

Focus Scripture:

I am the good shepherd (text: John 10:11, 14; context: John 10:1-18).

Theme: Christians believe the good shepherd summons us to a life-giving relationship with Himself.

“Known by the Shepherd”

Jesus immediately accentuates the chief qualification of the good shepherd. He lays down His life for the sheep. The defining characteristic of His shepherd role is a supreme act of sacrificial love for the flock that is under His care. The church will remember these words as a reference to the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross; but at the time they were spoken, these words were taken as application of a common observation. Shepherds in that day and place risked it all to protect their sheep from thieving humans and predatory beasts; and then there was the dangerous wilderness weather, poisonous reptiles and insects, and the perils involved in rescuing sheep from cliffs, ravines, and aimless wandering. In observing this commonplace, we are confronted with another irony. Jesus likens Himself to a shepherd but He is still unlike any shepherd that has ever been. The sacrifice that Jesus makes for the sheep is truly selfless. It is only for the sake of the sheep, not Himself, that he makes this sacrifice. There is nothing personal to be gained from His sacrifice except that which He already had before He arrived. Jesus loves the sheep for their sake, not His sake.

In contrast, the ordinary shepherd is really acting to protect his investment. His livelihood and the welfare of his family are caught up in his sheep. His sheep are the basis of his status, wealth, and reputation. His sheep are his food, supply, and currency. His identity is tied up in his sheep. Even when he selects some of them to be his offering on the altar or his Passover meal, or sells some to his neighbors for these purposes, he is serving his own self-interest. When the ordinary shepherd fights for his sheep he is fighting for his life and property. Jesus implies this when he contrasts the shepherd with the hired hand. The distinguishing circumstance of the hired hand is that he does not own the sheep. He has no investment in the sheep. His identity is not tied up in the sheep. His life is independent of the sheep. Therefore, when he sees the wolf coming, he flees.

The contrast between the shepherd and the hired hand allows Jesus to illustrate His passionate commitment to the people of His flock; however, the commitment of Jesus to His followers still exceeds that of any shepherd to his sheep. Jesus underscores this difference when He identifies Himself as the good shepherd.

It is also common knowledge that shepherds know their sheep and sheep know their shepherd. But Jesus compares the knowledge shared between Him and His sheep to that which is shared between Him and the Father. By making this comparison, Jesus not only draws His people into relationship with Himself, but also into relationship with His Father. No matter how close ordinary shepherds are to their sheep, and the sheep are to them, there is no relationship that approaches the love shared between Jesus, the Father, and us.

Jesus is the good shepherd because He draws us into relationship with Himself and the Father. He is the good shepherd because He also draws sheep of a different fold into one flock. This is the great work of uniting Gentile and Jew into one people of God. Finally, the good shepherd knows no comparison when He explains why the Father loves Him. It is not that Jesus has to earn the Father's love; it is just that Jesus does what the Father loves. He lays down His life so that He can take it up again. He has power to lay it down. He has power to take it up again. Shepherds have died for their sheep, but none have ever come back from the dead so that their sheep can do the same. With this extraordinary nod to His resurrection, Jesus shows that He is a shepherd without equal.

As wonderful as it is to know the shepherd, it is even more wonderful to be known by the shepherd. Jesus knowing us is the other side of us knowing Jesus. There really is something to that old adage "It is not what you know; it is who you know." especially when the person we know is Jesus. For to know Jesus is to be known by Jesus.

This is an extraordinary state of affairs that translates into assurance of salvation, confidence in life, and a sense of companionship, worth, security, purpose, and calling. We have seen the tragic results when these blessings are missing from the human spirit. The good news is that they need not be missing. They can be the possession of anyone who receives the shepherd into his or her life. Come to the good shepherd. He wants to make you one of His flock.

FOCUS QUESTIONS - John 10:11

1. What occurs to you as you read this? What questions arise for you?
2. Jesus invites us into a relationship with him in which we can know his voice. Have we embraced this reality with all of the possibilities therein? Are we deliberate about learning to hear his voice more clearly? Or are we content to listen only in our moments of deepest need?
3. How do you practice knowing Him as much as He demonstrates knowing you?
4. Who "owns" you?
5. When was there a time in your life when the Shepherd fought for you? What factors were involved in that incident? What was your response?
6. Jesus sets the example of a good shepherd for His flocks. How can we follow His example of being a good shepherd for our students?
7. What "wounds" have you hidden from the Shepherd? How can he heal them and bring you back to the fullness of His life?

Life/Discipline Application:

What does this passage mean in your school or department - consider the implications of the passage to your day-to-day lives.

Personal Reflection:

What does this mean to you - examine the implications of the passage to your own day to day life.

Additional Print Resources:

- Fuquay, Rob. *The God We Can Know: Exploring the "I AM" Sayings of Jesus*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2014.
- Harris, W. Hall III. *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. <https://bible.org>. 2009.
- Marrow, Tim. *Before Abraham "I AM!" The Claims of Christ from the Gospel of John*. Bloomington, IN., CrossBooks/Lifeway, 2010.
- Okorie, A.M. "The Self-Revelation of Jesus in the "I AM" Sayings of John's Gospels." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 28/5 (2001): 486-490.
- Simmons, Billy. "A Christology of the "I Am" Sayings in the Gospel of John." *The Theological Educator* 38/1 (1988): 94-103.
- Whitacre, Rodney A. *Commentaries for the Book of John (IVP New Testament Commentaries)*. www.biblegateway.com. 2010.
- Wiersbe, Warren W. *Jesus in the Present Tense: The I AM Statements of Christ*. Colorado Springs, Co., David C. Cook, Publisher, 2011.