

The Good Life

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning everyone. Today we are kicking off our new series, The Good Life, and I wonder when I say The Good Life, what comes to mind? What is it that makes a good life for you?

As I was preparing for this talk this morning, I was thinking what it would be for different people from different walks of life to have a good life. So I took to Instagram to get a well-rounded perspective and I asked the question, what does the good life mean to you? And I got a load of different responses so I'll share some of them with you. We had an all-inclusive hotel with a cocktail on the beach, might sound good to some of us. Knowing that I am enriched with every spiritual blessing in Christ, coffee and freshly baked goods in the morning, contentment no matter how emotionally, financially or physically drained I am.

Being joyful without guilt, self-love, and my brother very helpfully sent me a photo of himself with his cat. And then my friend Amber referred me to the 70s TV show The Good Life, which some of you will probably know better than I, but it's where a couple tries to make their life more sustainable and less reliant on the world. And then Amber said that if we were to put a Christian spin on it, perhaps it would be about the good life relying on God and not the world. Knowing that God is there in the low points of life and can help us see his goodness in the middle of the darkness. I think there's actually some truth about the good life in all of these responses. There's a sense of freedom from pressures, from worries, from the fast pace of life. But if I'm honest, I'm still not quite sure how I would define the good life. So perhaps a great place for us to start is with Jesus in our passage today.

As Ros read, our passage this morning is from John chapter 10 verses 1 to 10. And John's gospel is the final gospel account of Jesus' life in the library of the Bible, showing us who Jesus is, as the light of the world, the son of God, the word became flesh, divinity. John's gospel is a beautifully rich tapestry of stories from Jesus' life, including a bunch of miracles that he performed, healing the sick, turning water into wine, walking on the water, raising the dead, just to name a few.

Miracles that point us to the truth of who Jesus is as the son of God. And John's gospel is also where we find his I am statements that tell us who he is, the bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, the way, the truth and the life, the gate, the good shepherd, the vine. Our passage today comes sandwiched between two miracles, the healing of the blind man and the raising of Lazarus from the dead. And it includes Jesus' statement that he is the gate for the sheep. As I was exploring this passage and what it says about the good life, the thing that repeatedly really struck me was this overarching picture that Jesus is our shepherd. He says in verse 9 that he is the gate and the one that comes through him will be saved. In the biblical times that Jesus was speaking in, the idea of a shepherd laying down in the doorway of the sheep pen at night would have been a familiar concept to his listeners.

[3 : 40] The shepherd became like a gate in order to stop wolves and other dangers from getting to the sheep and causing them harm. The shepherd would be there ready to fight off anything that was causing harm, any wolves or any other dangers. His life was completely dedicated to the safety and the protection of his sheep. And in our reading today, that's who Jesus is telling us that he is to us, the one who dedicates himself to our defence. He invites us to be with him, to dwell with him, to hang out with him in his sheep pen. Not to keep us restricted, but to give us freedom within safe boundaries. As the psalmist says in Psalm 16 verse 6, the boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. Surely I have a delightful inheritance. The fence of our sheep pen with Jesus is good and safe and it leads us to a good life in Jesus. So Jesus says that he is our shepherd, he is our gate and he will lie down in the doorway of the sheep pen to protect us. He keeps us safe from the attack of the enemy. And I just love how we have this foreshadowing of Jesus on the cross, laying his life down for humanity so that we can enter the sheep pen of heaven. Jesus fighting the enemy so that we wouldn't come to any harm. In fact, if we look just a little further than our passage today, verse 11, Jesus says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

And this isn't something that Jesus said lightly, but something that he said knowing that he very, very literally, according to God's plan, would lay down his life for his sheep.

And I'd love just to linger a little longer on this idea of God as our shepherd. See, I love looking at biblical imagery of Jesus as a shepherd. We see it threaded right the way through the Bible. In Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd. Or in the original Hebrew, the Lord is Ra, my shepherd and best friend.

I lack nothing. He leads me beside quiet waters. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He refreshes my soul. Isn't this the good life? To be led and loved by a shepherd who knows what it is for his sheep to have full, abundant life. And so leads us into it, making sure that we have all we need.

Leading us to rest and refreshment and being so close. Our shepherd, our best friend. He is a shepherd who is so intimate to and familiar to his sheep that we can know and trust his voice against any other. Isn't God so good?

[6 : 42] And then in verse 10, we have this comparison between the shepherd and the thief. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. But I have come that you might have life and life in all its fullness.

The thief, the enemy, comes to steal and destroy and kill all the good things in our lives. But the shepherd, Jesus, comes that we can have life in all its fullness.

All good things in abundance. In him, we have salvation to eternal life. Because he laid down his life for us. Because he loves us. And because he loves us, he doesn't hold out on us.

Psalm 84 says, No good thing does he withhold from the one whose way of life is blameless before him. And Ephesians 1 tells us that he chose us from the beginning of time to be holy and blameless in his sight.

He is the good shepherd who loves so deeply that he wants the very best for us. And I suppose it's this verse that most captures my attention from our passage today.

[7 : 52] The enemy comes only to steal and kill and destroy. But I have come that you might have life and life in all its fullness. This is actually one of my all-time favorite verses. Isn't it such great news that Jesus has come that we might have life and life in all its fullness.

In abundance, pouring out to overflow. That makes me very excited. The enemy is clever. He'll try and trick us to creep in to use our weakness as a foothold.

His only aim is to steal and kill and destroy. What the enemy offers us is the total opposite of what Jesus offers us. What the enemy offers us is a life stripped of joy, of freedom, of favor.

But we have this good news because we have Jesus, the gate, the shepherd, who lays his life down in the gate of the sheep pen to protect his sheep from the enemy.

I was watching a video on Instagram recently of this guy talking about how clever the enemy is. Because he doesn't say, hey, would you like this chain?

[9 : 02] This chain will lead you to death and destruction and brokenness and shame and all the bad things. Because obviously we would say no. Instead, what he does is he tempts us with this shiny link and he says, hey, you can do this without God.

You can get by without God for this one thing. It would be okay. And one by one he offers us a link. One shiny link at a time. Until we've built our own chain and we can't get out.

That's the way of the enemy, the devil, Diabolos, the liar. He lies with accusation and temptation. And he tries to separate us from Jesus.

And actually that's not something just to briefly mention and lightly skip past. Because if we believe that God is good and he is real, then we have to accept that the enemy too is real.

We see this in the world around us. We see it in the spiritual battles that we face. We see it in Jesus' own life in scripture. But Jesus is the gate for the sheep.

[10 : 07] He doesn't lead us to fend for ourselves. But as we've been discussing for the last few minutes, he is there ready to fight the fight for us. No one is more powerful than the one who conquered death on a cross.

And Jesus offers us the way of truth. He offers us freedom. He breaks the chains and he brings us back to the good life. So let's go back to our passage in John 10.

And look at this good life that we're offered in Jesus. In verse 9, as I already said, Jesus says that he is the gate. Whoever enters through him will be saved. They can come in and go out and find pasture.

This is such good news. Jesus is such good news. He invites us into this safe place. Not a place of restriction, but of freedom.

Where we can have intimacy with him. Be nurtured by him. Because we're in his glorious presence, which is always with us. To quote 1 Corinthians 3 verse 17.

[11 : 12] Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And that leaves me to conclude that maybe that is the good life. That he is a good God who loves in proximity and intimacy.

Who promises us in James 4 verse 8 that as we draw near to him, he will draw near to us. Who, as it says in Psalm 139, knows us fully and loves us all the more.

Who bends near to us so that he can shape us and mould us into the people that he created us to be. The good life is about the good shepherd who lays his life down for the sheep.

Who makes himself known to us, calls us by name, goes ahead of us and leads us. Offers us his sweet salvation, undeserved but freely given. The good life is to be able to find peace in the chaos.

Stillness in the storm. Rest in the fast pace of this world. Because life isn't about the agenda of the world. It's about locking eyes with Jesus. Taking hold of his hand and knowing that with him, we too can walk on the water.

[12 : 27] Just as we close, I'd love to gently encourage you. However life feels at the moment. Whether it feels really good, really bad or somewhere in between.

Where can you see the goodness of the good shepherd in your life? How can you, despite the circumstances, grasp hold of the good life in Jesus? The good life is to know and be known by him.

To know that in him there is healing and provision, life, sustenance, protection and security. It's what we see in his I am statements as he tells us who he is.

It's what we see in his miracles as he shows us what he can do. A good life is a life spent with Jesus because Jesus is good. Jesus, thank you that in you is the good life.

That in you is life in all its fullness. Thank you that you offer us freedom from the ways of the world. And you invite us to be with you in your glorious presence. Where we are safe.

[13 : 38] Where life is good. Lord Jesus, would you help each of us here, however life feels for us right now. Whatever our circumstances, to know that we can come to you.

Find rest with you. Be at peace in you. Father God, would you show us your glory. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.