

Ah, the abundant life. What do you think of when you think of the abundant life? Maybe the funds to buy whatever you want: the newest hot rod, the most exquisite jewelry, or the cutting-edge technology. Maybe the abundant life means the ability to do what you want when you want: the ability to escape on to another country for an exotic vacation, not having to do chores, or even just the ability to go to a darn restaurant!

Jesus says, **“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”** What does it mean to have the abundant life? 3. Some think the abundant life is greener pastures. Today is Good Shepherd Sunday, so the imagery is filled with sheep, green pastures, and songs relating to Psalm 23. Now that we’re recording our services, I’m sure one of you guys listening who is bored in quarantine can re-watch the service and count the number of times we say “sheep” or “shepherd.”

If you’re a sheep, your main goal is to eat grass. Your life is a constant search for greener pastures, more delicious turf, and wide-open spaces. You know the old saying, “the grass is always greener on the other side.” For sheep, that might actually be true because the other side of the fence most likely hasn’t been mowed by a flock of hundreds of sheep. The other side of the fence might look tempting to a sheep.

What greener pastures are tempting to you? Maybe a new job is what’s been tempting you. A new job with a new salary. The grass will be greener when I have a lot more green in my wallet to buy everything I’ve ever wanted. When I get my new job, then I’ll be satisfied.

For some of us, greener pasture is a new set of friends. I can’t stand my friends calling me all the time and complaining about the quarantine. When all of this is over, I’m going to get some upbeat and supportive friends. If I just get some better people around me, then my ship will come in.

I would imagine for all of us, the greener pastures are when we as a human race finally kick coronavirus into the can. It’s been weeks, by now we’re sick of being socially isolated. We might say, “If only life was back to normal, then all my problems would go away.”

We live in a world that promises to deliver the abundant life. Now more than ever, companies target ads at specific people so that they can get you to buy the exact thing for your specific needs. A company can try to sell you greener pastures fit to your specifications, your needs, and your desires.

Perhaps you heard the story about a decade ago of a father who runs into a major department store clutching a coupon book filled with baby items. “My daughter got this in the mail! She’s still in high school, and you’re sending her coupons for baby clothes and cribs? Are you trying to encourage her to get

pregnant?” Indeed, the coupon book was addressed to the daughter and had things like maternity clothes. The manager was dumbfounded and apologized.

The father reportedly called back and apologized to the manager, apparently the department store using their algorithms and predictive patterns analyzed his daughter’s purchasing habits and found out that she was pregnant before he did.

Now none of these things are bad in and of themselves. It’s not a sin to want something better than the shape we’re in. However, never forget the way to greener pastures! **“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.”**

We run into trouble when we make a good thing the only thing. Things like material wealth, popularity, and beauty are all good things. It is a good thing to be out of quarantine to resume normal life. But if we make that into the only thing. The thing that we think if we have it, then we’ll be happy—then we’ll have the abundant life—then that becomes a problem. We can even fall into sin to put our hopes and trusts solely in getting out of this quarantine. The only way to the abundant life is through the gate. Many thieves and robbers will try to sell you “if-only’s”, and miracle cures, but the way to the abundant life is through the gate.

And 2. The sheep listen for the shepherd's voice to lead them through the gate. Seek fulfillment through legitimate channels. The grass may be greener on the other side of the fence, but that could be because it has been fertilized by sheep carcasses. Jesus tells us that the sheep don’t listen to the voice of thieves and robbers. You are a sheep, don’t listen to those voices which would call you to find contentment in anything else but the shepherd.

“But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.”

It’s true. Real live sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd. You’re watching this video, you have the Internet, a simple Internet search will show you videos of sheep recognizing and responding only to their shepherd’s voice.

And so, we as Jesus’ sheep hear His voice and listen to Him. Yes, we often stray. Yes, we can often try jumping the fence to search for greener pastures, but we know the Shepherd’s voice when we hear it.

We hear the Shepherd’s voice in the Scriptures. We hear the Shepherd’s voice through those who have taught us Scriptures such as our parents, our teachers, and our pastor. This voice of Jesus proclaims to us that Jesus through His suffering, death, and resurrection, has opened the gates of heaven to us.

Jesus died and rose again so that you may have an abundant life, both now and in the life to come. In fact, Jesus is not only the Good Shepherd, He is the gate itself. **“I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in**

and out and find pasture.” Through belief in Jesus, we can trust that He will provide for us. We can believe that on the last day He will take us out of death to life. And this risen again Good Shepherd 1. calls the sheep by name to abundant life.

A man in a luxury car wearing a business suit drives up to a huge sheep pen out in the middle of nowhere. He spots the shepherd who is tending the sheep and makes him a bet. The businessman says, “I bet the entire contents of your wallet that I know how many sheep are in the pen.”

The shepherd replies, “I’m not normally a betting man, but today I’m feeling lucky. I’ll take you up on it!”

Little did the shepherd know that the businessman had a drone flying over the pen, which could count each sheep even down to the lamb. The businessman told the shepherd, “462 sheep and one sheep dog!”

The shepherd was impressed and gave the businessman his entire wallet’s contents: all \$26, but as the businessman was about to drive off, the shepherd stopped him saying, “Yes, you may have been able to count all my sheep using your gizmos and gadgets, but I’m willing to bet the value of your luxury car that you don’t know the names of the sheep.” With that, the businessman smiled and drove off because he knew that wasn’t a bet he wanted to make.

Likewise, the department store may have known the daughter’s buying habits predicted a 76% chance of pregnancy, but the department store never changed the daughter’s diaper when she was a baby. The department store never went to any of her band concerts. The department store doesn’t know the face she makes when she’s told a bad joke. But the dad did.

The point of this is that there are a lot of forces out there that are trying to sell you on greener pastures, but they don’t know you. Many of them are thieves and robbers trying to lead you astray. They don’t know your name. They don’t love you.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, knows you by name. He loves you. He died for you. He knows you better than you know you. He’ll never leave you for dead. He will lead you through the gate to eternal life, and He knows what the abundant life is for you.

“...for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”
The abundant life is not in the abundance of things, but it lies in the abundance of Christ’s love for you. The abundant life doesn’t happen when you reach a certain net worth, but when your eyes are opened to see what is already there: a loving savior whose voice you recognize and who leads you to quiet pastures. No need to wait for the next big thing, the abundant life is already yours in Jesus. **THE ABUNDANT LIFE CONSISTS OF THE SHEPHERD CARING FOR HIS SHEEP. Amen.**