

“Have You Ever Met a Shepherd?”

John 10:11-18

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“I am the good shepherd,” Jesus said, not once but twice in this text. Obviously, he felt it important they hear this as he was trying to help them understand who he was and what he had been sent by God to do.

Have you ever met a shepherd? I didn’t think so. They are so rare in our culture that shepherding doesn’t even make the list of occupations on surveys that come our way. I’ve been tempted to write it in just for the fun of it and may do it one day. I can just see the intern who compiles the results asking someone what a shepherd is.

Shepherds would have made the list in Jesus’ time and still would. As a matter of fact, shepherding would have been near the top of the survey. There was, and still is no shortage of shepherds in Palestine.

Why did Jesus, however, describe himself as a shepherd? After all, he was a carpenter by trade.

This was a metaphor commonly used for leaders in Jewish culture because the earliest leaders were shepherds. Abraham was “a keeper of flocks.” Moses was tending his father-in-law’s flock when God called him into special service. David, the second and greatest king of Israel, was a shepherd boy when Samuel selected him to be Saul’s successor.

Even God is pictured as a shepherd and the people as his flock, especially in the Psalms. The most noted is Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.”

So, Jesus was using a common metaphor for a leader in Israel. Everyone listening to him would understand what he meant.

Why, though, did Jesus say he was “the good shepherd”? This implies some leaders were not so good, and they were not. Some were driven by unbridled greed, addicted to power and blinded by ambition, as Ezekiel 34:1-10 reveals. Their concern was for their own welfare, not that of the people they were called to serve.

Jesus wanted his listeners to know this was not the kind of shepherd he was. His mission was to reflect the heart and nature of God, making hope visible for all people.

His mission was to use all God had given him to help them achieve their potential. Like a good shepherd, he came to nourish, comfort, heal, guide and protect all God's children.

He came to walk alongside them so he could call them by name, see their pain, enter into their struggles, and watch over their lives.

In addition, he was sent to expose the hypocrisy of the bad shepherds and call them to repentance. Furthermore, no threat or danger would distract him from this mission. If necessary, he would give his life to save theirs.

Why did Jesus want them to know this? He wanted them to trust him and become his disciples. He wanted them to help him reach out to those in despair, offering genuine love and boundless hope.

Do you trust him? Have you opened your heart to Jesus and allowed him to be your good shepherd? Have you accepted his offer to accompany you along your journey? I certainly hope so and am confident nothing would please him more.

There is another question we must ask before we leave this text, though. **Do others trust you?** Are you the kind of shepherd others need you to be?

You see, there are times when we need a shepherd and times when we need to be a shepherd. Just as we want a good shepherd, we also need to be a good shepherd.

How do you know if you are a good shepherd? According to this text, you make room for other people in your life and are willing to make sacrifices on their behalf.

One of the key components of this text is the number of times Jesus referred to his willingness to "lay down" his life for the sake of others. He mentioned it five times.

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd **lays** down his life for his sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And **I lay** my life down for the sheep. For this reason, the Father loves me because **I lay** my life down in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but **I lay** it down of my own accord. I have the power to **lay** it down and the power to take it up again" John 10:11, 14-15, 17-18.

My friend, Tom Ehrich, has an interesting perspective on Jesus' words, "And I lay down my life for the sheep."

“Laying down one’s life as Jesus mentioned can mean literally ‘taking a bullet’ for someone else, as the Secret Service puts it. More often, though, it means **making room in one’s life for someone else**, making an effort, diverting energy from self to other.”

Who needs you to make room for them in your life this week? What could you do for them?

Could you call them by name and listen to their story? Could you bind their wounds and encourage them not to give up? Could you speak up for them when others are being critical? Could you love them unconditionally and be a loyal friend when others have abandoned them? Could you send them a note or take them a meal? Could you express your appreciation for their friendship and tell them how they make your life better?

These are the things good shepherds do. Will you?

Conversely, what are you willing to give up for the sake of others? If Jesus, the good shepherd, was willing to “lay down” his life for those around him, what sacrifices are you willing to make?

This text reminds us that making sacrifices on behalf of others is a vital part of healthy relationships. So, what do you need to “lay down” for the sake of those around you?

Is it an unhealthy pride, inflated ego or the desire to be in control? Is it bad memories, hurt feelings or the need to cast blame? Is it envy, a temper or an addiction?

What will happen and who will suffer if you don’t lay it down? What is happening now to your marriage, your family, that special friendship or on your job? What could happen if you let these things go?

Again, this is what good shepherds do. Will you?

Who can help you make room for other people in your life and make sacrifices on their behalf?

Who helped Jesus? I believe he relied upon his Father. He sought God’s will and power and so can you. The same One who helped him will help you. Will you ask for His help now?