

Jesus the Good Shepherd (Who Knows, Leads, and Protects His Sheep)

John 10:11 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

John 10:14 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁴I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me,

John 10:27 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

My sheep listen to My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;

Introduction

One day Jesus was having a discussion with the crowd. To them, He said twice (v. 11, 14), that He is the Good Shepherd. As soon as the audience heard that, they immediately understood what He was talking about. They were familiar with shepherding. Their forefathers have been tending sheep for centuries, beginning with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and all. Many of them were still tending sheep. It was their life. Not only was it a major industry back then, but it also reminded them of their relationship with their Father in Heaven.

As the sheep need a good shepherd, so do we the Shepherd of our soul. As the shepherd leads the sheep to green pastures and still waters, so does Jesus the Good Shepherd. He leads us to truth and rest. As the good shepherd never leaves the flock alone, neither does Jesus the Guardian of our souls. He is with us all the time. As the good shepherd protects the sheep from the wolves, so does our Good Shepherd. He laid down His life for us.

This morning, I invite you once again to ponder the identity of Jesus: Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and we are His sheep. We are going to think about characteristics of sheep and those of good shepherds.

So, let's consider sheep first.

Content

The word 'sheep' appears 191 times in the Bible, 150 (OT)/41 (NT). The usage of sheep/lamb in the Bible is very common yet significant such as Passover lamb, sacrificial lamb, and the Lamb of God. Out of so many animals God could've compared us to, He had

chosen the image of sheep in His relationship with us. He is the Shepherd, and we are His sheep. There is a reason for that. We resemble sheep in certain characteristics.

Three Characteristics of Sheep. Author Julie Plagens identified nine reasons in the Scripture why God compares us to sheep such as (defenseless, can't get up without help, recognize the shepherd's voice, are not meant to carry burdens, valuable, innocent, pure and so on), but here I will stick to the three characteristics that Jesus identified: *the sheep recognize the shepherd's voice, they have no sense of direction, and they are defenseless.*

Recognizing the Shepherd's Voice: In John 10, Jesus points out one simple truth: *the sheep listen to the shepherd's voice, not to that of any stranger.* They know the shepherd's voice and can clearly distinguish it from that of others. Jesus explains as follows: The shepherd calls ³... *his own sheep by name and leads them out.* ⁴ *When he puts all his own sheep outside, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.* ⁵ *However, a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.*" (John 10:3-5). Sheep are smart to recognize the voice of their shepherd.

A true story. A man visited a sheep farm. He wanted to test if Jesus was telling a truth, whether the sheep indeed recognize only the voice of their shepherd but not that of strangers. So, he imitated the shepherd's voice as close as possible, but sure enough the sheep didn't recognize his call at all. In fact, they all fled from him at his voice as Jesus said. Sheep know the shepherd's voice and follow him only.

No Sense of Direction: Concerning the sense of direction, author Julie Plagens wrote: *"Many people say sheep are stupid. Let's just say they have no sense of direction—at all. In fact, they will follow whoever is leading them, even if it leads them off a cliff. Remember the question, "If your friend jumps off a cliff, would you do it too?" Well, they actually would."*

A real story online, she continues. *"In Eastern Turkey, about 1500 unattended sheep fell off a cliff while the shepherds ate breakfast far away from the flock. The first 400 fell to their death in a ravine, but the remaining 1100 were saved because the first 400 broke the fall. The first 400 sheep were a big, fluffy cushion for the other sheep." ... Unless sheep are properly guided and led by the shepherd, they easily get lost and perish.*

Another funny story about sheep: *One farmer said that if you have a bunch of sheep in a barn, stretch a rope across the door before you let them out. When the sheep come out of the barn, the first few will jump over the rope. If you cut the rope, the remaining sheep will still*

jump over the “invisible rope” because it’s what the rest of the flock did.”
(<https://momremade.com/god-compares-us-to-sheep/>). No sense of direction.

Defenseless: Julie Plagens continues, sheep “... cannot defend themselves very well. Have you ever seen sheep growl or show their teeth? Or maybe bark, bite, run fast, shoot quills, or pull out their claws?...They do have two things in their arsenal:

1. When sheep are frightened by noise such as running water, they will run away together (hopefully in the right direction). As a whole group, they have some kind of protection, whereas individually, they are defenseless.
2. Sheep kick. An ewe is especially prone to kicking if she is protecting her young. Other than these two defense mechanisms, sheep are a Snicker’s bar just waiting to be eaten by a wolf if they don’t stick together” (ibid.). They are defenseless so they need someone to protect them from the wolves. No wonder Jesus said to His disciples, “Behold, I am sending you out as **sheep** in the midst of wolves; so be as wary as serpents, and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

Next, let’s talk about the Good Shepherd.

Christ Is the Good Shepherd: His life begins and ends with the shepherd image. Remember the Christmas story when the angels appeared and announced Christ’s birth to the shepherds in the fields? *When the angels had departed from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, “Let’s go straight to Bethlehem, then, and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”* (Luke 2:15). Jesus was born to be a ruler to shepherd God’s people (Matthew 2:6). He is the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20) and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Even in Heaven, He will be our Shepherd to guide us to springs of the water of life (Revelation 7:17).

Remember, last week, I talked about God sending His Son Jesus Christ as the light of the world and the light of life? The same God also sent Jesus as the Good Shepherd to tend His flock, especially to bring back the lost sheep. Listen to Jesus’ own testimony in Matthew 15:24: *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* (Matthew 15:24). Jesus also used a metaphor to explain how much He cares about the people who went astray from the Heavenly Father.

He said, *“What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the other ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ... And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost!’* (Luke 15:4, 6). You

get the picture: the lost sheep refers to the lost people. The shepherd who goes after the lost one refers to Jesus the Good Shepherd.

Finally, let me tell you what Christ the Good Shepherd does on our behalf His sheep: He calls us by name, leads us to truth and rest, and protects us from harms.

Three Characteristics of the Good Shepherd:

1. The Good Shepherd **knows** us by name and calls us by name. He knows everything about us. He knows deep and secret things in us. He understands our struggles and challenges. He knows our temptations and provides us with a way out. Listen to His own testimony. ¹⁴ ***I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me,*** ¹⁵ *just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father;* (John 10:14).

Reality Check: Jesus says that He knows us. We all agree and understand that. But can we honestly say that we know Him too? Do we recognize His voice among many other strange, misleading, confusing, and harmful messages in the world today? Furthermore, to know Jesus means to listen to His voice and follow Him. Do you obey His voice and follow Him in the light? By the way, lip service doesn't count here. In other words, those who call Jesus the Lord yet not do the will of God will have a rude awakening in the end. Listen to Jesus once again: ²¹ *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.* ²² *Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’* ²³ *And then I will declare to them, ‘**I never knew you; leave Me, you who practice lawlessness.**’* (Matthew 7:21-23). Jesus will say to some church goers that He never knew them. May it never be us! May God help us never practice lawlessness, meaning walking in our own fleshly desires. May the Lord help us to walk in the law of the LORD and do the will of our Father in Heaven. Are you Christ's sheep? Then, know Him, recognize His teaching, listen to His voice, and follow Him (John 10:27).

2. The Good Shepherd **leads** the sheep in and out through the gate (John 10:2). He takes them to green pastures and still waters. He tends to their wounds. He pulls them out from dangerous paths. He also goes out to the lost sheep and **brings** them back into His fold. The Scripture says that before we came to Christ, we were like lost sheep. *“All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all To fall on Him”* (Isaiah 53:6). To reach out to the lost sheep, God sent Jesus the Good Shepherd. When we were lost in darkness, Jesus reached out to us and transferred us from the darkness into His kingdom of light. *“For you were continually*

straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25). Indeed, we have returned to our Good Shepherd.

3. The Good Shepherd **lays down** His life for the sheep. It means He protects His sheep. In John 10, five times Jesus mentioned that He lays down His life for the sheep (v. 11, 15, 17, 18). What’s that mean to lay down His life for the sheep? It means that He cares about the sheep. It also means that he protects the sheep from the wolf to the point of his own death. Indeed, He suffered for our sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18). He paid the wages of our sins and delivered us from the punishment of our sins. Since we have Jesus as our Shepherd, therefore, we ought not to be afraid of condemnation, nor terrified of divine judgment. On our heaven-bound journey, He will keep us on the right path and take good care of us. None of us will be lost. None of us will be shaken. None of us will be snatched from Jesus (Jeremiah 23:4). In His arms, He will gather us and carry us in the fold of His robe, and He will gently lead us on level ground (Psalm 143:10) until we get to Heaven. We are secure in Jesus our Shepherd.

One last point.

Some Never Believe in Jesus: God wants everyone to be saved and be in Heaven with Him forever. We too hope that everyone in the world will believe in Jesus and confess with their mouth that Jesus is the Lord and Savior and get saved (Romans 10:10). God wants everyone to turn from evil ways and obey Jesus and follow Him. So do we. But some people will never become the believers or belong to Jesus’ flock. Listen to what Jesus says in the Scripture: *But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep* (John 10:26). It saddens my heart, yet I will take it as a mystery of God. As for us, we must thank God for giving us faith and eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Remember Psalm 23, written by David the shepherd boy? David describes a striking resemblance between sheep and us in our relationship with the LORD. So, he wrote: ¹ *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.* ² *He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he **leads** me beside the still waters.* ³ *He **restores** my soul: he **leads** me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.* ⁴ *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art **with me**; thy rod and thy staff shall **comfort** me.* (Psalm 23:1-4, Jubilee Bible 2000). In the same way, in Jesus the Great Shepherd, we shall not lack anything. He makes us rest in peace. He restores our soul and spirit. He leads us in the paths of righteousness and peace for His name’s sake. We will fear no evil, for He is with us. His discipline and guidance will comfort us. O, Jesus, be our shepherd and carry us safe forever (Psalm 28:9). Amen.