AbundantLifeChurch
SIMI VALLEY

Sunday, November 8, 2026 - AM I RIGHT WITH GOD? – Pastor John Henry Raskin

Abundant Life Church • Sermon Summary

The central message: Being right with God begins with receiving Christ's finished work by faith. Abundant life is the daily response: staying close to Jesus and loving the people He places before us. It is not more stuff—it is more of Him. **John 10:10**

You are welcome here. Whatever your background, questions, wounds, or financial circumstances, you are not beyond God's invitation. We all need the same grace, and we can all receive the same gift. **Romans 3:23; Proverbs 22:2**

1. Receive the gift: right standing with God

Jesus lived the life we could not live, died for our sins, and rose again. Religious heritage, church attendance, ceremonies, and good deeds cannot replace personal faith in Him. You do not have to clean yourself up before coming to Christ. Salvation is God's gift, not something you earn. **Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:8–9**

We are not saved by good works; we are saved for them. Our standing rests in grace; our daily walk expresses our response to that grace. **Ephesians 2:10**

2. Live the relationship: abide and love

Abiding means staying connected to Jesus through prayer, Scripture, and obedience—even when obedience costs something. Look for growing patience, honesty, kindness, mercy, and courage, not perfection. If you have drifted, turn back to Him. **John 15:4, 14–15**

Love for God must become love in action toward your neighbor, including people who believe or vote differently. Everyone can give: resources, time, prayer, gifts, and presence. The world recognizes Jesus' disciples by their love. **Mark 12:30–31; 1 John 4:20; John 13:35**

3. Reject the counterfeit: belong to God

Do not confuse loyalty to a nation, party, or movement with loyalty to Jesus. Loving your country does not mean God belongs to your side. Ask instead: **"What does my Lord want of me?"** Our true citizenship is in heaven. **Joshua 5; Philippians 3:20**

A simple rhythm for abundant life

1. Begin the day with Him. Spend a few minutes in Scripture and honest prayer. Start small; stay faithful.

2. Look for your neighbor. Ask, "Lord, who have You put in front of me today, and how can I love them better?"

3. End the day honestly. Ask, "Where did I abide, and where did I wander?" Confess, receive forgiveness, and rest.

4. Stay connected. Worship consistently, join a small group, and let someone know you.

Examine yourself with God, in hope not in despair

Have I received Christ's gift in faith? Am I talking with Him, listening, and obeying? Is His love reaching others through me? **2 Corinthians 13:5**

A prayer to carry with you: "Search me, O God, and know my heart … and lead me in the way everlasting." **Psalm 139:23–24**

God's searching is an invitation to healing, guidance, and deeper relationship—not shame.

AM I RIGHT WITH GOD?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last Sunday we continued to explore repentance from the standpoint of being a follower of Jesus and the acknowledgement and ultimate releasing of ongoing sin that may remain from the old person that we were before we accepted Jesus as Lord.

Now let me say this to my beloved abundant life family.

By intention, and by God's design for us, we are a church that stands as a lampstand in Simi Valley as a welcome home to all kinds of people.

Within our current family, believe it or not, there may be atheists, certainly seekers, people who were so turned off by the religions that they abandoned that they may also be turned off to having a real relationship with God in Christ.

I'm going to say that I'm fine with that.

Wherever you came from and whatever questions you have that you've been afraid to ask, I'm glad that you're here and so is God.

This is a safe place for everyone.

I know that there are some of you who question whether you actually have a relationship with God in Christ and that thought may haunt you.

I say this because there are people sitting in churches all over the world who are trying to fit in with the crowd but that don't really have the full assurance that a relationship with God in Christ should give them.

If that is you today, perhaps you have received Jesus as Lord but not truly trusted Him to be Lord of your daily life.

Concepts like the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to those of us who really have Him living within us are proved day in and day out by his faithfulness and goodness as we experience walking out the good works that He has prepared for us in joy.

I want to ask you a question this morning, and I want you to hear it the way you would if you were asking it alone, in the car, at the end of a long day, with no one else listening.

Here it is: Am I right with God?

Some of you have carried that question for years, quietly, and never said it out loud.

Some of you were never allowed to ask it, because you were handed an answer instead and made to feel foolish or worse if you questioned it.

“Of course you are” they said, “you were raised in the faith” , “you were confirmed”, “you were bar mitzvahed”, “you were baptized as a baby”.

And some of you never asked it at all, because the question assumed a God you didn't believe in, or one you had good reasons to be angry at.

I am not asking this question today to frighten anyone. Nor is it my intention to insult or confuse you.

I am asking it, because of the name of our church.

We are Abundant Life Church, and that name is not a slogan. It comes straight from the lips of Jesus:

John 10:10 - 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.

Jesus did not die so that we could hold a membership card in a world religion, a denomination, or any individual church.

He died and rose from the grave so that we could live abundantly, here, now, and forever.

I take my calling as your pastor seriously enough to ask a related hard question: are you living that life?

Are you actually walking with Him, or only sitting in or standing near the building you think He lives in?

So here is where we are going this morning.

First, how a person gets right with God.

Second, what being right with God looks like in an ordinary week, and how you relate to Jesus and to the people He puts in front of you.

And third, a warning about a counterfeit that is out there, because there is a very old temptation to confuse God being on your side with you truly being on His.

Look around this room for a moment. We did not all arrive by the same road.

Some of us were raised Jewish. You may have grown up with Moses and the Prophets in your ears, and as a born-again believer you already know that Jesus did not come to eliminate the story of Israel. He came to finish it.

Some of you were raised Catholic, and you carry a reverence for the cross, a sense of the sacred, and a memory of a church that was serious about sin and about God although perhaps mistaken in the way they approached Him.

Some of you were raised Lutheran, or in another Protestant church, and you know the hymns, the creeds, and the concept and phrase "grace alone."

Some came up in non-denominational churches, with a worship band and a Bible and a lot of warmth, like ours.

And some of you were raised in a Christian home and have heard the gospel so often that you could preach it yourself.

But there are others here, and I suspect more than we realize, who were raised with no understanding of God at all.

Or worse. You were raised in a home where God was a joke, or a weapon, or an enemy.

Maybe the only Christians you ever met were hypocrites.

Maybe religion was something that hurt you, or hurt someone you love.

If that is you, I want to say plainly: I am glad you are here, and I am sorry for what was done in God's name.

Some of what you ran from, Jesus ran straight at, and He overturned tables because of it.

And although we are unquestionably family here, there are other ways in which we may not be alike.

Some of us in this room are very comfortable financially, while some of us are wondering how we will cover the rent, and others of us are unsure of where we will sleep this week.

Scripture says it simply:

<u>Proverbs 22:2</u> - The rich and the poor have this in common the Lord is the maker of them all.

We were all made in the image of God and He loves all of us.

Here is why I am naming all of this. Every one of these roads we have journeyed to arrive here today has a different temptation built into it.

If you were raised in the faith, the temptation is to mistake familiarity for real relationship.

If you were raised without it, the temptation is to think you are too far gone, or too late, or that this is for other people.

If you have much, the temptation is to think you have earned your place in the Kingdom, and you are blessed because you are special.

If you don't have much, the temptation may be to think that God has abandoned you and that you don't really have a place at this table.

All of these temptations are lies of the enemy to divide and conquer the people God loves. Ultimately however, we are all more alike than we like to admit.

Paul puts a fine point on it:

<u>Romans 3:23</u> - for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

God sees no difference in our human nature. Not between the pew-sitter, the pastor or the first-timer.

Not between the person with a three-car garage and the person with everything they own in a backpack.

We are all standing on the same common ground, which means we can all receive the same gift of salvation and receive it in the same way.

So how does a person get right with God?

It's simple. You just have to want a relationship with Him and have faith that you can have it in what Jesus did for you.

The Holy Spirit is already calling you and He will do the rest if you allow it.

Romans 5:1 - Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Justified is a legal term. In the Greek Paul uses the word dikaioō (dik-ah-YOH-oh). It means "to declare righteous".

In the case of someone who accepts Christ as Lord, it means that the Judge looks at your record, and instead of reading it aloud, He points to the record of your Savior and says, "Not Guilty".

Jesus lived the sinless life we could not live, died the death we deserved, and rose again to give us what we could never earn.

That is the foundation of being right with God.

Not our résumé. His sinless life, substitutionary death and glorious resurrection.

So, if you were raised religiously, your heritage, your baptism, your confirmation, your attendance at Church, none of that can do for you what only Christ has done.

And if you were raised knowing nothing about God, know this, you do not have to clean yourself up before you come to faith.

There is no entrance exam. There is no waiting room for people who aren't ready yet.

The door is open. The Door is a person, and His arms are open wide.

He made you for personal relationship with Himself.

He loves you, He knows you and He wants you to know Him.

If you have a personal relationship with Jesus, you have a right relationship with God.

Paul says it again in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:8–9 - For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Paul says salvation, right standing, is a gift.

The thing about a gift is that it does not become yours until you receive it.

You can know a gift is on the table, you can admire it, you can even tell your friends about it, and never once unwrap it.

Which brings me to the next verse in Ephesians, which for us is a familiar one, and one that is often misinterpreted…

Ephesians 2:10 - For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

Here is where it fits into today's question…

We are not saved by good works. We are saved for them.

The gift was never meant to be the end of the story. It is the beginning of a life lived more abundantly.

And this is where the question gets personal.

The question, "Am I right with God?" has two halves.

The first half is about your standing: has Christ's finished work been received by you in faith?

If so, that is settled by grace, and only by grace.

But the second half is about if and how you walk in it: are you now living in the right relationship that gift was given for you to enjoy?

Let’s say you got a beautiful sweater for Christmas. Have you tried it on? Do you wear it? Are you enjoying it?

Your standing is the gift of God in Christ.

Following Him and living life abundantly should be your daily response to it.

Let me say something about the word abundant before we go further, because it is often misunderstood and occasionally mis-taught.

By offering the abundant life, Jesus was not promising a bigger house or a fatter bank account.

If He were, the poorest person in this room would have every reason to feel left out, and the richest one would have every reason to feel proud.

No. The abundant life isn’t more stuff. The Abundant Life is more of Him.

It is knowing the One who made you and died for you, being known by Him, and being changed by Him from the inside out.

Jesus tells us exactly what that looks like.

On the night before He died, He gave His friends a picture of a grapevine.

We read it last week.

John 15:4 - Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

Abiding is not a spiritual mood that comes and goes and it is not a Sunday-morning event.

It is following Him, daily, intentionally, staying close to the Source of life.

Abiding in Jesus is living life in Him.

Now let me ask you some honest questions about your walk, your relationship with Jesus.

The questions are not meant to condemn you, but to help you to see where you are.

Do you talk with Him?

Not only in emergencies. Do you speak to Him daily the way you would to a friend who is actually in the room?

Do you listen to Him?

The Word of God is how He speaks and it is His Spirit who guides your thoughts when you expose yourself to it. Are you asking Him to guide you? Is the Bible open in your life, or only on Sundays?

Do you obey Him when it costs you something?

Great obedience only comes with an investment. Jesus tells us that we are investing in our eternal future.

John 15:14 - You are My friends, if you do whatever I command you.

It is certainly possible to love the idea of Jesus and yet not be His friend because you don't really know Him.

He is your friend if you have made Him Lord of your life and do what He says.

Love for Jesus shows up in what we do with our time, our money, our thoughts, our emotions, and our secrets.

Ask yourself honestly…

Is there fruit in your life that can be seen?

Is there anything good growing in you that was not there a year ago: patience, honesty, tenderness, transparency, courage?

Are you using those things in your daily interactions with other people? At least trying?

Notice that I didn't ask, "Are you perfect now?"

I didn't ask, "Do you have it all figured out now?"

The branch is not measured by how many grapes it grew this week. It is measured by whether it is still attached to the vine.

Some of you are hearing this honestly and thinking, "Pastor, I'm barely hanging on."

Then hear the gentlest sentence in the whole passage:

John 15:15 - No longer do I call you servants… but I have called you friends.

Friends. He has called us to be His friend.

The One who holds the universe together wants to be your friend.

If you once had that kind of relationship with Jesus and have drifted, the way back is not a long list of penance.

It is simply to turn around and abide in Him again.

He has never moved. His patience and mercy are as amazing as ever.

Now I also must say this:

It's one thing to say "I love Jesus," and another thing to love the person sitting two rows behind you…

…or the coworker who undermines you, or the family member you have not spoken to in three years because of their politics.

A scribe once asked Jesus which commandment was greatest. He did not give one answer. He gave two, and He welded them together:

Mark 12:30–31- You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength… You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

Heart, soul, mind, strength. Everything you are, aimed at God. And then, in the same breath, love in action aimed at the people He has placed around you.

Jesus never lets us claim the first without doing the second.

And John, who leaned on Jesus' chest at the Last Supper and knew Him as a friend as well as His Lord, doesn't mince words about it.

He says this…

1 John 4:20 - If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

Let that verse search you.

A relationship with Jesus that never touches another human being is not the relationship Jesus described.

Love for God that does not become patience, kindness, and mercy toward real people is, at best, unfinished.

And Jesus is not just talking about your family or your church family or even other Christians… He says “your neighbor”.

And who is my neighbor?

When a man asked Jesus that very question, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan.

The hero of the story Jesus told was a person that the religious listeners were taught to look down on, yet he was the one who stopped and helped, while the religious professionals walked on by making excuses.

Jesus' point is direct and effective in its simplicity: your neighbor is whoever is in front of you with a need, and you are called to be the one who stops. You. Whoever.

In a church like ours, that has a very concrete shape.

Some of us have much and some of us have little, and Jesus asks both of us to open our hearts and our hands to each other.

Those of us who have more are called to give without grumbling or condescension, and to remember that the person on the receiving

end is made in the image of God and may well be richer in faith than we are.

Those of us who have less are called to give too, with our time, our prayers, our gifts, our presence, because no one in the body of Christ is only a receiver.

Jesus said it plainly:

John 13:35 - By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

How will the unbelieving world know that we are His disciples?

Not by our slogans. Not by our politics. Not by how many books about the Bible we have read or how many televangelists or Christian podcasters we spend our time listening to...

Not by our spiritual posturing.

By our love, and in this instance love is an action verb.

And that love has a recognizable character: compassion, kindness, grace, and mercy, the same things that were poured out on us by God when we were yet sinners.

Now I am compelled to say something controversial as gently as I know how, because I love the Lord, I love this church and I love this country, and I do not want either love to be confused with the other.

There is a very old temptation, as old as Israel, to believe that God is on our side.

Our team, our tribe, our nation, our party.

Gott mit uns, (God With Us) was emblazoned on Nazi German soldiers' belt buckles right below the swastika.

But the Bible tells us what God thinks about that.

Right after the 2nd generation of Israelites crossed the Jordan into the promised land, they encountered the walled city of Jericho.

Joshua was about to attack Jericho when the Angel of the Lord dressed as a warrior appeared before him with a drawn sword.

Joshua asked, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" Listen to the answer:

Joshua 5:14 - No… but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.

The Lord's answer was "No." Not for you. Not for them.

Joshua's question was the wrong question.

And he understood that at once, because then, he fell on his face and worshipped and asked, "What does my Lord say to His servant?"

It was only then that the Lord gave Joshua his specific instructions.

God listens when we stop asking whose side He is on and start asking what God wants of us.

That is the true heart of a relationship with God in Christ.

It is not claiming that God belongs to us.

It is acknowledging that we belong to Him.

Now, loving your country is not a sin. I love the United States of America and the Constitution which gives us freedom.

I like to think that I am serving my country by serving Americans who are also believers and followers of Christ.

That is my calling and it is my prayer that it will produce better Americans because it produces better Christians.

The Apostle Paul tells us to pray for those in authority, and to be good citizens.

Serving in public life can be a noble calling. But it can also be a source of the worst temptation that drives politicians to compromise their integrity for wealth and power.

Whenever the cross gets wrapped in any flag, or the gospel gets tied to any party or any movement, we have traded something priceless for something small at best and wicked at worst.

The Powers and Principalities are always working against the perfect will of God, looking for their opportune time to pollute the Body of Christ.

And let me be clear that this temptation exists on every side of every aisle.

In the Gospel of John, we see that a crowd of well-meaning followers wanted to take Jesus by force and make Him king.

He walked away from them.

And when Pilate asked Him if He was a king, He said:

"My kingdom is not of this world".

And remember that Satan once offered Him all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for a single act of worship.

Jesus refused.

If the Lord of glory would not take power on those terms, we should never presume to think that we can or that we should.

Paul reminds us where our real citizenship lies: In his letter to the church at Philippi, he writes “our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20).

So, what does it mean to be on God's side?

It can’t be just a bumper sticker on your car or a party you voted for.

It needs to be shown in your everyday life.

In the thoughts you take captive and the words you choose.

In whether you open the Word of God and then actually do what it tells you or just carry a Bible around for show.

In whether you confess when you are wrong and forgive when you have been wronged.

It is whether you love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and strength, and then love the neighbor He puts in your life with His compassion, kindness, grace, and mercy.

And that includes the neighbor who votes differently than you do, speaks differently than you do, or believes differently than you do,

That is not a lesser faith. It is the hardest faith there is. And it is the only faith that truly shows the world what Jesus died for.

So, having said all that… how do we actually answer the question, “Am I right with God?

Paul gives the church a simple instruction:

2 Corinthians 13:5 - Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.

How do we examine ourselves? How do we test ourselves?

David shows us how to do it without despair. He does not examine himself alone.

He invites God in:

Psalm 139:23–24 - Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

Notice the last line. The searching ends in being led.

God does not expose us to shame us. He exposes us to heal us and to lead us into faith and then, good works and on to our eternal home.

You have probably noticed that I am using many of the same scriptures, week after week now.

It is very intentional on my part.

As your Pastor, I am trying to build a rhythm of obedience that leads to the Abundant Life for which this church is named, for everyone who comes through these doors.

I do it because I love you and want you to have that relationship with God in Christ that will bring you joy everlasting.

So here is a simple rhythm to remember, whether you have walked with Christ for fifty years or fifty days or have been considering all this for the last 50 minutes.

1. **Begin the day with Him. With a few minutes in His Word, and a few moments of honest prayer. Start small and stay faithful. Let Him draw you in.**
2. **Ask Him this question. "Lord, who have You put in front of me today, and how can I love them better?"**

Ask Him to make you sensitive to His Spirit's leading throughout the day.

3. **End the day honestly. Ask Him, "where did I abide, and where did I wander?"**

Confess what needs confessing. Receive His forgiveness. Then rest in that.

4. **Develop close relationships with His people. No branch survives alone.**

Come to church and worship consistently, join a small group, and let someone know you.

If you do those things, even imperfectly for one year, I believe you will be amazed at how much has changed.

If you do these things, I think you will discover the joy of knowing that you are right with God.

Let's pray.