

In John 10 Jesus uses a common occupation in His world to make a dramatic claim. The Bible often portrays God as a shepherd, especially the Psalms. Psalm 80:1 says, "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock." Psalm 77:20 says, "You lead Your people like a flock." Psalm 79:13 says, "We, Your people and the sheep of Your pasture will give thanks to You." Psalm 95 says, "He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand." The most memorable shepherd is in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd." When Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd" He was making an unequivocal claim to be God.

Where you find shepherds you are sure to find sheep. There are a lot of sheep in the scriptures too. In fact, "sheep" or "lamb" is by far the most frequent animal reference in the Bible. The word "sheep" occurs almost 200x. When you include "lambs" that number almost doubles. By contrast "dog" appears 44x. Do you know how many times "cats" are mentioned? 0. Unless you consider the lion as part of the cat family and Peter compares the lion to Satan. Not a cat guy.

By saying, "I am the good shepherd" Jesus not only claims to be God but He also implies that there are bad shepherds. We met some of those in John 9 as the Pharisees threw out the blind man whose sight was miraculously restored by Jesus. John 10:11-18 provide some shepherding essentials. If you are a parent, pay close attention.

1. A Good Shepherd protects the sheep...vv. 11-13. Four times He says, "I lay my life down for the sheep." By contrast, the hired hand is not invested, he does not love the sheep. The Pharisees were false shepherds who helped themselves to the sheep but didn't help the sheep. Sheep need protection for obvious reasons:

a. Because sheep are clueless. You can train a dog but you can't train a sheep. The only way to make a sheep roll over and play dead is to shoot him. They can't even find their way home. They get lost easily. That's why Isaiah compares us to sheep when he says in Is. 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way." Sheep get distracted. They just move from patch to patch without ever thinking about where they are. That's why we are so passionate about helping people find their God-given purpose. So many just move from job to job, city to city, patch to patch, never thinking deeply about the purpose of their lives.

Sheep need a shepherd because they are clueless but also...

b. Because sheep are defenseless. They don't have claws or shells. They don't even have teeth on their upper jaw. When the wolf comes their only hope is a fearless shepherd. When the wolf comes, the hired hand flees but not the true shepherd...v. 12. He stays with the sheep and protects them. In one of the most moving scenes in the NT, Paul is giving final instructions to the elders of Ephesus and he warns them about the wolves. Notice the imagery. "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the **flock**, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure **fierce wolves** will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and *from among your own selves* will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified." Acts 20:28-32...

The only protection sheep have is the presence of a good shepherd. Before he was king, David was a shepherd. He may have been out in a pasture somewhere when he wrote the words, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me... Ps. 23:4. A good shepherd stays near his sheep. When I talk to young pastors I remind them that shepherds ought to smell like sheep. It is impossible to do a good job of shepherding without spending hours in the company of the sheep. "But the difference between sheep and people is that people DO bite." It is true but the ones who do bite are often those who have been bitten. Hurt people hurt people right? That is why the second essential quality of a good shepherd is...

2. A Good Shepherd knows His sheep...vv. 14-15.

a. He leads them. Ps. 23:3 says, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." When we go to Israel we always point out the lines on the dry hills outside of Jerusalem. These lines are paths that various flocks have taken to find water and food. In this mixed up maze we call life it is easy to get lost. There are a lot of trails and many of them are cul-de-sacs. Without a shepherd we are hopelessly lost. The sheep recognize the shepherd's voice and follow him...video of shepherd calling his sheep.

If you don't recognize His voice you either don't know him or you haven't spent enough time with Him. "He calls them by name." It is a powerful thing to know someone's name. How do you feel when someone doesn't know your name?

b. He feeds them. "He makes me lie down in green pastures." Sheep are nervous creatures. They won't lie down unless they feel safe. The good shepherd leads them to a place where they can relax because they are protected and there is plenty of food. On the other hand, the bad shepherd feeds on them... "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep.'" Ezekiel 34:2-3

3. A Good Shepherd pursues the lost sheep...v. 16. Jesus came for "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Some recognized His voice but most rejected Him. (**John 1:11**, "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.") They would not come out of the sheepfold of Judaism, the religious system that protected the Jews from the idolatrous nations around them until the coming of their Messiah. There were some exceptions like the blind man in the previous chapter who serves as a stark contrast to the unbelief of the Pharisees. (10:6). Jesus is calling forth His sheep from the fold of Judaism. He will not leave any behind. In fact, He told stories about the importance of rescuing even one lost sheep.

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? **5** And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' **7** Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Lk. 15:4-7.

Jesus emphasized that "there will be one flock with one shepherd." This is not merely a Christian idea. This has been the goal of false shepherds throughout history. The Greeks, the Romans, the Ottoman Turks, Adolf Hitler, all attempted to take dominion over the world and establish a one-world government. Even today, some Muslims want to establish a caliphate, a kingdom in which everyone is Muslim. Even the Jews were longing for a Messiah or King who would rule the world. They rejected Jesus because He didn't have the appropriate resume for a world leader. The problem with these efforts is that they are determined on the basis of ethnicity. Jesus came to earth to establish a movement that includes people from every tribe and every tongue. It's called the church and it is the hope of the world. I will never give up on the church because there is no other institution on earth that has been ordained by God for the flourishing of all humanity.

I Am
I Am the Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18

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Gary Brandenburg

4. Love for the Shepherd is always demonstrated by love for His sheep...vv. 17-18. This whole passage is a picture of loving care. Jesus laid down His life for the sheep. He didn't do it because they are such cuddly creatures but He did it because He loved His Father. If you love the Good Shepherd, you will love His sheep. When you disrespect my children, you disrespect me. Peter learned this the hard way...John 21:12-17.

One final observation: You don't evaluate a shepherd on the basis of how well they pet sheep. A loving parent doesn't just comfort their children. Love includes correction. Comfort and correction go together.

Let me close with a challenge this morning. My passion has always been to enlist and train an army of shepherds, men and women who get involved in the lives of God's sheep, men and women who come off the sidelines and get in the game. Men and women who love Jesus Christ enough to love what Jesus loves. Some of you have been consuming religious goods and services long enough. It's time to tend God's lambs. How?

You can lead a Life Group.
You can teach a children's class.
You can adopt a Compassion child...video...

Do you love Jesus, the Good Shepherd? Then take care of His sheep.