

A Healthy and Good Christian Life

Philippians 4:6-7

October 11, 2020

What is the secret of living a healthy and good life?

Charlie Chaplin, English comedian answered to this question, saying, “There are six best doctors in the world you need to have for a healthy and good life. They are: The Sun, Rest, Exercise, Diet, Self-respect and Friends.” It sounds right.

Let me share another answer to this question: Tibetan people in Asia answer this way: “eat half of the usual portion, walk two times more than usual, laugh three times more than usual and lastly love always.” It sounds right, too.

What is the secret of living a healthy and good Christian life?

Paul answers to this question, saying in today’s bible lesson, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (NIV)

Here, Paul offers to the congregation at Philippi a way to a new kind of life, a life free from anxiety, a life from worry, a life filled with “the peace of God which passes all understanding.” This is what we, people of God in the 21st century need to hear and follow, as well.

Based on today’s text, Leonard Sweet, pastor and preacher came up with the following three sentences, which I have found cool. Here they are: Be Anxious in Nothing. Be Prayerful in Everything. Be Thankful in Anything. Can you say that with me?

Another cool thing Sweet did is that he changed these in mantra form. “Anxious: Nothing, Prayerful: Everything, Thankful: Anything.”

Do you want experience peace? You want the peace of God, “the peace that passes all understanding?” Then, “Anxious: Nothing, Prayerful: Everything, Thankful: Anything.” and, Paul promises, you will find the “peace of God” in your daily living.

1

“Be thankful in Anything” is the first and foremost thing to do for a healthy and good Christian life.

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonian 5:18) Give thanks in all circumstances. Is it possible to give thanks in anything and in any situation? It is easier said than done. Isn't it?

A preacher preached a 30-minute sermon at a church in a city on the subject of gratitude. He concluded the sermon by saying, “And remember, however small the gift, always be grateful to the Lord.” The offering followed the sermon, and when no one could find the offering plates, the preacher offered his hat for the collection. The hat was passed, but when it came back to the good Reverend, he shook it carefully, tipped it cautiously and discovered it to be empty. The congregation braced themselves for the response. But the clergyman turned to the altar, raised his hands and holding the empty hat in the air, prayed, “I thank thee gracious God that in your good mercy I have today gotten my hat back. Amen”

Gratitude is in our Christian DNA, for we are saved by the grace of God through Christ Jesus. We neither are qualified nor deserve to receive God's love. But God has accepted us unconditionally as we are and called us as His sons and daughters. We are who we are now by the grace of God. We are set free to live and love. What a blessing we have received.

Do you remember the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15? The prodigal son who squandered all the money he got from his father were welcomed unconditionally when he returned home. The father threw a big party to celebrate his returning, saying joyfully, “for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” Wow. Wow. Can you picture the prodigal son so moved and touched by his father's welcoming that he was speechless and wept ceaselessly? Can you see his eyes filled with thankful tears and can you see his heart filled with thanksgiving over his father's accepting him as a son again?

That is what God has done to each one of us unconditionally. Because of this God's wonderful and wonderful welcoming and accepting, we can be thankful in ... what? Anything. That is right: Anything.

On top of this incredible salvation, all blessings we enjoy daily flow from God. So every Sunday, we sing thankfully, “Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” Because of God, the source of all blessings, we can be thankful in all circumstances and in ... what? anything. You are right. Anything.

Henry Matthew, a biblical commentator, got robbed one evening on the way home. The robber snatched away his watch. Before going to bed, he wrote on his journal, “Thank God that he took mine not someone else's. Thank God that I was not hurt. Thank God that I can have money to buy another one.”

Thankful: Anything. We can be thankful for earning extra from stock market. We can be thankful for losing stock market investment. We can be thankful for the children who give us love and joy. We can be thankful for the children who give us pain and worry. Even thankful for the Covid-19 virus. Thankful for the vaccines to be available soon. Thankful for jobs, families, homes, friends, pets. Thankful for enemies, unemployment, rejection. Thankful for the sun, the moon, and stars. We can be thankful in Anything.

2

Once we have mastered “thankfulness,” the other two, Anxious: Nothing and Prayerful: Everything are easy to do. When thankfulness overflows out of our heart daily, anxiousness is gone like the morning fog and prayerfulness is come to us like a good friend.

Thankfulness brings us to God in prayer.

A man visited a wise man one day to get some wisdom for life. “Master, I am burned out. I am stressful. I am miserable. Please let me know a way to live a healthy and good life.” Hearing his sincere plea, the wise man replied, “I need to take care of my garden now. Meanwhile, would you hold the bag?” The man was disappointed not to get the wise man’s answer right away. Thinking the wise man had to do gardening now, he decided to pick up the bag as instructed and wait until he finished. The bag was not that heavy. But it was getting heavier as the times went by. After about 30 minutes later, his patience ran out of gas. Finally, he asked the wise man in the garden, “Sir, how long do I have to hold this bag?” The wise man turned with smile, saying, “why don’t you put it down if it is heavy?” Immediately the man was awakened to realize that putting down what he has been holding too long is a way to live a healthy and happy life.

What is prayer? Prayer is laying down before God what we have been holding too long. Yes, as a hymn goes, praying is laying all our burdens down in the feet of the Lord with thanksgiving. Laying down our sorrow, pain, hurt, brokenness, disappointment, doubts, issues, yes, everything before God. We do so with thanksgiving, for we trust God who knows everything about us and cares about us does come to us and does God’s supernatural works to make us anew.

God heals our brokenness and pain. God comforts us in our sorrow. God restores our strength. God fills us with wisdom and understanding. God encourages us. God shows us a way to the light. God is with us and for us. Who else or what else do we need to look for? Why anxious? Why worry?

St. Francis de Sales, one of the early Christians gives us the following good advice.

“Do not look forward to what may happen tomorrow; the same everlasting Father who cares for you today will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either he will shield you from suffering, or he will give you unfailing strength to bear it. Be at peace, then, put aside all anxious thoughts and imaginations, and say continually: “The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart has trusted in him and I am helped. He is not only with me, but in me, and I in him.” Amen. Amen.

Of course, we will face many troubles as we continue to journey in this world. In fact, as we follow Jesus, we will face more difficulties and challenges and troubles. But we are not promised a trouble-free life. Only an anxiety-free life, a life filled with the peace of God.

A neighborhood library offered a community competition for the best painting symbolizing peace. The award-winning art work would be prominently displayed in the library. When all the entries were in, the judges narrowed the competition down to two. One painting featured a majestic lake, so tranquil and still that the lush hills behind it were perfectly mirrored in its reflection. Above was a blue sky, around it were blooming wild flowers. Behind it were deer grazing in the meadows. It was a picture of peace. The other finalist portrayed a terrible storm, winds blowing, trees bending, and debris flying through the air. The sky was dark, the sight was stark, and there was not a person in sight. There was, however, a bird perched on a limb on one of those bended trees. Observers got the impression that the bird was singing. To which painting would you award the prize of peace? The judges chose the bird.

Thankful: Anything, Anxious: Nothing, Prayerful: Everything.

May you be filled with the peace of God and sing, “It is well with my soul” today and tomorrow and now and forever. In the name of the triune God, Amen. Amen.