

John
10

The Good Shepherd



Carol Ghattas
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lifeinexile.net

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The

reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

John 10:1-18

New International Version

Hearing His Voice

Have you ever seen a distraught child find instant comfort and peace in the arms of a loving mother or father? These days of pandemic and chaos have made me want to just rest in the lap of Jesus and listen to his voice.

The words he spoke to his disciples, recorded in John 15, were so good for my soul, as I was reminded I just needed to rest in the Vine. I realized that our time in that beautiful chapter served to just whet my appetite for more.

I need more Jesus. More than ever before.

Trusting that you're in the same situation, I'm backing up a few chapters to cling to more of the words in red. I can find comfort in the psalms, I can learn from the letters of Paul, but Jesus' words speak to me, reminding me that he knows my troubled heart, is aware of my weaknesses and fears, and above all, will love me through the mess of my life.

Feeling a little like a lost lamb, I'm turning to the Good Shepherd.

Listen to these words from chapter ten of John's gospel:

Truly I tell you, anyone who doesn't enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber.

John 10:1 (CSB)

I'm going to stop right there. We're only going to look at one verse this time, because I think we (I) need to hear it.

Just because we are in the flock of Christ, doesn't mean we're safe from thieves and robbers.

This may be a very literal application for some of you today. You are loved by God, you have faith in Christ and live for him, but someone has broken in and violated you, your space, and your peace. That's what thieves do. They get into places where they don't belong.

Remember: Don't let a robber or thief steal your peace.

Recognize them for what they are — invaders, criminals. They've come into your life or home and tried to wreak havoc, but they cannot steal you from God. Cling to that.

That said, I don't think Jesus meant this in relation to literal theft, but spiritual, and this is what is happening on a grand scale in our world today.

The flock of Christ is under attack by those who would seek to draw them away from the Good Shepherd.

I've seen it happen. Sweet voices, slippery tactics, and attempts to play on peoples' feelings all cause sheep to turn their heads and perk up their ears.

What's that you say?

- Work to win it.
- Cheap grace.
- God's Word is not true.
- Did God *really* say that?
- The Bible evolves with culture.

Recognize some of those thieves and robbers now, do you?
Mull that over this week.

Jesus said, "I'm telling you the truth, these guys that don't come by the way I've come, by the teaching I've given, are messing with you. They're coming to rob you blind." (My paraphrase).

Open your eyes and ears this week and see if you find any suspicious characters in your sheep pen. Point them out to the Good Shepherd, who's here to protect you.

Shepherds

What would make The Good Shepherd talk about other shepherds? That's what happens in Jesus' talk with his disciples in John 10. In the first verse, he warned us of the fakes who try to infiltrate the flock with words and actions that don't jive with what Christ has taught us, but in this verse he gives a clue to what we should look for:

The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep.

John 10:2 (NIV)

Though the next few verses go over this more in depth, I want to sit on this one for a while today.

First, to answer my earlier question: Jesus tells us that though he is The Good Shepherd, he's got other under-shepherds who will be on the ground to serve the flocks in their care.

How will we know they're "his" shepherds?

They come in through the gate.

A true shepherd of the flock of Christ does not have to use manipulation or tricks to be put in charge of a flock of sheep; no, he comes in through the gate of Christ himself by answering the call to serve.

If anyone tells you that shepherding is a great job, full of self-fulfilling, easy work, then they know nothing about taking care of sheep. They've most likely not come in through the gate.

The true shepherd, the true pastor is a servant-leader. He's a straight shooter (pardon the analogy) with the Word of God, because he knows that's the truth for his life as much as it is for that of those he serves. The words that Christ spoke while on this earth are those he speaks, because they are the words of life.

I'm leaving us with one verse to meditate on this week, because I also want you to use it as a reminder to pray for your own personal shepherd, the pastor of your church. If there were ever a day that we need to be praying for the shepherds among us and around the world, it is today.

While they've come in through the gate to take up the hard task of pastoring and shepherding, they are actively fending off and protecting their flocks from the thieves and robbers of verse one. It's not just that pastors have to preach that Word, but they are entrusted with protecting their flocks from the attacks of those who would seek to sneak into the pen and wreak havoc on Satan's behalf. I don't think I have to tell you that they've got their hands full in doing that, do I?

So, what can you do as a sheep for your local shepherd?

- Pray for him.
- Let him know you are praying for him and appreciate him.
- Do good for him — you figure out what that looks like.
- Build him up because he's pretty beat up. Shepherding is hard work.
- Listen to what he says and take to heart what he teaches from God's Word.

- Stick with the flock — don't be a wandering sheep. It makes his job easier!

I thank God for those who have heard the voice and followed the leadership of The Good Shepherd to take up the hard task of service. May God use them greatly to His glory.

Called by Name

What makes you turn your head in a crowd?

Someone calls your name.

I could stop right there when talking about why Jesus is so wonderful, but I'll let these words he spoke, found in the tenth chapter of John's gospel, elaborate:

The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. (John 10:3-6)

As we continue to focus on the words of Jesus, he's already warned us about those who try to deceive us like thieves and robbers and how the true shepherd will always come in by the gate, aligning with God's Word. He continues on that thought today, by speaking about the voice of the shepherd.

God the Father has prepared the way for the Good Shepherd through his prophets. Christ comes to us as fulfillment of God's Word through them, so when we hear Jesus speak, he will always be speaking in confirmation of what God has been saying over the ages.

We, the sheep, must listen for that voice of confirmation.

When someone says they speak for Christ, but their words don't align with the Bible, you can be sure that their words are false.

We, the sheep, know it's Christ, because he knows our name and he leads us by example.

When someone talks to you in a way that is confusing and wants to push you or shame you into doing something, you can be sure that's not from Jesus.

We, the sheep, can be confident in following Christ, because he'll speak to us as we go.

When someone says they speak for Christ, but just drop you once you've accepted their message and plan, then you can be sure that their motives are not from God, but for personal gain.

Don't follow a stranger. Don't follow someone you don't know.

Be sure that the under-shepherd you follow is speaking words that can be affirmed by God's Word, that he knows your name, and will lead by example and consistent teaching and encouragement.

That's what Jesus did. Too bad the Pharisees didn't get it or him. Make sure you do.

The Gated Community

When I first married, my husband had an apartment in a “gated community” in Fort Worth. I thought I had really moved uptown to join him in such a swanky place. It was called “The Polo Club” apartment complex. There was no polo or club, however...just apartments.

That said, there was a gate. To get inside, you had to enter a code for the large gates to then roll back and let you drive through. Without a code, you were stuck on the outside looking in.

A few years ago, my youngest son joined me on a trip down memory lane, as we drove out to Texas and visited the places where that love first sparked, including the lovely Polo Club apartments. Imagine my disappointment to see that the gate was stuck open and the sign looking far from elegant and exclusive.

That community was definitely no longer *gated*.

Why am I sharing this sad tale? Because the words of Jesus from the tenth chapter of John remind me that I’m living in a much better *gated community* than the earthly one of long ago. I’m living in the community that has Jesus for the gate. Listen to his words:

Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come

in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

(John 10:7-10)

What does a gate do? It provides a source of protection for the sheep. They know that nothing can come through that gate, because the shepherd is laying across it. He's providing the ultimate sacrifice on their behalf.

Once we trust in Christ as Savior, he's the, not "human shield" but "supernatural shield" that defends us from the attacks of Satan. We're locked into the community of the Kingdom and nothing can snatch us from his care.

I love the idea of knowing that as we go in and out in the world, we're still under his protection. He provides us places of pasture in this temporary life. Jesus here echoes the words of Psalm 23:

*The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. **Even though** I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and **I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.***

In the Kingdom Community, gated by the King himself, we lack nothing and have no reason to fear. He provides for our needs, gives us rest, and refreshes us.

The World wants only to steal our joy and rob our peace, but Jesus has come that we might have life and life to the full.

Are you living within the comfort of the security of the gated community of Christ or standing on the outside looking in?

You don't have to stay there? **Jesus** is the code and he freely lets you use it to enter.

Abandoned

Sheep can be very trusting creatures, dumb but trusting. All the more reason these words of Jesus to his disciples, recorded in the tenth chapter of John's gospel, are so interesting.

Jesus has already used this analogy to warn his followers of outsiders who might try to snatch them from his care. Those who have read and meditated on his words, however, will be mindful of his voice and reject those who don't speak in ways the Good Shepherd would.

As the one who cares for his flock, Christ drew the illustration of himself as the gate for the sheep. Once we are his, no one can take us away.

How good it is to be in the care The Good Shepherd. Listen to these verses:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. (John 10:11-13)

Just like he talked about the difference between himself and thieves and robbers, Jesus now contrasts his care with that of a hired hand. What's the difference?

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep — dies for them, puts the life of the sheep above his own, sacrifices on their behalf.

The hired hand is quickly scared by predators. He abandons the sheep at the first sign of danger. He leaves the sheep open to attack. He doesn't care for the sheep.

What makes this difference? Jesus tells us: The hired hand is not the owner; the Good Shepherd is.

When you own something, you take better care of it, because you've paid the price for it.

Have you been abandoned by someone you thought cared? Did you trust them to help you find your way in life, but then, at the first sight of trouble, get abandoned and left to wander?

That's because you put your trust and hope in something or someone who had no stake in your welfare.

Jesus has paid the ultimate price for our lives — he gave his on the cross. He's got real "skin in the game" — literally.

Who will you trust your life to? Someone who's only involved because of what he can get out of it, or someone who's paid to make you his?

Jesus is worth your trust.

One Flock

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

(John 10:14-16)

I love the “I am” statements of Jesus, and this passage in John 10, is one of my favorites — ***I am the good shepherd.***

All throughout the previous verses, Jesus has shown us the difference between himself, the watchman, the thieves, robbers, strangers and hired hands.

Jesus alone is the one who has laid down his life for the sheep; he has made himself the gateway into safety and rest; and his sheep know the difference in his voice, as he calls them to himself.

The relationship we have with Jesus is like the relationship Jesus has with God the Father — We are KNOWN by Him, and we KNOW Him.

There is nothing in this world that can give us the intimacy of the relationship Christ longs to have with us.

- No other human can know the depths of our heart and needs like Jesus.

- No philosophy or political party will sacrifice on our behalf.
- No amount of money or material gain will give us security and rest.
- No other religion can guarantee salvation from sin or eternal life in Heaven.

I have to laugh when I hear people talk about the exclusivity of Christianity, and this passage helps to squash that false narrative. I think even Jesus' disciples were a bit taken by surprise with the words he shared. Listen to them again:

*I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be **one flock and one shepherd.*** (John 10:16)

Here was this Jewish hodgepodge of men, following a Jewish rabbi, thinking he was the Jewish Messiah, but all the while not realizing that God's plan was not limited by nationality, ethnicity, social standing, language or even personal righteousness.

Jesus came to save **ALL** who would believe. — There is no other movement or religion as **INCLUSIVE** as that.

I think some will be surprised, on the day of his return, to see how beautifully diverse that **one flock** is! As one who has traveled around the world and seen the flock in a multitude of settings, I can tell you that it will look nothing like our homogeneous gatherings on this earth.



Does that mean it's wrong for the people in "my pen" to look like me? No, but we *all* need to guard against becoming unwelcoming to those who come through our gates who *do* look different or speak differently.

The sheep of the Good Shepherd should practice hospitality to those whom that same shepherd is calling into the fold.

Woe to me if I try to keep a new sheep from entering the pen! It's not "mine" anyway — it belongs to Jesus.

My late husband had good insight about the pen of Christ. He would say different denominations or groups of Christian believers play different roles in the work of the Kingdom. As long as Christ is the head of a church, we need to recognize

that God is using them to reach different people for the growth of the Kingdom.

In the end – **We are One Flock under the care of the Good Shepherd.**

Are you a part of his flock? Don't wait any longer. Today is the day of salvation.

The Sole Authority

It's hard to remember, by the time we get to the end of this passage in the tenth chapter of John's gospel, that Jesus was actually talking to the Pharisees. I know he's been talking about the importance of entering through the gate, but the more he talked, I, I'm sure like the disciples listening, lost the point of what he was saying and just loved the idea of being a sheep in the care of the Good Shepherd.

It's easy to forget that the things Jesus shared with the crowds were radical. However, these final words remind us why:

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.

John 10:17-18 (NIV)

Yep, that did it for the Pharisees! Accusations of demon-possession spewed from their lips. Why?

- Because he calls God, *Father*.
- Because he claims to lay down his life for the people.
- Because he claims to have the sole authority for what he does.
- Because he claims God gave him this authority.

While such words might just seem to be those of any number of crazy people, the Pharisees knew exactly what he was implying. That's why later, at the Feast of Dedication, (John 10:22-39) they picked up stones to stone him — kill him. When

Jesus asked why, they said what they knew he was saying:
“because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

Jesus’ words always require a response.

Though it’s easy to reflect on this passage and think it’s nice and comforting for us today, we must remember that for those who heard it for the first time it made them ask:

Will I accept this One who claims authority?

Jesus alone claims the authority to give himself to the cross on our behalf. Have you accepted that? Have you submitted yourself to his authority as your Good Shepherd?

That alone will allow you to enter and find rest in his pen and with his flock.

I choose to follow the One who used his authority to lay down his life in place of my sin — what about you?

Grace and Peace

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