

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
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Life Verses: John 10:10b  
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It is so good to see you this beautiful Labor Day weekend. My name is Deb Kielsmeier. For those who don't know me, I am the membership pastor here. We are in the last week of a series on life verses: verses that have given you life. Maybe God used them in some special way in your life, or maybe they are the verses you hold onto in times of darkness, or they may have even been instrumental in bringing you to Christ.

Before I get to my life verse, I want to share with you a few of my other favorite verses. There are some incredible verses in the Bible. Here is an unlikely compliment from the Song of Solomon 4:1-2. Listen to this.

<sup>1</sup>Your hair is like a flock of goats,  
moving down the slopes of Gilead.

<sup>2</sup>Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn,  
coming up from the washing.

Wouldn't you just love to have somebody tell you that? Here's one I got during finals week, and I would encourage you if you have a student in your life to go ahead and share this with them at the opportune time. Ecclesiastes 12:12,

<sup>12</sup>Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

Or how about Proverbs 27:14? True confession: I am not a morning person. For all those who are not morning people, you will love this.

<sup>14</sup>Whoever blesses a neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.

But seriously, the verse that I count as one of my life verses comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 10, verse 10. Jesus says,

<sup>10</sup>...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Some translations say "and have it abundantly" or "and have life overflowing." It is embedded in a passage where Jesus is talking to the Pharisees about who He is. He is saying that He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep. He is the Shepherd who will bring them into pasture and show them the way to life. I'll just read to you verses 9 and 10. Jesus says,

<sup>9</sup> I am the gate;....

(for the sheep)

...whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

As pastors, we have been asked this summer to share how our own verses have impacted our lives, how God used them intersecting with real life. We have also asked you what your life verses are and to list them up here [6-foot letters spelling L-I-F-E]. Behind every one of these verses you've written is a story of a living God working today in your lives, how God gave you hope in dark times, inspired you, or provided direction. I would encourage you to share your life verse with your family and friends as well. I think it will encourage them, and it will bless you as you look back on how God used it in your life. Before I begin, let's pray, shall we.

Lord God, I thank You for the Word and how it is living and alive and how You use it to comfort and instruct and bring us closer to You. I pray, God, now as I share my story that You would be glorified and that You would speak Your life and Your love. In Christ's Name. Amen.

I was raised in Connecticut. Both my parents were children of Swedish immigrants. One of my grandfathers we called *Morfar*, which means mother's father in Swedish. He was an old Augustana Lutheran pastor, so my mom was a pastor's kid. Given this setup, you can imagine that we went to church every Sunday. I was raised in the 1960s. (*Slide shown.*) Do you see this little pin? It says Lutheran Sunday School on it. Do you see the little number at the bottom? You could change out that number every year. That means 12 years of perfect Sunday School attendance. Hello! I could have gone to 13 because I did kindergarten, too, but they didn't have 13s. I don't want to take credit for that. It was all my parents. I went to confirmation. I went to Lutheran camp in the summer. I went to Vacation Bible School, VBS, you name it.

But I think my faith really became my own through the ministry of Young Life when I was in high school. During that time I had some powerful, spiritual encounters with God and asked Jesus to be my Lord and Savior. I even started going to a Bible study but to be quite honest, it was a superficial kind of faith. It was like I took Jesus and sort of put Him in the back pocket of my life. There wasn't much in my life where you could tell I was a Christian. I just kind of led my life the way I always had.

Well, fast forward to when I was a sophomore in college at the University of Vermont, up in Burlington, Vermont. I was studying environmental studies. I wanted to work with kids in the great outdoors. Life was good. I had good friends. But I just felt like there was something missing in my life. I felt like there was a missing piece. My life wasn't whole. Somehow I kind of bought into the whole Cinderella story and thought, "What's missing is Prince Charming. There's a guy who is missing from my life." At that time there was a song by Neil Young that was popular called *Heart of Gold*. I don't know if any of you remember it, but some of the lyrics say,

I've been to Hollywood  
I've been to Redwood  
I crossed the ocean

for a heart of gold  
I've been in my mind,  
it's such a fine line  
That keeps me searching  
for a heart of gold  
And I'm getting old.

Well, I was only 19, but I felt like I was getting old, searching for this heart of gold. I had somebody in my mind though who I thought would just be great. He was a guy I knew in high school; he was kind, gentle, cared about other people. He was humble, good looking, played the guitar and seemed to have a heart of gold. He didn't go to the same college as I did but, amazingly, he started to ask me out. We developed this relationship, and I felt like, "Wow! Fairytales really do come true." I was just on cloud nine until I found out he had another girl in the wings. I was so disillusioned because I felt like he had just played me like a dime store fiddle. It wasn't just him; it was what he represented in my life.

I was living on the dorm floor. Had good friends. Ran down the dorm floor and just kind of talked to some of my friends about this. I was heartbroken, but they were all busy. You know, finals. They had papers. They were going away for the weekend, that type of thing, and none of them were there for me. At that point, I remembered something that my mom had told me when I was growing up. She said, "Debbie," that is what they called me then, "if you ever find yourself in a place in your life where you have no friends, nowhere to go, you're kind of lost, come home. That is what your family is for. We will always be here for you, no matter what."

So I was like, I'm going home. I found a ride, and I went back to my house that weekend. But, basically, all weekend I just sat in the chair in my living room. I so vividly remember this. Everybody was just zooming by me. I think maybe I exchanged two sentences with my parents that entire weekend. Not only that, my eyes were really opened that weekend to how unstable and fragile my family really was. Well, I got on the midnight train, the overnight train, and went back up to Burlington, Vermont. I felt like I had had the *one, two, three strikes; you're out*. Everything I had put my faith and trust in, all the things that were kind of like rocks underneath my feet were just opening up like trap doors underneath me, and I felt like I was in a free fall really. I remember saying, "Jesus, if You're there, this would be a really good time to show up. I need to find you!"

I arrived back at my dorm building at about six in the morning. Checked my mail, those little pigeonhole mail boxes, and pulled out an invitation to a study break from one of the campus ministries. I had no idea that there were campus ministries. That's how clueless I was. Well, within two days I was in the student union, sitting next to a young woman the exact same age as I was, who became a great mentoring friend to me. She began to share with me. She said, "I want to share a verse with you. It's John 10:10. Jesus said, 'I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.'" Then she said, "We are Christians. Why do you think most people don't experience this abundant life?" I said, "Yeah, good question." Then she showed me a little pamphlet, and in it there was a drawing of a big circle. She said, "Okay, this circle represents your life, and the center of this circle is sort of like Control Central or you could call it the throne of your life or maybe the driver's seat. Who is in the driver's seat of your life?" I was like, "Well, you know, that's me." I've got my plans, my ambitions, my dreams. I am working my plan, and in this circle, there I was on this throne, you know, doing it my way, the captain of my soul, that type of thing. There was this little cross in the corner, which just basically represented that Jesus

was in the Christian's life, and that was pretty much the way it was. Remember I said I had Jesus in my back pocket? He was in there but just nowhere where you could really notice Him.

She didn't say this, the words of Dr. Phil, "How's that working for ya?" For me the outside looked great, but the inside basically looked like London after a bombing raid. It was a mess. She said, "There's another way that you can live the Christian life." This was sort of news to me at that point. She said, "You can put God, Christ, through the Holy Spirit, in the driver's seat of your life. You are, obviously, still in your life but it's sort of like you give God the controls and you're along for the ride." That seemed a little confusing but she said, "The way that you do that is, you ask God for the Holy Spirit to come into your life." There is a verse in Luke, chapter 11, where Jesus is talking, and He says,

<sup>11</sup> "Which of you fathers,

(you parents)

if your son

(your child) asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? <sup>12</sup> Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? <sup>13</sup> If you then, though you are evil,

(unholy)

know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

So it is a matter of *asking* to be filled with this Holy Spirit, you know, the bombed out landscape of my life. Well, she said I would receive the fruit of the Spirit. We talked about this earlier this summer. We had a series on the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of living through the power of the Holy Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That was the kind of life I wanted.

Then she told me very tangible things I could do. She said, "The truth is, as human beings we have this propensity for wanting to be in control, but it's really easy to get back in the driver's seat of our lives." **She talked about spiritual breathing. She said, "When we find ourselves doing that or doing things we wish we hadn't done, exhale, confront all that stuff."** "God, I'm so sorry. You have just been shoved to the corner of my life. I've been trying to make things happen. I've given my heart to a boy instead of You. Forgive me." **"And then inhale, breathe in the Spirit of life, the Holy Spirit, God's forgiveness, God's grace and His power."**

Well, I did that, and for about the next two weeks, I could honestly say I was hyperventilating any time I did anything wrong. I was just so worried about it. But you know how I felt like I was on cloud nine when I started dating that boy? I felt like I had fallen in love with God when I truly gave control of my life to Him and asked for the Spirit to come in. It was like I had finally found that missing piece, the heart of gold, and not only that, it was a true rock. Here was one who would never fail me, who wouldn't two-time me. This was the one who was The Good Shepherd, who would lay down His life that I might have life to the full.

<sup>10</sup> ...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

About that word for life in John 10:10, there are more than six Greek words for life. I am just going to tell you two. One is *bios*. Can you say that, bee-os? If you transliterated it, it would be spelled *b-i-o-s*. We get the word *biology* from that. Basically, what it means is the time of life from birth to death. Your physical life. Right now you are alive. Your heart is beating. Your lungs are working. It can also mean all the things that sustain your life, like shelter or clothing or food. When you were born, you had *bios*. Right now, you have *bios*.

But in this verse in John 10:10, the Greek word for life is *zoe*. Go ahead and say that one, zo-ay. If you transliterate that, it is *z-o-e*. The girl's name *Zoe* comes from that and *zoology* comes from that. *Zoe* is quantitatively and qualitatively different from *bios*. *Zoe* comes from God. The life that God comes bringing abundantly is not more *bios*, more physical life. *Zoe* is not limited by our physical death. It is not limited by time. It is eternal and infilling. It is God breathed into your life. When you are born in the flesh, you are given *bios*. When you are born of the Spirit or filled of the Spirit, you receive *zoe*. Jesus said, "I have come that you might have *zoe* to the full." *Zoe* is marked by purpose, meaning significance, joy, hope, and vitality. It is derived from God, not from your external circumstances.

Have you heard of the prosperity gospel or the health and wellness gospel? I want to bring this up because you will hear about this from other pastors. There are pastors on television with huge followings that preach this gospel. They will say it is God's will and desire for you to have a life that is full of financial blessings. What you need to do is just tithe your money, preferably to the church, and then God will rain blessings down upon you a hundredfold. I want you to know that God *does* bless us. God blesses us financially and spiritually. All we have and all we are *is* from God, but I am not sure that is what John 10:10 is saying. Scot McKnight, who is a theologian, says this about the prosperity gospel. He says it reduces God to a "Vending Machine God: put in faith and out pops blessings—money, homes, cars, beautiful spouses, clever kids, good neighbors, big churches, and plush vacations." A transactional kind of relationship rather than a love relationship where we surrender to God and God gives us His all.

The truth of the matter is, Jesus was poor, and He is the one we follow. He was homeless. He was abused and though He was innocent, He was tortured and executed. According to tradition, all the apostles but John were martyred for their faith. The apostle Paul who had all kinds of credentials and status had everything taken away from him when he began to follow Christ. He was shipwrecked, abused, and beaten, but he counted all that rubbish compared with the unsurpassing joy of following Jesus. Jesus told his followers,

<sup>33</sup> ... In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."  
(John 16:33)

Yes, God does bless us materially and spiritually, but He warns us in Luke 12:15 to beware of greed.

<sup>15</sup> ... Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

So if you take this verse, John 10:10, and focus just on health and wealth, it really trivializes the profound truth and depth of what Christ is saying.

Well, back to my story. That was a long time ago. I am now a grandmother of five. There have been a few miles put on this person here since then, but I have found through the ups and downs of life that Jesus never fails. He is the rock, the faithful rock under our feet. Your friends, your family, those you love, your investments, your dreams, they may all fail you in this life. But Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep.

I have a true confession. Sometimes I just merrily go on my way in my life and kind of forget the richness that Christ offers. My heart begins to go after other things. I begin to trust other things or I get up on the throne of my life and try to make things happen. When that happens, I am like, what am I doing? Spiritual breathing, I do that, but also, I have this image that just keeps popping up in my mind where I am sitting outside on the street curb. It is freezing, and I am trying to get life out of a dry crust of bread. Behind me on a hill is this house that is lit up. There is a warm fire and laughter and music and a huge banquet has been prepared. Jesus is there waiting for me to come in and enjoy the richness of His fellowship. I love this quote from C. S. Lewis. He wrote:

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

Health and wealth are good things. I do believe God wants to bless us, but if we seek to get our life, meaning our purpose, our fulfillment, from external things, we are just making more mud pies. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full," but it takes being willing to relinquish your mud pies, handing over your heart, your ambitions, your dreams, your aspirations to God to get something so much better. Breathe in the Holy Spirit. Breathe in that zoe life and trust that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will lead you into life eternal. Let us pray.

Lord, God, I thank You that You haven't left us alone here to try to figure out life. We confess that our hearts often go after that which glitters before our eyes. Forgive us for that. Forgive us for not honoring You as our King and our Lord. We give You our lives once again, God. We pray that Your Spirit would come in and take over and ask that You would show us all the richness of Your glory that resides in You. In the strong Name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

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