

The Good Life

Rich Nathan
February 13 & 14, 2016
The Good Life
John 10:1-10

This week, our entire church, from preschoolers through adults, will begin to focus our attention for the next six weeks on The Good Life. What it is and how we can live it. All of my messages are followed up by a video teaching that all of our small groups will be watching in their small group meeting.

We prayed to start up 350 new groups during this campaign. As of this weekend, 390 of you have signed up to host a group. I just want to say “thank you”! This is the very last weekend to sign up to host a group. Following the service, head out to the lobby at your campus to sign up to host a small group. Every attendee will receive a copy of the daily devotions that have been prepared for the six weeks of this Good Life series. We’ve already given out thousands of copies of the devotional. You don’t want to miss this, if you are not in small group, again head out to the lobby following the service to join a group or simply go online to vineyardcolumbus.org.

Everyone will be talking about the Good Life. There’s a periodical out called *The Vegan Good Life*.

Picture of the Magazine

It’s advertised as being

Packed with the very best in vegan fashion, travel, lifestyle, art and design

So vegans have particular destinations for their travel. Would that include avoiding all roads that pass by dairy farms or ice cream stands? Making sure that the vehicle you’re traveling in has no leather seats? Vegan travel. Apparently, in America right now, the good life is strongly associated with our diets.

Here’s a magazine called *The Good Life for Less*

Picture of the Magazine

Dr. Oz has gotten in on the act. He has a magazine called *The Good Life*.

Picture of the Magazine

Apparently, the good life includes having a flat belly. On the opposite end of the spectrum, a recent Nestle ad

Nestle ad

CeeLo Green has a reality TV show called “The Good Life”.

CeeLo Green

Which, according to the advertisement, follows CeeLo as he tackles not only a packed schedule of producing/performing/recording, but also a creative partnership with his longtime best friends, Big Gipp, Khujo and T-Mo, as they prepare to bring their legendary hip-hop group, Goodie Mob, back to the world stage.

I don’t think many people would be surprised to discover that it was not Dr. Oz or CeeLo Green who first thought of the good life. Jesus talked about the Good Life nearly 2,000 years ago. In fact, He said that the reason He came was to give us the Good Life. But what is the Good Life and how can we find it? That’s what we’ll be exploring over the next six weeks.

I’ve called the first message in this series simply, “The Good Life.” Let’s pray.

John 10:1-10

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. 7 Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. 8 All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. 9 I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Consider what most people in America, and probably most people around the world, believe is the way to the good life

The path of material accumulation

One of the Presidential candidates regularly communicates, “I am a worthwhile human being because I am wealthy!” Many people don’t aspire to be billionaires, but our vision of the good life is having enough money to do what you want or buy what you like, to pay for college for the kids, to have a really nice car and a really nice home, to have economic security for the future. The good life for many folks means a comfortable retirement, a great insurance plan. But one of the questions that immediately comes to mind is the good life only attainable for a very small percentage of people in America, and a ridiculously tiny percentage of people in the world?

When Jesus said in John 10, “I came to give life and that to the full.” Was he only speaking to the so-called 1%? If material accumulation is what’s required to have a good life, are we saying that you can’t have a good life if you’re a single mom struggling to make ends meet? Is the good life denied to a twenty-something who has significant student debt? Are you shut out from Jesus’ offer of a good life if you’re 58-years old and you don’t have a huge retirement nest egg?

Certainly, most of us would associate the good life with feelings of contentment and overall life satisfaction, but when you think about times you were really content have they mostly been associated with having a lot of stuff?

Marlene and I were married when we were young and in college. Our combined gross income during our first year of marriage was \$3,200. This, of course, was 40 years ago. We lived in a little 3-room apartment that you got to by walking through a garage and then underneath a series of staircases. There was only one door in the apartment, the door to the bathroom. We had a tiny kitchen, a small living room and a small bedroom. Virtually all the furniture in the apartment was hand-me-downs from the previous tenants.

I remember sitting on the old hand-me-down couch in the living room looking at my books in the little bookcase I made with cinder blocks and boards. As I sat back and I surveyed my estate, the table and chairs in my kitchen, my couch, my books, the bed in the bedroom, our dresser, I was so content with my life. I was recently married to my best friend. I had my books. I thought to myself, “Who could want anything more than this?” And the answer was ME!

Like everyone else, I bought into the American Dream and my lifestyle floated up with my increase in income. But, honest to God, I can’t say that I’m happier or more content today with a 4-bedroom house and a nice car than I was sitting in that little apartment 40 years ago.

You know there are multiple ways to dispose of that myth that material accumulation is the way to the good life. Think about this with me. Are the people who are standing in line at Walmart on Thanksgiving in order to get a great deal on a new iPhone, are they

really enjoying more life satisfaction than the people that choose to skip the sale to stay home and enjoy their families and friends? Are the people with 300 shirts really happier than the people with 20 shirts? Once we have our basic needs met – more doesn't mean better. The Beatles said that money can't buy love, but it would be wise for us to remember that money can't buy us happiness either.

Let's explore Jesus' response to the idea that the way to the Good Life is by accumulating more and more stuff.

Response: The path of true life

Jesus said in John 10:10,

John 10:10

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

You know, the Bible gives us two different Greek words for our English word "life." The first Greek word is "bios"

Bios = biological life

Bios is biological life; material life. But there is a second Greek word that John repeatedly uses; it is the Greek word "zoe"

Zoe = spiritual life

Zoe is the word used by Jesus in John 10:10. It's zoe Jesus promised to his followers. We see zoe used in John 1:4:

John 1:4

In him [Christ] was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

Spiritual life can only be found in Christ.

Now it is the neglect of zoe – spiritual life – that makes Americans so unhappy. We constantly think that if we have more bios – more material life – then we will be satisfied. Because the message that we constantly hear from every marketer and every advertiser is essentially you are just material. Every advertisement is about bios, about your body, feeding your body, pampering your body; adorning your body; comforting your body; relaxing your body; improving your body; exercising your body; clothing your body; strengthening, satisfying your body. It is bios, bios, bios.

And the message that we get from marketers is so long as you cater to bios, your material life, your biological life, you will live the Good Life. Yet we find wealthy people taking anti-depressants and Hollywood stars checking in and out of rehab. What's going on?

The Bible tells us that we need more than bios. We need zoe – spiritual life. Our children need zoe – spiritual life. Jesus says this to us over and over again.

Children need more than new sneakers to be satisfied. The poor need more than food and the wealthy need more than new cars and bigger TVs. To a woman who kept looking to men and sexual relationships for life, Jesus points out the distinction between bios and zoe when he tells her in John 4.13, 14 these words:

John 4:13–14 (NIV)

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

C.S. Lewis, the Oxford English professor, wrote about zoe in his wonderful book, Mere Christianity. Lewis said,

God created us. He invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gas and it doesn't run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on himself. God himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn, or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. That's why it's just no good asking God to make you happy in your own way without having to bother about Christianity. God can't give you happiness and peace apart from himself. There's no such thing.

The problem is people try to pour into their engine something other than God. That's why the engine conks out.

Let me ask you a question, what are you pouring into your engine to fuel your own life? Is it zoe? Life from God? Or is it just more Bios? More material? More stuff? And parents, what are you pouring into your children's engines that will cause them to enjoy the good life that Jesus came to bring over the long term? Are you pouring in zoe, spiritual life? Or just more bios, more material stuff?

You know, during this Good Life campaign, the children and teens are also focused on living the Good Life. We have a bunch of small groups for middle schoolers and for teens on the Good Life. You may want to check one of those out for your young person.

We also have a little handout called “Car Talk” to follow up on what your children are hearing and listening to in Children’s Ministry. So often, we ask our kids, “What did you talk about in Children’s Ministry today?” And they say, “God.” Well, this little handout “Car Talk” provides you with a little conversation starter with your kids for the car ride home or over lunch. So, parents, we can pour in more than bios – material into our kids, we can pour in zoe, spiritual life, into our children’s lives.

If material accumulation doesn’t bring the Good Life, what about fame?

The path of fame

Let’s look at John 10:10 again

John 10:10

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Jesus talks about a thief that comes to steal, kill and destroy. There are lots of things that steal life. I think of addiction, for example. Addiction to alcohol, addiction to prescription medicine, addiction to illegal drugs, addiction to food, addiction to people’s approval, addiction to shopping, addiction to video games and social media. There are lots of thieves that steal the good life away from us. Certainly, one of those thieves is the pursuit of fame.

Arthur Brooks, the head of one of Washington, D.C.’s most prominent think tanks, recently wrote an editorial titled

Love People, Not Pleasure

In this editorial, Arthur Brooks wrote,

“I work in Washington, right in the middle of intensely public political battles. Bar none, the unhappiest people I have ever met are those most dedicated to their own self-aggrandizement [making a name for themselves] – the pundits, the TV loud mouths, the media know-it-alls. They build themselves up to make their images, but feel awful most of the time.

That’s the paradox of fame. Just like drugs and alcohol, once you become addicted, you can’t live without it. But you can’t live with it, either. Celebrities have described fame like being ‘an animal in a cage; a toy in a shop window; a Barbie doll; a public façade; a clay figure; or that boy, that guy on TV...’ Yet they can’t give it up.”

Perhaps you think that Arthur Brooks is overstating the emptiness of fame. Perhaps you believe if you or your child was really well known, then you or they would have the good life.

Listen to what the actor Jim Carrey recently said,

Picture of Jim Carrey

“I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that it’s not the answer!”

But the most poignant statement about fame was shared by a man who if anyone could be said to have it all in America, he has it all. If you could think of one person about whom many people would say, “You know, that guy, he’s got it all!” Who would that person be? Certainly, among the top few picks of people who have it all would be Brad Pitt. He’s been repeatedly voted the Sexiest Man Alive. He’s married to a beautiful wife. He’s got the fame, he’s got the wealth. Listen to what Brad Pitt said in interview in *Rolling Stone* magazine.

Picture of Brad Pitt

“Man, I know all these things are supposed to seem important to us – the car, the condo, our version of success – but if that’s the case, why is the general feeling out there reflecting more impotence and isolation and desperation and loneliness? If you ask me, I say toss all this – we gotta find something else. Because all I know is that at this point in time, we are heading for a dead end, a numbing of the soul, a complete atrophy of the spiritual being. And I don’t want that.”

Then Rolling Stone asked:

“So if we’re heading toward this kind of existential dead end in society, what do you think should happen?”

Here’s Brad Pitt’s answer:

“Hey, man, I don’t have those answers yet. The emphasis now is on success and personal gain. I’m sitting in it, and I’m telling you, that’s not it. I’m the guy who’s got everything. I know. But I’m telling you, once you’ve got everything, then you’re just left with yourself. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: it doesn’t help you sleep any better, and you don’t wake up any better because of it.”

Your bios, your stuff, your fame, your recognition by the public – it will not provide you with zoe, spiritual life, the Good Life that Jesus came to bring.

Perhaps the most common and contemporary way that people think they'll find the good life is a philosophy that was named by a Berkeley University sociologist, a man by the name of Robert Bellah. He called it expressive individualism.

The path of expressive individualism

What is expressive individualism? We communicate expressive individualism every time we say things like "it just feels natural to me" "I've gotta be true to myself" "I'm not going to live a lie". According to one London professor,

Anything which restrains the expression of the self within us is to be rejected as parental abuse, psychological repression, or cultural imperialism.

Expressive individualism is what you hear voiced in almost every graduation commencement address. Have you sat through a commencement address recently? Most likely you're going to hear the speaker say something like, "You need to follow your passion. You need to chart your own course! You need to march to the beat of your own drummer! Follow your dreams! Find yourself! Get in touch with the real you and express that and you'll discover the good life."

It's what Robin Thicke is communicating in his song, "The Good Life" when he said,

In my own town, my friends are saying what happened to you
We thought you made it, and you'd be driving Bentleys and living the good life over sun
My father says when will you ever make it
My mother says you'll learn to fake it
But I'm not you and you're not me
But I'm as good as I can be baby

I'm not you and you're not me. I need to express who I am if I'm going to live the good life.

There is

Something right

About wanting to be authentic. About not wanting to live a lie. There's something right and good about not wanting to conform, not wanting to be squeezed into a preset mold. No one wants to be a square peg that society pounds into its round hole.

Jesus affirms in John 10 the need for each of us to live out our individually tailored destinies. To live according to our unique wiring. Jesus says that an essential element of living the Good Life is discovering the unique path that God has for each of us.

Listen to Jesus' words in John 10

John 10:3-4

³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

Here's what one New Testament commentary said about these verses:

The sheep listen to the shepherd's voice. That he calls his own sheep presupposes that several flocks are in the fold; the shepherd calls out his own. Near-Eastern shepherds have been known to stand at different spots outside the enclosure and sound out their own peculiar calls, their own sheep responding and gathering around the shepherd. This shepherd [in John 10] goes further: he calls his own sheep by name, which at least means that he calls them individually and thus leads them out.

The shepherd in Jesus' story here knows each of his sheep intimately. He calls each of his sheep out personally on their own unique path in life. I think the personal call by name suggests, at least to me, that the Good Life is not mass produced in a factory. It's not like the furniture in Value City or the beer that's produced at the local Budweiser plant. The Good Life is more individually created. It's hand shaped by a craftsman. What I get from this text is that you and I are one of a kind. Each of us is unique. Hand shaped by God in the womb. So, one of my core definitions of the Good Life throughout this campaign is simply this:

The Good Life is Living the Life God Created You to Live.

So, expressive individualism is right in wanting people to live authentic lives, wanting folks to follow a unique, individually tailored path. The life God created you to live is going to be, at least a little bit different than the path for everyone else.

When expressive individualism goes wrong is the suggestion that you and I can create, indeed must create on our own, that individual path for ourselves.

Something wrong

What's wrong with just looking inside yourself and deciding what path you ought to take? What's wrong with looking inside yourself and choosing to express that self?

One thing that's wrong is figuring out which self should I express? Because when I look inside there are a million selves in there. There's a website called "Humans of New York". A person goes around and photographs different people in New York and gets a quote from them.

Picture from Humans of New York

There's one young woman, sitting on her suitcase down in the subway. She says, "People always say 'be true to yourself.' But that's misleading, because there are two selves. There's your short term self, and there's your long term self. And if you're only true to your short term self, your long term self slowly decays."

Which self should I express? My short term self which wants to go for instant gratification right now or my long term self that says, "No, no, no. Don't do that." Don't give in to that temptation because it'll rob you of long term happiness. Work on your long term self – that's the way to the Good Life.

If I want to express the real me, who is the real me? That's the problem. Is the real me my resume self? A list of my accomplishments that I would put on my resume: the schools I've attended, my grade point average, the places I've worked, the things I've written. Is that the real me? Or is the real me my eulogy self – things that those who know me best would say about me at my funeral. The things about you that people will remember you for. The little kindnesses. The quirky sense of humor. The different way that you talked or tilted your head or laughed. Who's the real you? The stuff on your resume? Or the stuff that people who know you best will tell stories about after you're gone?

If we say that being true to ourselves is the way to happiness and we look inside and you don't know what will make you happy. What if you try a whole bunch of things that you think will make you happy and none of them work?

I want to listen to Roxi Larsen who is a leader here at Vineyard describing her search for happiness.

Video - Roxi

Jesus describes what I think is the deepest problem with expressive individualism in this text. He says, and I think he said it very lovingly, He tells us that to be human is to be a follower. That we are all sheep following someone. We either follow a good shepherd who cares about us and leads us out on our own individual paths to life. Or we follow false shepherds who, in the end, will rip us off. See, expressive individualism, charting your own path, marching to the beat of your own drummer presumes a picture of individuals who are totally disconnected from social pressure. People who are islands.

Folks who are hermetically sealed off from being pressured by everyone and everything else.

But the truth is that none of us is disconnected from everyone else. We human beings are social animals. There are enormous powerful forces shaping our vision of the good life that came to us from our parents and our families and our friends and the media and TV and some guy sitting in a Madison Avenue advertising firm who is right now writing a script telling us the next thing that we need to live a good life.

So, when we look inside, we're not necessarily finding ourselves, the true us. We're finding all these inputs from everyone else. Just engage in a little thought experiment with me, will you? Imagine you exactly genetically as you are right now but instead of being born in the year you were, just imagine you are born in 1850. Do you think you'd feel the same things you feel about your body? Your looks? Your career? Your life? Do you think the self that you need to express would be the same self if you were born in a different era? Or if you were born in a different country? Same genetics, but only now you're born in Jordan or Thailand or Zimbabwe. The truth is that we'd feel totally different than we do right now.

I believe the Good Life is found by not looking inside and being true to yourself because there are a million selves in there, many of them put into us by celebrities and marketing machines, folks exploiting us in one way or another. I believe the Good Life is found by finding a model you totally admire and imitating that model. Finding a shepherd whose voice you can trust and following after that voice.

I want to suggest to you today, friends, that you'll not find a better model of someone who lived the Good Life, an authentic life, a free life, a life of love and contentment. You and I will not be able to find a better model than Jesus Christ who knows each of us by name. He walks before us. He calls us out on our own individualized path. As you follow Him, you'll discover the Good Life.

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II. The Path of fame

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A. Something right

B. Something wrong