

Home Group Leaders Discussion Guide

I AM...the Gate for the Sheep...the Good Shepherd—John 10:1-21

The imagery of sheep and shepherd is a key metaphor throughout the Bible, transcending both the Old and the New Testaments. The gist is: God is a shepherd; His flock is His people—Israel in the Old Testament, and the Church in the New Testament. At the same time, the imagery of a shepherd is also used for the leaders of God's people. In the Old Testament both Israel's king, as well as Israel's religious leaders (priests and prophets) were viewed as shepherds of God's people (or more accurately, under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd, God). This imagery stays true within the New Testament. In fact, the word translated "pastor" is the same word as "shepherd" in Greek; and elders are instructed to "*Be shepherd God's flock...*" (I Peter 5:1-4)

We've been looking at the "I AM..." statements in the Gospel of John. Something I've realized that I've failed to mention is a key word in the Gospel of John: the word "Know". John uses this word far more than any other New Testament writer. The Greek word is "ginosko" which corresponds to the Hebrew word "yada"; both of which carry the idea of knowing experientially and intimately...so much so, that these words are often used as a euphemism for sex. (John also uses another Greek word for "know" quite a bit too, the word "oida", but for our purposes will stick with "ginosko". (To get technical for a moment, these two Greek words can be used in complementary fashion or contrasting fashion, depending on context and author's intention. John's use throughout his Gospel is largely complementary.)

In John 1:10 we read, "*He [Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not KNOW [ginosko] Him.*" (emphasis added) Throughout the Gospel of John—a key theme actually—is the delineation between those that KNOW Jesus/God and those that do not KNOW Him. This provides an important framework for working through this Gospel.

So back to our present text in John 10. Notice the use of the word KNOW in this passage. In describing a legit shepherd Jesus said, "*When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they KNOW his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him, because they do now recognize (KNOW) a stranger's voice.*" (10:4-5...emphasis added)

Jesus then applies this to Himself, "*I am the good shepherd; I KNOW my sheep and my sheep KNOW Me—just as the Father KNOWS Me and I KNOW the Father...*" (10:14-15a...emphasis added)

Throughout this passage Jesus contrasts a good shepherd to thieves, robbers, and hired hands—or what we might say from a sheep's perspective, bad/false shepherds. So, what makes a good shepherd good, and what make a bad shepherd bad? Jesus outlines this for us. A good shepherd knows the Father (and by implication, the will of the Father); bad shepherds primarily knows their own self-interest. A good shepherd cares about the well-being of the sheep. A bad shepherd sees the sheep as a means to an end, what the sheep can do for him. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep; a bad shepherd runs away in the face of danger.

As mentioned earlier the idea of “shepherding” was/is a picture used of human leaders of God’s people, both religiously and politically. Let’s update the picture a bit. Let’s, broadly, utilize the image of mid-level management. Truth be told, this is not an enviable position. In the business world, for example, mid-level managers have people over them that they need to keep happy, and people below them who they must get the most out of. What makes someone good in this role is two-fold. First, knowing what makes those above them happy and working toward that end. Second, truly caring for those under and remember what it feels like to have people over you. Things go awry when mid-level people forget that they’re accountable to those above them and when they forget that being “above” others is not an issue of status or position, but rather of responsibility. Leadership is not about satisfying our petty egos but playing a role in accomplishing something much bigger/grander than ourselves.

Elsewhere Jesus stated, *“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you.** Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”* (Matthew 20:25-28...emphasis added) Notice the consistent message: Jesus, the Greatest Leader, the Chief/Good Shepherd, demonstrates what godly leadership is like; it’s about serving others, not being served by others, even to the point of laying down one’s life.

Most of us, in some way, shape, or form, function in a mid-level manager/under-shepherd sort of role. Sooner or later, most of us end up being in authority over someone else, at least for a season—pastors, elders, home group leaders, parents, teachers, case-workers, supervisors, coaches, etc. Ultimately, we are accountable to Jesus the Chief Shepherd. What does He want? He wants us to selflessly, sacrificially, humbly love one another...as He exemplified. He also wants us to never forget that at the end of the day, we are all “sheep” in need of Him as our Shepherd, regardless of whether or not there are any people “under” us. How can/do we become such people who love others well? This goes directly back to that important word—KNOW. We must KNOW Jesus. We must be able to recognize His voice in our lives. To KNOW is different than to KNOW ABOUT. Again, this is a key idea throughout the Gospel of John. Even as we spend these several weeks looking at the I AM statements of Jesus, the point is not to bolster our knowledge about Jesus, but to hopefully come to KNOW Him better.

Beyond contrasting the Good Shepherd vs. bad/false shepherds, there is another level of depth to Jesus’ statement, I AM the Good Shepherd. His first listeners would immediately think of Psalm 23, which begins, “The Lord is my shepherd...” Literally, “YHWH is my shepherd.” Once again, Jesus is claiming to be YHWH/God...which all the I AM statements point to in their own way. Notice how the last three verses of this passage (10:19-21) show the natural/inevitable division and confusion Jesus’ words caused. When someone claims to be God, it tends to have that effect.

YHWH, the great Creator God, the sustainer and redeemer of mankind, KNOWS us and (perhaps more shockingly) wants to be KNOWN by us. He demonstrated this by becoming as accessible as He possibly could...by becoming one of us. This is a hint to the meaning of Life. We were

created, we exist, to KNOW and be KNOWN. This speaks to the deepest level of relational connection. To Love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to Love our neighbors as ourselves requires this depth of KNOWING (or, perhaps said a different way, Loving leads to this depth of KNOWING.) We were created to experience the depth of Love that the Trinity has for one another; we are the outpouring/result of their Love.

In closing, it is important to take note of 10:16, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." Something the Jewish people wrestled with was understanding that God's heart was for all people. While God did have a special plan for them, that plan was for the benefit of all people. The Church needs to be careful of this narrow view of God's love, grace and mercy as well. As the Church, we KNOW God...SO THAT we can help others KNOW God. We are not allowed to be exclusive as to who we share God's love with. In fact, we could go as far as to say, if we are stingy in sharing God's love, we may not KNOW God like we think we do.

- Q. Consider for a moment how completely dependent sheep are to their shepherd. Without a shepherd sheep cannot survive, let alone thrive. Do you/we feel that way about Jesus? How are you/we dependent upon Him? (Consider this both on a personal/individual level, as well as a communal/flock level.)**
- Q. If someone were to ask you, "Do you know God?" how would you reply?**
- Q. How are you growing/cultivating your intimate knowledge and experience of God? (Keep in mind the difference between knowing ABOUT God, and actually KNOWING God...many, sadly, and without realizing it, often settle for knowing ABOUT God.**
- Q. Who is someone you personally know that you can confidently say, "That person KNOWS God." What makes you think that? What evidence would you offer to support that?**
- Q. Do you recognize God's voice in your life? (Or, do you struggle to recognize His voice in your life?) How can you/we cultivate an awareness/recognition of His voice? What other voices vie for your/our attention? (Again, think individually and communally)**
- Q. If you have people "under" you in any capacity, how do you exhibit the love and care of Jesus to them? How might viewing yourself as a shepherd (patterning yourself after the Good Shepherd) change how you relate to them?**
- Q. It is undeniable that Jesus claimed to be God. That is no small claim. It has immense implications. Do you think most people today understand that Jesus made such a claim? Explain. What do you believe is the biggest stumbling block to people believing that/Him?**