

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

JOHN 10:11-18



UNDERSTANDING HIS WORD

1. Chrysostom comments, “When he brings us to the Father, he calls himself a Door, when he takes care of us, a Shepherd.”
The symbol of the shepherd is more comprehensive than that of the door, since it includes the thought of bringing people to God and caring for them.
2. Jesus calls himself “the Good Shepherd.”
Attention must be given to the article ‘the’ before the word ‘shepherd.’ Jesus is not any shepherd, but the definitive shepherd.
There is also an article before the adjective ‘good.’ John is giving equal emphasis to both the adjective and the noun: the ‘good’ and the ‘shepherd.’ Literally, John 10:11 would be translated, ‘the shepherd, the good one.’
3. Two different words are translated ‘good.’
Agathos is used in Jn. 1:46: “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”; in Jn. 5:29: “Those who have done good will rise to live”; and in 7:12: “Some said, ‘He is a good man.’”
Kalos is used in Jn. 2:10 to describe the wine one serves first, here; in Jn. 10:11, 14 to describe the shepherd.

While the two words may be interchangeable, *agathos* seems to focus more on competence and efficiency, capability, usefulness or the intrinsic moral quality. *kalos* seems to include an element of grace and love, a winsomeness that makes it beautiful or lovely. *Kalos* then embraces both beauty and goodness.

Hence, Jesus, as *kalos* is both efficient (*agathos*) and gracious in his loving care of his sheep. It points to the shepherd’s readiness to lay down his life for his sheep.

4. The difference between a shepherd and a hireling is that the *good* shepherd “lays down his life for the sheep” (10:11). Because “the hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep...when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away” (10:12). “The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep” (10:13).
In stark contrast, a shepherd counts no cost too high to protect his sheep. He is even willing to give his life for his sheep. Regardless of what happens, he will never leave his flock to danger. He stands steadfastly between the sheep and the ravaging wolves. Instead of the sheep facing the wolves, the shepherd takes the sheep’s place in the confrontation. Instead of the sheep dying, the shepherd dies. The concept of voluntary substitution is more than hinted here.

5. Jesus reiterates, *"I Am the Good Shepherd"* and elaborates, *"I know my sheep and my sheep know me..."* (10:14).
A shepherd's knowledge of his sheep was very important in Palestine, especially where several flocks grazed together or spent the night in the same fold. Psalm 23 indicates the personal attention given by the Good Shepherd, so the sheep have no lack.
The close relationship between the shepherd and the sheep rests on and is a participation in the intimate relationship that binds Jesus to the Father. It is this intimate relationship that results in the abundant life Jesus came to give (10:10). The essence of this relationship is a total self-giving. The basis for a superabundant life is unreserved trust and self abandonment.

6. The Shepherd's role is not only to tend the flock, but also to gather all his sheep. *"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also"* (10:16).
"...Jesus would die...not only for that (Jewish) nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one" (11:52).
There is no other Shepherd who can give the fullness of life to all, as only He gave His life for all, to *"draw all men to myself"* (12:32). His mission is not only to the Jews, but to the world. His people are not only in the Jewish fold, but the Gentiles as well. The Great Commission is to *"make disciples of all nations..."* (Mt. 28:19). The people of God are not to remain scattered, but *"there shall be one flock and one shepherd"* (10:16).

7. All come to the Shepherd by responding to His call: *"They too will listen to my voice..."* (10:16a). God is the Creator, in that He initiates life. When we respond to His initiatives, we receive His life. Intimacy with God is a response to God who took the first step towards us.

8. Elaborating the assertion that *"the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep"* (10:11), Jesus announces that His death is willed by God's love for the world – *"This command I received from my Father"* (10:18c) – but also a voluntary laying down of His life. Jesus was not coerced to give His life – *"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"* (10:18) – but He willingly laid it down in concurrence with God's will of love. The *"no one"* refers to those who seek to kill Jesus. He was not a victim of a conspiracy, the target of betrayal, or the subject of mockery of a trial. The situation was never out of His control. All his humiliating suffering was willingly endured by Jesus, who gave His life of His own accord.

9. The death of Jesus is always spoken in the same breath as His Resurrection. Just as Jesus *"lay(s) down"* His life, He *"take(s) it up"* by His own authority. John's Gospel records the *"lifting up"* sayings, 2:19-21; 3:14-15; 8:28; 12:31-32 to indicate Jesus' resurrection. In His death, Jesus obeys His Father. In His resurrection, Jesus glorifies the Father.



1. The Shepherd stays with his sheep to confront the dangers the sheep are vulnerable to. He protects those who are his, and gives his life for their safety and welfare. He will never abandon his people. Those who have no stake in the sheep care only for themselves, and they will not risk their own security.

The shepherd was absolutely responsible for the sheep. If anything happened to a sheep, the shepherd had to produce some kind of evidence he had done all he could to protect or save the sheep. Amos speaks of the shepherd who rescued two leg bones or a piece of an ear out of a lion's mouth (Amos 3:12), in giving assurance that the Israelites will be saved from their enemies. The Mosaic Law stipulates, *"If it was torn to pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring in the remains as evidence"* (Ex. 22:13), indicating that the shepherd must bring home proof that the sheep had died, and there was nothing that was not done to prevent that. David described how he fought a lion and bear to protect his father's sheep. Isaiah records how a crowd of shepherds were called out to deal with a lion (Isa. 31:4). Jesus is the **good** shepherd – more than able, and filled with love and compassion. The shepherd risks and gives his life. The hireling protects his own life at the expense of the sheep, and justifies it. Such *"worthless shepherds"* *"will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs"* (Zech. 11:16). They will be judged: *"Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!"* (Zech. 11:17). Our lives are entrusted to the Good Shepherd.

The shepherd stands between us and the dangers that threaten us. We have a buffer in Christ. Anxiety is raised when we feel alone facing real or imagined dangers. If we feel we can depend on no one to face a hostile situation, destructive powers stronger than our strengths, or people out to ensure our failure, the shepherd's promise is, *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?'"* (Heb. 13:5-6).

2. The people of God are always threatened. Jesus said He was sending His disciples as sheep in the midst of wolves (Mt. 10:16). Paul warned the Ephesian elders that grievous wolves would come; not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29).

Our threats could be external or internal. Or an intertwining of both. That is the feature of anxiety and worry. We are worried about the past, future, people, health or finances. These can rob us of our peace and joy. Some of these threats may be real, others imagined.

Emerson captured it well –

*Some of your hurts you have cured
And the sharpest you still have survived
But what torment of grief you've endured
From evils that never arrived.*

We seek God's intervention in all that torments and threatens our well-being. We know there is nothing He will not do to protect and save us. Even in the most intractable situation, He will make a way for us.

GOD WILL MAKE A WAY

Words & Music by Don Moen

God will make a way
Where there seems to be no way
He works in ways we cannot see
He will make a way for me
He will be my guide
Hold me closely to His side
With love and strength for each new day
He will make a way
He will make a way

By a roadway in the wilderness, He'll lead me
And rivers in the desert will I see
Heaven and earth will fade
But His Word will still remain
He will do something new today

3. The shepherd assumes total responsibility for the welfare of the sheep, those under his charge and care. The Creator of the universe and the redeeming God of the world, the God who has a history with his people – it is this great and particular God who assumes the role of the shepherd.

The grammatical force of Ps. 23:1: *“So long as the Lord is my shepherd, I suffer no lack!”* That is followed by *“I will fear no evil”* (Ps. 23:4b). The source of that confidence is *“You are with me...”*.

Our boastings of self sufficiency is an affront to God when we are naturally as lost as sheep. We depend so much on our abilities we do not step into a future we cannot foresee or control. We depend on studies, analysis, forecast, financial strength or influential relationships to conduct our business and life. When we do not see those bases for action, we fix blame or relegate responsibilities to others. We do not fully realize that we can neither predict nor control anything.

But, when we practice the “Presence of God” we become “faith entrepreneurs.” There is an abandon of trust in the means when we are sure of the goals. There is a venture of faith in seeing the Lord put everything together. There is an implicit trust in the Lord, from whom no one can take anything.

4. The Shepherd knows us intimately. The intimacy is expressed in the recognition of his voice from the cacophony of noise around. “Hearing God” is a sign of a close relationship that is of critical importance. His voice is distinct from other sounds. The test of our hearing is in times of crisis and danger when pandemonium breaks. When there is shrieking and yelling around us that raises fear and panic, only His sheep will hear the clear, calm voice of the Shepherd that will lead them to safety and security.