

Get a Life

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[0 : 00] Get a life. Possibly one of the most demeaning put-downs that you can have directed at you. Get a life. Some of you are thinking, well, I haven't come here to be insulted.

What does it imply? This phrase, these words that we often hear and maybe sometimes use. Get a life. Well, it suggests that you're alive but not really living. You breathe but you don't really live. You're trapped in an existence that is boring and mediocre, unable or unwilling to get a life to really start living. I want you to imagine that you have a friend who needs to get a life.

It's the classic scenario, isn't it? I have a friend, okay? So, we're going to go down that route. You have a friend who needs to get a life. Obviously, you don't, but you have this friend, okay, who needs to get a life? Where might this unfortunate friend get a life? What do you think? Your friend, it is your friend, of course, it's not you, your friend is relying on you to provide an answer.

What would you say to him? What would you say to her about getting a life, about living life to the full? Well, there are, no doubt, a number of possibilities out there that might help us in this quest for living life to the full. Maybe just a few suggestions and some F words, if we can call them that.

Freedom. Is that not what life to the full is all about, about having freedom?

Freedom. Some of you are coming for the first time to Aberdeen and leaving home for the first time, away from the restrictions and the rules, the limitations of home. And now you are free.

[2 : 14] You can do your own thing. You can make your own rules. Or in any case, you can choose the ones that you reckon are important and indeed every so often choose to break as some of these rules. Freedom.

Is that not what life to the full is all about? Or maybe another F word. It's about friends, having lots of friends, being part of the crowd, being accepted, being included, and all the opportunities that that affords, all the enjoyment to be had in being part of a group of friends. Is that what life to the full is all about? Or maybe it's about fun, new experiences, crossing the proverbial line that adds just a little bit of risk and excitement to life. Not always just living in the box and doing what you're told, but crossing those lines, experimenting, new experiences, freshers we, a time to experiment with drink, maybe with drugs, certainly with sex. Is that life to the full? Freedom, friends, fun, philosophy. I never was very good at spelling. Some people aren't into the party scene. Maybe it's not their thing. They're not Christians. They're not religious, but that's not their world. Speak to them about drink and drugs and they say, well, I'm not interested. But maybe for some the focus in seeking a life to the full is that search for knowledge, for exploring and mastering new ideas. Maybe even coming up with your own new ideas and your own new theories in different areas of knowledge. Is that not perhaps life to the full? Or maybe it's all about funds. It's all about money.

It's all about the toys that you have, the stuff that you can gather. The classic line that seems to be repeated in all the game shows, the chance to win life-changing amounts of money. You notice how that's the way it's always expressed. Now we've reached life-changing amounts of money. You could possibly get a life today if you could just win these 10,000 pounds. All this mediocre, sad life you've been living will be in the past and now you'll have life. You'll get a life. If only you had the money.

If only you had the funds. Now maybe for some of you this is the start of that. The route of academic endeavor and success, a glittering career that could follow and the financial rewards that will come in the wake of these efforts that you can put in now in the years that lie ahead.

Is that how you can get a life? Is that the advice you could give to this friend who wants to get a life? Who needs to get a life? Well, if your friend were to ask me where to get a life, I would have a different answer. That's not to say that all of the stuff mentioned above is wrong in and of itself, but it's not what life is all about and certainly it is not the source of true life.

[5 : 43] Well, what would my answer be? Well, I would point your friend to Jesus. Why did Jesus come into this world? We've already been thinking about that with the children this morning. Why did He come?

Well, listen to how He Himself answers that question. And He answers that question with these words, I have come that they might have life and have it to the full. Life to the full, rich, satisfying, exciting, fulfilling, life as a real adventure, life where your rich potential is tapped and blossoms, life to the full, life where you can enjoy true freedom to be what God designed you to be.

And for the avoidance of doubt, no shortage of friendship and fun in this life to the full that God would have you live. This is what Jesus came to secure for you. This is what Jesus offers you today. Life to the full. I wonder if that is what your friend would like. Well, let's learn a little bit more about this life to the full as we consider what Jesus says about it in John chapter 10, where we find these words, I have come that they might have life and have it to the full. John chapter 10, the Gospel of John chapter 10 on page 1076 in the church Bible. We're going to read a few verses in this chapter to set the scene for our exploration of what this life is all about.

John chapter 10, we'll read from verse 7 through to verse 17. John chapter 10 and verse 7.

I am the good shepherd.

[8 : 52] He knows me, and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life only to 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 authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.

I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. At the heart of this passage, we find, if you wish, this mission statement of Jesus. His mission statement. What was his mission? What did he come to do? Why did he come? Well, here we have his mission statement. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. And surrounding this declaration, surrounding this mission statement, if you wish, he is busy mixing his metaphors as he explains what is involved in entering into this life and experiencing this life to the full. The purpose of his coming is that you might have life and have it to the full. But in this passage, Jesus gives instruction as to how we can enter into this life and what will be involved in experiencing this life. And the two images that he uses that we want to think about briefly that speak about these two aspects, entering into life and experiencing life, are the image of a gate. There in verse 9, he describes himself in this way, I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. This idea of entering in to an experience, of entering into life. Jesus describes himself as the entry point. I am the gate. Whoever enters in through me. So that's a suggestion or instruction as to how we enter into this life. But there is another picture that Jesus uses, a related one. It is perhaps the more familiar one from this passage, and it is that of the Good Shepherd. I am the Good Shepherd. And his self-description as the Good Shepherd points to the experience of this full life. What does this full life look like? What is to be experienced in this full life that Jesus came to grant us, to provide for us? So the gate, that's the entrance to life.

The Good Shepherd, the experience of life. Let's consider these two pictures that Jesus himself uses. First of all, the gate. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.

To appreciate the picture and the truths that are revealed by this picture, I would invite you to visualize this gate for a flock of sheep. I'm sure you can do that. In your mind's eye, visualize this sheep pen and there's this gate. Now as you visualize this scene, this gate, sheep pen, I think you can agree with me. And in your mind's eye, you'll be able to see that there are, if you wish, three locations in that picture. What are the three locations? Well, there's the outside.

[12 : 40] You've got a gate, necessarily. It separates the outside from the inside. So you have the outside, that which is outside the gate. You have the gate itself, and you have the inside. Okay? Those are the three locations, if you wish, that we have presented to us by this picture that Jesus gives. I am the gate.

Outside, the gate itself, and inside. Well, let's think of these three things and see what they teach us about this matter of entering into this full life that Jesus would have us live.

We'll start with the inside. What is on the inside? What is beyond the gate? Once you go through the gate, what is there waiting for you? Well, what is on the inside is life to the full. In the verse in question, in verse 9, where Jesus describes himself as the gate, he goes on to say, I am the gate.

Whoever enters through me will be saved. He speaks of being saved. But here, Jesus is using this word saved, essentially, as synonymous with the offer of life to the full. Full life is synonymous with being saved. What is being saved? It is to experience, to enter into this full life that Jesus would have us live. So, what is on the inside, what is beyond the gate, is this life to the full that we're wanting to understand and to explain with the help of the teaching that Jesus brings to us? We are saved from spiritual death. We are saved from alienation from our God and Creator. We are saved from an empty and mediocre life. We are saved from slavery to sin and to self, saved to be what God wants you to be. So, on the inside, as we go through the gate, this is what we find. This is what we discover. This is what awaits us. Life to the full. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.

[15 : 03] So, there's the inside. But to get into the inside, you have to go through the gate. How do you get in? Well, you get in through the gate. Not that difficult to conceive the picture.

Well, where is this gate, this gate to life? Where is it that I might go through it? Well, again, the answer has been given so eloquently by Jesus. He has stated, as we have noted already, I am the gate. Whoever enters through me. Jesus is the gate. Jesus is the way to friendship with God.

Jesus is the way to reconciliation with God. It was Jesus Himself who said on another occasion, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me.

What does it look like or what does it involve going through this gate that is identified by Jesus as Jesus? Well, entering into life through Jesus involves recognizing who He is, recognizing what He has done for us, and putting our trust in Him. Now, I'm not going to develop that more at this precise moment because we'll come back to this just in a couple of moments. But as we consider these three locations of this first picture of the gate, the inside, what's on the inside? Well, on the inside is this life to the full. How do we get in? Well, we get in through the gate, and the gate is identified as Jesus. But then there is another location that we can't simply ignore. That is the outside.

The existence of an inside requires an outside. You can't have an inside without an outside. And what is the outside? Well, the outside is the place of spiritual death. It's the realm of self-centered living. In the words of the Bible, it is that place where you live without God and without hope. Now, the outside may sometimes appear very attractive, very alluring, but it is ultimately a lonely and destructive place for men and women. There was an old man addressing some young people in Scotland recently. And this old man recognized how the outside can appear a very glittering place.

[17 : 50] Listen to what he said. There are many temptations placed before you every day. Drugs, money, sex, pornography, alcohol, which the world tells you will bring you happiness. Yet these things are destructive and divisive.

There is only one thing which lasts, the love of Jesus Christ personally for each one of you. Search for him, know him, and love him. And he will set you free from slavery to the glittering but superficial existence frequently proposed by today's society. Answers on a postcard as to who that old man was. I'll give you a wee clue. It was in Bella Houston Park last week. So, Jesus is the gate or the entrance to the gate. But he is also, he also describes himself as the good shepherd. In this passage, not only does he describe himself as the gate, speaking of how we enter into life, how we can enter into the experience of life, but he also describes himself as the good shepherd, which points rather to the very experience of life. What is this life to the full like? And on that point, or in this matter, we can say two things. We could say many things, but two things that we want to limit ourselves to. And it is this, that the experience of life to the full involves at its heart a relationship with the good shepherd.

It involves a relationship with Jesus, but it also involves, and the two ideas are really ingrained together, it also involves the protection of Jesus. These are the two things I just want to comment on briefly. This life to the full, the experience of life to the full, having entered into this life through the gate that is Jesus, the experience of life to the full involves a relationship with Jesus. And it provides us with the protection of Jesus. Let's think, first of all, of this relationship with Jesus. Notice what Jesus says immediately on describing himself as the good shepherd in verse 14. There Jesus, for the second time, makes this claim, I am the good shepherd. But then he goes on to say, I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. This is the language of relationship.

What Jesus is affirming is that he enjoys this relationship with his people. Indeed, he describes it in quite remarkable way that in verse 15. He compares it in a stunning way with the relationship that he enjoys with his own father, just as my father knows me, and I know the father. So I know my people, and my people know me. The experience of this full life has at its heart this relationship with

Jesus Christ. And like any relationship, there are, of course, two sides to it. Jesus identifies them both. He says, first of all, there in verse 14, I know my sheep. We who have entered into life by putting our trust in Jesus, we are known by Jesus. Jesus knows his sheep. He knows his own. He knows us intimately and minutely. Jesus doesn't just know all about us as part of some divine, all-knowing prerogative. And of course, that is indeed his prerogative. That is indeed true of him, that he knows everything about us. That is so. But where here Jesus speaks of knowing his sheep, of knowing his people, it goes much beyond a mass of knowledge that he has at his disposal. Rather, he knows his people in the sense of a deep and intimate love for his people. This is the force of what Jesus is saying. He knows his sheep. He loves his sheep. He cares for his sheep. He knows us, and he understands us. He knows us and sympathizes with us. He knows us and so is able to help us at the very point of our need and vulnerability. The core and central need of men and women is to be loved. And Jesus meets that need in a way that no other can. I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep. So, known by Jesus. But this relationship, of course, cannot be only in one direction. Yes, we are known by Jesus. But in response to this, his own, his people, those who enter into life, come to know Jesus also. The relationship is not, nor can it be, just in one direction. It begins with Jesus, but we respond to his love. And life to the full involves getting to know Jesus more and more. And there can be no greater adventure than a life lived in this mission, as it were, in this activity of getting to know

Jesus more and more. Many of you are students. Some of you are beginning a course of higher education for the first time. And maybe, I hope, many or some of you have a great thirst for knowledge. And I would encourage you to satisfy that thirst. Explore, discover, go beyond what others have discovered.

[23 : 59] Why not? Perhaps hear future Nobel Prize winners in different fields of science and understanding. And by all means, dedicate yourselves to this search for truth and for knowledge. But let me tell you this, that there can be no greater knowledge than to know Jesus Christ. There is no greater excitement to be had than to know Jesus Christ, to come to know him more and more. And that is not to minimize or to belittle the value that there is in other areas of knowledge. But it is to state what is, I am persuaded, an undeniable effect. This was certainly the view of the Apostle Paul, as he expresses himself in the passage that we've already read, and that we will read again, but only one part of it, there in Philippians chapter 3 from verse 17. What does the Apostle Paul say?

But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of what? Of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him. Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings. And he goes on to know Christ. This is life to the full. This is eternal life. This is the experience of this life that Jesus has come to grant those who would receive what He offers at its very heart. This is the experience of being known by the Good Shepherd, of being known and being loved by Jesus, and of knowing Him back, of knowing Him more and more. The sentiments of the Apostle were paraphrased by Graham Kendrick in the song that is no doubt familiar to many of you. All I once held dear, built my life upon. All this world reveres and wars to own. All I once thought gain, I have counted loss, spent and worthless. Now, compared to this, knowing you, Jesus, knowing you, there is no greater thing. You're my all.

You're the best. You're my joy, my righteousness, and I love you, Lord. Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you.

Jesus Himself explains to us that this life that He has come to give involves this relationship with Him. I am the Good Shepherd. I know my sheep, and my sheep know me. And I ask you this morning, do you know Jesus? This is life to the full. This is the life that Jesus has come to give you. Listen to how Jesus Himself expresses this truth in conversation with His own Father, as we read in John's Gospel, chapter 17, and verse 3. Now this is eternal life. This is full life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. So, as we consider Jesus as the Good Shepherd, and as we consider what light that throws on this matter of experiencing life to the full, we have stressed and given the greatest emphasis on this wonderful truth, that it involves a relationship with Jesus, being known by

[28 : 10] Jesus and knowing Jesus. But very much connected with that, a supplementary idea is that the experience of this eternal life involves the protection of Jesus. In verse 11, Jesus says, I am the Good Shepherd.

And then He goes on to say, the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. And of course, Jesus here is using the picture of a shepherd to describe the protection that a shepherd affords to his flock.

And He develops, and we don't have time to do so, the contrast between those who are simply hired men, who aren't really concerned for the sheep, and those who actually own the sheep. And He describes Himself as one who owns the sheep, who knows the sheep, who loves the sheep. And so, He is willing to provide this ultimate protection for the sheep. I am the Good Shepherd. And the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, died in the place of His sheep. Here He speaks of what was coming. Here He speaks of what awaited Him at Calvary. Here He speaks of His firm intention and willingness to lay down His life for the sheep. And of course, the time came when He did precisely that. And He died.

He died for His sheep to secure for them, to secure for us, to secure for you, life eternal, life to the full. He died to crush the grip of sin and guilt that would keep us on the outside. He died taking the punishment of sin and in the place of sinners. But as we think of this picture, some might respond with a measure of good reason and might say, well, hang on, surely the death of the shepherd implies disaster for the sheep. Is that not the case? Imagine a shepherd who's looking after a sheep, sheep, and he dies. What would be the fate of the poor sheep? Well, it would be a disaster. The one who was there to protect them, oh, it was very heroic of him to die, but he's dead now. And the poor sheep, well, they are now really seriously at the mercy of the wolves because the shepherd is dead. What good is a dead shepherd? Some might protest. A reasonable protest.

[30 : 36] But not this death, and not this shepherd. For this shepherd who died for his sheep did not remain in the grip of death, but he rose again triumphant over death. Listen to what Jesus Himself says in this regard concerning this life that He hands over 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.

This perfect demonstration of the Good Shepherd's protective love is a done deal. It's in the past. It's something that Jesus has already done. He laid down His life for the sheep 2,000 years ago. It's done.

But the intensity of love for His own that took Jesus to the cross remains unchanged and undiminished this very morning. This is eternal life. This is life to the full. This is the life that Jesus came to secure for you and to provide for you to be known and loved by Jesus, to be rescued and protected by Jesus, enjoying the life that Jesus secured by handing over His life for the sheep. There is no better life. In fact, there is no true life other than the life to be enjoyed in and through Jesus Christ.

And so, as we draw things to a close and return to where we began, get a life. Get a life. How? No. But it all starts as you go through the gate. There is only one gate. There aren't many gates for you to choose from. There is one gate and one gate alone through which you must walk. And that gate is Jesus. He is the only way to this eternal life. He is the only way to friendship with God. He is the only way to secure forgiveness for your sins. There is one gate. But listen well, it is an open gate.

[33 : 04] It's an open gate. It's not a locked gate. It's not a closed gate. It is an open gate. It is wide open for you. It's not difficult to get in. There's no need to scramble over the wall. No picking the lock. No ringing on the bell until somebody answers. The gate is wide open for you.

If you are on the outside, be assured that the gate is open and you are welcome. The arms of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, the eternal Son of God, His arms are wide open for you.

If you would but come, if you would but approach Him, if you would but respond to the invitation that He makes that you would come and walk through this wide open gate, open for you.

I wonder, will your friend come in from the outside and enjoy the embrace of Jesus and get a life? Perhaps, just for a moment, forget about your friend. Will you get a life? Let us pray.