



John 10:11-18 - 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."

Jesus is our Good Shepherd



How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

(1 John 3:1)

Of all the images and metaphors the Bible uses to describe the relationship between Jesus and his people, the one we have before us today has got to be one of the most well known and best loved. We designate a Sunday of the church year (today) to focus our attention on it. We name churches and schools by this title; we teach our children songs about it; we call to mind this comforting truth at every Christian funeral service when we read the words of Psalm 23. You know which one I'm talking about – Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are his sheep. But who needs a shepherd? I've never met a shepherd, and I'm guessing you probably haven't either. And outside of a petting zoo and a very occasional run in with lamb chops, I have no experience with sheep. Doesn't it strike you as a little odd that this most well known and well loved metaphor describing the love of Christ for his people, seems almost inaccessible and unrelatable for the vast majority of 21st century Christians? Really, who needs a shepherd? Most people would probably say, "Not I!" And so, people go looking for something else. Give me a financial planner; someone who will chart the course for my personal wealth through an ever-fluctuating stock market. Give me a physical trainer; someone who will get me trim and tone and finally happy about myself. Give me a life coach; someone who will watch and guide and teach and bring about the best possible version of myself. These are relatable. These make sense. But do any of these self-help gurus really provide a solution to your biggest problem?

Who needs a shepherd? We don't think so...until we realize our desperate need. No amount of money gained, pounds lost, or life improved could ever provide us with the way to God or pay for our sin or deal with our death. A healthy, wealthy, and improved human will inevitably become a once healthy, formerly wealthy dead person. What then? Listen to the voice of your Good Shepherd in his word of promise, **I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...only to take it up again.** Who needs a shepherd? You do. I do. Everyone on this planet does. Why? Simply put, born as sinful creatures into this sinful world, we were lost – and not just the happy-go-lucky kind of lost. There are forces actively seeking our destruction. The wolves of the world and the hounds of hell would've liked nothing more than to make a quick meal out of you – lost, alone, wandering aimlessly, without knowing which end was up. The illustration Jesus uses is an accurate one. We're like sheep – not the brightest critters in the barnyard; wanting to wander; searching for satisfaction in all the wrong places; thinking we're good on our own, as we march our merry way farther and farther from the safety of the flock toward our own destruction.

If you think it's insulting to be compared to sheep, you're right. It is insulting...to the sheep! After all, sheep don't talk about each other behind their sheep backs. Sheep don't lie or steal or hate. Sheep don't hold grudges. Sheep don't use their words to tear down. Sheep don't rejoice in seeing that arrogant person finally get what's coming to them. Sheep don't, but humans do. And it's not just a problem outside of these walls. If you want to see how bad it can get, even in the sheepfold of the church, then look no further than this sheepish heart right here. I can say with King David, *"The LORD is my shepherd"*...but I still want things I can't have; and I find myself wondering if my Shepherd really will supply my need. *"He makes me lie down in green pastures"*...but the grass is greener over there – at his house, at her job, in their marriage. *"He leads me beside quiet waters,"* but I can think of a million different things to do rather than drink deeply from the well of my Good Shepherd's Word. Maybe I'm tired, maybe I think I have other commitments to honor, or maybe I just don't care all that much. *"He restores my soul"*...but really, I don't need it as much as she does. Do you see the sheep-like attitude? One that thinks all is well and I'm doing fine on my own, but one that's blind to my spiritual condition. Slowly, subtly, we saunter from the safety of our Shepherd.



The prophet Isaiah had it right when he spoke these words about 700 years before Jesus used the same picture, **We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.** Because of our sin, we should've been devoured by devil's wolves, and Jesus had every right to act like the hired hand. **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.** Who would die for such a worthless bunch of wandering sheep? Not the hired hand; he's got no skin in the game. Who would die for such a worthless bunch of wandering sheep? Only the Good Shepherd. Because of our sin, we were separated from the flock. We were lost, alone, and oblivious to our condition. But that's where the Good Shepherd found you. You didn't find the Shepherd; he found you. And he didn't just stumble upon you. He went looking for you. He put all his attention, all his focus, all his power to work so that he could save you and bring you into his fold.

But how did he do it? The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is one of those heart-warming pictures of the Bible. This is not the description of God as the mighty Refuge and Fortress; this is not the Almighty God as the mountain moving Deity. Instead, in Jesus the Good Shepherd, we see God's compassionate heart. We see the Jesus who binds up the broken hearted, the Jesus who stoops down to embrace even the littlest of his lambs, we see the Jesus who holds his precious sheep close to his heart, never to be removed. This gospel promise paints the picture of resting in green pastures beside quiet waters. It's peaceful, idyllic, and serene. It's heart warming! But how does he do it? How did the Good Shepherd bring about such peace? I don't mean the kind of peace we think we have when our finances are squared away or my marriage is looking up. I mean the only peace that really matters - true peace between a sinful human and a holy God. How did Jesus bring about such a peaceful, idyllic reality? Through death and destruction...but not yours. Did you catch what Jesus said five times in the span of eight verses? **I lay down my life...I lay down my life...I lay down my life.** How did the Good Shepherd bring about peace? By sacrificing himself on Calvary's cross to pay for our sins and bring us into his flock.

How backwards is this love of God! What shepherd would die for his sheep – who dies for a job? Does the auto mechanic sacrifice himself for the sake of that rebuilt transmission he's been working on? If a fisherman spills his bait in the water, does he dive in after it, even though he can't swim? Even if disease decimates the dairy farmer's milking cows, he could buy more cows. It might cost him some money, but it wouldn't cost him his life. So, what a remarkable love Jesus shows by **laying down his life** for the sheep. Why does he do it? Because to him, you're not a job. You're not an expendable commodity; you're not just something to be replaced should anything happen. To him, you're everything. To him, you're worth dying for. And, grace upon grace, this isn't something that just happened to Jesus and coincidentally benefits you. Quite the opposite, in fact. Over and over again, Jesus says, **The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I lay down my life for the sheep...I lay down my life.** Did you notice who's the subject of those sentences; the one doing the action? It's Jesus! This wasn't someone else's doing, this was all under our Good Shepherd's control. He willingly gave his life to pay the full price of your sins, but he didn't stay dead. He took up his life again on Easter morning to guarantee that your death is defeated and your eternity is secure.

We have a Shepherd, not one who shouts direction from a distance in the hopes that you'll find your way back to him. We have a Shepherd who dives in; one who doesn't shy away from the muck and mire of your life; one who pays no mind to the putrid smell of our shame or the great personal cost to himself. We have a Shepherd who saw the hopelessly and haplessly lost sheep, so he did something. He didn't sit on his throne on high and lament the wretched state of his once perfect creation. Instead of rightly condemning the whole sinful world, he became sin itself. Jesus Christ became what he was not, so that he could declare us to be what we were not – holy, righteous in God's sight, perfect sheep in the fold of the Good Shepherd. Jesus said, **I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.** Your Good Shepherd knows you – not just as a nameless, faceless creature, but as his



brother or sister. Through your baptism, the Good Shepherd has claimed you as his sheep for time and eternity, calling you by name, adopting you into his family. That's the blessing we get to celebrate for Edison today. The Good Shepherd has added another lamb to his fold – and though the devil and the world may try to tear him away, listen to the promise of the Good Shepherd, **My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.** In the waters of baptism, your Savior makes you that same promise – nothing will tear you from his nail scarred hands.

You have a Good Shepherd who's with you every day and everywhere you go, so there's no reason to feel "sheepish" about life! What's making you sheepish today? Fear of the future? Your Good Shepherd knows the past like he knows the present like he knows the future, and just as he's promised you his shepherding care today, so he'll be there tomorrow and the next day, giving you his full attention, even calling you by your name. What's making you sheepish today? A temptation that just won't go away? Your Good Shepherd was **tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin.** Your Good Shepherd has defeated the devil and his temptations, and gives you his victory through faith. What's making you sheepish today? Guilt over the past? Your Good Shepherd has paid for your sin, defeated your death, and risen triumphant over all of it! What's making you sheepish today? A constant desire for more – a bigger this or a better that? Jesus is your Good Shepherd, and with King David you can say, "the LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." In your Good Shepherd, you have everything – forgiveness for yesterday, hope for today, and certainty for eternity. And the beautiful truth about our Good Shepherd? All he wants is you. In 21st century America, who needs a shepherd? We do, and by God's grace, we've got the best one.

Amen

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

(Jude 24-25)