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Title: A Faith That Works: The Good Life

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Text: [James 3:13-16](#)

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Two conversations that I have been thinking about this past week. The first was with someone I know who started and sold a company early in his working career and now at age 45 is essentially retired. We were texting back and forth a few weeks ago and I asked him how he was doing. His response was, "living the good life."

Around ten years ago I was on a mission trip in the border community of Tecate, Mexico, and came across a man who was cooking a fish over an open flame in a barrel. The man lived in a home that was maybe ten feet by ten feet with a dirt floor. I asked him how he was doing, and he said, "Living the good life."

What is the Good Life?

We are in Week 3 of our worship series, A Faith That Works, looking at the wisdom from the book of James. We all want a meaningful faith, a faith that makes a difference in our lives, and a faith that helps us make sense of the world. James is also clear that in a faith that works, it's not enough to simply be hearers of the word, but we must also be doers of the word. It's not enough just to know, we must also put our faith in action.

In the third chapter, James examines our soul and then makes a diagnosis of the human condition. All of the various ways in which people live in broken relationships and broken community can be located through one source: envy.

James says that you covet something and cannot obtain it, so instead, you engage in disputes and conflicts. Here is what he writes: *"Are any of you wise and understanding? Show that your actions are good with a humble lifestyle that comes from wisdom. However, if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, then stop bragging and living in ways that deny the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. Instead, it is from the earth, natural and demonic. Wherever there is*

jealousy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and everything that is evil."
James 3:13-16 CEB

I don't know if you've ever been in a group where someone started addressing the group by saying, are any of you wise and understanding, but it can't be good. It's followed by a phrase that only appears here, in essence, that you live your best life, the good life when you have a humble lifestyle that comes from wisdom. It's the only place in scripture where humility is associated with wisdom. That humility and wisdom provide the right balance needed to live the good life.

James is addressing the bitter jealousy and the selfish ambition people are living with. They are living with a spirit of envy. This type of envy or jealousy isn't the temporary state of being, rather it is the condition of the spirit. Envy in this context is the lens through which we view our circumstances and the circumstances of others. We think we aren't enough, and we will do anything to be like someone else who we view as more fortunate than we are. That becomes our idol, that becomes the God which we worship.

I had a conversation with a friend of mine once who was struggling with some discontent in his life and I asked him "what would make him content? What will make you feel like you are enough?" His answer was "making 10% more money per year than my brother-in-law."

I can't tell you the number of clergy conferences or events I've been to where the first question you ask when you meet someone or see someone you haven't seen in a while is, "how many members does your church have?" 200, 2,000, 20,000, before you know it, you had 50,000 people in worship last Sunday.

Scripture tells us to seek a life and a social order that is rooted in the heart of God, and a spirit of envy compels us to do the opposite. When we live with a spirit of envy, it slowly and yet effectively eats away at our soul. It eats away at who God created us to be.

"In the very first Harry Potter book, Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone, Harry Potter and Albus Dumbledore have a very important conversation. Harry has discovered a strange artifact called the Mirror of Erised, which reflects the observer that which they most deeply and most desperately desire in their lives. For Harry, it was the image of his long-deceased parents. For his friend Ron Weasley, it is an image of himself holding the house trophy. Dumbledore explains the power of the mirror in this way,

"The happiest person on earth would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror; that, they would be able to see themselves exactly as they are."

For James, that is the beginning of the good life. A life in which contentment, contentment born out of having a spirit of humility, is the rule of life. That is what makes one truly wise. When we think about the people in our lives who have modeled a life of faith, those who have lived the good life, they model exactly what James is writing about here.

"Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts." James 3:13 MSG

Those who we learn from, those whom we seek to emulate, this is the way they not only talk but live. They model what the good life looks like.

There is a story of a stonecutter who is unsatisfied with his place and his station in life.

There was once a stone cutter who was dissatisfied with himself and with his position in life.

One day he passed a wealthy merchant's house. Through the open gateway, he saw many fine possessions and important visitors. "How powerful that merchant must be!" thought the stonecutter. He became very envious and wished that he could be like the merchant.

To his great surprise, he suddenly became the merchant, enjoying more luxuries and power than he had ever imagined, but envied and detested by those less wealthy than himself. Soon a high official passed by, carried in a sedan chair, accompanied by attendants, and escorted by soldiers beating gongs. Everyone, no matter how wealthy, had to bow low before the procession. "How powerful that official is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a high official!"

Then he became the high official, carried everywhere in his embroidered sedan chair, feared and hated by the people all around. It was a hot summer day, so the official felt very uncomfortable in the sticky sedan chair. He looked up at the sun. It shone proudly in the sky, unaffected by his presence. "How powerful the sun is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be the sun!"

Then he became the sun, shining fiercely down on everyone, scorching the fields, cursed by the farmers and laborers. But a huge black cloud moved between him and the earth so that his light could no longer shine on everything below. "How powerful that storm cloud is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a cloud!"

Then he became the cloud, flooding the fields and villages, shouted at by everyone. But soon he found that he was being pushed away by some great force and realized that it was the wind. "How powerful it is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be the wind!"

Then he became the wind, blowing tiles off the roofs of houses, uprooting trees, feared and hated by all below him. But after a while, he ran up against something that would not move, no matter how forcefully he blew against it – a huge, towering rock. "How powerful that rock is!" he thought. "I wish that I could be a rock!"

Then he became the rock, more powerful than anything else on earth. But as he stood there, he heard a hammer pounding a chisel into the hard surface and felt himself being changed. "What could be more powerful than I, the rock?" he thought.

He looked down and saw far below him the figure of a stone cutter.

A person who fully seeks and lives into who God has made them to be, that's the person that truly is living the good life.

Think about this, James had a front-row seat to watch the one who knew what the good life was better than anyone.

The whom we follow, Jesus, seemed to have no permanent home, owned very few possessions, wandered from place to place depending on the hospitality of others,

He would be the most important figure to ever live, the one we call Messiah.

He's the one we look at to see the good life.

Let Us Pray.