

God, Man, & MAMMON

Navigating the tension between
the material and the spiritual

Chapter 6



with
Mitch
Anthony

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Finding the True Life

If you were alone at sea, could you find contentment? We must consider how comparison with others drives us to appear “successful.”

Seeking the “Good” Life

It’s counterintuitive to think that seeking the “good” could actually be bad. But what if pursuing a “good” life distracts us from finding true life?



FINDING THE TRUE LIFE

*Watch out and guard yourselves
from every kind of greed;
because your true life is not
made up of the things you own,
no matter how rich you may be.*

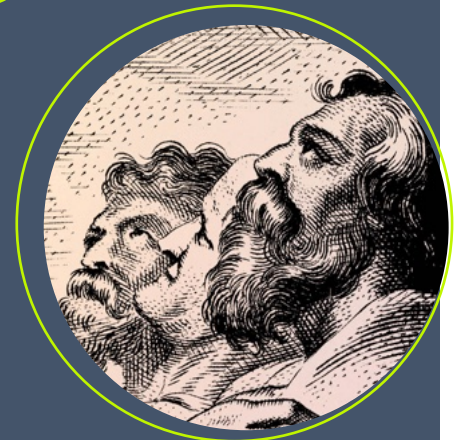
— Luke 12:15, GNT

After my friend sold his beautiful, spacious boat, he told me that there's no better place to learn about one's inclination toward covetousness than on a harbor dock. He also informed me of the boater's maxim, "Comparison is the killer of contentment." He continued, "On the water, you can be as content as possible, no matter how big or small, cheap or expensive your boat is. A man on a dinghy can be as content as a man on a yacht while afloat. That serenity lasts until you dock it next to the boat three times as big and 10 times as expensive as yours, and you quickly start feeling pretty small." The harbor, in this context, is a window into the nature of covetousness. While we are alone with our possessions, we enjoy the experience, the environment, the contentment of the breeze and sunshine. As soon as we enter the distraction of what others have achieved, our contentment evaporates like the morning fog, and we start feeling diminished by comparison.

Feeling "small" is the real problem. Who told you and me that we were inconsequential? This suggestion occurs when we open our ears to money's voice—a voice that haunts our insecurities regarding our supposed lack of progress in this world. This voice plays upon our prevailing need for affirmation, telling us that if we had more, or were more, we would be somebody. This is the voice of covetousness: the canker sore that devours the fruit of contentment, the worm that bores its way into the deep recesses of our brains and tints every view with a longing for something better. This is the voice that



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brings a perspective where what I have is spoiled by what I could have, where the meal in front of me sours in my stomach because of the illusion of a banquet elsewhere. The “greener grass” thinking grows in our brain and spoils the moveable feast we should be enjoying. Being consumed with what we could have is rooted in our need to “appear” as achievers in the eyes of the world. If it were not for our interest in others’ opinions of us, none of us would care one iota about a bigger this or a better that. We would focus more on taking care of what we have, rejoicing in what we have been given, and deriving more pleasure from the provision at hand. Concern about appearances is the spinal column of covetousness. Letting go of appearances is parallel to letting go of others’ opinions of you. The following quip speaks to the futility of leaning on the opinions of others:

*When I was 20,
I worried about what others thought of me.
When I was 40,
I didn't really care as much.
When I turned 60,
I realized they weren't thinking of me at all.*

– Author Unknown

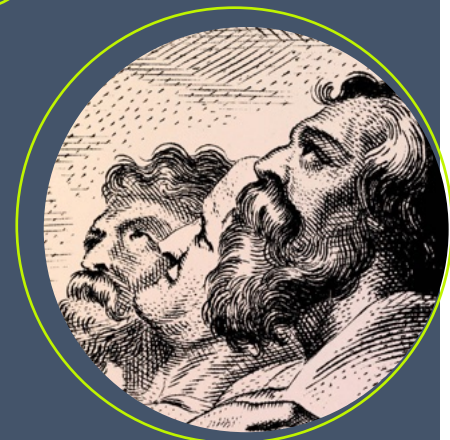
SEEKING THE “GOOD” LIFE

In this world we can get so busy chasing down the good life that we miss the “true life” that God designed for us. This is precisely what Jesus had in mind. He reveals the awareness that “life” is defined by what is on the inside of us, not by what adorns us on the outside.

When I was in my early 20s an elderly British missionary told me, “That which is good is often the enemy of that which is best.” I remembered the phrase and wrote it on the inside cover of my Bible. I suspect that this guidepost may have prevented some mistakes of compromise around money—and continues to be a needed reminder that this world has difficulty understanding what is best. How ironic that the best life could be most threatened by obsessing over the “good life.” Jesus taught that a person’s true life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. We must contemplate what Jesus meant by these words, because it stands



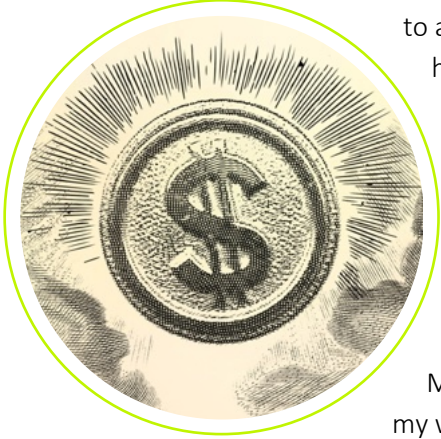
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to reason that the true life would stand in stark contrast toward a false life or a shadow life.

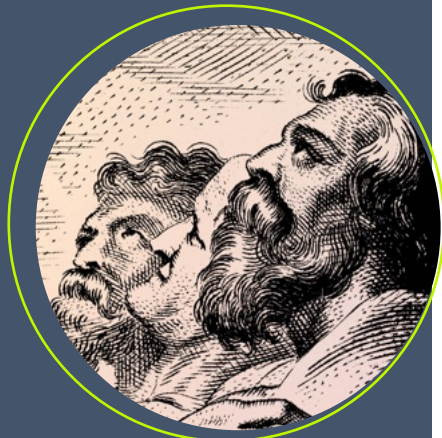
This is not to infer that living the good life is an evil thing. Evil enters when the good life calcifies our conscience and insulates us from human need. It is then the good life becomes a deteriorating force. In the next chapter, I will discuss how God has given us every good thing to enjoy. If we are enjoying material blessings and eating off the “fat of the land,” we are likely experiencing

God’s grace and provision. God led his people to a land “that flowed with milk and honey”—not filthy wells and bitter herbs. This blessed bounty is good and to be enjoyed without guilt. Where we cross the line into a false or shadowed life is when obtaining that good life becomes the aim and not the consequence.



My aim is to give love and wisdom to my wife and children. As a consequence, they write touching notes and cards for me now and then. What a beautiful and tender consequence it is to receive these notes of loving affection. Imagine the oddity if I began to demand the consequence and lost sight of the aim? What if I began manipulating or coercing my loved ones to give me more of these affirmations? The meaning would be lost. Beauty would drain out of the exercise. Minus the aim of love and wisdom—and allowing the blessing to come as a natural result—this scenario becomes odd, polluted, and vexing. So it is with making things our aim instead of the consequence of hard work and successful endeavor. People who make money the chief aim in their lives, instead of allowing money to arrive as a natural consequence of industry and effort, take on this same odd and unnatural air.

When the good life becomes the aim, it quickly begins to erode the best life. True life is about why we are here. The good life is more about how we live materially. We must, under no circumstances, let how we adorn our lives smother out why we live. Purpose is the daystar of the true life—allowing the why to lead all-important decisions, including decisions around money. Shortly after you tell me what you do, I want you to tell me why you do it. If you tell me what you do and start hinting at how much you make, I will sense that the purpose is lost in the shuffle. Your purpose is the hub from which your work



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processes should flow. Keep the connection between the two alive, vital, full of energy, and overflowing with the breath of God.

Ask yourself, “Where do I feel his life breathing through me?” The definition of the Greek root for the word “inspiration” (*theopneustos*) is translated, “God breathed.” God breathed into man the breath of life. Think of the gentle comfort and refreshment you feel when breathing in fresh spring air after a winter of cabin fever. It is this feeling of spiritual invigoration that nourishes us when we walk on the path of our true life.



Jesus said, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life.” (John 6:27a, NKJV) The most transcendent payoff in earthly life is not a material stockpile reaped from our labors, but the significance of the labors themselves. Jesus offers an interesting metaphor when he says, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35). When our bodies lack nourishment on a daily basis we become irritable and susceptible to outbursts of emotion. We have all done some damage to our prospects and relationships while in an undernourished state.

What happens when our souls are undernourished—when we are disconnected from the Bread of Life and from his purpose for us? We feel tired, irritable with life. We are susceptible to anger and negativity. We not only become susceptible to damaging emotions, but we also become vulnerable to misdirection and “snake oil” pitches for a better life. We end up going further and further from our true-life path on the Maker’s map. If these symptoms persist in our lives, they are signals that we may be lost. Jesus said, “My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work” (John 4:34, NLT). God designed us in such a way that our greatest fulfillment and joy for living comes from being centered in his plan for us.

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