

# ***God of Wonders: Life***

*This is the last message in a seven-part series in which we're looking at God through the lens of powerful Biblical metaphors. All messages in the series are available on [www.GrowWithSecond.org/sermons](http://www.GrowWithSecond.org/sermons)*

**A Sermon Preached by  
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**Easter Sunday, April 24, 2011**

*John 20:1-18*

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

*John 1:1-4 NRSV*

*So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

*John 10:7-10 NRSV*

*Jesus said to [Martha], "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.*

*John 11:23-26 NRSV*

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to*

him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

*John 14:1-6 NRSV*

What kind of life are you looking for today? Meet Dr. Life. Dr. Jeffrey Life.



Isn't that a perfect name for a doctor—*Life*? And he's not just any doctor. He holds degrees from Albion College, Wayne State University, the University of Iowa, and the University of Michigan. He's board-certified in Family Practice medicine and an expert in environmental toxicology. But it's not his academic resume that has people flocking to his Las Vegas medical practice. It's this:



Dr. Life is a hunk.

Now I know what you're thinking: this picture is simply Dr. Life's head photo-shopped onto *my* body. I appreciate the thought, but you would be wrong. Dr. Life is a real person. And this is his real body. And the reason he is real popular right now is Dr. Life believes he can help you become a hunk, too

– or a honey – *at any age*. In fact, for the last ten years he has concentrated in a new – and controversial – medical specialty called “age management.”

As he was approaching his late 50s, Dr. Life looked at himself in the mirror and didn’t like what he saw. He decided he needed to take drastic steps. He not only wanted to stop the aging process, he hoped to turn back the clock. In many ways he has succeeded – at least outwardly. It’s hard to argue with his results when you see photos of what he looked like before he began his transformation. But this kind of “*amortality*” comes at a price. While Dr. Life’s techniques don’t involve surgery, they are now without side-effects. A typical regimen for his patients involves the prodigious prescription of anabolic steroids and massive amounts of human growth hormone in addition to daily exercise and healthy eating.

Reading about Dr. Life in *Time* magazine last week got me thinking about the difference between the life the good doctor offers and the life the good Lord offers. Let’s compare Dr. Life with the One who said, “*I am the resurrection and the life, those who believe in me will never die.*”

*Dr. Life* helps people look younger, decades younger in some cases, at least from the neck down. *The Way, the Truth, and the Life*, promises nothing for a person’s complexion, body mass index, or waistline. But Jesus does offer something he calls the “abundant life.” He said to his disciples, “I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly.” For Jesus, a tanned and toned body isn’t exactly a priority; the *good* life is. That’s what he wants us to have. But even here there’s a difference between the way most of the world would describe “abundant living” and the way we do as Christians.

Ask a dozen people on the street to describe the “good life” and they will probably say it consists of ....

- *Good looks* – which usually means being young, tall, tan and thin, but not too thin.
- *Lots of money* – at least enough to buy a lot of stuff and to not have to do anything for ourselves that we don’t want to; we’ll hire someone for those jobs.
- *Status* – we want to be popular, powerful, and members of an exclusive club, but not so exclusive, of course, that they don’t let us or our friends in.
- Speaking of friends, we want *lots of them*—the perfect friends in this “ideal” world would be people who are always there for us, but who require almost nothing in return.

- This is a life where there are no sacrifices or responsibilities – only *opportunities* and *privileges*.

This is the good life that people are trying to sell us everyday—just look at ads for retirement communities and colleges. And a lot of us are buying. The sad part is no one can deliver on the promise of *this* “abundant” life.

This is not the abundant life that Jesus offers.

The One who said, “I am the first and the last, . . . the living one,” [Revelation 1:17] doesn’t care about our age, height, weight, zits, or wrinkles. His concern is the condition of your heart and mine: not how rapidly it beats but how often it is full of compassion for another life.

Jesus doesn’t want us to accumulate more and more stuff; he wants us to share what we have with the poor. They need it more than we do, and all that stuff seems to get in the way of our relationship with him and others.

Jesus certainly offers freedom, but not freedom from responsibility. He wants us to take on the challenge of being his hands and feet in the world, continuing the work he began. Sometimes this means getting our hands dirty. Sometimes it means “losing” our *so-called* life so that we might gain the real thing.

And Jesus – the King who rode into Jerusalem *on a donkey* -- calls us to get off our high horses and take ourselves a whole lot less seriously. In the life he offers there’s no room for status symbols or exclusive privileges.

It’s a different kind of life, isn’t it?

*It’s better.*

Jesus offers

- *Contentment* in place of the continual search for the next thrill, the next big thing, the next high, and the next deal.
- He offers *lasting joy* – not the passing adrenaline rush that comes with a new purchase or new relationship.
- Jesus offers *companionship* – he will never leave you nor forsake you, but he will require something of you; he wants your life. Give it to him and he’ll give it back to you – and much more to go with it.
- Jesus offers *compassion*. Instead of looking down on us and saying, “Why aren’t you more like me?” He sees you and me and says, “I’ve

been there. I know how hard life is; let me help you to face your challenges.”

- Jesus offers *peace*, peace of mind. In place of fear of aging, fear of being alone, and fear of death, Jesus offers a peace “that passes understanding.” [Philippians 4:7]

To put it the contrast most plainly, *Dr. Life* says, “This is my body – you can have it, too.” *The Resurrection and the Life* says, “This is my body, broken for you.”

Dr. Life would argue that his techniques produce not just a more youthful appearance, but something much more important, a better quality of life. He says that his patients enjoy a much more active life than do their peers who are not fighting the effects of age at every turn. To the extent that Dr. Life’s programs support general good health his claim makes sense; when you’re not healthy it’s hard to enjoy anything else. No one is going to argue with that. But we need to remember that there’s a world of difference between a “better *quality* of life” and “the *good* life.” For Christians the good life does not amount to being *healthy* enough to play tennis into your 80s or being *wealthy* enough to be able to afford summer and winter homes. Those things are nice, but they aren’t the *good* life.

For Christians the good life is not about having good things, it’s about *being* good, about living like Jesus did. It’s about serving others. It’s about being able to be hopeful and content even when we are not healthy and wealthy.

These past few years have been particularly hard on our Second Family. Several members of our extended congregational family have experienced stroke, cancer, the ravages of addiction, and the crushing disappointment of long-term unemployment. What does Dr. Life have to offer these folks?

And in the past few months we have said goodbye to twelve saints among us. Our hearts are still heavy even on this Easter morning, even as we know that their new life has begun. What strikes me is that not one of these people were living the “good” life when they died, at least not the “good life” as we see it advertised on T.V. These people weren’t particularly wealthy; they lived humbly. And they certainly weren’t healthy; disease had left them weak. But in the Christian sense these people were among the *uber-rich*; they died surrounded by friends and family in whom they had invested so much and from whom they received so much. And these everyday saints were *strong* no matter how weak their bodies were. Their faith carried them through their final moments and inspired others who watched them pass into God’s hands with dignity and grace.

The good life Jesus offers is about looking in the mirror and *liking* what you see. It's about putting others first as Jesus did, knowing that you won't end up last in the long run. It's about sacrificing now in exchange for the certain promise of reward someday. For Christians "quality of life" isn't about us; it's about making a difference in our brothers and sisters' lives.

Hordes of scientists like Dr. Life and his peers are trying to extend life as long as possible. 120 years seems to be the outer limit. Apparently cells can reproduce just so many times; but who knows, we might be able to change that. But how many of us want to live to be 120—or beyond? Who wants to be the only one attending their hundredth college reunion? With the help of lots of chemicals, hard-work, and luck, people like Dr. Life can extend the length of *this* life and make the quality of *this* life a little bit better. But even so we are still in *this* world, which even at its best is full of suffering, injustice, and heartache.

The One we call the "Resurrection and the Life" offers something much better and *everlasting*. Not agelessness, but new life: a life free from fear, tears, suffering, loss and sorrow. No *doctor* can write a prescription for that. But Jesus can.

When the women went to the tomb on that first Easter morning, what kind of life do you think they were looking for? And when they ran to tell the disciples what they had found, what do you think they were so excited about? Jesus' didn't die on Good Friday so that our life could be *a little bit better* or that we'd live a *few years* longer. Jesus gave his life so that we might be born again into lives full of hope.

I was out shopping the other night and ran into a friend of a friend. He's been in trouble. A lot. He's fifteen or twenty years younger than me, but he's lived fast and furious. He's got a couple of kids and now he's fighting for custody of them. He's done a couple stints in rehab. He's going through a divorce. He's lost too many jobs to count. He gave up his license long ago.

I saw him at his new job. It's a good one. He was smiling and chatty during a cigarette break. He asked me, "Hey, did you hear that I'm getting baptized on Easter?" "No, that's great," I said, genuinely surprised and pleased. "I'm really happy for you." "Couple years ago I was a die-hard atheist," he explained, "so this is a pretty big deal." "Wow," I said. "Why the change? What turned things around?" "I guess it was losing the kids and all the trouble I've been through; and the rehab and starting my life over. Looking back I can see God was carrying me through it all." "I think you know something about death and resurrection," I said, letting the pastor in me slip a few words into the

conversation. He thought about what I said and replied with a knowing smile, "Yes, I do." This guy has a something completely unique and special to celebrate today. This guy gets what Easter is about – not just making good people better, but helping dead people come alive. That's the new life, the abundant life, the eternal life we celebrate today and every Sunday. Amen.

*Dear Friend,*

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