

Life in the Pen #1: The Good Life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 June 2023

Preacher: Kevin Smith, Senior Pastor

[0 : 0 0] We turn now to John chapter 10 verses 7 through 11. We're moving through this passage and once again understanding Jesus is going to explain the parable we looked at last week. What is what is he talking about? More details about what is he talking about when he talks about being a shepherd and us being sheep. Let's pray together. Father thank you for your mercy.

Thank you that we are the sheep of your pasture and we Lord we would be faithful sheep. So give us ears to hear now what you our shepherd are saying. May we follow after the good shepherd.

May we follow hard after him for he is worthy and we can trust him. Bless your people now. Lord fix us help us do all that we need done Lord. You know better than we do what we need.

So Lord help us only we turn to you in Christ's name we pray. Use your unworthy servant. Amen. John chapter 10 beginning the reading of verse 7.

So Jesus again said to them truly truly I say to you I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers but the sheep did not listen to them.

[1 : 3 1] I am the door if anyone enters by me he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. Father thank you for this word. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

You may be seated. Thank you praise team. Thank you so much. What is the good life?

How would you describe it? Think about it. Many say it's the American dream. Owning your own home. Having a good career.

Family. Sexual freedom. Lots of free time to pursue interests. And the money to do it. Amen to that. The book which I which is a fascinating study.

[2 : 4 8] The book called The Good Life shows the results of the longest scientific study of happiness ever conducted. It brings together other studies within it.

It was sponsored by Harvard University. And it was part of their Harvard study of adult development began in 1938. And it's still going on.

They asked they wanted to study the question what made people thrive? In 2007 they did a survey of millennials.

They were asked about their most important life goals. 76% of millennials said that becoming rich was their most important goal. 56% said a major goal was becoming famous.

The study says that more than a decade later after millennials have spent more time as adults similar questions were asked again and a pair of surveys. They came back followed up 10 years later.

- [3 : 51] Fame was now lower on the list. But the top goals again included things like making money having a successful career and becoming debt free.
- Now here's what the survey has said. These are common and practical goals that extend across generations and borders. So we all feel that way.
- It says over time we develop the subtle but hard to shake feeling that our life is here and now and the things we need for a good life are over there or in the future.
- Always just out of reach. Always just out of reach. the good life.
- What's your definition I ask again? Here's a question. If you had to make one life choice right now one life choice to set yourself on the path to future health and happiness what would that choice be?
- [5 : 02] You only get one sorry. One choice right now before you left this service to set your future for life and happiness what would that choice be?
- they ask that question too. Hmm. I'm letting that float around in my mind so forgive me. But here's the thing I think it would be safe to say that Jesus understanding of the good life for his sheep may actually be different from what many people are instinctively looking for.
- Might be different. And God isn't playing a mystery game with us yet. He's not playing a clue with us to say you can't guess guess what it is people. He's not playing a mystery game with us.
- He shows us what the good life really is as we respond to his shepherding love. You see the good life is life in the pen.
- As followers of Jesus remember we follow someone who's also called the lamb. Isn't that funny?
- [6 : 12] We're sheep we're following the lamb. Wow. We're all sheep. And as you saw last time animal sheep have certain qualities that we share spiritually with them.
- It's not very flattering but God calls us sheep for a reason. Remember what those qualities were? Timid easily frightened defenseless no claws no fangs no stinger we can't defend ourselves against the spiritual darkness that attacks us every day.
- We can't even defend ourselves against our own heart. And most of all sheep are dense easy led astray sheep will I'm going to expand on this a little bit more because this is important.
- Sheep will wander from good grazing land into wasteland looking for greener grass. You're sitting here you're eating it's amazing. They have been known listen to this they have been known to follow one another into death.
- I came across an article in CBS News it's recorded in the book while shepherds washed their flocks. This happened in Istanbul Turkey in July of 2005.
- [7 : 26] First one sheep jumped to its death. Then another and another and dozens more. Having left their herds to graze while they ate breakfast stunned Turkish shepherds now watched as nearly 1500 other sheep leapt leapt off the same cliff.
- The first 450 animals died under the billy pile. The sheep were allowed to wander into the wrong trail. Shepherds weren't paying attention.
- unaware of what lay ahead each one simply followed the next only to perish in the valley below. It is a curious behavior of sheep that once one picks a trail the rest simply follow the tail in front of them without regard for their destination.
- and God calls us sheep. We're sheep because we need a shepherd.
- We need the good shepherd the chief shepherd Jesus to be if I wasn't clear enough. God the father sends us the good shepherd not only to save us from our enemies but to save us from ourselves.

[8 : 44] But how do we get into his pen? How do we get into his pen? First thing Jesus is the door to the true good life. There are actually two I am statements in this section.

Two. Verses 7 through 9 I'm looking at right now. Remember the I am phrase remember what that's about right? Just in case you were here you haven't heard this before most of you I'm sure have but the I am statements in John's gospel we already looked at a couple I am the bread of life I am the light of the world those I am statements referred to the burning bush that Moses when Moses met God at that burning bush in Exodus God said tell them I am that I am Jesus is identifying himself with that I am he's he's saying to the people of that day who knew the Old Testament better than we do in some sense they don't see Jesus so we know it better actually because we see Jesus but that's another story they knew exactly what he was probably hinting at and it drove them mad Jesus Jesus is identifying himself as God and now he says as our God he is the I am the door he is the divine door for his sheep to enter

God's flock God's sheep pen the sheep pen is the church within the kingdom of God remember the whole universe makes up all of God's kingdom he is king over all he surveys he surveys everything but sin calls rebellion and decay to enter into that kingdom temporarily so to enter the kingdom now is to live under God's rule under God's reign under God's king who is Jesus it is to say that is to pray the Lord's prayer and live it hallowed be thy name holy be your name your kingdom come your will be done and we display this relationship to the king of the kingdom by coming into his church the visible outpost of the kingdom we come into the pen we now to enter the sheep pen

Jesus says is therefore is to be saved but Jesus is saying there's only one way into this salvation and that is through the door through him the only way once again you might remember last week that I mentioned there were two types of sheep pens remember from last week the parable verses 1 through 5 spoke of an enclosed structure structure with a door and a watchman it was likely in the cities remember it was a public pen for various flocks at one time but now he changes he goes to the second type of pen here here our Lord is referencing the pen in the wilderness out in the fields it was an enclosure of rocks or stones piled up high but there was actually no door just an opening just an opening the shepherd at night would lie down across the opening with his own body are you following me the only way for a sheep to get out was to step over the shepherd one shepherd said no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body so out in the wilderness the shepherd himself becomes the door and Jesus identifies with that imagery he is that place where the sheep are protected literally by his own body he

Ephesians 2 18 says it is through him through Jesus we both have access in one spirit to the father how do you get to access to God how do you get into the kingdom how do you get into the church to be near God and his people you gotta go through the door who is Jesus later Jesus will say he is the way to the father the truth and the life the gospel transformation bible which is a nifty study bible if you don't have one it's really nifty it says this the sheep hole was commonly attached at times to the shepherd's home to enter the sheep hole was to come home as the door of the sheep Jesus is the only means of coming home to God of becoming a member of the household of faith you know Jesus is the way the door to your true home in God's family home whatever your outward economic or social status if you are a sheep of Jesus you have a place and a people and a father in him but you have to enter the door through faith trust trust alone in who

[14:11] Jesus is and what he has done is he your good shepherd my wife and I rented an apartment for the first couple couple or three years of our marriage church but when we bought our first home in South Jersey it was special we shouldn't have bought that home I have to be honest with you it was too far away we made the mistake that so many make and we never did it again we moved away from our church rather than closer to it because we were chasing the American dream we were chasing the home we had that we had that we had to have that house because that represented status that represented hey we've made it we you know we we were moving on up from the hood we were I was out of the hood baby I could walk around my house outside that is outside I mean I I had we so we so we not our hearts were in the wrong place because again what's the good life we bought that home but it was home it was home it wasn't an apartment

Elder Gilbert Sister Carol it was home there's nothing like owning your own home isn't it I mean there's a special place in there here we began our family and even today no matter where we go in the country and even the world there's still no place like home let me be clear an apartment is home if you never own a building your apartment is home don't believe the world's hype don't get sucked into it like we did for that moment of craziness wherever you live let it be home home but there's a better home you see this is what keeps us on the right path we gotta realize there's a better home and that home is Jesus y'all Jesus is home you were wandering in the desert of sin dehydrated exhausted hot but then you entered the door of the

Lord's sheep pen and you finally had a home you could finally rest you could finally be at peace but I have to ask you are you a sheep are you a sheep because only sheep can enter this door he's the door for the sheep not for the goats not for the wolves he's the door for the sheep and sheep are those people who admit they need a divine savior sheep are humble people who recognize that they can't fix their lives who recognize that everything they do to try to fix their lives without the good shepherd will fail if you're honest we're frustrated because we've been chasing the good life and we just can't see it's just out of reach and even if we got the money we think we want it you see it all the time it's still out of our reach because it's more than money

Jesus Jesus said there were many who had come before him among the Jewish people he's speaking of the Pharisees in particular they were the false shepherds the thieves and the robbers they they they they they they led the people astray and now we can say today now that there have been many who've come after Jesus too who also have proved to be thieves and robbers who have led the sheep astray thieves and listen to listen to them because thieves and robbers can be people false teachers or false religions and false ideologies they promise the good life but in the end they take your life these false ideologies and false teachers rob you of your freedom there are two types basically one especially religious ideologies there are two types of those one preaches rules without grace we call that legalism right the other preaches grace without responsibility that's antinomianism which means lawlessness lawlessness one puts you in bondage to their rules the other leaves you in bondage to your sins and desires one works you to death the other leaves you lazy this is what religion without a relationship to God through Jesus does to you it puts you in one of those categories either you're working hard to make God happy you're working working working into the kingdom into heaven into nirvana into paradise wherever you're trying to go you're working more do do do make God happy or the deity or the or the cosmic all whatever it is make that happy and then it will bless you that's the legalistic side and then the other side is the out the outback theology no rules just right baby whatever feels good to you whatever makes you happy doesn't hurt others so and so whatever that whatever that is see that's the other side and but here's the thing both those ideologies both those ways of trying to get to

God both those ways of trying to find the good life leave you dead sheep can't thrive under either one of those Philip Keller and you you you you must I hope you read this book a shepherd looks at Psalm 23 it's a classic now really neat book he was a shepherd who wrote on the Psalm he says this in my memory I can still see one of the sheep ranches in our district that was operated by he called them a tenant sheepman he ought never to have been allowed to keep sheep his stock were always thin weak and riddled with disease or parasites again and again they would come the sheep now would come and stand at the fence staring blankly through the woven wire at the green lush pastures that my flock enjoyed had they been able to speak

[21:10] I'm sure they would have said oh to be set free from this awful owner shepherd you see until you enter the Lord's pastures you're like those sheep and sadly even some of us who have entered the Lord's pen we end up being led astray because prone to wander remember Lord I feel it prone to leave the God I love we're still sheep and we still wander and we wander sometimes we end up wandering into the place of leanness and into a place of thinness and we get parasites and we're hungry and we get lean of soul and we're looking back at the people of God I wish I could be like so and so they seem to have so much joy just because you went on the wrong side of the fence you see when you enter the kingdom of God by trusting

Jesus through his work for you alone you find true freedom in his pen there's true freedom there's true freedom here and this leads to my next point my last point here this morning basically Jesus is the essence slash giver of the true good life some phrases you're going to see in a minute in and out pasture abundance that's what he talks about next he says that the sheep will be able to go in and out verse 9 they're saved will go in and out and find pasture that phrase in and out is a Hebrew idiom a Hebrew expression and William Barclay says it means to be able to come and go unmolested it was the Jewish way of describing a life that is absolutely secure and safe when people can go in and out without fear it means that their country's at peace that the forces of law and order are supreme and that they enjoy perfect security it means the leaders of this particular country have the affairs of their nation under control you see

Jesus is saying in my kingdom there's law and order in my kingdom I got everything under control in my kingdom there are no indictments of presidents because this president does it all right in my kingdom there is no voting in or voting out in my kingdom there is no war in the sense that a civil war an unrest among my no no no in this kingdom there is economic security because this king provides for his people he's a most loving and just ruler we go in and out in safety in the boundaries of his sheep pen and in the boundaries of his shepherding love you're safe your soul is safe in his land you have peace with God but he later in John he will warn us though as well as comfort us about this world as we talk about this in and out John 16 33 says

I've said Jesus speaking I've said these things to you that in me you may have peace in the world you will have tribulation but take heart I have overcome the world you see in our going in and out we are going in and out in the world not the world system per se but just in the world at large in and out not in and out the church not in and out of the kingdom but we are going about our daily affairs Jesus said as you remember the great commission go and make disciples literally it's as you are going so we as the people of God we go in and out we are going about our lives we're going about our callings we're going into work we're going to school we're going into life we're buying houses we're buying cars we're enjoying whatever economics we have we're exploring God's creation he says yes yes to all of that go in and out in in security not in who's in the white house but go in and out in security because of who is on the throne our security now is not determined by the

American economy or American security now don't get me wrong those things are important I'm not saying they're not important at all we're just saying that our security as the Lord's sheep is in the fact that he is reigning in the year that King Uzziah died Isaiah says I saw the Lord do you remember what happened Uzziah had reigned for 40 years God gave Isaiah a picture a vision of who was really in charge of the nation who was in charge of the economy who was the one who could bring real peace when Uzziah dies Isaiah sees the great shepherd the good shepherd the best shepherd who is reigning over all things and he is not even perturbed Uzziah died he loved him but that don't stop the Lord's plan don't stop the

[26 : 58] Lord's plan he's your good shepherd do you see him we can he says then you can go in and out and find pasture find pat now listen sheep never find pasture on their own they follow the shepherd to pasture I know you got that already right so be clear he says Philip Keller once again owing to their timidity sheep will not lie down remember Psalm 23 says says that he makes us lie down in green pastures read both those read Psalm 23 and go back and read John 10 together this week and see what you see he says Keller again owing to their timidity sheep will not lie down unless they are free of all fear free from all fear free from friction with other sheep free from pests aggravations and free from hunger sheep won't lie down in green pastures unless they're free from fear but it all depends on the diligence of the shepherd he to shepherd he can eat and be full and they can have no fear and they can rest because they know there's somebody watching over them who neither slumbers nor sleeps note that language in the psalms he that king

James he that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleep he is the great shepherd he's the ultimate shepherd he never goes to sleep on the job like those Turkish shepherds I told you about early on in the message who let their sheep wander off while they were eating breakfast our shepherd never gets distracted and so he can be there you can rest at night you can sleep you can you don't have to live in fear and anxiety Jesus our good shepherd seeks to calm our souls with his care of us he speaks peace to our souls reminding us that he is Emmanuel always with us he will deal with the pests and aggravations in our lives by giving us more grace to sustain us we are saved satisfied secure and of service to him whenever wherever the

Lord leads us because he is that great shepherd who leads us in and out of the pen so that we can be safe you see this leads to the abundant life this is what he's talking about I have come the thief comes to steal kill and destroy I have come that you may have life and have it to the full or have it abundantly see that's what he's talking about this is the good life that Jesus offers we are content in Jesus my pastor Dr.

Boyce talks about the word abundance he shows from the Latin how we get our English word abundance from the Latin it means to rise in waves to overflow it's like that word abundance it's like the unceasing wave surges hitting a beach or a river fed by heavy rains rising irresistibly into it overflows its banks the abundant life is therefore one in which we are content in the knowledge that God's grace his unearned undeserved favor and kindness that he gives us that's grace we are aware that his grace is more than sufficient for our needs that nothing can suppress his grace and that God's grace God's favor towards us is unending have you found contentment in your shepherd yet that's a word we don't even use anymore we don't even use the word contentment in our speech because people are not content the good life is just always future is always a little bit out of our reach but for us who are sheep of the

Lord Jesus contentment is our birthright right now in whatever state you are in because it's not dependent upon economics not dependent on how much stuff you have or where you live some of the most content people I know live in the hood what we call the hood because they have Jesus they have the good shepherd and we're not content and we don't live there we live on nice tree-lined streets many of us and we just want more we're not we're missing it we're missing it we're missing what this shepherd wants to give us when God's people begin to experience discontentment we experience shalom the peace of God that that big word that we like to throw around shalom it was it didn't mean it wasn't about it wasn't only merely about outward peace it was inward satisfaction it was it was it was joy in our

[32 : 38] God when you experience this peace and contentment and shalom and the pen of the Lord it will affect and infect other areas of your life you will live learn linger and work in contentment and peace your neighbors are not experiencing that contentment and we who live in the pen with Jesus we are meant to display so that people will look across your fence look on your porch or your deck and see you and know that there's something there there's something missing I don't have what they have and they may have more of this world's treasure than you and house bigger than yours nicer cars than you and they're looking at you and recognizing I'm missing something and they've got it what is it we have a shepherd we have a good shepherd

Moses says he was about to die pray God would raise up someone to shepherd his people in numbers 27 15 to 17 Moses spoke to the Lord saying let the Lord the God of the spirits of all flesh appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them who shall lead them out and bring them in that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep that have no shepherd now on the short stick it was Joshua who followed right behind Moses and other leaders but ultimately you see it it's right there in front of you ultimate it had to be Jesus it has to be Moses saying yes I'm talking about Jesus he is that shepherd of the congregation what does that tell you that's it you see it the congregation sheep don't do well by themselves sheep should be in a congregation sheep should be together with other sheep that's why this choosing to do this stuff from home video watching church you're missing it you're not independent you're missing it sheep don't do well by themselves they're communal animals that's the great strength of sheep besides wool and mutton sheep need other sheep they do well together even though there's problems they still do well together but they don't do well with friction of a sheep that's why the great shepherd commands us to reconcile with each other that's why it's not division in the body

Jesus hates it he promises to destroy folk who do it the body of the pen has got to be at peace with each other we have to fight for relationships we have to fight not each other but fight for them fight for harmony if you're not getting along with somebody in this church you need don't just sit there and go it's on them no it's on you do all as much as it depends on you be at peace with all people do what you can at some point you have to you can't do no more because some folk just won't they just harden their hearts and won't listen we know that but have you done everything you can the Harvard study I told you about bears witness to the importance of human connections it shows that people who are more connected to family to people who are more isolated than they want to be find their health declining sooner than people who feel connected to others lonely people also live shorter lives that's the study again the

Bible already knew this we have to study it to figure it out if we just went to the book we already know we need community the good life is a life of relationships with God and with other sheep and with family especially family who are fellow sheep are you living a good life yet are you still looking are you still looking have you been led astray have you been following the wrong voices and you are outside the pen looking in you see if we truly believe that life was Jesus in his pen as our shepherd was the good life how would that impact how we spend our money how would that impact where we choose to live how would that impact what church we attended how would that impact what we give our time to etc you see it's meant to life with

Jesus it touches everything but do you believe you're living the good life right now with Jesus if we really found our satisfaction and contentment in Jesus we wouldn't be controlled by what others have or what the ads tell us we must have we wouldn't kill ourselves or our families trying to climb the ladder of success we be less tempted not untempted but less tempted in our sexuality to find expression outside of heterosexual marriage we find blessing in being part of Christ's church knowing and being known knowing others and being known by them this is life in the pen but are you loitering at the door are you at the door looking in wondering if I don't know are you at the door are you debating about going in let me encourage you

[39 : 12] Jesus is the best shepherd best friend best God savior you'll ever have you'll ever know come on through the door trust in Jesus come on through the door when you go in and out for you who are sheep how are you listening for the voice of the good shepherd so he can lead you to pastor he'll lead you to pastor at work he'll lead you to pastor at school he'll lead you to pastor in recreation he'll lead you to pastor wherever you are the question is are you listening for his voice or have you bought into the false ideologies that basically tell you you can save yourself basically tell you get all you can before you die it don't work y'all we know it doesn't work we've seen it time and time again the rich and the famous are killing themselves you think we learn you think we wake up and say that's not the good life evidently and yet we still in our own way in your own way our own way we're still chasing behind the same poison pastures family you have a good shepherd let him feed you let him satisfy you you'll rise up and call me blessed if you do you'll say hey pastor thank you if you let

Jesus blow your mind with his kindness and goodness elders will you come now we running behind of course as always with me the Psalm 23 says he prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies I wonder is this part of that table the table land was the place where the shepherd would go and prepare on the high place would go and prepare the area he would go and clean it up make sure everything was good move rock stones all that stuff away so the sheep would get up there and they could just graze freely it's like Jesus went ahead of us to prepare he did it by dying because the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep that's how he prepares the way for us this table shows us that tale he's gone to prepare a place for you he did it by dying and rising again the good shepherd is feeding you at this table come sheep of the Lord come sheep of the Lord and enjoy and by the way I'm a sheep too just a little darker than some of you come and feast upon

Jesus come and be encouraged if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior this table is for you because you're a sheep but if you don't know him as your Savior this table will hurt you he warns us that we should that if we eat and drink without discerning the body of the Lord he says that's why some of you are weak some of you are sick and some of you are dead don't play with this table this table is for sheep it's poison to anyone else it's for sheep come and feast here if you don't know the Lord right now here's your call here's what he wants to do he wants to draw you to himself he wants to make you a sheep he wants to bring you into the kingdom aren't you tired of wandering around in the desert come on he wants you to come home he wants to wrap his arm he wants to grab you and bring you back into his love on you and deal with those parasites that's been bothering you he wants to clean your wall he'll do it he'll take care of all that stuff you just need to know he's your shepherd will you surrender yourself to him today

I get no points for this this is just between you and Jesus but I'm loving I'm begging you don't leave here without being a sheep don't leave this room until you've come to face to face with the living God he's speaking to you now will you become the Lord's sheep and surrender your life to him father as we come to this table we come as limping sheep aggravated sheep hurting sheep sometimes some of us are rejoicing sheep leaping to this table but some of us Lord we're just limping but thank you that we're sheep and we come that you would feed us make us healthy bind up our wounds put oil on us cleanse us oh Lord we come to this table to feast upon Jesus we know they don't the elements don't become his actual body and blood but we know spiritually he is present with us right now at this table to feed us to help us and so Lord we come for that help so help help us Lord and Father if there's anyone here who's not one of your sheep will you draw them will you by your spirit just just Lord just agitate them let them see this is true let them see this is not the preacher's words these are your words from your book help them to see who Jesus is please and change your lives even as you've changed mine and many others in this room here we are

Lord feed us now in Jesus name amen man