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Abundant life

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TEXT: John 10:7-11 (NASB1995)

So Jesus said to them again, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

Dear friends: grace and peace are always for you from God, our Father, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus said, "I've come that you might have life *abundantly*." [emphasis added.] Who wouldn't want abundant life? But I'm convinced that many Christians live far beneath our privilege as the people of God. Perhaps you've heard the story of a beggar woman who, every day, left her hovel of a home and walked the streets, living as if she were broke and broken, pushing an old grocery cart, acting as if she were homeless. When that woman died, those who handled her affairs discovered that she was a multimillionaire many times over. But she lived as if she were destitute.

What is the abundant life that Jesus offers us? Maybe it's helpful to begin by saying what it is not. It is not material prosperity. It's not a guarantee of lavish homes or expensive cars or lots and lots of money or being immersed in the personal pleasure and entertainment all the time. It's not about power or fame or prestige. Those are not

God's priorities for His people. It's not material things, though a Christian believer might be blessed by those things. It's not the guarantee that you'll never experience pain or brokenness or sickness in this imperfect world. Let's remember that, in faith, we follow a King who had nowhere to lay His head, washed the disciples' feet when they were dirty, rode a donkey into Jerusalem, played and laughed with children and drug crossbeam down the Via Dolorosa, and then was nailed to a cross and died, suspended between Heaven and Earth. Jesus was a vagabond servant.

It's also important to remember what Jesus said about our enemy, Satan. "The thief," He said, "comes to steal, kill and destroy." He's the enemy of our souls and he is a liar. He tries to seduce us and then he accuses us. He tries to diminish our life, defeat us, discourage us and, yes, destroy us. He tries to accomplish the absolute opposite of abundance. Well, then, what is abundance, as Jesus offers it and intended for us? The first thing I'd say: it's faith tapping into God's spiritual infinity of power and love. It's saying to the Lord Jesus, "I believe in you and I gladly receive all that you have to give me in your name." That faith confessed in Jesus as son of God and savior is the key to unlocking the experience of abundant life.

Maybe it's important to also ask, "What is it that could block us from experiencing the abundant life in Christ's name?" Well, the first is no surprise. It's immoral behavior, secret sins, or sinful habits and rhythms that do not give life and hurt other people and break our close fellowship with God and His love. Of all these things, we need to repent – tell the Lord we're sorry, ask forgiveness, and ask for the power to be set free. It also might be a closed, cold heart that is ambivalent to spiritual life or never listening to the voice of Christ. Maybe it's a stinky attitude, a self-serving arrogance that wants to rule our own lives. Maybe it's a hyper-critical spirit that says, "Everything about life is terrible and everyone that I meet is a fool." You heard, maybe, about the person who thought that life stinks and that everyone they met stinks. And then they discovered that there was a hunk of Limburger cheese stuck in their nose.

What could block abundant life? Maybe it's misplaced priorities and flawed loyalties. Many of you have no doubt read or seen the movie *Unbroken*, telling the story of Louis Zamperini, an Olympic distance runner, a miler, who later served as a pilot in the Pacific theater during World War II. He was shot down by the enemy and he and two other soldiers survived in a life raft for 47 days. And then they were picked up by the Japanese and endured years of harsh imprisonment. They especially were brutalized by

the psychology and the physical beatings of Mutsuhiro Watanabe, who later would be classified as a war criminal. At the end of the war, Zamperini's battles were still not over. He dealt with recurring nightmares of the war and memories and the torture tormented him. In his anger and bitterness, he turned to alcohol. It became such a problem that his wife, Cynthia, considered divorce. And then she attended a multi-week Billy Graham crusade in Los Angeles, where she accepted Jesus and placed her faith in Him as her savior and Lord. Returning to home, she begged Lewis to come with her to the rally. He finally agreed, but he got angry hearing Graham's message and stormed out of the crusade. A few days later, though, he went back. And when Graham gave the invitation to come forward and believe in Jesus, Lewis recalled that when he was floating in the life raft in the Pacific, he had promised God, "Lord, if you'll save me, I'll serve you forever." And so Lewis made good on his promise, and he became a Christian. He trusted Christ. His nightmares ended. He gave up alcohol, and he opened Victory Boys Camp to help troubled boys be renewed and reformed and live productive lives of faith. Zamperini's abundant life began when he found hope in the steadfast love of Jesus. He changed loyalties. He experienced the victory that Jesus offers us to be free from fear, live in the joy of forgiveness, and break free in the newness of life.

The second thing I'd like to say about abundant life is that we learn to walk in the Spirit – that we live every day conscious of and content in God's presence; that we approach each day aware and confident of the Spirit with us and within us so we know that we're never alone. I love the story in Genesis 5 of a figure named Enoch. He was the great grandfather of Noah. It says simply of Enoch: "Enoch walked with God." Do you walk with God? Would that be an appropriate description to succinctly summarize how you approach life? "This person walks with God." So when we walk by the Spirit, we learn to walk under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture compares the impact or the influence of the Holy Spirit when it says, "Don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit." Instead of the toxicity of alcohol, which can take over a life and derail it in the wrong way, the Holy Spirit is a sweet communion that fills us with life and joy and possibilities. And we learn to walk with God in that way. But the Holy Spirit, when we walk in the spirit, also pours strength into us to face every adversity and challenge of life. How many of you may remember the story of a man named Horatio Spafford, who was a prosperous Chicago lawyer in the mid-19th century? He had made shrewd investments in properties along Lake Michigan and he and his wife Anna were blessed with four daughters and a son. Then a series of tragedies struck. First, the Spaffords' four-year-old boy died of scarlet fever. And then just a short time later was the

infamous Chicago fire of 1871 that caused extensive damage and burned down the properties that Spafford owned. And then third, two years later, in 1873, there was a tremendous economic downturn, that further dealt a blow to the Spaffords' financial portfolio. In late 1873, needing a break, the whole family decided to journey to Europe. Horatio stayed behind in Chicago to deal with some business challenges and sent Anna and the girls ahead on a ship toward Europe. But on November 22nd, the ship was struck by an English vessel and sank immediately to the bottom of the Atlantic. Anna, his wife, floated, clinging to debris, and was one of only 47 people that survived. All four of their daughters drowned in the tragedy. When Anna reached Wales, she sent Horatio a telegram that said, "Saved alone." So, when Horatio, a devout Christian, traveled the ship to join his grieving wife, this crushed father wrote the hymn we know so well:

When peace like the river attends my soul,
When sorrow like sea billows roll,
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say
It is, well, it is well with my soul.

Walking with the strength of the spirit, Christ lifted him up despite the tragedy, despite the terrible grief, to still give him hope to persevere. Maybe you've heard the saying, "God is never at His extremity, therefore we are never at our extremity."

The third area of abundant life I want to mention is the ability to embrace our gifts and abilities and then commit ourselves to fully develop them: to maximize our potential and then dedicate all those gifts and abilities and talents to the Lord's service. I love the story of the British Olympic gold medalist runner Eric Liddell. He was a competitor in the 1924 Summer Olympics in Paris, but he refused to run in the heats for his favorite event, the 100 meters, because they were held on Sunday. Instead, Liddell decided to compete in the 400 meters, which was not his specialty. Yet, when he competed, he won the gold. But here's what I want you to hear: he said this, "When I run, I feel God's pleasure." He knew that he was gifted as an athlete to run, and when he ran, he felt affirmed by the God who had given him that gift. Friends, I don't know what your gifts are. What are your abilities, where are your passions? But you should maximize their development to the fullest extent and then offer them back to the Lord for his service. Carson Wentz, the [former] Philadelphia Eagles quarterback, said this recently: "I am not an athlete who happens to follow Jesus Christ. I am a follower of Jesus Christ, who happens to be an athlete."

The fourth thing I want to mention about the abundant life Jesus offers us is that we would be transformed into the character of Christ – that Jesus' character would be formed in us. In Ephesians 4, it says, "Build up the body of Christ, live in the unity of faith, grow in the knowledge of the son of God so that you may grow to full maturity – the fullness of Christ." Tim Keller, the author and preacher, says, "It's interesting to note that none of the gospel writers describe Jesus' physical appearance: the cut of His figure, His size, the color of His hair or eye or what clothes He wore. But all of them focus on Christ's character." The abundant life is to have the character of Jesus Christ formed in us; character qualities like faithfulness and patience and humility. It struck me as I prepared for this message that when Jesus washed the disciples' feet in John 13, He also washed Judas his feet, even though He knew that Judas, a few hours later, would betray Him. Or think of the love of Jesus, who's the Good Shepherd, to lay down His life sacrificially, to free us and save us. Or authenticity or wisdom and maybe the quality that most endears us about the quality of Jesus' character is His willingness to forgive.

The fifth and final area I want to mention to you about the abundant life is that we should live with a vision of great expectation as God's partners in this world. A woman named Lori Krei, our church's administrator, has a quote hanging in her office by D.L. Moody. It says, "If God is your partner, make your plans big." It says in the scripture, "Our eyes have not seen or heard nor has it entered into the heart of man, all the wonderful things God has in store for those who love Him." Because we belong to Jesus Christ and because He pours out this abundance to us every day, we should attempt great things for God. We should expect God to bless us, but we should always do it with the heart of a servant, remembering that Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be great must be the servant of all."

I dare to venture that many Christians live far beneath their privilege. Most of the time we live with too small a vision and too low an expectation of what God will do through the hearts of His people when we are fully surrendered to Him. Do you hear Jesus? He's calling and He's promising you abundant life.

Amen.