

Christians Under Construction:
Let the Living Begin
John 10:1-10

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Once upon a time a man fell in love with his sports car. He drove it everywhere he went. He paid more attention to the car than he did to his family. When time came to make funeral arrangements he asked to be buried in it. Since money was not an issue, the man's unusual request was granted. On a bright sunshiny day a crane lowered the sports car with the deceased man at the wheel into a gigantic grave. A crowd gathered to witness the strange event. As the car and corpse slipped out of sight, one bystander said to another, "Now that is really living."

Christians Under Construction: Building a Life that Really Matters. I began this series of sermons by asking "What is life?" I would like to conclude this series of sermons by asking "Where is life?" All of us are looking for life. George Gallop says most young Americans believe it is very important to find a meaningful and purposeful life. About 46% of us think about the meaning and purpose of life very often. We are looking for life. Sometimes we look for life in all the wrong places, search for life in too many faces. Even in our confusion we are longing for life—for a life that really matters.

Jesus said this about life: "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that you may have life, and have it to the fullest.*" Eugene Peterson translates the latter part of this verse this way: "I came so they could have a better life than they ever dreamed of." What a promise.

BEWARE: THERE ARE LIFE KILLERS.

There are hirelings and thieves and robbers who will steal your life away. They will keep you confused and discouraged. They will entice you to wander in the wilderness without decision or direction. They will attack you when you are wounded and take advantage of your vulnerability. The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. All of us have encountered the intruder.

Watch for life-killers when you are WANDERING. We nibble here and there, chase after this dream and follow that desire. The hireling, who cares not for the sheep, says go where you want, do what you will, have it your way, you deserve a break today. So we wander without awareness that we are wasting our life.

The prayer of General Confession says: We err and stray from God's ways like lost sheep. We follow too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done. May God have mercy on us.

Chris Evert, who won 146 tennis championships, said in an interview, "We get

into a rut. We play tennis. We go to a movie. We watch TV. But, I keep saying, ‘John, there has to be more.’” We are prone to wander.

The U2 rock band has a hit song entitled, I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For. The lyrics go something like this:

I have climbed the highest mountains,
I have run through the fields,
I have run, I have crawled,
I’ve scaled these city walls.
But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.

We are prone to wander.

A.W. Tozier wrote nearly a century ago, “We must face the facts that many today are notoriously careless in their living. But what would a violin solo sound like if the strings on the instrument were all hanging loose?” Wandering leaves us weary, lost, tired, trapped.

Watch for life-killers when you are feeling WOUNDED.

Do you ever wonder why every children’s story has a villain? The Three Little Pigs and Little Red Riding Hood have to deal with the big, bad wolf. Cinderella has a mean step-mother and step-sisters. Snow White is tricked by the wicked queen. Luke Skywalker is destined to encounter Darth Vader.

Are we not trying to warn our children early that it’s dangerous out there? The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Just as sharks can smell blood in the water from miles away, the enemies of our souls can smell woundedness as they close in for the kill. They want to take your life away, destroy your confidence, challenge your safety, threaten your future, and make you subject to their power.

According to Moses Goldberg, producer of the play about wolves now running at Nashville Children’s Theater, “the wolf is hungry all the time but the only way he can get food is to come up with a scheme.” So the lesson of the Three Little Pigs is to build your house out of good stuff for the big, bad wolf will huff and puff and try to blow it down. The lesson of Little Red Riding Hood, says Goldberg, “is to not fall in bed with the first wolf you meet.”

John Elderidge says, “The story of your life is the story of a long and brutal assault on your heart by the one who knows what you could be and fears it.”
“The thief comes to steal, to kill, and to destroy—to take your life away.”

BUT JESUS IS A LIFE-GIVER. *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the fullest.”* He wants to give you a better life than you ever dreamed of.

Life is what we’ve been looking for since we lost paradise. Eve ate the apple from the wrong tree. So we got the Knowledge of Good and Evil but missed the Tree of Life. Jesus does not say you want too much. Instead, He says don’t settle for too little. He, who caused the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, and

raised the dead to life, wants us to live, not merely survive. The life we long for and truly desire is new life in Christ.

Christ, Himself, is the door to life. There were two kinds of sheep pens in Jesus' day. There was the communal sheepfold in villages manned by a doorkeeper. Shepherds left their sheep in pens like these when home to rest. But, there was another kind of sheepfold. It was a sheepfold built in the wilderness. There the shepherd, himself, became the door as he laid himself across the entry way to protect the sheep. So there arose a saying, "The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep."

Jesus offers Himself as God's doorway into the life that is truly life. Confidence in Him leads us to become His apprentices in eternal living.

One door and only one and yet its sides are two.
Inside or outside on which side are you?

Christ, Himself, is the Good Shepherd.

*The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul.*

Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep by name. He leads them. They follow. He has promised to receive us, poor and sinful though we be. He has mercy to relieve us, grace to cleanse, and power to free.

Andrae Crouch has recorded 15 albums, won 9 Grammy Awards, worked on musical scores for The Lion King and The Color Purple and has been nominated for an Academy Award. But Andrae Crouch was not always on top of the world. He had no formal musical training and still cannot sight-read music. He had to overcome stuttering and still struggles with dyslexia. His mother, father, and brother all died in a span of two years. He tells some awful stories of Christian people walking out of his early concerts because of his color. My favorite song that Andrae recorded is entitled Through It All. One stanza goes like this:

I thank God for the mountains,
I thank God for the valleys,
I thank God for the storms He's brought me through.
For if I'd never had a problem,
I wouldn't know that God could solve them.
I wouldn't know what faith in God could do.

Through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God.
Through it all, through it all, I've learned to depend on His Word.

You can have new life in Christ. Why not live, not merely survive?

New life is found in Christ and lived out in community. The word *religion* comes from a Latin word meaning “to bind together.” So religion binds people together to deal with life’s joys and sorrows. The ties that bind are sacred.

What frightens me most about the days that lie ahead of me is not the suffering, though there will be surely some of that; nor the life threatening complications, though they are very real. What concerns me most about this medical procedure is my separation from church for two months. I have never been away from church that long in my life. For 39 consecutive years, I have stepped into a pulpit almost every Sunday. Some of my first congregations would easily fit inside this pulpit with plenty of room for visitors. However small, or however large, there is something sacred and powerful about the Church gathered. A nurse said to me last week, “You have a compulsion about church.” I said, “No ma’am, I have an obsession about church.” You don’t need me, I need you. For all that I am, all that I hope to be, I owe to the body of Christ who dared to believe in me. So, call me crazy, but I still believe:

The Church is the body of Christ.

The Church is blessed of God.

The Church is God’s best hope for humanity.

The Church deserves my heart, my life and my deepest devotion.

It’s time for some of you to step from the margins into membership, from sidelines into service, from the circumference into the center of this community of faith. If you want life, real life, spiritual life, make that vital connection today. Simply fill out the card in your bulletin and meet me at the altar during the hymn.

When it’s all been said and done, there’s just one thing that really matters. Did I do my best to live for Christ? Did I live my life for others? Let the living begin!

Amen.