

The Good Life

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- [0 : 0 0] Now, we did the Sanctity of Life video this morning, so I thought I would get a jump on things and talk a little bit about life today.
- When we speak of the Sanctity of Life, we have to remember, we're talking about life now, right? Life. Now, it's interesting that we use the word life in different ways.
- He is the life of the party. The judge gave him life. She was his life.
- His job is his entire life. His sermon was full of life. The life of that washing machine is about 10 years.
- What kind of quality life does she have? We use it, that word gets used in so many different ways, but probably the most basic definition of life, I found this online in dictionaries and whatnot.
- [1 : 1 6] She said, the animate existence or period of animate existence of an individual. Animate, living. Now, I like the International Bible Encyclopedia better.
- He says, very frequently refers to the vital principle itself, apart from its manifestation, apart from doing. It is the person, complete, conscious, and active.
- That's a good one. And I think I can say, I think I can say that most Bible-believing Christians rightly believe that life is a gift from God.
- And begins, I'm going to go on a limb here, begins at conception. I know I'm on a limb. Don't saw it off. But I think we, most of Bible-believing Christians, would agree with that.
- We don't say life begins at birth. We don't say life begins at a certain period in the pregnancy. No. The moment there is conception, there is life.
- [2 : 2 3] Now, let me be clear. Human life. Not animal life that progresses to human life. You've heard that.
- You've heard that before. No, no, no. Human life begins at conception. And that life is sacred. It is to be regarded with reverence as belonging to God and a gift from God.
- Now, something interesting happens later when that child is born. That child will experience life outside of the womb.
- And that is where things get even more interesting. It was interesting before. If you ever studied the development of a child in utero, that's mind-boggling, okay?
- But it gets even more complicated and even more interesting once the child leaves mom's womb. And sadly, what happens often is as that child begins to grow up a bit, life becomes a matter of stuff.
- [3 : 3 8] And then we really start talking about quality of life. And then we really start talking about quality of life. Then stuff, what you're able to do.
- But I've got to wonder, is there more that we as Christians can offer our culture concerning life?
- Can we offer more? And by this I mean the good life. What can we offer?

What do we have to offer? Well, now, please rise with me for the reading of God's word. I think our Lord Jesus gives us some ideas.

Let's honor the reading of God's word. If you're able. If you have to sit, that's fine. John chapter 10, beginning at verse 9. Jesus speaking.

[4 : 37] I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and 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. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Father, your word has been read. And even now, by your spirit, it's working in our hearts. Now, will you bless the preaching of your word. So that your people might hear a clear sound upon the trumpet.

That they might understand even more what this passage means. Use your unworthy servant to be clear. And may your word go forth with your power.

That we might be instructed, fed, encouraged, equipped. That we might be on mission. And enjoy all that you have given us.

[5 : 44] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. You may be seated. Amen. That's a passage that I think everyone is familiar with. I mean, I hope so anyway.

So let me ask you a question then. What is the good life then? I mean, as we mature, I think, I think, our understanding of the good life begins to change and mature.

Or maybe. Maybe. How would you describe the good life? Many say it's the American dream. Owning your own home.

Having a good career. Family. Nowadays, we include things like sexual freedom. Lots of free time to pursue interests. And, of course, money to do it.

In the book, The Good Life, it was based upon the longest scientific study of happiness ever conducted.

[6 : 45] But, the writers mentioned in a 2007 survey of millennials, they were asked about their most important life goals.

76% said that becoming rich was their most important goal. 56% said a major goal was becoming famous. So they waited a decade later to see if it changed.

Well, after millennials had spent more time as adults, they said fame was now lower on the list. But the top goals, again, included things like making money, having a successful career, and becoming debt free.

Now, again, the writers say these are common and practical goals that extend across generations and borders. Over time, we developed a subtle but hard-to-shake feeling that our life is here, now.

And the things we need for a good life are over there or in the future. Always just out of reach.

[7 : 58] End of quote. So what's your definition? If you had to make one life choice right now to set yourself on the path to future health and happiness, what would it be?

I think it's safe to say that Jesus' understanding of the good life for his sheep may be a little different than what many people are instinctively looking for.

So let's dive in a little bit. As followers of Jesus, who is also called the Lamb of God, we're all sheep. Now, when God refers to us as sheep, he's not being very flattering.

Sheep have certain qualities that we as human beings share spiritually. Now, listen, this is, it becomes, sheep are an analogy of our spiritual life.

Sheep are timid. Easily frightened. Spiritual, you're talking now, for us. Defenseless.

[9 : 16] Sheep are defenseless. They don't have any claws, fangs, or stingers. We don't have any defenses in and of ourselves against the spiritual forces of darkness.

And I hate to say it. Sheep, most of all, are dense. My pastor said, sheep are stupid.

Easily led astray. Sheep will wander from good grazing land into a wasteland looking for greener grass. Greener grass.

Come on, somebody. I heard two grunts and a groan. All right. This also means that sheep will follow sheep. Sheep run because the other sheep are running. They've been known to follow one another into death.

CBS ran a story some years ago. It happened in Istanbul, Turkey around July of 2005.

[10 : 22] First, one sheep jumped to its death. Then another sheep and another and dozens more. Having left their herds to graze while they ate breakfast, stunned Turkish shepherds now watched as nearly 1,500 sheep leapt off the same cliff.

The first 450 animals, they said, died under a billowy pile. The sheep had been allowed to wander onto the wrong trail.

Unaware of what lay ahead, each one simply followed the next, only to perish in the valley below.

It is a curious behavior of sheep that once one picks a trail, the rest simply follow the tail in front of them with regard for the destination.

Sheep. And God refers to us as sheep. I can't believe that's one story where a sheep was walking along the path and thought it saw something and so leapt in the air and kept on going.

[11 : 44] Well, all the other sheep did the same thing. When they got to that spot where that sheep leapt, they all leapt. It was nothing there. Sheep.

You leaving, I'm leaving too. God calls us his sheep because we need a shepherd. He sends us the good shepherd. And he sometimes even called the great shepherd, the Lord Jesus, not only to save us from our enemies, but to save us from ourselves.

So in our passage, it says Jesus, first of all, is the door to the good life. Verses 7 through 9, Jesus says, Truly, truly, I am the door of the sheep.

All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

In this passage, there are actually two I am statements. Jesus refers to himself as the door, and later he refers to himself as the good shepherd. Remember the I am phrase, right?

[12 : 59] You all know this by now because we've seen it before in this gospel. The I am statement that Jesus uses, literally, he says, I am, I am.

It's emphatic. And he's linking himself with another I am statement that you're all aware of when Moses got to the burning bush. And the bush, not the bush, not the bush spoke.

God spoke in the bush. And he said to him, tell them I am has sent you. Jesus, Lord of glory, is saying, I am that I am.

Now he says, as I am, I am the divine door for the sheep to enter God's flock, God's sheep pen that we might have the good life.

Now the sheep pen is the church within the kingdom of God. Remember, the kingdom of God is the whole universe. God is Lord and master over everything he surveys, and he surveys everything.

[14 : 11] Everything he created is under his vision and control. He is reigning. He is king of the kingdom. But sin has caused a rebellion and decay, therefore, to enter the kingdom temporarily.

Temporarily. Temporarily. So to enter the kingdom is to live under God's rule and reign, where his name is holy and his will is sought and done.

That's the Lord's prayer. Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. That's a kingdom prayer. That's the prayer of those who recognize they are part of the kingdom and part of the church.

Therefore, they are the heirs of the good life. And we display that relationship by being members of his church, which is the visible outpost of the kingdom.

To enter the sheep pen, Jesus says, is therefore to be saved. But Jesus is saying there's only one way into this salvation, through him the door. Now listen, there are two types of sheep pen.

[15 : 31] The one that the Lord is talking about here is the pen where there were three sides. The shepherds would usher the sheep through a narrow opening into an area that had three sides to it where they would pin the sheep up at night.

Now, then the shepherd would lay down at the opening. The shepherd became the door.

And the sheep would sleep soundly at night because their shepherd had his body across the opening. The only way for the sheep to get in and out was to step over the shepherd.

As one shepherd said, no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body. Paul will say of Jesus, the work of Christ in Ephesians 2.18, For through him we both have access.

That's Jew and Gentile. We have access in one spirit to the Father. Access to the sheep pen, access to the Father is through the Son whose body has lain across the opening.

[16 : 53] One article said the sheepfold was commonly attached to a shepherd's home.

So to enter the sheepfold was to come home. As the door of the sheep, Jesus is the only means of coming home to God, of becoming a member of the household of faith.

Jesus, as we will see later in John, is the way or the door to our true home in the family of God, in the kingdom of God forever.

Listen, whatever your outward economic or social status, whatever your so-called quality of life, if you have entered the door of Jesus, you have a place with him.

Family, your home. Jesus is home. But you've got to enter through the door. You've got to enter through faith and trust in what he has done for you.

[18 : 00] Now, I remember some years ago, my wife and I, you know, we rented an apartment our first few years of marriage. And that was nice. But we knew that was temporary.

Because we were going to buy a home. Ultimately, finally, when all of our daughters were, all four of our daughters were born, we were blessed to buy a house in the D.C. area in Maryland.

And it was home now. That really became home. All our children, our whole family together in one place. That was home. Here we began to raise our entire family.

And even today, when we go into the D.C. area, the girls want me to drive by that house. Because in their minds, no matter where they go, I don't care.

And I got daughters who've traveled different parts of the world. Wherever they go, they think of Bowie, Maryland, and that home are made in drive as home.

[19 : 04] There's no place like it. Jesus is home. You wandered in the desert of sin. You got dehydrated spiritually and exhausted and hot.

You were looking for the good life. You were always reaching for more. And if you're not, if you haven't found Jesus yet, you're still doing it. And listen, even Christians fall for this.

Because we forget what the good life really is. And so we're always reaching for more. But listen, if you've entered the door to the Lord's pen, that's where home is.

You are his sheep. Because the only sheep get to go through that door. The Lord's sheep are people who admit they need him. Listen, you're not a sheep if you just admit you need a Savior.

Because there are many Saviors in the world. So-called Saviors. You're a sheep if you admit you need Jesus as your Savior. That's what makes you a sheep.

[20 : 16] And you're home. But then there's bad news here. There's always bad news. There are enemies to the good life. Sheep, they're enemies.

Jesus talks about them a little bit here in this passage. He says in verse 8, All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

Now, in this context, Jesus is referring to chapter 9. He's referring to the Pharisees and the scribes who excommunicated the man who was born blind.

You remember that story. This guy's born blind. Jesus comes along and heals him. This guy then gives Jesus the glory. He didn't even know who healed him. Because Jesus healed him and left.

He sent the guy to a pool to wash. And so when the guy washed, he comes back and Jesus is gone. So he just knew a name. Some guy named Jesus did it.

[21 : 19] And the Pharisees got up. Damn me, they got downright living. He's a sinner. And God says to them, he was brilliant.

He says, well, whether he's a sinner or not, I do not know. But have you ever heard of a sinner opening eyes at the blind? Squashed him good.

And then they kicked him out. That's what happens when you lose an argument. Some people lose an argument. The only thing to do is attack you. Ad hominem, whatever, attack. They lost the argument. They kicked him out.

Jesus is referring to them. They are the thieves and robbers. They are the false teachers who should have been welcoming people, who should have been drawing people into the kingdom, who should have been opening the door to the kingdom.

And yet these guys were blocking the entrance by taking away, as it were, the glory of Jesus. As it were now. But we can say there are many other robbers and thieves who've come after them.

[22 : 27] Thieves and robbers that promise us the good life. But in the end, they end up taking our lives. They rob us of our freedom. Maybe one preaches rules without grace.

And I'm not just talking about Christianity. I'm talking about religion. Rules without grace. Things like Islam. We call that legalism.

The other preaches grace without responsibility. Lawlessness, or to use the big word, antinomianism, against the law. You see that in the church sometimes, but you also see it in other religions.

I think Buddhism probably falls into that category. One of these puts us in bondage to the rules. The other leaves us in bondage to our sins and desires. One works you to death.

The other leaves you lazy and carefree. This is what religion does without the gospel. It doesn't lead to freedom. And sheep can't thrive there.

[23 : 31] Have you, have you, are you putting yourself in your own thinking under legalism where you think that if I, oh, I didn't have my quiet time today, God won't bless me.

That's a form of legalism. God is much bigger than your daily quiet time. Hallelujah. He's much bigger. Oh, I sinned.

I did something wrong. God's going to get me. I'm so glad we're sinned and abound. Come on, somebody. Grace did much more abound. Amen. Are you living, are you deluded now that because I'm saved by grace, I can do whatever I want.

I don't have to change. I don't have to say no to sin. I'm saved by grace. God accepts me as I am so I can do as I please. God may accept you as you are, but he never leaves you as you are.

That's what salvation is all about. Transformation. If you're still the same, same desires, same wants, nothing's changed and you haven't entered the pen.

[24 : 43] You haven't met the Savior. This sheep pen, this place where the enemy wants to attack, it reminds me of Psalm 23.

You know that Psalm. And I can, I can, that Psalm is a place where we are protected and guided. I mean, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, right?

He, he, he makes me lie down in green pastures. Lie down. Sheep can't lay down unless they're comfortable. Unless they're free of fear. Unless they're free of, of parasites.

They can't lie down. They, they gotta be free in order to lie down in green pastures. He leaves me beside still waters. You see, sheep, sheep are scared of running water. It terrifies them.

But, but still waters, calm waters, that's where the shepherd would take them that they might have squished their thirst. He restores my soul. Oh, that's good for us.

[25 : 39] He restores my soul because my soul gets weak and weary. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. You see, sheep, if you're a sheep, he is leading you into a different life.

Righteousness. Keeping, that means keeping the law, by the way. We only keep the law because Christ is in us who, he who kept the law for us is in us.

And even when I fail to keep the law, he is still my righteousness for he never failed. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, oh, I love, I love, this is one of my favorite ones because, because, you know, if you've ever been sick, I mean really sick, and thought maybe this might be the end, oh, you've been under the shadow.

Now, I love how the fact is just a shadow. You see, when you're in Christ, when you're in the family, when you're in the pen, when you're, when you're under the good shepherd, living in the, the good life that he has given us, death becomes merely a shadow.

But under that shadow, it's still real. But you have a shepherd who will walk with you.

[26 : 59] And you don't have to fear even death because he's with you. Oh, I gotta hold, I gotta move on. This is good stuff. End of passage.

So, false shepherds, the enemies, attack our peace, attack our comfort, attack us so that we will not be at peace and contentment in Christ.

The enemy does not want you to enjoy the good life. So he will always keep coming at you, agitating you in your home, in your family, in your church. He will come at you to destroy your peace.

But, so are, but are you living the good life? Are you living his good life? Because you can stand against those attacks. Otherwise, you give in. and the sheep are scattered.

Strike the shepherd, scatter the sheep. Strike, strike us sheep and the right sheep and people, and that sheep will lead others into whatever.

[28 : 09] But even that's not enough for us today because these false shepherds think that everything our culture says you need to believe.

False shepherds are always pointing to the changing values of our culture. They may not even be people necessarily. It's stuff.

A culture will say to you, you've got to have the iPhone 16. Now I tell you guys, I was, man, I was, I got the 15 and I was like, man, I want that 16.

And then God said, really? Really? That new iPhone or a new gadget or, or you, you've got to have great finances or you've got to experience worldly success.

You've got to have likes and you've got to have a following. You've got to get your brand out there. You've got to have physical beauty. I mean, how many people are doing things to their body to maintain physical beauty?

[29 : 18] You've got to be perfectly healthy. You've got to have the right house or the right condo or the right car you've been dreaming of, et cetera. The culture is always saying to us, who, us, who are living the good life that your life ain't so good unless you have, unless you experience.

you see, that's more of the enemies attacking our good life. It's bondage. It's a trap because you're never satisfied.

You're never content. And Jesus warned us so brilliantly. Listen to this. Luke 12, 15. Just one verse. And he said to them, take care and be on your guard against all covetousness.

Covetousness means greed and desire to have more. He's talking to his people. Take care, be on your guard against greed and desire to have more.

Here you go. For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. He couldn't have been clearer.

[30 : 43] And yet, we have a whole theology called the prosperity theology that swept through the church. Churches across this land and across the world. Churches who would even consider themselves part of that movement.

But all of us are susceptible to the prosperity teaching. Yes, you are. When you think you should not have trouble. When you think you shouldn't be sick.

When you think that my family should be perfect. When you think your church should not give you any issues, any problems in it. You have suckered up to the prosperity teaching which says if you have enough faith, everything will go well.

here's a good thing about the abundant life that Jesus gives us. It's not dependent on your circumstances. Matter of fact, the abundant life that Jesus gives us guarantees you will have trouble.

It guarantees it. You will not save for easy, not in this life. It's coming, but you will not save for easy in this life. you will have trouble.

[31 : 56] Jesus told us to enter by the narrow gate. Matthew 7, 13 and 14. Enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few.

It's interesting. He says in his kingdom your life will be hard. Yet he says I've come that you may have life and have it abundantly. Is that contradictory?

Not at all. They go together. Your life will be hard. Ethan, you will have conflict with Mike and y'all got to work it out.

Don't run. Work it out. We say we believe in racial reconciliation. Well, first of all we got to be good at reconciliation. I'm going to I've built the wrong way because I'm Kevin Smith that's why but he's my brother and we work it out.

Yeah, in the church and in the world you will have trouble and the way is hard. Brothers and sisters don't believe the prosperity gospel. That's not prosperity that's bondage.

[33 : 32] that's death. That's disillusionment because it doesn't work and when it doesn't work you will crash. But when you enter into the Lord's pen he promised you something that does work.

Now let me end on that note then. Jesus is the essence and the giver of the true good good life. He says, listen, we will go in and out and find pasture and he says, I came to give you life and that abundantly.

Those all go together. The sheep go in and out of the pen not in and out of the kingdom not in and out of the church but they go in and out. They do life. You were meant to do life.

You were meant to go in all phases of life all areas of life. I'd like to tell whenever I get to speak to college students who are graduating I said, get a job. Your parents want you to get a job.

Life. Fly. You're meant to do that. Experiencing life but with your shepherd. You, I mean, that phrase to go in and out is a Hebrew idiom.

[34 : 43] One commentator says it means to be able to come and go unmolested. It was a life of absolute security and safety. When people go in and out without fear it means that their country is at peace.

The kingdom of God will not miss a speed bump if America goes under. Kingdom won't miss a beat.

Now, we'll be experiencing some stuff don't get me wrong but aren't you glad Hebrews 12 that you have been given a kingdom that cannot be shaken.

Whatever happens in the economy we have been given a kingdom that cannot be shaken. We've been given abundant life. We've been given security. We've been given purpose and meaning.

We've been given comfort in him. He is our abundant life. Jesus is our life. He is everything. He's the one who calms our souls when we are perplexed.

[35 : 59] He's the one that deals with the pests in our lives by giving us grace to sustain us. He's the one who will guide us through life's decisions as we listen to his voice in his word.

We are saved, satisfied, secure, and of service wherever the Lord leads us because we are in his pen, his kingdom.

That's the good life, y'all. If you got that, you may not have all the money you want. You may not have the family you want.

You may not live in the place you want to live. But if you are in Christ, if you are in the kingdom, his peace, his presence, his love, his protection, his guidance, they're all yours.

They're yours for the asking. So why are you chasing the world's dream? Why are you listening to social media and commercials and whatever else that we listen to that pulls our hearts away from our security and contentment in Jesus?

[37 : 25] Listen, when you're content in Jesus, hey, you can say, well, I don't have it, but that's all good. When I'm content in Jesus, I can, Brother Taylor can have it, I can rebuke for him and praise God that he got it, even if I don't got it.

Bad English, good gospel. That's how you know you're experiencing the abundant life. You're not covetous. You don't have to have it.

You're like what Paul says, and I'm just about to wrap this up, I promise. You're like what Paul says. I love this Philippians passage, it's beautiful.

He says, I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content. This chapter, verse 11, Philippians 4. I know how to be brought low. I know how to abound.

In any and every circumstance, I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

[38 : 36] That text goes over what he just said before. He strengthens us to be content in our circumstances because I'm being fed by the good shepherd.

I'm being cared for. Outwardly, I love what Paul says, outwardly, we may be wasting away, but inwardly, we're being renewed day by day for these light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs the troubles.

Do you believe it? The good life is the best life. The good life in Christ is the only safe life. The good life in Christ brings us into a community of the faithful.

There are other sheep here with you. Sheep don't do well by themselves. Sheep are communal. That's a good thing, by the way. That's one of the good things about being a sheep.

We're communal. That study I told you about on the good life, it found out wonder of wonder. They show that people who are more connected to family, to friends, and to community are happier and physically healthier than people who are less well-connected.

[40 : 01] People who are more isolated than they want to be find their health declining sooner than people who feel connected to others. Lonely people also live shorter lives.

That's why the sheep need each other. people who are more than people who are more than people who look like you and agrees with you.

That's not the church. The church is this. Not necessarily in this place, but this is the church. Look around the room. You're different. And some of you vote differently.

And some of you think differently about all kinds of things. Listen, that's the church. Diversity, but yet unity. Because of we are under one shepherd.

And for him we will live and die because he died for us and lives for us. Well, let me tell you a story.

[41 : 10] I love Greek mythology. When I was a kid I read every book in my school library. Greek, Roman, Norse theology. I love all that stuff. The story is told of Tantalus.

He was a king who had been found guilty of giving the secrets of the gods to mortal men. His punishment was to be placed in the river called Hades.

The water came up to his chin. Hanging and dangling over his head were branches of full fruit. You know, just hanging above him.

The punishment was this. Every time Tantalus got thirsty and lowered his chin to drink the water, the water would recede. every time Tantalus reached up to grab a piece of fruit, the branch would go up.

So the refreshment for his thirst was right there at chin level. Food for his stomach was right there above his head. but the harder he tried to get it, the harder it was to reach it, the less he got.

[42 : 37] The punishment was to be in the vicinity of blessing and not be able to get it. Simple point. if you reach out for fulfillment in things of this life, you'll discover that they will always be just out of your reach.

Oh, you'll get some, but see, because of the nature of it, when you get some, it's like an addiction. You want more, and so you'll always be reaching, and sometimes it'll just be out of, you just can't seem to get it all.

Because nothing in this life is designed to give you fulfillment. Nothing in this life is designed to give you ultimate satisfaction. Nothing in this life is designed for you to worship it.

The things you cling to most for meaning may, may, and you continually hoard them. Why?

[43 : 43] Because they quickly go away. The only lasting satisfaction in this life can be found in the good life, our relationship with Jesus.

So listen, as we, yeah, brother, as you, as you and I are pro-life, and we are justly defending life in utero and ex-utero, we're defending the weak, who some want to euthanize.

We are defending the poor, who others want to just push aside, and yes, I won't say it again, we are defending the unborn, yes, yes, yes. But listen to me, brothers and sisters, if you're truly pro-life, then you must be living the abundant life.

If you're truly pro-life, you must be living the good life that Jesus gives you. Listen, because that is the example that the people we save from destruction need to see.

They need to see us. If I save that one from dying in utero, if I help that one get out of poverty, they need to see in me another kind of life.

[45 : 02] Otherwise, they will go right back to the pigsty. How pro-life are you really? Are you living the abundant life?

Are you living the good life in Jesus? Father, oh, bless your word to your people. Thank you for their patience in listening to this message. Lord, may it go down deep into their souls.

May this word, your word, transform all of our lives so that, Lord, we get our eyes off of the world and it's trinkets and junk food and we find in Jesus the great satisfaction and life that we truly need so that we can live in this world on your mission as your people enjoying your creation.

Thank you for letting us enjoy your creation. Thank you that we don't have to worship it. We don't have to find life in it because Jesus is our life. May that be seen in us day and day day in and day out.

May we grow in that. In his name we pray. Amen.