

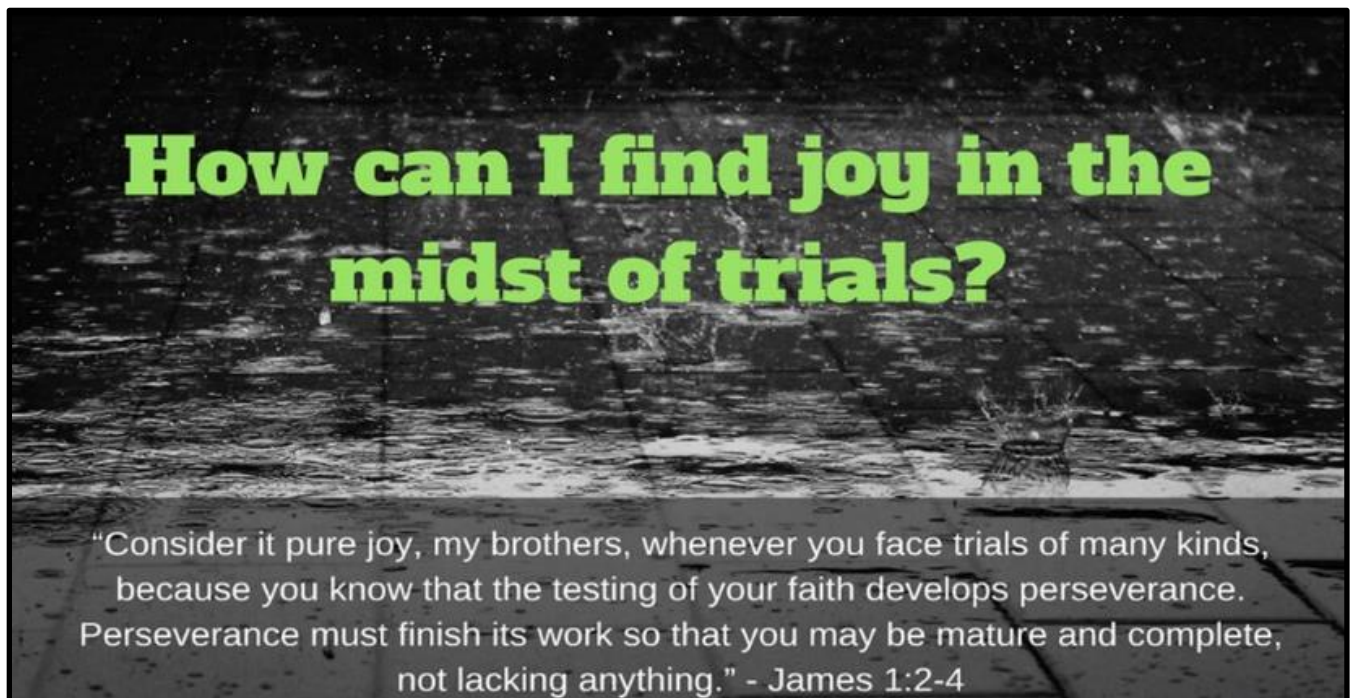
October 29 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

Life Worth Living Study – Week 7 – Chapter 4: How does a good life feel?

Chapter 4 of Life Worth Living is entitled “How does a good life feel?” The authors begin with a possible obvious answer to the question: A good life feels good of course. Maybe there’s some value in occasional pain or in going through an emotional struggle now and then, but what we’re all after is a life that feels good. Supposing that this is the answer, the authors ask: “What does it mean to feel good?” The chapter centers around these questions with considerations of life consisting of both pleasure and pain and where this leads in our perspective of a good life. The chapter concludes with questions: ‘What feelings do you think characterize a genuinely good life? Do you think that we can measure all our feelings according to how much pleasure or pain they include? How much does it matter that your feelings connect with something true about the world?’

Before proceeding into Chapter 4, we look to Scripture about this life that is not all pleasure to which we each can attest.

James, the brother of Jesus, writes in his letter of finding joy in the midst of trials (James 1:2-4):

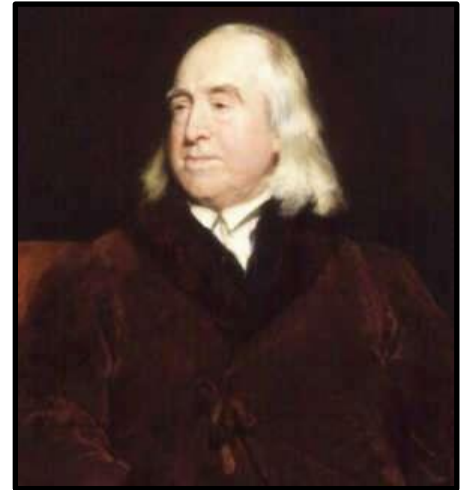


He writes *that ‘perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.’* This is the very first thing James writes in his letter after his salutation given its importance. The commentary shares that once we have made the decision for Christ, we may think that everything in life will fall into place. When trials and tough times come upon us or continue, we may begin to question, “why?” How can enduring horrible circumstances be considered joy. First, we need to understand that the joy the world gives is not the same as the joy the Spirit gives. Worldly joy or happiness comes and goes as often as waves hitting the shore. It isn’t something you can cling to when you’ve lost a loved one or are facing bankruptcy. The Spirit’s joy or happiness, on the other hand, is lasting. For the believer, the fruit of the Spirit, including joy, is like a bottomless well of water—there’s

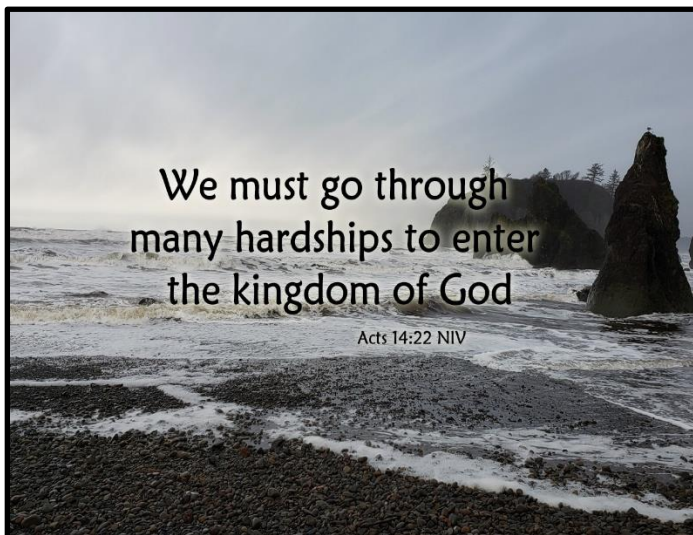
always an abundant supply. Even in the darkest days, when sadness, grief, and loss may threaten to overwhelm, God's joy is there and cannot be taken away. We are promised the constant presence of the Holy Spirit. We are promised His joy. Jesus says in John 15:11, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Just like salvation, joy is a free and perfect gift from Him, and we must reach out and accept that gift. Grab onto it like a lifeline. Choose joy over bitterness, anger, and sorrow. *"You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thessalonians 1:6). "Be joyful always" (1 Thessalonians 5:16)*

The authors present the thinking of Jeremy Bentham regarding the questions presented. He was an eighteenth century English political philosopher. He was educated at the Westminster School, Queens College, Oxford. He studied Law but did not practice it. Bentham was so shy that he didn't relish the public speaking that the law would entail so his father gave him an allowance of £90 per year so that he could set about writing books on philosophy, economics and politics.

Jeremy Bentham
1748–1832



In 1768, although originally a Tory in outlook, he was profoundly affected by the work of Joseph Priestly who stated that the good and happiness of the majority of the members of the State is the standard by which everything in the State must be driven. In 1776, another major influence on his work was David Hume. This is reflected in "A Fragment on Government" where he states that the proper objective of all conduct and legislation is "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" (later to be termed Utilitarianism). A simple principle of Utilitarianism is that good is pleasure or exemption from pain ... evil is pain or loss of pleasure. In 1789, Bentham argued that pain and pleasure are "the sovereign masters of a man's conduct" and man will always act with self-interest. Therefore sanctions, which were sufficiently painful, should be introduced to persuade the individual to subordinate his own happiness to that of the whole community. He used what he termed the Hedonic Calculus to estimate the overall effects of different actions. How does the good life feel? For Bentham, as for many people today, it feels good. It's a life of pleasure with a minimum of pain.

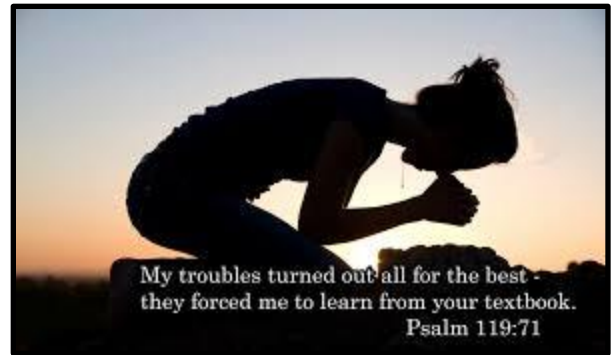


What does God's Word say about things that are hardships?

As Paul and Barnabas were preaching and reaching new believers, Paul gives a word of encouragement to remain true to the faith, in the midst of hardships. The 'Enemy' does not want a believer to move forward with God and will throw anything and everything against him to stop him. These troubles could be simple struggles to pay the bills all the way up to direct persecution, threatening one's life. The challenge for the believer is to remain true to his faith in God. He should never back down or

give up on his faith when trouble comes his way. He must continue to trust in God and His word, knowing that God will win in the end. As God wins, so will he, if he remains true to His word.

In Psalm 119, the psalmist reflects that troubles endured were for the best for they led him to the Lord's statutes, which are perfect and trustworthy, refreshing the soul and making wise the simple. Anything that draws us closer to God is good (Psalm 19:7)



In Chapter 4, the story of Subbha's eye is shared involving a Buddhist nun and a would-be seducer. In seeking a deserted place, Subbha wasn't seeking pleasure, but equanimity, a state of mind that would remain calm like the ocean's depths regardless of what was happening on the surface. After unceasing advances from her harasser and in a demonstration of her own detachment from bodily pain and pleasure, she gouged one of her eyes out and gave it to the man, upon which he immediately repented and asked her forgiveness. She went on to the Buddha, who restored her eye.

The authors summarize that the trouble with pleasure isn't that it feels good. It's that we get invested in it feeling good. It draws our attention away from what really matters. It drives us to have an exaggerated concern for ourselves and for what will satisfy our cravings. It is shown in Subbha's assailant, to view another person as nothing more than a tool for satisfying our cravings

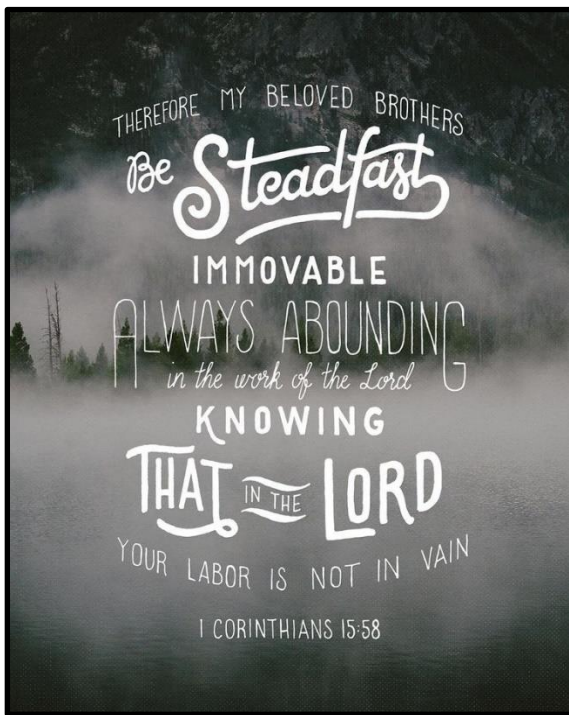
According to the Buddha's teaching, the whole cycle of seeking, desiring, getting what you desire and then desiring again is "unease" or "suffering. For the Buddhist, achieving enlightenment is considered the only way to overcome the problem. The contentment (cool, calm and peaceful) that comes from following the path and achieving enlightenment is how a good life feels for the Buddhist.

Buddhism started with the Buddha. The word 'Buddha' is a title, which means 'one who is awake' — in the sense of having 'woken up to reality'. The Buddha was born as Siddhartha Gautama in Nepal around 2,500 years ago. He did not claim to be a god or a prophet. He was a human being who became 'enlightened', understanding life in the deepest way possible. Siddhartha was born into the royal family of a small kingdom on the Indian-Nepalese border. According to the traditional story he had a privileged upbringing, but was jolted out of his sheltered life on realizing that life includes the harsh facts of old age, sickness, and death. This prompted him to puzzle over the meaning of life. Eventually he felt impelled to leave his palace and follow the traditional Indian path of the wandering holy man, a seeker after Truth. He became very adept at meditation under various teachers, and then took up ascetic practices. This was based on the belief that one could free the spirit by denying the flesh. He practiced austerities so determinedly that he almost starved to death, but he still hadn't solved the mystery of life and death. True understanding seemed as far away as ever. So he abandoned this way and looked into his own heart and mind; he decided to trust his intuition and

Buddha



learn from direct experience. He sat down beneath a pipal tree and vowed to stay there until he had gained 'enlightenment'. After 40 days, on the full moon in May, Siddhartha finally attained ultimate 'freedom'. He believed that he reached a state of being that goes beyond anything else in the world. If normal experience is based on conditions — upbringing, psychology, opinions, perceptions — 'enlightenment' is 'unconditioned'. A Buddha is believed to be free from greed, hatred and ignorance, and characterized by wisdom, compassion and freedom. Enlightenment is thought to bring insight into the deepest workings of life, and therefore into the cause of human suffering — the problem that had initially set the Buddha on his spiritual quest. During the remaining 45 years of his life, the Buddha travelled through much of northern India, spreading his understanding. His teaching is known in the East as the Buddha-dharma or 'teaching of the Enlightened One'. He reached people from all walks of life and many of his disciples gained 'Enlightenment'. They, in turn, taught others and in this way an unbroken chain of teaching has continued, right down to the present day. The Buddha was not a god and he made no claim to divinity. He was a human being who, through tremendous effort of heart and mind, is thought to have transformed all limitations. He affirmed the potential of every being to reach Buddhahood.



As believers in Christ, our faith rests in *Ephesians 2:8-9*: 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast'. Our salvation is a gift from God - it is not something that we can earn by our own efforts and good works.

We are encouraged to be '*steadfast, immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord*' (*1 Corinthians 15:58*). We are to '*continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it.*' (*Colossians 4:2*).

Paul thanked God for the steadfastness he heard of in the embattled Thessalonians — an endurance, he said, that stemmed from their "*hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*" (*1 Thessalonians 1:3*). Paul writes in *Colossians 1:23*: '*Continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Good News which you heard.*'

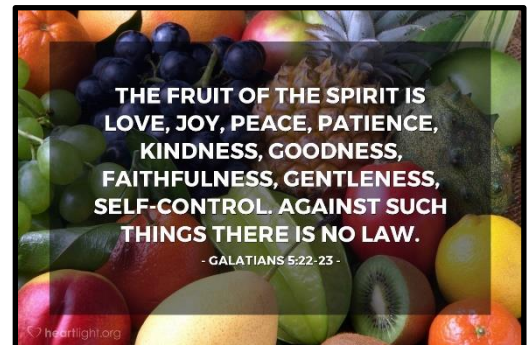
Peter, Paul, and James all highlight the need for endurance, or steadfastness (Greek *hupomoné*) — the ability to bear up under trial. '*Make every effort to supplement your . . . self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness*' (*2 Peter 1:5-6*). '*Suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character.*' (*Romans 5:3-4*). '*The testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*' (*James 1:3-4*). Steadfastness isn't a virtue that shines in comfort but in conflict, afflictions, and uncertainty.

The authors present the story of Oscar Wilde in the context of pleasure and suffering. Oscar Wilde was a nineteenth century Irish poet and playwright, who became one of the most popular playwrights in London in the early 1890s. He is remembered in part for the circumstances of his criminal conviction and imprisonment for gross indecency for consensual homosexual acts. His was one of the first “celebrity trials”. Prior to his imprisonment, Oscar Wilde lived a hedonistic life full of pleasures. A character in one of Wilde’s plays says of himself, “I can resist everything except temptation.” These excesses sent Wilde to prison and allowed him to lose many things. He came to realize that all of the things he had thought were worth striving for no longer mattered. Not all pleasures are equal - some are ‘senseless- they flit along on a whim. They are not what a good life feels like. Sorrow, he says, is the “supreme emotion humans are capable of”. Wilde concluded that life is shot through with disappointments, failures, broken relationships and unintended injuries - it is filled with suffering that cannot be rid of. The appropriate response is sorrow. Sorrow is true and central to a good life. Wilde never says that sorrow is pleasant or that it feels good but it is ‘wonderful’. Wilde’s answer to the question of what the good life feels like is, *Whatever is true to life in all its splendor, all its suffering, and everything in between.*

Oscar Wilde
1854-1900



If we are living for Jesus and allowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit to change us, we will show the change Jesus has brought to our lives by bearing the fruit of the spirit in us (*Galatians 5:22-23*). **Joy** is a deep sense of happiness that comes from Jesus. We can have joy in our lives no matter what the circumstances are. **Peace** is a sense of calm. We can have peace in our hearts and minds because we know that God is in control of all things. **Longsuffering** means to bear other burdens and to help others during difficult times while being patient, trusting God, in our own hardships. **Kindness** is treating others with the same respect we want for ourselves. We can be kind with our words or actions to others. **Goodness** is to have moral purity or virtue. In all we do, we can strive to be Christlike and act as Jesus would. **Faithfulness** is being honorable and keeping our word to others and be true to God. **Gentleness** is being soft-spoken, meek and humble. **Self-Control** means to be in control of emotions and acting in control with our words and actions. As we grow and develop the fruit of the spirit in our life, there is no limit to how much we can have or show of the fruit of the spirit since the giver of these gifts come from God.



What does a good life feel like? Maybe a good life is not all about feelings but about ‘being’, about living the fruit of the Spirit. To be a recipient or giver of what God has given to us in the fruit of the Spirit, life requires another person. Being in relationship with one another and relationship with God is a good life.

Looking ahead – Sunday November 5

Read Chapter 5 ‘What should we hope for?’ Pages 62-75

Answer “Your Turn Questions” on Page 76

