

That They Might Have Life

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations are from the King James Version.

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ISBN: 978-1-7345519-1-4

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8787 West Coon Lake Road
Gregory, MI 48137

Published by Life Abundant Ministries

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The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

—John 10:10

Do you ever see one of those moms who's effortlessly pulling it off? And maybe you're brave enough to ask what her secret is. Then she tells you and it's usually one of two things: It's something that you're already doing ineffectively, or it's something that would take so much more time and effort and energy that you just can't even imagine what it would take to implement it all. She proudly declares, "We just eliminated all processed foods, artificial dyes, gluten, soy, dairy,

nuts, and put him on a raw, organic, low-carb diet. Then all we had to do was eliminate television, tablet, and computer screen time and avoid any place that has a cell phone or Wi-Fi signal.”

And you think to yourself, “Really? That’s all?” In the back of my mind, I’m thinking, “Yeah, my kid ate Halloween candy for breakfast—last year’s Halloween candy. She found it in the closet when I was supposed to be looking for her during hide and seek. I forgot. Oops.”

Life is hard. Parenting adds unprecedented complexity that is rarely anticipated. We all have that one person in mind, though, who just seems to have it all together. Maybe

you've viewed her from a distance. Maybe you are close with her. I had a friend like that.

Tina was an amazing mom. She was nearly that mom I just described. Her kids were mild-mannered and well behaved and made mine look like a couple of escaped billy goats. She was an all-natural, homeopathic, cloth-diapering, grow-your-own and make-your-own baby food, amazing kind of mom. She had an endless supply of patience and love for her children and seemed to have it all together.

I had known her my whole life, and she was the kind of friend where we would always just pick up where we left off, and it was as though no time had passed. Always the adventurer,

she followed her dreams to New Zealand for a month-long backpacking expedition, to West Virginia as a certified whitewater rafting guide, and even to the skies while jumping out of a perfectly good airplane. And she took me with her. Not just on the skydiving and whitewater rafting trips, but her life took all sorts of twists and turns that I only ventured to dip my toes into. I am proud and embarrassed to say that I admired her.

Because you never see the whole story, you only get glimpses, no matter how well you think you have someone figured out. I am not here to tell you Tina's whole story, though.

I remember the last time I spoke to her. She was inviting our family to her

daughter's fourth birthday party and as it was just a reminder. It was a brief and nondescript conversation. Two days later she took her own life while her daughter was at preschool, and her 2-year-old son was upstairs napping.

It was the hardest thing I've ever had to deal with, and it is something that I am—understandably—still processing.

In the days between her death and her funeral, I realized that this was one of those life-changing events, where you can easily divide the elements of your life into *before* this thing happened, and *after*. I made the decision that I would not let this just be an event in my life. It wouldn't be just another dot on my timeline, but

rather a moment that altered my direction, and became a major defining factor in my future—because everything in my life changed. And in mere moments, God revealed to me the beginnings of my ministry.

Months later, after much planning, prayer, and paperwork, I launched Life Abundant Ministries. We are founded and rooted in John 10:10, where Jesus says, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

We are a ministry geared toward teaching, equipping, and empowering the members of the body of Christ so that they may live life to the fullest. We

want people to know who God is, who they are, and what their relationship is with Him. We teach people that God will meet them wherever they are, whoever they are.

In the time since Tina's death, I've talked to a lot of women. I've asked a lot of questions. And there are a few things I've come up with.

I'd like to start out with our ministry's foundational scripture. "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." That first part paints a very stark comparison to what Jesus says He came to do. Jesus is clear about that. He is not the thief—because let's be clear, here—we are talking about the enemy of God, the enemy of His people, and our enemy,

the devil. And he has one goal, in three parts—steal, kill, and destroy. Have you ever had anything stolen from you? Lost a loved one? Watched a marriage crumble and fall apart? That is the enemy's plan in action: steal, kill, destroy.

On one hand we have the thief (stealing, killing, and destroying) and on the other hand we have Jesus (bringing life, and not just everyday ordinary life). Yes, Jesus is concerned that we are living, breathing, and our heart is beating. But He is also interested in so much more than that.

Jesus is interested in healing your wounds and erasing those scars. He wants to lift you up out of those deepest-darkest thoughts that haunt

and imprison you. He wants to fulfill your dreams. He is the lover of your soul and wants you to have life more abundantly. Some Bible versions even call it having life to the fullest.

It is pretty clear that these two opposing forces are not working in concert with one another. One side seeks to bring destruction and death, and the other side seeks to bring life more abundantly. It seems like a pretty clear split, to me. So, when Tina died, I had such a hard time talking to good, well-intentioned people who just said some of the most ignorant things. Hopefully, none of those people were any of you.

I heard people say, in an attempt to offer comfort, “God took her because

she was needed in heaven more than here on earth.” What? First off, God did not take her, remember? Steal, kill, destroy, is the devil’s work. Also, He did not *need* her in heaven, and certainly not more than she was needed here on earth. God had a plan for her life. He has a plan for each of our lives. Additionally, telling someone that God “took” a loved one is a fantastic way to create a relational rift between a hurting person and God.

For example: If I kidnapped your child (and there was nothing you could do about it) and someone told you that I needed your child more than you did, don’t you think that would affect our relationship? Wouldn’t every subsequent encounter we had be

negatively affected by this event? I think it would.

I'm not here to point out every instance of loss, turmoil, and defeat, to say, "Oh, look what the devil has done." No. That gives him too much credit. He can't do anything all by himself. But the devil does have a bunch of really bad suggestions. And he is relentless, as you may or may not have noticed.

Because of this relentlessness we need to be on guard. 1 Peter 5:8 says we need to "be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, (walks) about, seeking whom he may devour." It sounds like we need a game plan.

Think about how we prepare for our children each day. We know they are going to wake up needing something, so we prepare for that. We plan ahead, we pack lunches, put dinner in a crock pot, we make sure the coffee pot is set for the morning, we set out clothes, and we bathe the night before. We do what we have to do to make the rest of the day run as smoothly as possible. We know that if we do not prepare, things fall apart very quickly.

Much in the same way, we need to plan ahead knowing that we will find ourselves under attack in some way or another. Sometimes those attacks are from an outside source like a negative co-worker, or a situation at your

child's school. But sometimes it comes from a very trusted source—yourself.

The most dangerous kind of attack is one where there's an inside guy—a Trojan horse, so to speak.

Autoimmune diseases like lupus and Crohn's disease, and even cancer are all attacks from within our bodies. A precise, premeditated plan of attack is necessary for victory.

How, then, do we prepare for battle if we are our own worst enemy? Well, there are a lot of ways, and I think it's a matter of personal preference.

Prepare yourself by devoting time to read the Bible. It plants a seed in you that eventually takes root and strengthens you. Memorize helpful

scriptures and think on them throughout the day. Having these gentle reminders can be invaluable when trials and temptations come.

Plan ahead by praying. I'm not talking about giving God your wish list for the day. I'm talking about a real back-and-forth conversation with the Lord. I will admit, I get a raised eyebrow or two when I tell people I talk to God and He talks back, but it comes with the territory, I guess.

It's not like an audible voice from the outside. God's voice is a still, small voice on the inside. Sometimes, it seems crystal clear, but other times it's not—and that's my fault, not His. Sometimes, I get a full conceptual understanding of something. And

sometimes I get an image of something, usually with a deeper understanding of what it means. Often, it's something that is just for me; it's something that only I would get. God may already be communicating with you in some of these ways, but you won't know if you're not looking for it. God will meet you where you are.

Plan ahead with strategic avoidance. If you know you are a “chocaholic” and you are looking to shed some holiday weight, do yourself a favor and *do not* bring sweets into the house! Likewise, if you know you have an area where you are continually tempted, be proactive and stay away.

Probably the biggest thing we can do is practice positive self-talk. Start to

take note of what you are saying to yourself, whether verbally or just in your head.

We need to be intentional about not just what we say, but also our very own thoughts. In 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Paul writes, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that (exalts) itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”

In other words, we don't face our struggles the same way the world does. We don't use the same weapons as

other people, who don't know God. We have God's power available to us and can kick the devil out of our lives.

People may try to convince us that the world's ways are better, but we are the masters of our own minds. We are able to choose God's thoughts and throw the others out like trash. Ideas may come to mind, but we are able to decide if they line up with what Jesus says.

Those positive God-given thoughts then become what you say about yourself. You can store some of those powerful thoughts in your mind, and speak them out loud to yourself, along with memorized scriptures about how God sees you.

Doesn't that just sound so doable? I like that there is something we can be actively doing instead of just falling victim to every attack of the enemy. I'm not about to let Satan hijack my mind! He doesn't get to say who I am. God does.

I can assure you that during Tina's last days, there were many uncontrolled and unsolicited thoughts taking root in her mind and turning them into uncontrolled fears.

Philippians 4:8 teaches us that we need to think about the things that are honest, just, pure, lovely, and admirable. Anything we can call "good" – that is what we are supposed to be thinking about.

I don't know about you, but there are some days when—if I could look at the “recent activity” tab in my brain—those are not the things I have been thinking upon. Not even close. And to be perfectly honest, some of these thoughts have frequented my mind so often in the past, that I don't even recognize they are there as part of an attack. They are just part of the background noise that I don't even realize is bad for me.

These are thoughts that are negative and recurring. They are what you hear on the inside when you mess up. It's that voice that reminds you of your past failures and terrorizes you about your future. It suggests hypothetical worst-case scenarios. It stirs up your

emotions and keeps you awake at night. Everyone has them, and it is alarming how similar they are from person to person. They are so similar in nature that one could theorize that these thoughts are, in fact, not originating from our own brains after all, but put there by our enemy as a suggestion.

If you are still unsure what I am talking about, I've collected a list of a few of the negative thought patterns you might hear. You may be susceptible to self-criticism, worry, defensiveness, irrational and rational fears, and even suggestions of harm toward yourself and others. Sound familiar? Now that you know what to

look for, what can be done about them?

Let's do a quick experiment. Mentally, go through the alphabet. You can even mentally sing the alphabet song, if you wish, but the key is to do it mentally. While you are doing that, say your name out loud. Go ahead, take a moment to do that.

You stopped thinking about the ABCs when you said your name, didn't you? When you speak, it short-circuits the brain's thought process. If you plan ahead, you can combat those negative thoughts by speaking something positive. Over time, you can retrain your brain to think good thoughts. Please understand—you cannot remove a thought from your brain

without replacing it with something else.

The thoughts that we think don't just live harmlessly inside our own minds. They become part of us, and part of our belief system, and eventually part of our speech and actions. Our voice is really just an extension of our body through the use of our tongue, mouth, and vocal chords. It is all interconnected. Our thoughts lead to beliefs, which exit from our lips, and turn into words followed by actions.

There is actually neuroscience out there that corroborates exactly what the Bible tells us in 2 Timothy 1:7, "God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a

sound mind.” What we are thinking manifests itself in our brain and in our bodies. With Jesus involved in our lives, we can have the Holy Spirit working on the inside of us, generating positive life-filled thoughts.

My friend, Tina, didn’t just wake up one day and think, “You know, I think today I’ll take my own life.” Nope. Just like most people don’t suddenly make a decision to cheat on their spouse, it all starts with a thought. One tiny thought, like a strand of ivy, finds the tiniest crevice and takes hold. Then it grows, and it grows, and it grows until, one day, you’ve got a whole wall covered in ivy, destroying the foundation and integrity of your home.

Do you know how many women I have talked to who answer “yes” when I ask them if they have thought about suicide in the past six months? A lot. I’m not saying they have a plan. They have just thought about it. Maybe it was just for a quick second, in a moment of desperation. It sounds something like a suggestion, looking for a crevice, to creep into their minds. It’s moments like these that make it so important to be masters of our thoughts.

You should know that every bit of what you’ve read comes absolutely from love, and without judgment. I know it may not seem as though everyone is fighting a battle of life and death, but everyone’s struggle is real,

regardless of what it is. But, as challenging as life may seem, we have already won through Jesus. And I have to remind myself of that sometimes, too.

If you don't already know Jesus personally, you can invite Him into your life today. Paul wrote, in Romans 10:9-10, that if you agree that Jesus is the ruler of life and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the realm of the dead to new life, you can share it with Him. As we learned, what you believe can become what you think and say.

Deciding to make Jesus the Lord of your life will be the best thought you ever have. And these will be sweetest words you will ever hear yourself

say: “Jesus is Lord, and God raised Him from the dead. Amen.”

If you just did that, welcome to the family! Now that you are reunited with your heavenly Father, He wants to give you a gift—the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will help you learn more about Jesus and how to live abundantly in this world, and beyond.

If the things you’ve read in this book touched you, or reminded you of someone—even yourself—I ask you to do a few things.

First, talk to someone—preferably, a mature Christian, if not a trained minister. Pastors and counselors are great listeners. From there, form a plan and be accountable for your

thought life. The mind is a scary place—don't go there unprepared!

Secondly, if you are not already in a church that teaches you how to live according to the Bible, find one! Don't rely on self-help books, social media influencers, or psychologists for advice. You need the clear teaching of God's Word to live the abundant life!

Third, spread the word and share this resource with others. Obviously, this book was written with women in mind, but this message applies to anyone who struggles with negative and harmful thoughts. We hope it will be a resource that changes and saves lives everywhere.

Thanks for reading!