

**21 day fast.**

**Bible reading/prayer plan-**

Lectio 365

Moment of Silence

Ben Sasse- who is he- why I appreciate him  
Letter two days before Christmas.

“Friends-

This is a tough note to write, but ... I'll cut to the chase: Last week I was diagnosed with metastasized, stage-four pancreatic cancer, and am gonna die.

Advanced pancreatic is nasty stuff; it's a death sentence. But I already had a death sentence before last week too — we all do.

I'm blessed with amazing siblings and half-a-dozen buddies that are genuinely brothers. As one of them put it, “Sure, you're on the clock, but we're all on the clock.” Death is a wicked thief, and [he] pursues us all.

Still, I've got less time than I'd prefer. This is hard for someone wired to work and build, but harder still as a husband and a dad. I can't begin to describe how great my people are. During the past year, as we'd temporarily stepped back from public life and built new family rhythms, Melissa [my wife] and I have grown even closer — and that on top of three decades of the best friend a man could ever have. Seven months ago, Corrie was commissioned into the Air Force and she's off at ..at flight school. Last week, Alex [graduated] from college a semester early. This summer, 14-year-old Breck started learning to drive. I couldn't be more grateful to constantly get to bear-hug this motley crew of sinners and saints.

There's not a good time to tell your peeps you're now marching to the beat of a faster drummer — but the season of advent isn't the worst. As a

Christian, the weeks running up to Christmas are a time to orient our hearts toward the hope of what's to come.

Not an abstract hope in fanciful human goodness; not hope in vague hallmark-sappy spirituality; not a bootstrapped hope in our own strength (what foolishness is the evaporating-muscle I once prided myself in). Nope — often we lazily say “hope” when what we mean is “optimism.” To be clear, optimism is great, and it's absolutely necessary, but it's insufficient. It's not the kinda thing that holds up when you tell your daughters you're not going to walk them down the aisle. Nor telling your mom and pops they're gonna bury their son.

A well-lived life demands more reality — stiffer stuff. That's why, during advent, even while still walking in darkness, we shout our hope — often properly with a gravelly voice soldiering through tears.

Such is the calling of the pilgrim. Those who know ourselves to need a Physician should dang well look forward to enduring beauty and eventual fulfillment. That is, we hope in a real Deliverer — a rescuing God, born at a real time, in a real place. But the eternal city — without cancer — is not yet.

Remembering Isaiah's prophecies of what's to come doesn't dull the pain of current sufferings. But it does put it in eternity's perspective: “When we've been there 10,000 years...We've no less days to sing God's praise.”

I'll have more to say. I'm not going down without a fight. ... [Thanks to God's grace through modern medicine]- Death and dying aren't the same as they used to be— the process of dying is still something to be lived. We're zealously embracing a lot of gallows humor in our house, and I've pledged to do my part to run through the irreverent tape.

But for now, as our family faces the reality of treatments, but more importantly as we celebrate Christmas, we wish you peace: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned....For to us a son is given” (Isaiah 9).

With great gratitude, and with gravelly-but-hopeful voices,

Ben — and the Sassses”

This is the kind of letter I want every single one of us to be able to write.

What Ben Sasse could write a letter like this because he has found what almost every human being alive is looking for- The Good Life.

This year- We are going to focus on Finding the Good Life.

### **Finding the Good Life Series Slide**

In short- what does it mean to be happy....what do you need?

That's what I'm aiming for this year.

Invite your friends.(inviter cards)

Have them come along on the journey.

We're going to start this in John's gospel.

Why John- talks extensively about LIFE

### **John 3:16, 10:10, 15:11, 20:31**

When John talks about “eternal life” or quotes Jesus talking about eternal life- he's talking about more than an amount of time...he's talking about a quality of life.

Jesus says he came to give abundant life.

He says he came to make our joy complete. and John said he wrote his whole gospel so that you would believe that Jesus is the Son of God...and so that you would have LIFE in his name.

Again- its not just NOT DYING...its a quality of life.

Ben Sasse talked about the incarnation of Jesus- what we celebrate at Xmas...and John did too- so I want to start there today.

### **John 1:1-5**

**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

**2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. 4 In him was life,**

and that life was the light of men. 5 That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it.

#### **John 1:10-14**

10 He was in the world, and the world was created through him, and yet the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, 13 who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God. 14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

#### **John 1:16-18**

Indeed, we have all received grace upon grace from his fullness, 17 for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18 No one has ever seen God. The one and only Son, who is himself God and is at the Father's side —he has revealed him.

### **1) The Good Life is flourishing & wholeness, not the absence of negative circumstances.**

Consider these common scenarios- offered up by Arthur Brooks (someone I'll be referencing quite a bit this year- not only as a public expert in the field of happiness research- but also a follower of Jesus himself). from his book "Build the Life You Want"

Claudia is an office manager in NY. At 35, she's been living with her boyfriend for the past five years. they love each other, but he is not ready to make a permanent commitment. Claudia doesn't feel that she can plan for the future, where she will live, whether she will have kids, how her career arc will go. This frustrates her and leave her at loose ends, making her feel sad and angry. She wants to be happy, but doesn't think she can be until her boyfriend makes up his mind.

Ryan thought when he was in college he would make lifelong friends and see his career goals. instead, he came out of school more confused about life than when he went in. Now, at age 25, he's thousands of dollar in debt, jumps from job to job, and feels aimless. he hopes he will be happy when the right opportunity comes along and makes his future clear.

Margaret is 50. Ten years ago, she thought she had everything figured out- she worked part-time, her kids were in high school, and she was active in her community. But since her children left the nest, she's felt restless and dissatisfied with everything. She

browses houses on Zillow, thinking it might be helpful to move. She thinks a big change will bring happiness, but she doesn't know what the necessary change is.

Finally- there's Ted. Since he retired, he hasn't had real friends. He's lost touch with everyone from work. He's been divorced for years, and his adult children are focused on their own families. Sometimes he reads, but he mostly watches television to pass the time. He thinks he would be happy if there were more people in his life, but he can't seem to find them.

These are normal people with normal problems. And their beliefs about happiness and life are all quite normal— but they are mistaken.

There are 2 underlying beliefs in all of their ideas.

- 1) I can be happy, ...
- 2) ...but my circumstances are keeping me unhappy.

Both of the ideas are wrong.

First- you can't be happy- because happiness is a direction, not a destination. You will never- at least on this side of death- be without negative feelings. But you can orient your life TOWARD something that points you in a happy direction.

Second- circumstances or sources of negative emotions DO NOT have stop you from aiming your life in a HAPPY direction.

Obviously, Ben Sasse's life circumstances contain have pain, difficulty, and death...and yet you can hear from his words that he is happy.

Now- let's look at what John wrote about Jesus.

### **John 1:1**

WORD is the Greek term "Logos"- Greek philosophers debated about the "meaning of life" This is the idea of the LOGOS. Some transcendent idea that makes sense of life.

In the Beginning (Genesis) & Moses (Exodus and the Torah) - throw back to the Torah...

John, in one sentence is writing to both Hebrews and Greeks and he's saying- what you have been seeking Jews in the Torah...and Greeks in your philosophy of the LOGOS- It has all come together in Jesus Christ.

Jesus was born into a particular time and a particular location. In fact, the scripture says that He was born "in the fullness of time".

One aspect of the fullness of time is the intersection of the Hebrew and Greek cultures.

And those cultures both brought something groundbreaking in terms of ideas of what makes “the Good Life” that the world had never seen before.

First- before YHWH revealed himself to the Hebrew people- through Abraham and Moses- there was no concept that the world had a TELOS.

TELOS just means an end- a goal- a purpose.

All concepts of existence at that point were cyclical. Think “the circle of life” or being eternally reincarnated.

But in the OT- what GOD revealed to the Hebrews was actually the timeline of the universe wasn’t a circle- it was an arrow. Going somewhere. Doing something. Changing. Progressing. Moving to a point.

TELOS.

### **John 1:2 & 13**

You can hear from John the emphasis not on the randomness or cyclical nature of the universe- but of a Creator who has a design, a purpose, a will.

### **John 1:4**

The Greeks contributed their philosophy of a higher order of ideas. A kind of transcendent perfection that governs the world. In other words, if you wanted to live the good life- you needed to understand the LOGOS behind the world- and live a life dedicated to a set of virtues while you avoided a set of vices. This is how you lived a life enlightened by the LOGOS instead of wandering in the darkness.

The Greeks were obsessed in arguing philosophically about exactly what those virtues and vices were...and about just how one LIVED according to the LOGOS...but they did agree that there was a higher standard.

John comes along and says “Hebrews & Greeks- I know you guys don’t necessary get along- but I’m telling you- the LOGOS that governs life and the CREATOR that has given a TELOS and an end goal to life- are not at odds. In fact- they come together in JESUS.

In fact, in Jesus’ most famous teaching- the sermon on the mount- in Matthew 5- he is combining Greek virtue Philosophy and Hebrew TELOS into one sermon about “the Good Life”

And the 2 primary ideas that come from that teaching- which is known historically by non-christians and christians alike- as the most transformative well-respected ground breaking ethical teaching in history...the 2 primary ideas highlighted in the sermon on the mount is that the GOOD LIFE is about FLOURISHING and WHOLENESS.

### **Matthew 5:3**

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Beatitudes

Makarios- Happy...but not quite- Flourishing is the most accurate.

Blessed is too passive for this word. Sit around and wait for God to bless you.

Think about the idea of flourishing- what comes to mind. For me its a garden. Fruit trees. Big leaves...juicy fruit...its gonna move ya!

Look back at John's discussion of the LOGOS- the WORD- JESUS.

### **John 1:3-4**

Talk of creation- (of course a reference to GENESIS and a perfect Garden. For the Hebrew the phrase IN THE BEGINNING AND CREATION doesn't motivate them to go outside and look at the trees- it motivates them to remember the opening of the TORAH- to go back to GENESIS. But the big picture is life springing up. Flourishing.

### **John 1:12-13**

There is also this picture of new birth. again. Flourishing. Life springing up. For those that receive the LOGOS- Jesus- they are BORN of the WILL OF GOD.

OT equivalent is ASRE

### **Psalms 1:1-3**

**How happy is the one who does not  
walk in the advice of the wicked  
or stand in the pathway with sinners  
or sit in the company of mockers!**

**2 Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction,  
and he meditates on it day and night.**

**3 He is like a tree planted beside flowing streams  
that bears its fruit in its season  
and its leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.**

Do you see the flourishing here?

So the Good life is FLOURISHING- bringing life to the world.  
And its also WHOLENESS.

This is summed up in the Greek word “Teleios”

### **Matthew 5:48**

Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect.

This in not about moral perfection. Its not a statement of impossibility to make you go  
“UGH- I’m imperfect. I need God”

its a statement about singlemindedness. You need to make your life about a goal. A  
Telos. And let that END- that GOAL- govern all that you do. This is the HAPPINESS  
direction.

Aliging your will- the direction of your life- ALL OF YOUR LIFE...not just Sundays, not  
just spiritual moments...but down to the ordinary nitty gritty of life. The life that the  
LOGOS was born into.

2 Hebrew words translated into Greek as “Teleios”.

Tamim- with means WHOLE or complete.  
Salom- Peace- everything working together.

Its the way things work as God created them in the garden...in the beginning.

### **Back to 1)**

## **2) The Good Life comes from Spiritual Connection, Deep Relationships, and Transcendent Purpose.**

Sasse about Brooks: Need 4 things working the right way for happiness.

**Faith**

**Family**

**Community**

**Work**

Faith: Do you have a framework to make sense of death & suffering?



Family: Do you have a home life with mutual affection, where the good of others is as important to you as your own happiness?

Community: Do you have at least 2 real friends who feel pain when you suffer and share joy when you thrive?

Work: Perhaps most fundamentally, when you leave home on Monday mornings, do you believe that there are other people who genuinely benefit from the work you do? Is your calling meaningful? Not: "Is it fun or well-compensated?" — but rather, "Does it matter"?

I translate all of this into those 3 things.

**Spiritual Connection**  
**Deep Relationships**  
**Transcendent Purpose**

In John 1-

**Spiritual Connection**  
**John 1:3 & 10**

Creator- Owner's manual. You can't make up your meaning. HE KNOWS WHY YOU ARE CREATED. And that purpose is a connection to him.

BUT- we didn't recognize him. Distrusted him. Made our own way.

**Transcendent Purpose**  
**John 1:1**

Logos- your life has to aim for something beyond you.  
David Brooks 2nd mountain.

Sin- we didn't aim for something beyond ourselves- we kept our world small. Just trying to figure out our own happiness in spite of God's presence and love.

**Deep Relationships**  
**John 1:11-12**

We did not receive him. He was crucified by the Greeks and the Jews of his time. But the plan all along was to come to the whole world. The Greeks and the Jews. The people who crucified him

The Scripture says that it wasn't just the people who were there physically- but all of us were there spiritually. With our rejection of a relationship.

And on the Cross- Jesus took the pain, separation, the punishment and chastisement for our sin. to restore us to a relationship.

BORN AGAIN. A happy direction toward a TELOS WITH GOD.

### **John 1:14 & 16-17**

Grace upon Grace- Grace and truth.  
Which is what all deep relationships have.

### **John 1:18**

A revealing- a vulnerability (don't we get frustrated at surface relationships)  
Bosom- vulnerable crawling up in lap.

### **Matthew 22:37-40**

**37 He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the greatest and most important command. 39 The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."**

### **John 17:20-23**

**20 "I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. 21 May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. 22 I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me."**

Sasse's letter-  
Unafraid. Overflowing. Sent.

Spiritual Connection, Deep Relationships, Transcendent purpose

Prayer Team