

Week Five

Read Chapters 9-10 and the Conclusion

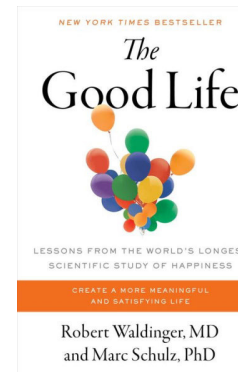
Have you had a work environment or connections with given co-workers that allowed you to improve your life or connect to the wider world as in the example of Loren in Chapter 9? How did that positive spillover impact the rest of your life at that time? Is there a way you feel challenged to make your work (including volunteer work) hours more positive?

The need for and power of friendships is evident in the study. What has held your longest friendships together? Have you experienced reconnecting with a friend where you let the relationship dwindle?

Scripture tells us that our God is a God of second chances (and third and fourth and more) so that we can have the grace of God to assist us in making needed changes in our lives. When have you seen someone make healthy changes well into adulthood that improved their lives? In reading this book, have there been any changes you have been encouraged to make that you want to share with the group?

EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF GEORGIA

1 Book 1 Diocese for Lent 2024



The Good Life
*Lessons from the world's longest
scientific study of happiness*

by Waldinger and Schulz

This Lent, the people of the Diocese of Georgia will consider what makes a life fulfilling and meaningful through the lens of the Harvard Study of Adult Development. As the book itself makes clear, “happiness” in the study is *eudaimonia*, or a flourishing life. Great theologians have weighed in on this. While Augustine of Hippo was pessimistic of true flourishing in a fallen world, Thomas Aquinas wrote of imperfect happiness, *felicitas*, that is possible in this life, even before the perfect happiness, *beatitudo*, of Heaven. He taught that practicing the virtues taught by Aristotle—prudence, justice, temperance, and courage—plus the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love, assist in our sanctification, or becoming more like Jesus over time.

The Good Life is not an intentionally theological text, but the book does open up topics that a church group can discuss with easy connections between this study and our faith in Jesus. This five-week study is intended to begin the week following the First Sunday in Lent and to conclude the week prior to Holy Week.

Questions for every week of the study

Each week, the group may use the following prompts as an icebreaker: How have you seen or experienced God’s love in the previous week? *or* What was your moment closest to Christ?

After working through the questions for the week, as time permits, close the discussion with: What else stood out in this week’s reading?

Week One

Read Chapters 1-2

Who have you known or known of whose life you would say was an example of *eudaimonia*, a life with deep well-being that comes from meaning and purpose? Did their faith play a significant role in their life? Have you experienced moments like this? What were the circumstances?

As you were growing up, what did you learn about what makes one's life successful? Was it connected to money and prestige or something else? How would you define success now?

Paul wrote to the Philippians, "Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others" as he taught us to have the same mind as Jesus. When has caring for someone else, or having someone assist you, enriched your life?

Week Two

Read Chapters 3-4

Show the group a photograph of yourself (whether a print or on your phone) when you were half the age you are now. If you are under 35, share a photo taken when you were starting out on your own as an adult. Tell the group what plans and hopes you had at that time and what was most important to you.

When has a loss or another unplanned event been a key turning point for you? Was there a time when this turned you toward God or away from God, or away from the church while still holding faith?

There are strong friendships in scripture from Ruth and Naomi or David and Jonathan to Jesus with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. When has a friend strengthened your faith or gotten you through a difficult period? What are the characteristics of a friendship like this? How might you intentionally cultivate these kinds of friendships?

Week Three

Read Chapters 5-6

Read Luke 10:38-42. Jesus says, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things." The New Testament Greek word used here is *periespato*, which means literally to be pulled or dragged away. This was millennia before smart phones with apps designed to monetize our attention. What assists you in being more owl than hummingbird in focusing on one thing?

How did you stay connected to others during the initial lockdown phase of the COVID-19 pandemic? Has that experience changed how you stay connected with others now?

The W.I.S.E.R. model presented in Chapter 6, does not make explicit room for the Holy Spirit as a part of reflecting on how to act or react. How do you make room for your decisions to reflect God's will? When has spiritual discernment made a difference for you in a key decision? What are some spiritual practices you could employ to support this?

Week Four

Read Chapters 7-8

How have you seen unrealistic expectations of close relationships work themselves out among your friends and family or in your own relationships? Who has been a model of a healthy couple for you?

Jesus does not speak against his own family or origin, but does speak of a family of faith in saying, "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." Do you connect more to your family of origin or to another chosen family? Why do these relationships matter so much? What strengthens that connection?

When possible, Christians are to forgive and reconcile, which can be needed within a family. When might that not be advisable? When have you seen a reconciliation within a family that reflected the virtues of faith, hope, and love working in those relationships?