



I AM THE
GOOD SHEPHERD.
THE GOOD
SHEPHERD LAYS
DOWN HIS LIFE
FOR THE SHEEP.

JOHN 10:11

I AM

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

DATE

September 5 & 6

WEEK

4 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 10:10-30

KEY VERSE

John 10:11

SETTING THE STAGE

Last week we looked at the end of John 9 and the beginning of John 10, where Jesus is proclaiming the third *I Am* statement while talking to a combative group of Pharisees. Jesus gave a word picture of a shepherd, sheep and the sheepfold with only one entrance. Jesus very clearly stated, not once, but twice that “*I am the Door.*” Jesus is the door into the sheepfold, representing salvation. It is in salvation that there is freedom, security, and purpose.

Today we pick up where we left off. Jesus is still talking, which you will notice if you have a “red letter” edition of the Bible. Jesus is still painting a word picture. Jesus is still using the example of a shepherd and sheep but shifts positions from a door to a shepherd, focusing more on the relationship between shepherd and sheep.

In these verses Jesus proclaims the fourth *I Am* statement in the very same context with the very same audience as last week. Jesus says, “*I am the Good Shepherd*” thus becoming not just positional as the door, but relational to the sheep as their provider and protector. Shepherds were known to be loyal to their sheep and even sacrificial. In the agricultural and rural culture of the first century, people were familiar with the roles of shepherds; and like any other profession, some were good and others were less than good. Jesus gives a clear contrast as He declares what it means to be a Good Shepherd.

LESSON OUTLINE

1. Who the Shepherd Is
2. What the Shepherd Does
3. What the Sheep Need to Do

THINGS TO KNOW

- Whenever the name “*The LORD*” is used throughout Scripture, it is referring to the covenant name of God, “*Yahweh*,” God’s personal name.
- The Greek word “*Kalos*” is translated as “good”. The literal meaning is: excellent, honorable, commendable, surpassing.¹
- We will only know Jesus as Shepherd when we begin to see ourselves as sheep.

I AM

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Introduction

The rural imagery of shepherds and sheep is difficult to imagine in our largely metropolitan and increasingly suburban culture. In the United States, the closest profession that could relate would be ranching. But even that profession falls short of conveying the nature of shepherding in ancient times.

The image of shepherding is nevertheless an important one in Scripture, as there are over 500 different references to sheep and over 200 different references to shepherds.² Thus, one could argue that this rural image might be God's favorite analogy in describing the nature of His unique relationship to us.

Perhaps the most popular passage in the Bible that invokes this rural imagery is Psalm 23, which may be the most well-known chapter in the entire Bible. Whether you have spent your entire life in church or are brand new to Christianity, you are likely familiar with it.

PSALM 23:1-6 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures.*

He leads me beside still waters.

³ *He restores my soul.*

*He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.*

⁴ *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,*

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ *You prepare a table before me*

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

forever. (ESV)

You can find this passage sketched on paintings, glazed on coffee cups, stamped on bookmarks, printed on T-shirts, and stitched into quilts. What is interesting is that BibleGateway.com, the world's leading and most used online Bible, reports that Psalm 23 is the most searched chapter in



¹ biblestudytools.com/lexicon

² www.studylight.org

the Bible year after year; and even more astonishing, that all six of its individual verses each rank in the top 20 most searched verses in the entire Bible year after year.³

One thing is certain, regardless of whether or not we are familiar with the rural image of shepherding and sheep, the image of the Lord as our Shepherd resonates deeply within us. It gives us a picture of God who provides comfort, deep satisfaction, and real peace. It touches our deepest nerve, and it awakens our deepest yearning. And in John 10, Jesus steps into our context and says, *“I am He. I am the Good Shepherd.”*⁴

In the following lesson, we will observe John 10:10-18 and study what it means for us to see Jesus as the Good Shepherd He promises to be for us, literally picking up where we left off last week when Jesus said with compassion and confidence, *“I am the Door.”*

1. WHO THE SHEPHERD IS

JOHN 10:10-11 *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

In explaining to us who He is as our Good Shepherd, Jesus first draws a contrast to who He is not: the thieves and robbers, who come to steal and kill and destroy. In fact, Jesus is the exact opposite of them. Instead of taking our life, He lays down His life for us.

Jesus continues by employing another contrast as well. He contrasts Himself not against obvious evil (thieves and robbers), but interestingly against even the best “hired hands”—those who are good employees working for the shepherd. Read His words:

JOHN 10:12-13 *He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. (ESV)*

The difference between shepherds and thieves, robbers, and hired hands is that shepherds have a vested interest in their sheep.

A. Our Shepherd Invests In Us.

Robbers and thieves do not have an investment in the sheep. They only want to exploit the sheep for their own gain. Additionally, even though hired hands are positioned to care for the sheep, even they do not have an investment in the sheep, their interest in the sheep is simply work-related as they are compensated for their time in caring for them. This is why whenever hired hands see trouble that could potentially threaten them, they run and abandon the sheep because they value their lives over the lives of the sheep.

But the shepherd is different from the robbers, thieves, and hired hands because the shepherd has ownership of the sheep. The shepherd’s wealth is the sheep. The quality and quantity of the flock is the shepherd’s pride and joy, bringing him honor and wealth.

This is why Jesus says in the parable found in Luke 15:1-7, a good shepherd will temporarily leave the 99 sheep and fetch the one sheep that wandered off. Every single sheep matters because they

³ <https://www.BibleGateway.com/year-in-review>

⁴ Timothy Keller, *The Good Shepherd* (Redeemer Church, NYC), July 14, 1991.

are inextricably tied to him. In rural ancient cultures, the shepherd would live, sleep, and spend every moment with the sheep.

Timothy Keller says, “when Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd, He is making the grand statement that “His people are His joy and pride and glory.” In being our shepherd, God has bound up His honor and glory and joy with our honor and glory and joy.”⁵

Thus, as we are navigating life, we must ask ourselves a couple of questions:

- Who is my shepherd? Does my shepherd care for me like this?
- How ought I perceive my circumstances in light of this great truth, that my Good Shepherd’s glory and honor and joy is bound up into mine?

The question is not **whether** we have a shepherd, but rather **who** or **what** is our shepherd. We are all following something or someone that we believe will care for us deeply, protect us completely, and empower us. We are all looking to something or someone to give us that “abundant life, life to the full” for which we yearn.

And Jesus is boldly saying, “*I am the Good Shepherd.*” And if He is, then no one else nor nothing else is. Jesus does not only have ownership investment in you; He has a double-ownership investment in you because He laid down His life for you. His investment in your life is His very own life.

In contrast, all other shepherding figures—robbers, thieves, or hired hands—do not have any investment in you like the Good Shepherd does. So, when trial or tribulation comes, they leave because they have no investment in you. All other potential shepherds—things we are living for and following relentlessly for life and happiness—cannot love us in a way that we deeply desire. Romance does not have any investment in you. Job security does not have any investment in you. Approval from others does not have any investment in you. Good looks do not have any investment in you.

What makes all false shepherds similar is that none of them willingly lay down their life for us, yet we often lay down our lives for them.

If we put our stock in them, the “market”—whatever our circumstances may be—may crash and we will lose our investment. What makes all false shepherds similar is that none of them willingly lay down their life for us, yet we often lay down our lives for them. We so easily invest in them, even though they do not invest in us.

But the Good Shepherd readily invests in us and voluntarily lays down His life for us. When trial or tribulation come, the Good Shepherd feels our pain, feels our worry, feels our fret because His welfare is connected to our own. And soberingly, unless we find Jesus as our Good Shepherd, we will try to find some distorted, cheap type of shepherding somewhere else.⁶

B. He Knows Us Fully.

We can also see another glimpse of who our Good Shepherd is by how He knows us.

JOHN 10:14-15 *I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know Me,¹⁵ just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. (ESV)*

These verses are easy to read quickly. Instead, take a moment and think intently about Jesus’ statement.

⁵ Timothy Keller, *The Good Shepherd*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

Jesus knows us in the same way that He knows the Father. Jesus has known the Father from eternity past and delighted in that perfect relationship forever. They know each other deeply and perfectly. And then Jesus, remarkably, says that He knows us—His very own sheep—in the same kind of way. He knows us and delights in us and cherishes His relationship with us with great loyalty and sacrifice.

In other words, Jesus knows the deepest, most wicked, and shameful parts of us and loves us deeply enough to still lay down His life for us. Romans 5:8 says, “*While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” When we were at our weakest and most sinful—Jesus still loved us enough to count us as the one who wandered from the 99 and laid down His life for us.

Also, if the Good Shepherd knows us this intimately and deeply, there is not the smallest detail in your life in which He is not aware, both good and bad. David realized this truth when he wrote Psalm 139.

PSALM 139:1-3 *O LORD, You have searched me and known me.*

² *You know when I sit down and when I rise up;*

You understand my thought from afar.

³ *You scrutinize my path and my lying down,*

And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.

We can trust the Good Shepherd, therefore, with every detail, every confusion, hurt, pain, and uncertainty of our lives as we follow Him. This truth should motivate us to remove any wall that we have attempted to put up between us and our Shepherd. Jesus already knows the depths of our soul, our greatest fears, and grandest dreams. He is not only willing but desiring to walk with us every step of the way all the days of our lives.

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This is who the Good Shepherd is: He loves us deeply, and He knows us fully. Being led by this kind of shepherd is an experience our hearts desperately long for. To be fully known and yet fully loved. If this is who the Good Shepherd is, let us see what He does for us as an expression of who He is to us.

2. WHAT THE SHEPHERD DOES

JOHN 10:15B *and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

Ultimately Jesus is foreshadowing what is going to take place on the cross, when He lays down His life for you and me. This would be the ultimate sacrifice for our Good Shepherd. However, the good news of the Gospel is that our Good Shepherd not only laid down His life but rose from the grave and lives today! Therefore, we have this relationship with a living Savior, Jesus Christ as our personal Good Shepherd.

Any shepherd who is a good manager always bears in mind one great objective: that his flock may flourish. The continuous well-being of his sheep is his constant preoccupation.⁷ Jesus as the Good Shepherd wants the best for the sheep for whom He laid down His life. The responsibility of the shepherd is to both protect and prod the sheep depending on the situation.

King David was a shepherd, both literally and figuratively. He was tending sheep as a teenage boy when Samuel came to anoint him to be King of Israel. Because of his background as a shepherd,

⁷ Phillip Keller, *The Shepherd Trilogy*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 228.

David wrote Psalm 23, his experience allowing him to say with boldness and confidence, “*The Lord is my Shepherd.*” In describing God as his shepherd, David goes on to say in Psalm 23:4, “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*”

In the darkest of times, in the valley of the shadow, when we have the Good Shepherd we never have to fear evil because we are not alone. The Good Shepherd is prepared to protect us when needed and prod us when necessary. He does that with His rod and staff. Sometimes these are two separate items. A rod can be a small club like a piece of wood, while the staff is the long stick

with a hook or crook at the end you see in so many pictures of shepherds in biblical times. But it would not be unusual for a shepherd to simply have one of those which would be the long stick with the hook which could serve as both the rod and the staff.

The stick portion would be used to protect the sheep from wolves and anything that would try to harm the sheep. But it could also be used to prod the sheep if they were just standing around sulking becoming stagnant. The hook portion of the staff served two purposes. One purpose would be to extend the arm length of the shepherd and the second purpose would be to pull the sheep back if they were wandering off, they would use the hook to gently wrap around the neck of the sheep and pull it back into the flock.

Jesus, as our Good Shepherd does the exact same thing because He knows us, loves us, and wants the best for us. He will protect us from danger and harm if we allow Him to do so. He will prod us when we become stagnant and sulking in our circumstances or even wandering in the wrong direction if we allow Him to do so. This is a relationship, both the shepherd and the sheep have responsibilities.

3. WHAT THE SHEEP NEED TO DO

JOHN 10:16-18 *I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd.*¹⁷ *For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.*¹⁸ *No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”*

A. Trust in the Shepherd.

Sheep are not like most animals. There are wild horses, wild pigs, wild dogs, wild cats. For example, if you let one of these animals go, two things will either happen: 1) They will go wild and never return; or 2) they will return home.

But sheep just wander around. They have no sense of being wild and independent because they are so dependent on being cared for, protected, and guided. Their going “wild” leads quickly to their death. Sheep have no sense of direction nor discernment about what to eat. They are completely dependent upon the shepherd.

Similarly, we are like sheep who are completely dependent on the Lord. We often think we can be independent and survive without His care and supervision, but we are mistaken. Keller notes that “We like the sound of the Lord being our Good Shepherd, but we hate the truth of it.”⁸ This is because it means utter surrender and complete lordship. For Jesus to be our Good Shepherd, we have to come to Him releasing our own terms and conditions.

The Good Shepherd is prepared to protect us when needed and prod us when necessary.

“We like the sound of the Lord being our Good Shepherd, but we hate the truth of it.”⁸

⁸ Timothy Keller, *The Good Shepherd*.

He is trustworthy. We are to lay down our life in surrender for the One who laid down His life surrendering to the cross for us.

B. Stay in the Fold.

When Jesus describes His relationship with us like a shepherd to his sheep, there is one fundamental necessity being implied: that we are to belong to the flock. It is important to recognize the difference between a flock and a fold. The shepherd is said to have only one flock. The flock is the sum total of all the sheep which belong to him. Put another way, we can say one shepherd's flock is made up of many different folds.⁹ In the context of this passage, Jesus is saying that there are other sheep in His flock. The Pharisees thought the Messiah would be strictly for the Jews, the nation of Israel. They not only missed the fact that Jesus was the Messiah, they missed the fact that the salvation of Jesus was for all people, both Jew and Gentile. There would be other folds beyond the nation of Israel, but there would only be one flock. It is not uniformity which is promised, but unity.¹⁰

Paul would describe this to the church in Ephesus.

EPHESIANS 4:4-6 *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

Sheep need to be part of a fold within the flock. For sheep, a “herd-mentality” is a good thing because there is nothing more threatening to its welfare than isolation. Sheep are highly vulnerable and defenseless, so isolation makes them easy targets for predators.

Similarly, the Christian life is not to be a solo event. We are called to live in the context of the local church, in community with other believers because independence and self-sufficiency make us highly irrational and extremely vulnerable to attacks from the enemy. God designed us to depend on one another for strength and guidance and wisdom, as we corporately depend on our Good Shepherd.

If connecting deeply with the Shepherd's flock is not a priority for us, this means that our Good Shepherd does not mean everything to us. Otherwise, we would follow His leadership in all aspects of life. He wants the best for His sheep because He has invested His very life into us after all. And His joy, honor, and glory are bound up into our own.

We must never forget that Jesus willingly laid down His life for us. His voluntary death was followed by His victorious resurrection. Jesus was not only the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep of the entire world, He is the Good Shepherd who lives today and wants to have this intimate life-changing relationship with each one of us, calling us to be part of His flock for all eternity.

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⁹ Phillip Keller, *The Shepherd Trilogy*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 261.

¹⁰ biblehub.com/commentaries/John10

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

The image of a shepherd and sheep has been used throughout Scripture, literature, artwork and beyond. There is a reason that Psalm 23 is used at so many funerals, because of the comfort the words and the image bring in times of grief. But it is also one of the most hopeful of all scriptures because of the truth revealed in that first verse, *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”*

Jesus said, *“I Am the Good Shepherd”* instantly bringing to mind this image of a shepherd and sheep. And as our Good Shepherd He protects and prods; He comforts and consoles; He laid down His life only to live again, that we might have life abundantly for eternity.

When we are lost, the Good Shepherd finds us. When we are confused, the Good Shepherd enlightens us. When we are neglecting being part of the flock, the Good Shepherd brings us back into the fold. When we are stagnant in life, fearful to move forward, the Good Shepherd prods us to take that next step. When we are overwhelmed by the circumstances of life, the Good Shepherd will protect us from evil and harm.

Jesus, as the Good Shepherd wants to do all of these things for His sheep, if we truly allow Him to be our Good Shepherd; our life-changing, life-giving Shepherd that leads us each step of each day. Are you willing to trust Jesus to be your Good Shepherd? Will you demonstrate sheep-like faith in His guidance and provision?

God’s plan as our Shepherd, will always shape our purpose as His sheep. The author of Hebrews knew the power of the image of a shepherd and sheep as he closed out the letter with a benediction that is fitting for us even today.

HEBREWS 13:20-21 *Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord,²¹ equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*