

# What Did Jesus Say?

*“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”*

I grew up in Kit Carson, Colorado, a small town with a population of about 350 people. It was mostly a rural population of farmers and ranchers, and, in fact, there were far more cattle per square mile in the county than there were people. As one can imagine, Kit Carson was by no means a metropolis, nor did it offer many distractions outside of cattle tipping. If you were to blink while driving down the main highway through town, you would miss it entirely.

When I was ten years old, my family decided that it was time to move. To my complete and utter joy, we were headed to Colorado Springs, which offered previously unrealized distractions such as Wal-Mart (formerly a 60 mile drive for us). Although I loved growing up in Kit Carson, I was very excited about the change of scenery and the new and many opportunities I would have in this “mega” city. In reality, I really did thank God for being true to His word and providing me with a new and abundant life, as John 10:10 promises.

However, the context in which I was thinking about this scripture as a ten-year-old was more than a little flawed, to say the least. I understood abundance only as a term that described large sums. At the time, I anticipated that the move to the new city would provide numerous and better distractions, more friends, more chances to go to the movies, and generally, more of anything that I really wanted to get my hands on. All of these extra things I thought would certainly increase the level of happiness in my life.

Even eleven years later, I still struggle with thinking that abundance means only a state of physical plenty. I would be lying if I told you that more A’s on my transcript, more money, and more accomplishments are not incredibly attractive to me. I still get caught up in thinking that having more increases the magnitude of how well I am able to live my life and how I ought to measure my significance. Yet this philosophy is contrary to what Jesus said in Luke 12:15: “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.”

So what is this “abundant life” that Jesus does actually promise in John 10:10, and what steps are necessary to procure it?

The latter part of this question is best answered in John 10:9, where Jesus says, “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.” In preparing to deliver His promise of an abundant life, Jesus describes Himself as a door, or rather a portal, to a better life. Choosing to walk through this door and accepting Christ as savior is the beginning of an abundant life.

The first question, however, that of what Jesus means by “abundant life,” is more difficult to answer. I believe that this abundance, the one Christ promises to those who follow Him, is threefold: it contains His forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7), His mercy (Hebrews 10:17-19), and His grace (Romans 3:23-24), which Christ provided through His love and sacrifice on the cross. What is unique about these three gifts is that they have the capacity to restore us, spare us, and give us favor. Despite what we may have done and failed to do, Jesus says that through His forgiveness, all of us can be restored to our purpose and spared from the consequence that would normally be due for such faults, and this is the manifestation of His mercy. Jesus goes one step further and graciously gives favor to those who trust Him, not holding past records against them. Ultimately, the abundant life Christ promises is a life filled with and measured by the sum of His infinite forgiveness, mercy, and grace. The abundant life promised by Jesus has complete and perfect restoration that suffers no shame, and this life experiences all of His favor.

The world in which we live does not generally operate with these properties. Dishonorable behavior suffers shameful outcomes. All types of records are kept to monitor both our accomplishments and our failures. These records are used by others to develop conclusions about the substance of our character and our capabilities. I personally find that living with a constant awareness of these records is exhausting. Thankfully, Jesus does not characterize us through these types of records. All He uses to measure us is whether or not we have accepted His gift of forgiveness in recognition of our incompleteness. Deciding to accept this gift is enough to win His favor.

Perhaps, then, it is not a mistake that we try to measure our lives by an abundant sum. Only, the parts of this sum cannot come from anything we accomplish, acquire, or achieve: the abundance we have in our lives has absolutely nothing to do with our abilities. On the contrary, it has everything to do with Jesus. The abundance by which we ought to measure our lives is based on everything that Jesus did for us on the cross in saving us and providing us with His infinite forgiveness, mercy, and grace.

- Peter Perdue ‘13