



**FOCUS SERIES GUIDE**  
**OCT 23 – NOV 26**





# Your Guide to The Good Life

## A Waite Park Church Focus Season Guide

This is your guide for our five-week Focus season. During this Focus season, we want to give God an opportunity to grow us in faith together as a church. We want to tackle the question, "What is the good life?" and in the midst of that we're going to explore several postures that we can take in our relationship with God. Here is what you will find inside:

**Sermon Notes:** We have provided a section for you to see the scripture focus for the day, take notes, and follow along with the message. We want this guide to be a part of your life for the next five weeks, so get used to having it with you.

**Action Steps:** We've provided you with some simple ways to live out the Sunday morning message and tangibly apply the week's message to your life.

**Daily Devotion:** Romans 12:2 says, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The world sends us a lot of messages and over time those messages shape us. Fortunately, God's Word speaks to us too and when we take the time to listen, He shapes us according to His will. When you use the devotion resource, have your Bible handy to look up the passages and see the surrounding context. We've only provided you with an excerpt.

**Family Devotion:** Most children will reflect the faith they see in their parents. If your children never see you pray or read your Bible, then they probably won't either. Why? Because they don't see it modeled for them. When you do a family devotion, children recognize that being a Christian isn't confined to Sunday morning and that pursuing God isn't just for the spiritually elite among us.

**Small Group Questions:** If you're in a small group, prepare ahead of time by thinking about these questions and jotting down some answers to them. If you're not in a small group, get in one.

WEEK 1

# LIFE OVER GOD

Not many of us would be quick to claim that we are "above" God or "over" God. Most of us would readily admit that God is in charge and has supreme authority. Is that still the case when we look at the details though? Is God really in charge of my life? my finances? my vacation time? my work? my family life? my speech? my day-to-day decisions?

Let's face it. It's easy to go through our day and not think of God. It's easy to respond to a situation with a gut reaction instead of asking God how he'd have us act. We're used to figuring things out ourselves and sometimes we don't even consider stopping and seeing what God would have us do.

On the other hand, there are also plenty of people in our society who purposefully choose to live life over God. Either they don't believe in God, don't believe that He is active in our world, or simply don't want to live according to His ways. Some might not think they're worthy or "good enough" and so choose to do life apart from God as a result of their past sin and misunderstanding of who God is.

No matter the reason, we've all probably experienced the Life Over God posture at certain times in our lives. This week we're going to explore why we do it and the consequences of it.

# Sermon Notes

10.23.16

Week 1 – Sermon Notes

## Action Steps

- Spend time in prayer, asking God to reveal to you parts of your life that aren't surrendered to him. Where are you not trusting Him? Where are you working out of your own strength?
- Ask a trusted friend whether or not they see areas of your life that aren't fully surrendered to God. Accept what they have to say and consider it prayerfully. God often speaks through godly friendships.
- Write down a list of 10 things you're thankful to God for at the end of each day this week. Recognizing that all good things come from His hand and not from our own efforts is a huge step towards trusting Him in more and more areas of our life.
- Give to a stranger in need. Don't ask questions. Don't worry about how they'll put it to use. Practice generosity that's modeled after the Father who causes his sun to shine on the unrighteous and righteous alike. When you loosen your grip on your money, it will loosen its grip on you.

# Daily Devotions

**10.24.16 | READ James 4:13-17**

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. <sup>15</sup> Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, "In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable." While it's important for us as Christians to look ahead and be intentional with our lives, it's also important to be flexible and joyfully submissive in the face of God's will. Make plans but be ready to toss them aside at a moment's notice. This may be more difficult for A type personalities but God's plans must always come before our own.

**10.25.16 | READ Luke 12:13-21**

"This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you."

At the beginning of this parable Jesus notes that the success of the man came from the ground that produced abundantly. The man hadn't planned for it and wasn't expecting it. The man in this parable was full of wealth but also full of himself. He thought to himself. He built barns for himself. He stored grain for himself. He wanted an easy life for himself. Prayerfully self-assess: Who do you speak to when you have an issue? Yourself or God? Who does your wealth belong to? You or God? What are planning on spending your savings on? Yourself or God? What guides your plan for retirement - comfort or faith? When you experience an unexpected windfall, how do you respond?

Week 1 – Daily Devotions

## Daily Devotions

**10.26.16 | READ Genesis 15-16:4**

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her."

In Genesis 15, God makes a covenant with Abram and tells him that his descendants will be more numerous than the stars. In Genesis 16, Abram tries to make it happen his way, out of his strength. Abram takes matters into his own hands in an effort to follow God. Hagar would give birth to Ishmael and he would become a warrior who lived in hostility towards his brothers. Oftentimes impatience and a "can-do" attitude keep us from prayerfully waiting on God and even in an effort to follow God we can end up causing more harm than good.

**10.27.16 | READ Genesis 4:1-16**

The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

Cain and Abel both brought their gifts to God. Why did God reject Cain's gift but accept Abel's? Usually gifts are rejected if they're a) done with the wrong motive or b) less than the best we have to offer. Cain became angry, jealous, and bitter. He held a grudge, not against God but against his brother. It only took a few chapters into Genesis to see humanity commit murder. What caused it? A Life Over God posture among other things. God told Cain to do what is right and to not be mastered by sin. How do you respond to anger? Do you submit to God or do you put yourself over God and do things your way? Cain saw Abel as rival, not a role model. How do you respond when others achieve or excel in an area that you're failing in. Who are your rivals and role models?



# Daily Devotions

**10.28.16 | READ Numbers 20:1-12**

Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

Moses was used to seeing God work through his and his brother Aaron's shepherd's staffs. It was turned into a serpent on two occasions, it turned water into blood, and it parted the Red Sea. God told Moses to speak to the rock in Numbers 20:9 yet in Numbers 20:11 Moses resorts to what he knows and he strikes the rock with his staff. It's what he knew. It's what was comfortable for him. Moses disobeys and ultimately, instead of trusting in God, he trusts in a process that's worked for him before. His faith, in this moment, is misplaced. He strikes the rock instead of speaking to it. God allows it to work but Moses is severely punished for this sin. Prayerfully consider: What systems and processes do I trust more than God? What do I have misplaced faith in?

**10.29.16 | READ Matthew 13:53-59**

"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?"

Jesus' hometown was quick to dismiss his divinity. In bringing up his family history, they subtly denied the virgin birth. It's a harsh jab. "Isn't this the man conceived out of wedlock - the son of Joseph?" Moreso, it's doubt in God's supernatural power and presence. It's a denial of the miraculous and an assertion that there is only a natural world with natural law and no supernatural. Prayerfully consider: how quick are you to dismiss God? Are you quicker to give credit to circumstance, luck, and coincidence? Is it possible that in doing so you have often denied God's hand?

Week 1 – Daily Devotions

## Family Devotion

Have everyone write down or think about a 1-3 sentence definition of love.

### **READ John 14:15-24**

“Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.”

### **ASK:**

- 1.) What’s harder, to obey someone because we’re scared of them or to obey someone because we love them?
- 2.) What are some of God’s commandments or rules that come to mind when you think of obeying Jesus?
- 3.) Why do people sometimes disobey rules?
- 4.) What are some reasons that God gives us commands and rules?
- 5.) What are some things you can do this week to be better at obeying God?
- 6.) Why should we obey God?

### **PRAY:**

Heavenly Father, help us to love you more and as a result of our love for you, help us to obey you more. We know that you are a good Father who loves us and wants what’s best for us. Help us to trust in your ways and not out own.

# Small Group Questions

## Week 1 – Small Group Questions

1. As we talk about “The Good Life” Can you remember a time when your life was particularly good? What made it so good?

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2. Read 1 Samuel 13:1-15. Saul has a bad habit of disobeying God, trying to do things without God, and then making excuses for himself afterwards. What might have been some personality flaws or character issues that caused Saul to live “Life Over God.”

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3. Is it difficult to trust that God has the best way of life for you? Why or why not?

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4. God’s desire for how we live our lives and his specific plan for each of our lives are two slightly different things. Is it difficult to trust that God has the best plan for you personally?

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5. “Live with no regrets” “You Only Live Once” “Follow Your Dreams” “Be True to Yourself” Live for the moment” are all modern day proverbs. Are they wise? Are they foolish? Which ones do you agree

# Week 1 – Small Group Questions

with or disagree with? Which ones promote a “life over God” mentality?

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6. What do you think Jesus meant when he said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full?”

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7. Self-Test: When’s the last time you took a “leap of faith” even though it could cost you?

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8. Choose one way to combat the “Life Over God” temptation and share it with the group or come up with your own.

- a. **FIND LIFE:** Take a day, don’t run errands, don’t do work, don’t allow distractions. Find some time to deepen your relationship with God.
- b. **SHARE LIFE:** tell a trusted friend, mentor, or accountability partner about an area of your life that isn’t fully surrendered to God. Ask them to pray for you and hold you accountable for growth.
- c. **GIVE LIFE:** Jesus said we can’t serve both God and money. Our loyalty would be divided. This week, give prayerful consideration to where you might give a donation to in an effort to live more freely.

WEEK 2

# LIFE UNDER GOD

Week 2 – Sermon Intro

“One Nation Under God.” Most of us grew up repeating those words every morning as we put our hand over our heart and pledged our allegiance to the nation.

Whether or not our nation ought to be “under God” is a discussion for another time.

We might think that if Life Over God is wrong then Life Under God must be the best posture for our faith.

We’d be wrong.

This posture is so compelling and tempting for us because it’s deeply embedded in truth: God is to be served, obeyed, revered, respected, and listened to. God is Judge and King and in many ways we are to submit to His will. However, God is much more than Judge and as a result, primarily living out of this “Life under God” posture can be detrimental to the life-giving faith God has in mind for us.

Throughout this week, we’re going to explore the “Life Under God” posture and consider its consequences.

10.30.16

# Sermon Notes

Week 2 – Sermon Notes

# Action Steps

## Week 2 – Action Steps

- Practice forgiveness this week. The more gracious and forgiving we are with others, the more we'll be able to understand God's grace and forgiveness. Be quick to forgive strangers, commuters, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and especially your spouse and children. When someone wrongs you, see it as an opportunity to grow and deepen your faith.
- Look up these verses about God's love for you and commit one to memory:
  - Romans 5:8
  - John 3:16
  - Romans 8:37-39
  - Ephesians 3:17-19
  - Zephaniah 3:17
- Or look up these verses about being saved by grace and commit one to memory:
  - Ephesians 2:8-9
  - Titus 3:5
  - Romans 10:9-10
  - Romans 5:1-2
  - Galatians 2:21
- Pray daily that God would increase your knowledge and understanding of His love and grace. Consider partnering with someone and praying for one another as well as praying this for yourself.

## Daily Devotions

**10.31.16 | READ Luke 7:36-50**

As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

Simon, like many Pharisees lived with a “Life under God” posture. Here, a woman who “lived a sinful life” was repenting and worshipping. Simon clearly missed the point as all he could see was a sinner. Jesus saw a child coming home to the Father and angels rejoiced. Take a moment to ask God to give you (1) this woman’s heart of repentance when it comes to your own sin, (2) Jesus’ heart of forgiveness when it comes to the sins of others and (3) The Father’s heart of celebration when others repent and come to know Jesus.

**11.01.16 | READ Luke 18:9-14**

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”

Jesus notes that it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee who returned home justified before God. God is not impressed with self-righteousness or unhealthy comparisons. How we relate to others on the scale of personal “righteousness” is a worthless measure. When we compare ourselves to God, the standard of righteousness, we find ourselves in a desperate situation and we see our need for grace clearly. Ask God to soften your heart, to be quick to repent, to take sin seriously, to pursue holiness, and to care about the effects of sin as much as this tax collector did.



# Daily Devotions

**11.02.16 | READ Matthew 16:5-12**

“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

After some discussion the text says that he was telling them to guard against their teachings. Why would we have to be careful and on guard? As Galatians 5:9 says, “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” It doesn’t take much self-righteousness to infect, affect and destroy our faith. We’re naturally prone to this. We want to earn our due. We don’t want handouts. We’re prideful. We want to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps even if it’s physically impossible. And Jesus says “BEWARE!” “BE ON GUARD!” “DON’T FALL FOR IT!” “IT’S A TRAP!” “TRUST IN ME!” “PUT FAITH IN ME!”

**11.03.16 | READ Colossians 2:16-23**

“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Sometimes we surround ourselves with rules that have more to do with outward appearance rather than our inner lives. It’s easier. We care more about what people see than who we actually are. We’ve been doing it for thousands of years. You know what’s not destined to perish? Your soul. Your character. Your personality. Your being. Who you are matters more than how people see you. This world will perish and so will people’s opinions of you but how you live your life will matter for all of eternity.

Week 2 – Daily Devotions

## Daily Devotions

**11.04.16 | READ Matthew 11:25-30**

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

A yoke is a harness for oxen plowing a field. It's not easy. And the plow is not a light burden. But Jesus says: The work I've called you to is refreshing, it's rest for your weary souls. Jesus was talking about living according to the Spirit and not according to the Law. Life Under God is heavy and hard and wearisome and if your faith is exhausting you, it might be a sign to you that your posture is wrong. Find rest in Jesus. Don't try to be righteous out of your own strength, ask Jesus for help!

**11.05.16 | READ Hosea 6:4-6**

For I want you to show love, not offer sacrifices. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings.

God spoke to the Israelites and told them that He wasn't interested in their worship and the sacrifices they offered if there was no love behind it. More than He wanted burnt offerings, He wanted His people to know Him. It's easy to get caught up in thinking that God is primarily concerned with behavior modification. The truth is, He's primarily concerned with us knowing and loving Him. Even in the Old Testament we see that God is a God of love and relationships. Think about what you offer to God. Think about your Sunday morning worship, your tithes, your attendance, your devotion, your energy, your obedience to what you perceive are the right rules. Are they from a place of love or are they just one more way for you to try to earn forgiveness? God loves you and He wants you to know Him more so that you might love him more.

# Family Devotion

## Week 2 – Family Devotion

Have everyone write down or think of a 1-2 sentence answer for “What does God want from me?”

### **READ Micah 6:1-8**

What can we bring to the Lord? Should we bring him burnt offerings? Should we bow before God Most High with offerings of yearling calves? Should we offer him thousands of rams and ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Should we sacrifice our firstborn children to pay for our sins? No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.

### **ASK:**

- 1.) In this passage of Micah, the Israelites were basically asking: What do you want from us God? What were some of the things they thought he wanted?
- 2.) What do you think it looks like to “do what is right?”
- 3.) What is mercy and why is it so important to God?
- 4.) What do you think about the fact that one of the main things God wants from is just for us to walk with him?

### **PRAY:**

God, you don't want our stuff. You don't want us to work ourselves until we're dead tired just so we can give you things. You don't want to take from us what we love and cherish. Rather, you want us to do the right thing, to be merciful when others don't do the right thing, and to share our life with you. Help us to do that God, and thank you for wanting to spend time with me.

# Small Group Questions

1. What was your parents parenting style growing up? Authoritative, neglectful, permissive or authoritarian? How do you think this affected your view of God?

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2. Reread the story of the Prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. The older brother takes the posture of “Life Under God.” How did the Father view the relationship?

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3. “God helps those who help themselves.” “You made your bed, now lie in it.” “What goes around comes back around.” Are all modern day proverbs. Which do you agree with and which do you disagree with? Which fuel a “Life Under God” posture?

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4. In what ways is the posture of “Life Under God” helpful and in what ways can it be harmful?

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5. Read the Parable of the Minas in Luke 19:11-27. The master entrusts his servants with a large sum of money. Those who invest it are rewarded with cities and they to keep their money too. The servant who doesn’t invest it accuses the master of being a hard and unfair man. How did his view of “God” affect his way of living?

# Week 2 – Small Group Questions

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6. The servant saw his master as a man to be feared, respected, and obeyed but not as a Father to be loved. Same with the older brother in the parable of the lost son. How did this affect how the older brother treated others?

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7. Self test: Would you follow Jesus if there was no Hell and everyone went to Heaven anyway?

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8. Choose one way to combat the “Life Under God” temptation and share it with the group or come up with your own.

- a. **FIND LIFE:** Have coffee with God. Children love to spend time with their parents, being in their presence, and sharing simple conversation. Why not schedule a date with God?
- b. **SHARE LIFE:** Talk with someone about how you tend to view God: Is he a dictator? A judge? A father? A friend? A vending machine? Have an honest conversation and invite them to share as well. Provide feedback for one another.
- c. **GIVE LIFE:** Living “Life Under God” often causes us to feel paralyzed out of fear of failure and then punishment. Recognize that God is not a harsh or unfair master and take a risk. Start the process of sharing your faith with someone that doesn’t know Jesus.

WEEK 3

# LIFE FROM GOD

One of the problems with “Life Under God” is that it fails to recognize God as a Father who loves us and wants to give His children good gifts. As a result, those growing in their faith beyond a “Life Under God” posture and into something new might consider the “Life From God” posture.

Whether they admit it or not, many people see God as a vending machine, as a source of wealth and success and prosperity. Some only follow Him when things are going well or others will turn to Him only when things are going south. Why? Because God wants me to be happy, right?

Well, as it turns out, it might be a little more complicated than that. Throughout this series we’ll explore the “Life From God” posture and take a look at some of the positive and negative effects of it.

# Sermon Notes

11.06.16

Week 3 – Sermon Notes

## Action Steps

- Google “John Wesley’s Covenant Prayer” and consider praying it each day. Read the words carefully, don’t lie to God. If it’s not a prayer you’re comfortable with praying, then ask God to get you to the point.
- Prayerfully make a list of all the times that God has disciplined you or used pain and hardship to grow you. Often times when we think of “Good things” from God we fail to recognize that He uses both good and bad – all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to his purpose.
- Serve someone intentionally this week. Don’t wait for a moment to find you. Who can you bless? Who can you serve? Do it! The “Life From God” posture is often self-serving.
- Ask God to give you a heart for holiness. If you’ve never wept over your own sin before or if you’ve never been heartbroken by the reality of hell, ask for those blessings. Ask that God would soften your heart and open your eyes to the spiritual realities of the world. The “Life from God” posture is consumed with the material world and oftentimes devoid of spiritual realities.



# Daily Devotions

11.07.16 | READ Luke 22:24-30

Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them. Jesus told them, “In this world the kings and great men lord it over their people, yet they are called ‘friends of the people.’ But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant.

The disciples and most of the religious people during the time of Jesus seemed to be concerned with places of honor and positions of respect, authority and dignity. I love that Jesus says, “In this world” because He knows a world that’s different. Jesus’ response was a challenge to serve one another. How much do you like to be acknowledged? How much do you enjoy being pampered or waited on? Do you have any room to grow when it comes to humility and service? What’s one thing that you can intentionally do this week to purposefully take a position of “the lowest rank?” Take out the trash, clean the litter box, clean a toilet, pick up litter, etc.

11.08.16 | READ Philippians 2:1-11

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

The NIV says, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition.” What a strong rebuke to the American dream. Don’t we love to impress others? Don’t we love to go to school reunions and see where we stand compared to everyone else? Don’t we love to post the best parts of our lives on social media? Yet throughout the Bible we’re told not to try to impress others, not to do “acts of righteousness” in order to be seen by others, and not to seek man’s approval. What would it look like this week to champion someone else’s cause, to lift someone else up above you, and to care more about God’s opinion than man’s?

Week 3 – Daily Devotions

## Daily Devotions

**11.09.16 | READ John 6:25-29**

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

When Jesus feeds the 5000, the crowds continue to follow Him because they want more bread. Jesus’ response to them is “Don’t work for food that perishes but work for food that endures to eternal life.” He’s certainly not telling them to quit their jobs or live on the streets. Jesus often speaks with hyperbole. What He is saying though is: pursue God more than you pursue wealth. I love that He calls it work. I love that the Son of God recognized that faith sometimes feels like work to us. Yet if there’s anything worth working for, it’s God.

**11.10.16 | READ Luke 10:1-20**

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name” “...do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

Jesus sends out the 72 in order to prepare towns for His visit. When He sends them, He sends them with power – power to heal people and cast out demons. The disciples return and they are filled with joy and excited to report that they have power over demons. Jesus says, “but how much more important is it that your names are written in heaven!” Sometimes we might think our faith is about what we get from God. Sometimes we feel that God loves us, approves of us, thinks fondly of us only if we’re being blessed by some possession or circumstance or spiritual gift. Jesus says “no!” You’re blessed because you’re God’s. You know God thinks fondly of you because He knows your name.

# Daily Devotions

**11.11.16 | READ Luke 17:11-19**

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?"

In Luke 17 Jesus heals 10 lepers who come to Him saying, "Jesus! Master! Have pity on us! When He heals them, only one comes back to say "thank you." So often we only come to Jesus to get something from Him. We only come when we really need Him. Sometimes we might make so many requests that we don't even realize God has answered a prayer because we've already moved on to asking for something else. The Life from God posture develops a sense of entitlement and ingratitude. Spend some time remembering and thanking God for prayers answered.

**11.12.16 | READ Hebrews 12:4-11**

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son."

When we think of the fact that "all good things come from God." We often forget to realize that that also includes discipline and punishment. The Life from God posture often fails to see God's love through rebuke, discipline, and chastisement. Yet the scriptures are clear - we are God's children and He disciplines us out of love. Here's a good self-test: Are you able to name one time that God has disciplined you? Are you able to name one time when He has rebuked you? The question isn't, has it happened but rather, have you recognized it?

Week 3 – Daily Devotions

## Family Devotion

Have everyone write down 1-3 reasons for why it's important to follow God.

### **READ Philippians 3:8-9 (NLT)**

<sup>8</sup> Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

### **ASK:**

- 1.) Paul says "everything else" is worthless compared to knowing Jesus. Can you think of some things that you really love that you'd be willing to give up if it meant being able to know Jesus more?
- 2.) Paul says that he considered everything to be like garbage compared to Jesus in order to be more like Jesus. Why should we want to be more like Jesus?
- 3.) Paul says He follows God because he gets to know Jesus and be like Jesus how are your reasons for following God similar or different?
- 4.) It's clear that Paul loved Jesus and wanted to know him more and be like Him. Why do you love Jesus?

### **PRAY:**

Pray for one another, that you would be able to consider all things to be garbage compared to Jesus Christ.

# Small Group Questions

## Week 3 – Small Group Questions

1. What are some great things that you've received from God? List material possessions as well as spiritual things.

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2. Have physical things ever hurt or hindered your relationship with God? Would you be willing to share?

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3. Read Acts 8:9-25. What questions does this passage bring up?

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4. What does Simon do wrong?

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5. Have you ever pursued God for the wrong reasons?

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6. Look at this spectrum of reasons for pursuing God. What would you add in between that are other

# Week 3 – Small Group Questions

motives for pursuing God? When does it become “wrong?”

To mock  
God

To love  
God for  
His sake

7. Ancient Jews didn't believe in the afterlife. The faithful Jews who followed God did so because of what He meant to them in the present. Would you follow God if there was no eternal reward? What would be the point?

8. Choose one way to combat the “Life From God” temptation and share it with the group or come up with your own.

- a. **FIND LIFE:** Commit to a spiritual discipline: spending time in solitude, a day of fasting, silence, an hour in prayer, etc. And do it, not to get more from God but to get more of God. Spend time in His presence.
- b. **SHARE LIFE:** Ask a friend to serve with you and volunteer your time at a soup kitchen or food pantry.
- c. **GIVE LIFE:** The “Life from God” posture often gives in order to receive more in return. Consider giving anonymously and receiving nothing in return except to understand God more (who gives to those who could never repay him).

WEEK 4

# LIFE FOR GOD

## Week 4 – Sermon Intro

Whether we're dreamers searching for meaning, heroes seeking a quest, or God-fearer's looking to fulfill our God-given purpose, most of us wants to make a mark, to leave a legacy, or to do something meaningful with our lives.

Maybe you've heard something like this before: Make your life count. What do you want your eulogy to say? If someone wrote a book about your life, would anyone want to read it? Do something with your life. Be a World-Changer.

"Life For God" is a tempting posture to take on in Christianity for many reasons. It sounds selfless at first glance, it promotes the good ol' fashioned protestant work ethic, and it gets people on mission. What's not to love? It's inspiring, convicting, compelling, and seemingly righteous all at once.

This week we're going to look at the pros and cons of the "Life For God" posture.

11.13.16

# Sermon Notes

Week 4 – Sermon Notes



## Action Steps

- Often times those who live “Life for God” want their good deeds to be seen by others. Find opportunities this week to serve others and bless others in secret.
- Write God a love letter throughout the week, adding to it day by day when you have a moment to spare. God isn’t just there to be served, he’s there to be loved and enjoyed!
- Reflect on Christ as a Shepherd and yourself as a sheep. Read Psalm 23. What is a Shepherd’s role? What is a sheep’s role? Write down one or two characteristics that resonate with you and come back to them from time to time throughout the week.
- It’s not rare for Christians to speak out against other Christians that they disagree with. Names like Joel Osteen, Mark Driscoll, or Rob Bell can often incite feelings of anger and discord. This week, highlight Christians that you respect. Honor those who set a good example to others. Be generous in your compliments. This week, notice others and celebrate what they do for the Kingdom.

## Daily Devotions

**11.14.16 | READ Matthew 7:21-23**

Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

This verse is often a source of anxiety for many believers. Is it possible to drive out demons, to perform miracles, and to prophesy in the name of Jesus yet not go to heaven? How so? Unfortunately, not all people who use the name of Christ – faith healers, cult leaders, con-artists, do so sincerely. It’s possible to labor for God without actually having faith in Him. You might not be a con-artist or a prosperity gospel heretic, but the question remains: What’s more important to you: knowing God personally or doing a lot of good and powerful works in His name? What are you most concerned with?

**11.15.16 | READ Philippians 2:12-18**

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

“Work out your salvation” here does not mean to earn your salvation but rather to continue in the work of a saved person – that is, to look more like God. To “work out” your salvation is willful work, it’s intentional, it’s hard, and the focus is on self. He then says to do it with fear and trembling because it is God who is helping you. In other words, it is God who gives you the desire, the will, and the power to act in a way that pleases Him. Paul reminds us that any righteousness we experience, whether practical or positional, is to the glory of God.

# Daily Devotions

**11.16.16 | 1 Corinthians 15:1-11**

But whatever I am now, it is all because God poured out his special favor on me—and not without results. For I have worked harder than any of the other apostles; yet it was not I but God who was working through me by his grace.

Paul, humbly describing himself as, “whatever I am” or “I am what I am” is arguably the most influential Christian to ever exist so why does he speak in such deflated terms? Because He knows that anything he is and anything he does is only to God’s credit. It is not him but rather God at work through him. Life For God is often consumed with seeking recognition from God or from man for the work that we do. Yet the Bible is clear – the glory is not ours, but God’s. Knowing this to be true keeps us from following God for the wrong reasons.

**11.17.16 | READ Hebrews 13:20-25**

...may he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.

The writer of Hebrews prays that God would give us everything we need to do His will and that God would produce in us every good thing that is pleasing to Him. A father picks a dandelion and gives it to his toddler to give to his mother. The mother gushes. The child smiles ear-to-ear. The father is proud. Why? Love. The gift is small and has hardly been wrought by any working of the toddler yet love makes his modest gift a treasure. Yet not the toddler’s love but the love of His parents. This is a picture of what happens when we offer our modest gifts to God. His love turns it into treasure.

Week 4 – Daily Devotions

## Daily Devotions

**11.18.16 | READ Revelation 3:1-6**

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: ...I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent.

The church in Sardis has sometimes been referred to as the church of the living dead. They had a reputation for being alive – they were an active church that did a lot for their community. They were social justice warriors but Jesus says, “you are dead... your deeds are unfinished.” Jesus says their deeds are “not full.” In other words, their actions are empty. They’re going through the motions. Later, he tells them that only a *few* of them are “dressed in white.” This is usually a reference to being clothed in the righteousness of Christ by faith. So apparently most of them don’t have faith. Sardis has become full of good deeds but emptied of faith. They’re living Life For God but they don’t know Him personally.

**11.19.16 | READ Luke 10:38-42**

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Martha was working for Jesus. She was getting the house and food ready for him and his disciples (presumably). Mary, her sister, was the other host that night and she was sitting at Jesus’ feet. Jesus was there and she gave him her full attention. For Jesus, this was far more important. Jesus loves your presence more than He loves your service. He loves you more than He loves what you do for Him. Do you believe that?

# Family Devotion

## Week 4 – Family Devotion

Have everyone write down or think of a 1-2 sentence answer for “What are you known for? What’s your reputation?”

### **READ Revelation 2:1-5**

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write... I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first...

### **ASK:**

- 1.) What good things was this church known for?
- 2.) What was the main problem with this church?
- 3.) How would you feel if someone you really cared about acted the right way around you but didn’t actually love you?
- 4.) God tells the church to “do the things you did at first.” What are some things we do to show our love to God?

**PRAY:** God, help us to do the right things, like the church we read about and even more so, fill us with love and desire for you. Help us to do those things which express our love to you and which increase our love for you. We love you and we pray this in Jesus’ name, Amen.

# Small Group Questions

1. Who are some Christians that you really admire for their hard work in the faith and what have they done for God's kingdom? (People in your life, people in the Bible? Missionaries? Pastors? Evangelists? Politicians? Etc).

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2. Can you recall a time of intense commitment and service to God that was refreshing to your soul? Can you recall a time that was spiritually exhausting? Did you grow from those moments?

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3. Read 1 Kings 19:1-10. Why is Elijah running, hiding, and wanting to die?

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4. Elijah did everything he was supposed to do, all that God had asked him and what did He have to show for it?

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5. What personality/mentality shift needs to happen in order for a person who serves God to enjoy His work not based on results but based purely on partnership with God?

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# Week 4 – Small Group Questions

6. Read Philippians 3:8-9. Paul referred to himself as a servant of Jesus often and was imprisoned often for his faith. He was beaten and stoned and lived, in many regards, a miserable life. What made it all worthwhile?

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7. Read Ephesians 3:16-19. Paul places a high priority on knowing God, loving God, and knowing His love for us. Have you ever lost focus on God's love while serving him? How can we prevent that?

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8. Choose one way to combat the "Life For God" posture and share it with the group or come up with your own.

a. **FIND LIFE:** Say "no." Allow some things to go undone, or ask someone for help. One of the best lessons from Sabbath rest is – we're not as important as we think we are. The world will still turn even if we take a day off.

b. **SHARE LIFE:** Talk to a friend or accountability partner about how often you do things for God because "you have to" rather than "you want to" and discuss how your attitude should be towards those things.

c. **GIVE LIFE:** Tell someone that God loves them. Don't have any motives other than letting that person be refreshed by such a simple yet amazing truth. God loves you. Whether I know you or not, whether I know all the junk in your life or not, whether I know your past or not, I know that God loves you.

# LIFE WITH GOD

Maybe you flipped ahead in this booklet or we've just spilled the beans along the way but by now you're probably aware that the posture we've been getting at is "Life With God."

Most of us grew up operating with a posture of life over, under, from or for God. So unfortunately and heartbreakingly, there's been a lot of time wasted and there's a long road ahead in forging a new understanding of God and how we ought to relate to Him.

"We have been taught that 'the good life' resides in everything and anything but God. Discipleship, the cross, obedience – these are hardly words that we associate with goodness. And because we cannot see the goodness of rightness, we fail to see the goodness of God. But perhaps, just perhaps, we can take a cue from... the psalmist to 'taste and see that the Lord is good.'"

- Richard Foster (Devotional Classics 2005 pg.79)

Often times we think of happiness and holiness as two concepts that are opposed to one another. Does God want me to be holy? Or does God want me to be happy? It'd probably be a heated debate between Victoria Osteen and the Pharisees but the Bible doesn't tell us that the two are mutually exclusive. In fact, it's quite the opposite. True happiness is only found in true holiness and true holiness will bring about true happiness. One does not and cannot exist apart from the other. As the Psalmist says, "Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!" In other words, The Good Life is Life with God.



# Sermon Notes

11.20.16

**Week 5 – Sermon Notes**

## Action Steps

- Put a small cross in your pocket, a rubber band around your wrist or change the background of your phone to remind you every time you see it that you are with God and He is with you.
- Purposefully do small things with God this week. The Holy Spirit is in You. God is with you. Whether you're folding laundry or filing paper, try recognizing God in this midst of it. He sustains you. He gives you strength, coordination, dexterity, and intellect.
- Create a sacred space for your quiet times with God that will serve as a reminder for you to pray and to spend time with him. Maybe this is a prayer mat that you kneel on or a desk where you journal. Consider using crosses, candles, incense, a bible, etc. to make it personal and special.
- The Asher Yatzar is a Jewish prayer traditionally recited after pooping! It expresses thanks for the ability to excrete because without it, we could not survive. Offer prayers of thanksgiving to God during regularly occurring times: Using the bathroom, driving in the car, and eating meals or drinking coffee. Creating rhythmic reminders for prayer is a great way to take on the "Life With God" posture.

# Daily Devotions

11.21.16 | READ Luke 15:11-32

“His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”

The parable of the lost son isn’t just about how we relate to God or how Gentiles and Jews relate to God but it’s also about how God relates to us. He sees us as his children. He’s quick to forgive and quick to redeem. He longs for us when we leave him and runs after us when we return to him. All he has belongs to his children and he always stays by them. He celebrates when we return to him and so do the angels (represented by the servants of the father in the parable).

11.22.16 | READ John 6:60-70

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, “Are you also going to leave?” Simon Peter replied, “Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life.

For Peter, there was no other option. There was nowhere to go where life could be found outside of Jesus. There was no one better to go to, to share life with. Those who Jesus taught often and came into contact with often found themselves at a crossroad. Do I turn from my old ways and live with Jesus or do I continue to depend on my own strength? What’s perhaps most interesting about this passage is that for Peter, being with Jesus meant having His words. We have the words of Jesus too and therefore we have the ability to be “with” Him in a special way. For Peter, the words of Jesus meant more than visions, dreams, miracles, and the like. Being with Jesus was about hearing and listening to Jesus.

## Week 5 – Daily Devotions

## Daily Devotions

**11.23.16 | READ Nehemiah 4:1-9**

They all made plans to come and fight against Jerusalem and throw us into confusion. But we prayed to our God and guarded the city day and night to protect ourselves.

Nehemiah is known for his godly leadership - particularly the way that he reacts to situations with prayer and then responds to the task at hand. Normally we react to situations with human effort and later on, if we fail, we pray. Those who live “Life With God” will begin to make God a part of their day to day life and their minute by minute decisions. I love this verse because Nehemiah does both: he prays and he posts a guard. He prays and he acts. He takes initiative in both the spiritual and the physical. He doesn’t expect God to do everything but he does ask God for help.

**11.24.16 | READ 1 Samuel 17:1-50**

David replied to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

When you read all of the context surrounding David and Goliath, one thing is particularly clear: David wants everyone to know this is God’s doing. Saul gives David his armor and weapons. David lays them aside. Goliath thinks he’s up against a shepherd boy with a stick. David knows that Goliath is up against God. He says, “Everyone assembled here will know that the LORD rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the LORD’s battle and he will give you to us!” David places no faith in his ability to sling a rock. He’s not going up against Goliath because he’s arrogant or brash, he’s going because He knows God is with him. It’s Life With God.

# Daily Devotions

**11.25.16 | READ Exodus 33**

## Week 5 – Daily Devotions

Then Moses said, “If you don’t personally go with us, don’t make us leave this place. How will anyone know that you look favorably on me—on me and on your people—if you don’t go with us? For your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth.”

At the beginning of Exodus 33 God tells Moses that He will give the promised land to the Israelites and that He will give them victory over their enemies. He tells Him that the land flows with Milk and Honey. There’s just one caveat: God won’t tag along. God says, “you can have everything you want and everything I promised you but I’m not coming with you.” And Moses’ response is: We don’t want it then. His response is, if you’re staying, we’re staying. His response is, we want to do this with you. We want Life With God. That’s the model. It’s all or nothing. You’re either all in or you’re all out. Either you want God for God or you don’t.

**11.26.16 READ Luke 6:12-16**

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles:

Jesus often retreats for prayer. He enjoys being alone with God. On this occasion, he goes to the Father and spends the whole night praying outside on a mountain. Why? It’s the night before a very important decision and Jesus wants the Father to play a major role in it. If I had to guess who needs prayer more: me or Jesus... I’d guess me. If I had to guess who actually prays more: me or Jesus, I’d say Jesus. When’s the last time you spent a night praying to God? Never? Let’s allow “Life with God” to change us in extraordinary ways.

## Family Devotion

Have everyone write down or think about who are the people in their life that they spend the most time with.

### READ Psalm 1

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, <sup>2</sup> but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law, day and night. <sup>3</sup> That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers. <sup>4</sup> Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. <sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

### ASK:

- 1.) The idea of Psalm 1 is that we wouldn't be influenced by wicked people, that we wouldn't grow more and more comfortable with them. Who are your friends and how do they influence you?
- 2.) How much time do you spend with God in a given day?
- 3.) Psalm 1 is a beautiful picture of what it looks like to live "Life with God." What are some things we can do to look more like the blessed person of Psalm 1?
- 4.) What are the benefits that the blessed person of Psalm 1 experiences?

**PRAY:** God, help us to care more about what's influencing us. May you have more influence over us than our friends. Help us to live life with you and to spend time with you. May we be like the blessed person of Psalm 1. Like a tree by streams of your grace.

# Small Group Questions

## Week 5 – Small Group Questions

1. Who are your best friends and why are they your best friends?

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2. Why doesn't "Life With God" come more naturally to us?

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3. Read John 15:1-17. What are a few things that stand out to you?

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4. Based on the passage, brainstorm: what are all of the benefits of remaining in Jesus?

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5. What do you think it means to bear fruit?

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# Week 5 – Small Group Questions

6. What does Jesus say that friendship with Him looks like?

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7. How do we remain in the vine? What does that actually look like?

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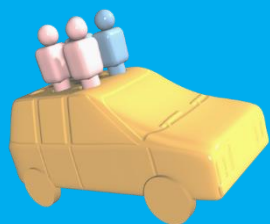
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8. Choose one way to embrace and live out the “Life With God” posture and share it with the group or come up with your own.

- a. **FIND LIFE:** Dedicate some time praying to God as one speaks to a friend. Tell him what the best parts of your day were, the worst parts of your day, tell him your dreams and your frustrations. Share with him things he already knows and spend time listening to Him.
- b. **SHARE LIFE:** Where do you connect with God most? Minnehaha Falls? The Cathedral of Saint Paul? The Basilica of Saint Mary? Consider bringing a friend along with you to visit such a place together and spend time in prayer together.
- c. **GIVE LIFE:** Tell someone about the importance of “Life With God.” Have a conversation about our sermon series, our small group Focus season, or send them the book “With” by Sky Jethani for them to read and enjoy. Change a life!







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