

October 11, 2020

## “The Good Life” Psalm 128

FCF: Our view of God as a miser

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) The LORD is holding forth the good life before us.  
(magnet) We need to lay hold of it.

### SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

A “miser” would be (**READ**) “someone who is reluctant to spend, sometimes to the point of foregoing even basic comforts and necessities, in order to hoard money or other possessions.” No doubt you’ve known such folks. History records some sad stories, folks who blackmailed their friends for free meals, ate rotten garbage, scammed free clinics, and even forced their house guests to use pay phones that they installed in their mansions. But that’s what a miser does.

Imagine you were their neighbor. Knowing what you knew about them, would you ever look to them for help? Of course not. You have no expectation of kindness or generosity.

Here’s the question. Is that how we see God? No expectation of kindness or generosity and so no freedom to ask for help? Thankfully, such an image doesn’t square with the Bible.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** **Psalm 128**

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

### SERMON INTRODUCTION:

What is the good life? Is it just about wealth and fame? To answer that, a Harvard Study of Adult Development tracked the lives of 724 men over a period of 75 years. The research team studied their work lives, their home lives, tracked their personal relationships, conversations, and health records. The result? It turns out that good relationships play a huge role in the good life. The findings here are well worth noting. As are the questions this raises about our priorities.

That said, we know that people aren’t perfect. Friends can fail us. Close associates may abandon us when times get hard. And, even beyond that, we all die. So, as important as our relationships are, perhaps we need to look a bit further and ask, “What makes for blessing in life?” Blessing is a biblical category. To bless God means to give Him praise. For man to be blessed conveys a state of happiness, a deep gladness. It assumes that we are the recipient and God is the benefactor. It is to know there are paths that lead to blessedness and paths that lead away from it. It touches every human longing. And, as our text shows, the LORD is holding this blessedness, the good life, before us. That may surprise you, depending on what view of God you may have. But the LORD is holding the good life before us. We need to lay hold of it.

What would that mean? Taking these three things to heart. First, the consistency of the blessing. Second, the community of the blessing. And, third, the complexity of the blessing.

### I. CONSISTENCY

First, consistency - what this blessing is, where it comes from (**READ Psalm 128:1-2**).

A) *Reverence*

1. Definition

It all begins with a fear of the LORD. Not terror or fright but reverence and awe. Elsewhere, we read that this is the beginning of wisdom. And the absence of such fear is the root of all evil.

## 2. Explanation

Let's unpack this. We all fear something. Something will loom largest in our eyes. It's not a matter of "if" but "what" that will be. The Bible says that wisdom begins in letting this be God.

### *B) Obedience*

So this blessing begins with reverence. Which then overflows into obedience.

#### 1. Submission to God

Such obedience is rooted in a heart's submission to God, a yielding to His laws and commands. Which involves living according to His word, a life shaped by justice, mercy, and faithfulness.

#### 2. Relationship with God

(**READ Psalm 119:1-3**) This sort of obedience implies a relationship, a reciprocal knowing.

That's what this good life consists of - both reverence and obedience, each tied together.

### *Illustration:*

This has to be emphasized. God is not a cosmic vending machine or a great celestial food truck. The good life comes not by our faithful labors that warrant a certain response. It is not an arrangement where we receive what we deserve. We receive what we need. And by His mercy.

### *Application:*

Which then changes everything. For example, how this impacts the way we respond to suffering. What do we do in the face of situations - physical, financial, relational - we didn't ask for and would like to be rid of? If you think life is about getting what you deserve and you think you've earned a pretty high score, then when the suffering comes, how will you feel? Cheated and embittered. But if you realize that all of life is a gift and all the good things we receive from God's hand are utterly undeserved, that changes the whole picture. For it's all of His mercy.

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## **II. COMMUNITY**

Which takes us from the consistency of this blessing to its community, from the source of the blessing to its overflow, where it comes from and who it involves (**READ Psalm 128:3-6**).

### *A) Upon Us*

There are three particular spheres mentioned as this blessing comes upon us.

#### 1. On the table

In vv.1-2, we see it on the table. An abundance of covenant blessing, countering the Fall's curse.

#### 2. Around the table

Now, in vv.3-4, we see it around the table. A wife like a fruitful vine - her charm and allure. And then children like olive shoots - an image pointing to the hope and promise of the family's future.

#### 3. Beyond the table

And, in vv.5-6, we see the blessing going beyond the table. It multiplies and expands to Israel, to God's people. It's traced from the center and moving outwards like ripples across a pond.

#### *B) Through Us*

But there's still more to say here. No few commentators have picked up on this blessing coming upon us and then moving through us. Again, starting at the center and moving out.

##### 1. Connection

Which points to a connection between us, to community life. We share common burdens and blessings. Each prospering on the outer circles because of the blessing on the circles further in.

##### 2. Intention

Which is the LORD's purpose and intention for us. This is a theme in both the Old and New Testament ([READ 2 Corinthians 9:8-9](#)). God's provision to us is not solely for us. It is also for those around us. We have the privilege of participating in the Lord's provision for each other.

The good life and its pursuit involves not just us but those around us. This is a much broader vision than we are accustomed to. It flies in the face of our western individual mindset.

#### *Illustration:*

It is a completely different way of seeing. It is a true paradigm shift, not unlike the Copernican Revolution when scientists began to realize that we could no longer think of the Earth at the center of the universe but in orbit around the Sun. It is a different way of seeing.

#### *Application:*

Taken to heart, this really shifts things around. It opens the way for a rich life of glad generosity, freed by the assurance of God's good supply ([READ 2 Corinthians 8:9](#)). Think of the implications of Paul's words. There is no more need to hold back, to play it safe, to hoard our resources. We are rich. We have all the resources of heaven. We are to live and give out of that.

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### **III. COMPLEXITY**

Which brings us to the third point - not just where and who but how this could be. Think with me. Does this picture not seem, at least at some level, somewhat fanciful? Which means we have to talk about not only the coherence and community of this blessing but its complexity.

#### *A) Nuance*

##### 1. Wisdom literature

There is nuance here. This is a wisdom psalm. Which means it has themes like other wisdom literature, describing not so much how things always are but how they are meant to be, how they one day will be, and how we should live in light of that. We have to read this with that in mind.

##### 2. Historical place

But there is another nuance to consider here. Oddly enough, we talked about it in a Fireside Chat last week, "Already...But Not Yet." The question to ask is not "Where are we?" but "When are

we?” And the answer is “Between the first and second comings of Jesus.” Our status and forgiveness have been secured. But the transformation of all things has yet to be. It is sure but has yet to come. These are the sort of nuances that must be kept in mind as we read these words.

### B) Provision

That’s part of the complexity. As is how the LORD intends to provide for us. I alluded to this earlier regarding the community. This is not automatic, just falling down from the sky.

#### 1. Intercession

The psalmist assumes hard work in the field, the stewarding of marital bonds, the exercise of wise parenting at home. And something else - prayer. That’s what vv.5-6 are about, a prayer that each may come to know such blessing and that the whole community would benefit from it.

#### 2. Interdependence

So there is intercession involved. And interdependence. We may well be the answer to such prayers. Think back to the family. Many wish to have a family who don’t. And many others who do have a family wish it was different. The solution? (READ Mark 10:29-30) The church is now our family, bonds that supersede all others and provide for what we lack and long for.

There is a layer of complexity to the good life - both in the nuance and in the provision.

#### Application:

Whatever else you have been told, the Bible is not simplistic. It is realistic. It is true to how things are. It is not simplistic. And that should hardly be surprising, considering its source.

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### CONCLUSION:

This life of blessing from the LORD does assume a certain posture. That is, not just the humility to receive from Him but the sensibility to receive with the consistency, community, and complexity of His blessing in mind. Not insisting we know or have a right to something better.

There’s a scene in the second Christopher Nolan Batman movie, *The Dark Knight*, in which an accountant examining the books of Wayne Enterprises confronts Lucius Fox, Bruce Wayne’s technical consultant supplier for his late night labors. The accountant says he’s found discrepancies and, for his silence, he wants \$10 million a year for the rest of his life (READ):

**Lucius Fox** : *[to Reese]* Let me get this straight, you think that your client, one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in the world, is secretly a vigilante, who spends his nights beating criminals to a pulp with his bare hands, and your plan is to blackmail this person?  
*[Reese's face falls and Fox smiles]*

**Lucius Fox** : Good luck.

You see the madness in this, the way presumption can blind and befuddle our thoughts and aims.

Thinking of our text, sometimes it’s helpful to remember whose world this is, who we are as finite creatures and fallen sinners, and who the LORD is as our infinite Creator and gracious Savior. It’s really not ours to negotiate the terms. And, honestly, we should not want it to be.

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