

Are You Living An Abundant Life?

John 17:3

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It is a common misconception among non-Christians—and that, as we have seen, is a sector that is getting bigger and bigger—that the Christian life is frankly ‘restrictive’ and ‘boring’ and they would not want to have anything to do with it. Christians the world over are thought to be dull, humorless, and austere people.

Southern Baptists seem to take the brunt of all this—at least in recent years. They are ridiculed by the media because they preach against drinking, card playing, and dancing. And how out of touch of them to speak against homosexuality and premarital sex! They must be a bunch of downers! A few years ago, there was a boycott of Disney World because of Disney World having a gay day once a year. So the Southern Baptists decided to boycott Disney World. The media could not have done more. They seemed to have gone out of their way to reinforce the world’s image that Christians are intolerant, rigid, square, and they are biblical—they give credence to this 2000-year-old Book that is so out of touch with the way things really are in life in these modern times.

Of course, over the past week, we have had the Phil Robertson ‘Duck Dynasty’ dustup in which he essentially was castigated—and of course, pretty much fired from the show or at least he has been suspended—for quoting the Bible (I Corinthians 6:9) or paraphrasing it, however he did it.

But this just reinforces the idea of all the secular people out there that Christians are ‘holier than thou,’ unauthentic (“They’re just putting it on. They’re trying to be something else because we know people really aren’t that way”), and that Christians wear their religion on their sleeves and they are just false and fake.

The cause of Christianity has not helped a great deal by stuck-in-time lifestyles like the Amish who wear clothes that were in fashion 500 years ago and forbid the use of any kind of modern electronics or appliances. That just screams ‘austere’ and ‘archaic’ to them. Most people actually consider them to be kind of crazy, weird to adhere so inflexibly to a way of life half a millennium removed from our advanced, modern society.

Modern mainline Protestants have tried to move beyond this very uncool image of Christians. In most churches today, a contemporary service has either replaced or been added to the traditional service. So if you want a traditional service, you could go at a different time. But, otherwise, you are going in there and you are going to have a rock

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band and you are going to have probably a younger preacher that is going to give the message. He is usually the youth pastor, he has got a lot of energy and drive, and he is going to give this high-energy sermon.

Of course, everybody who comes to the contemporary service—and a lot of them to the traditional service too—comes as they are, in anything from blue jeans to khakis, T-shirts, Polo shirts, however they feel most comfortable because God accepts you as you are and come on in to the worship service and just act like it is your own living room.

You have got Joel Osteen. He is not necessarily a young guy anymore. He has got this image of being a really nice dresser. He gives a sermon that is very contemporary.

Of course, in Charlotte, we have Steven Furtick. He is from the Elevation Church and he is in his thirties. He dresses in jeans and an untucked buttoned-up shirt while he gives his message. He has got his band which comes in and plays a cord whenever he hits the high note in his sermon or whatever.

That is the kind of thing that people in mainline Protestant churches are trying to do to attract people to the churches because they want to rid Christianity of the dreary reputation that it has among the unchurched.

Even so, if the world considers unrestrained hedonism to be the norm in terms of fun and living large and being yourself and being authentic, we have got to admit that biblical Christianity will be considered a bit lackluster and unyielding by comparison because we are not to sink to those levels if we are true Christians. The Bible is clear that it calls for Christians to cease behaving as the world does; and if the world expects us to behave like them, then they are going to think of us as pretty much fuddy-duddy.

I Peter 4 is very clear when Peter tells us that we have left that life behind. He shows us the attitude that people even in his day had for Christians.

I Peter 4:2-4: [He says that the Christian] no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

So we have got to just take it as par for the course that people who are out there in the

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world—the unconverted, people who really do not know the truth—are going to think that our lifestyles suck, to put it mildly. They think that we are boring, that we do not have any fun, that the life we have to live is too restrictive, and they do not normally want to have anything to do with it. They are especially not going to want to have anything to do with it if God is not calling them. So we have to get used to having fingers pointed at us or being castigated as people who do not live like the world. We do not run in dissipation as much of the world does.

Just because a Christian exercises self-control, just because he is restrained, does not mean that his life is boring. It does not mean that he is missing out on things. It does not mean that he has no privileges in life, that his life is unrewarding. That is not it at all.

In fact, if the Christian life is lived properly, it is *ultimately* (and that is the big word there) more exciting, more successful, and more satisfying than most human beings in general can imagine. They do not know what is in store for Christians. They do not know what we are doing and why we are doing it.

Certainly, the lives of Christians are full of responsibility and self-restraint and self-control, if we are doing it right. But the rewards and the blessings that accrue over a lifetime of pleasing God and living His way of life simply overwhelm the seemingly onerous duties and strictures of the Christian life. What we have in store for us and what we accrue over a lifetime of living the way God wants us to live makes any kind of sense of boredom or any kind of feeling like we cannot do stuff—feeling constricted—overwhelm all that. There actually is no comparison. Look at what Paul says about this in Romans 8:

Romans 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

What he shows here is that we have to have a different perspective. It is not a perspective that this world is going to have. They are not going to be able to see this at all. But we are not living for now necessarily; we are living for the future. And whatever we happen to be going through at the time has to be looked at, has to be perceived in terms of what it is aiming toward.

So, even suffering, as Paul says here (and Paul went through quite a bit of that more than maybe just about any of us have ever gone through, besides Jesus Christ Himself), he was able to look at his life—look at the sufferings, look at maybe his boring life (he did not consider it boring, others may have)—and look at the things he had to do and

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the hardships he had to face, and he thought they were nothing compared to what was in store for him and for all the rest of us.

Most of us do not realize (maybe we do not think about it; maybe we do realize it, we kind of know it) that this idea of what Paul is expressing here of an abundant life is one of the reasons—the primary reason—that Christ came to this earth. He wanted to teach us how to live abundant and fulfilled lives, and that is what this sermon is all about. Notice His plain statement in John 10. This is in the Good Shepherd passage. He says:

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. ...

He is setting up a contrast here. The bad guy, when he comes, all he wants to do are bad things. Steal is the least bad thing, but then he kills and he destroys. He is coming with all sorts of bad motives. And then Jesus shows the contrast.

John 10:10 ... I [as the Good Shepherd] have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Christ came to make our lives full and exciting and mean something. So according to the very founder of Christianity, His disciples, if they follow His teachings, will actually live enviable, full lives. When all is said and done, you put a Christian's life against any other life in this world, the Christian's life is going to shine as superior because they have not been following the thief who had come to steal, to kill, and destroy, but we follow the Good Shepherd and He has come to give us an abundant life. That is the perspective that we have to have. Christians, if they follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, will have lives worth living.

But, specifically, what does He mean by having life more abundantly?

A problem arises when discussing this concept due to the apparent subjectivity of the term 'abundant' because we all have different ideas of what 'abundant' means. One person's abundance may be entirely unsatisfying for somebody else.

Think of it this way: You have someone who is maybe an A-type person—full of energy, hard charging. He is a businessman or an athlete. He does not leave any stone unturned. He is just go, go, go! He wants to do everything, try everything once. He is into things like exotic vacations; he loves to go to Tahiti, he will go to Burma—just name

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your place, he wants to go there. One of the things on his bucket list is to visit the South Pole. He likes really nice fast cars. He likes beautiful architecture and builds this great house that everybody would like to have. He likes to run marathons. He can shoot the jumper and hit it 80 percent of the time. He was recruited by the NBA but he gave it up because he had something else to do that was more important. He is the guy who is just full of life.

Now if you give him a rocking chair and a porch and a garden and one round of golf a week at the local executive course, that guy is going to say that is not the abundant life. He is going to be bored out of his skull. But if you give that same option to somebody who has just retired and would just want a rocking chair, a front porch, go out golfing, piddle in the garden, that might sound like nirvana to that person.

But, you see, their abundant lives are very different. Your abundance and my abundance may not be anywhere near the same. You could put it this way: One person's bowl of cherries is another person's bowl of pits.

The Greek word that Jesus uses in John 10:10 to describe the kind of life He came to teach His disciples—He calls it the more abundant life or the term 'life more abundantly'—is *perisson* and it means 'a lot,' 'more.' It means 'exceptional.' It means 'extraordinary,' 'superfluous,' 'overflowing.' It means 'over and above a certain quantity.'

So if you have a gallon, when He is talking about 'having it more abundantly,' you get a gallon and more—whatever it is. You set your quantity; whatever it is, it is more than that. So if your abundant life is X, Y, and Z, you get X, Y, Z and then you get A, B, and C as well on top of that.

One commentator put it this way: The term *perisson* suggests a quantity so abundant as to be considerably more than one would expect or anticipate. So it is not just a skosh more, or one more, or a little more; it is more and more and more and more—more than you can probably take. That is the kind of life Jesus came to teach us to live. "I came to give you a life so full, so overflowing, so extraordinary, so wonderful that you'll not be able to contain it. It's just so great."

This could also be translated as "I came to give you life to the full" but it actually means more than that because it is overflowing in fullness.

Some have translated it "life in all its fullness" and still that does not say really what it means.

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I have one here that says “I came that they might really live.” That is kind of a modern way to say it.

But the one I like is “that they might have fullness of being,” that you just have superabundance in yourself because that is what is produced.

So, in short, what Jesus means—if we can put all this together—is that He promises a life far better, far bigger, far greater than we could ever envision. It is really beyond our capacities to grasp. It is reminiscent of what Paul quotes there in I Corinthians 2:9 (quoting from the Old Testament): “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard” what is in store for us.

Ephesians 3:20 is one of those scriptures that is good to always have in your spiritual vocabulary because it is so encouraging. It is part of Paul’s prayer to God in the midst of this epistle where he has just been describing the Father that He is the One whom the whole family is named after. We are all patterned after Him. He says:

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...

It is not just ‘abundant,’ which is the word that Jesus used, now Paul adds “exceedingly abundantly.” This is more. It has got this root word *perisson* in it. But, to it, Paul has added *hyper-* which has come down to us through Latin as ‘super.’ So he is saying not only is it abundant, but it is superabundant. God can do all of this and give us all kinds of superabundance through the power that He has invested in us through the Holy Spirit.

Jesus and Paul are trying to encourage us to understand that it is God’s intent that we live just wonderful, fulfilled, abundant lives, and that God has the power through His Spirit to give it. We do not need to worry. Is it not one of those things Jesus told us—“Don’t worry, I’ve got you covered. Live. Live the right life. You’re going to love this life if you approach it in the right way”? So He is willing to give us all these things.

However, before we begin counting our millions, before we begin planting our palatial homes and thinking about what classic automobiles we would like in our driveways, and how many world trips we want to take and visit all those exotic places, we need to consider very seriously what God says comprises life. When we say ‘abundant life,’ we think of all these things we would like to have—all this money, all these opportunities.

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But that is not what God considers to be life. This is part of rearranging our thinking to God's perspective on these things. Once we determine what His view of living is, we have a better opportunity then to grasp what kind of blessings we can expect from Him.

All we need to do is glance around at those around us and say we are mildly successful. We have homes. We have automobiles. We have food and clothing. We have the necessities of life for how we live today. But we can tell that giving us mansions and sports cars and all kinds of extra cash is not a high priority with God. If they were, would He not give them to His children, to His people? Would He not lavish us with all these gifts of things? Well, obviously not.

Paul warns us, in I Corinthians 1:26-29, that God has called the poor, the foolish, the weak, the base of this world and we are supposed to put all those other ones—the rich, the wealth, the noble, the wise—to shame.

And think about this: Most of us called—whenever we are called, to the time we die—do not change our status in this world very much. If He calls us and we are, let us say, lower middle class, odds are good that we are going to as die lower middle class. Or if we are lower class, we may become lower middle class, but there is not a whole lot of social movement.

Most people in the church do not become wealthy. They do not become powerful. That is just not important to God. He supplies our needs. But those advances in social hierarchy or whatever are just not necessary.

I want to pick up the attitudes that Paul has that he explains to the Corinthian church. Do not necessarily think about the specifics here, but think of the attitudes and the general principle that he is trying to get across. He says:

I Corinthians 7:20-24 Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called.

Paul is talking here about slavery and he is saying, "If you were called while a slave, don't worry too much about being a freeman (in God's eyes, you are free). And if you are free, don't try to change it to become a slave" (you could actually say, rather than

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going down to being a slave, he becomes a slave to social pressures or whatever). He said, "No, we're slaves to Christ. We have a whole different calling."

The principle here is that even though we do not have to stay in the situation in which we were called, we are not being compelled by any means to change that. It is not all that important to God that we change our physical situation, our social status, how much money we make. It is just not really important to God unless He has a plan for us to use that in some way and then He will make it possible.

But if we are spending all our money and time trying to climb the social ladder, obviously we are not spending a great deal of time on what is truly important. We are probably spending our time much like the Laodicean who is wealthy and has need of nothing, but God says, "Hey, you guys are just miserable out there because you don't have the right perspective on things."

So how does God define life? The best simplest definition in Scripture is in John 17. Jesus tells His disciples, just before He was arrested:

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

This is what God is aiming for. This is life to Him. It is a relationship. Now this is particularly eternal life, but notice that in this case there is really no mention of length of days. Even though we think of 'eternal' meaning 'without length of days' (just forever and ever), that is really not what He is getting at. But it does not mention things like our health, our prosperity, our family, or our work. All He says here is that eternal life is all about knowing God. The Father and the Son become the central focus of the Christian life. There is that word again—'life.' Our life is all focused on the Father and the Son. So what can we take from this pretty simple statement that eternal life is knowing God?

1). The first thing that pops into my mind is that God is not overly concerned with the physical circumstances of our lives. The operating term there is 'overly.' He is concerned enough. He gives us the health and strength and He provides the things that we need for daily living. But it is enough that He assures us that we need not worry what we are going to eat or drink, or what we are going to wear. He says if God clothes the flowers of the field, He can certainly clothe us. If God gives to the birds so that they have plenty to eat, He can give to us what we need for our sustenance. So we do not need to worry. That is what He says in Matthew 6:25-32: "Don't be anxious about these things. God has got it covered. That's not where you need to focus your thoughts."

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And even then, at that point in time, people had to work much harder, it seems, to get their daily bread. They had to put in a full day's work to get enough to buy a whole loaf of bread. It was a lot of work, but not much in return. But He was telling even them: "Do not worry about that."

Let us look in Psalm 37. This is another very encouraging scripture.

Psalm 37:25: I have been young, and now am old [David writes]; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread.

So he says, his descendant, Jesus Christ, probably drew from something like this. "Don't worry. The righteous have a place in God's heart and He's going to make sure that they have what they need."

Here is another one to keep in your spiritual vocabulary. Paul writes:

Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

So He has got our needs covered. He is not overly concerned about our physical circumstances. He has got it taken care of. So we do not need to worry.

2). The second thing that I derive from John 17:3, which I have mentioned already, is that the kind of life in which a Christian should be truly interested is not determined by duration. He is not talking about length of days, but He keys in on the fact that a Christian life is a relationship with God. This is why, once we have been converted—once we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit—we are said to have eternal life already. Let us look at this in I John 5. John writes:

I John 5:11-13 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Once we have been given the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ and the Father come and

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live in us. Once we have the Father and Son through the Holy Spirit, we are already considered to have eternal life because God is in us and He *is* eternal life. And our getting to know Him more fully, more deeply, just makes that eternal life all the better.

Now we do not have eternal life in its fullness. We are still physical human beings, we will still die. This gets a lot of people confused about what He means. But God does not think in terms of our physical life and death. He thinks in terms of our spiritual lives. Once He has put His Spirit in us, our spiritual life has begun and that spiritual life is never ending in Him. So we can be said to have eternal life.

Ephesians 1:14 says that the Holy Spirit is our guarantee of eternal life. It is the 'earnest'—like you would put a down payment on a house. It is God's down payment in us that He is going to give us the full amount at some point in the future—at the resurrection from the dead.

3). Another point about this eternal life that we can derive from thinking deeply about John 17:3, and having these first points already taken care of, is that eternal life—the life that God offers us through Jesus Christ, through His Spirit, through the teaching that we have received—is about quality, not about quantity. So the life is not about duration; it is about how it is lived. Put it another way, maybe the simplest way of all, the abundant life or eternal life is life as God lives it. That is true living. Let us go to the Old Testament. It is answered very clearly in Ezekiel 33. This is part of the watchman prophecy. This is God speaking to Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 33:10-11 Therefore you, O son of man, say to the house of Israel: "Thus you say, 'If our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them, how can we then live' [Very simple straightforward question]? [And this is God's response] Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

He is saying, "You're dying. You don't have an abundant life. As a matter of fact, your life is awful" (as they say they are 'pining away' in their lives—and the reason is they are full of sin). But He says, "If you live My way" (which is just the opposite of the way of sin), "you will live." That is real living. And so He says, "Model your life on Mine. As I live, that's how you're supposed to live."

We can also see this in a New Testament context, in I Peter 2:21. That is where Peter

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says we are supposed to follow His steps. He is speaking of Christ.

And of course, there is I John 2:6, where he says:

I John 2:6 He who says he abides in [Christ] ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

This is a New Testament restatement of the same thing that was said in Ezekiel 33:11. If you want to live, if you say you want to be a Christian, if you say you are a Christian, then you should be walking as He walked, meaning, you should live your life as He lives His life. We do not have the same ministry, but the principles of life are the same and, as Peter says, we are supposed to be following in His steps. Once we come to know Him, which is eternal life, we are going to want to emulate Him.

People desire to copy those whom they worship. They want to copy the lives of those whom they really love and like. So if we really love God, if we really love His Son, we are going to want to do as they do because we are going to be like them.

“You want to be like Mike?” was a saying 15 to 20 years ago about Michael Jordan. All the kids out there who wanted to be pro basketball players: “Hey, I wanna be like Mike.” Well, if you want to be like Michael Jordan, you have to put in a lot of work to do the kinds of things that he can do. (Well, not anymore.) But the same principle holds true spiritually.

If we want to be like Jesus Christ, if we want to be like God—we want to have an example to the world, to our children, to whomever, and shine as lights—then we have to do as He did. We have to walk as He walked. We have to follow His steps.

4) Another point that comes in as we go through this process of thinking about John 17:3 and what Jesus said about what eternal life is, means that physical blessings may or may not be byproducts of God’s way of life. Put another way, neither our wealth nor our poverty is a sure indication of our standing with God because He could use a poor man or a rich man. He could use a person with a Mustang or He could use a person with a beat up Chevy S10, like I have. It does not matter. Those physical things in the grand scheme of life do not matter a whole lot.

So if you are looking to see things that your physical blessings say one thing or another about you, in terms of your spirituality, you may be actually going off on an excursion in thought (a diversion maybe or something distracting) because that may take you totally

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away from what is really important—the real signs of whether you are actually doing well or poorly in your spiritual life.

It says, in III John 1:2 that God wishes us (He is saying that through the apostle John) to prosper in all things and to be in health. That is certainly true. God *does* want us to prosper and be in health. But it is not something that is absolutely important, because if you go down to verse 4, he tells you what is really important. He says:

III John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

That is the important thing—not that they are full of cash, nice house, nice car, nice clothes, and perfect health. He likes us to have things like that, but they are not really important. What He is really interested in is that we walk in the truth. That is the priority.

We are getting down to the last of these conclusions about what God considers an abundant life.

5). Finally, a Christian's life revolves around “growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18). That is what the Christian abundant life revolves around. This suggests then that the abundant life is a process of learning, practicing, and maturing; and it also includes things that we do not like to think about like failing (we all stumble, do we not?), recovering (that is better), adjusting (once we find out that we have been doing things wrongly), enduring (He who endures to the end shall be saved), and of course overcoming.

Because in our present state, as Paul says in I Corinthians 13:12, we see in a mirror dimly. We do not know exactly what is coming up in our lives or in the life of the world and what is going on, and we certainly do not know exactly what God is preparing us for in His Kingdom—what position, what office He wants us to fulfill there. That may mean that He has to put us through a lot of paces, a lot of things that we actually do not want to do, but are necessary to get us trained for what He wants us to do either in this life or in the life to come. So we do not know a lot of what is happening.

But Christ knows, the Father knows, and They are working on us and They want us then to be focused on this abundant life, focused on growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ because that is going to help us for what is coming.

As humans, we are naturally oriented towards material things. We are fleshly. We think of things in the flesh. We think of things we can see. We think of things we can touch. It

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is just natural. As Christians, our lives are changed by the calling that we have been given and so our perspective has to change so that we are not thinking all the time about all these physical things, but our minds are focused more on the spiritual. And this is a scripture I do want to go to because it kind of encapsulates how we have got to think, now that we have been called. Paul writes:

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ . . .

Meaning, you were raised out of the waters of baptism. You were part of this world and God called you and you went through this ritual in which you were buried in the waters of baptism and then raised to a new life. This is what he is talking about.

Colossians 3:1 . . . seek those things which are above, where Christ is . . .

The focus is on growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. The focus is on knowing God. So he says that we are to seek those things where Christ is.

Colossians 3:1-2 . . . sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above [he repeats it], not on things on the earth.

We have got to quit thinking about making it in this world and we have got to set our sights on making it in God's world.

Colossians 1:3 For you died . . .

Meaning, that former you, that earthly you, that fleshly you, that carnal you, that materialistic you died in those waters of baptism.

Colossians 1:3 . . . and [now] your life is hidden with Christ in God.

It is almost like that person that was—that former you—is now totally surrounded and subsumed into Christ. It is almost, in a way, kind of is scary, but it is almost like you have lost your identity. You really have not—that is not what Paul means. But that former person that you were is totally gone, or should be, and over time we try to make sure that former person stays buried. But he is saying now you have been raised to the

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point where your life is totally 'wrapped up,' in the modern lingo, in Christ. Our lives are wrapped up with Christ in God.

We do not tend to think this way because we have to deal with the world all the time. We have to deal with eating. We have to deal with sleep. We have to deal with our health. We have to deal with people. We have to go to work. We have to go to the store. We have to do all this stuff.

But, between our ears, we have to be totally wrapped up with Christ in God. Our mind has to be focused on Him to the point where all this other stuff becomes peripheral, secondary. Obviously we have our responsibilities and things. We cannot just let them down and go up on top of a mountain and be a monk so that we can do this. Obviously God wants us to live in this world. He has left us here. We have things to do and things to learn.

But when it all comes down to it, the most important thing is that we focus as much as we can on Christ. To us, life and our perception of abundant life is entirely new, once we rise from the waters of baptism. So the old man dies and now, out of the water, comes a new man. The new man actually, once you chase it out, is Christ Himself. We are in Him. Does not Paul's analogy say that the church is the body of Christ, He is the Head, and we are all little parts of Him? It all kind of comes together, but that is what we are. We are a new creation and now we have been put into Him.

Get used to it. If you are part of the bride of Christ, you are going to be with Him forever and it will be like man and wife. And what is it about man and wife? They become one flesh. The people who become part of God's church become one Spirit with Christ. So that is why our life—the abundant life—is wrapped up in Christ, and knowing Him and knowing the Father.

But what about God's promises of physical blessing? They are all through the Bible, are they not, that God promises this and that and the other thing. We cannot just say, "No, we're spiritual now. Those things don't matter." He obviously tells us that He is going to give us certain things.

A lot of televangelists have keyed in on this and they preach the prosperity gospel. Creflo Dollar teaches a prosperity gospel. A lot of others have done it too. What they do is, using select scriptures in the Bible—certain promises that they pull up—they teach that if a person gives his life to Jesus and he follows these biblical principles to a T (he prays the prayer, whatever that happens to be; if he acts in Jesus' name), then God is obligated to fulfill that promise. And they are usually saying, "Well, He promises us

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wealth, health, and well being and everything will be wonderful.”

In the end, if you chase it out far enough, God becomes little more than a genie in a bottle who has to grant the wishes of His people out of compulsion because they followed everything to a T (if you have prayed this prayer exactly—you have prayed it right out of the Bible—He is bound to. All you have got to believe is for Him to give it to you in His time, and it is going to happen. You can take it to the bank). And you know what, the televangelist takes it to the bank because, if you have ever noticed, the only one who ever gets rich is the televangelist because all those people who are praying their prayer are sending him money. Do they ever really receive those things? Maybe some of them receive something, but it seems like the preachers are the only ones that become wealthy under this prosperity gospel.

Now let us look at a few of these. Let us go to the book of John.

John 14:13-14 And whatever you ask in My name [Jesus says], that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.

John 15:7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:16 whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

John 16:23-24 And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

John 16:26-27 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God [So Jesus is saying, “Just go straight to the Father and ask Him. He’s going to give what you ask for.”]

Back in Psalm 37 again, where we were earlier.

Psalm 37:4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart [How is that for a promise?].

It is true that the Bible is full of promises, and these sound like absolute promises: You ask anything in Jesus' name and it will be given you. And if God is to be true to His Word, says the prosperity gospel preacher, He must fulfill them or He would not be God. That is what they say, and then make Him into a genie in a bottle.

Really though, this is a simplistic conclusion. It is not a conclusion that they come to with the whole Bible as backup. Like I said, they cherry-pick these verses and they pull them out of context and say, "All you've got to do is . . ." and off it goes.

But we should understand that not very many of God's promises in the Bible are absolute in nature. Instead they are conditional promises. They are based on certain things that we have to do as part of our covenant with Him, like the Israelites had to do certain things as their part of the covenant with God, as the people of God, in the Old Testament times. These conditional promises are governed not only by our responses to God (meaning, we fulfill certain requirements), but they are also conditioned by the perfect judgment of God. That is the most important thing to remember.

God is not up there like a frantic stocker in a store where He is just there inventorying everything He has to give and you send up your request and He says "Okay, got that" and He sends it down to us without thinking about it. The things that we ask for, first, are conditioned by, as I said, our doing certain things, fulfilling certain requirements. Usually, it is our belief and our doing of certain things—keeping His commandments—and whether God thinks that it is good and right for you to have those things that you ask for. So we have James 1 where this principle comes out. The apostle James writes:

James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

What does this say? First of all, God gives only good and perfect gifts. What that means is that He has decided, using His perfect judgment and wisdom, whether that gift is actually good and perfect for you and your situation at that time. God is a loving Father. He does not want to give His children anything that is going to be bad for them or detrimental. Would you give your kid a rattlesnake just because he asks? God will never give one of His children a 'blessing' that will ultimately derail His purpose for that person, or that would be for him too much to handle.

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I am sure God would love to give us all a million dollars and that would solve a lot of problems. But what happens in the lotteries? Someone just gets a whole bunch of cash, they run through it in a week, and ruin their lives. God is not going to give His children something that they cannot handle, or that is going to cause them to turn their faces away from Him and get their minds off of what is truly good and right.

We have to remember that we are a lot like Him. He made us to be a lot like Him. And so just as a human parent would not send his child to a vocational school if you wanted him to be a doctor (Why would you send him to a vocational school if you wanted him to get an MD? That just would not be right. To do that might be a good thing, but it would not be what you wanted him to go for), so He is not going to undermine His goals for us by giving us something that is not good that will not take us in that direction.

Let us look at it from another direction. Many of you have children out here in the audience. As a parent, you would not give your kid a thousand dollars and send him off to Toys “R” Us and just say “Go out.” First of all, we do not have thousand dollars to give them. But it would be a very foolish thing to do—even though the kid would think “Wow! I can get finally this and this” and would get this whole list that they would pull out of their pockets. As a matter of fact, a lot of people in the world right now are fulfilling all those lists and giving their kids things they do not need.

But if human parents have enough wisdom to give goal-and-maturity-dependent gifts to their physical children, why can we not think about God in this way? He is going to give us things that are good for us and perfect for us for the time of life that we are in and our stage of growth. We have to remember that God’s wisdom, God’s knowledge, and God’s understanding are far greater than ours. If we are able to use our wisdom to know when it is good to give our kids certain things and to channel their lives towards certain goals, then He can do it much better than we can.

So we have to remember that even though we may want something and ask Him for it, it is at least partially dependent on His own judgment of whether we need it, whether it is good for us, whether it will get us to where He wants us to go. So He is going to use His judgment and we have to remember that it will be the absolute best judgment.

Let us see an example of this in the book of Genesis. I am sure you have seen this before. I guess it is good to be reminded. We are going to follow the story of Abraham and the promises that God gave. Let us start in Genesis 12 where God tells Abraham:

Genesis 12:1-3 Now the Lord had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. I

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will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Let us key in on the first line of verse 2: “I will make you a great nation.” Now Abraham must have thought “How in the world is that going to happen? I’ve got some servants. I’ve got some employees. I’ve got a few relatives. But I don’t have any kids. How is He going to make me a great nation out of this?” And so his immediate thought, I am sure, was that God was going to give him a child at some point. Now we need to understand that Abraham was 75 years old at this point.

Genesis 12:4 Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

So there we have the time frame here.

Genesis 12:7 Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.”

Abraham gets to the land and God says, “Look, Abraham, wonderful land! Your descendants will love it and I’ll give it to them.” He says, “God, I don’t have any descendants.” Obviously this means that He is going to give him a son, yet He does not give him a son the next year when he is 76; or a couple of years later, when he is 78; or even when he is 80.

Let us go now to Genesis 15, a few years down the line. He has spent his time doing certain things. He has rescued Lot from these people from the Babylon area and he has talked with Melchizedek. So we have, in verse 1:

Genesis 15:1-3 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!”

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Abraham says, "It's a servant. It's not my kid. And it's great, God, that You say that You're my shield, that You're my reward. I love it that You're my reward, I'll be very happy. But You haven't given me a son. How are my descendants going to love this land? How are my descendants going to be a great nation? You've not done it yet. Where's the kid?" He is now 80 years old—five years have passed. So we have verse 4:

Genesis 15:4-6 And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one ['Eliezer of Damascus,' the one born in his house] shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." And [Abraham] believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

So Abraham said, "Okay, God. I'm satisfied with Your answer. I'm going to have a son. My descendants are going to be numerous and mighty." And he believed. Time passes. Abraham and Sarah get a little bit angsty and then they figure out this plan to use Hagar, and little Ishmael is born. We find out, in Genesis 16:16, Abraham was 86 years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abraham. So another six years had passed and still God has not made good on His promise. Abraham thought maybe Ishmael was the promised seed. He did come from his body, but not from Sarah. So, by the time Abraham is 99, God reiterates:

Genesis 17:16 And I will bless [Sarah] and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her.

So we have this barren woman who is 89, Abraham is 99, and still the promise has not been kept.

Genesis 21:1-2 [Finally] And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had spoken. For Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him [He had mentioned that in an earlier place that it would be next year this time].

Genesis 21:5 Now Abraham was one hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

So, from Genesis 12 to chapter 21, twenty-five years passed and finally God gave Abraham what He had promised. Notice I emphasized verse 2 that the son came “at the *set time* of which God had spoken to him.” Evidently Abraham and Sarah had to mature spiritually quite a bit between 75 and 100 for them to be ready for the promised son, the promised seed to finally be born. God had set the right time and Isaac came at the very exact time God had set and not the impatient, quick, give-me-a-son time that Abraham and Sarah had shown in their examples throughout those 25 years. So we can conclude that there was one perfect time for this promise to be fulfilled, and God fulfilled it when the conditions were right—when Abraham and Sarah were ready. The same applies to us, in Galatians 4. And it applied to His own Son. That is what these scriptures show us here.

Galatians 4:3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

We were subject to the demons and the things that were going on in this carnal world.

Galatians 4:4-6 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!”

What Paul does here, by linking verse 3 to verses 4 and 5, is to say that just as Jesus Christ came at the fullness of time—just as He came at the right set time—so God called you and redeemed you and gave you eternal life at the right time. He puts those two thoughts together—that we were redeemed from being under the bondage of the elements of this world at the fullness of time just as His Son was born and redeemed the world at the fullness of time, right at the right time.

So are we living abundant lives? That is the question we have to ask ourselves. Despite our lack of toys and devices, despite our lack of a mansion on the lake, despite not having a Rolls Royce to drive, are our lives better than we expect it? Are we living the abundant life, or do we feel that life has passed us by? If so, could it be that we need to get the right perspective?

Solomon lived a life of wealth and power and privilege, and what he concluded at the

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end of his book was that we need to keep the commandments and follow God. His conclusion is totally compatible with what Jesus said in John 10:10 that He has come to give life more abundantly, and Jesus came with good news from His Father about how we can attain eternal life (John 6:40). His message is very clear. I want to read Matthew 19:17, as we close.

Matthew 19:17 So He said to him, "Why do you call Me good [This is when a young man had come asking the Lord.]? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments" [same thing that Solomon said].

The big secret is that abundant life is contained in the keeping of God's commandments, which encapsulate, in principle, the godly way of life that He wants us to live. And that is added to by the infusion of what John calls 'grace' in John 1.

John 1:16-17 And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

This is the big secret of abundant life. Jesus came to give man the means by which he could properly keep God's commandments. He came to give us the ability to live like God and His grace makes that possible.

So are we living abundant lives? Are we reaping the rewards of following God's way of life? Do we enjoy the benefits of keeping God's commandments? Now think about this just as a way of changing your perspective.

Right now we are keeping the Sabbath. By keeping the Sabbath, we are keeping the fourth commandment. By doing so, we enjoy the benefit of keeping the Sabbath holy, which includes physical rest, time with our families, fellowship with our brethren, and communion with and instruction from God. It may not be exciting, but this is living the life that God wants us to live. And it is the same with the other commandments.

If we have happy marriages and happy families, we are reaping the benefits of keeping the fifth and the seventh commandments. If people find us trustworthy and honest, we are being rewarded for keeping the eighth commandment and the ninth commandment. If we are content in our circumstances and we are not coveting things, we are reaping the rewards of the tenth commandment.

Moreover, if we see spiritual growth taking place—if our lives are beginning to produce good fruit—we are experiencing the results of strengthening our relationship with God, which is encapsulated in the first four commandments. And that is really the key to abundant life—as Jesus says, that is the first and great commandment—if you love God. There is no greater or satisfying accomplishment than having the rewards of loving God and that is the greatest thing that there is of all. It might not be seen in this life, but it will be in the next.

So, if we, like the apostle Paul, can reach the point where we can say, as he did in Philippians 4:11 (“I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content”)—if we have reached that point—we will have learned the godly perspective on an abundant life. No matter what our circumstances that we happen to find ourselves in, we know that the life of God, with God, that we live is definitely abundant living.