

John 10:10-21 “I Am the Good Shepherd”

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[0 : 01] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us. We talk a lot about life on Easter, don't we?

New life, eternal life, abundant life. But what is the good life after all?

It's a really important question, isn't it? What's the good life? Maybe you come to a church like this on Easter and you conclude that the good life that Christians have to offer involves wearing pastels even when they're uncomfortable, gathering plastic eggs, and listening to a long monologue from one of many people pretending to be holier than he is.

And you would understandably want out of that. Just as much as you don't want the good life to be endlessly floating on a cloud with a harp.

What comes to mind for you when I say the good life? Is it security? Community?

[1 : 18] Health? Purpose? Comfort? Peace? A lot of things probably. Maybe jot a couple things down if you want to this morning.

For me as a kid, the good life was being a professional baseball player. That was it. And all the success and the fame and the fun that would come with that.

And it was all about being a professional baseball player. And then I got injured. And then I got older. And now I just hope that I can make it through one game of pickleball without pulling a hamstring or tearing a rotator cuff.

The good life for me has always included everyone getting along. Peaceful relationships all around me. Oh, it makes me feel so good. But man, y'all relationships are hard.

Life is messy. Maybe, I've thought more often than I'd like to admit, maybe I can just, I can't give all the relationships, but I can just make everyone love me.

[2 : 26] And think I'm wonderful. And I've performed for that. I've exhausted myself trying to please everyone. And then I became the father of teenagers and I just gave up on that dream altogether.

Love you. Love you. Even wildly successful quarterback Tom Brady, after reaching the pinnacle of sport and for many life, said it's not all it's cracked up to be.

It was longing for something more. Maybe you've known that same struggle with the things that are on your list, even if they're different.

You long to have the good life. But you're going to need something that fixes the brokenness you see around you. That fills the emptiness that you feel inside you.

No matter how hard we try or how much success we have achieving the good life, it seems to elude our grasp. See if you can write down a few words that describe the good life in your mind.

[3 : 42] And then let's see what kind of life Jesus offers. In John chapter 10, Jesus is telling us that he comes to give abundant life.

The good life. But his may be different from our idea of it. It may also answer some of the same longings that you and I have in an even better way.

Let's read beginning at verse 10. What Jesus has to say about who he is and what he offers. Hear now the most important part of the sermon.

The very word of God. 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. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd who does not own the sheep sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

[4 : 53] He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

And I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

For this reason the Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and I have authority to take it up again.

This charge I have received from my Father. There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, he has a demon and is insane.

Why listen to him? Others said, these are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. And can a demon open the eyes of the blind?

[5 : 59] Jesus, we ask for your help this morning. Would you help us to see you clearly for who you say you are?

Would you by your spirit open eyes? Give hope to hurting hearts? Enflame hearts that have grown cold? Show us, Jesus, who you are in the life that you give.

We ask in your name. Amen. Jesus uses here in this chapter the imagery of the sheepfold and the sheep and the shepherd to talk about our relationship with God.

And that should be striking right off the bat because of the close relationship that sheep and shepherds have. More involved with one another than any other animal and caregiver at that time.

It was a unique, striking relationship. The coming and the going. The morning and the evening. The sleeping and the eating. Together. All the time.

[7 : 15] And this is part of the abundant life. The good life that Jesus is describing is that he, as the good shepherd, knows his sheep and they know him.

In fact, they know each other, he says, as intimately as the Father and the Son from all eternity. That kind of close relationship is what Jesus has in mind.

One key aspect of the good life, Jesus says, is being fully known. Earlier in the chapter, Jesus says the shepherd of the sheep enters the sheepfold and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Personally. Individually called and led. What would happen in Jesus' day is that several flocks of sheep would be kept overnight in the same sheepfold.

And that way, one shepherd could keep them and sleep there with them. But then in the morning, out would come the separate shepherds and the first one who would show up would come and call in his own unique voice.

[8 : 31] And out of that entire group of sheep, his sheep would come out and follow him. Only his sheep would come. See, he knows them and they know him.

That's actually what makes them a flock is that they have the same shepherd. That's what Jesus means in verse 16 when he talks about calling other sheep that are not of this fold.

They will listen to his voice. And as they do, otherwise, unconnected sheep will become one flock. Why? Because they all follow the voice of one shepherd.

Jesus is speaking particularly of Jews and Gentiles. But think in that context of the most extreme enemies, people of diverse backgrounds brought into relationship because they all know and are personally known by Jesus.

What great community, right? In the flock of the good shepherd with young and old, rich and poor, black and white, sharing in common the most important relationship in all of life.

[9 : 50] It can be a wonderful thing to be known truly, fully. To have someone who knows the blemishes outside and inside.

The struggles you face each day. The place you really belong. It can free you up, can't it? Not only from having to be left out, but it can free you up from having to pretend.

From having to hide. The shepherd knows you too well to think that you can blend in with another flock and not be noticed. The piano tuner was here this week helping us get ready for today.

And as I was talking to him about the piano, whenever he talked about it, he talked about it like a close friend. He talked about her, in fact.

He had been part of the rebuilding of this piano years ago when that was needed. He knows it inside and out. What it should sound like. How it needs to be tuned up when something's off, right?

[11 : 00] Friends, God was part of your building. He knows you by name. Even more thoroughly than the piano tuner, which can be a wonderful thing, right?

God knows you. Unless you're afraid of being fully known. Unless you know your blemishes enough to feel shame.

Unless you've experienced what usually happens when someone sees all your flaws and all your failures.

One of the remarkably hopeful realities that Jesus offers here is abundant life where you are both fully known and fully loved.

What happens when Jesus gets the full view of us? When he's aware of all our failures? When he knows us completely?

[12 : 08] He says it twice. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Isn't that amazing?

Just ponder that for a minute. Isn't it amazing that knowing us and everything about us, he decides to die for us?

What incredible love. Jesus will later say greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Paul marvels in Romans that it's hard to imagine dying even for a really good person, right? And that wasn't us.

We weren't really good people. We're weak. We're ungodly. While we were yet sinners, what? Christ died for us.

[13 : 12] God, knowing our worst, gave us his best, fully known and fully loved, exposed and embraced.

How? How does that happen? How does God protect us from the consequences of our weaknesses and failures? Jesus says, I lay down my life for the sheep.

I step into harm's way, as we talked about with the kids, to defend you from the dangerous attack, right? Sheep have many predators.

We've only talked about wolves. There's bears and lions. Shepherds would have to fight them off. In the case of sinful people, we are facing sin and Satan and death.

Those are the enemies we need protection from. So our good shepherd will have to lay down his life to protect us from those enemies.

[14 : 26] The preposition for there is one of substitution. Yes, for our good, but particularly I lay down my life in the place of the sheep.

In other words, the sheep who are rightfully afraid, right? They're afraid that they're going to get the rejection that they deserve from God, are protected only by someone else who deserves something different, who deserves acceptance, being willing to trade places with them.

Isaiah 53 says it this way, But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep, interesting, have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

The good shepherd, in this case, in this image, becomes a lamb, right? Sacrificing his life in our place so that we are welcomed into his place in God's family.

[15 : 54] Some of you have heard me recount the documentary on sheep that has a little orphan lamb. A ewe lamb has died giving birth.

And her little orphan keeps being kicked away by all the other ewe lambs because they know and will only feed and care for their own lambs.

The narrator tells us that certainly this little orphan lamb is facing death soon. The vision comes, the picture rolls to the lamb being kicked away, and he's rolling away from the flock in the dirt.

And then the narrator says, Ah, but the shepherd knows best. What does the shepherd do? He pulls aside one of the little lambs that's feeding from his mother, and he shears his coat.

And he takes that coat, and one leg at a time, he puts it over the little orphan lamb that he's holding in his arms, and then he bends down and he sends it running right back to that ewe lamb who bends over and sniffs it and eagerly welcomes it in and cares for it and nourishes it as her own.

[17 : 17] That's what our good shepherd has done for us as the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, covering us instead of our sin with his perfection so that we can be welcomed in and cared for in the family of God.

Isn't that wonderful? Can you imagine living at work in a context where you don't have the pressure of making budget? In fact, if you made a mistake that cost the company a billion dollars, you wouldn't be run off for that.

In fact, you worked at a place where if that happened, the boss would say, I'm going to take care of it. Let me cover the cost. In fact, let's throw a party. Employee of the year.

Wouldn't it be great if that was the real world? Listen, it is the realest world that you'll ever know.

If Jesus is your good shepherd, the fear of failure, the shame of disappointment can be gone in his embrace.

[18 : 31] He cares for you. He protects you. He pays your debt and lays down his life for you. Contrast that with anything else, with the hired hand.

What happens when there's danger coming towards the sheep? What does the hired hand do? He runs away from danger and from the sheep. So they're left exposed and facing harm on their own.

Listen, friends, your money will not lay down its life for you. It won't. Your success, your comfort won't lay down its life for you.

But Jesus, your good shepherd, will and has. He will keep loving you. You are fully loved.

You can live adventurously and never lose. You can live confidently and never fear. Hey, with a life like that, you may actually not want it to end.

[19 : 44] Ever. That's a life worth living, isn't it? Wouldn't you love to be freed up to live like that every day? To know that kind of joy and confidence and purpose and freedom?

We long to live fully known and fully loved forever. Just think about it.

If you're wondering, is that really what I long for? Think about it this way. Most of us in here have lost someone who for us was an absolutely fundamental part of the good life.

Right? For us, a longed-for child many years ago. More recently, beloved family members and friends.

And now you live and even the best moments, the best experiences that we have, the good things in this life are not quite complete without them, are they?

[20 : 52] without being able to share it with them, it just is not completely good. See, we long not merely for existence after death, but personal life and relationships and love that continues.

That's what we want and only Jesus offers that. No money, no success, nothing that I often live for brings my loved ones back, does it?

Look at what's so unique about Jesus. We get distracted, understandably, by the glorious reality that our good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. But you know, that's not really the most surprising part of what Jesus says here.

I can lay down my life, right? You can lay down your life. Only Jesus can say, I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. Aha! We finally made it to Easter. Some of you were wondering.

[22 : 11] Some of you weren't sure I was going to get there. It's the good shepherd who doesn't just die and that's the end. What happens to the sheep then?

No. The sheep would be left unattended. If he's not alive, some of the broken parts of the good life can never be fixed. If he's not alive, the pain that Holly shared and the struggles that she's having are real and there's no real hope for change.

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. But, Jesus has more to say.

Jesus is the author of life. Jesus is the Lord of life. Jesus is the giver of life. So, when life is painful here, he lives to weep with us.

When life is disappointing here, he lives to offer us a new life to come. When life is confusing or scary here, he lives to hold us and to say, no one can snatch you out of my hand.

[23 : 31] My Father is greater than all. no one is able to snatch you out of my Father's hand. That's security, friends. That's the safety and the life that we long for.

Fully known, fully loved, fully protected in his hand no matter what comes because he lives. Jesus' resurrection also frees us up from one of the most difficult parts of this life.

the uncertainty and pressure of running out of time. Boy, we fight Father time every way we know how, don't we?

We want to get everything we can out of life while we have the chance. It feels to me like we've got a one day pass to Disney World and we've got to wake up early and stay late and run full speed wire to wire to get to everything we can.

Our version of the good life has us finding purpose by rushing around to see how many states or countries we can check off our list to skydive to drive the coolest cars to experience it all before we run out of time.

[24 : 43] When Jesus offers us an eternal extension of all of our bucket lists, I love this. Kelly was sharing about this insight earlier this week.

It's so helpful. Abundant life means I'll keep enjoying these things forever so I can slow down now and actually enjoy them and savor moments with the grandkids and linger over conversations with friends and neighbors and rest in prayer with God because I'm not running out of time.

Think with me, how much more enjoyable will that trip be if you don't have to rush back home before you're ready? Wouldn't that be nice?

Wouldn't that trip have been better? Listen, I want you to imagine how much more memorable will those moments that you look forward to be when you share moments like that with those you love that you miss in your life right now?

How much more sweet will they be when you share them together? Now, I want you to stretch a little bit on this one. I want you to dream if you possibly can how much more glorious will your tour of the universe be when you're given it by the one who flung out the planets and then threw the stars over there beyond what we've been able to find yet who crafted the mountains and the beaches who painted the flowers and the rainbows and he's going to walk with you and give you that tour and enjoy it with you?

[26 : 40] Isn't Jesus amazing? Isn't he awesome? Won't that be glorious? Jesus offers the good life without the uncertainties of the future fully secure eternally free because he always lives and listen because he lives he brings his sheep who hear his voice and follow him to live with him forever if the shepherd after the worst attack from the most dangerous enemies if he lives so do the sheep if the good shepherd is alive you will live with him forever that's good news if you hear that and it sounds crazy it sounds too good to be true you're not alone in fact the crowds listening to Jesus say it were starkly divided listen verse 19 there was again a division among the Jews because of these words many of them said he has a demon and is insane why listen to him others said

I don't know these are not the words of one who's oppressed by a demon can a demon open the eyes of the blind two options right either he's crazy possessed not worth listening to at all go on with your life or he's really the Christ the divine Messiah it's his comment about authority to take up his own life that pushes them there isn't it you can talk about laying your own life down fine anybody can say that but don't tell us that you're in charge of taking it back up only God can yep Jesus leaves the crowd with limited options doesn't he demonic or divine we're still left there and notice what many begin to say as they wrestle in that tension they begin to realize both his words and his works argue for the latter this guy doesn't talk like the demonic people we've known his words make sense he speaks with authority his imagery is understandable it's right from our world he seems to be speaking for the good of others and on top of that his works the way he lives

I mean he's not getting rich off these wild claims he's humble poor he's not living for himself or even using these powerful miracles for his own ends he's feeding other people he's healing other people like this blind man that's not demonic perhaps divine maybe there's something to this Jesus wouldn't it be great if there was just hypothetically wouldn't it be great if there was someone who could fix the brokenness who could fill the emptiness that we all know too well friends this is this is Jesus this is who he's telling you he is he's offering us the good life fully known fully loved forever and he's telling us that that life is really all about him right the good life is with the good shepherd you can't have it any other way can you because he's ultimately good he is what is best see for our versions of the good life Jesus didn't have to come he doesn't need to come for me to be a famous wealthy professional baseball player who has peaceful relationships and everybody loves him and thinks he's wonderful

Jesus didn't come so that we could avoid struggles always be healthy make gobs of money impress all our friends fit in with the cool kids and wear ourselves out along the way it's not why he came no Jesus came he tells us and died and rose love that we might have abundant life the true good life in deep relationships with true purpose to shine the glory of the good shepherd everywhere in a renewed world of justice and peace and hope to everyone life in secure love that never fails and never lets us down no matter what we walk through how often we stumble how bad we mess it up in life with him that never ends where we never stop marveling at his grace where we never see the end of the impact of our lives with him where we never plumb the depths of his perfection or run out of reasons to praise him for his goodness

Jesus lives he lives to invite you into that life today if you've never trusted him before would you come and talk to him about that would you come and ask him to give you the life that he promises right now in the midst of whatever you're dealing with wherever you are don't clean up first no no pastels not required don't go run for those in fact perfection not allowed unless it's his so you don't actually get to do the work you just come to him he's eager to receive you he invites you right where you are he gives that life right here in this struggle and forever in glory I also suspect there are a bunch of us in here who have come to Jesus who have tasted that life that he offers but who are struggling to think of their life as abundant right now perhaps even on

[33 : 11] Easter maybe especially on Easter we need to come to Jesus too don't we listen to his voice he's the good shepherd ask him and nothing else to give you the life that he promises he says I am the good shepherd I lay down my life for the sheep no one takes it from me but I lay it down of my own accord I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again I give my sheep eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand I came that they might have life and have it abundantly let's pray Jesus would you indeed give us such life free us from the places that we are frantically running trying to make our life good bring us back to you show us the hope the purpose the joy that we can know in relationship with you thank you for meeting with us this morning thank you that you're alive that gives us hope and so would you meet us even now as you work in our hearts help us to hear your voice to know your love to rest in your care amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org and mmm to