

God's Preserving Love

Bible Background • [JOHN 10:1-15](#)

Printed Text • [JOHN 10:1-15](#)

Devotional Reading • [MATTHEW 18:1-5](#), [10-14](#)

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: EXPLORE the metaphor of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who opens the gate for the sheep; AFFIRM the love of God expressed in the life and ministry of Jesus, the Good Shepherd; and RESPOND to God's persevering love by loving others.



Jasmine sat quietly on the back pew of Emmanuel Methodist Church, like she had for the last three weeks. Her co-worker, Jaylen, insisted she come because her new pastor and his family were genuine, loving Christians. Jasmine did not trust anyone. At the last church she belonged to, the pastor was very vicious toward the members and regularly took money from the offering plates.

As Jasmine listened to Reverend Shepherd preach about the love of God, she felt the power of God begin to take away the pain she had. At the end of the worship service, a woman approached Jasmine. "Hi. My name is Miriam. I'm the pastor's wife. We noticed you have been visiting for the last couple weeks. The pastor wanted me to invite you to go out to dinner with us. We try to invite members and new visitors out at least once or twice a month so we can get to know each other better. Do you think you can come?"

Jasmine hesitated for a moment and then said, "I guess I can come."

"I'm glad. You can meet us in the parking lot."

After spending the afternoon with the pastor and his wife, Jasmine felt Jaylen was right. So far, from what she had observed and experienced, they were leaders who loved and cared about the people.

Good leaders show love toward others. In today's lesson, we will evaluate how the Good Shepherd, Jesus, loves and cares for us. How have you followed Jesus' leadership in your life?

Keep in Mind

"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep"

([John 10:14-15](#)).

KJV

John 10:1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

NLT

John 10:1 "I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber!

2 But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

4 After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognize his voice.

5 They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't recognize his voice."

6 Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant,

7 so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.

8 "All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them.

9 Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures.

10 The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.

12 A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will leave the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock.

13 The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

14 I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me,

15 just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep."

The People, Places, and Times

Pharisees. The Pharisees were religious leaders who practiced the strict observation of the Mosaic Torah. Their power provided them great influence among the people, especially in the synagogues. They thought it was very important to follow God's will. The Pharisees believed, like Jesus, in the resurrection of the dead. However, they did not believe Jesus was the Messiah because He constantly violated accepted interpretations of the Law of Moses called Oral Torah or Mishnah Torah ("a second Torah," i.e., established Jewish explanations of the meaning of Moses' teachings).

Sabbath. The Sabbath day is considered a time for rest and a day to remember what God had done. It was instituted by God through Moses ([Exodus 16:23-29](#); [20:8-11](#)). It is observed because during creation, God rested on the seventh day from His work. Therefore, it is a holy day. The Israelites' promise to keep the Sabbath throughout all generations symbolized the covenant between them and God ([Exodus 31:17](#)).

The Pharisees had established thirty-nine categories of actions forbidden on the Sabbath, based on their own interpretation of God's Law and on Jewish custom. No work was permitted on the Sabbath. They frequently accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath. Jesus never permitted their interpretation of the Law to hinder Him from His ministry on earth.

Background

Jesus' ministry caused conflict with the religious leaders, especially the Pharisees. John records two times Jesus healed on the Sabbath (5:1–17, 9:1–7). On both occasions the Pharisees accused Him of violating the Law. In John 9, the blind man whom Jesus healed was taken to the Pharisees, who questioned him. He told them Jesus was “a prophet” (9:17). The religious leaders were divided in their understanding of whom Jesus was. However, it had already been predicted that the Messiah would give sight to the blind ([Isaiah 29:18](#), [35:5](#), [42:7](#)). Jesus had proven once again that He was the Messiah.

The Pharisees even questioned the man's parents, who told them to ask their son what happened. They were afraid of being put out of the synagogue, which meant they could possibly be excommunicated and other Jews would not socialize with them. Their son was not afraid of the consequences and told them his answer was the same as the first time they asked him. The Pharisees threw the man out of the synagogue, and he was ostracized by everyone.

The man's joy of being healed had been transformed into rejection and isolation from others. What happens when we feel lost and alone? The Good Shepherd searches for us.

In Depth

1. The Gatekeeper ([John 10:1–10](#))

Jesus told a parable in 10:1–5 that described Himself as the gatekeeper and Good Shepherd. At night, sheep were gathered into a secure area such as caves, sheds, or open areas surrounded by walls made of stones and branches. The area only had one entrance. The sheep were protected from thieves, bad weather, wild animals, or wandering off. The shepherd remained with them to make sure the sheep were kept secure. Judaism was the religion of the Law, in which God's chosen people were kept and guarded in custody until Christ came.

The Pharisees lacked understanding, so Jesus gave further explanation about the parable. Jesus is now “the gate” through which any person who enters shall be saved (v. 7). All other religious leaders who tell of another way are thieves. Jesus is the only way; “no man cometh unto the Father, but by [Him]” (cf. 14:6). His sheep know not to follow the thieves. Jesus is our protector, provider, and sustainer (vv. 9–10). His interest is in the sheep, but thieves are only interested in themselves and want to destroy lives. Jesus loves us and wants the best for our lives.

2. The Good Shepherd (vv. 11–15)

Jesus declared, “I am the good shepherd” (v. 11; cf. [Matthew 18:12–13](#); [Luke 15:4–6](#)). Shepherds often risk dangers to save the sheep, which are loved and worthy of protection. The hired hand is paid to take care of the sheep, so when danger comes, he abandons them (vv. 12–13); it is just a job to him. They have no personal interest, just like some religious leaders ([Jeremiah 23:1–3](#); [Ezekiel 34:5–10](#); [Zechariah 11:15–17](#)).

The Good Shepherd has an intimate relationship with the sheep, His people (vv. 14–15). They love Him and He loves them. When the sheep turn to Him, the Shepherd offers guidance. Whatever their needs, He provides (Psalm 23). The Shepherd is trustworthy because He proved His love for the sheep by laying down His life (v. 15). Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross was based on His love for the world and His desire to save us. This was pure love.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why do the sheep follow the gatekeeper ([John 10:4](#))?
2. What did Jesus mean when He said, "I lay down my life for the sheep" (v. 15)?

Discuss the Meaning

Jesus said, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (v. 10). Whom do you identify as "the thief" in today's society? What does an "abundant life" mean?

Lesson in Our Society

We encounter both bad and good leaders in our lifetimes, but we have to ask God for discernment about whom to follow and seek guidance from. Authentic, good leaders will take the time to show love and concern. They do not have hidden motives for their actions, and they are not the first to run when trouble arises. They stay with us as we go through the valleys of life. This is the heart of a genuine leader.

Make It Happen

God's love for us was proven through the sacrifice and death of Jesus Christ. He continues to provide, protect, and guide us each day. Others need to know and experience the love of God. How can that be accomplished? Show interest in others and offer to help. It can be a kind word, a listening ear, an encouraging card, running errands for the sick, babysitting, etc. If they ask, let them know it is the love of God shining through your actions.

More Light on the Text

[John 10:1–15](#)

1 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.

In this discourse, Jesus employs the familiar analogy of a shepherd and his flock to teach an important lesson about Himself and His relationship with believers. Applying the imagery of the shepherd to kings and priests was a common practice in Middle Eastern culture. In the Old Testament, the shepherd was often used to symbolize a royal caretaker of God's people (cf. [2 Samuel 5:2](#); [Isaiah 44:28](#)). God Himself was referred to as the "Shepherd of Israel" (see [Genesis 49:24](#); [Psalm 23:1–4](#), [80:1](#)). The "sheepfold" (Gk. *probaton*, **PRO-bah-tone**) or herd of sheep were kept in a walled enclosure with one entrance. Usually, a sheepfold would hold several

flocks. The “shepherd” (Gk. *poimen*, **poy-MANE**), or gatekeeper, set up sleeping posts near the entrance to ward off wild beasts, thieves, and other intruders.

The parable depicts the shepherd as the only one allowed access to the flock. The shepherd is in stark contrast to a “thief” or a “robber,” who must sneak into the fold. Unlike the stranger, from whom the sheep run away, the shepherd has established a relationship with the sheep. The welfare of his sheep is uppermost in his mind.

2 But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

The shepherd was allowed access to the sheep, as evidenced by the “porter” (Gk. *thuroros*, **thoorow-ROCE**, meaning “gatekeeper”) opening the door for him. The shepherd rose in the mornings to call out his sheep by name. He rightfully entered the fold because the sheep were his, and their best interest was his primary concern. He had no intention of bringing harm to them. Regardless of the number of flocks in the fold, the shepherd called out to his own by name, and they recognized and responded to his familiar “voice” (Gk. *phone*, **fo-NAY**, meaning “sound”).

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.

The shepherd went ahead of the sheep instead of driving them from behind. Their bond was so strong and intimate that the sheep willingly followed him out of the sheepfold as he went ahead of them. They knew the sound of his voice, which reassured them. His presence and his rod and staff brought comfort to the sheep (cf. [Psalm 23:4](#)).

5 And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.

Jesus used this parable to teach how the shepherd formed his flock. As in verses 3 and 4, the imagery used in verse 5 communicates a sense of intimacy. Note the role the shepherd’s “voice” (Gk. *phone*) plays in this discourse. The sheep followed because they knew the shepherd’s voice, but they would never follow a stranger whose voice they did not recognize. The sheep that stayed safe recognized the voice of the shepherd. They came to the shepherd because he called them—the proper response for sheep.

6 This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. 7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

Up to this point, Jesus has spoken figuratively about the Pharisees’ situation. He realized His audience would certainly understand the analogy of the shepherd/sheep relationship; unfortunately, they missed His intended spiritual lesson. So, Jesus shifts metaphors and declares, “I am the door of the sheep.” Again, His hearers would be familiar with the figure of a shepherd as a “door” (Gk. *thura*, **THOO-rah**) of the sheep. Since shepherds habitually lie down across the

entrance of the sheepfold with their bodies, forming a barrier to thieves and wild beasts, they speak of themselves as the door to let the flock in or out and to protect it from intruders. Through the door, the flock goes in and out to graze and to rest. If attacked or frightened, the sheep can retreat into the security of the fold.

Several times in the Gospel of John, Jesus describes Himself using the phrase “I am” (Gk. *ego eimi*, **eh-GO ay-ME**; cf. 6:35, 8:12, 9:5, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1, 5). Christ’s usage of the phrase in this manner leaves no question about His claim to deity. In fact, to a perceptive Jew who understood the term *ego eimi* as a reference to [Exodus 3:14](#), Jesus was making Himself equal to God (cf. [John 10:33](#)).

8 All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

This verse is not a reference to Old Testament prophets, but to all Messianic pretenders and religious charlatans, like many of the Pharisees and chief priests of the time. Jesus describes them as “thieves” (Gk. *kleptes*) who divest the unwary of their precious possessions, and “robbers” (Gk. *lestes*) who plunder brazenly by violence. They did not care about the spiritual good of the people, only themselves. As a result, the sheep (i.e., those who are faithful) would not heed their voice.

9 I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

Christ claims to be *the* door, not just *a* door. Jesus is explicitly identifying Himself as the means to salvation (cf. [Psalm 118:19–21](#)). As the Shepherd, Jesus provides safety and sustenance for His flock. He is the only way of salvation. Through Him, believers find “pasture” (Gk. *nome*, **no-MAY**), or provision for all of their daily needs.

10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

The thief’s motive is diametrically opposed to the shepherd. His interest is selfish. He steals the sheep in order to kill them and feed himself, thus destroying part of the flock. In this description, we see a veiled glimpse into the character of the Pharisees and religious authorities who opposed Jesus. In contrast, Christ is the Life-Giver and Life-Sustainer. His interest is the welfare of the sheep. He enables the sheep to have full and secure lives. The thief takes life, but conversely Christ gives life.

11 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

The adjective “good” (Gk. *kalos*, **ka-LOCE**) carries the meaning of being a true or a model shepherd. Here, Jesus is referring to the model of a shepherd found in [Ezekiel 34:11–16](#). According to Ezekiel, the good shepherd gathers, feeds, and protects the sheep. A strong bond exists between sheep and shepherd. It was not unusual for Palestinian shepherds to risk their lives for their flocks. Wild beasts, lions, jackals, wolves, and bears were on the prowl. In David’s experience as a shepherd, his fights with a lion and a bear over the life of his flock convinced him that God was also able to give Goliath into his hands ([1 Samuel 17:34–37](#)). When Jesus

says, “I am the good shepherd” (i.e., the true Shepherd), He is expressing how He carries out His mission of salvation.

12 But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep.

A “hireling” (Gk. *misthotos*, **mees-tho-TOCE**), or hired servant, is someone who is willing to do a specific task for a price. He might not be personally invested in the sheep, but instead he’s only willing to do exactly what he is told and not take on additional risks or responsibilities. Therefore, if a wolf shows up, he runs to save his own life, leaving the sheep to fend for themselves. The result is devastating for the sheep. The hireling’s self-interest exposes the flock to fatal danger. Israel had many false religious leaders, selfish kings, and imitation messiahs; as a result, the flock of God suffered constantly from their abuse. This is still the case today, as the church suffers from false teachers and hypocritical leadership.

13 The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

The “hireling” (Gk. *misthotos*) is just that—a hired hand. This reminds one of Israel’s selfish kings and false prophets found in the Old Testament. Both here and in the Old Testament, the hired hand’s main concern is himself. The sheep are only a means to an end.

By contrast, the “good” (Gk. *kalos*, **kal-OS**, meaning “noble” or “true”) shepherd cares for the sheep—so much so that he is willing to lay down his life for them. It is important to note the bond of intimacy between the shepherd and his sheep, as indicated by the phrase “I know” (Gk. *ginosko*, **ghee-NOCE-ko**). The use of the Greek word *ginosko* implies Christ’s ownership and watchful oversight of the sheep. The reciprocal point that the sheep know their shepherd identifies the sheep’s response to Christ’s love and intimate care. Moreover, the use of *ginosko* indicates that this knowledge is of high value to the shepherd.

15 As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.

The deep mutual knowledge between Christ (the Shepherd) and His sheep is likened to the relationship between the Father and the Son. The “knowing” between God the Father and Jesus, His Son, is a uniquely intimate relationship. The connection between the sheep and the shepherd who knows his sheep and lays down his life for them shows unity of purpose between the Father and the Son. Jesus is more than the Good Shepherd; He is the fulfillment of God’s promises to His people. Christ voluntarily laid down His life for us. His death was not an unfortunate accident, but part of the planned purpose of God.

Say It Correctly

Hireling. **HIRE**-leeng.
Fleeth. **FLEE**-ith.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Why You Don't Understand
([Matthew 13:10–17](#))

TUESDAY

God Will Rescue the Endangered Sheep
([Ezekiel 34:1–10](#))

WEDNESDAY

The Shepherd Cares for the Lost
([Matthew 18:1–5, 10–14](#))

THURSDAY

Pastors Shepherd the Church of God
([Acts 20:25–28](#))

FRIDAY

Peter, Tend My Sheep
([John 21:15–19](#))

SATURDAY

The Blind See
([John 9:35–41](#))

SUNDAY

Jesus the Good Shepherd
([John 10:1–15](#))