

John 10:1-5, 9-10 (NLT) – The shepherd and the sheep

Main point: Jesus, the good shepherd, leads us to life.
Learn to hear his voice.



Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: Jesus has been teaching a lot about his identity as God's Son, sparring with the religious rulers of the day (Pharisees), who think Jesus is getting way too big for his britches. In this passage, Jesus describes himself with a story, a parable. By telling this story, he makes enemies; as John records, after this story, "There was again a division among the Jews because of [Jesus's] words. Many of them said, 'He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?' Others said, 'These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'" (John 10:19-21). Let's find out why this parable stirred up so much controversy!

Focus of study:

[Jesus said,] "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 recognize the shepherd's voice and come to him. The shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ After the shepherd has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of the sheep, and they follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ The sheep won't follow a stranger; they will run from the stranger because they don't know the stranger's voice. ... ⁹ Those who come in [to the sheepfold] 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. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

Questions:

1. *Who are the characters in this story?*
 - a. Sheep
 - b. A shepherd (and a gatekeeper)
 - c. A thief or robber
2. *What's happening at the beginning of this story? (reread v. 1)*
 - a. Someone is sneaking over the wall into a sheepfold. *What's a sheepfold?*
 - i. The place where sheep gather, usually overnight, for safety, like a corral.
3. *What does Jesus say about the person who sneaks into the sheepfold? Who are they?*
 - a. A thief and robber. *What do thieves and robbers do?*
 - i. Bad stuff! Steal, break things
 - ii. And if we jump down to verse 10, Jesus lays it out even more starkly: "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy."
4. *If you were a sheep in this corral, what do you think you'd do when you realized there was a thief or robber in your midst?*
 - a. Try to run away! But if you're in a corral, you're stuck; you're vulnerable.
5. *In contrast, who else comes into the sheepfold? (reread v. 2-4)*
 - a. The one who enters by the gate: the shepherd. *What does this shepherd do for sheep?*
 - i. Calls them by name (v. 3)
 - ii. Leads them out (v. 3) – *where?* Pasture, exercise, living life freely and safely

- iii. Gathers them (v. 4)
 - iv. Walks ahead of them (v. 4)
- 6. *How do the sheep know that this one is the shepherd and not another thief? (reread v. 3-5)*
 - a. The shepherd comes in the right way: through the gate, not sneaking over the wall.
 - b. The sheep recognize the shepherd's voice.
 - c. They hear the shepherd calling them by their own names.
- 7. *How do you learn to recognize someone's voice?*
 - a. You hear it over and over, and you learn what kind of voice it is: trustworthy or dangerous.
- 8. *How would the shepherd know the sheep's names? How do you learn the names of people you love?*
 - a. You're around them, you spend time with them, you care about them, and so their names become second nature to you.
 - b. Jesus knows our names because he cares for us and knows us intimately.
 - c. *So how do we hear Jesus, the good shepherd, calling our names?*
 - i. Same way! We spend time with Jesus, in prayer, obedience, scripture, day-to-day trusting in his good leadership.
- 9. *When you listen to a voice you know and trust, what happens? Let's reread v. 9: "Those who come in [to the sheepfold] through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures.") What does it feel like to be free?*
 - a. Life feels open, without fear; nothing can harm you.
- 10. *I wonder what makes you feel not free ... What would you like to be free from?*
 - a. Worry, bad voices, regret, shame, fear ...
- 11. *I wonder what you think "good pastures" feel like to sheep?*
 - a. Safe, luscious, good food, quiet waters ... everything sheep need to thrive.
- 12. *Jesus finishes this story with a contrast between the voices that compete for our attention. (Reread v. 10: "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.") Anyone or anything that's not Jesus is a thief and a liar, bent on stealing our joy, confidence, and peace, making us fearful, angry, shameful, prideful, etc. – all things that lead to a destructive, sad life. In contrast, what does Jesus say is the reason he came?*
 - a. To give abundant life. LIFE, not death!
- 13. *I wonder what "abundant" means to you? What do you think abundant life looks like?*
 - a. Full of goodness; no lack, no hesitancy, no worry about the present or the future. This is the life Jesus promises us.
- 14. Ask for prayer requests for today.
- 15. Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
- 16. End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

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