

An Exposition of the  
**GOSPEL OF JOHN**



## “The Good Shepherd”

*John 10:11-18*

**Theme: The Good Shepherd, at His own initiative, sacrificed Himself to save His sheep.**

**Introduction:** **[READ TEXT]** Few images in Scripture are more comforting to a believer’s heart than that of a shepherd tending to his sheep. It’s a scene that draws us in—quiet and personal—because it reflects something we all know to be true: we are not as strong or self-sufficient as we often pretend. By nature, we are needy, vulnerable, and prone to wander. Yet, in His kindness, God does not leave us to face these struggles alone.

As we come to the Gospel of John 10, Jesus gently, yet unmistakably, reveals Himself in one of the most precious ways possible:

*“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”* (John 10:11, NASB 95)

This isn’t just a theological statement — it’s a very personal one. Jesus isn’t talking in abstract terms. He’s describing His relationship with His people. He’s showing us what kind of Savior He is... and the care He offers to those who belong to Him.

Because the truth is this—not every shepherd truly cares for the sheep. Some lead for their own benefit. Some only stay as long as it’s easy. And when hardship or danger arises, they pull back, leaving the sheep vulnerable and scattered.

But Jesus is completely different. He does not keep His distance from His sheep—He draws close. He does not protect Himself at their expense—He gives Himself up for them. He does not abandon them in danger—He secures them through His sacrifice. He is the Good Shepherd—not just because He leads well, but because He loves perfectly.

And what makes this even more remarkable is that His care is not general or impersonal. It is intimate. He says, *“I know My own and My own know Me”* (John 10:14, NASB 95). That word “know” signifies a deep, relational, personal knowledge. He knows His sheep completely—their weaknesses, their struggles, their fears—and yet He loves them fully. In response, His sheep come to know Him—not just about Him, but Him—as their Shepherd, their Savior, and their constant source of life and security.

And this relationship did not come cheaply. The path to this intimacy was paved by His sacrifice. *“The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”* He willingly, purposefully, lovingly gave Himself in our place—bearing the cost of our sin so that we might be brought near, known, and kept by Him. And even more, He continues to seek and gather His sheep. Jesus reminds us that His flock is not limited, but that He draws others to Himself—bringing them into one flock under one Shepherd. What a picture of grace—that those who were once far off are brought near and made His own.

As we walk through this passage, we’re not just studying a doctrine—we’re beholding a Shepherd. We will see that **the Good Shepherd, at His own initiative, sacrifices Himself to save His sheep**. Notice three things:

- I. **The Importance of the Good Shepherd – vv. 11-13** —because only He can truly care for and secure the soul.
- II. **The Intimacy with the Good Shepherd – vv. 14-16** —because He knows His sheep

and draws them near to Himself.

- III. **The Initiative of the Good Shepherd – vv. 17-18** —because our salvation rests not primarily in our pursuit of Him, but in His pursuit of us.

And as we start, this passage encourages us to rest in a simple yet powerful truth: If you belong to Christ, you are not alone, forgotten, or left to wander. You are known. You are loved. And you are perfectly cared for by the Good Shepherd who gave His life for you.

## I. **The Importance of the Good Shepherd – 10:11-13**

### A. **He Provides Sacrificial Devotion – v. 11**

1. Having persisted in the use of the analogies to the shepherd and the sheep, Jesus now brings them to a crescendo – *“I am the good shepherd;”*
2. Such a statement would have been understood as a claim to a messianic relationship with Israel – a fulfillment of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.
3. The construction is *“I AM ... (Ἐγώ εἰμι)* – an emphatic construction that was often cited as a translation of Jehovah – “I AM that I AM”) *... the shepherd, the good one.”*
4. *“good” [καλός]* - Jesus is not just claiming to be “morally good,” or He would have chosen a different word. Instead, by using this term, He is declaring that He is noble, beautiful, and ideal— a shepherd whose character is compelling, notable, and deserving of the devotion of His followers.
5. What verifies His claim of being the “ideal shepherd” is that He is willing to *“lay down His life for the sheep.”*
  - a) *“... lay down ...”* – conveys the idea of a willing and deliberate act or deed of surrender done with clear purpose and motivation.
  - b) *“... His life ...”* – literally reads soul (*ψυχή*) and refers to the impact of this sacrifice – it wasn’t merely physical death, but it carried the spiritual cost of separation from the Father.
  - c) *“... for the sheep ...”* - demonstrates that He gave his life not as a martyr for truth, nor as a moral example of self-sacrifice, but for people – those ones whom God had given him.
6. Such willingness to sacrifice oneself for the welfare of others is a sign of true greatness and a definitive standard for our devotion.
7. Christ, therefore, is the One who watches out for those sheep who belong to Him, powerfully keeping the threats and dangers of falsehood from ravaging the people of God.

### B. **He Protects through Selfless Devotion – vv. 12-13**

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1. In contrast to this wonderful, perfect, and ideal shepherd, there are those who would tend the flock who fail to maintain a priority on the sheep.
2. Instead, some *“leave the sheep and flee”* and refuse to sacrifice themselves on behalf of the true Shepherd – the One Who cares.
3. The kind of person who would do this *“... is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep.”*
  - a) *This likely continues the contrast between Jesus and the religious leadership of Israel, whom He consistently condemns throughout this passage.*
  - b) *They are motivated by personal interests, not the welfare of the sheep, and when those personal interests demand it, they’ll prioritize themselves over the sheep instantly.*
    - (1) ... no interest in the lame man healed at the pool of Bethesda (John 5);
    - (2) ... no interest in the woman caught in adultery (John 8);
    - (3) ... no interest in the blind man healed by the Temple gates (John 9).
4. Thus, vested interest in the sheep is absent – these kinds of men would stand and intently observe the approach of an enemy and merely run for cover themselves – *“sees [gazes at] the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.”*
5. It’s not that anyone hired to watch the sheep is this way, but when the only focus is on personal benefit and wages earned for tending the flock, and there is no real compassion for the sheep, a spiritual leader is exposed: *“He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep.”*
6. The example of Christ highlights a selfish lack of devotion within a clear context of disgust.

## II. The Intimacy with the Good Shepherd – 10:14-16

### A. The Priority of Intimacy – vv. 14-15a

1. However, Jesus reminds us of the contrast between Himself and those hirelings who think only of the temporal advantages of their employment, but who are *“not concerned about the sheep.”*
2. He restates the major theme: *“I am the good shepherd”* – my compassion and devotion are complete.
  - a) *“good” [καλός] – conveys the notion of something being everything it ought to be*
  - b) *Jesus identifies Himself as that Shepherd who is everything it should be – as a personal provider, powerful protector, and a perfect pathfinder.*

3. He then shares that the reason the “*good shepherd*” is “*concerned about the sheep*” is because an intimacy exists between them – “*I know My own and My own know Me.*”
  - a) “*know*” [γινώσκω] – is a word of intimacy because of personal interaction and experience, euphemistically used to describe the extreme form of intimacy experienced uniquely between a husband and wife – cp. ***Matthew 1:24-25.***
  - b) God described His special and unique knowledge of Israel using this word in the Septuagint (LXX) – cp. ***Amos 3:2.***
4. The testimony by Christ that He “*know[s] My own*” is eternally critical – upon this reality rests the eternity of any sinner who would qualify for eternal life – cp. ***Matthew 7:23.***
5. However, when we are known by Christ, He will never allow us to wander from His watchful care – cp. ***Luke 15:4-5.***
6. Despite the confusion caused by false teachers, religious hypocrites, and legalistic externalists, those who genuinely belong to Him are recognized by Him – cf. ***2 Timothy 2:19.***
7. That which compels the believer and drives him onward in his Christian experience is the persistent hunger to know Christ and follow Him – cp. ***John 10:27,28; Philippians 3:10; 1 John 2:3; 1 John 5:20.***
8. This closeness between Jesus and us reflects the loving and trusting relationship of the Father and the Son, making it dynamic and personal, not just theoretical – “*even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father.*”
9. There is no closer relationship for Christ Jesus than His relationship with “His sheep,” except for His relationship with the Father, and we are drawn into the deep, intimate love shared between Jesus and the Father.

## **B. The Price of Intimacy – v. 15b**

1. However, this intimacy - albeit prized by Christ - did not come without a great price – “*and I lay down my life [soul] for the sheep.*” – cp. ***Isaiah 53:11-12.***
2. The ability to enjoy this fellowship and intimacy with the sheep was so prized by Christ that He willingly died in place of the sheep.
  - a) The Greek word “*for*” (ὑπέρ) conveys the notion of “on behalf of” and implies substitution – cp. ***John 11:50-52; 15:13; 18:14.***
  - b) This pictures the vicarious atonement – where Jesus died for the sins of the world – ***2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 5:6-8.***
3. The cost of intimacy with the Good Shepherd is, on His part, His blood,

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and on our part the willingness to die to self and submit to Him – **1 Corinthians 6:20**.

**C. The Pursuit of Intimacy – v. 16**

1. He then indicates that those who belong to Him are not limited to the Jewish people, but the Father has chosen *“other sheep”* [ἄλλος] which in this context would mean *“additional”* - *“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold.”*
2. This refers to us (the Gentiles), who, before Christ's work, were considered “far off” and “outside the covenant” – but Jesus shows here that He will go and bring them into the joy of intimacy with Him – *“I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one Shepherd.”*
  - a) Notice that Jesus is stating that He does more than give the opportunity for Gentiles to be saved.
  - b) *“they will hear My voice”* describes what is called the effectual call of God – that irresistible grace when applied, results in a person believing.
  - c) Jesus states that He *“must bring them also”* – (lit, it is necessary) to fulfill the will of the Father and receive those the Father gives to Him.
3. This is a beautiful picture of the unity and peace that exists between people previously estranged – *“and they will become one flock with one Shepherd”* – cp. **Ephesians 2:11-16**.
4. Our unity as the Church exists not because of walls which can enclose wolves within and bar other sheep outside, but in our proximity to and relationship with the Shepherd.

**III. The Initiative of the Good Shepherd – 10:17-18**

**A. The Point of His Initiative – v. 17**

1. Jesus indicates that the major motivation in His love for the sheep and the work of redemption in laying down His life was the love of the Father – *“For this reason the Father loves Me ...”*
2. That is, the approval of the Father motivates Him to do what pleases the Father and brings Him glory – including being concerned about the sheep that are given to the Son by the Father – cp. **John 10:28-30**.
3. In a similar way that we love because He loves us, Jesus loves because the Father loves Him.
4. This is why Jesus commits Himself to accomplishing of His mission of

redemption – *“because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.”*

5. Notice that His life is NOT TAKEN – it is a voluntary deed done deliberately, purposefully, and at His own initiative – with a view toward the ultimate victory on the other side of the grave – cp. **Hebrews 12:2**.
6. “The fact that Christ’s death is an act of free volition must be stressed in order that when death occurs the enemies who have brought it about may have no right to boast as if this were *their* victory, and also in order that the disciples may have no reason to despair, as if this were *his* defeat.”<sup>1</sup>
7. Jesus is aware that the selfless sacrifice of Himself will please the Father, and this is the ultimate motivation for His initiative.

## **B. The Power of His Initiative – v. 18**

1. Jesus indicates that the major motivation in His love for the sheep and the work of redemption in laying down His life was the love of the Father – *“For this reason the Father loves Me ...”*
2. That is, the approval of the Father motivates Him to do what pleases the Father, and brings Him glory – including being concerned about the sheep that are given to the Son by the Father.
3. It is for this reason that Jesus commits Himself to the accomplishment of His mission of redemption – *“because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.”*
  - a) Here in our text, Jesus is called the **“Good Shepherd”** because of His willingness to die for us.
  - b) Because of His power over death through the resurrection, He is called the **“Great Shepherd”** – **Hebrews 13:20**.
  - c) Because of His constant attentive care for us as His sheep, He is called the **“Chief Shepherd”** – **1 Peter 5:4**.
4. Jesus then declares, *“This commandment I received from My Father.”* – demonstrating that the cross isn’t a tragedy, it is a commission given to Him that He remains absolutely devoted to fulfill in both dying and raising from the dead in victory over sin and death – **Acts 2:23-24**.

### **So What?**

1. In what areas of my life am I resisting Jesus’ authority instead of submitting to His leadership?
2. How can I biblically discern between faithful shepherding and self-serving leadership in the influences I follow?
3. What fears or anxieties in my life are diminished when I truly believe that the Good Shepherd is both sovereign and good?

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<sup>1</sup> William Hendriksen, *John* in the *New Testament Commentary*, p. 115.

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