

**I came that they may have LIFE... and have it abundantly!** Wow! What a promise!

- That's a promise that we need to hear, again and again... perhaps *now* more than ever!
- That's a promise that we need to claim / hold tightly to, as followers of the risen Jesus...
- That's a promise that we need to proclaim—for all the world to hear—especially now... when so many other “voices” are telling who to trust / what gives “LIFE”...

But what exactly is the **abundant LIFE** that Jesus promises? What does it look like?

Are you experiencing it for yourself? If so, do others see it in you?!

How do you define **abundant LIFE** for yourself... for others? Is it something that is measurable, like—accomplishments? financial success? possessions? relationships? If not, what is it?!

Too often, I'm afraid... when we hear the word “abundance” we think about it by the world's standards → abundance = “more”: wealth / money... goods / possessions... good fortune...

But is *that* what Jesus promises here? Or elsewhere in John's Gospel (for that matter)? I don't think so.

From start to finish, John's Gospel announces that the central purpose for what God does—in and through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection—is to give LIFE.

We hear it first in the Prologue (1:1, 3b-4), where John writes this about Jesus: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... What has come into being in him was LIFE, and the LIFE was the light of all people.*”

And it resurfaces several times throughout the Gospel—whenever Jesus is explaining *why* he came—in Jesus' midnight discussion with Nicodemus... in his noon-time conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well... in the feeding of the 5000... and many other places...

And then, again, near the end (20:30-31)—where John tells us *why* he wrote this Gospel: “*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have LIFE in his name.*”

LIFE—the LIFE that is referred to here, in John's Gospel—is *not* just about LIFE after death...

It's about LIFE—a certain kind / quality of LIFE—that begins here and now... in *this* LIFE...

It's about LIFE in relationship with God... where we *know* (and *trust*... and *follow*...) the voice of the Shepherd who truly cares for us / our well-being...

It's about LIFE in a community of faith and friendship... where we find security and support... nourishment and rest / renewal as part of his flock...

It's about LIFE that has purpose (beyond ourselves and our wants)... LIFE that abounds with deep meaning and value... and that endures even beyond death.

**I came that they may have LIFE... and have it abundantly!** I dare say the LIFE that Jesus wants for us... the LIFE that Jesus gives to us isn't about “more” (as in affluence / lives of luxury). That's a rabbit hole (although it *is* a common / pervasive message today). The more we have... the more we want... it's never enough... and we will do almost anything to keep “more” coming—no matter who gets stepped on in the process... no matter who goes without because of our wanting “more.”

No, the LIFE that Jesus wants for us... the LIFE that Jesus gives us is NOT about “more”—it’s “deeper”... “richer / fuller”... “more whole and complete...”

This LIFE can’t be “earned” or “achieved” (no matter how hard we try). It is sheer gift—that comes from the God who loved this world so much that he gave his only Son... from the One who loves us enough to lay down his life for us.

There are so many “thieves and bandits” who seek to rob us of “true” LIFE... and cheat us of God’s abundance and provision. There are also “*wolves in sheep’s (shepherd’s) clothing*” who do the same.

Jesus is God’s answer!

John 10 opens with the familiar biblical image of a shepherd and his sheep. And the first 5 verses are ***all about the shepherd***... and how *his* is the “known” and trusted voice for his sheep.

- When the shepherd calls, his sheep *know* that he’s the one they can trust to follow.
- He’s the one who comes in through the gate... not the one who sneaks in over the fence...
- He’s the one who leads the sheep out to green pastures and calm, cool waters of refreshment...
- He’s the one whose sole focus is to protect and care for the sheep of his flock... to make sure they have the best / fullest LIFE possible.

*It’s all about the shepherd*, you see. And it seems pretty clear—to us, anyway—that Jesus is saying that *he* is the shepherd who is recognized and trusted by the sheep. We expect Jesus to continue that line of thought. In fact, if we were to “cut out” verses 6-10 and flow right into vs. 11—where Jesus actually says, “*I am the good Shepherd*”—we wouldn’t miss a beat. But instead, we are told in verse 6 that Jesus’ audience “*didn’t understand what he was saying to them.*” So, he tries a different tack, hoping to make his message clear. “*I am the gate for the sheep,*” Jesus says.

What?!? Now I’m the one who’s confused (and I imagine Jesus’ audience was too). Where did this image of “*the gate*” come from? And how, exactly, does it clear up the confusion of the first 5 verses? How is Jesus’ being *the gate* helpful? Why does Jesus identify himself as *the gate*... even before he identifies himself as *the shepherd*?

Here’s one possibility... that I remember reading in a commentary a while back. While doing some research in the Middle East, the commentator spent some time with a Bedouin shepherd—a keeper of sheep—who proudly showed off his sheep as well as the penned-in area where his sheep slept every night. “*When they go it there,*” the shepherd said, “*they are perfectly safe.*”

But the interviewer noticed something. “*Your sheep sleep in that pen?*” he asked. “*But that pen doesn’t have a gate on it...*” “*Yes, that’s right,*” the shepherd replied. “*I am the gate.*”

“*What do you mean?*” the man asked?! “*After my sheep are in the pen, I lay my body across the opening. No sheep can step over me... and no wolf can get it without getting past me first. I am the gate.*”

A powerful image, isn’t it?! And one that might help us understand how Jesus can mix the imagery of the shepherd and the gate—it’s possible be BOTH! In fact, as far as a shepherd is concerned—he *is* BOTH!

Jesus, *the gate*, is the One who literally “*lays down his life*” for his sheep...

Jesus, *the gate*, is the One who takes care of / protects his own—who puts himself between his sheep and any predators / thieves or bandits that threaten to steal or destroy... He assures his followers, “*whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture*” (v. 9).

It is *the gate*—the very body of our loving shepherd Jesus—that makes the difference!

**I came that they may have LIFE... and have it abundantly!** Jesus promises. To thrive... not just “eke it out.” To flourish... not just “get through.” To live LIFE to the fullest—to have a deep sense of meaning and purpose—to know and be known... to love and be loved... as we are!

“Thieves and bandits” / “wolves in sheep’s (or shepherd’s) clothing”—they come to harm and destroy... to take LIFE away. But *the gate*, our Shepherd Lord protects LIFE in the watches of night... and promotes LIFE during the day—by leading his sheep to green pastures... bringing them to calm, refreshing waters... guiding them along right paths... protecting and comforting them as they walk through dark and dangerous valleys...

**I came that they may have LIFE... and have it abundantly!** That’s Jesus’ promise to his followers—then and now! Well... half of it, anyway. You see, I hear another promise here, too—a promise that rests in “relationship.”

Notice: Jesus not only assures us that he *is* the good shepherd and the gate who comes to give abundant LIFE... he also says, repeatedly, that his sheep will NOT follow anyone but their Shepherd. The sheep *know* their shepherd’s voice (can distinguish their shepherd’s voice from among the many voices out there fighting for our attention)... The sheep will NOT listen to “thieves and bandits”... they will run from strangers.

That’s a lot of confidence that Jesus has in his sheep, it’s it?! And a part of me wonders if his confidence misplaced? I mean, think about it, Jesus’ followers—both then and now—have quite a history of falling short... of turning away when the path gets difficult... of seeking “greener pastures”... of following after so-called “shepherds” who promise “abundant life”...

But what I know is this: Jesus’ confidence in his sheep isn’t based so much on “the sheep”... as it is on the relationship between the shepherd and his sheep (a relationship we are brought into *through* Jesus – *the gate*... in the waters of baptism).

He reminds the sheep that they *know* him... that they’ve trusted him... and that they will continue to trust him—that they will be able to tell the difference between “false hope” and “real hope”... that they’ll be able to detect a “genuine offer” of abundant life from all the counterfeits peddled by the “thieves and robbers” of this world. He promises not only to lead them... but that they *will follow* his voice.

This is Jesus’ version of “You’ve got this”... that is rooted in his promise: “I’ve got you.”

Here, Jesus makes a promise BOTH about what he is doing *for us*—protecting... providing ... caring... sacrificing... giving LIFE—and ALSO a promise about how we will respond—trusting... listening... embracing... thriving—*because of* our relationship with him.

You see, abundant LIFE, according to Jesus, has nothing to do with “more” anything—as our world defines it! It is simply trusting that God will give us what we need—protection... provision... presence... and purpose. It is knowing *who* we belong to—*who* our true Shepherd is. It is believing that we will be safe and sound in his care. It is trusting that, in and through him, our basic needs will be met. It is knowing / trusting that we are never alone... and that we are a part of something beyond ourselves—we have a purpose! When we know and trust that, how can LIFE not be abundant?!

Dear friends, Jesus has us—now and always! And if we listen to his voice... and follow where he leads, we will get us through! More than that—we will have LIFE in abundance... because that’s the LIFE that he alone can give. Amen.