

HOW TO HAVE A LONG, GOOD LIFE By Ron Harvey

Text: Psalm 34:11-22

INTRODUCTION

You will notice in this Psalm that David undertakes to teach children, for he says, "Come, ye children." I don't know if David had in mind those who were young in terms of age, or those who were young in terms of spiritual maturity. Nevertheless, David says, "Come, ye children."

Does this not tell us something of the great humility and tenderness of this man David?

David was a man of war. Great and valiant was he. Even as a youth he slew Goliath with a slingshot. And as an adult he led armies into battle. And David was anointed as the king over all Israel. And he must have been a very busy man with many responsibilities. And yet, he could find time to sit down and call children to his knee for instruction.

And I find it impressive not only that David had the time for children, but that he had the heart for it. You would think that David would be more concerned about the business of his kingdom, about weighty matters, about matters of national concern.

But David says, "Come, ye children."

Now it appears that David called the children to him in order to teach them.

Come ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you . . . (v.11)

This tells us something about the heart of this man David. He considered himself a teacher and he called the children to himself in order to teach them.

Perhaps David grew weary of trying to teach the parents, those stubborn and obstinate people of Israel. But, on this occasion he called to himself those young, tender hearts that were open to instruction. And he called the children to himself in order to teach them.

You know, a teacher must have a heart for teaching. And David had such a heart. It was a very tender heart. It was a fatherly heart. And if the elders of Israel would not listen to instruction then he would teach the children. And he says,

Come, ye children . . . I will teach you.

Now notice here what every teacher expects and desires from his students. He says,

Come, ye children, hearken unto me.

That is, lay down your toys, come in from your playing and listen to what I have to say. But the word hearken carries with it not only the idea of paying attention but also the idea of obeying. So David says, "Hearken unto me." That is, listen to what I have to say and give heed to it.

And this is the prayer not only of a parent and of a teacher but also of a pastor. If he labors hard to dig the truth from the Scriptures and he stays up until the wee hours of the morning to find a message from God, then he prays that the people will hearken to the Word of God. That is, first of all, that they would come to hear the Word. And then, he prays that they would take heed to the Word and obey it. And so, David says, Come, ye children, hearken unto me.

Now notice what it is that David would teach them.

Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

Now there are many things that David could teach them. David was a famous musician who was an expert on the harp. And, he could have given them a music lesson and I'm sure he could have entertained them and held their interest with the harp. He could have played a very beautiful rendition of the 23rd Psalm. After all, he was the author of that Psalm and I'm sure he put it to music.

Perhaps David could have instructed them in the use of a slingshot and could have held them spellbound with the story of his encounter with Goliath and how he slew the giant with one stone to the forehead.

David was a great soldier and he could have taught the children to handle the sword or to draw the bow. He could have instructed them in the strategies of war.

But David chose rather to teach them "the fear of the Lord."

And this is instructive for all parents. It is important to teach our children to read and to write and to excel in arts and sciences. But it is most important to instruct our children in the fear of the Lord. And so, David says,

Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

The message this afternoon is designed to instruct. It is designed to instruct children and it is designed to instruct all of us how to lead a long, full and happy life.

I want you to look at verse 12. This could serve as the title for our message this morning.

What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?

David says, "Is there anyone here that desires a long and good life?"

This is universal among all men. We desire to live a long, full life and not just a long life but a pleasant life. David says, "Come, ye children, who among you would like to live rather than die? Who among you would like to live a long life? Who among you would like to see good during your life, rather than evil?"

And the answer surely would be, "We all would."

All of the children would raise their hands.

How many here would like to live a long life?

How many here would like to see good things in their life?

And that is what David is asking these children. And they all would raise their hands because this is a universal desire of mankind. Life, long life and a good life – this is the desire of all men.

Now for those of you who will hearken to him, David will tell you how to have these things.

Now the general answer to that question (What must we do to have a long, happy, life) is found in verse one where David says, I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

The Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:4)

Example: Did you know that a very wise child is a child who listens very carefully to the instruction of his parents and obeys. This is for his own good. And a child will generally live a very pleasant and good childhood if he takes heed to his parents.

And this is also true of all God's children. If we listen very carefully to his instruction and if we obey him, then it will lead to life, long life and a life filled with good.

The fear of the Lord – that is the beginning of knowledge. It is recognizing that God is the Creator and we are his creatures. It is recognizing that God is strong and we are weak. It is recognizing that God is wise and we are not. It is recognizing that God is sovereign and we are servants. The fear of the Lord is recognizing and submitting to our proper place in the world.

It is recognizing that there is a holy God and that we have a duty to him. In short, it is submitting to his authority.

But the world has gone completely haywire and as Romans 3:18 says,

There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Example: I was downtown recently and I saw a young man wearing a T-shirt which read, "I'm going to hell. Wanna go with me?"

And I literally was stunned when I saw that. Here was a person essentially mocking God publicly. He apparently had no fear of God whatsoever, no recognition of his place in the universe.

"I'm going to hell." He proudly bragged about it as though this was a funny joke.

There are many people in this world who have no fear of God before their eyes. This is a chief characteristic of sinners. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Example: Why, people have the audacity to use the name of Jesus in lieu of a curse word. "Jesus Christ," they say when they make a mistake. And this just makes me cringe every time I hear it. But they have no fear of God whatsoever and they use his name as though he were the scum of the earth rather than the Creator of the earth. And there is no fear of God before their eyes.

Example: Many, many people live their lives as though God does not exist. They go to great pains to make themselves socially acceptable, but they have no idea that they are not accepted by God.

You see, there is no fear of God before their eyes. They give no consideration at all to God in their daily routines. They live as though they have nothing to do with him. And that's because, "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

But David says,

Come, ye children, hearken unto me, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

So, I would suggest to you that if you are searching for real life, long life and a good life, then you must first learn the fear of God.

Could I make a suggestion? If you want to learn a healthy respect and fear of God, go outside on a clear night and look up into the heavens and see just a part of all that God has created. His creation is magnificent and awe inspiring. Spend some time contemplating who God is and who you are. Once you discover that he is the Creator and you are the created, then you will begin to develop a healthy fear of God.

You will discover that this universe does not revolve around you, but it revolves around God. He has made us all - male and female he has made us - black and white, rich and poor, handsome and homely. We are all his creatures. And when we understand that, then we have begun to understand the fear of the Lord.

But now, David gets much more specific. Do you want to have a full, rich life? Then let me show you what you must do.

I. You must keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

Isn't it curious that David didn't begin by forbidding the great sins of murder and adultery, but he says, "Keep thy tongue from evil."

The tongue is a wild beast and it is very hard to tame it.

David says, *Keep thy tongue from evil.*

Example: Have you ever seen a referee trying to keep two fighters apart? He physically restrains them and does all he can to keep them apart.

And David says, "Keep thy tongue from evil."

We must learn to bridle our tongues. One hateful word will undo 1000 kind words. One hurtful word will nullify 1000 helpful words.

See James 3:5-8

Did you know that a person may seem to be religious, but his tongue gives him away?

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

James 1:26

Example: A wise man is not so much a man who knows what to say, but a man who knows how to keep silent.

Example: If you just don't say anything everyone will think you are very wise. But the moment you open your mouth, then they will hear your foolishness.

But when you do open your mouth, keep your tongue far away from evil. What does that mean?

Train yourself not to curse. Listen to what Psalm 10:7 says speaking of the wicked:

His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud.

You recognize a wicked man immediately by the cursing that comes from his mouth. Horrible words and filthy words. And they flow off his tongue in a steady stream. One after another they roll off the lips.

Example: All of us have been around people who curse with every breath. And their cursing tongues reflect a cursed heart. There is bitterness and hate within and it comes out the mouth.

Example: Have you ever put a hose in a jug and tried to fill it with water. And when the jug gets full the water has nowhere to go but to pour out. And that's the way it is when the sinner is full of bitterness within. The foulness and the stench has nowhere to go but over the tongue and out the mouth.

And David says, "Keep thy tongue from evil."

This is advice by David, no less, a man after God's own heart. And it is very excellent advice. You can ruin a friendship, you can offend a brother and you can ruin a marriage with just a few hateful words. And David says, "Do you want a long, good life? Then, keep your tongue from evil.

It is interesting that of all the advice David could have given, he says, "Keep your tongue from evil."

And he says, "Keep thy lips from speaking guile."

To speak with guile is to be cunningly deceitful. You think you are smarter than everyone else and you speak in such a way as to disguise the truth. Speaking guile springs from a deceitful heart.

And David says, keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile.

Don't you love talking to someone whose yay is yay and whose nay is nay and who is not always trying to gain an advantage over you in the conversation – someone who is not always trying to deceive you and lie to you.

David says, "If you want to live a good life, then don't speak with guile."

Now what do you do if you are a person who has trouble keeping your tongue from evil? How do you break a habit that you have practiced for years?

First of all, you must have the desire to break the habit. No one will stop a habit if they don't want to. So, David says, "Do you want a long life and a good life? Then keep your tongue from evil.

Now listen, you must be motivated. Do you believe the Word of God? David is giving you a secret to life itself and to a good and pleasant life. And he says, "Keep your tongue from evil." Now if you are an unbeliever, then I suppose you don't care what the Bible says. But if you are a believer, then here is a great principle of life. Keep your tongue from evil and you will have a long, good life.

II. Depart from evil. (v.14)

It is nearly impossible to hang around evil without being drawn in and without being affected by it. Evil brings despair and hopelessness and ultimately disaster on your life. If you hang around the bars, you are likely to become a drunkard. If you hang around riotous people you will likely soon be in a fight.

Example: When Tyler left to take his first job out of town, we sat down in my office and we talked about the dangers of hanging around with the wrong crowd. And said, "If your working buddies want to go out to the bars and the night clubs, don't go with them. If they want to drag you along, don't go. If you hang around evil, the evil things overtake you.

And this is what David says when he says, "Depart from evil." If you are engaged in it, then stop. If you are hanging around it, then leave. And then, good will come your way.

III. Do good. (v.14)

David says, "Do good." Now that is simple advice, isn't it? But if you want good to come to your life, then doing good is the formula. Don't just get away from evil, but find the good in life and do it. Do good unto others and you will be surprised what good will come to you in return. Do good unto God. Consider his commands in all that you do and his Word will be a lamp unto your feet and goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.

But look,

IV. Seek peace. (v.14)

Some people are never happy unless they are in some kind of a fight. And every word that comes out of their mouth is contentious and their life is a bone of contention every day. But David says, "Seek peace."

A peaceful life is much to be desired. And we are to seek it. If there is a chance for peace in your life, then David says, "Pursue it." Chase it down. Do everything you can to follow after peace.

Very few things in life are worth a life of contention and strife. Sometimes it is better to live a life of peaceful poverty than to go to war day after day for the sake of riches.

David says, "Pursue peace."

V. Ask the Lord for deliverance. (v.17)

Are you troubled on every hand, then David says, "Cry unto the Lord." This would suggest that we should often pray to God about our troubles. Sometimes we have not because we ask not.

And David says, "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth."

You know, there are everyday troubles that cause us much distress. And we should daily consult the Lord about those troubles. But then, there are those troubles that overwhelm the soul. All of us have had those times of great trouble and distress. Most of us have seen loved ones in the grave. Some of us have lost children. Some of us have suffered great financial loss. Some of us have been loaded down with heavy burdens from time to time. Some of us have had our hearts broken. Some of you may be broken-hearted even today.

And I want you to look at Psalm 34:18.

The Lord is near unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

This world is full of many troubles, but when your heart is broken into pieces, know for sure that the Lord is near to you. And he will redeem you. Not only does he save your soul, but he will save you out of your despair. He is a God of redemption. And if there is one thing I have learned in my own life, he can turn the bad into good. He can turn a calamity into a blessing.

Look at verse 19.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.

Many of you in this sanctuary are elderly. You have lived through many troubles and I bet each of you could testify how God has delivered you through those troubles. Every one of you has had a broken heart from time to time and it has brought you to your knees and you cried out to God and he saved you through it all.

There have been dark, dark days in your life when you thought all hope was gone – when you thought your troubles were too much to bear. And each time, God redeemed you out of your troubles.

That is just the way God is. He is very near unto them that are of a broken heart. And David says, "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth."

Lastly, David gives the children one last bit of advice and he says in verse 22, "Trust in him."

VI. Trust Him.

Really that is all we can do, because ultimately we can't control the circumstances of our life. When things are going well we think we are in control. But then calamity befalls us. And we lose control of our circumstances. And we cry out to God for help. And it is our duty to trust Him.

And David says, none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate. (v.22)

Did you know that if you trust God you will wait on Him. As Brother Jack often says, "Help us Lord not to run ahead of you." And what he is saying is, "Trust Him." Wait on him and he will deliver you in due time.

Now at the moment your strength may be gone and you may be weary with a broken heart and you may be about to faint. But just wait a little while and trust God and he will redeem you out of your troubles.

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31