# John 10:1-21 – Jesus is the Good Shepherd

After healing the man born blind, the Jewish leaders attacked Jesus, ultimately culminating in this exchange.

“**39** ¶ Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." **40** Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" **41** Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.” (Joh 9:39-41 NIVUS)

On the surface, there is a major change in topic as we enter chapter 10. The overall theme of Chapters 8-12 is on light, but right here in the middle Jesus talks about shepherds, sheep and thieves. Not knowing much about shepherding practices, it is easy to overlook that even in this analogy, Jesus is contrasting the things of light and darkness.

They normal practice was for the shepherds to take their sheep into the fields during the day, letting them graze on the grasses and drink from the local streams. Daylight gave them several advantages, they could see the sheep, they could see the approach of predators, the sun kept the sheep warm, the sheep could find the food and water they needed, and the sheep could find each other. It is important to note that sheep are stupid animals. A sheep will put its head down and begin to walk along while eating the grass in front of them. If they happen to look up and not see their flock, they will panic and run off in a random direction to try to find them. They also tend to avoid shadows and so even a passing cloud can effectively cut them off from the herd.

At heart, sheep are herd animals. They are so dependent on the herd that when they believe they are cut off, they will often collapse in their panic. Sheep will willingly follow each other. If one sheep decides to go in a particular direction the others will follow, even if it seems obvious that this is a dangerous choice.

Sheep have great daylight vision when it comes to detecting the motion of predators sneaking up on them, but they have lousy depth perception. A sheep may look at a wide or deep ravine and think it is safe to jump even when it is not, especially if there is not a visual contrast between the light areas and the shadows in the ravine. Combining this with there strong desire to follow other sheep can cause problems. For instance, in July 2005, 400 sheep in Turkey died when they followed one sheep who tried to jump over a 45 foot deep ravine, 1,100 other sheep also jumped off but survived because their fall was cushioned by the bodies of the other sheep.

As it gets dark, and the shadows grow, the shepherd knows that the sheep are going to get skittish. They have poor night vision, so they are even more likely to get into danger, or get scared and run away. During the night, the shepherd also has difficulty spotting predators or other threats to the sheep. So the shepherds lead the sheep into pens near the pastures. Often these pens are shared by several flocks, they have walls that are 4-5 feet tall and no roof. By gathering the sheep together, they are protected from predators and they keep each other warm through the night. Since there is no door, the shepherd lays down across the opening to keep the sheep from escaping.

In this passage Jesus shows the things that happen to sheep in the darkness. In this analogy, He demonstrates how to identify the shepherd, that the shepherd’s voice is known by the sheep, that He is the gate of the sheep, that He cares for the sheep and that the Father loves the shepherd.

Also notice that the next two I am statements of John are in this passage: I am the good shepherd and I am the gate.

## Identifying the Shepherd. John 10:1-3a

“**1** ¶ "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. **2** The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. **3a** The watchman opens the gate for him,

It should be obvious, the person who has legitimate business uses the door. Imagine one night you drive by your friend’s house and see someone climbing in through a window. What would you do? Of course, you would call the police, it is a safe assumption that someone crawling in the window is not there for good reasons. But Jesus is not talking about a physical robber. As we will see in verse 6, Jesus is talking about those who try to get their points in by sneaky and deceptive ways.

If someone is consistently dishonest in one area of their life, you cannot trust them in other areas. If someone takes control by illegitimate means, they are a thief. In contrast, a shepherd would never use illegitimate means because he doesn’t need to.

The Shepherd is also known by the watchmen. The watchman has temporary responsibility to guard the sheep. He knows how to identify the shepherd. Who were the watchmen that recognized Jesus? Ezekiel was told that he is a watchman for Israel (Ezekiel 3:17), Hosea says that the Old Testament prophets are watchmen (Hosea 9:8). Link this with 2 Peter 1:19-21 which tells us that the prophets are a light.

“**19** ¶ And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. **20** Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. **21** For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2Pe 1:19-21 NIVUS)

The initial way that you can know the shepherd is by the way He enters your life and by the testimony of the watchmen, but once you know the shepherd, you also come to know His voice.

## The Good Shepherd’s voice is known by the sheep. John 10:3b-5

**3** The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. **5** But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice."

American sheep herders tend to use dogs to push the sheep where they want them, but this was not the way in the middle east. Middle eastern shepherds lead their sheep by calling to them. As they take care of the sheep, from the time they are lambs, they talk to them and sing to them. Each time they give them food or water they sing to them. Sheep have excellent hearing and love to follow a leader. Eventually they come to associate the shepherd’s voice with safety and food, so they will follow Him anywhere.

As I said, multiple flocks would often be gathered in one pen for the night. In the morning, the shepherds would let the sheep out of the pen and each would begin to sing his song or make his call. The sheep would then sort themselves out by following the voice of the shepherd that they knew and trusted.

When you became a Christian, you primarily knew God through the testimony of other people. When you live as a Christian, read the Bible, pray, and listen to God’s voice, you learn to discern if you are hearing from God or someone else. A new believer may be easily fooled by false teaching, but as a believer matures, they flee from false shepherds.

## The Good Shepherd is the gate of the sheep. John 10:6-11

**6** Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. **7** Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. **8** All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. **9** I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. **10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. **11** "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

The gate is there to keep the sheep in the pen and to keep the predators out. Once the sheep enter, they are in safety, they can go out with the shepherd in the light and come in to safety at night. Jesus description of those who come before him as thieves and robbers points to the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Jewish Leaders who were more interested in their power than in pointing people to following the true and living God. When He refers to the sheep not listening to the thieves, He likely refers to people who worshipped God from their heart in spite of the Jewish leaders. When religious or political leaders orchestrate things for their own power and wealth, they are stealing glory from God. Most often, they are also stealing resources from the people who they lead. Ultimately, thieves come to kill and destroy. Look at what has happened to our nation, the people who have sought political power and wealth have destroyed our country, we can no longer even have a civil conversation with people who disagree.

Jesus then says the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. This is literally true when the shepherd lays across the entrance to protect the sheep at night, but it is also pointing to a higher truth. In this statement, Jesus declares that He will die for His people. But he also promises something even more, He promises that His people will have life to the full. He doesn’t want us limping through life, he wants our lives to be something we want to celebrate. We may never be rich in money, power or influence, but we can overflow with God’s joy.

## The Good Shepherd cares about the sheep. John 10:12-16

**12** The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns 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. **13** The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. **14** "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— **15** just as the Father knows me and I know the Father— and I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** 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 shepherd would be an owner of the sheep. Maybe they belonged to his father, maybe they belonged to Him, but He was invested in them. The shepherd spent time with them and cared about them, but occasionally he had other people to help him. These hired hands were paid by the day to help him out but had no investment in the sheep. The shepherd spent time with the sheep and knew them individually, the hired hand looked at the herd as a job.

Imagine you were watching the sheep when a wild animal attacked. You are making minimum wage and all you think of the sheep is that they are dumb, dirty and stinky. How much effort would you put into protecting them? On the other hand, what if you knew one of your kids might not eat if your flock was destroyed? How much effort would you put in to protecting the flock then?

In contrast, Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He not only claims to be a shepherd, or even a good shepherd, but THE Good Shepherd. He again says that He lays down His life for His sheep. But look at the beauty. Jesus knows and is known by His sheep in the same way as He knows and is known by God the Father.

Jesus also mentions other sheep that are not of this pen. This verse is abused by some of the cults. The Mormons claim this refers to Jesus going to America after the resurrection to preach to and convert the Native Americans. There is NO indication of this being true anywhere in scripture. So who are the “other sheep?” Throughout John, Jesus is talking primarily to Jews and gathering Jewish believers. In Psalms 78, 79 and 100, the nation of Israel is described as God’s sheep.

“**1** ¶ A psalm. For giving thanks. Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. **2** Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. **3** Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” (Ps 100:1-3 NIVUS)

All the earliest Christians were Jews. When Jesus says other sheep, He is talking about non-Jews being saved. You are those other sheep. You are united in His one flock.

## The Father loves the Shepherd John 10:17-21

**17** The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life— only to take it up again. **18** 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." **19** ¶ At these words the Jews were again divided. **20** Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?" **21** But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"” (Joh 10:1-21 NIVUS)

To me, verse 17 is shocking. “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life.” I had to dig further into what the Greek says:

The word translated therefore (δια) is far more often translated as through, but in this case it is appropriate to say, “because of this”. It is not THE reason as much as A reason. As best as I can tell, Jesus is saying God is currently highlighting his love for Him by letting Him lay down His life and take it up again. It is not just a reason for God to love Jesus, but a demonstration of the love of God for Jesus.

Τhis passage might be better understood as “Through this my Father loves me that I lay down my life in order to take it up again.” This is supported in the following verses as Jesus then talks of His authority from the Father to lay down His life and take it up again. The father does not love Him because He lays down His live, He shows His love for Him by giving Him the authority to lay down and take up His life.

At this some thought Jesus was a lunatic, others thought He might be the Lord. Which will you believe? As C.S. Lewis said, He can be a liar, a lunatic or the Lord, but He cannot just be a good teacher.

# John 10:1-21 – Jesus is the Good Shepherd

## Identifying the Shepherd. John 10:1-3a

If someone is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ dishonest in one area of their life, you cannot trust them in other areas.

The Old Testament \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ are watchmen. Hosea 9:8

The prophets are a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. 2 Peter 1:19-21

## The Good Shepherd’s \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is known by the sheep. John 10:3b-5

When you live as a Christian, read the Bible, pray, and listen to God’s voice, you learn to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ if you are hearing from God or someone else.

As a believer matures, they \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from false shepherds.

## The Good Shepherd is the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of the sheep. John 10:6-11

When religious or political leaders orchestrate things for their own power and wealth, they are stealing \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from God.

Jesus declares that He will \_\_\_\_\_\_ for His people.

He promises that His people will have life to the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

## The Good Shepherd \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ about the sheep. John 10:12-16

Jesus \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and is known by His sheep in the same way as He knows and is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ by God the Father.

Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ of his pasture. Psalm 100:3

You are those \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ sheep. You are united in His \_\_\_\_\_\_ flock.

## The Father \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ the Shepherd John 10:17-21

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ this my Father loves me that I lay down my life in order to take it up again. John 10:17