

## Fight the Good Fight

1 Timothy 6:6-19  
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As I read through the whole corpus of Paul's letters: Romans, Corinthians, Galatians and all the rest, I see that he is constantly fighting an inner battle. It's as if there are two people inside him with boxing gloves on. And they are duking it out night and day. What is at stake is the definition of life that is really life.

For Paul, this has been a battle worth fighting, a battle he can not afford to lose. There is life that is really life; and then there is a kind of life that is really a sham. And, in a way, he assumes that everyone faces this same inner struggle: **which is the life that is really life?**

I have the impression that Paul, in his younger years, had taken every slick magazine advertisement seriously, had believed every claim that THIS product or THIS vacation destination or THIS wrist watch or THIS beverage would lead to the real abundance. In the end, he saw that none of those things mattered; that what does matter is the pursuit of righteousness. Life that is really life is life that is lived in pursuit of righteousness.

Righteousness simply means 'being in a life-giving relationship with God.'

As Paul serves as a mentor to younger disciples such as Timothy, he feels compelled to urge the next generation to fight this good fight that he, himself, has fought, to get crystal clear about the life that is really life.

As Paul reflects on the next generation pursuing righteousness, pursuing what it means to be in a life-giving relationship with God; he says something quite remarkable, something down-to-earth, something we can get our hands on. Speaking of the next generation of Christians, he says: **they are to do good, to be generous, and to share.** This is what he writes to Timothy. He defines righteousness differently in other Letters, but this is how he spells it out to young Timothy. Paul is convinced that the life that is really life has to do with embodying these Christ-like qualities: to do good, to be generous, and to share.

On the surface, this sounds a little too easy, maybe a little trite, and not all that spiritual. But as I poked into each of these three qualities, I saw that Paul was no fool.

To do good is to shape one's own soul. Like many of you, I have been moved by Glastonbury's response to Morgan Bjarno, a local high school student living with leukemia. So many students at the high school and others all around town have created a spontaneous support group for Morgan. Wearing orange wristbands. Morgan is a soccer player. They've made her an honorary starter on the team! In small ways and in big ways, this community is living into Paul's vision of righteousness by simply doing something good. And here's the mysterious thing: though the goal is to support Morgan, everyone wearing an orange wristband is being inwardly shaped by this gesture. Each one's soul is molded by the simple act of doing something good. I want one of those orange bands. But what I really want is to be living the life that really is life!

Paul instructs Timothy and others in the churches to be generous. To be generous is really to be God-like. God is often described as being almighty or all-powerful or all-knowing. My life experience suggests that God is primarily **generous**. I see this generosity in the landscape. I see it in the star-scape. I see it in the ocean-scape. I see it in so many people I know.

I saw it in my friend, Mickey Groshart, who died last Thursday. A school guidance counselor, a champion for Habitat for Humanity, a saint of a husband, an accepting, loving father; this man chose to be extraordinarily generous with his time. Being in Mickey's presence was like being in the presence of God's own spirit. He reeked of generosity. Perhaps you know someone like Mick, someone you could call at 2:00 in the morning and know it would be all right. We are all given the same gift of time, twenty-four hours in each day. I've noticed how some squander their time while others give it away. It's when we give it away that we are living into the vision of righteousness. It's when we give it away that we see we are living the life that really is life!

Finally, Paul invites the community to share, to share its substance. For in so doing, we discover the very presence of God. If you want to find God, place yourself in a neighborhood or in a family or in a relationship where sharing is a core value. **Where sharing happens, that is where God is revealed.** Sharing is one of those values we learn in Kindergarten. Sharing is stressed in the South Church pre-school and in the Sunday church school all the way through Wednesday School. For some, sharing is an after-thought. For some it is a core value.

If there is one thing that draws me back to the villages of the Great Rift Valley, to the homes of people near Lake Nyasa, to the families of central Malawi, it would be the certainty of encountering the Holy One in the midst of the sharing of a simple meal. Regardless of how bare the cupboard may be, how scarce the firewood may be, how empty the water bucket may be; when a guest arrives, someone starts a fire; someone draws water from the well; someone stirs the maize flour into the boiling water; and everyone has something to eat. Mysteriously, hunger is satisfied.

One comes away from such a simple meal certain of having been in the presence of the Christ, having been in the presence of the love that is released into the universe whenever sharing is claimed as a core value.

What the Apostle Paul hopes for is that everyone will find the life that is really life. He has found it in doing good, in being generous, and in sharing his substance. I share his wisdom with you all, in the greatest of hope. Amen.