

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:1–18

Key Verse: 10:11

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

Do you feel qualified to help others? Some people are eager to teach, correct, and give advice. But most of us would answer, “No, I don’t feel qualified.” Even if we know a certain subject, or have some experience, if asked how good a mentor we are, we might pause, or wonder if we have any business even trying to help. Ours is an individualistic culture where people focus on themselves. Staying self-focused seems so much easier and safer. But in today’s passage Jesus proclaims that he’s the good shepherd. Why? More than anything, he wants us to come to him, believe in him, and have life abundantly in him. He’s also implying that those who follow him should learn from him. What does he mean that he’s the good shepherd? And how can sinners like us possibly become good shepherds like him? May God speak to us through his word.

The opening to chapter 10 is unusual. There’s no change of time or place, no people mentioned, no activity. Jesus just begins speaking. He starts solemnly, “Truly, truly, I say to you...”, says it again in verse 7, and keeps speaking until verse 18. He makes not one but two of his seven “I am” statements in John, and he repeats them both: “I am the door” (7,9) and “I am the good shepherd (11,14).

What’s going on? Jesus has just performed his sixth of seven miraculous signs. In his compassion he healed a man born blind (9:1–7). How the man testified about his grace is heart-moving.¹ But the way the religious leaders responded is disturbing. They used their authority to pressure the man and his parents to deny Jesus.² When the man refused, they treated him like garbage and cast him out (34). Jesus went and found this man abandoned by everyone and helped him believe (35–38). Then he rebuked the Pharisees (39–41). Now he takes this opportunity to help his disciples learn about himself.

I. The shepherd and his sheep (1–6)

Look at verses 1–5. Jesus’ words here are a “figure of speech” (6). In their world, these were everyday things: sheep, a sheepfold with a doorway, a gatekeeper, a shepherd, a thief, a robber, and a stranger. It’s an ordinary setting, but it’s all so deep. Jesus sheds more light on it later. For now, he says the shepherd enters the sheepfold by the door. He knows the sheep by name. He comes to the sheep daily. The gatekeeper knows him very well. The sheep know his voice. He goes before the sheep. Because they trust him, the sheep follow. But they will never

¹ Verses 9,11,15,17,25,27,30–33.

² Verses 16–24,28–29.

follow a stranger. He's talking about not animals but *people*. What's his point? He's exposing bad leaders. He calls them "thieves," "robbers," and "strangers." Leaders, even "religious" ones, if they're bad, are actually thieves, robbers, strangers. It says, "...but they did not understand what he was saying to them" (6b). Still, Jesus uses this figure of speech, not just to rebuke bad leaders but to help us all get to know him better.

II. "I am the door" (7–10)

Read verse 7. In verse 2 Jesus said the shepherd "enters by the door." Here he says he himself *is the door*. Why is he stressing this? He wants us to know he's the only way of salvation (5:24). Later he says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (14:6). Here he continues, "All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them" (8). He means the legalistic Pharisees, and the man born blind who did not listen to them. He might also mean false prophets, messiahs, teachers, or any bogus "leader" with a personal agenda. Sadly, some who appear to be religious leaders are actually "sketch." They're suspicious, not trustworthy, even dangerous. Why? They didn't go through the door; so, they've got the *wrong motives*. Motives actually matter.

By saying he's "the door," Jesus is sharing the **first** timeless truth in being a shepherd: A shepherd always approaches people through the door, *through Jesus*. A shepherd first needs to be united with Jesus in the Holy Spirit through personal repentance and faith. Only then can he or she genuinely help people. The shepherd who "enters by the door" helps people turn not to himself or herself, but to Jesus, the door. Such a shepherd helps people believe only in the name of Jesus, and helps them only for his sake.³ If we're truly Christ-centered and prayerfully point people to him, his sheep sense it and trust us. But if we have other motives, no matter how clever we are, his sheep won't listen.

Read verse 9. Jesus the door is the only way of salvation, but the phrase "go in and out" also says he's the door his sheep *use regularly*. As the door, he's the one we can come to every day. This is the **second** timeless truth in being a shepherd: we need to be coming to Jesus regularly. Not media but Jesus. Before doing anything and after, at the beginning of the day and at the end, every day we need to personally come to Jesus, the door. He promises that if we do, we'll "find pasture." Our souls will find new satisfaction, security and rest if we come to him. Spending time in prayer and Bible study is not to impress people, but to truly spend time with Jesus. It's not occasional, or forced; we do it every chance we get. Shepherds come to Jesus, the door, every day, and help others do so also.

Read verse 10. Jesus the door is a contrast to bad leaders, who only want to use and devour the sheep (cf. Eze.34:3–4). In his words we find the **third** timeless truth for shepherds: we need to grow in the heart of Jesus, who wants his sheep to have *life abundantly*. He doesn't want us to just be doing the bare minimum, or meticulously keeping superficial rituals, or putting on a show, while our inner problems remain untouched and unresolved. He wants us to have

³ 1:12–13; 20:31; cf. 1 John 2:12; Rom.1:5b; Phil.1:29.

life abundantly in him. What is “life abundantly”? “Abundantly” means “beyond the expected, over and above, more than enough.” During Advent, we saw how “life abundantly” is full of hope, full of peace, full of love, and full of great joy. In “life abundantly,” we have real conviction and direction to serve our Lord Jesus and his sheep. “Life abundantly” comes if only we have a real relationship with Jesus. As the door, he’s the *source*⁴—not activities, not methods, but a living relationship with our living Lord. Shepherds don’t just try to hold people in their ministry with activities for the sake of having people and looking good. And we don’t approach people with mere sympathy or pity. We do our best to bring them to Jesus, the door, who alone gives salvation, pasture, and life abundantly.

III. “I am the good shepherd” (11–18)

Thus far Jesus has been describing a shepherd. A shepherd knows his sheep by name. A shepherd leads his sheep. A shepherd regularly takes his sheep to pasture. A shepherd wants his sheep to have life abundantly. All this shows how a shepherd is not just working; he actually *loves* his sheep. Now Jesus comes to a climax. Read verse 11. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” It’s love’s greatest expression (15:13). Jesus didn’t die on a cross as an epic self-sacrifice for an idea or cause. He died for flawed human beings, *for us*—even in our hostility, rebellion, and stubborn unbelief. In this way he became “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). This Jesus, our good shepherd, fulfilled God’s prophecies to send us a shepherd.⁵ Because God, at his core, is our Shepherd,⁶ Jesus being our good shepherd proves he’s God’s Incarnate Son (1:14). Through his death, only he can restore our broken relationship with our Father God (2 Cor.5:21). Only he brings us God’s forgiveness (Acts 10:43). Only he can save us from our sins and death and Satan and this evil world.⁷ There are other good human shepherds. But only Jesus shed his blood and died to save our souls. He held nothing back. He loved us that much. Jesus, our good shepherd who laid down his life for us, is the only one who can heal all the wounds in our souls (1 Pet.2:24–25). He wants us each to receive and experience this greatest love ever known. This is the **main way** to be a shepherd: to personally experience this great love of Jesus, who laid down his life for me (Rom.5:5–8). When I realize that Jesus went through that horrible death and humiliation even for me, it breaks down all my pride and self-righteousness, all my anger, selfishness and indifference. If we taste his great love, we gain a new passion: to follow his amazing example and begin a new life journey to learn to love sinful people as he does.

Read verses 12–13. Here, the good shepherd and the hired hand are similar. They both enter by the door. They both know the sheep’s names, lead them out, and take them to pasture. Their main difference is when the wolf shows up. The good shepherd is ready to lay down his life. But the hired hand dips out; he doesn’t want to fight or get hurt. Jesus says bluntly that the hired hand flees because “...he cares nothing for the sheep” (13). Why not? It’s because he thinks the sheep are not “his own” (12a), so he doesn’t really take responsibility for them. Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, “...all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1

⁴ 1:4; 15:5.

⁵ Isa.40:11; Jer.23:1–6; Eze.34:23; Micah 5:2–5.

⁶ Psalm 23:1; 80:1; Ecc.12:11; Eze.34:15; cf. Gen.49:24.

⁷ Matt.1:21b; Gal.1:4; Col.1:13; Heb.2:15.

Cor.3:22b–23). When we accept this profound truth about ourselves and everyone else, we stop with all the silly jealousy, strife, and divisions. It's why Jesus adds the word "good" to "shepherd." In Greek, "good" can mean "handsome," "useful," or "noble." But in the context of Jesus' contrast with a hired hand, "good" seems to mean "true," "authentic," or "real." The one who works like a hired hand is not a real shepherd. But the one who thinks of everyone as a shepherd would, takes responsibility for them in God, and really cares for them is a real shepherd. Jesus makes this challenging contrast of shepherds with hired hands to help his disciples, and us.

Look at verses 14–15. This is another goal of the good shepherd. Jesus really wants all his sheep to share the same intimate fellowship with God that he has (cf. 17:21–23). He's ready to lay down his life for this purpose. But his shepherding doesn't stop there. Read verse 16. The good shepherd has such a big heart, he's thinking about all the lost sheep in the world. He has God's heart for them all, who are all God's creation. In his great compassion he says, "I must bring them also." He doesn't forget them; he believes his sheep are out there and that they will hear his voice, be saved, and join those who believe in him. Though there are impossible barriers between them, he's the one who can unite them all into one flock under one shepherd. So, at the end of John's Gospel Jesus tells Simon Peter, who represents all believers, "Do you love me? Feed my sheep" (21:17). Only as we love our good shepherd Jesus and feed his sheep can his vision and purpose be realized. It's because he works in the world through people. At the end of today's passage, Jesus stresses his personal love relationship with the Father, ready to obey at the cost of his life. At the same time, he has the authority from God the Father, and the freedom, both in his death and in his resurrection. It shows that even in his death, he's not a victim of man; he is God the Son. (17–18). Praise Jesus, God's Son, our Good Shepherd.

Being a good shepherd may seem unattainable, or burdensome. But it's where Jesus our Lord wants to take each of us. It's what Jesus our Good Shepherd can do for us: he can change us to be good shepherds like him. As we pray for spiritual leaders for the world and for future generations, practically we need specific direction, to grow as good shepherds like our Lord Jesus. The only way is to get closer to him.

As I review 2024, I'm amazed at what God has done. As a pastor God has helped me in so many ways. But as I become more aware of all the people in our community and all our needs, sometimes I feel overwhelmed. I try to hide my indifference, and can feel dumped on and frustrated. In my sin I'm useless and helpless. But God reminds me of Jesus' words: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt.11:28–30). This is my key verse for 2025. More than anything else, I need to come to Jesus daily. Only he's the door to pasture; only he's my good shepherd. To really come to him, I practically need to take his yoke and learn from him, especially his gentle and lowly heart. I know unexpected conflicts, problems and challenges lie ahead. But I pray to rely on him more closely in 2025 and grow in his gentle and lowly heart as a good shepherd for all those he entrusts to our care.

In summary, who is a good shepherd? A good shepherd knows and leads his sheep (3b,4). A good shepherd enters through Jesus, the door, the only way of salvation (7). A good shepherd goes in and out through Jesus, the door, every day, and helps his sheep do that, too (9). A good shepherd helps his sheep “find pasture,” “life abundantly,” in Jesus (10). A good shepherd holds onto the great love of God in Jesus, who laid down his life for us, and helps his sheep to know his redeeming love (11). A good shepherd doesn't run away like a hired hand; he truly cares for his sheep and stays and fights for them (12–13). A good shepherd has intimacy with the Father through Jesus, and he shares this intimacy with his sheep (14–15). A good shepherd is always seeking to bring the “other sheep” and unite them all into one flock (16). A good shepherd does it all, like Jesus did, out of loving obedience to the Father (17–18).

Human beings always seem self-sufficient. But all of us really need a good shepherd. It may be the most meaningful work in the whole world, to raise good shepherds in Jesus. In 2025, may God help each of us grow closer to Jesus, our Good Shepherd, so we can bring wounded and lost people all around us to him.