



[Author Note: This message was meant to set the foundation for the rest of the series. Before diving into the thief, I wanted to identify what the thief was trying to steal.]

Tonight, we are starting a brand-new series called “Thieves: Sneaky Sins that Steal your Joy.” How fun is that to say! This is the introduction to the whole series. Next week we will dive into some of the specific sneaky sins, but this is a brief overview as to why this is even important to talk about.

Let me ask you a question, right off the bat. Have you ever decided to accomplish something, and you’ve had success? Think of things that you have worked on, such as learning a new instrument. Maybe it is something you got for Christmas, like a Rubik’s cube, and you wanted to learn how to solve it. Perhaps you wanted to beat a specific video game 100% and now you can look at the hours played on it and you see you’ve invested over 150 hours into it. Maybe cooking is your thing and you wanted to learn how to cook something new.

[Author Note: In my setting, I had students get into groups of about 5-6 and share their answers over a 3-minute countdown. If getting into groups doesn’t work for you, take some answers from the crowd. Always be prepared to share your own example in case no one has anything to offer. The point of the question is to show that to accomplish something important, it takes effort and focus.]

There are so many examples of goals you have set for yourself. The key I want you to understand right away is that accomplishing these goals doesn’t just happen. It takes effort, persistence, a plan, and some hard work. Tonight, I want to challenge you to see what it takes to set your mind on the goal of growing spiritually, as a follower of Jesus.

That doesn’t just happen by chance. You can’t just rely on growing up in a Christian family, or even just attending church regularly. You see people around you who seem spiritually mature. It’s not like **poof** magically you are now mature.

The thing is, as you work toward maturity, or towards spiritual growth, there is always something ready to steal your progress. That is what we will be focusing on in the next few weeks, but tonight I want to set the groundwork on that desire to grow spiritually. Why? Because if you are just going through life with no goals or making no progress, the thief has already won. There is no need to spend time trying to steal anything from you.

Let's dive into the theme verse for this series—one of my favorite verses in the Bible:

John 10:10 (NLT)

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

It is pretty encouraging that Jesus wants to give me a rich and satisfying life. That sounds fantastic! I want to be rich. I want to be satisfied. Who doesn't want that?

However, a big mistake is to interpret this that if we follow Jesus, we will have a happy and fun life, full of stuff and money and popularity. Unfortunately, as you may have guessed, that isn't what that phrase "rich and satisfying" mean. Actually, in the original language that phrase comes from the Greek word *perissōs*. Here's the interesting thing. That word literally translates to "beyond extraordinary."

Our main idea to grab tonight comes straight from this verse. **Jesus wants to give us the BEST LIFE but the thief wants STEAL OUR JOY.**

Jesus wants to offer us the best life possible. Jesus says this is His purpose. His goal for your life is that it will be beyond extraordinary. However, He isn't promising riches, popularity, status, or any of that stuff. Instead, His promise is a life filled with Him. Not focused on the things of this world, but focused on eternity.

A life with Jesus is one filled with peace. It is a life filled with hope. It is a life full of His love. So if you could get rid of everything else in your life—and this is hard for us to fathom—but instead your life was completely filled with these things (peace, hope, love) how much better would your life be? If you had complete peace, complete hope, and complete and perfect love there would be no need for the other things. There's no need for trying to fill your

life with satisfaction, because you would be completely at peace. There would be no need to worry about what other people thought because you already had complete hope in Jesus. When you are filled with perfect love, your life would reflect that and others couldn't help but respond. You see, the life Jesus wants for us is better than anything else. It is beyond extraordinary.

Why are we all still not completely satisfied? I know I feel it. I know I still struggle with those things. Why? Because of that first sentence. You see, our problem lies with the fact that there is always a thief, trying to steal our peace, kill our hope, and destroy our love. The thief's purpose is to prevent you from living the life Jesus wants for you.

You see this word thief, and most likely you instantly think of Satan. Like Jesus and Satan are battling—maybe on each of your shoulders trying to win you over. Of course, if Satan walked into the room in a little red costume with pointy ears and a pitchfork, we all would know to run away. First off, Satan doesn't look like that. Secondly, this actually isn't necessarily a reference to Satan. Instead the thief is the sneaky sins that creep into our life when we are least expecting. The sin in us convinces us that following Jesus isn't the best, but instead we should find our satisfaction somewhere else.

Do you want this beyond extraordinary life? Do you really want this rich and satisfying life Jesus offers? If so, this is what it will take:

SALVATION

This is where it begins. You cannot have the life Jesus offers if you don't know Him personally. This isn't the finish line, though, but the starting block.

You should know when your race has begun. You should know when—or at least have a good idea of when—you were saved by Jesus. Again, it doesn't just magically happen one day at youth group because you came enough weeks in a row. Instead, this is the moment when you know you surrendered your life to Jesus. For me, I was 5 years old. Perhaps I didn't really know what I was doing, but I re-dedicated my life when I was 18 with my youth pastor.

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