

# INTRODUCTION

*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

—*John 10:10*

I ran out of gas once. I was shocked. My '89 Topaz had numerous problems, but I assumed the gas gauge was not one of them. The gauge clearly told me that I had enough gas to reach my destination, but for some reason—despite what my gauge told me—I found myself stranded on the side of the road.

I felt stupid. I felt so betrayed, so humiliated. “I can’t be out of gas!” I yelled out loud.

The gauge *said* I had a full tank.

As I walked down the highway past the gravel, tire parts, and road kill, I mentally vented my anger: *That stupid fuel gauge.* I felt a little better as I blamed an inanimate object for my predicament.

Everyone else was zipping happily by me in cars with obviously functioning fuel gauges. My fuel gauge deceived me and I was stuck.

It’s not fun to run out of gas.

Have you ever run out of gas?

Not your car—you.

I have.

The gauge I was looking at in my life clearly read *full*, but I still found myself stranded on the side of life’s road. The gauge I was using—the *world*—was flawed, but I didn’t realize it until my tank was empty and I was going nowhere. If we judge whether or not our lives are “full” based on the world’s standards, we are destined to run out of gas.

The problem is that the world says our lives are full simply because we are busy.

My wife and I spent the summer after our college graduation traveling. We drove thousands of miles seeing the country and visiting family. One of our final stops was in the booming metropolis of Sugar Tree Ridge, Ohio, where we stayed on my wife's grandparents' farm. That evening we enjoyed a delicious dinner of fried chicken, fresh green beans, homemade biscuits, and strawberry shortcake. As we sat there with Mamaw and Papaw Emery delighting in the taste of the food and the sweetness of the fellowship, I told Mamaw how much I liked the chicken. Then she said something that changed my life forever.

She thanked me, then revealed that the chicken I was enjoying had been enjoying its own life just hours earlier. Mamaw Emery made chicken the old-fashioned way—she caught it!

I sat quietly and grew queasy as she explained in detail how she caught the chicken, stepped on its neck, and pulled its head off.

The story got better.

I was sitting with a half-chewed piece of chicken hanging out of my mouth—unsure I wanted to swallow—as she continued the vivid description of the gentle way she prepared our main course.

Mamaw explained that after she separated the chicken's neck from its body, the body flapped frantically around the yard. Fun. I carefully swallowed—thanking Mamaw for teaching me an important lesson—and then excused myself from the table.

Several years after that meal, as I thought about that chicken running around with its head cut off, I realized that Mamaw Emery really had taught me an important lesson: activity does not equal vitality.<sup>1</sup>

Just because we are *busy* doesn't mean that we are *alive*.

Just because the world says our lives are full doesn't mean that our lives *really* are full. Our lives are not full simply because

we are working hard, playing hard, and living hard. When we try to fill our lives with the fuel of this world, we find ourselves running on empty.

I want you to let true Life—Jesus Christ—help you have a truly full life.

The gospel of John records that Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). In other words, Christ said that he wants us to have “life—in abundance.” He wants our tanks full of life, life, and more life spilling over us, through us, and out of us.

The apostle John loved life. He used a form of the word *life* sixty-nine times in his gospel. He was not alone in this passion. Luke talked about life thirty-two times, Matthew twenty-nine times, and Mark thirteen times.

John, however, talked about life more than twice as much as any one of the other gospel writers. Why was he obsessed with life? We know that he was one of Jesus’ closest friends—so close that while on the cross, Jesus entrusted John with the care of his mother.

I think John was obsessed with life lived in abundance because he walked with the very source of life for more than three years.

I read that every person over the age of thirty-three is obsessed with death. Death will inevitably arrive for each of us, but first we must live.

I want to be obsessed with life.

Jesus was and is obsessed with life. He didn’t come so that our lives would be busy. He came so that our lives would be *full*.

I want to have an abundant life—as Jesus defined it. And I want the same for you. In this book, we will journey with Jesus through the gospel of John, identifying with Christ the twenty-one elements of an abundant life. As we incorporate these principles into our lives, we’ll discover how meaningful an abundant life can be.

One of my favorite movies is *Braveheart*. It is the story of a Scottish rebel, William Wallace, who led an uprising against the cruel English ruler Edward “Longshanks” who wanted the crown of Scotland for himself. After Wallace’s wife is killed, he begins a long quest to make Scotland free, once and for all. Near the end of the movie, Wallace is visited in his prison cell by the daughter of the king, who has fallen in love with him. He is to be executed, and she enters his cell to beg him to confess and swear allegiance to the King of England. Wallace will not compromise; he will not surrender. The princess, knowing there is no hope for Wallace unless he confesses, says, “You will die! It will be awful!” To which Wallace replies, “Every man dies, not every man really lives.”

That quote leaves me feeling both convicted and motivated. Conviction comes when we ask ourselves, *Am I truly living?* Motivation comes when we embrace the conviction our answer brings.

Are we truly living? We get up; brush our teeth; hug our kids; and go to work, school, or to the couch. We inhale and exhale shallow, safe breaths. We pay our bills. We confront a multitude of stimuli throughout the day. But is this living?

It’s time for us to get a life.

Maybe you’ve only heard this challenge from a critic: “You think you’ll get that promotion? Get a life!” “You think he’s being faithful to you? Get a life!” “You’re going back to college? Get a life!” “You’re going to start going back to church? Get a life!”

I want to steal this challenge from the critic and give it to you with a smile on my face and with joyful anticipation for you if you accept my challenge: Get a life!

Each day of life is a gift. Take it, say thanks, and open it. Lift the corner of the box and try to imagine the treasure waiting for you inside. Tear it open. Rip away the stuff of this earth and gaze at the present from heaven.

Get a life!

Don't get sucked into the routine of the dead: waking, working, eating, sleeping, paying, and dying. Dream big dreams. Inhale and exhale deeply. As often as possible, skip.

My daughter is a great skipper. She skips everywhere.

Do you know why she skips? She skips because she doesn't have to pay taxes. She skips because all her friends are still alive. She skips because she's healthy. She skips because she's glad to be alive. Have you ever seen a sad skipper? Skipping is a sign of a joy-filled heart.

We all need to stop whatever we're doing that we think is so important and skip.

(Side note: I think that we could use a little more skipping in this world. I say we get all the world leaders, put them in one room, and say, "We're going to talk politics, but first ... everyone skip!" I think this has real potential.)

We need to sing songs, smell the flowers, hug our kids, stay up late, laugh excessively, call an old friend, and kiss our spouse—on the lips—like we did before our hair started falling out or turning gray.

Get a life! We are the children of the Lord of Life. To not live fully each day—to waste one moment of life—would be to deny our identity and squander an opportunity.

My sister wrote a song with a profoundly true line. "Time's like a bubble that's caught on the breeze. You reach out to touch it—and it's gone."<sup>2</sup>

I just turned thirty-four and I can't believe how quickly I got here. Time flies whether or not one is having fun. As I blew out my candles, I felt convicted. What had I done in thirty-four years? I also felt motivated and decided—at that very moment—to write this book. I will not let thirty-five arrive without writing the book I've said for years I'd write.

I have three humble goals for this book. First, I want it to be practical. It's full of simple stories and images designed to

be remembered easily and woven into the fabric of your daily life. Second, I want you to be blessed in some way for having read it. Your time is precious and should not be wasted. Third, I want every person who reads this book to remember—if only for a moment—that life is a special gift to be cherished, opened, and enjoyed.

I am a simple person, so this is a simple book with short chapters, uncomplicated themes, and down-to-earth lessons. There are twenty-one chapters in the gospel of John; each presents elements of a truly full life, so there are twenty-one chapters in this book.

I am also a practical person, so throughout this book you'll find sections titled "Refuel!" which are easy activities designed to get you out of your comfort zone and into life.

Walk slowly through this book. Linger in its pages. Reflect on its stories. Read a chapter. Walk away. Take a nap. Take a run. Pet the dog. Kick the cat. (Just making sure you're paying attention.) Lie on your back in the front yard and see what amazing creatures are hiding in the clouds. Come back to this book before you go to bed. As much as possible, try to integrate the lessons of this book into your everyday life.

And when our journey together is through, look me up so we can talk about what it is to get a life. You won't have any trouble spotting me. I'll be the one skipping.

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## ELEMENT 1

# LIGHT

*In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

*—John 1:4–5*



I was afraid of the dark when I was a little kid.

One Saturday morning, I woke before the sun came up. I wanted a drink of water, so I began to crawl out of my bunk bed when—to my horror—I encountered the most hideous creature I had ever seen hulking to gargantuan proportions just beyond the door.

Well ... I didn't actually *see* the creature. I saw its grotesque shadow on the wall outside my room. I was petrified. As I lay in bed with my covers clinched in my tightly curled fingers, I could see the monster's movements reflecting on the wall. I couldn't yell—he surely would enter my room immediately and devour me just to keep me quiet. I couldn't move—he would hear me and eat my entire family. So I lay there staring at the wall outside my room.

I don't know how long I lay in the dark, afraid of the monster, but I do know how he died.

As the sun rose that morning, the monster on the wall began to disappear. My fear faded away with the light of day. With the rising of the sun, I realized that the monster on the wall wasn't a monster at all. It was the moonlit shadow of a plant outside my window dancing on the hallway wall. I was still thirsty, so I bravely jumped out of bed and got my drink.

*Darkness will make a thirsty boy so afraid that he will not walk ten steps to get a drink of water.*

In the darkness we have more shadows than substance.

In the darkness we have more questions than answers.

In the darkness we have more fear than faith.

In the darkness we have more fantasy than reality.

In the darkness Satan likes to put shadows of monsters on the walls to paralyze us with fear.

I'm not afraid of the dark anymore, but I still don't like it. I'm in good company, too. God doesn't like the dark either.

God's first *spoken* words in the Bible were, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). God created light first because it is essential for life. John reminds us that Jesus was there when God turned the lights on for the first time so that we could have life. "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (John 1:3–4).

God's first *living* Word in this world was Jesus, "the true light" (John 1:9). God sent light to our dark world because the Light is essential for life. Light was the first element of life on earth, and it's the first element of a life that is truly full. Just as we need light to live in this world, we need the "Light of the World" (John 8:12) to live life abundantly. No light—no life. Know light—know life.

Light is the first element of a full life.

There are creatures that thrive in the darkness and have developed a comfortable existence in a world separated from light: lightning bugs, owls, rats, vampires, and Pharisees.

Nicodemus was a creature of the dark. He even came to Jesus at night, presumably so he would not be seen by others (see John 3:2). As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was a ruler of the Jews and a distinguished scholar. We know from John 3 that he was also interested in the ministry of the Light of the World. His world was a dark world of cold religious traditions and rituals.

Cave-dwelling animals that live in the dark become blind and pale. Like a cave-dwelling creature, Nicodemus was spiritually blind and pale. He was comfortable in the dark, and so it is fitting that his first encounter with Jesus was in the dark.

Mine was. I was trapped in the darkness of sin when I first embraced the Light of Life.

God designed our eyes to adjust to different amounts of light. When we first leave the bright light and enter a dark room, we can't see. We bend over, stretch out our arms, and try to keep from kicking a toe on something hard, but eventually we adjust quite well to the dark. In fact, we can grow comfortable there.

Are you comfortable in the darkness? Bars are dark. Back-alleys are dark. Night clubs are dark. It's ironic that it's called "Night-Life" when, in fact, so much of what occurs when the sun is blocked and the lights are off is so spiritually deadly. Darkness hides sin; it will kill us if we try to live there too long.

When you've been in a dark room long enough for your eyes to adjust to the darkness, light is painful and disruptive. Turn on the lights in a dark room filled with people and you'll hear the moans of frustration. The immediate impact of bright



## REFUEL!

1. *Grab a flashlight, go into a room, and turn out the lights.*
2. *Read John 1 and then turn out the flashlight.*
3. *In the darkness of that closet, confess the darkness in your life.*
4. *When you are finished, turn on the light.*
5. *Repeat when necessary.*

light piercing into darkness is discomfort, but the long-term impact is life. That light and the life it brings are vital.

Turn the light on.

A country church was located so remotely that for many years there was no electricity. Finally, an enterprising company offered electricity to the area. At one of the business meetings of the church, someone stood and said, "Now that we have electricity, I make a motion that our church buys a chandelier."

The most cantankerous member of the church, who always voted "agin" what everyone else was for, made the following plea: "I hope we don't vote to buy a chandelier. After thinking long and hard on this situation, I have come up with three reasons why we should forget about buying a chandelier. In the first place, if we bought a chandelier, nobody would know how to spell it. In the second place, nobody in this church knows how to play it. And, besides all that, what we need is some light!"

We need light, too. If you are living in a world of darkness, then you are living in a world of death. If you want to live an abundant life, then you must be committed to live in the light. Leave the dark thinking behind. Leave the dark living behind.

*In the dark you can't see.*

*In the dark you can get hurt.*

*In the dark you will deteriorate.*

*In the dark you will die.*

God created us for light, and he sent the Light to create life for us in this life and in the next, so "Let there be light!"

There. That ought to take care of the monsters.