

Seeking the
Good Life:
A Very Brief
Introduction to
Christian Ethics

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Jot down your thoughts

What is your vision of the good life?

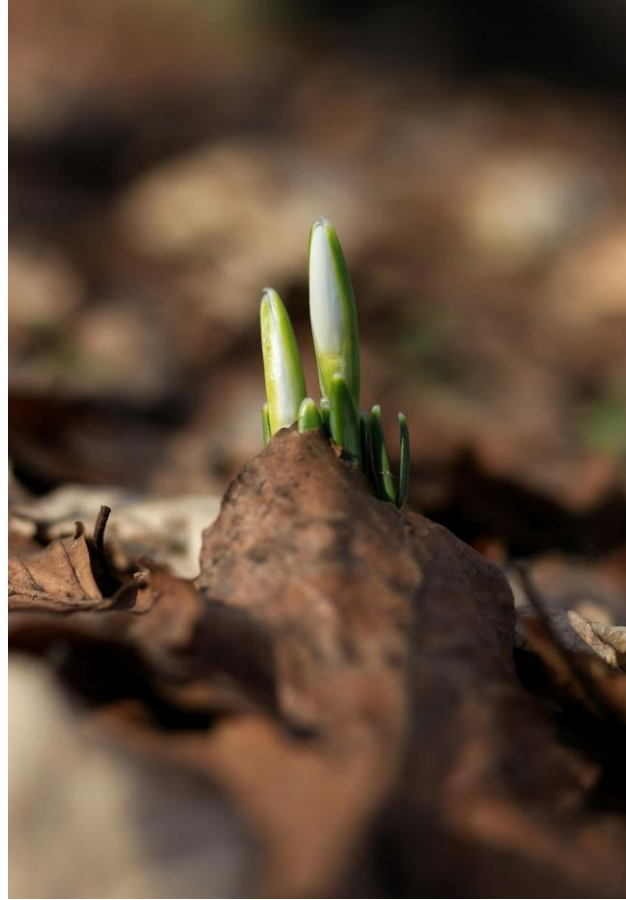
Does your vision of the good life include conflict? If so, how do you navigate conflict? If not, why not?

What sources of wisdom do you draw upon when you confront conflict?



The Context of Christian Ethical Reflection

- Two propositions -
 - Everyone has an ethic. The task is to understand competing moral norms and values and visions of the good life.
 - "We live in conflict. The dynamics of conflict are the stuff of daily life, the movement of history, the making and remaking of community, and the vibrancy of faith. To be is to be in conflict." (Ellen Ott Marshall, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics*, 1).
- The literal meaning of conflict -
 - Latin root, con meaning "with," fligere meaning "to strike" or "to strike together"
- Conflict is part of our existence and who we are -
 - We are relational beings.
 - We exist as part of a larger ecosystem and part of a larger social community.
 - We live in a world undergoing constant change.



Think about ...

Thoughts and questions before us ...



Christian ethics, particularly the Reformed variety, is the study of conflict.

How do we live a good life amid conflict?

How do we identify competing visions of the good life amid of conflict?

The Christian life is about faithfully navigating all the joy and conflict that we encounter every day.

Approaches to
the ethics of
the dominant
culture in the
predominantly
Christian West
developed over
time.

Historically, Greek philosophers “assumed that the only people with moral choices to make were free, adult, male citizens who had the leisure and opportunity for discussion, for participation in politics, and for the pursuit of civic and military honors” (Robin Lovin, *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide*, 27).

Aristotle on active vs. contemplative life.

Augustine maintains similar tensions in the way he approached living out a Christian life.

In Middle Ages, the superiority of the contemplative life established in Roman Catholic Tradition.

Protestant Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin, rethink relationship between the active and contemplative life.

Modern expansion of vocation didn't reach many people in industrialized countries until 20th century.



Classical Theories

Goals – *Teleological Ethics*

“A system of ethics that give primary attention to the goals or good that we achieve by our actions” (Lovin, 23). Our moral choices are “dependent on goals, so that our rules and virtues help us achieve our goals” (Lovin, 20).

Rules – *Deontological Ethics*

“Deontological ethics makes doing one’s duty, doing what is required, the key determinant of whether one is a good person” (Lovin, 42). Our moral choices are driven by rules. “[W]e choose our goals within the limits set by rules and seek those virtues that make us better at following the rules” (Lovin, 20). Often professional ethics falls within this approach.

Virtues – *Areteological Ethics*

“A virtue ... is a pattern of behavior earned through practice, so that it becomes part of the way a person normally tends to act” (Lovin, 64). Our moral choices are not driven as much by goals or rules. “[W]hat we do and what we choose is in the end less significant than the kind of people that we become” (Lovin, 20).



Additional considerations ...

Concepts of God are always closely tied to concepts of moral agency.

Examine conflict in context.

Underscore the critical nature of listening to those most effected by conflict.

Analyze power dynamics.

Explore the anthropocentrism in past approaches to Christian ethics.

Focus your attention on ethics as more than a field of study, but also as an area of practice and a way of life.

Discussion

Returning to questions raised earlier this evening ...

What is your vision of the good life?

Does your vision of the good life include conflict? If so, how do you navigate conflict? If not, why not?

What sources of wisdom do you draw upon when you confront conflict?



Recommended Resources

Ellen Ott Marshall, *Introduction to Christian Ethics: Conflict, Faith, and Human Life*.
Louisville: WJKP, 2018.

Robin Lovin, *Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.