

## The Good Shepherd

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We live in a world of competing voices battling for our hearts and minds. We live in the age of social media. Influencers. Podcasters. Newsfeeds. AI. The tactics of this battle have changed over time; however; the battle is not new. The apostle Paul wrote about the battle for the mind (2 Cor. 10:4-5). Surprisingly, we determine who wins our hearts and minds. We can listen to Jesus or we can listen to the world.

One of the best-known descriptions of Jesus is the Good Shepherd. In John chapter ten, Jesus describes Himself as a shepherd with genuine love for the sheep. This teaching of Jesus is about us and who we choose to follow. Unlike the self-serving hired hands, Jesus gives His life to save the sheep. In this article, we will consider the meaning of Jesus' illustration of the Good Shepherd and the sheep.

### The Good Shepherd & the Sheep

**1). We are sheep.** To better appreciate the importance of what Jesus describes in this illustration, we will begin by considering where we fit in His description. Being described as sheep is significant. Sheep are not considered strong, assertive animals. If we were to name an animal that best suits our personality, few if any would describe themselves as a sheep.

Sheep are helpless animals. They are unintelligent. They require someone to lead them to food and water. They cannot protect themselves from predators. If left to themselves, they will die. On one occasion, Jesus described a crowd of people as sheep. They were harassed and helpless (Matt. 9:35). They desperately needed a shepherd.

What is Jesus trying to teach us about ourselves by describing us as sheep? We are hopeless without a shepherd. But, we do not need just any shepherd. We need a shepherd with self-giving love. We need what Jesus alone can give us.

**2). Jesus gives us identity.** In His description of the Good Shepherd, Jesus said, "...he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3). As an act of authority over the sheep, the shepherd names his sheep. The sheep do not name themselves; of course, they are incapable of naming themselves. Yet, once named, they respond to the voice of the shepherd.

What is Jesus trying to teach us? Our names represent our identities. Jesus gives us a new identity. This represents a new purpose, a new vocation, and or a new life. Jesus giving identity is not how the world teaches we gain identity.

In our society, we put the responsibility of finding an identity on ourselves. This is a crushing burden. Today, people attempt to identify themselves by their careers, their gender, and or with whom they have sex. This creates disappointment, pride, pain, confusion, and shame. Sadly, many people live without knowing who they are.

Jesus takes the burden of identity away from us. He names us. He gives us purpose. He calls us son or daughter. He tells us to spend our lives in the service of His Father.

**3). Jesus died for everyone.** Jesus contrasts the hired hands and the Good Shepherd. The hired hands are self-interested; whereas, the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The Good Shepherd died trying to save the sheep, even some who were not yet part of the fold.

Instead of tearing apart the sheep, the predator tore apart the Good Shepherd. This image is intended to overwhelm us with emotion. Jesus died to save the world from eternal death. He sacrificed Himself out of love for the sheep. He died for us, in our place.

“I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father” (John 10:15-18).

**4). Jesus gives life.** The Good Shepherd died so that the sheep might live. The quality of life provided by the Good Shepherd must not be underestimated. Jesus describes the Good Shepherd leading the sheep to food and safety. By following the voice of the Good Shepherd, the sheep enjoy an abundant life.

Jesus is trying to convey the good, abundant life we could have if we obeyed His voice. What would our lives be like if instead of trying to find ourselves, we allowed Jesus to give us a name? Imagine the weight that would be lifted from our shoulders. What if we had someone in our lives who genuinely had our best interests at heart? We could trust and then find peace.

**5). A word of warning.** Jesus warns about listening to the voice of the stranger. The stranger’s voice is enticing. He promises life but only brings death and destruction. At the first sign of danger, he runs and leaves the sheep exposed to danger.

We must have discerning ears. The sheep of the Good Shepherd know the difference between the voice of their Master and the voice of the stranger. Jesus said, “A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:5). We must be attentive to the teaching of Jesus. Otherwise, we will be led astray by an empty promise.

### **Conclusion**

The world is a dangerous place. Without some base of awareness, the world will destroy us. The Good Shepherd has died that we might live; yet, He still calls out to us. His voice is discernable through the din of strangers. He will lead us to an abundant life. He will save us for eternal life.