

The GOOD SHEPHERD

A STUDY OF PSALM 23

Pre-Camp Study

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2026 Pre-Camp Bible Study – The Good Shepherd

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OVERVIEW

In a world full of noise — opinions, pressures, expectations — it's easy to get lost or follow the wrong voice. But Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows you, leads you, and laid down His life for you. That means He knows you deeply, leads you gently, and loves you sacrificially. His voice brings peace, truth, and life. You can trust His voice above all others.

Scriptures: John 10:1-18; John 16:6; Romans 10:9; Psalm 139:13-16; Ephesians 3:20; Matthew 11:28-29

Key Verse: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me” (John 10:14).

Life Question: What does it mean to trust Jesus as my Good Shepherd, especially when life feels confusing or hard?

GATHER THESE SUPPLIES:

- Large sheets of paper
- Markers
- Paper for each student
- Pens for each student
- Reflection question cards for each student

PREPARE AHEAD OF TIME:

- Print these reflection questions on a card (one card per student).
 - How do you learn to listen better to the voice of the Good Shepherd?
 - How do you avoid trusting bad shepherds?
 - How do you deal with the efforts of the enemy to steal, kill, or destroy in your life?
 - Do you trust God to lead you even when it doesn't feel easy? How can you surrender more to Him?

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MOTIVATION

They Know His Voice

Ask for a volunteer (student, youth leader, or youth pastor) to face one side of the room. Invite a group of students to line up behind the volunteer. Make sure the volunteer cannot see and doesn't look at the lineup of students. One-by-one, lead each student to say, "**We're going to FUGE Camps!**" The volunteer facing away must guess the name of each student based on their voice. Keep a tally of how many correct guesses are made. Debrief with the volunteer by asking:

- **Was this task easy or difficult?**
- **How did you recognize some voices but not others?**

Say: "**This game was about identifying one another's voices. Did you know that sheep are able to identify the voice of their shepherd? The shepherd's familiar voice tends to be the only voice a flock will respond to. Scripture often describes believers as sheep and Christ as our Good Shepherd. We are called to know our Good Shepherd's voice. We love the idea of this, but the truth is we are often tempted to follow the voices of this world.**"

Form groups of four to five students and give each group markers and a large sheet of paper.

Say: "**In your groups, write down other voices we tend to listen to and follow.**" (Ex: social media, friends, celebrities, our own expectations, etc.)

Invite one or two groups to share. Ask: "**Why are these voices so tempting to us?**"

Debrief: As believers, our aim is to follow the voice of our Shepherd. His voice is trustworthy and true. His voice is calling us to be a part of His flock. The people Jesus spoke to would have been familiar with shepherding. This was a well-known career and one that deeply influenced the Jews' reading of the Old Testament. After all, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David, pillars of the Jewish faith (and all in the line of Christ), were shepherds. Jesus was strategic when He used this metaphor. He was drawing on an example His listeners would have been familiar with. His goal was to bring all sheep to Himself — that people might put their faith and trust in Him.

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Say: “Generations later, we’re asking the same question: Who is the shepherd, or the voice, we are to follow?”

Pray before continuing. Ask the Good Shepherd to lead you and your group to a better understanding of these passages and a deeper love for Him.

EXAMINATION

The Good Shepherd

Direct a student to read aloud **John 10:1-6**:

1 “Truly I tell you, anyone who doesn’t enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber. **2** The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. **3** The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. **5** They will never follow a stranger; instead they will run away from him, because they don’t know the voice of strangers.” **6** Jesus gave them this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them.

Ask: “After reading this, how many of you feel the way Jesus’ audience felt . . . lost and a bit confused about what Jesus was saying?”

Say: “To help us get some context, what are some facts you know about sheep?”
(They are not intelligent; some say they can see almost all the way around their head; they are able to distinguish voices and faces; they are animals who feed on pastures; they are not aggressive animals.)

Say: “In Scripture, we are likened to sheep. (Don’t be offended, there are worse animals we could have been compared to!) With that in mind, did you know that sheep are the most named animal in all of Scripture? When we love something, we typically talk a lot about it. I think it’s safe to say the Good Shepherd loves His sheep.” (Dr. Jeremy Evans [I Am Part V](#))

Share: Like the passages mentioned, during this time, sheep were often kept in sheep pens. These pens were circular or square wall enclosures made of stones. (**NOTE:** Do

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an internet search for an image of these pens to show your class.) If there wasn't a gate to close, the gatekeeper or shepherd would sit in the opening to prevent intruders from getting to the sheep. If someone is sneaking over the wall instead of passing through the gate, they probably don't have the flock's best interest in mind. In John 10:1, Christ is warning His listeners of people — or the evil one — trying to sneak into our lives with intentions of harm.

Direct the class to form into groups of four to five students. Add this stipulation: You cannot be with more than two from your earlier group. Ask them to answer this question: **“What are some things you notice the shepherd doing in this passage?”**

Leave time for a few groups to give their answers.

Share: The Shepherd in verses 1-2 gives permission for the gate to be *opened* and *knows* the sheep. In verse 3, the Shepherd *calls* them. And in verses 4-6, the Shepherd *leads* the sheep. Before sheep can be called and led, they must be familiar with the voice of the Shepherd. To recognize the voice of the Shepherd, you have to know Him. “Knowing” something requires dedicated time to that person or thing.

Say: **“We must spend time with the Lord to get to know Him and His voice. Instead, we often fill our time listening to other things such as other people’s opinions, the lies of the enemy, culture and society, and our own desires. For some of us, the bulk of our time may be spent getting to know the people we follow on social media.”**

Ask: **“How many of you spend several hours on social media each day? What about time watching your favorite show or YouTube videos?”** Give time for students to answer. Have fun with this!

Share: We spend so much time becoming familiar with other people’s voices that we forget to make the Lord’s voice our highest priority. We begin to be shepherded by things of this world. Instead, we should be following the example of the sheep in our earlier passage. Reread **John 10:5**.

Say: **“Do you run from other voices? You cannot follow two masters. It’s time for us to start running away from the tempting voices of this world and start running to the cross.”**



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Instruct students to stand for a spin-off game of “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes.” Explain to students that you will call commands from the front of the room. Students are to point to their head, shoulders, knees, or toes as you call each part. While you call commands, invite another adult (or two) to come to the front of the room to call commands alongside you. If the students fulfill the commands from the other adult volunteer(s), they are out. If they don’t complete your command, they are also out. The last student standing wins.

Debrief by asking:

- **How did you do?**
- **How confusing was it with the different voices?**

Say: **“Just like in this game, our world can feel chaotic with so many voices. These voices and lots of distractions try to gain our attention and pull our eyes away from our King. It’s important to know our Shepherd’s voice above the noise. As we hear Him, our only response should be obedience. Don’t just walk away from the other voices — run!”**

Ask: **“How can we distinguish Christ’s voice among the noise? What does it look like to run from the things of this world?”**

Allow discussion and then share:

God’s Word: Do you spend time in God’s Word? God has given us a source of communication that has withstood time and has never changed. As you study the Scriptures, you will be guided through the challenges in life and the heart of the Father will be revealed to you.

Prayer: When was the last time you invested in prayer? I’m not just talking about a quick blessing over a meal, but dedicated time where you brought God your concerns, requests, praises, and a moment to listen for Him. Time with Him grounds us and quiets the chaos of our world.

Godly Community: Are you invested in your youth group? Are you actively participating in your church? We all need a godly community who will help point us to

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the truth of God's voice when we get lost in emotions, disappointments, and sorrows. Accountability is essential if we are serious about obedience to His voice.

Share: When we are part of Jesus' flock, we are led by His voice. And sometimes the way is not always easy or smooth or the way we thought it would be.

Ask: "Will you still trust Jesus even in the difficult times? Will you choose to follow Him when the pastures of life aren't as green as you hoped?"

Tell students to find a partner and share a time when God led them into a difficult season. Answer the question: **How did you choose to respond?**

Say: "Jesus is better still. He has called you by name (John 10:3) and knows every ounce of you (Psalm 139:13-16). My prayer is that you will give Christ a chance to lead you fully and that you will trust His plan, which is 'above and beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us' " (Ephesians 3:20).

Invite a student to read aloud **John 10:7-13:**

7 Jesus said again, "Truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. **8** All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. **9** I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. **10** A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance. **11** I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **12** The hired hand, since he is not the shepherd and doesn't own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them. **13** This happens because he is a hired hand and doesn't care about the sheep."

Say: "In these verses, we are introduced to some of Jesus' 'I am' statements. These statements found throughout the New Testament are how God describes Himself."

Ask: "How does Jesus describe Himself in these passages? Who does He say He is?" ("I am the gate" [John 10:7] and "I am the good shepherd" [John 10:11])

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Say: **“When Jesus describes Himself as ‘the gate for the sheep,’ He is referring back to the sheep pen. Remember, if a sheep pen didn’t have a gate, the shepherd might sit in front of it and act as the gate — protecting the sheep from anything getting in. The sheep are brought into ultimate safety.**

Ask someone to read aloud **John 14:6:**

Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Ask: **“After reading this passage, how is Jesus our ‘gate’?”**

Say: **“When we receive Jesus as our Savior, He acts as our ‘gate,’ or our access to the Father. He gives us permission to enter into the throne room of heaven at the end of our days when we believe in our hearts and confess with our mouths that He is Lord (Romans 10:9). He is what makes us blameless before the Father. He is the one who allows us to find pasture and ultimate rest in Him because He is willing to lay down His life for us.”**

Share: In these verses, Jesus identified Himself as the “Good” Shepherd. With this in mind, there must have been bad shepherds He was distinguishing Himself from (Jeremy Evans [I am Part V](#)). Many scholars believe Jesus is talking about the Pharisees and priests. These men were leading God’s people astray. They acted out of selfish ambition and were pretending to be the “gate” to God. They held the Jews to a strict law that was slowly drifting away from the original law God gave them. The Pharisees and priests were making a mockery out of the love of the Father and pulling people into a works-based faith. Ultimately, these bad shepherds could be anyone trying to pull us from the love of the Father.

Direct the class to form groups with four to five different students. Instruct them to discuss this question: **What are some ways we try to work to earn God’s favor?**

Say: **“Our world tells us we have to be the best at all we do and work for and earn God’s favor. However, God isn’t interested in you earning His favor. He desires a relationship with you. As believers, we need to be reminded of this too. We don’t have to earn God’s forgiveness. It’s a free gift to those who believe in Him, and it’s called grace.”**

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Say: **“Let’s look back to John 10:10: A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.”**

Say: **“This verse says there is a thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy, and that is the devil. But that’s not where the story ends. There is a King who came to give His life so that we may live in abundant grace. He is a Good Shepherd who came for His sheep. He is a Savior who came for you.”**

Ask another student to read aloud **John 10:14-18:**

14 “I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, **15** just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. **16** But I have other sheep that are not from this sheep pen; I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd. **17** This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

Ask: **“What do you think it means when Jesus describes having ‘other sheep who are not from this sheep pen’?”**

Share: Many theologians believe “other sheep” represents the Gentiles (those who were not Jews). Jesus is explaining that the good news He brings is not just for the Jews, but for people of all nations and all generations. He was freely laying down His life for humanity.

APPLICATION

Give each student a pen and a piece of paper with these questions listed:

- **How do you learn to listen better to the voice of the Good Shepherd?**
- **How do you avoid trusting bad shepherds?**
- **How do you deal with the efforts of the enemy to steal, kill, or destroy in your life?**
- **Do you trust God to lead you even when it doesn’t feel easy? How can you surrender more to Him?**



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Share: There's one last fact I'd like to share with you about sheep:

“When a sheep gets away from the flock and gets lost, they don't turn around and try to go back. They hunker down and cry out to be found . . . God isn't asking you to be smart enough, (or) fast enough to figure it out and to chart the path. He's okay with me just hunkering down and crying out for Him to come find me.” (Kristi McLelland: [This is How Much God Really Loves You](#); Better Together on TBN)

Share: Some of us may be feeling like the wandering sheep who thinks there's better pastures in the world other than the one our Shepherd is leading us to. It's time to hunker down and cry out to Him. We were not made to do life on our own. We were not made to follow the thieves and robbers of this world. The pastures our Savior leads us to are better and filled with His goodness.

Re-read John 10:14 out loud: “I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me.”

Share: Today, some of you need to finally recognize there is a better Shepherd for you. One who knows you intimately and has called you by name. A Good Shepherd who isn't intimidated by your past or the state in which you come to Him in. Do you know Him? Are you willing to run from the other shepherds and thieves who are robbing you of the life you were meant to live? Fellow believers, have you stopped and listened for His voice lately? Where is He leading you? Have you thanked Him for being a God who is gentle and lowly among His people?

Say: “Let's take some time to come to Him. Take three to five minutes to meet with your Good Shepherd. Practice listening to His voice.”

PRAYER

Close in prayer by asking the Father to soften their hearts to His Word. Pray that they would get excited for camp and learning more about the Good Shepherd.

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COMMENTARY

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I. Introduction

An Ancient Youth Hymn

We think of the modern youth movement as a post-World War II phenomenon, and, as we know it, that is essentially true. The concept of “teenagers” as a marketing model began in approximately 1941. Teens and “tweens” today (children 8–14) dominate a huge portion of the economy with their wants and needs. Most churches struggle to find new and effective ways to minister to Christians below the adult level.

But young people have always been with us, even though they may not have had their own sociological category. Sometime between A.D. 202 and A.D. 220, Clement of Alexandria wrote a hymn text in Greek that we now know as “Shepherd of Eager Youth.” The original title could literally be translated “tamer of steeds unbridled.” It was apparently used as a hymn of Christian instruction for new converts. Commonly sung to an Italian hymn tune *Felice De Giardini* composed in the eighteenth century, the words pick up the metaphor Jesus uses in chapter 10 of John’s Gospel.

Shepherd of eager youth, guiding in love and truth through devious ways—
Christ, our triumphant King, we come Thy name to sing; hither Thy children bring
tributes of praise.

Thou art our holy Lord, the all-subduing Word, healer of strife; Thou didst
Thyself abase that from sin’s deep disgrace Thou mightest save our race and give
us life.

Ever be near our side, our Shepherd and our Guide, our staff and song; Jesus,
Thou Christ of God, by Thy enduring Word lead us where Thou has trod, make
our faith strong.

Middle-aged and older adults familiar with hymnody know the tune and commonly sing it to the popular hymn, “Come Thou Almighty King.” Osbeck picks up the relational theme of discipleship and focuses on the discipline necessary for sheep: “Christian nurturing of our children requires consistent discipline. Webster defines discipline as ‘training, which corrects, strengthens, and perfects.’ Discipline goes far beyond merely being punitive. Discipline and training have done their job only when they result in a changed character and a desire with self-control. Although there may be times when our youth may rebel and react against their early Christian training, they can never get completely away from it (Prov. 22:6)” (Osbeck, p. 81).

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But shepherding is not just for children and young people. Early in the nineteenth century, Dorothy A. Thrupp wrote another hymn many of us have sung often, “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us.” Thrupp was a native and resident of London. She rarely signed her name to her hymn texts. When she did, she often used a pseudonym. Osbeck tells us that even this familiar hymn “first appeared unsigned in her collection *Hymns for the Young*, in 1836” (Osbeck, p. 79).

Savior, like a shepherd lead us; much we need Thy tender care;
In Thy pleasant pastures feed us; for our use Thy folds prepare:
Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, Thou has bought us, Thine we are;
Blessed Jesus, Blessed Jesus, Thou has bought us, Thine we are.

II. Commentary

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MAIN IDEA: John 10 is one of the most theological chapters in this Gospel, though often misunderstood. The Lord had entered an intense period of conflict and opposition to His ministry, as His enemies analyzed every word with the intention of punishment. He repeatedly alienated the Pharisees and yet drew His own flock closer to Him with teaching sessions just like this one.

A. The Good Shepherd Offers Security (10:1-6)

SUPPORTING IDEA: In contrast to those who steal and abuse the sheep, Jesus is a caring shepherd who takes care of the sheep.

10:1-2. Beginning the chapter with His now famous “I tell you the truth” statement, Jesus changed the metaphor from blindness to sheep-stealing. We cannot tell whether the content of chapter 10 followed immediately on the discussion of chapter 9 or occurred on another occasion. Certainly the Lord intended His listeners to identify people of their day reflected in the metaphors of this parable.

The sheep pen, for example, represents neither heaven nor the church, but probably first-century Judaism. Verse 1 speaks of the thief invading the sheep pen, not the sheep. The “watchman,” if we identify one specifically, may refer to John the Baptist, or perhaps even the Holy Spirit. Obviously, the shepherd is the Lord Himself, and the thief and robber probably refers to the Pharisees against whom He had battled for several chapters.

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Borchert describes the first-century pen of which John spoke: “The sheepfold was a place of security, not a place for intruders. Such a sheepfold would likely have been either a circular or square enclosure, probably constructed like a high stone fence or wall and perhaps topped with vines. The entrance would have been the only break in the wall, and once the sheep were safely inside at night, the watchman/guard (either a servant or a shepherd, usually an assistant) would lie down across the opening and serve both as the protector for the sheep and as a gate to the sheepfold. Unless an intruder was willing to confront the watchman, the only way into the sheepfold was to climb the wall (cf. 10:1)” (Borchert, p. 331).

Some interpreters place prophetic references on the various “figures of speech” as John calls them. But that is not necessary in light of the reality of the times in which Jesus spoke these words. This was a period of intense conflict in the life of our Lord. The Pharisees and their cohorts had committed themselves to exterminating this one whom they considered a “pesky prophet” from Nazareth. These first six verses emphasize security. In the ancient Middle East, one sheep pen held several flocks, so shepherd recognition was imperative. Only personal identification with a shepherd could make a sheep feel safe.

10:3. Verses 1 and 2 tell us that the shepherd knows his sheep, verse 3 that he calls them, and verses 4-6 that he leads them. Clearly the shepherd and the watchman cannot be the same since the watchman opened the door for the shepherd. But we should recognize the uniqueness of parables and not press every word for a specific meaning.

The active verbs seem important in this verse—opens, listen, calls, leads. John is quite specific about the intimacy between shepherd and sheep.

This shepherd does not just sound a call to the whole flock; he calls his sheep by name. This apostle John employed the same expression at the end of his third epistle when he told Gaius, “Friends here send their greetings. Greet the friends there by name” (3 John 14).

The emphasis on leading the sheep reminds us of Numbers 27 and the prayer of Moses for a successor “over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd” (Num. 27:16-17).

10:4-5. Not only do these sheep listen to the shepherd’s voice, they know his voice. John seems to emphasize the point that they never leave the shepherd and never follow a stranger. Garipey reminds us:

The shepherd did not drive his sheep; he led them. Christ has gone the way before us. He has journeyed through life’s thorn-grown wilderness. He knows life’s dangers and perils. The Good Shepherd leads His sheep “beside the still waters.” Otherwise a rushing current might sweep away the flock to destruction,

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or mask the sound of an approaching enemy. But He does not always lead us in pastures green or by waters still. Sometimes He leads us amid the tempests and down into the deep ravines of life. But there is reassurance in the presence of the Good Shepherd (Garipey, p. 212).

But who is this stranger whom the sheep avoid? We do not want to put any dogmatic assignments on the particulars of this parable, but one thing is clear—the stranger is anyone other than the shepherd they know. Strangers abound in our day in a variety of religions and cults as well as the secular domain. Shouting for sheep to follow is common practice, but the Lord’s true sheep pay no attention because they will never follow a stranger.

10:6. As in many of Jesus’ parables, people did not understand the metaphor, at least until He explained its various components which we find later in the chapter. But one thing seems clear in this first paragraph: the sheep were dependent on their shepherd, whom they knew and trusted. Furthermore, the shepherd took full responsibility for the sheep, even though thieves and robbers constantly tried to break into the sheep pen and steal them. In this verse John uses the Greek word *paroimia* (figure of speech), his preferred substitute for *parabole*. The first never appears in the synoptic Gospels and the second never occurs in John, although he used *paroimia* again in 16:25, 29.

B. The Good Shepherd Offers Shelter (10:7-13)

SUPPORTING IDEA: The shepherd alone determines who may enter the fold. He guards the sheep, provides for them, and cares for them. This genuine shelter shows the difference between a true shepherd and a hired hand.

10:7-8. Verse 7 begins just like verse 1 in the Greek text—*amen amen*. Before Jesus actually identified Himself as the Good Shepherd, He described His activity at the sheep gate. We know from Luke 15 that a shepherd counts his sheep and from Psalm 23 how carefully he takes care of them. First-century listeners would have been certain to link this teaching with that familiar psalm.

Jesus did not merely explain the first paragraph of the chapter but actually expanded it. New features are added such as the “hired hand” (v. 12) and the adjective “good” (v. 11). **Thieves** we have seen earlier, but the “wolf” (v. 12) is a new character and the insertion of the teacher into the narrative in the first person—**I am the gate**.

Westcott expands the statement of verse 8: **all who ever came before me were thieves and robbers:** “They who ‘came’ who pretended to satisfy the national expectation inspired by the prophets, or to mould the national expectations after the

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Pharisaic type, who offered in any way that which was to be accepted as the end of the earlier dispensation, who made themselves ‘doors’ of approach to God (Matt. 23:14), were essentially and continued to be inspired by selfishness, whether their designs were manifested by craft or by violence, and whether they were directed to gain or to dominion” (Westcott, p. 153).

We need to be careful with the words **before me**, since they could mean “came up to the gate” or “came ahead of me in time.” The latter is preferred as indicated in Westcott’s comment, but we must keep the cultural context well in mind. Jesus was not criticizing Moses and the prophets and certainly not John the Baptist. But the religious leaders who listened to Jesus’ parables (notably the Pharisees) seem to be the direct target along with false messiahs who tried to entice the sheep.

10:9-10. In addition to guarding the sheep, the Good Shepherd provides for them—unlike thieves who **steal and kill and destroy**. Throwing aside the metaphor to reveal spiritual truth, Jesus told the sheep that He had come to give life so they might live it **to the full**. False shepherds intend to injure the sheep, but that is never the behavior of the true shepherd.

We need to watch carefully the flow between metaphor and spiritual reality here. In verse 9 Jesus is clearly talking about people as spiritual sheep, while verse 10 falls back into the metaphor at the beginning and then talks about spiritual life. The word **life** in verses 10 and 11 translates the Greek word *zoe*, which we have already discussed at some length. As we move into verse 11, we see the contrast built around this spiritual eternal life. The sheep may have it only because the Good Shepherd gives His own life to make this possible.

10:11. This verse provides the key to our passage and another one of the famous “I Am” statements of this Gospel. The good shepherd does not just lie across the opening of the pen to frighten away dangerous predators; if necessary he **lays down his life for the sheep**. Unlike the “worthless” shepherd of Zechariah 11:17, the **good shepherd** makes the supreme sacrifice.

The word *kalos* (**good**) emphasizes genuineness, value, and truth. This verse shows us how the **good shepherd** differs from other shepherds. They might risk their lives for the sheep as David did in fighting off lions and bears, but they would never intentionally die for the sheep as the good shepherd will do. This passage describes substitutionary atonement for sin, the supreme sacrifice of Calvary.

As Carson observes, “The shepherd does not die for his sheep to serve as an example, throwing himself off a cliff in a grotesque and futile display while bellowing, ‘See how much I love you!’ No, the assumption is that the sheep are in mortal danger;

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that in their defense the shepherd loses his life; and by his death they are saved. That, and that alone, is what makes him *the good shepherd*” (Carson, p. 386).

10:12-13. The good shepherd cares for the sheep in a way no hired hand could. We dare not equate the hired hand with the thieves and robbers described earlier. They are clearly evil; he suffers from poor motivation. Since the sheep do not belong to the hired hand, he will not risk his life to save them. He only wants his paycheck and will protect the sheep only when their enemies provide no threat to his own life and safety. Later in the New Testament Peter warned the elders of the church not to be like hired-hand shepherds who functioned with a mercenary attitude (1 Pet. 5:1-7).

C. The Good Shepherd Offers Salvation (10:14-21)

SUPPORTING IDEA: The good shepherd who sacrifices his life for the sheep also relates to them in trust and intimacy; he joins them with other flocks, and in the case of the good shepherd, he dies for the sheep.

10:14-15. We see in this paragraph that the shepherd relates to the sheep in trust and intimacy. What a comparison! The good shepherd knows his sheep in the same way the Father knows the Son. Not only that, but the sheep know the shepherd in the same way the Son knows the Father. Notice how often the Lord talked about laying down His life for the sheep—five times in eight verses—a phraseology unique to John’s Gospel. The third person statement of verse 11 has now become first person: **I lay down my life.**

Boice emphasizes the Lord’s example for our own lives: “We will never be able to give our lives as Jesus gave His life for us—He died for us as our sin-bearer—nevertheless, there are other ways in which we can give our lives for others. We can give our time in order to help them. We can sacrifice things that we would rather do or rather have in order to serve and give to others. In other words, we must put others ahead of ourselves. Our primary desire must be for their spiritual well-being and comfort” (Boice, pp. 110-11).

10:16. But who are these **other sheep that are not of this sheep pen?** Most scholars believe this refers to non-Jews, the Gentile believers who would become a part of the Lord’s people as the disciples preached the gospel in Acts. And in multiflock pens, it becomes all the more important for sheep to understand their master’s voice. These various flocks, Jesus said, will be one because they follow one shepherd. This is a beautiful picture of the unification of genders and ethnic groupings through the Savior.

Jesus not only proclaimed additional sheep outside the scope of His hearers’ thinking; He also said that He **must bring them** to the **one flock**. Through the centuries

The GOOD SHEPHERD

A STUDY OF PSALM 23

the English text has occasionally substituted the word *fold* for *flock*, thereby giving the verse a different orientation. There are many folds (pens) containing other sheep that must be reached. But when the spiritual unity of Christ's followers comes into correct perspective, there is only one flock—one body of Christ, with many denominations and affiliations.

10:17-18. The Lord emphasized that His death on the cross would not occur because earthly powers are stronger than the power of the heavenly Father. He would lay down His life willingly and at the time the Father required it. Substitutionary atonement is the heart of the gospel (Isa. 53:6), and that certainly focuses the Lord's words here. He would join the sheep from a variety of pens and He would die for all of them.

It is difficult to imagine that either Jesus or John intended to tell us that the Father loved the Son only because the Son willingly died for the sheep. Borchert emphasizes just the reverse and reads the text, " 'Because [*dia touto*] the Father loves me, that is the reason [*hoti*, therefore] I lay down my life.' The model of the Father provided the model for the Son, which in turn should provide the model for the followers of Jesus (cf. 13:34; 15:12)" (Borchert, p. 336).

10:19-21. The more the Lord described himself, the more the Jews became angry and divided, resorting again to their charge of demon possession. Obviously the common people had not forgotten the healing of the blind man as verse 21 links chapter 10 with chapter 9.

Indeed, Morgan treats the chapters as almost one event, not an impossible approach:

Here was the point in the ministry of Jesus, where, by an action, He opened the door of the new economy, and assumed authority over it. That poor blind beggar was barren of spiritual apprehension, Jesus opened his eyes, and by that act in the physical, led him professionally to the recognition of Who the Man was that had done it, so that he rendered worship to Him. He received that worship, and by that act opened the door of the new economy. The man now entered the new order through the Door; and from that moment he was into the true authority, the authority of the Shepherd Himself (Morgan, pp. 176-77).