

The Good Shepherd \* John 10

February 16, 2020 \* Langford Community Church \* Graham Gladstone

*The Saturday before I was to give this message, I started having a strange, localized pain in my lower stomach. I decided to go to the ER to have it looked at and just in case, I recorded a video version of the message. As it turned out, I had appendicitis and my appendix was removed that night. I can't begin to tell you how grateful I was to have these thoughts of Jesus – my Good Shepherd – with me through the whole ordeal. Lots of people at church stepped up to make worship happen that Sunday; here's the video message in full.*

Take a look at this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kk0g1hoOeK4>

That's a question that I think that a lot of us can identify with – how do you live life to the fullest? How do you get the most out of life? Can you identify with that? Is that something you'd like to know? If so, you're not the only one – when I did a web search for 'how to live life to the fullest,' guess how many hits I got? 10,380,000,000 hits. That's a lot of ways to live life to the fullest.

And some of them are helpful – 'don't go to bed angry,' 'don't dwell on the past,' 'don't worry about the future' – those are ideas from the people in the video, but frankly, they're also straight from the Bible – but to be honest, some of them are a little lacklustre (uninspired/spurious/questionable). Like wearing sunscreen for example. A good thing to do, for sure, but I have a hard time seeing how that helps you get the most out of life, unless you're on vacation all your life – and that just doesn't happen.

So the question remains – how do you live life to the fullest?

In the passage that we're looking at this morning, we see Jesus taking on that very question, and He gives us a conclusive answer - If you want to live a good life, then you gotta follow the Good Shepherd. Follow the shepherd and He will give you fullness to life. That's the message at the heart of this passage – follow the shepherd to fullness of life – now let me explain why I say that.

If you were to pick a metaphor for a leader today, what would it be? Like the leader of a group of people – what would you compare them to? A general or a CEO maybe? A coach, laying out strategy and drawing the best out of each player?

If you asked that question of an ancient Israelite, their very first answer would be 'a shepherd.' To the people of God, a leader was a shepherd. Of course, they were all familiar with the idea of a shepherd; they knew what shepherds did; many of them did that for a living – but the idea of a shepherd also supplied a really helpful way to think about leadership. If you are in charge, then it's your responsibility to take care of your people – to see them grow and prosper and thrive – the same way that a good shepherd would his sheep.

And so throughout the OT, the idea of 'shepherd' was applied again and again to the leaders in Israel. If you were a leader in Israel, you were a shepherd and God's people were your sheep – and your job #1 was to take care of those sheep with selflessness and compassion and dedication and love.

The problem though is that the leaders of Israel were not always good shepherds. We're talking kings here, priests, the people who we know as Pharisees – they were supposed to be looking out for the

people, but all they really did was look out for themselves. They took advantage of the sheep and the sheep suffered for it. These bad shepherds led their people into a second-rate existence.

And this became such a problem in fact, that a number of times throughout the OT prophets, God stepped in and said 'shepherds, you are doing a really poor job of shepherding my sheep!'<sup>i</sup> You see it in Isaiah and Jeremiah and Zechariah and there's actually a whole chapter dedicated to it in the book of Ezekiel.

In Ezekiel 34, God really lays it out for these bad shepherds. Let me read it to you – this is Ezekiel 34:2 and onwards - 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?

3 You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock.

4 You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

He actually describes the shepherds – the leaders of the people - in ways that make me think of our cows back home. You know when cows come up to the feeding trough, there's a pecking order? The big ones push the little ones out of the way to get more for themselves? Well, in Ezekiel 34, God says these 'shepherds' – the priests and teachers and scribes who sought their own benefit are just like those cows to push the weak out of the way to get more for themselves.

That was a problem in Ezekiel's time and it was a problem in Jesus' time too. Remember in John 10, Jesus says - All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers – that's verse 8 and then verse 10 - 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy (Joh 10:8-10 NIV). Jesus knows that the Pharisees and scribes and teachers are just as bad as the religious leaders were in Ezekiel's time. They are bad shepherds – they're like thieves and robbers – who couldn't care less about the flock because they're in it for themselves.

That was a problem for Ezekiel's time and for Jesus's time but it's also a problem for our time too, isn't it? There is no shortage of false shepherds who would like to tell us where to find greener pastures, for the right amount of money. I can't tell you the number of emails I've gotten from African princes wanting to make me rich if only I will give them my bank account info. You've got fortune tellers and false teachers; you've got people in positions of authority – Hollywood producers, teach coaches, even pastors who abuse their power and their sheep for their own benefit. And on top of that, you've got systemic shepherds too – consumerism – the shepherd that says 'if you want to thrive, you need more, more, more.' You've got nationalism – the shepherd that says 'my kind of people are the only ones that matter' – and you've got this culture of popularity that says that satisfaction is measured in likes and followers. Those are voices that call out for our attention and sadly, they can be just as harmful as the false shepherds two thousand years ago.

But way back in Ezekiel, when God called out the shepherds, He didn't just point out the problem, He offered the solution. This is Ezekiel 34:8 -

8 As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for

my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock... (I'm paraphrasing here – "I will do it myself." God says "\*I\* will be your shepherd.

...

11 " 'For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.

12 As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.

13 I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land.

14 I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

15 I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD.

16 I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

God promises that HE Himself will be the Shepherd that the people need – HE will be the shepherd who will take care of them and feed them and prosper them –

And then in John chapter 10, Jesus stands up and says "That's me." Verse 11 – "11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Joh 10:11 NIV).

God came in the person of His Son Jesus to be the selfless, life-giving Shepherd that His people needed. Not one who would take advantage of the sheep, but one who would actually die to give them life. Look again at verse 10 –

10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (Joh 10:10 NIV).

God Himself came to earth – to be our shepherd and to give us abundant life. Not ho-hum life. Not life barely scraping by. The Good Shepherd leads His sheep to fullness of life.

Don Carson puts it like this –

"The life [that] Jesus' true disciples enjoy is not to be construed as more time to fill (merely [waiting for] eternal life), but life at its scarcely imagined best, life to be lived" (Carson, John, Pillar Commentary, 385).

Jesus came to be the Good Shepherd who would give His sheep abundant life. He laid down His life to give us fullness of life.

Now, here's a question – what exactly does that abundant life look like? Jesus doesn't really expand on the idea here – so I think we really need to bring in another part of the Bible to describe what Jesus means when He says fullness of life.

So tell me, can you think of another passage in the Bible that describes the kind of fullness of life that God-as-shepherd gives His sheep? (I mean, besides Ezekiel 34) ;) Psalm 23. I think that Psalm 23 tells us

what abundant life looks like when you follow the shepherd and I'm sure that it was at the back of Jesus' mind when He said it – so let's just take a quick look.

Fullness of life according to Psalm 23 –

When YHWH, When Jesus is your shepherd – you shall want for nothing. You will have everything you need. Now this doesn't mean non-stop material blessings – I mean, Jesus tells us to expect hardships, but it does mean that we will always have all that we truly need – and if I'm honest with myself – I have to admit, that I've been blessed with MORE than I need for most of my life.

So when Jesus is your shepherd, you will have everything you need. That's clear from the next verses – 2 & 3 – He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul – these are pictures of the shepherd providing what we need.

He provides in good times, like rolling hills of beautiful pasture and also in the bad. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Again, this is a picture of God providing what we need – not just daily bread, but in this case – protection – your rod and staff they comfort me.

And the next verse echoes that – another difficult situation where the shepherd helps us –

Even in the presence of my enemies – you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. “I have all that I need.”

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

That's a picture of abundant life – God providing that we need, in good times and bad, both now and forever. That's the psalm – God giving us provision and protection in good times and in bad, both now and forever – that's fullness of life. And that's what the Good Shepherd came to give us.

Chuck Swindoll puts it like this:

The abundance Jesus offers is a spiritual abundance that transcends circumstances like income, health, living conditions, and even death. The abundant life is life that never ends, yet we don't have to wait until the end of our physical life to receive this abundance and to enjoy it. Abundant life includes peace, purpose, destiny, a genuine purpose for living, the joy of facing any adversity—including the grave—without fear, and the ability to endure hardship with confident assurance (Swindoll's Living Insights, on John 10:7-10).

When we follow the Good Shepherd, we walk in confidence knowing that He will provide and protect in good times and bad both now and forever. That's abundant life.

Now, here's a question. How do we know that that's true? How do we know that we can count on this Shepherd; that He's not just some opportunist who overpromises and under delivers?

Well, look again at John 10. John 10, verse 11. Jesus says –

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.  
12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.  
13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.  
14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me--  
15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep.  
(Joh 10:11-15 NIV).

We know that Jesus is not just some opportunity who's trying to get ahead, because He is in this for our benefit and not His own.

He says that in two different ways in those five verses.

First, in the middle, vs. 12-13, Jesus says 'Look, I'm not a hired hand. I'm not the guy who's only in it for the paycheque who's gonna bolt the minute there's trouble.' No, I know my sheep and my sheep know me and I am going to stand up for my sheep.

Second, He's so willing to protect His sheep that He will DIE for them. Did you notice that, bookending the part about the hired hand? Twice, in the course of five verses, at the beginning and the end, Jesus says the same thing. \*I\* am the good shepherd. \*I\* will lay down my life for my sheep.

And in the course of time, that's exactly what Jesus did. At the Cross, Jesus laid down His life to deliver us from our greatest enemy – death. And then He rose to life again to provide and protect, both now and forever.

We can trust that Jesus will indeed give us this abundant life when we follow Him, because He has given His life to secure it for us. He is no hired hand; He is deeply, profoundly, intimately committed to His sheep.

There's a really neat little book written by a guy named Philip Keller. He grew up among Masai shepherds in east Africa and then moved to Canada to run a sheep ranch in BC and he wrote this book called – '[A shepherd looks at the Good Shepherd.](#)' He's a shepherd and so he takes his experience as a shepherd to think about what it means to have Jesus as our shepherd. And he tells this story of the "love, loyalty and devotion" that the Masai shepherds have for their animals. He writes:

Just a few days after we moved into the Masai country, a small, slim boy about ten years old was carried up to our house. He had, single-handedly, tackled a young lioness that tried to kill one of his flock. In total self-abandonment and utter bravery, he managed to spear the lion. We rushed him to the nearest hospital... where his life was spared... but why did he do this? Because the sheep were his. His love and honour and loyalty were at stake. He would not spare himself... (Keller, 239) but gave everything to prosper and protect them because they were his.

Same with Jesus – He went to the cross to rescue us from danger and laid down His life, so that truly, the goodness and mercy of God would follow us all the days of our lives and we would live forever. His self-sacrifice demonstrates His undivided devotion to us.

Jesus is the good shepherd, who lays down His life, to give His sheep abundant life.

So here's the question – is Jesus YOUR shepherd? Are you His sheep? Do you know Him as intimately as He knows you? Remember verse 3 - He calls his own sheep by name (Joh 10:3 NIV). When you belong to Jesus you are not 'part of the herd' – Jesus knows you by name. He knows exactly who you are and loves you just the way you are and wants to see you prosper and grow into the godly person that He knows you can be.

When we were away, we saw some dolphins and talked to their trainers and he was saying 'they probably all look alike to you' but he knows each and every one of them down to the smallest detail – that's how well Jesus knows you. And He laid down His life to give you eternal life.

Again, Philip Keller the shepherd makes a really neat observation – the question is not who are you, but whose are you. He writes: "It is not who I am that makes me special to God. Rather, now, it is whose I am that makes me precious." If you belong to the Good Shepherd, then He is actively leading you into an abundant life of provision and protection in good times and now both now and forever.

But you gotta let Him lead. Jesus is not like a western shepherd who goes along behind the herd and drives them forward with dogs; our Shepherd goes ahead of us, calling us by name and we need to follow Him.

So... follow the good shepherd to fullness of life.

That's the big idea for this morning; that's the point of I think of Jesus saying 'I am the Good shepherd.'

We need to follow the shepherd to fullness of life.

How do we do that? Well, good question. Because it's not as though we can literally SEE the Good Shepherd walking before us. But we *can* listen for Him. Remember John 10:3 – Jesus says "The sheep listen to His voice. He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out... His sheep follow Him because they know His voice."

*3 The watchman opens the gate for him [the shepherd of the sheep], and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.*

*4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. (John 10:3-4).*

Do you know your shepherd's voice? Do you listen to your shepherd's voice and go where He leads?

Gary Burge asks a really important question in his application commentary – he says – In the midst of this moral chaos [the postmodern, humanist, atheistic, fake news culture that we live in] – "In the midst of this moral chaos, in this threatening desert, whose voice, which shepherd, do we follow?" (Burge, NIVAC, 303). (Joh 10:1-4 NIV).

Jesus invites us to hear His voice and come after Him – to hear His voice in His Word, in prayer and reflection, in your conscience, in the community of believers and in the stillness of your heart.

We need to tune out those other voices and fix our attention on Jesus' voice. Let Him point out the dangers and the obstacles of life, the way a shepherd would for His sheep, and let Him set the boundaries for the pasture you live in. Know that He is giving you abundant life, no matter how much greener it might look on the other side.

If Jesus is your shepherd, then make hearing Him your primary priority and follow Him where He leads.

Jesus is the good shepherd, who laid down His life, to give His sheep abundant life – provision and protection, good times and bad, now and forever.

Follow the shepherd to fullness of life.

*The morning after surgery, I was thinking of Langford meeting together for worship and I sent this message, asking that it be shared after my video message:*

*Laying here in this hospital bed, I can truly say 'this is abundant life' – not a life free from trouble, but a life lived with confidence knowing that I am secure in the Good Shepherd's caring and capable hands.*

## BENEDICTION

21. Heb. 13:20-21 - Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> 10 Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep.

11 They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain.  
(Isa 56:10-11 NIV).

21 The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the LORD; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered.  
(Jer 10:21 NIV).

2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?' (Eze 34:2 NIV).

3 "My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish the leaders; for the LORD Almighty will care for his flock, the house of Judah, and make them like a proud horse in battle. (Zec 10:3 NIV).