

# Living the **Good** Life

## Session 1: What Does It Mean to Be Good?

### Opening Prayer

Gracious God,  
Everything that you created is good,  
including us.

Be patient with us when we forget  
that we were created in your image  
and are led astray.

Help us to become the people  
you intended for us to be:  
confident in your love,  
generous with others,  
and grateful for all you have given us.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

### The Good Things in Life

*Read the talking points throughout this process aloud. Simply have each participant read one paragraph at a time to the whole group, continuing around the circle.*

- Most of us intend to be good. We want to do the right thing, but we often fail—often sabotaging our own happiness—and don’t know why. Is there anything we can do about it? Long before there were life hacks, ancient wisdom from our faith tradition outlined practical, battle-tested insights for becoming the best version of ourselves. We will explore those insights through this series.
- Some of us may be reluctant to embrace Catholic morality. Our faith tradition is often portrayed being focused on following rules, fasting, and avoiding the “good things” in life. Take Billy Joel’s song “Only the Good Die Young,” in which he tells a Catholic girl that “The stained glass curtain you’re hiding behind never lets in the sun.” “I’d rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints,” he continues. “The sinners are much more fun.”
- If this is how we see living out our faith, then we’re doing it wrong. It certainly wasn’t what Jesus intended. In fact, Jesus was accused of partying too *much*—“a glutton and a drunkard”—and hanging out with the wrong crowd—prostitutes, tax collectors, and all kinds of sinners (Luke 7:34, 15:2).
- Jesus did not come to put restrictions on us, but so we can “have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). And as Hilaire Belloc put it:  

Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine,  
There’s laughter and dancing and good red wine.  
At least I’ve always found it so.  
*Benedicamus Domino!*
- (For those whose Latin is rusty, that last line translates to “Bless the Lord.”)
- Now, enthusiastically following Jesus does not mean that you will always be happy, that you will become rich, that God will answer all your prayers the way you would like. But surrendering our lives to God *will* bring us an inner joy, fulfillment, and a sense of peace. Living good lives will make us more *free*.

# What We Do and Who We Are Becoming

---

- But, of course, we are not perfect. We fail. We're tempted to do the wrong thing. We're selfish. We hurt the people we love the most. We *sin*.
- One way to understand sin is as breaking rules that come from God and the church. Rules can be helpful in many ways, but they are a limited tool. That's why Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath." Rules are helpful guidelines to keep us on the right track.
- Being a good person is about making good, moral decisions—big and small. Ironically, the best way to become good at being good is to focus less on individual decisions and more on the person we are *becoming*. We need to ask: are we becoming the best version of ourselves—the person God wants us to be?
- We gradually shape who we are, little by little. Just as an athlete develops muscles and builds strength through exercise, we develop our "moral muscles" gradually based on the actions we take and what we allow to influence us. And just as it becomes easier to lift weights over time, we also become better at doing the right thing.
- Parents will particularly appreciate a concern for the kind of person their children are becoming. Parents have a special responsibility to help their children form good habits and grow into good people.
- God always wants what is best for us in the long run. God leads each of us on the path that is most life-giving, in a sustainable way. That often requires ignoring temptations that are appealing in the short term, but will lead us astray.

## Reflection Questions

---

- ① Does it seem as if "having fun" and "doing the right thing" are mutually exclusive?
- ② Do you feel you are becoming a better person: friend, partner, parent, co-worker, neighbor, etc.?
- ③ What influences in your life make you more likely to do the right thing? What influences make you more likely to do the wrong thing?

# When We Fail

---

- The creation story found in the book of Genesis is not a history lesson, but something far more important. It does its best to explain the human experience, and why we struggle to make the right choices. It gives us a number of insights about what sin is. It is our story.
- The first insight is that everything God created is very good, including people. We are fundamentally good, which is a good place to start. In fact, we were made in the image of God.
- Second, God gives us the freedom to make our own choices, wrong or right. God loves us, and wants us to be able to truly love him back. This is only possible if we have a choice.
- Let's pause now to read what happens in this familiar story after God says not to eat from "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Gen. 2:16-17)

*Read aloud the passage **Genesis 3:4-13** from a Bible, then continue with the following talking points.*

- What is this story trying to tell us? There is more here than meets the eye. Just like God, we are all about relationships. In this story, we break four important relationships. And that is what sin is.
- The first broken relationship is with God. "Who needs God, anyway?" we say. "We can do it on our own. We can take care of ourselves." When we act as if we don't need God, we cut him off.
- The second relationship is with other people. We lie and we blame. We don't love our neighbor as we should. We damage our relationships with others. Note that this refers not only to those closest to us, but to everyone we come in contact with and even those we indirectly effect through our actions (and inactions).
- The third broken relationship is with the rest of creation. We are meant to live in harmony with everything God created, but we can harm this connection, too.
- The fourth break is with ourselves. Our actions can cause us to lose our healthy self-image, self-respect, and dignity. When we fail to love ourselves, we become disconnected.
- These four relationships are closely intertwined and vital to being human. We can't be healthy and balanced without them. When we disrupt these relationships, we sin, and we find ourselves isolated and alone.
- Our goal is to remain connected to God, other people, the rest of creation, and ourselves. When these relationships are healthy, we are most fully alive.

## Reflection Questions

---

- ① How does it change your perspective to think about sin as broken relationships?
- ② Which of the four relationships are most difficult for you to keep healthy? In what ways?

## Goodness in Real Life

---

- If we want to keep our relationships healthy, we need to be prepared. Are you ready for your next encounter with a talking serpent? We need to become a person who is strong enough to take on the challenges that will face us.
- Why is this so important? Because life is messy and full of ambiguities. If every decision we are faced with could be easily looked up on the Ten Commandments, it wouldn't be so difficult.
- The choices we make in life, big and small, are all about our priorities. Everything is a trade-off. *We can't have everything.* Living the *Good Life* is the art of embracing the right priorities, even in challenging situations.
- The important work comes *before* we are faced with a large, potentially life-changing decision. We form habits—good and bad—all the time, and those habits will determine how “good” our life will be, and how we will perform in the toughest situations.
- It's like a baseball player who prepares all his life on the fundamentals, through practice, drills, weight training, and study. He works hard to form good habits so that it is reflex to make the right play. When he plays in a World Series, his performance will be based more on all that preparation than just how he happens to play that day.
- In upcoming sessions, we will explore ways we can “train” for living the *Good Life*, prioritizing what is most important, and keeping our relationships strong.

## Reflection Questions

---

- ① In what areas of your life do you train, practice, or prepare? What reaction do you have to the idea of training to be a better person?
- ② Have you ever taken an action or set of actions and noticed a change in yourself (positive or negative)? Share an example of how it has changed you.

## Closing Prayer

---

Creator God,  
You made us in your own image  
so we can love like you.

You created us with a need to  
stay connected to you,  
the people in our lives,  
the world around us,  
and ourselves.

Help us to follow the example of your Son:  
to have fun,  
to enjoy life,  
to always love,  
to live fully.

We pray this all in Jesus name.

Amen.

*Living the Good Life.* Copyright © 2018 Paul Canavese. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission. Published by The Pastoral Center / PastoralCenter.com.