

The Good Life

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[0 : 00] One of the really quite outstanding students we had on the Corn Hill course this year was a man named Determine, who came to us from Rwanda. It was a great joy a few days ago at our leaver's service at the end of the year to hear Determine share the story of how he came to faith in Christ.

He had been a university student during the period of mounting tribal tensions that eventually led in 1994 to the horrific genocide. Of 800,000 ethnic Tutsi by the Hutus.

Determine recounted, as he told his story, how in this dark period, every club and every society on the campus split right down the middle on tribal lines, Hutu and Tutsi.

All except for one. The Christian Union remained strikingly united around faith in Jesus. As the university and the whole country really was splitting in two, this one society, the fellowship of believers in the Lord Jesus, remained stubbornly one.

And Determine, who didn't know much about Christ, knew this much. I must have what they have. He made his way along to the Christian Union meeting.

[1 : 19] He heard the gospel and he came to Christ more or less there and then. And he's been living for Jesus ever since. Now, Titus chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, is a passage all about distinctive and attractive Christian behavior in the midst of an unattractive society.

And Determine's story reminds us why this matters so much. These verses teach us how to show off the beauty of the gospel to a dying people in an often ugly world.

Paul has just been warning Titus about some false teachers who need to be silenced. They are like the Cretans of the old saying, chapter 1, verse 12, liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.

They have a twisted doctrine that issues forth in twisted living and which chapter 1, verse 16, proves beyond doubt that they are not true believers. But as for you, Paul writes, chapter 2, verse 1, but as for you, Titus, teach what accords with sound or healthy doctrine.

That is, show the people under your care the kind of sound and healthy living that flows from a sound and healthy understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 39] And so, ultimately, do that so that God's people may commend the gospel, end of verse 10, so that in everything they may adorn the gospel of God our Savior.

This sound doctrine, of course, centers on the fact of Jesus' death and resurrection. We see that at the end of chapter 2, and we'll see it again eventually in chapter 3. And so, the instructions here that accord with sound doctrine are really cross-shaped instructions.

If you've ever been on holiday to the UK in the summertime, especially to a seaside town like Eastbourne or Blackpool or somewhere like that, you may have had the unique privilege of sampling rock sweets.

Now, for the uninitiated, rock is basically a lollipop-shaped stick of hardened sugar. It's not very exciting. But the special thing about rock is that it will invariably have the name of the town or the resort running right through the whole length of the sugar stick.

So, wherever you bite it throughout the whole stick, it'll say Eastbourne or Blackpool or whatever the place is. Now, I mention that because the instructions of verses 1 to 10 are instructions about the cross-shaped life.

[3 : 52] Like Eastbourne Rock, they have a message running right through them. The message of the cross. Wherever you bite them off, the cross shows through. We'll see how that works as we go through, but it's just worth registering that as we begin.

I guess that there will be a number here this morning who are visitors or guests, perhaps exploring the Christian faith, but not yet committed followers of the Lord Jesus. If that's you, it's great that you're here, and I know you're very welcome.

You may look at this morning's Bible passage and think it's all a bit of sort of, you know, in-house for Christians. There's nothing really here for you as an outsider looking in.

Let me suggest two reasons why these verses are important reasons for you as an onlooker to grapple with and consider. First, if you're beginning to look into the message of Jesus this morning, one of the things you'll want to know is what difference the gospel actually makes.

You'll know, perhaps, that it's a good message about the free forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus. But is it just pie in the sky, or does it really make a difference to the way we Christians live our lives?

[5 : 04] Now, that's a crucial question. Well, here in Titus chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, is a summary of the kind of difference the gospel should make and does make in the life of a believer.

Second, if you're thinking of becoming a follower of Jesus, this passage will show you an outline what he will expect of you if you make him your Lord. It will help you to consider the cost of following Jesus and to weigh up whether you'd be willing to live his way.

So then, in the midst of a society that is so ugly in many ways, liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons in ancient creed, I guess similar vices and more in modern Vancouver, in the midst of a messy society, God's people are to live cross-shaped lives and so commend the gospel.

Paul breaks the church family down into three groups. He begins with older people. He then turns to the younger people and finally the slaves. We'll take each in turn.

Living the cross-shaped life first as an older person. Verse 2 of chapter 2. Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness.

[6 : 25] I think it's fair to say that we live in something of a golden age for the retiree. Retirees today live longer and healthier lives than in any generation in recent history.

And those longer lives are funded in most Western countries by unprecedented levels of state support. In Britain, you may know that there have been some fairly deep cuts to parts of the public spending in wake of the credit crunch.

Education, defense, civil service, drastic cuts all round. But it's been fascinating to see how benefits for the elderly and state pensions have been completely protected.

Politicians know that it would be suicide to make cuts there. Cut anything you like, but don't touch our pensions. Don't ruin my retirement. Well, the reason that we're so touchy about our retirement, of course, is that it's such a precious thing for us.

We work for 30 or 40 odd years. We put in long hours. We save hard. We tire ourselves out, perhaps raising children. And when the children fly the nest and the pension kicks in, well, that's me time.

[7 : 37] That's my payoff for all my hard work. That's the moment I've been waiting for and straining for. Hands off my retirement. I used to serve on the ministry staff I mentioned a minute ago at a church on the south coast of England in quite a beautiful area that was very popular with retirees.

We would often get folk come and join us who had just retired from successful careers up in London or wherever and had bought their dream home down by the beach. And it was a real joy to welcome a steady stream, really, of seasoned and mature believers into the church family.

But sometimes we found, even with well-taught believers, that we had a certain amount of work to do reminding them that they hadn't retired from serving the Lord Jesus when they moved down to be by the beach and to convince them that committed gospel service wasn't always going to fit in well with a packed schedule of Mediterranean cruises and lengthy golf days, pleasant and good as those things are.

The world constantly bombards us with the message that when we reach a certain age, we finish serving others and we have permission to indulge ourselves.

Paul knows that Titus is serving in a culture, full chapter 1, verse 12, of liars, evil beasts and lazy gluttons. And so he knows that Titus is going to have a battle on his hands, convincing some of the older believers that they never reach that stage when they can put their feet up and relax in their pursuit of godliness and in their service of God and his people.

[9 : 17] Far from easing up, chapter 2, verse 2, older men are to keep on working at their godliness and their maturity in Christ should be more and more evident the older they get.

They should be sober-minded. That is, they should be mature in their thinking and measured in their response to events. When the latest theological fad or crisis of circumstance comes along to threaten and derail the church family, the older men in the congregation should be those who have

the godly wisdom and the grasp of Scripture to help keep others on track.

They should be dignified in their behavior, modeling what it looks like to reach seasoned maturity in Christ, setting a pattern for younger men to follow.

They should set an example in self-control, in their speech and in their temper, and in their control of their physical appetites. And all that sounds great. And I guess all of us men would like to be like that as we grow older.

Well, what's the secret? How is it possible? How can a Christian man age well as Paul commends here? I think the secret comes in the second half of verse 2.

[10:32] Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, and sound. Literally, it flows, being sound, in faith, in love, in steadfastness.

The second half of the verse provides the basis for the first half. Being sound, literally, in faith, and love, and steadfastness will enable older men to be sober-minded, and so on.

If you're an older man here this morning, and you want to be the kind of man who commends the gospel all the way to the finish line, work at being sound in faith.

That's what Paul's saying. That is, keep on reading your Bible day by day. Don't give that up. Keep on sitting under the preaching of God's Word here, Sunday by Sunday. Make time for midweek Bible studies.

Invest some of your free time in reading useful Christian books. Be sound in love. Be full of healthy and wholehearted love for the Lord Jesus and His people.

[11:37] Love in Scripture always goes beyond emotion to volition, and then to action. So dedicate yourself to the loving service of God and His people.

And then be sound and healthy in steadfast hope. We'll only ever keep on serving Jesus and living for Jesus right until the end if our horizon is fixed beyond the end of this earthly life, if we remain steadfast in our hope of heaven.

Notice what the grace of God trains us to do down in verse 13 of the chapter. The grace of God has appeared, and it trains us, verse 13, to wait for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

That's what a gospel-shaped outlook and horizon looks like. It is steadfast in that hope. We're hugely privileged at the Corn Hill course to welcome students from this huge variety of situations. I mentioned Determine from Rwanda a moment ago, but in connection with verse 2, I think of another student who's just left us, a man named David in his late 50s, who recently retired from quite a senior position in the finance industry in the city of London.

[12:52] Retiring with some energy because he was younger and financial security, David could have done anything he wanted. He loves golf, so he could have played a lot of golf.

He enjoys travel, so he could have traveled the world. What he decided to do, though, and I was very struck by this, was to sign up for the Corn Hill course and spend the last two years deepening his knowledge of the Bible so that he could volunteer as an evangelist back in the city, reaching out to workers in the finance industry in London.

David has decided that in his senior years, he is going to remain sound and become more sound, verse 2, in his faith. He's going to get sharper in his Bible knowledge. He's going to give himself in loving service to the Lord Jesus.

And he's going to remain steadfast in his hope for a glorious future and not place all his hope in the short-lived prize of a comfortable retirement. And as he does so, I feel pretty certain that his watching friends and a watching world will see the truth and attractiveness of the message he proclaims.

Older women, verse 3, are similarly to avoid giving themselves over to self-indulgence, hear slanderous gossip and drinking too much, but instead are to work at their godliness, being reverent in behavior.

[14:16] I think that just means being Christ-like. And more than that, they're to devote themselves to ministry and to service, end of verse 3. They are to teach what is good and so train the younger women to love their husbands and children.

The older women in the church family have a teaching responsibility, a natural teaching role that no one else can fill. They are to train the younger women in godliness.

And for the older women to be able to do that with some integrity, they need to be godly themselves. That's why the first half of verse 3 comes before the second half. We as a family have

recently moved away from a church with lots of older believers, as I mentioned, and we've joined a relatively new church plant in southeast London, which is predominantly made up of young families in our kind of age bracket, 30s and 40s.

I think there are five people in the church family over the age of 60, two of whom are women. As we've reflected on the move to the new church since October, I think the biggest adjustment for us as a family has been to get used to the absence of the older believers.

Gemma, my wife, has felt it more than me, I think. We have two young children and Gemma is at home with them full time and we've discovered that there is so much about parenting and so much about motherhood that isn't written in any manual anywhere.

[15 : 39] And Gemma would just love a few older Christian women to take her under their wing and to share with them some of their experience. But we're in a place where such wisdom is in short supply and we really feel it.

We've really noticed it. We'll come to the substance of verse four in a minute, but it doesn't take much reading of verse four to realize that the skills a Christian wife and mother needs to learn from the older women in the church family are not skills that are common currency in our society today. And as a whole Christian family, we desperately need the wisdom and the godly example of older women who will teach and train the younger women. Usually, the context where this kind of instruction and training happens is within the busyness and messiness of life where older women take costly decisions to be available and involved in the lives of younger women.

If you're an older woman here this morning, and I'll leave you to decide if that's you, my grandmother turned 94 this past week, and if I said that she was an older woman, I would be in a lot of trouble.

But if that's you, you decide. Are there one or two younger women who you could befriend and take under your wing and encourage in godliness?

[16 : 58] Our society says that our older years, years when perhaps children have flown the nest and when we have a bit more freedom and maybe some more money, those years are me years, years to indulge and to enjoy.

But for the Christian who's been ransomed by Jesus and who is living a cross-shaped life of service, following in his footsteps, those years are Jesus years, just like the earlier ones, years to work at godliness and in love to serve God's people.

If you're an older believer, the challenge of Titus 2 is simply this. Are you still working at your godliness and are you giving yourself to loving service of the Lord and his people? Or have you bought into that idea, even in some small part, that these are years that belong basically to you? That's the older church members. Paul now moves on to the second group whose lives are to accord with sound doctrine, the younger people, verses 4 to 8. The older women are to teach the younger women, all of them, whether married or single, I think, to be, verse 5, self-controlled and pure and later on to be kind.

The younger women need to learn from the older women the kind of self-control that will keep them from being addicted to too much wine, that will keep them from indulging in slanderous talk behind the backs of others, but instead to be models of goodness and kindness.

[18 : 25] They're to see in the older women a dignified model of sexual purity and then to follow it. Our society hardly knows what sexual purity looks like anymore, what it'll mean for interactions with members of the opposite sex, what it'll mean for simple decisions like what to wear.

And so younger women rely on godly older women to teach them and show them a counter-cultural and godly model. For married women in particular, they're to learn from older women, verse 4, how to love their husbands and children and how, verse 5, to work at home and be submissive to their own husbands.

As I've been preparing for today, it struck me that David has very kindly invited me to preach on one of the most controversial verses in the whole of the Bible. One of the great benefits, though, of being a visiting preacher is that you can tackle the controversial things that the Bible says and then promptly get on a plane and leave the country.

And I'm enjoying the benefit of that now. Working at home, verse 5, what's that all about? On the most basic level, this instruction is about being hardworking rather than lazy.

Remember where we are. We're in Crete, a place known, chapter 1, verse 12, for lazy gluttony and so on. In that society, by contrast, the younger women who belong to the Lord Jesus are to be known for self-controlled industry.

[19 : 52] The godly younger woman is to work and not be idle, whatever that looks like in her situation with her responsibilities. But Paul says more than that. He says, verse 5, that she is to be working at home.

There's lots to think about here, but let me just suggest one principle for us to chew on and take away, and it's this. Verse 5, I think, shows us the dignity and the value of working and serving at home.

We live in a culture that says for a woman to limit or even forego the career she might have had to serve her family at home is a sign of bondage. and a sign of failure.

Our society says that's a weak thing to do, but God's word here says it's a godly thing to do. It's a godly thing to prioritize family and home, and it's a loving thing to do.

That service is precious in God's sight, and it mustn't be looked down upon. Now, this isn't an instruction that Christian wives and mothers must not work outside the home and must not have careers.

[20 : 57] For many, the need to do paid work outside the home is simply economic reality and a personal choice too. And in any case, many women in the ancient world were involved in money-making work at home, home-based shops and cottage industries.

And Paul probably includes those here in the instruction to work and be industrious at home. We see in Proverbs chapter 31, don't we, a commendable model of a woman of God who is successful in business and devoted to her family at the same time.

So working at home, I don't think, implies no paid work. But I think verse 5 does signal the importance and the dignity of service within the sphere of home for the Christian wife and mother.

And in doing so, in calling that a good thing, it cuts right against the grain of our culture, which so often despises such service. The counter-culturalism of verse 5 only deepens as we continue.

Young women are to be, verse 5, self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands. Submissive, not in an unthinking, in an opinionless, sort of doormat kind of a way, but recognizing that God in his creativity and wisdom has made us equal but different as men and women.

[22 : 21] And so to honor that difference, to allow their husbands to take leadership and responsibility within the home, something that we men are often far too slow to do, and then to submit to that loving leadership.

Where our culture says that service of family in the domestic sphere is something to be liberated from, God's word says it's something dignified and good and commendable.

And the Christian wife and mother who makes costly decisions to serve the Lord Jesus and her family within the context of home and who also freely submits to the loving leadership of her husband, well, she'll stick out like a sore thumb in today's society, and in doing so, she'll commend the gospel of grace.

Notice again the basis for all these instructions. Verse 11. Do all this for, because, the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness.

How does God's grace train us, teach us to do that? Well, it points us to the Lord Jesus, verse 14, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

[23 : 39] We're never called in the Christian life to do more than Jesus has already done for us. At the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ gave up his rights and his freedoms as the Son of God to bear the penalty of our wrongdoing before God the Father.

And he did that through the costly service of an agonizing death. And his grace, his sheer kindness to us, trains us to give up ourselves in his service.

That's the case for younger women and it's also the case for younger men, verse 6. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. We younger men get only one instruction, but it's just what we need to hear.

Younger men will be tempted to let go of self-control and to give way to self-indulgence when it comes to laziness in work, to temper, to food and drink, and to sexual behavior as well.

Foibles that our society excuses and even encourages. But younger men who belong to Christ must stand out from the crowd by showing self-control. And notice again how cross-shaped and Jesus-shaped all this is.

[24 : 50] Jesus, who was himself still quite a young man at the time of his death, learned to say no to his own comfort and his own preferences. And he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, do you remember it?

Not my will, but yours be done. We're told in Hebrews chapter 5 and verse 8 that Jesus the man learned obedience to the Father's will through what he suffered.

In the context of agonizing self-sacrifice, he learned what it meant to set some of his own human desires aside and to obey the Father for the sake of his people, even to the point of death.

What self-control. And so the grace of God trains us young men to control ourselves that we might honor Jesus and serve his people.

For Titus, the young man in the church leader, this is especially important. He must work at his godly self-control and so become, verse 8, a model of good works and a teacher of God's word who shows integrity, dignity, and soundness of speech that no opponent can say evil things of God's people.

[25 : 57] For young men who have roles of leadership within the church, family, and responsibility within the church, the need to learn self-control and so be a model of godliness and to learn self-control so that he might give himself to the study of God's word diligently and then teach it with integrity, well that's an urgent need, isn't it?

It's an urgent need because the reputation of God and his people are at stake. If you, like me, are a younger man here this morning, where in particular do you need to grow in your self-control this week and where do I?

Is it in that area of work and laziness, food and drink, sexual purity, perhaps the control of your tongue? Why not each of us young men pray for God to teach us and help us to grow in one area of self-control this week?

Why don't we all do that that we might better commend the gospel? Finally, and very briefly, our third group, living the gospel-shaped life as a slave.

Verse 9, Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything. They are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that in everything they may adorn the gospel of God our Savior.

[27 : 15] Paul here isn't commending slavery, of course. He is simply acknowledging that there will be slaves in the church family. Slavery was the dominant employment arrangement in the Roman world and there were millions upon millions of slaves in the Roman Empire.

The equivalence is not exact, but the principles of verses 8 and 9 apply to any of us, really, who work for someone else. So for the moment, let's read the word employee at the beginning of verse 9.

That sharpens it a bit for us. What will it look like to live the gospel-shaped life as an employee on Monday morning? Well, it will look like showing submission to our employers, even when they're not kind or considerate or even reasonable.

Submission in everything, not just the things that are convenient for us, but aiming to please our boss and do a good job, not arguing, not pilfering, that's not taking home the office supplies, not over-claiming in our expenses, not stealing, but, verse 10, showing all good faith so that in everything we may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.

I was trying to think this week how to illustrate this, and it struck me probably that buying jewelry for one's wife or fiance was probably the closest parallel here to this adornment.

[28 : 32] What's the man's job description when he goes out to choose, say, an engagement ring for his girlfriend or a necklace as an anniversary present for his wife? Well, first seek advice, that's important, but what's he ultimately trying to do?

What's the aim of the exercise? The aim of the exercise is not to try and find something that will make his wife more beautiful than she is. What's he trying to do? He is trying to find something that will complement and magnify and adorn the beauty that she already has.

The sparkle of the diamond or the glow of the pearl catches the eye, and he sees again how beautiful she is. I didn't take that from a Berksad, by the way. In any case, a necklace, a ring, a beautiful adornment, that's the idea here.

Now, work in a fallen Genesis 3 world is often ugly and drab, isn't it? And workplaces can be very unpleasant places. But the gospel of grace is a beautiful thing.

And if we're those who serve our employers in a gospel-shaped way, what will happen? What will be the result? We'll show off the beauty of God's truth, the beauty of the gospel by the way we serve.

[29 : 42] And the gospel that may have been hidden and unnoticed to our colleagues will suddenly become visible, and they'll see it. As we work diligently and gladly and honestly, the light will catch the jewel of our service, and the reality of the gospel will shine through, and perhaps an opportunity will open up to speak of Jesus and his good news.

Again, only the grace of God will train us to do this. Only when we see that Jesus, verse 14, has redeemed us, that slavery word, a slavery word, he's bought us out of slavery to sin and its consequences at great cost, only then will we, in submission to him, learn to work and serve in this way.

That's a gospel-shaped instruction like all the others. D.L. Moody, the famous American preacher of a century ago, was once said that of 100 people, one will read the Bible and 99 will read the Christian.

When the watching world reads your life, what do they see? Do they see hypocrisy and so revile the word of God so that they'll never listen to it? Or do they see goodness and hear words of integrity and so find nothing evil to say?

Do they look on and think that is a beautiful life, it positively sparkles? And do they look beyond you and see something of the Savior who appeared and gave himself freely to bring salvation to a dying world?

[31 : 13] For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

Our Father, we pray that this week you would help us to learn the message of grace afresh and so live lives that adorn the gospel for the glory of your name.

Amen. Amen.