don't you just succumb to your desires?

Why don't you just do what you feel? Why don't you just do what you want to do? Why not? Why not allow your heart and mind to be a playground of desire? Why put in the effort required to live beautiful and consistent lives? Why bother? Well, Peter gives us a threefold answer that gives us, if we grasp the three strands of Peter's answer, gives us every reason to bother to live such a life. And the threefold answer concerns our identity, our security, and our purpose as believers. Let's just think of these three things. A three-pronged answer to the question, why bother to live such a life?

[21 : 43] First of all, our identity. Why bother to live a good, God-pleasing life? Well, because of who you are.

Peter explicitly grounds his call to a holy life in our identity as believers. Notice in verse 11, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires. What Peter is doing as he calls believers to abstain from sinful desires, to live such good lives, he's saying, remember who you are. Remember who you are. You are strangers and aliens in the world. Peter is reminding believers that this world is not our permanent residence. Our citizenship is in heaven, and therefore, our conduct is to be as citizens of heaven. Earthly conduct in the sense of sinful conduct is not appropriate for heavenly citizens. And so, in response to the question, well, why should I abstain from sinful desires? Peter says, remember who you are. You are a citizen of heaven. You are a child of God.

You are a disciple of Jesus Christ. It's not appropriate for you to live such a life. This is the life that you are called to. Why bother because of who you are? It's as fundamental as that, because of who you are.

But I think there's another aspect of our identity that Peter refers to that is lost in translation. Then in verse 11, we read, dear friends, I urge you. But this word that is translated dear friends is literally the word beloved. Some of the Bible versions opt for a more literal translation. And so, what Peter is saying is, beloved, I urge you. Now, it may well be that Peter is using that word beloved to emphasize primarily his own love for those to whom he is writing. And that's what I was suggesting as I was speaking with the children. And I'm very relaxed with that being perhaps the primary purpose of this word beloved. Peter is saying, I love you. And because I love you, I'm exhorting you in this way. But of course, there is a more wonderful truth that is communicated by describing the believers as beloved. And it is this, that they are beloved of God. That God loves them. Yes, Peter loves them. But God loves them. And this is central to their identity. And this has to do with the matter of the lives that we live.

Because God loves us, because we are loved of God, to live a good life is an opportunity, a welcome opportunity for us to show God our gratitude and our love to Him. As those loved by God, the living of a good life, of a God-pleasing life, serves as that welcome opportunity for us to show our love for the one who so love us. Why bother? Why bother to live a good life because of who you are?

[25 : 14] But there's a second strand to Peter's answer, and it concerns what I'm calling our security, our spiritual security. You see, Peter says to those who he is sending his letter to and to us, us, he says that failure to abstain from sinful desires will have consequences. These desires, says Peter, war against your soul. Notice the language he uses there in verse 11, abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul. Peter is very clear that a spiritual battle is raging, and failure to engage the enemy in the manner prescribed by God will result in spiritual damage to you. You will pay a heavy price if you fail to abstain from sinful desires. Now, using the language of the battlefield, using the language of warfare that Peter uses, are we saying that the war for your soul could ultimately be lost? By no means.

Are we saying that nor is Peter saying that? The war for your soul, thank God, has already been won at Calvary. But if you fail to abstain from sinful desires, there will be spiritual damage that you will suffer. What kind of damage? A loss of joy in the faith, an increasing spiritual impotence, a loss of effectiveness in God's service, a prayer life that is at best perfunctory and at worst non-existence, a lack of appetite for God's Word and the gathering of His people, and we could go on. Serious damage to your soul if you fail to abstain from sinful desires. And do you know what the worst part is, or often is, that so often we don't even realize, realize the damage that we're doing to our own

soul. You see, such is our spiritual blindness that we are damaging ourselves and we don't even realize that that is what's happening. And sometimes when we finally do realize, I wouldn't say it's too late, but certainly an awful lot of time has been lost and a lot of damage has been done. Why bother to live a good life? Why bother to abstain from sinful desires for the good of your soul? But there's a third strand to Peter's answer, and it concerns our purpose as believer. His answer to the question, why bother? And the third strand of his answer concerns our purpose. What is our ultimate purpose as believers?

What is man's chief end? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Our chief end, your chief end, is to glorify God. And Peter explicitly links a good life to God being glorified. Peter says there is a direct causal connection between the two. How does that work? Peter is not saying here that living a good life is in itself God-glorifying. Of course it is, but that's not what he is primarily saying here. Rather, Peter is pointing to the fact that there is a God-glorifying consequence of living a good life. What is that consequence? Well, it's not really that complicated. He states it so clearly there in verse 12. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us. It's not complicated. The connection that He is making between a good life and God being glorified by others is not complicated, nor is it original. Because Jesus taught precisely the same truth. And we read the passage in Matthew 5. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. All that Peter does is echo what Jesus had said before. You, Christian friend, by abstaining from sinful desires and by living such a good and beautiful life can be the means to draw unbelievers to the gospel, that they might put their trust in Jesus and glorify [30 : 15] God with their lips and with their lives. This is a proven evangelistic strategy, if you wish. Of course, it's much more than a strategy, but if we want to use that language. As effective today as it has ever been.

When will this happen? When will others glorify God as a consequence of the good lives that we live? Well, we can certainly answer that question in a couple of ways. In the first way, we can say, not before a great deal of grief along the way. You see, before this happens, before there are those who glorify God having seen the lives that we live, before that happens, these very people will accuse you of doing wrong. That's what Peter says in verse 12. Though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God. The order is fairly obvious. They begin hostile, they begin accusing you, they begin opposing you, but as they see and they hear the matter of consistency is so important day by day, week by week, they see the life that you live. Some, not all, some are drawn, are drawn to the gospel, are drawn to the Savior and put their trust in Him. When will this happen?

Well, after an awful lot of grief for us along the way. But in addition to that, there's also seemingly a clear time reference in what Peter says. He speaks of the day God visits us, or literally, on a day of visitation. What is Peter saying about the when of when this will happen? When will men and women glorify God on account of the lives that they have been witnesses of? The answer to that question really is one of two. It can be understood as a reference to Christ's return. That's a possibility.

But even if we do understand it in that way, it would be important to stress that Peter is speaking of those who gladly and freely glorify God, not of those who will do so under the weight of divine compulsion, if we can use that language, on that great and awful day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess. Here, Peter is speaking of those who in this life had come to embrace the Savior and so glorify Him. And if it's a reference to when He returns, well, they'll do so then as they already do so now.

But perhaps it's better to simply understand this reference of Peter, the day when God visits us, as a day of God's visitation, a day happily repeated time after time, when God by His Spirit visits us in saving power and draws men and women to Himself. And what do those so visited do? Well, they glorify God. And we join with them in glorifying God.

[33 : 21] Why bother living a good life? It's difficult. It's tough. It's a big ass. It involves your soul. It involves your heart. It involves those things that are so difficult for you to control. It involves the life you live out in this world with all the pressures and all the stresses and all the temptations.

And it's tough. Why bother? Do you feel the weight and compelling force of God's answer through Peter?

Because of who you are. For the good and security of your soul. Because of what your ultimate purpose is, it is to bring glory to God. Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to You and we thank You that You are a God who speaks to us. You are a God who speaks to us clearly. And we pray that we would hear Your voice and we pray that You would help us to obey You.

We come and we come confessing our shortcomings, confessing our sin, confessing that we often fail to abstain from sinful desires, confessing that our lives so often fall so far short of the good lives, of the beautiful lives, of the attractive lives that we are called to live. We pray that in the light of our past failings, we would not give up hope, we would not throw in the towel, we would not imagine that this is a call that is beyond us, but that we would realize that with Your help and as we would cling to You and ask for You to help us and to direct us by Your Spirit, we would indeed, day by day, live lives such as those described and that such lives would indeed be the means whereby others glorify God. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[35 : 41] Amen. We'll close our service this morning by singing again. We'll sing in Psalm 51. In Sing Psalm, Psalm 51, we'll sing verses 1 to 12, and we'll sing these verses to the tune Ottawa.

O my God, have mercy on me in Your steadfast love, I pray, in Your infinite compassion. My transgressions wipe away, cleanse me from iniquity, wash my sin away from me. If you're conscious that in your life you have fallen short in these matters we've been considering, you've sinned, then take the opportunity, as we sing these verses, to confess your sin, to repent of your sin, that it would be washed away, and that you begin with a fresh sheet of paper to live a life that is pleasing to God. Let's stand and sing these verses.

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