

Really Living!

1 Thessalonians 3:8-13

"For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;

Night & day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, & might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? Now God himself & our Father, & our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase & abound in love one toward another, & toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

What does it mean to really live? If you were to ask the average person out there on the street, "What does it mean to really live?" what kind of answer would they give you?

One of the first things that will surface is **money**: Really want to live? You have to have the bucks! Maybe you know people who feel that way. It is easy for us to get pious here & say, "Money really has nothing to do with happiness!" but let's be careful not to be too pious. It is kind of nice to be able to pay your bills; nice to know you can make the house payment, or the car payment. It takes money to live comfortably, doesn't it?

Joe Lewis, former heavy weight champion of the world, had a great saying: "Money? Ah, its not that important. But it does quiet my nerves." Sophie Tucker, just before she turned 70, made an observation about life: "From birth to age 18, a girl needs good parents. From 18 to 35, she needs good looks. From 35 to 55, she needs a good job. Beyond age 55, she needs cash." **But we know that money in itself is not the good life!**

Someone would say it takes **youth** to really live! If I could just take away 30 years, & be young again, I'd find out what real living is; if I could just be young again. Age comes so quickly, doesn't it. Jim Dobson has the best line I ever heard: "About the time your face clears up your mind gets fuzzy." We get old so quick! But is it really true that being young is really living? Ever meant anyone who wanted to be a junior higher again? Junior highers are sometimes called "pre-people." Did you know that nearly 6,000 teenager suicides are reported annually in the USA? Youth, in itself, certainly does not provide the good life!

How about **good looks**? Beauty! But then we discover that the Hollywood stars, with all their good looks, are among the most miserable. We read about the tragedies of their lives in *People Magazine*. We could go on with other ideas: education, travel, etc. **But what does the Bible say to us about really living?**

In 1 Thessalonians 3:8, we discover a description as to what it means to "really live." Let's look at what the Apostle Paul tells us. **1 Thessalonians 3:8**, "For now we really live..." Many translations include the word "really" in that statement. Did you know that was in the Scriptures? **"For now we really live, if you stand fast in the Lord"** (1 Thess. 3:8). What does it mean to really live? **To really experience the fullness of life is to know that you have a strong & firm faith in the Lord!** The very substance of life, to really live, is to know the Lord Jesus Christ, & to remain **firm** in Him. Knowing that your faith is alive keeps you alive! It is the very breath of life to us that we have a strong faith in the Lord! A strong faith is what it takes to truly live! In fact, we can bear most anything, as long as we know that our faith remains strong in the Lord.

May I ask you this morning: "How is your faith in the Lord doing?" Is it strong & firm? Or is it weak & flimsy & shaky? How is **your faith** today?

Paul does not mention money; he doesn't mention education; doesn't mention comfort; doesn't mention beauty or youth; any of those things. But in the following verses (vrs. 9-13), Paul explains to us just what it means to have a strong faith in the Lord! Four things we need to do to have a strong faith in Christ our Lord.

1. To Have A Strong Faith in the Lord means Living in Joy! -- vr. 9.

In verse 9, Paul says, "for all the joy wherewith we joy (rejoice)." Paul, who had been hounded by the devil himself, misunderstood, abused, stoned, & still he writes of having joy! Joy is really a matter of attitude! We can choose to live beneath our circumstances, **or** we can choose living in joy!

Some of you have become grim people; you wear long faces; you seldom smile. You don't mean to be that way, but it has happened. You were not that way as a little child, but life has become hard. Did you know that the average adult laughs 15 times a day, while a child laughs 400 times a day. There is something terrific about little kids, & they are just fun to be around.

A small boy & his parents are eating out in a nice restaurant. As mom is sitting at the table, the boy & his father come back from the restroom, & the boy announces in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear: "I remembered to wash my hands, mommy; -- but daddy didn't."

I always liked Art Linkletter. He could get the greatest thing out of little kids. He had a little three-year-old girl sitting on the stool, put a mic in front of her face, & he asked: "What do you do every day?" She answers, "First of all I help momma fix breakfast." "Fix

breakfast?" "Ya, every day." "Well, what do you do to help your momma fix breakfast?" "Well, she always puts toast in the toaster, & she lets me **flush it.**" Isn't that terrific! Only a little kid can get away with flushing the toaster.

If we could somehow return to our childhood, we would be laughing a whole lot more than what we do.

We should stop taking life so seriously! Who wrote the book that says, "When you get old, you are suppose to get serious. Now get serious!" I can not find that in this Holy Book anywhere! Isn't it fun & enjoyable to be around people who are still enjoying life? Isn't it great to find folk whose attitude is above their circumstances? People who live in joy?

My friends, are you carrying around some weight, some hatred, some grudge, some long standing ugly feeling toward someone? Everyone here has somebody they can blame for something (me included). But I choose not to live that way; I have determined I will not grow old as a bitter-old-man. And I encourage you not to become bitter in life either! You do have a choice!

Keep the child alive within you! Your children need it! Your grandchildren, the folk at work, your friends at church! Some Christians come to church Sunday mornings looking like they drank vinegar for breakfast. They sit in their seats with their arms crossed & a frown on their faces that says: "Well, here I am; bless me, if you can!" Joy is all a matter of attitude! It is an attitude of genuine gratitude!

I saw a sign recently that said: "When I die, I want to go peacefully; -- like my grandfather did in his sleep. Not screaming like the other passengers who were riding in his car."

2. To Have A Strong Faith in the Lord means Living in Prayer! vr. 10

In verse 10, Paul writes, "Night & day we praying earnestly..." Want to really live? Then stand firm in the Lord by living in sincere & earnest prayer! **Be earnest in the practice of prayer!** You will really begin to live when you really begin to pray!

Paul tells us in Philippians 4, "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, & thank Him for all He has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts & minds as you live in Christ Jesus" (4:6-7 NLT). Isn't that a great thought! Then put it into practice! When you pray the very angels of heaven march guard duty around your heart giving you peace!

Here is a **project** for you: Make up a worry list & a prayer list. Most of us have a legal size page for our worry list, & a 3x5 card for our prayer list. I suggest we transfer them! Let your **worry** list become your **prayer** list. **When you make it a matter of prayer, cease to let it be a matter of care.**

When is your time alone with God? You **do** have a time you spend with God, don't you? By all means you should! You know what those things are that have been draining your energy & your joy. Why in the world are you carrying them? You were not made to carry them! It's like a pack on your back. It becomes heavier every day. Roll your burden onto the Lord, & He will sustain you!

When I was in college, working hard to pay for an education, I got into a real tight financial situation, where I thought I'd have to drop out of school, & go to work full time just to get caught up financially. In fact I owed a 40 cent library fine & couldn't pay it, & I was not permitted to check out any books from the library until I paid the fine.

I prayed about it earnestly, telling the Lord He would have to do something to help me for I could not do it by myself. Would you believe, that very week I received a check for \$50 from a business man in Iowa whom I have never meant. He sent a check to the president of the college with the request that he give it to some worthy student, & out of a student body of 1000, the president picked me & had it placed in my mail box.

The next week I went home for Spring break, & there waiting for me was a my tax refund check. Wow! An uncle called me & asked if I could paint the inside of his kitchen cabinets while I was home! I said, "You bet!" I went to buy the paint, & the owner of the paint store saw me & said, "Lyle, I didn't know you were home." Then he told me he had just contracted to paint the inside of a grocery store at night while they were closed, & asked if I could help. Again, I was thrilled at the opportunity to earn some money.

All week, while I was at home on Spring break, I would paint all day at my uncle's, go home & sleep a couple hours, paint all night at the grocery store, go home get a couple hours of sleep, & go back to my uncle's & paint his cabinets. I did that all week, & returned to college as refreshed as if I had slept the whole time I was home.

When I put everything together, the check from a business man in Iowa, the Income Tax refund, the checks from my uncle & from painting the inside of the grocery store, I had enough to pay all my bills in full, including the library fine! And it **confirmed to my heart that God does answer sincere & earnest prayers! Praise His name!** My friends, be earnest in prayer! By living in earnest prayer you will experience an inner peace! That is really living!

3. To Have A Strong Faith in the Lord means Living in Love! vr. 12

In verse 12, Paul writes, "(May) the Lord make you to increase & abound in love one toward another, & toward all men." Other worlds, may your love abound toward all men & women, of any denomination, in any part of the world, of any color of skin, of any culture or race, or language. The Bible says "toward **all** men." That is so universal. We are so limited. We are such prejudice people. We have our favorites.

When we get to heaven -- we are going to be surprised to see some people there! Want another thought? **They** are going to be surprised to see **you** there! Why? Because of the way we treated them on earth. To live above with the saints we love -- Oh, that will be glory. But to live below with the saints we know -- well, that's another story!

Let's bring this close to home. How are you getting along with your family? Let's start there! Are you & your kids talking? Brothers & sisters still speaking to one another? Still getting along? How about husband & wife?

Here is an acrostic for the word love: -- L-O-V-E. You may want to write this down. **L** -- stands for **listen**. When you love someone, you listen to them. Listen when they talk! Hear what they are saying. **O** -- stands for **overlook**. You overlook petty little differences. Jeannette & I have been together in marriage for 50 years now, mainly because we have been willing to do the "O." We overlook a lot of silly little things about each other. Had something happen this past week; -- it's none of your business!

I heard of a couple who were celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, when someone asked them what the secret was for their lasting relationship. The husband explained that when they first got married, they agreed upon the idea that when a disagreement occurred, rather than argue or get mad, one of them would just walk outside until they had a chance to think things over & to cool down. Then he said, "We have enjoyed 50 years together, due to my love of the great out-of-doors."

V -- stands for **value** them. Respect your mate; value your children. **E** -- stands for **express** it. Show your love -- demonstrate your love. **L-O-V-E**. -- **Listen** -- **Overlook** -- **Value** -- **Express**. My friends, live in love for one another! By living in God's love you will experience what it means to really live!

4. To Have A Strong Faith in the Lord means Living in Holiness! -- vr. 13.

In verse 13, Paul writes, "To the end He may stablish your hearts unblameable in **holiness** before God." This last one is the **toughest** one! We don't hear that word "holiness" much in our society today!

People of all kind are calling out, asking for acceptance to alternative life styles of all sorts. My friends, if **we**, in the church, don't set the standard for a holiness life style, who will? The politicians in Washington wouldn't call for a holy life style. The gay community working on their agenda, wouldn't call for a holy life style. The secular schools & universities across our land will not call for a holy life style. The powerful unions working for better wages, aren't calling for a holy life style. **We**, who make up the church, must once again study the Bible -- & see that God desires a **holy** people -- & we must proclaim its message!

In chapter 4:7, we read those words, "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness (to be impure), but unto holiness (to live a holy life)." No immoral acts; no affairs in marriage; no filthiness of habit; no dark hidden secrets in the hopes that no one finds out. Don't hide your sin! Confess it; get rid of it; deal with it.

Get help with that addiction if you need too! And **by the grace of God**, seek to practice holiness & purity in your life!

As we read & study the Bible, it is impossible to ignore God's call to holiness. When we find ourselves at odds with holiness, we are in conflict with a Holy God! The holiness to which God has called us is to be patterned after His holiness. God has written in His Word: "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Our example is in Jesus Christ! -- **Holiness is Christlikeness!**

Jerry Bridges is an evangelical author & popular conference speaker, & has served faithfully on the staff at The Navigators for over 50 years. His most popular book, *The Pursuit Of Holiness*, has sold over one million copies! He writes, "God has made provision for our holiness. Through Christ He delivered us from sin's reign so that we now can **resist** sin. **But the responsibility for resisting is ours.** God does not do that for us. We need to pray daily for humility & honesty to see (our) sinful attitudes for (what) they really are, & then for grace & discipline to **root them out** of our minds & replace them with thoughts pleasing to God." I believe Jerry Bridges is **right!** We need to be in active **pursuit of holiness!** We do many things in our "pursuit of happiness" -- but as Christians, we ought to be in "pursuit of holiness" wherein there is true happiness!

You may think that holiness is too strict; too straight laced; too boring. But living with a clear conscience, & knowing the peace of God in your hearts, is the most exciting life style there is this side of heaven! I personally have found more joy, more happiness, more delight, more cheerfulness, more contentment, more gladness, in living for God, than I ever found in the pleasures of this old sin-filled world! In all my years of serving Christ, I have never met a person who totally lived for the Lord, & regretted it. But I've met a lot of people who have lived **without** Christ, & **in the end regretted it very deeply!** You want to really live? Then be established in purity & holiness. Surrender yourself completely to God's will, & live in God's holiness.

Conclusion: -- What does it mean to really live? It doesn't take money; it doesn't take travel; it doesn't mean comfort; it doesn't mean education; doesn't mean youth. None of these! If you really want to live, a full & abundant life, it calls for a strong faith in Jesus Christ through His saving & sanctifying grace! The Bible says, "Now we really live, if you stand fast in the Lord." Knowing that your faith is alive keeps you alive! It is the very breath of life to us that we stand firm in the Lord. In fact, we can bear most anything, as long as we know that we remain strong in the Lord! A strong faith in Jesus Christ is what it takes to truly live!

You can do it! You really can! You can really live! I'm not talking about our bodies, or our faces, our bank accounts, the tangible. **I'm talking about our souls!** This is **soul-work!** I'm talking about the condition of your soul. That is what God saves; He saves our souls. His work goes down deep into the inner life, beyond the skin, the bone & the marrow & the joints. God's work gets into the soul, the very heart of our inner being! Let me ask you this morning: **Is it well with your soul? Are you really living?**

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