

LIVING
IT OUT

DAILY BIBLE STUDY

CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Could Something in Your Life Be Better?

September 18, 2017

In Ben's message this past weekend, he kicked off our new series "Better" by asking this question, "Could something in your life be better?"

Go ahead and answer that question right now. For many of us, that question did not take long to answer. I know that I was able to think of very specific areas in my life that I wish were better. Chances are that you too were able to quickly identify something in your life.

For some of us, we wish our jobs were better. Others may wish for a better marriage. Maybe it's the relationships with your parents, children, or friends that you wish were better. Perhaps you are thinking that if your car was more reliable, or if your house was just a little bigger, then life would be better.

The reality is we all have areas that we wish were better. You may be thinking if you could just eliminate a few pressures, then your life would be better. That's a misconception though. Pressure is not necessarily the enemy of better. We know that no matter how great life is, we will always have pressures.

So, what's the solution? Since we will never be able to eliminate all the pressures in our lives, we need to learn how to respond and navigate through them.

In Ben's message this weekend, he shared from **John 10:10-15**:

¹⁰ *The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*

¹¹ *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. ¹² A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.*

¹⁴ *I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, ¹⁵ just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So, I sacrifice my life for the sheep."*

This passage points out that there are wolves and thieves that are looking to destroy and disrupt the sheep. You and I are the sheep in the story, and the wolves and thieves are looking to destroy and disrupt our lives. The wolves are the predators that attack the better in our life. As Ben mentioned in this weekend's talk, the wolves are not consequences. They are events or tragedies that happen to us throughout life that are outside of our control. The thieves are not like the wolves; instead they come in quietly to steal, kill and destroy the better you.

Ephesians 2:10:

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

This verse in Ephesians tells us that we are God's created masterpiece. It also tells us that he made us with a purpose. He created us to "do the good things he planned for us long ago." But the thieves and the wolves in our lives try to keep us from realizing God's best. They attempt to keep us from discovering the purpose that God has for us, and they too often succeed.

So who in our lives can help turn the pressures we face into a catalyst for growth? And who can help eliminate the wolves and thieves?

We see in John 10 that there are two characters in the story who are there to help us. There is the hired hand. But the hired hand thinks of himself before he thinks of you. Ben pointed out this weekend that the hired hand is with you, but not always for you.

The other character with us is the Good Shepherd who guides us. He is the one who helps us to navigate and respond to pressure. He protects us. He provides us with a rich and satisfying life. The Good Shepherd knows us and will sacrifice his life for us. He wants to see us live out our purpose, and he keeps us safe from the destruction the thieves and wolves wish to cause us. The Good Shepherd wants the best for us.

Throughout this week's LivingItOut, we are going to be looking at the characters in John 10. Each character represents something or someone in our lives that is either helping us move toward a better life or keeping us from the better life. I am excited for you as you dive into these verses this week and discover God's best for you.

Questions:

When you look at your life, what would “better” look like?

How are you pursuing the “better” life?

Who is helping you get there?

Prayer:

God, thank you for your provision. Thank you for creating me and calling me your masterpiece. I know that you have a plan for my life and that your plan is better than anything I could ever dream of because when you created me, you created me with a purpose. Help me as I pursue “better” in my life. Guide me and direct my choices as I follow you. Amen.

This post was written by Ben Bockert, the Director of the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Who Will Come Running When You Call?

September 19, 2017

I grew up listening to the “oldies” with my mom who had a particular fondness for James Taylor, so I have heard his version of “You’ve Got a Friend” more times than I can count. As a boy, if I had trouble sleeping, I would listen to that song, which had a calming effect as much from the melodious sounds as from the comfort of the words.

“When you're down and troubled and you need a helping hand and nothing, whoa, nothing is going right... You just call out my name, and you know wherever I am, I'll come running to see you again.”

Is there anyone in your life who will stop what they are doing, regardless of where they are or what time of day it is, and come running to be by your side? Is there anyone you would be willing to do that for? I attended a men’s retreat several years ago, and almost as soon as we arrived, we were asked to name two men who would answer that call for us. Out of forty men, fewer than ten were able to name even two men who would do so. Because of the events that transpired during that weekend, by the time we went home, each man had 39 phone numbers that they could call and know the person on the other end would come running. We continued to forge those relationships by meeting together regularly.

I have since moved away, but there are still a handful of men from that group whom I know would answer my call in a time of need. I am fortunate to still have two men in my life now who would do the same thing. Those relationships were not formed overnight, and for men it seems more difficult to achieve that kind of depth in a friendship. We aren’t typically as willing to open up, to talk about our feelings, or to share our darkest secrets. But when we do, we know we have an authentic relationship, built on a foundation of trust, that will stand the test of time. Those people will help us to navigate the pressures we all face every day, the wolves that sneak past the shepherd and creep into our lives.

I knew I had found these trusted confidants when I opened my life to them, and their response was not only to accept me, but to genuinely want me to succeed and grow. These people want more *for* me than they want *from* me. The same goes for Jesus. When I listen to James Taylor sing those words, and I ask who would come running when I call their name, I can’t help but think of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. We can learn a lot

about what it means to be an authentic friend to someone from just a few verses in the Gospel of John.

John 10:11-15:

¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

The good shepherd will not abandon his flock in times of need. When things aren't going well, and the wolves are attacking, the shepherd does not run away. He actually runs into the field of battle to face the wolves head-on and protect the sheep, willing to give his life in place of the sheep. In addition to protection, the shepherd offers guidance to the sheep, leading them to greener pastures to find food and providing them with the essentials of survival. Jesus offers the same for us. While wolves may get inside the sheep's gate, and life's pressures will take hold, Jesus offers his protection. He already laid down his life so that we "may have life, and have it to the full." With a promise like that, "Ain't it good to know you've got a friend?"

Prayer:

God, thank you for loving me enough to give your Son as a sacrifice for me. Thank you for the Good Shepherd who protects and guides us. I pray that you will provide two people in my life with whom I can grow and connect on a deep and authentic level, who will support me and help me to become the person you created to me to be. Amen.

This post was written by Ryan Cook, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

Be Aware of Those Who Are with Us but Not for Us.

September 20, 2017

My very first job was working at my father's business. I was around 12 years old when I started going into work with my dad. My main duty was to wash and wax cars that had recently been delivered to the local Lincoln and Ford dealerships. It may be hard to believe that a twelve-year-old was any good at detailing cars, but I have to tell you, I was pretty good at it. After all, I wasn't working for the paycheck. I was working for my dad and doing my part to help make his business a success. Making a difference and contributing to my family made me feel good about going to work.

Years later my dad had to close his business, and I eventually took a job as a car porter at one of the local dealerships. As a car porter, I was responsible for helping the auto dealerships run as smoothly as possible. It was my job to clean and fuel vehicles that were being sold - making them look as good as I could for their new owner. I also was tasked with parking the cars. At a dealership, this is not easy because each row has to be in perfect alignment. The worst part of the job, came in the winter time when there was a snow and ice storm. If you don't like clearing snow and ice off of the windshield of your personal car, imagine scraping ice and snow off of 100 windshields.

While I loved this job and I enjoyed my co-workers, this job was much more about the paycheck than when I worked for my dad's company. That's probably why I didn't ask too many questions when the used car manager, that I directly reported to, asked me to run errands for him or had me help him with personal tasks. I actually kind of liked going to the hay auctions for him. Where else was I going to get the chance to throw hay bales around a barn?

When I think about that job, the more I realize that I was like the character of the hired hand in John 10:10-15. While I did the tasks that I was asked to do and I did them fairly well, I never thought about how I could make the dealership better. If that job would have become a burden or if I would have stopped enjoying it, I would have left without a second thought. And I did. When I found a job that was going to pay me more, I left. The reality was that I was only working for the money and not for the dealership.

John 10:10-15:

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¹¹ *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. ¹² A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.*

¹⁴ *"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, ¹⁵ just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.*

It's important to take note that the hired hand is not the villain in this story. It's also important to notice that the hired hand isn't the hero. He falls in between. The hired hand's commitment to the sheep was similar to my commitment to my job at the dealership. The commitments were about self-improvement. It wasn't about the improvement of others.

While the hired hand is not someone that needs to be eliminated, he is someone that we need to be aware of. So, who does the hired hand represent in our lives? Who is it that we need to be aware of? It could be a co-worker, it could be a friend or a family member. Anyone in our lives could be a hired hand.

They are the individuals in our lives that run away under pressure. They are the people who are with us, but not always for us. We should not expect more out of them than they are willing to give. And we would be foolish if we thought these individuals in our lives would make our lives better.

We should also realize that we are the hired hands in the lives of others. While we would love to think that we could be more than that to everyone in our lives, we only have the capacity to stay and help fight off the wolves and thieves for a few.

Questions:

Are there hired hands in your life that you are expecting to make your life better?

Is there anyone in your life that is expecting more than you are able to give?

Prayer:

God, thank you for this story. Thank you for the wisdom that we receive from it. Lord, I know that there are hired hands in my life, and today I ask for help. God, please help me to be aware of the hired hands in my life.

How to Identify the Thieves in Our Lives.

September 21, 2017

I grew up watching Saturday morning cartoons at my grandparents' house. One of my favorites was Mickey Mouse. I remember laughing at the antics of poor Donald Duck as he battled the angel on one shoulder and the devil on the other. The devil was red and had sharp pointed horns and sometimes a pointed tail and trident. He was always trying to get Donald to do the "fun" thing (the wrong thing), while the angel sat on other shoulder with his halo and white robe trying to convince the wayward soul to do what was right. I always laughed when the character looked from one to the other, sometimes in hyperspeed, trying to decide what to do. Since it was a cartoon, he usually ended up doing the right thing and all ended well. However, in our daily lives, the thief, or devil, is not so apparent and obvious. Many times the thieves that infiltrate our lives are obscure, or even disguised as a good thing.

A thief is defined as a "person who steals, especially secretly or without open force." According to this definition, a thief is someone who quietly sneaks into your life and takes something from you. You do not see the thief while he is at work. We've all seen surveillance videos of someone who is stealing something. He looks around and carefully takes the desired item and slips it into his bag or pocket. A thief does not usually rob a house in broad daylight; he waits for the cover of night when everyone is asleep or out. If we knew a thief was lurking outside our homes, we would lock the doors and stay awake. We would put up all of our defenses. We would protect ourselves and do everything we could to keep them out. However, when a thief strikes, we are often unprepared.

So what does this look like in the life of a Christ-follower? Some thieves are obvious: a blatantly sinful image that pops up when we are searching for something on the internet, an opportunity to cheat on a test, or a chance to take something that does not belong to us. However, as the definition of a thief reveals, many of the thieves in our lives are not obvious. A thief can be the seed of resentment that is growing toward the co-worker who got the promotion we deserved, the way your spouse squeezes the toothpaste tube, the bad attitude about your children waking up before the crack of dawn raring to go (ask me how I know about this one - no matter how much I love my children, I don't want to play with them at 5:30 a.m.). A thief can be the old high school friend who randomly contacts you through Facebook, seeking to reconnect, but

instead ends up sucking you into the vortex of social media and thus away from your family and your real world connections. It could be the idea that there is some “perfect plan” that you can activate to guarantee the results you desperately want (for your health, children, or marriage). Many times a thief looks like a good thing, but it ends up keeping us from living the life God has planned for us. We spend our time working toward all these “good” ends and miss the best that God wants for us.

According to John 10:10, the thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy.

Satan is the ultimate thief. His sole purpose is to pull us away from God. He uses whatever he can to accomplish this aim: distraction, insecurity, and sometimes even blatant sin. Satan knows our weaknesses and will capitalize on them to continually drag us away from God’s best for us. He knows that you really want that quiet uninterrupted time in the morning before everyone is up, so he will use that cute two-year-old to interrupt those plans and sour your mood for the day. He knows that certain friends can cause you to drink a little (or a lot), so he bumps up their latest Instagram so you reach out to them for a night on the town. He knows that you are insecure about your role in the office, so he stirs up some water cooler gossip that you happen to overhear. These little thieves can destroy us, but they don’t have to. Our job is to stop them before they get into our house and rob us of our joy. Most of these thieves can be stopped before they take our most precious possessions if we just acknowledge them and change our responses to them. So next time that chubby face peeks around the corner at 5:30 a.m., invite him to join you while you read your Bible. When that friend calls and asks you to head out for the night, invite her over for dinner or coffee in the morning. When you feel like you are failing at everything, try calling a friend that can give you honest feedback and encouragement. Don’t allow the thief to rob you of joy. Use those times to build up your defenses.

Questions:

What are some thieves in your life right now?

What can you do to protect yourself from being destroyed by these thieves?

Prayer:

God, thank you for always having our best interests in mind. Give me the strength and wisdom to identify the different areas of my life where I am susceptible to the thieves that seek to destroy me. Help me fight against them and live the abundant life that you have prepared for me. Bind Satan, the ultimate thief, in my life. Amen.

This post was written by Julie Mabus, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.

The Ultimate Guide to a Better Life:

September 22, 2017

One of the greater movies to come across the big screen in the past decade is *The Dark Knight*. It isn't a great movie simply because of the incredible action scenes and wonderful cinematography. Of course, any good movie has more going on than great acting and incredible cinematography. What separates a great movie from a good movie is the point behind the plot.

In *The Dark Knight*, Batman meets his nemesis, the Joker, and fights the entire movie to stop him from unleashing chaos on the city of Gotham. But, the Joker wasn't merely interested in wreaking havoc. No, the Joker was trying to prove a point, and he reveals this point while talking to Batman in an interrogation room.

Batman: *Then why do you want to kill me?*

The Joker: [giggling] *I don't, I don't want to kill you! What would I do without you? Go back to ripping off mob dealers? No, no, NO! No. You ... you ... complete me.*

Batman: *You're garbage who kills for money.*

The Joker: *Don't talk like one of them. You're not! Even if you'd like to be. To them, you're just a freak, like me! They need you right now, but when they don't, they'll cast you out, like a leper! You see, their morals, their code, it's a bad joke. Dropped at the first sign of trouble. They're only as good as the world allows them to be. I'll show you. When the chips are down, these... these civilized people, they'll eat each other. See, I'm not a monster. I'm just ahead of the curve.*

In this dialogue, the Joker reveals a truth about humanity that few are willing to acknowledge, mainly, that we aren't as good as we hope we are, that we are all, in fact, *not good*.

God makes this abundantly clear throughout Scripture. He tells us that we have all sinned and fallen short of his glory (Romans 3:23), that no one is good (Romans 3:10, Psalm 53:1), and several other verses that communicate the same idea: we are all born in sin.

Though it may be a difficult truth to admit, we all know this intuitively. All you have to do is spend a short time with a child and you can see that we do not need to be taught sin; it is in us. This is the human condition, and it is the problem that humans have been trying to solve for the entirety of their existence.

If the human condition is something we were born with, then what can we do about it?

We can only trust Jesus.

However, instead of accepting our condition and trusting that Jesus is cleaning us up, we instead feel the need to try to fix the problem ourselves.

So, we do things like...

- Make it a priority to be at church
- Read our Bibles every day
- Serve
- Give
- Fast
- Read more
- Serve more
- Give more

And on and on, until we end up exhausted and stuck.

These things (church attendance, Bible reading, serving, giving, fasting) are all good things! These are things that Christians should do. However, when we do those things because we think they do anything to cleanse us of our sins, we're missing the point completely.

This brings us to our passage today:

John 10:11:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd - the ultimate shepherd - gave his life for us. He shed his blood to cover our sins because **nothing** we can do will ever cover our sins.

He is the Good Shepherd because he willingly laid his life down for us.

No matter what, no matter how often we attend church, read our Bibles, serve, give, etc., we cannot fix our condition; we cannot fix our sins. Outside of the love of Jesus, we are destined to live in our condition.

When we trust in Jesus, he cleanses us completely. He frees us from condemnation (Romans 8:1) by offering us the free gift of salvation.

If you have already placed your trust in Jesus, you know that your life is a daily return to that trust. Even as Christians, we need the reminder that we cannot take care of our sin problem, that it is solely the work of Jesus.

If you haven't placed your trust in Jesus, and if you've lived your life really thinking that you had to be good enough, today can be the day that changes. You can place your faith and full trust in the work of Jesus on the cross, and he can be your Good Shepherd.

Try praying this prayer:

Heavenly Father, I know that I am a sinner. I know that left to my own devices, I will choose sin. I know that I can do nothing to take care of this problem and that you alone can make me clean. I need your forgiveness. I want to trust you in all of this, and I ask it in the name of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

If you've placed your trust in Jesus for the first time, congratulations!

We think you should tell someone. If you are connected to a local campus, reach out to your campus pastor. If not, reach out to us at lio@cedarcreek.tv

For those of us who follow Jesus, we can say a prayer of surrender daily so that we can keep our mind focused on continuing to follow the Good Shepherd.

This post was written by Andy Rectenwald, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut Bible Study.