

I have a variety of t shirts with the logo "Life Is Good." It is a clever product that many have seen and worn. In a world where headlines seldom trumpet the goodness of life, it is so refreshing and comforting to see such words in print. But is life good or is that a pipe dream or unrealistic advertising gimmick? How many would love to feel that way more often than they do? How many have never felt or believed in the goodness of life or the lives around us? What does it take for anyone to feel and believe that life is good? And as you consider your answers, ask whether your grandparents might have had completely different answers.

Many years ago, several news outlets ran a story from Mayo Clinic. The headline stated, "Researchers say they have cracked the code to being happy." After examining all the evidence, the scientist concluded that the degree of happiness people enjoy has to do with how resilient they are to life's many curve balls. He said the study showed that complainers will never be happy and happy people choose not to complain.

Is that really a surprise? And yet, how does one feel happy and find no reason to complain? The study really couldn't answer that, but maybe we can. Could it be that no matter what we do or get, we will never be completely happy -- because whatever it is that we need will never be enough? And even if we do someone find or receive exactly what we hope for, what do we do when it fades, breaks, or is lost forever? With that reality in mind, how good, then, can life be? Is the world's definition of a good life even possible or is it just an impossible dream?

Paul wrote that faith allows us to always be confident, meaning we are at peace and full of good feelings. He went on to say such confidence begins with faith, not by what we see, understand, touch, or can prove. That is a mouthful but think about what Paul said. The confidence that allows us to see goodness in life is the result only in a surrender to the love of God. We can't create it, capture it, or hang on to it. Only by letting go, which is the definition of faith, can we have what we need more than anything else.

Paul's witness, then and now, is that if we have faith, life is good, even if we don't have all the stuff the world looks for, offers, or controls. Faith is about surrender. And the good life with all its peace and comfort comes not from what we can see or control, but by simply believing that God is good and his touch changes all that touches us.

When you drive a car, do you need to see how steering linkage works, how spark plugs fire, or do you have faith that turning wheel and putting pressure on the gas pedal will succeed? Do you see the difference between seeing and believing? Between control and faith? Faith allows for confident living, so how come some who have much feel so empty and some whose lives are judged to be empty can't keep from smiling?

When my son, Mark, went on a mission trip to Haiti, he was working with young orphans, most of whom were malnourished and had only one set of clothing. Most had no shoes. The orphanage was on the side of a mountain, several miles from the tourist

beaches, yet none of the kids had ever been to the water. They had literally nothing, and lived in one of the poorest nations on earth and yet they had something in common. He said he had never witnessed so much joy, laughter, and singing in his life. These kids, who had nothing, were happy all the time. He found out from the workers and the kids that their faith in Jesus was stronger than anything that surrounded them. They didn't know what they didn't have but were happy with what they knew and believed. The poorest in our communities have more than most of the inhabitants of Haiti. Our middle class would be perceived by most in the world to be millionaires.

In our solar system there are "black holes," where there is literally nothing. There is no light, no life, only a place so empty it sucks in anything else that gets close. Even light cannot exist as it is sucked into the emptiness that is like a vacuum swallowing up anything that gets close. Is that not a perfect definition for what we call sin and death? More remarkable yet is that is exactly what Jesus willingly entered on Good Friday for you and for me. He went into the blackest, darkest, deepest vacuum ever where nothing good can be so that on Easter morning he could emerge, triumphant with that eternal darkness now blazing with Light and joy and peace! That is why Paul finished the passage of his letter, we just read, by saying he was confident and joyful even when he knew he was facing the black hole of death. No matter what, life is now good!

Fred Buechner wrote, "faith is better understood as verb than noun." In other words, faith is a process not a possession. Faith is not something we can grasp or create; it is a gift that is poured into us by the very life of God himself.

Jesus said faith is like a field in which someone has planted life. Whether awake or asleep, seeds grow, whether or not we understand how. Faith like a seed, brings the good life! Jesus used the example of bush that comes from a tiny mustard seed. He asked his audience if they thought the birds cared how that bush came to be, or did they just use its shade and protection. In the same way, faith sets us free to walk by a loving surrender to God, rather than by what we can see, gain, or prove on our own.

There is no greater miracle of faith than an infant who dares to take a first step or the giggling and smile that follows! That is faith! What about a young child who overcomes fear and gets on a school bus for first time? Again, that is faith! OR how about the willingness of a doctor or a patient to engage in open heart surgery, or a blind person to be led by a dog, or a young couple who are willing to bring children into a world as uncertain as ours?

Those are all practical examples that can illustrate the meaning of the word faith. Think about the times you have been depressed, troubled, afraid, or worried. When that happens, don't we assume it is a lack of faith, which explains our lack of confidence. But faith is God's gift and is already ours. So in reality, our depression, worry, or fear aren't because we lack faith, but simply have chosen to bottle it up rather than setting it free! The good life comes from God's gift of faith, not our strength in becoming what is impossible to do on our own. We criticize Peter for not having enough faith to walk on water, but the truth is it took incredible faith to try, and that is a lesson overlooked.

I visited my son in Switzerland. As he dropped me at the airport, he warned me about the security checkpoint. He said the Swiss have no sense of humor so no joking around with them. Every fifth person will be pulled out of line and sent into a private interview room. I was one of those, and entered somewhat apprehensively, daring not even to smile. As I walked in the customs officer looked at me, broke into a smile and said, "go on through." That was it! I was bewildered. She said, "I love your t-shirt." I looked down and realized it said, "Life Is Good." She said, "we need to hear that more often!"

So, what is the good life other than allowing faith to be life, rather than the things we waste so much time gathering and losing! Faith not dependent on what we see but, in the freeing, saving love of Jesus! It is not what we get but what God has given that makes life good. Think about it! If you have faith, life is always good even if you don't have all the stuff the world looks for. Rather than being tempted (as the world teaches) to say, "When I see it, I'll believe it!" allow faith to free us to say, "Because I believe it, I know I will see it!" And it is good! Just like God said, in the beginning!

TWSeeber