

John 10:1-21
September 7, 2025

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What comes to mind when you think of a shepherd? [Let people engage]

Transition: In John 10, Jesus likens himself to a good shepherd. This metaphor may be hard to understand in today's times:

- Some of us have seen sheep in a field or perhaps even pet one at a petting zoo, but we lack understanding of what a shepherd really does.
- Palestinian shepherds led their sheep. Most sheep were raised for wool, so shepherds had a 10-12 year relationship with their sheep. It was common for shepherds to name their sheep, and they were extremely valuable to them.

Let's think about the role of Jesus as our shepherd as we delve into today's text. Let's begin.

BOOK:

The Shepherd and His Flock

10 “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. ²The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.”

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 (or kept safe). 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. 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. 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?”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Since Jesus Christ is “the Door,” we would expect a division, because a door shuts some people in and others out! He is the Good Shepherd, and the shepherd must separate the sheep from the goats. It is impossible to be neutral about Jesus Christ; for, what we believe about Him is a matter of life or death (John 8:24).

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today’s Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 328-331). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

“I Am the Door” (John 10:1–10)

This sermon grew out of our Lord’s confrontation with Jewish leaders, following the excommunication of the beggar (John 9). He had briefly spoken to them about light and darkness, but now He changed the image to that of the shepherd and the sheep. Why? Because to the Jewish mind, a “shepherd” was any kind of leader, spiritual or political. People looked on the king and prophets as shepherds. Israel was privileged to be “the flock of the Lord” (Ps. 100:3). For background, read Isaiah 56:9–12; Jeremiah 23:1–4; 25:32–38; Ezekiel 34; and Zechariah 11.

Jesus opened His sermon with *a familiar illustration* (John 10:1–6), one that every listener would understand. The sheepfold was usually an enclosure made of rocks, with an opening for the door. The shepherd (or a porter) would guard the flock, or flocks, at night by lying across the opening. It was not unusual for several flocks to be sheltered together in the same fold. In the morning, the shepherds would come, call their sheep, and assemble their own flocks. Each sheep recognized his own master's voice.

The true shepherd comes in through the door, and the porter recognizes him. The thieves and robbers could never enter through the door, so they have to climb over the wall and enter the fold through deception. But even if they did get in, they would never get the sheep to follow them, for the sheep follow only the voice of their own shepherd. The false shepherds can never *lead* the sheep, so they must *steal* them away.

It is clear that the listeners did not understand what Jesus said or why He said it. (The word translated “parable” means “a dark saying, a proverb.” Our Lord’s teaching in John 10 is not like the parables recorded in the other Gospels.) The occasion for this lesson was the excommunication of the beggar from the synagogue (John 9:34). The false shepherds did not care for this man; instead, they mistreated him and threw him out. But Jesus, the Shepherd, came to him and took him in (John 9:35–38).

It is unfortunate that John 10:1 is often used to teach that the sheepfold is heaven, and that those who try to get in by any way other than Christ are destined to fail. While the teaching is true (Acts 4:12), it is not based on this verse. Jesus made it clear that the fold is the nation of Israel (John 10:16). The Gentiles are the “other sheep” not of the fold of Israel.

When Jesus came to the nation of Israel, He came the appointed way, just as the Scriptures promised. Every true shepherd must be called of God and sent by God. If he truly speaks God’s Word, the sheep will “hear his voice” and not be afraid to follow him. The true shepherd will love the sheep and care for them.

Since the people did not understand His symbolic language, Jesus followed the illustration with an *application* (John 10:7–10). Twice He said, “I am the Door.” He is the Door of the sheepfold and makes it possible for the sheep to *leave* the fold (the religion of Judaism) and to *enter* His flock. The Pharisees *threw* the beggar out of the synagogue, but Jesus *led* him out of Judaism and into the flock of God!

But the Shepherd does not stop with leading the sheep out; He also leads them *in*. They become a part of the “one flock” (not “fold”) which is His church. He is the Door of salvation (John 10:9). Those who trust Him enter into the Lord’s flock and fold, and they have the wonderful privilege of going “in and out” and finding pasture. When you keep in mind that the shepherd actually was the “door” of the fold, this image becomes very real.

As the Door, Jesus delivers sinners from bondage and leads them into freedom. They have salvation! This word “saved” means “delivered safe and sound.” It was used to say that a person had recovered from severe illness, come through a bad storm, survived a war, or was acquitted at

court. Some modern preachers want to do away with an “old-fashioned” word like “saved,” but Jesus used it!

Jesus was referring primarily to the religious leaders of that day (John 10:8). He was not condemning every prophet or servant of God who ever ministered before He came to earth. The statement “are thieves and robbers” (not “were”) makes it clear that He had the present religious leaders in mind. They were not true shepherds, nor did they have the approval of God on their ministry. They did not love the sheep, but instead exploited them and abused them. The beggar was a good example of what the “thieves and robbers” could do.

It is clear in the Gospel record that the religious rulers of Israel were interested only in providing for themselves and protecting themselves. The Pharisees were covetous (Luke 16:14) and even took advantage of the poor widows (Mark 12:40). They turned God’s temple into a den of thieves (Matt. 21:13), and they plotted to kill Jesus so that Rome would not take away their privileges (John 11:49–53).

The True Shepherd came to save the sheep, but the false shepherds take advantage of the sheep and exploit them. Behind these false shepherds is “the thief” (John 10:10), probably a reference to Satan. The thief wants to steal the sheep from the fold, slaughter them, and destroy them. We shall see later that the sheep are safe in the hands of the Shepherd and the Father (John 10:27–29).

When you go through “the Door,” you receive life and you are saved. As you go “in and out,” you enjoy *abundant* life in the rich pastures of the Lord. His sheep enjoy fullness and freedom. Jesus not only gave His life *for* us, but He gives His life *to* us right now!

The emphasis in this first section is on “the door.” Our Lord then shifted the emphasis to “the shepherd” and made a second declaration.

“I Am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11–21)

This is the fourth of our Lord’s I AM statements in John’s Gospel (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:9). Certainly in making this statement, He is contrasting Himself to the false shepherds who were in charge of the Jewish religion of that day. He had already called them “thieves and robbers,” and now He would describe them as “hirelings.”

The word translated “good” means “intrinsically good, beautiful, fair.” It describes that which is the ideal, the model that others may safely imitate. Our Lord’s goodness was inherent in His nature. To call Him “good” is the same as calling Him “God” (Mark 10:17–18).

Some of the greatest people named in the Bible were shepherds by occupation: Abel, the patriarchs, Moses, and David, to name a few. Even today in the Holy Land, you may see shepherds leading flocks and revealing how intimately they know each sheep, its individual traits, and its special needs. Keep in mind that Jewish shepherds did not tend the sheep in order to slaughter them, unless they were used for sacrifice. Shepherds tended them that the sheep might give wool, milk, and lambs.

Jesus pointed out four special ministries that He performs as the Good Shepherd:

He dies for the sheep (vv. 11–13). Under the old dispensation, the sheep died for the shepherd; but now the Good Shepherd dies for the sheep! Five times in this sermon, Jesus clearly affirmed the sacrificial nature of His death (John 10:11, 15, 17–18). He did not die as a martyr, killed by men; He died as a substitute, willingly laying down His life for us.

The fact that Jesus said that He died “for the sheep” must not be isolated from the rest of biblical teaching about the Cross. He also died for the nation Israel (John 11:50–52) and for the world (John 6:51). While the blood of Jesus Christ is *sufficient* for the salvation of the world, it is *efficient* only for those who will believe.

Jesus contrasted Himself to the hireling who watches over the sheep only because he is paid to do so. But when there is danger, the hireling runs away, while the true shepherd stays and cares for the flock. The key phrase is “whose own the sheep are not.” The Good Shepherd *purchases the sheep* and they are His because He died for them. They belong to Him, and He cares for them. By nature, sheep are stupid and prone to get into danger; and they need a shepherd to care for them.

Throughout the Bible, God’s people are compared to sheep; and the comparison is a good one. Sheep are clean animals, unlike pigs and dogs (2 Peter 2:20–22). They are defenseless and need the care of the shepherd (Ps. 23). They are, to use Wesley’s phrase, “prone to wander,” and must often be searched for and brought back to the fold (Luke 15:3–7). Sheep are peaceful animals, useful to the shepherd. In these, and other ways, they picture those who have trusted Jesus Christ and are a part of God’s flock.

The Pharisees, in contrast to good shepherds, had no loving concern for the beggar, so they put him out of the synagogue. Jesus found him and cared for him.

He knows His sheep (vv. 14–15). In the Gospel of John, the word *know* means much more than intellectual awareness. It speaks of an intimate relationship between God and His people (see John 17:3). The Eastern shepherd knows his sheep personally and therefore knows best how to minister to them.

To begin with, our Lord knows our names (see John 10:3). He knew Simon (John 1:42) and even gave him a new name. He called Zaccheus by name (Luke 19:5); and when He spoke Mary’s name in the garden, she recognized her Shepherd (John 20:16). If you have ever had your identity “lost” in a maze of computer operations, then you can appreciate the comforting fact that the Good Shepherd knows each of His sheep by name.

He also knows our natures. While all sheep are alike in their essential nature, each sheep has its own distinctive characteristics; and the loving shepherd recognizes these traits. One sheep may be afraid of high places, another of dark shadows. A faithful shepherd will consider these special needs as he tends the flock.

Have you ever noticed how different the 12 Apostles were from one another? Peter was impulsive and outspoken, while Thomas was hesitant and doubting. Andrew was a “people person” who was always bringing somebody to Jesus, while Judas wanted to “use” people in order to get their money for himself. Jesus knew each of the men personally, and He knew exactly how to deal with them.

Because He knows our natures, He also knows our needs. Often, *we* do not even know our own needs! Psalm 23 is a beautiful poetic description of how the Good Shepherd cares for His sheep. In the pastures, by the waters, and even through the valleys, the sheep need not fear, because the shepherd is caring for them and meeting their needs. If you connect Psalm 23:1 and 6, you get the main theme of the poem: “I shall not want . . . all the days of my life.”

As the shepherd cares for the sheep, the sheep get to know their shepherd better. The Good Shepherd knows His sheep and His sheep know Him. They get to know Him better by listening to His voice (the Word) and experiencing His daily care. As the sheep follow the Shepherd, they learn to love and to trust Him. He loves “His own” (John 13:1) and He shows that love in the way He cares for them.

The Good Shepherd brings other sheep into the flock (v. 16). The “fold” is Judaism (John 10:1), but there is another fold—the Gentiles who are outside the covenants of Israel (Eph. 2:11ff). In our Lord’s early ministry, He concentrated on the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 10:5–6; 15:24–27). The people converted at Pentecost were Jews and Jewish proselytes (Acts 2:5, 14), but the church was not to remain a “Jewish flock.” Peter took the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10–11), and Paul carried the message to the Gentiles in the far reaches of the Roman Empire (Acts 13:1ff).

The phrase “one fold” should read “one flock.” There is but one flock, the people of God who belong to the Good Shepherd. God has His people all over this world (see Acts 18:1–11), and He will call them and gather them together.

The missionary message of the Gospel of John is obvious: “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). Jesus Himself defied custom and witnessed to a Samaritan woman. He refused to defend the exclusivist approach of the Jewish religious leaders. He died for a lost world, and His desire is that His people reach a lost world with the message of eternal life.

The Good Shepherd takes up His life again (vv. 17–21). His voluntary death was followed by His victorious resurrection. From the human point of view, it appeared that Jesus was executed; but from the divine point of view, He laid down His life willingly. When Jesus cried on the cross, “It is finished!” He then voluntarily yielded up His spirit to the Father (John 19:30). Three days later, He voluntarily took up His life again and arose from the dead. The Father gave Him this authority in love.

Sometimes the Scriptures teach that it was the Father who raised the Son (Acts 2:32; Rom. 6:4; Heb. 13:20). Here, the Son stated that He had authority to take up His life again. Both are true, for the Father and the Son worked together in perfect harmony (John 5:17, 19). In a previous sermon, Jesus had hinted that He had power to raise Himself from the dead (John 5:26). Of

course, this was a claim that the Jews would protest; because it was tantamount to saying “I am God!”

How did the listeners respond to this message? “There was a division therefore again among the Jews” (John 10:19). Note that word *again* (John 7:43; 9:16). The old accusation that Jesus was a demoniac was hurled at Him again (John 7:20; 8:48, 52). People will do almost anything to avoid facing the truth!

Since Jesus Christ is “the Door,” we would expect a division, because a door shuts some people in and others out! He is the Good Shepherd, and the shepherd must separate the sheep from the goats. It is impossible to be neutral about Jesus Christ; for, what we believe about Him is a matter of life or death (John 8:24).

His third declaration was the most startling of all.

Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 309-311) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

3. The good shepherd discourse (10:1–21)

The discourse on the Good Shepherd continues the same setting as in chapter 9. Comparing people to a shepherd and his sheep was common in the Middle East. Kings and priests called themselves shepherds and their subjects sheep. The Bible makes frequent use of this analogy. Many of the great men of the Old Testament were shepherds (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David). As national leaders, Moses and David were both “shepherds” over Israel. Some of the most famous passages in the Bible employ this motif (cf. Ps. 23; Isa. 53:6; Luke 15:1–7).

Jesus developed this analogy in several ways. The connection with the preceding chapter is seen in Jesus’ contrast of the Pharisees with the man born blind. The Pharisees—spiritually blind while claiming insight (John 9:41)—were false shepherds. As the True Shepherd, Jesus came to seek and to heal. His sheep hear and respond to His voice.

10:1–2. Verses 1–5 describe a morning shepherding scene. A **shepherd** enters through a **gate** into a walled enclosure which has several flocks in one **sheep pen**. The enclosure, with stone walls, is guarded at night by a doorkeeper to prevent thieves and beasts of prey from entering. Anyone who would climb the wall would do it for no good purpose.

10:3–4. By contrast, the shepherd has a right to enter the sheep pen. **The watchman opens the gate**, and the shepherd comes in to call **his own sheep by name** (out from the other flocks). Shepherds knew their sheep well and gave them names. As **sheep** hear the sound of their owner’s familiar **voice**, they go to him. He **leads them out** of the pen till his flock is formed. Then he goes **out** toward the fields with **the sheep** following **him**.

10:5–6. If a **stranger** enters the pen, the sheep **run away from him** because his **voice** is not familiar. The point of **this figure of speech** consists in how a shepherd forms his flock. People

come to God because He calls them (cf. vv. 16, 27; Rom. 8:28, 30). Their proper response to His call is to follow Him (cf. John 1:43; 8:12; 12:26; 21:19, 22). But this spiritual lesson was missed by those who heard Jesus, even though they certainly understood the local shepherd/sheep relationship. In their blindness, they could not see Jesus as the Lord who is the Shepherd (cf. Ps. 23).

10:7–9. **Jesus** then developed the shepherd/sheep figure of speech in another way. After a shepherd's flock has been separated from the other **sheep**, he takes them to pasture. Near the pasture is an enclosure for the sheep. The shepherd takes his place in the doorway or entrance and functions as a door or **gate**. The sheep can go out to the pasture in front of the enclosure, or if afraid, they can retreat into the security of the enclosure. The spiritual meaning is that Jesus is **the only Gate** by which people can enter into God's provision for them.

When Jesus said, "**All who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers,**" He referred to those leaders of the nation who cared not for the spiritual good of the people but only for themselves. Jesus the Shepherd provides security for His flock from enemies (**whoever enters through Me will be saved**, or "kept safe"). He also provides for their daily needs (the sheep **come in and go out, and find pasture**).

10:10. **The thief**, that is, a false shepherd, cares only about feeding himself, not building up the flock. He steals sheep in order to **kill** them, thus destroying part of the flock. But Christ has **come** to benefit the sheep. He gives **life** which is not constricted but overflowing. The thief takes life; Christ gives **it to the full**.

10:11. Jesus then developed the sheep/shepherd figure in a third way. When evening settled over the land of Palestine, danger lurked. In Bible times lions, wolves, jackals, panthers, leopards, bears, and hyenas were common in the countryside. The life of a shepherd could be dangerous as illustrated by David's fights with at least one lion and one bear (1 Sam. 17:34–35, 37). Jacob also experienced the labor and toil of being a faithful shepherd (Gen. 31:38–40). Jesus said, **I am the Good Shepherd** (cf. John 10:14). In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd of His people (Pss. 23:1; 80:1–2; Ecc. 12:11; Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:10). Jesus is this to His people, and He came to give **His life for** their benefit (cf. John 10:14, 17–18; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 5:2, 25; Heb. 9:14). He is also the "Great Shepherd" (Heb. 13:20–21) and "the Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4).

10:12–13. In contrast with **the Good Shepherd, who owns**, cares, feeds, protects, and dies for His **sheep**, the one who works for wages—**the hired hand**—does not have the same commitment. He is interested in making money and in self-preservation. If a **wolf attacks** (*harpazei*, lit., "snatches away"; cf. this same verb in v. 28), he **runs away** and his selfishness causes **the flock** to be scattered. Obviously he **cares nothing for the sheep**. Israel had many false prophets, selfish kings, and imitation messiahs. The flock of God suffered constantly from their abuse (Jer. 10:21–22; 12:10; Zech. 11:4–17).

10:14–15. In contrast with a hired workman, **the Good Shepherd** has an intimacy with and personal interest in the sheep (cf. vv. 3, 27). **I know My sheep** stresses His ownership and watchful oversight. **My sheep know Me** stresses their reciprocal knowledge of and intimacy with Him. This intimacy is modeled on the loving and trusting mutual relationship of **the Father**

and the Son. Jesus' care and concern is evidenced by His prediction of His coming death for the flock. Some shepherds have willingly died while protecting their sheep from danger. Jesus willingly gave His **life for His sheep** (vv. 11, 15, 17–18)—on their behalf as their Substitute (Rom. 5:8, 10; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). His death gives them life.

10:16. The **other sheep ... not of this** flock refers to Gentiles who would believe. His coming death would **bring them also** to the Father. **They too will listen to My voice**. Jesus continues to save people as they hear His voice in the Scriptures. Acts 18:9–11 illustrates how this works out in the history of the church. “I have many people in this city” (i.e., Corinth), the Lord told Paul. **One flock and one Shepherd** speaks of the church with believers from Jewish and Gentile “sheep pens” in one body with Christ as Head (cf. Eph. 2:11–22; 3:6).

10:17–18. Again, Jesus predicted His death, saying four times that He would voluntarily **lay down His life** (vv. 11, 14, 17–18). The **Father** has a special love for Jesus because of His sacrificial obedience to the will of God. Jesus predicted His resurrection twice (He would **take ... up His life again** [vv. 17–18]) and His sovereignty (**authority**) over His own destiny. His death was wholly voluntary: **No one takes it from Me**. Jesus was not a helpless pawn on history's chessboard.

10:19–21. For the third time Jesus' teaching **divided** the people (cf. 7:43; 9:16). **Many** in this hostile crowd judged Him to be **demon-possessed and raving mad** (cf. 7:20; 8:48, 52). **But others** figured that He was not demon-possessed, for how could **a demon open the eyes of the blind?** (cf. 9:16)

White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 478). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

The Good Shepherd (10:1–21)

One of the great images of Jesus is as the “good Shepherd.” First, He is the gate to the sheep pen, meaning that no one can enter the fold through any other means than Jesus Himself. Only through Jesus Christ can anyone be made right with God leading to eternal life. Second, Jesus leads His sheep. No other voice is the true voice of leadership. Third, as the good Shepherd, Jesus protects His flock—even to the point of death. Unlike someone who watches sheep for employment, Jesus is a Shepherd motivated by love for His sheep.

As the good Shepherd, Jesus mentioned that there are other sheep that will listen to His voice and will one day be brought into the fold. More than likely, what is in view are the Gentiles who would come to believe in Christ. The idea is not many shepherds with many flocks, but one Shepherd joined together as one flock (see Eph. 2:16). Jesus was not forced into being the good Shepherd; He willingly took the role upon Himself, and for this He is loved by God.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 10:1-21. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.