July 2, 2023

Rick Myatt

JUST ANY MEDICINE WON’T DO

John 10:1-10

Laurie and I went on a recent trip to Hawaii to help take care of Wesley and Hunter, our grandsons. Hunter had a bit of a rough time at first, but he eventually got in the swing of things. Wesley had a great time. He loved Hawaii. Since we all got back he has said repeatedly that we should go back to Hawaii. We all spent a lot of time in the swimming pools, at the beach, out in the sun. We were careful not to overdo it with the boys, so Laurie and I would take them back to the hotel room to get some rest and get out of the sun for a while. Often during those breaks we would let them watch TV in the room. Our hotel had several Disney shows that were unique to that hotel. They are not on TV anywhere else. One of them was an animated show featuring Lightning McQueen, the central character in the *Cars* movies. Wesley loved that show. He wanted to watch it over and over again. He watched it several times every day. One day we got back in the room at the end of the day and he was really tired. He had a great day, but he was completely worn out. We asked him if he wanted to watch TV, and he said he did. I asked if he wanted to watch Lightning McQueen, but he said he didn’t. Because he was so tired, before I could even suggest another show he began to get upset. Somehow in his mind he thought we were going to insist he watch that show. I said, “You don’t have to watch that, Wesley. Let’s look for something else.” But everything I suggested seemed to make him more upset. He was really working himself up into a meltdown. Finally, I said, “Wesley, I don’t know what you want. You can watch whatever you want, but you have to tell us what you want to watch. So what would you like to watch?” He said, “Lightning McQueen.”

There are other times when what Wesley wants becomes a problem. He thinks he knows what he wants. He gets fixated on wanting a new toy truck. He gets so obsessed with this new toy truck that he needs that he can hardly think of anything else. He has been through a number of iterations of this. At various times he has fixated on a Fed Ex delivery truck, a car hauler truck, a trash truck, a fire truck, what he calls a Jeep truck and more. Wesley has more toy trucks than Hertz has rental cars. There is a clear pattern with him. He becomes obsessed with a new toy truck, then when he gets it, he is thrilled and plays with it continually. For a couple of days. Then he sees another toy truck that he absolutely must have. The previous object of his desire becomes just another piece of his toy truck fleet. He says he loves them all, but he won’t be happy until he gets this new one.

I believe we grown ups are wiser than a 3 year old. However, there are a couple of similarities between what we see in Wesley and how we tend to think. One of them is that, like Wesley in that hotel room, we sometimes don’t know what we want. The other is that much of the time we think we know what we want, but whatever it is, it is not going to satisfy us. If we get it, it will be nice for a while, but then we will move on to something else that we decide we absolutely have to have.

A central issue in the verses we’re going to look at today is what we really do want. I want you to ask yourself what you really want in life as we consider these verses today. I think what I want is to never be asked for my user name and password again. However, as lovely as that sounds, I know that if I got that somehow, it would not satisfy my soul. It’s not enough. What do you really need in order to satisfy your soul? Let’s look at John 10:1-10.

THE BACKGROUND HAD TO DO WITH SHEPHERDS

This chapter continues depicting a conflict between Jesus and the establishment of his day, which was led by the Pharisees. In the previous chapter we saw a stark contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees. Jesus did the work of God by miraculously healing a blind man and giving him a whole new life. The Pharisees insisted that Jesus was evil because he violated one of their trivial rules about the Sabbath. In chapter 10 Jesus directly attacked the Pharisees and their leadership. He used imagery that was familiar to ancient Jews, that of shepherds leading their sheep. This is not something we are well acquainted with. Most of us have no first hand experience with sheep and the little we know comes from things we’ve heard or read. What I’ve heard about sheep is that they are not especially brilliant animals. They also are not close to the upper end of the food chain. They a much closer to the fuzzy end of the food chain. They are the farthest thing from apex predators. No one says, “Oh, no, look out. Here comes a sheep, and he’s a baaaad animal.” Sheep don’t scare anyone. They are prey, not predator.

Because of these characteristics sheep tend to be vulnerable. They need to be led, and they need to be protected. The Scriptures tell us that those same things apply to us humans. We also are vulnerable and in the spiritual realm we’re not real bright. We need to be led and we need to be protected. We need a shepherd to care for us. The religious leaders of ancient Israel were the shepherds of that day, but they were not good shepherds.

Jesus alluded to how shepherds cared for their sheep back in his day. In order to keep their sheep safe they would often build pens for them, These pens would have stone walls perhaps about waist high. There would be one opening in the wall that served as the gate. It would be guarded by a gatekeeper, possibly one of the shepherds. Several shepherds might keep their sheep in one pen. Each shepherd had his own personal call that he would teach his sheep. He would use this sound to call his sheep out of the pen.

Jesus spoke about 3 key points in verses 1-10. The first was the true shepherds who cared for the sheep would enter through the gate. But there was always the danger of thieves who would climb the wall in order to steal the sheep. He meant the Pharisees and other religious leaders in Israel. He claimed their motives were selfish and that they would harm the sheep, not care for them.

The second point was that the sheep know the voice of the shepherd. In the Old Testament frequently God is depicted as the great shepherd of Israel. Jesus was claiming that the Pharisees did not believe in Jesus even though he had given evidence of his identity through his miracles, because they did not know God. They did not hear his voice when he called them because they didn’t know him. Finally, when people weren’t getting what he was saying he changed the image and said that he was the gate, the way into the safety of the pen for the sheep.

JESUS CAME TO BRING LIFE

The key point in this passage is in verse 10. There Jesus contrasted himself with the religious leaders. They were the thieves who were seeking not to care for the sheep, but to use them for their own ends. In his words, they were like thieves who steal, kill and destroy. In their efforts to promote themselves and their own personal agenda, they were harming the sheep, keeping them from following the shepherd. He was the complete contrast because he had come to care for the sheep, to give them what they most needed, to bring life to the sheep. He did not come to bring just any life, but exceptional life. He says he came into this world so that people could have life “to the full.”

The word translated “full” was not the typical word for full. It wasn’t the word you use when you are putting gas in your car, assuming it’s not an electric vehicle, and when you finish the tank is full. This word means overflowing, remarkably abundant, or even extraordinary. Scholar D. A. Carsfon wrote in his commentary on John that this life is “Life at its scarcely imagined best.” I would put it that Jesus came that we might have extraordinary lives.

This statement is consistent with the message we have seen in John all along. Jesus is about bringing life to people. He is the source of life. So many people associate religion, including faith in Jesus, with guilt and condemnation. They think Jesus came to say “No” to everything, to spoil their fun. They think Christianity is about being dour, rigid, stern joyless and lifeless. Jesus claimed here that nothing could be further from the truth. He claimed that his purpose in coming into this world and doing his work on our behalf is that we could experience life as it ought to be. He wants us to overflow with life, to have a life bursting with joy, enthusiasm, and love. He wants us to be fully alive, to be pulsing with life in everything we do at every moment. On Friday I mowed the lawn. For most that’s a routine task. For me it’s a daredevil act, a risky venture because of my virulent allergy issues. Still, it was a mundane, though risky task. Then I had to pay bills and work on our finances, things that for me are unpleasant drudgery. Jesus wants me to be fully alive, fully in the moment, even as I do those mundane, unenjoyable chores. He wants us to have extraordinary lives that everyone dreams of having, but that very few in this world actually experience. This is a statement that should be drilled into our hearts and minds. Jesus came to give us life, not death, not guilt, not condemnation, not drudgery, but life, extraordinary life. His intent was that **this remarkable life would be the norm for those who believe in him**.

This statement brings up 2 crucial questions for all humans.

***What is this extraordinary life like?***

In his book, *John, The Universal Gospel*, Joseph Quimby wrote, “In general men desire not even a heavenly kingdom. Nor do they want salvation. **But all men want life!** However, small, twisted, selfish and even wicked their notions of life may be, yet it is life they want…To be alive is everything.”

We need to think clearly about what it is we need and want. What does this life look like? If you took a survey of people in our society and asked them what the good life, the best possible life would be like, what sort of answers do you think you would get? You would probably get answers that lean toward circumstances. The good life is being healthy, having lots of money, having all the good things in life, being well-liked, maybe even famous. In the minds of most people it is the lifestyle of the rich and famous. It is jet setting, having few limits, owning expensive properties, maybe owning your own tropical island, having the best foods, wearing the best clothes, going to one’s favorite events, vacations in idyllic places. That’s when life is really good. It is life full of excitement and adventure.

Many years ago there was a guy I heard speak on a number of different occasions. He was a fascinating guy who had done a wide variety of things in his life. He had traveled widely. He had climbed mountains, driven race cars and he had actually participated in a bull fight, among many other things. He had been many places, known a lot of people and done lots of things. We might think that is the definition of an extraordinary life. But that man’s example was instructive, for he said all the things he had done were not enough. It left him feeling empty, needing more. Life wasn’t found in his adventures and circumstances.

I recalled what life was like for Laurie and me when we were first married. We lived in a small apartment that had gold shag carpet. Are you old enough to remember that kind of carpet? Our décor had a sort of early Goodwill theme. Most of our furniture was hand me downs and cast offs. The book shelf was made out of bricks and boards. We had a 19 inch black and white TV that sat on an old, ripped vinyl ottoman. To change channels you had to walk over to the TV and turn a dial, but that was okay because we only got 2 channels on it so we didn’t need to change the channels much. There was no channel surfing. Our car was Laurie’s peach colored Mustang II, a major mistake by Ford. It had a problem with the catalytic converter that for some reason they could never fix. It rattled loudly and continually. Our first vacation after our honeymoon we went to Palm Springs and stayed in a Motel 6, and both of us got food poisoning. We had next to nothing. We lived right on the edge of total financial disaster. But we had life. We were fully alive. Having better circumstances would have made life easier for us, but it would not have given us more life. The life was there even though the ideal circumstances were not. That suggests to me that the life Jesus came to give us has little to do with what is happening around us. It is about what is inside us.

There are several elements that we need to truly have life. Augustine wrote in his book, *Confessions*, “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” He was right. Colossians 1:16 says we were made by God and for him. That means we are created with a built in need to be connected to God, to know him and live in his presence. There is no substitute for that. To try to have a full life without a relationship with God would be like trying to make an omelet without eggs. You can put ham, cheese, mushrooms, tomatoes in that thing, and you’ll have something, I guess. But you won’t have an omelet. You can put all kinds of things in your existence, but if you aren’t connected to God you will be missing the absolutely essential ingredient for true life. You will have an existence, but it won’t be life at its “scarcely imagined best.”

Another absolutely essential ingredient for extraordinary life is peace. In order to have peace we need some answer for our guilt and for our awareness of the fact that we don’t measure up. All of us sense that inadequacy. We know we’re not what we ought to be. We need some relief for the demand to do better, to perform so we do measure up. We need peace about what might happen. 2 Thessalonians 3:16 says, “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all.” God is the God of peace. He can give us the peace we need to be able to have an extraordinary life. That verse says he can give it at all times and in every way. That’s what we need, peace in every way, in every situation at all times.

There is nothing we can do or gain that will give us that kind of peace. What can take our guilt away? What can give us a sense that who we are is enough, that we are approved and loved? What can give us confidence in a world that is full of threats and difficulties? The peace we need in all those ways comes from God.

So the extraordinary life is founded on being connected to God and having peace. Those are absolutely essential to this life. But there’s more. We need to be loved and be able to love. Life without love is empty and painful. Being loved is crucial, and loving others is what fills life. Years ago I was driving Toby and a buddy of his home from school. We stopped at an intersection behind a young couple in a sports car. As we waited for the light to turn green, the man, who was in the front passenger seat, got out of the car and began yelling through the open window at the woman. We couldn’t hear everything he said, but he was obviously angry and berating her, and the little I could hear included some awful language. He briefly walked away, then he came back, yelling at her the entire time. He got back in the car, slammed the door shut, and continued yelling at the woman. I didn’t know what the circumstances that led to that situation were, but I do know that no one deserves to be treated the way that man was treating that woman. Toby said, “Dad, why would a woman put up with that? Why wouldn’t she just drive off without him?” The answer to that is that the woman wants to be loved. She likely is so desperate for it that she would put up with that kind of treatment. As bad as it was, she apparently felt it was better than not being loved at all.

In Ephesians 3:18-19 Paul prayed that we might grasp, “How wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” The foundation for a life filled to the maximum, the most full life possible, is being totally immersed in God’s limitless love for us in Christ. Being loved is the thing that most fills the human heart with life, but right along with that is loving others. We need to both receive and give love for life to be extraordinary. Our hearts are like a lake. Water needs to flow into a lake for it to be healthy and alive, but it also needs to flow out. If it doesn’t flow out, it becomes stagnant and dead. Our hearts are the same with love. It must flow in and out. We were created to be loved and to love. If either of those elements is missing in a life it will feel empty and painful. God has done an astounding thing by pouring his love into us in Christ, then calling on us to love as he loves.

Laurie and I finished off our recent vacation with 4 days together to just rest. We got home from that trip at 1 AM on a Friday morning. We got up Friday and headed over to Toby and Anna’s house to take care of their 4 kids that day and over night. Their two older girls, Ella and Cara, are extreme extroverts who are also absurdly talkative. They both want interaction all the time. So it is demanding to relate to them because frequently they are both talking at the same time. The two younger kids, age 2 and 1, require constant attention because they are continually trying to kill themselves by putting themselves in precarious situations. To say it is tiring to care for the 4 of them is kind of like saying housing prices in San Diego are a little high. It just doesn’t capture the true extent of the thing. We took care of those kids all day Friday, Friday night, and until around 2 Saturday afternoon. Then there was an emergency and Laurie had to go back and take care of them Saturday evening. It was like our 4 days of rest never happened. It was demanding, stressful, tiring, and an enormous joy. Would I be happier if we didn’t have those kids to care for? No, it would be sad. Loving is what makes life full and extraordinary.

We need meaning in life. A pointless existence, which our culture says is what we have, is empty and painful beyond description. We need our life to have a purpose for it to be full. I was thinking about the San Diego Padres recently. They came into this season with huge expectations. They were widely regarded to be possibly the most exciting team in baseball, with a World Series a very reasonable goal. It is now July and they have been totally disappointing. They are right on the cusp of putting themselves out of the running for the postseason. In other words, they are close to becoming irrelevant, playing out the remainder of a season going nowhere. If that happens, there is going to be some serious unhappiness on that team and their attendance is going to plummet. Hey they’ll still be playing the same game. Yes, but the season will be going nowhere, an exercise in futility. And that is pointless, dull and boring. The whole thing becomes empty when it doesn’t mean anything. And that is what happens in life as well.

We need hope and joy to have an extraordinary life. Such a life is overflowing no matter what might be happening. D. Michael Lindsay is the president of Taylor University in Indiana. He has written a book titled *Hinge Moments*. In it he wrote about his daughter, Elizabeth. She has an extremely rare genetic disorder. There are only 500 known cases of her condition worldwide. It causes profound cognitive deficits, blindness and many difficult issues with her organs. Parenting her is difficult and painful, but also full of happy moments. He wrote that he has learned much from Elizabeth. He said, “Elizabeth is not drawn to fame or self-advancement. She reflects a more authentic way of living, one that is less interested in appearance or achievement. She takes pleasure in simple things, the taste of vanilla ice cream, the thrill of reaching heights in the back yard swing, or the delight of listening to a familiar melody. Elizabeth is genuinely happy when she pleases her father, clapping for herself when she hears my affirmation.”

Can Elizabeth have that extraordinary life? Yes, she can, because it is about what she experiences inside her, not about her circumstances. When we have God’s grace and love, when we are at peace with him, when we live in his presence trusting in his plan, when we love, when we live in hope and in his joy, when we live for his purpose, we can have the life we want, and it won’t be diminished or destroyed by what happens to us.

***How do we have this extraordinary life?***

Focus on what Jesus said at the end of verse 10. “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” Having life to the full is dependent upon his coming. Had Jesus not come, it would not be possible for us. John has told us to have this life we need to receive Jesus and believe in him. If we do that, we can have the life. If we do not, we will never have this extraordinary life. We will exist, but that existence will have hollowness, emptiness at its core. It will be frustrating and cause us to be restless, because we know that life should be more than what we have.

John 1:4 said, “In him (Jesus Christ) was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.” The life we seek, the remarkable life, is in Jesus Christ. 1 John 5:11-12 says, “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.” The extraordinary life is in Christ. If you have Christ, you have the life. This life is not a thing we create, it is not something we achieve, it is not about circumstances, it is something God puts inside us. He does this when we put faith in Jesus, who came to bring us this life.

In another 10 days I’m going to have another infusion of Novilimab, also known by its commercial name Opdivo. I’ve been receiving that drug combined with ipilimimab, called Yervoy, to try to rid my body of cancer cells. There are a lot of things that doctors could put into my system. They could give me an IV of saline solution. That would help if I was dehydrated. They could give me antibiotics. That would help if had a bacterial infection. They could give me a blood transfusion that would help if I was anemic. They could give me steroids that would help if I had inflammation. Those things would help if I had those other issues. But here’s the key point: none of them would deal with cancer, the big threat to my life. They can’t fix it. Saline, antibiotics, blood transfusion, steroids, simply cannot solve the problem and restore me to health.

All of us have a problem. We want life, full life, extraordinary life. Every human being wants that, but we are born without it. It is crucial that we grasp that. In our natural state, we are born without that life, and we will always sense its absence. We will seek it. We think we can find it through accomplishments, through wealth, through pleasure, through power, through approval or fame. But all of those things will fail. They can’t infuse us with that life. We can become accomplished people who lack that extraordinary life. We can become wealthy people who don’t have life to the full. We can be powerful people who lack the life we want. We can become famous people who are missing the life we want. That’s because those things cannot give us that life any more than saline or antibiotics or steroids can cure cancer. The extraordinary life is the life of God. We need an infusion of his life in us, and we only gain that by connecting to God through Jesus Christ, who came specifically so that we could have that life!

CONCLUSION

When I was in college a met a young guy who was very ambitious, driven and intelligent. He insisted he only believed in science. He became a good friend. He had zero interest in spiritual things. Though he became a friend, he had no regard for Christians. In fact, he kind of ridiculed them. But an odd thing happened. One by one the people he most respected and liked became believers in Jesus. The Christian group I was a part of embraced him. We included him in social events, invited him to Bible studies. We had many long discussions with him about faith in Christ. We prayed for him, but he remained staunchly resistant to faith. At one point he eventually ran out of arguments against Christianity, but he refused to give in to Jesus. This was around Halloween my junior year. The Christian group I was a part of decided to have a Halloween party. We invited this guy, whose name was Doug, to come to the party. There was no alcohol. There was no program. We just played games and had fun together. It turned out to be a terrific evening just enjoying each other. The next day when Doug saw me he said, “Rick, I need to talk to you. I have something to tell you.” We found a place to sit down and talk and I said, “What’s up, Doug?” He said, “Well, I need to tell you that I asked Jesus into my heart last night.” I was surprised. I said, “Doug, that’s wonderful, but I’m a little surprised. What happened that caused you to finally make that decision last night?” He said, “I had the best time I’ve ever had in my life at the party last night. I didn’t know people could have that much fun without getting drunk. I’ve known for some time that what you guys believe in is true, but I didn’t want to give in because I thought if I gave my life to Jesus he would take the fun out of life. Life would just be a bummer. I found out last night that is the farthest thing from the truth, so I finally gave in.” Doug encountered life to the full, and he discovered it was what he wanted. That changed the entire direction of his life. He has spent his adult life in full time ministry helping others find that life.

However, over many years of ministry I have observed that many followers of Jesus don’t seem to exhibit much of that extraordinary life. They believe in Jesus, but seem to not be overflowing with life no matter what happens. What do we need to do to experience the life Jesus came to bring us?

*Remember what the life is and where it comes from.*

We get focused on so many of the things we think will give us life and we pursue them, only to find they aren’t the answer. We forget what we have in Christ and get frustrated by things we don’t have. These things tend to cause us to lose life.

Our problem is we think what we need is more money, more success, more friends, more popularity, more accomplishment. So it’s like we go to the hospital and get infusions of those things, when they can never give us what we really seek. We need to remember where extraordinary life is found and trust in Jesus rather than pursue these other things.

I recently have been frustrated by our credit card company. We have had the same credit card for 28 years and have had great service from this company. In the past when there was any question of the validity of a charge, they would call us to verify if we had made a purchase. But recently something has changed. Suddenly our card wasn’t working. There was no notification of a problem. We called and they said there was a fraud alert so the card had been locked. I assumed we would just clear it up as has always been the case in the past, but not this time. They informed us our phones did not meet their security qualifications. I asked them to explain that, but they wouldn’t. The phones have been fine for more than 20 years, but suddenly they’re not. They said they were sending a letter and we should call after we got it. They sent it to a wrong address that we had never given them. It was supposed to give us a case reference number which we needed to resolve the problem, but there was no such number. I’ve called now 4 times and have gotten nowhere. I’d be happy with just closing the account, but they won’t even let me do that. It has been annoying, frustrating, aggravating. But when I focus not on the situation and the frustration but on what I have in Christ, on the fact that God is in charge even in this, peace returns. I find I can have life by focusing on what God brings to my life, not on the circumstance.

Most of the time when we are not experiencing extraordinary life it is because we are looking for it in some place it doesn’t exist. We are trying to cure our problem with something that can never cure it.

*Keep believing in Jesus*

We get the extraordinary life by putting our faith in Jesus. We continue to experience that life by doing the same thing. Keep believing that he loves us, he is with us, he will keep his promises to us, he is working in our lives to bring us good. Keep trusting that what he gives us is enough.

*Rejoice*

We forget sometimes how often the Scriptures tell us to rejoice. Philippians 4:4 says, “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” He said it again because we forget. What we have in the Lord is so precious, so powerful, so awesome, that it should eclipse everything else. Sadly, we forget it and focus on the little negatives in our lives. What we can do to experience extraordinary life is to look at what God has given us, give thanks continually for it, and rejoice in him.