

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-21



The Bad Shepherds

- ❑ While in Jerusalem, Jesus healed a blind man (*John 9:6-7*) and the man became a follower of Jesus (*9:38*). However, particular Jewish leaders opposed Jesus and could not accept what happened. So they “threw [the man] out” of the synagogue¹ (*9:34*). Like the bad shepherds² mentioned in *Ezekiel 34*,³ these Jewish leaders failed to care for God’s people.

The Good Shepherd

- ❑ Read *John 10:1-18*.⁴
 1. Jesus contrasts the “thieves and robbers” with the “shepherd” (*10:1-5*) and himself (*10:7-10*). What distinctions or differences does Jesus mention?
 2. Who are the “thieves and robbers?”⁵ Who might be characterized as “thieves and robbers” today?
 3. Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (*10:10*). How would you describe this kind of “life?” What does it mean to have “life to the full?”⁶
 4. Jesus says, “I am the gate for the sheep” (*10:7, 9*). In what way is Jesus the gate? Compare to *John 14:6*.



¹ ‘synagogue’ – the meeting place of Jews for worship, instruction, and community.

² ‘shepherd’ – a person who takes care of sheep; a very common job in Jesus’ day.

³ In the Old Testament, the concept of ‘shepherd’ is used to symbolize the caretaker of God’s people. People are ‘like sheep’ who need a shepherd (*Isaiah 53:6, Matthew 9:36, 10:16*). In the Old Testament, God was called the ‘Shepherd of Israel’ (*Psalms 80:1; cf. 23:1; Isaiah 40:10-11*), and He gave the Jewish leaders the responsibility of being shepherds over his people (*Ezekiel 34*). However, the Jewish leaders failed to care for His people (*Ezekiel 34:1-10*), so God promised to provide the ‘one shepherd,’ the Messiah, to care for His people (*Ezekiel 34:23*).

⁴ ‘sheep pen’ – an enclosure for the sheep, for their protection. The sheep pen has only one entrance (or gate). The sheep pen in verse 1 is the sheep pen of Judaism (Jewish religion). The shepherd’s sheep are those Jews who follow him (*vv. 2-3*). The ‘other sheep’ (*v. 16*) are Gentiles – that is, those who are not Jews. Jesus came to make a single flock out of sheep (or people) from every nation. That means us!

⁵ In verse 1, the phrase probably refers to the Jewish religious leaders who opposed Jesus, like the Pharisees who threw out the healed man (*9:34*). In verse 8, it might refer to a broader group, including Jewish leaders and false messiahs (political saviors). There have been many supposed guides and saviors in the world, both religious/spiritual and political. They claim to be guides, leaders or saviors, but they don’t truly care about the people, and they lead the people astray. The result is *not* ‘life to the full’ but rather deprivation, death, and destruction (*10:10*).

⁶ The best life is life in union with God – the Source of life and every good thing. This is much better than mere physical life. It is spiritual life – eternal life, which begins now and extends into eternity in harmony with God. The full realization of this ‘life to the full’ is future, but our *present* life is enriched by the peace, joy, purpose and hope we experience because of our relationship with God. It is enriched by the gift of the Spirit – God’s presence in us.

The Good Shepherd's Sacrifice

- ❑ The “good shepherd” does something no other shepherd would willingly do for his sheep.
 5. What is the “good shepherd” willing to do, and what does this indicate about him? (*10:11, 15*)⁷



Recognizing the Good Shepherd's Voice

- ❑ Jesus says the sheep “listen to his voice” (*10:3, 16*) and “know his voice” (*10:4*).
 6. How can the sheep know the shepherd’s voice?”⁸ Why do the sheep *not* follow the “stranger’s voice?”⁹ (Consider John 10:3-5, 14.)

- ❑ To “know the Shepherd” and “know his voice”...

- We must be known by God (*10:3b, 14*).¹⁰
- We must realize we are like sheep in need of the Shepherd (*Isaiah 53:6*).
- We must acknowledge (accept) the Shepherd in his goodness, grace, and power.
- We must “listen” to the Shepherd,¹¹ distinguishing between His voice and other voices.¹²
- We must follow the Shepherd.¹³



The Light & You

- Read John 10:19-21. As the Jews were divided at Jesus’ words then, so people are today. What do you think? Do you think Jesus was “raving mad?” Or is he who he claimed to be? Continue to read and think about John’s gospel, and carefully consider the claims of Jesus.
- Brothers and sisters, how well do you know the Good Shepherd? How well do you know His voice? Are you consistently following Him instead of “strangers?” Commit to grow in your personal knowledge of him through listening to his word and obediently following him.

⁷ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us’ (*1 John 3:16*). He offered his life as an atoning sacrifice. He gave himself over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our salvation (*Romans 4:25*).

⁸ In this context, Jesus is speaking primarily of those who listen to his call to follow him, especially during the time of his earthly ministry. Like actual sheep who hear their shepherd, these people can actually hear (that is, audibly hear) the Shepherd’s voice. However, the analogy is appropriately extended to people today, both in ‘hearing’ Jesus’ call to follow him, and also in ‘hearing his voice’ in the daily life of the believer. See the next bullet point.

⁹ ‘do not recognize a stranger’s voice’ (*v. 5*) means not recognizing the voice as being their rightful shepherd.

¹⁰ Of course, God knows all things. But here, ‘to know’ goes beyond intellectual knowledge to intimate knowledge and personal commitment. This type of knowledge requires personal relationship, which is initiated by God. Our part is to enter into that relationship through faith in Jesus Christ, and then seek to grow in our knowledge of him.

¹¹ ‘Listening to God’ is a subject of some disagreement among Christians. All Christians agree that God ‘speaks’ through the Bible by his Spirit. Many talk about God also ‘speaking’ through ‘the prompting of the Spirit,’ the exhortations of other believers, circumstances, or dreams and visions. God is able to ‘speak’ in whatever ways he chooses. The question is: how should we seek to ‘listen to God’s voice?’ God’s written word (the Bible) is primary and foundational. To hear God’s voice through the Bible, we should realize that the divine Author is living and active. God still speaks through the words written long ago. We need to understand the spiritual nature of God’s word (*1 Corinthians 4:12-14*). The Holy Spirit enables us understand, believe and apply God’s word to our lives.

¹² The more we become familiar with ‘the Shepherd’s voice,’ any ‘voices’ that are inconsistent with His voice can be more easily discerned. If we are walking closely with Jesus, we are much less likely to stray off with ‘strangers.’

¹³ Just ‘hearing’ is not enough. We must follow the shepherd if we are going to benefit from his care. Following the shepherd means entrusting ourselves to his leadership and care. As we do that, we grow in our knowledge of him.