

The location is probably somewhere tropical, any place where it's not freezing or snowing. Time passes slowly as you enjoy every moment of your day. No shoveling, no school, and best of all no work. It's of course vacation. It's great and relaxing. It feels like you're living the good life without a care in the world. In your tropical paradise you might wonder how living this good of a life could get any better. How could the warm air feel any warmer? How could the luscious food be any tastier? How could the lazy days get any lazier?

Come back to reality. I'm sorry but there's still a little snow out there. The temperatures are getting warmer but far from tropical. School is going to eventually have to meet regularly again. Even though it isn't vacation what if I said you were already living the good life. The apostle Paul writing to the Thessalonians wanted them to know that they were. They were obeying the commandments, loving God, and loving their neighbor. The downside of this good life; it wasn't consistent. They could still do better, and so can you.

Now is not the time to panic and give up, but rather the time to buckle down. It's time for us to realize what we're already doing well. Then we'll seek to improve. The second lesson for today offers encouragements from the apostle Paul on how we can be...

**Living the good life**  
**Doing the good things God wants**  
**Growing to continue these good things**

I just assigned a paragraph for the students to write telling me how the Holy Spirit brought them to faith and what that meant to them. I was hoping it would take ten minutes. Two minutes later one girl asked, "Is this enough for my paragraph?" On her paper were two sentences. She had barely started. But the assignment was complete. One sentence was about how the Holy Spirit brought her to faith and the other was about what it meant to her. Many times we're like her, always wanting to know what the bare minimum is to get by. We say, "I've come to know what God says in the Bible, now I want to know how much I have to do to be saved?"

If you listened to Jesus addressing you in his sermon in the gospel you heard, **"Do no murder, do not commit adultery, and do not break your oath..."** These are the bare bone commands we feel. Keep from killing, cheating, or breaking major oaths and you'll be okay. But of course we know Jesus takes them deeper than that. Murder is sinful but so is anger. Adultery is sinful but so is just looking at another woman or man with deep desire. Breaking an oath is sinful but even taking an oath when it's not needed is too. Now we're in trouble because we haven't always kept all of these. We can't say we've done the bare minimum.

**"Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living."** Paul said to the Thessalonians, "You did it. You heard what good things God wanted and you're actually doing them." Understand Thessalonica was a town where morality was optional. Sex was openly practiced anywhere and with anyone. A man could sleep with a woman other than his wife under certain circumstances. This was the world they lived in. Avoiding sexual immorality was a stretch much less already living a life that pleased God. How could Paul say they were already living the good life God wanted when temptations and slipups would be almost inevitable?

Paul isn't asking whether they're saved or not. He's talking sanctification. **"It is God's will that you should be sanctified."** Being sanctified is a process, one that always begins with justification. For justification think a courtroom. The judge hands down the verdict on the accused, declared not guilty. That's being justified. It's a onetime act, not a process. It's complete and final, not ongoing. And it only happens to sinful human beings because of Jesus. These Thessalonians were declared not guilty of their sins in the blood of Christ. Now forgiven they could get on living the good life God wanted.

In Christ Jesus Paul says the same thing to you. All those commands Jesus left for you in the gospel about murder, hatred, adultery, lust, and oaths, all of them were kept not by you to be saved but by him. As Nathan told King David when he confessed his sin, **"The LORD has taken away your sin."** Jesus took away your sin. He lived and died so you could live the good life. Not in riches or on some tropical island but the good life of sanctification, doing the things God demands. Jesus perfect life purifies your works and makes them good before God. So every time you clean off the dishes you're already living the good life. Every time you're on time to work you're living the good life. Every time you take down the tables and chairs, clean up in the kitchen, or change the hymn boards you're living the good life God wants.

I needed eight more minutes so I this girl and her classmates to think hard about what they were writing. They needed to really dig deep into their feelings. But she was satisfied and wouldn't write more. For someone living the good life God wants the apostle Paul would be happy with your efforts so far. But your life isn't over yet. Living the good life still means good days and bad. Without those you'd be perfect and there would be no reason for Jesus. But because you're not perfect, not only is there a reason for Jesus, there's room for improvement. We can grow in doing these good things.

Even in the city of brotherly love, Philadelphia, there's probably murder, stealing, and other lesser crimes. In the city of Thessalonica there was plenty of crime too. But among the filth were the Christians. Their light was beaming out because they were practicing brotherly love. **"Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers through Macedonia."** Their love in Jesus was getting a reputation because it spread even beyond their borders to the surrounding towns.

Paul took the time to recognize God's gifts and blessings among the Thessalonians. He praised God that their love was visible and being shared. But he would not allow the Thessalonians to get complacent or satisfied. **"Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more."** More could always be done. They could please God to a higher degree. It wouldn't earn them anything before God. It wouldn't guarantee heaven. No works can or ever will. It was simply the process God expected of continuing to grow in living it.

Are you happy with your pay or are you showing better output hoping for a raise? Are you satisfied riding the bench on the team or are you struggling to climb into a starting position? Is a C on a report good enough or are you shooting for that A or B? We encourage ourselves all the time to do better. We want to grow, be more successful, and always get better. So why think that our lives of sanctification are okay just staying in place? Is it fear of failure? Why grow when good works don't earn us anything before God anyway? Too hard? Living the good life God wants is hard; growing is going to be even harder.

Remember how you grow in faith? You search the Scriptures. You read about Jesus. You think about baptism. You take the Lord's Supper. You grow with your Savior because of your Savior. Jesus saved you, salvation is complete, and heaven is guaranteed. Growing in your good works throughout your life will never be complete. Living to please God in all situations must continue. Getting better at avoiding sin is something to be worked on. Becoming more Christ-like takes studying more about Christ. These are the works in progress. But we'll grow and get better as we grow closer to Christ through his Word and Sacraments.

So I commend you as Paul does, you're living the good life God wants. Christ Jesus has wiped away your sins so the things you do in life are good in God's eyes. The love God shows you and your love for God provide the motivation you need to keep up the good works. A holy life in this world is always going to be incomplete. We're saved by Jesus, that's done. We grow into Christ everyday and that's never done. So while we live here on earth let's continue to grow into these good works. God will reward the effort and purify all of it in Christ. Only in heaven will we be able to truly rest from our labor of good works and truly live the good life in the presence of Christ forever.