

# PROTECTING

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## LOVE

DEVOTIONAL READING: Matthew 18:1-5, 10-14

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: John 10:1-15

### JOHN 10:1-15

<sup>1</sup> “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. <sup>9</sup> I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

<sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

<sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—<sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”

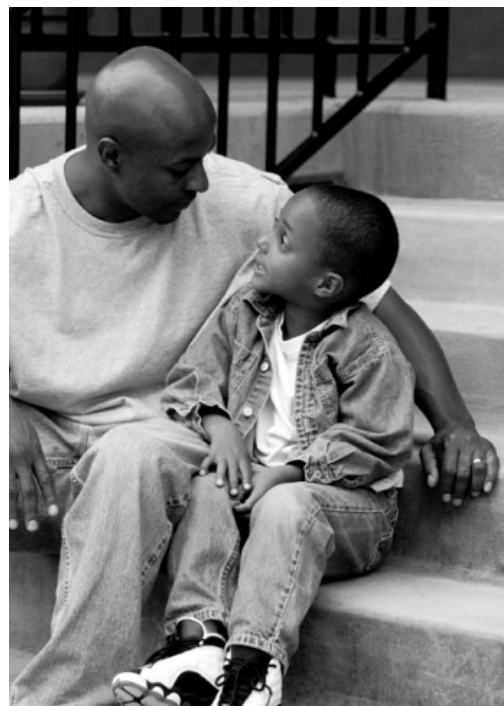


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### KEY VERSES

*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—and I lay down my life for the sheep.—John 10:14, 15*

### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the good shepherd and the sheep.
2. Explain the metaphor of Jesus as the door or gate.
3. Suggest a twenty-first century, nonagrarian equivalent to the sheep-shepherd metaphor.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Mistaken Identity
- B. Lesson Background

### I. Jesus the Entryway ([John 10:1-10](#))

- A. Imagery ([vv. 1-6](#))
- B. Identity ([vv. 7-10](#))

*Spiritual Charlatans*

### II. Jesus the Good Shepherd ([John 10:11-15](#))

- A. Giving and Caring ([vv. 11-13](#))

*Who Cares?*

- B. Knows and Known ([vv. 14, 15](#))

### Conclusion

- A. Follow the True Shepherd
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Mistaken Identity

Most of us have experienced the embarrassment of mistaken identity. We see someone across the room whom we think we recognize. We wave. That person waves back, but with a puzzled expression. We speak to someone standing behind us, thinking that person is a friend or family member. He or she responds uncertainly, if at all. Cases of mistaken identity cause confusion; those people are not who we think they are.

Today's text is about removing confusion regarding the identity of the one who leads, protects, and provides for God's people. Many claim to be God's designate for that role. But our text says that only one such claim is genuine. Only one individual can make us God's people and give us the life that God offers.

### B. Lesson Background

Our text, from the middle of John's Gospel, records part of a series of conflict episodes between Jesus and his opponents. Important for context is the account of Jesus' healing of a man born blind ([John 9](#)), which occurs just before today's text. The healed man was confronted by religious leaders who were opposed to Jesus. But their opposition made the healed man all the more certain that Jesus had been sent by God ([9:13-33](#)).

The infuriated leaders threw the man out, effectively claiming that they had cut him off from fellowship with God's people ([John 9:34](#)). Subsequently, Jesus identified himself to the man as the one God had sent ([9:35-38](#)). The story closes with further confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders ([9:40, 41](#)).

In providing the backdrop for today's text, that account addresses this question: Who truly governs God's people? In other words, do the religious leaders of Jesus' day decide who belongs in God's people and who is excluded, or does that authority lie elsewhere? The conflict between Jesus and his opponents concerning who Jesus is and what that means for God's people was accelerating.

Jesus' use of the phrase "I am the" occurs four times in today's text ([John 10:7, 9, 11, 14](#)). These form part of the larger picture of Jesus' use of the phrase on other occasions in this Gospel (see [John 6:35, 41, 48, 51; 8:12; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5](#)). The phrases serve as Jesus' claims regarding his unique role in God's plan to be the one who fulfills God's promises in finality.

But more than that, the phrase "I am" echoes God's statement to Moses that Moses should tell Israel that "I am" was the one sending him ([Exodus 3:14](#); compare [John 8:58](#)). As Jesus used this expression, he was saying something about himself that implied that he was divine, God himself in human flesh. Jesus' opponents certainly didn't miss this implication, given their immediate attempts to stone him ([John 8:59](#)).

Our text focuses on shepherd imagery in regard to "I am the" statements. Keeping flocks of sheep and goats was a vital part of the economy of the biblical world. Shepherds often spent day and night with their animals to keep them nourished and safe (compare [Luke 2:8](#)).

The Old Testament frequently draws on these practices in depicting God as shepherd and his people as sheep (examples: [Psalm 23:1](#); [80:1](#); [Isaiah 40:11](#); [Jeremiah 31:10](#)). His faithful shepherding is contrasted with the harmful shepherding by others ([Ezekiel 34](#); etc.). This history, familiar to Jesus' audience, is what he draws on as he delivers this discourse.

## I. Jesus the Entryway

([JOHN 10:1-10](#))

### A. Imagery (vv. 1-6)

1. **“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber.**

The Greek behind the translation *truly* is often transliterated as *amen* (example: [Revelation 1:6](#)). A word that is often used as a solemn finality, Jesus uses here to begin a statement. The intensified *very truly* stresses the importance and reliability of what he is about to say.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Ezekiel Ee-*zeek*-ee-ul or Ee-*zeek*-yul.

Hosea Ho-*zay*-uh.

Isaiah Eye-*zay*-uh.

Jeremiah Jair-uh-*my*-uh.

The image of *the gate of the sheep pen* illustrates the difference between those who intend to harm the sheep and the one who cares for them. A sheep pen is an outdoor area bounded with a low stone wall. Sheep can be kept there overnight for safety. The gate is the opening in the wall. It is guarded in such a way so that sheep do not wander out and predators do not enter. Any person or creature who enters by climbing over the wall is clearly not the sheep's protector.

We keep in mind that Jesus makes this point just after his rebuke of religious leaders in [John 9:40, 41](#) (see the Lesson Background). His implication is clear: those leaders who claim to decide who belongs to God's people and who does not are the ones who come in over the wall.

#### What Do You Think?

What plans should a church have in place for dealing with “a thief and a robber” as Jesus uses that phrase?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In terms of advance recognition
- In terms of notifying leadership (sounding the alarm)
- In terms of leadership response
- In terms of repairing damage done
- In terms of preventing recurrence

2. **“The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.**

We should note that Jesus' illustration is not an elaborate allegory. That is, each detail of the story is not intended to correspond with an event in reality. Jesus is probably not thinking of a particular event in his life when he speaks of *the shepherd* entering *by the gate*. Rather, this detail is intended to contribute to the larger contrast between the shepherd and those who do not care for the flock as the shepherd does.

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

*The gatekeeper* is the assistant shepherd who guards the opening to the sheepfold. He recognizes the true shepherd and gives him access. Likewise, *the sheep* recognize their shepherd's *voice*. Shepherds in the Middle East today reportedly use distinctive calls to which their sheep are conditioned to respond. Jesus seems to draw on a similar custom as he describes the sheep's response to the shepherd. Only the shepherd leads the sheep out to safe pasture (compare [Psalm 23:2](#), [lesson 5](#)).

4. **“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.**

The depiction of the shepherd's care and the sheep's recognition continues. When daylight comes, it is time to exit the sheep pen for food and water. To get the sheep to the needed nourishment, shepherds of the biblical world do not drive their sheep from behind, but lead them from the front (*goes on ahead of them*). The sheep's recognition of the shepherd makes that possible; the word *voice* is used for the second time for

emphasis in this regard (compare [John 3:29](#); [5:25, 28](#); [18:37](#)).

**5. “But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.”**

This third use of the word *voice* contrasts the leading of the true shepherd with that of a pretender (*a stranger*). The sheep do not recognize the voice of others, so they view them as a threat. These sheep are like the man healed of blindness. In contrast with his parents ([John 9:18-23](#)), he had refused to cower before the religious leaders but responded to Jesus instead ([9:24-38](#)). Bad things happen when wrong voices are heeded ([2 Peter 2:1](#); etc.).

*What Do You Think?*

What are some things churches do to ensure that their teachers speak with the voice of Christ?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

With regard to evaluating their track record in teaching (the past)

With regard to ongoing training (the present)

In terms of periodic monitoring (the future)

Other

**6. Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.**

Jesus’ opponents are nearby, listening to him teach. But as he has said before, they are blind to the truth because they claim that they can “see” ([John 9:39-41](#)). They cannot believe that God has authorized anyone other than themselves to speak for him and to lead his people. Thus, they refuse to listen as Jesus paints the portrait of the shepherd. They will not admit that instead of being shepherds who cares for the sheep, they are more like thieves who fleece the flock.

## B. Identity (vv. 7-10)

**7. Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.**

Again by use of *very truly*, Jesus solemnly emphasizes that he is speaking a vital truth. That emphasis is underlined by the use of *I am the*, with its implications as noted in the Lesson Background. Jesus’ claim to be *the gate for the sheep* may be surprising until we understand that shepherds often block entrances to sheepfolds with their bodies. They do so by lying across the opening at night so that nothing gets in or out without their consent.

In light of the controversy over the man healed of blindness, Jesus is making the audacious claim that he alone decides who belongs with God’s people and who does not (contrast [John 9:22, 34](#)). The religious leaders do not make that determination. No one does but Jesus. And certainly no one truly decides who belongs to God except God himself. Thus, Jesus uses the suggestive *I am* to make this statement.

Taken with the earlier discourse, we understand Jesus’ point: those who listen to and believe him are the sheep who listen to the true shepherd. They belong to the true flock. They are granted entry to the sheepfold. Jesus’ followers are God’s true people.

**8. “All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them.**

There can be only one chief shepherd. Anyone who pretends to be him is in the category of *thieves and robbers*. An example of how such false shepherds operate is found in [Luke 19:45, 46](#), where worship acts of sacrifice are opportunities for profit. Most directly associated with the text before us is, again, the situation of the man healed of blindness. Note that the religious leaders would have preferred that the man not be healed rather than have it done on a Sabbath ([John 9:14-16](#)). This contrast makes clear that the shepherd stands alone and that there is no legitimate alternative to hearing his voice and following him.

## SPIRITUAL CHARLATANS

Jim Jones (1931-1978) started his ministry career in Indianapolis. But it was after he moved his Peoples Temple to California in the late 1960s that he gained notoriety. His ministry focused on issues of social justice, and he developed a large following among society’s downtrodden.

For a time, Jones was endorsed by many leading politicians. But following his exposure as a cult leader, he moved his congregation to “Jonestown” in Guyana. His little empire came crashing down in 1978 with the mass suicide and murder of over 900 people there, including Jones himself.

In retrospect, Jim Jones was merely one spiritual charlatan in a line stretching back centuries. God had to deal with such individuals even within the ranks of his chosen people ([Isaiah 1:23](#); [Jeremiah 7:9-11](#); [Hosea 7:1-3](#); etc.). They stand in stark contrast with Jesus, who stands ever vigilant for the well-being of his flock. The saga of Jim Jones reminds us that only Jesus is worthy of unconditional trust.—C. R. B.

**9. “I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture.**

Jesus repeats his claim to be *the gate*—the only way to enter the flock of God’s people. The one who enters Jesus’ sheep pen *will be saved*, that is, be kept safe from harm.

As the sheep are led to and from the sheep pen, they *find pasture* needed to survive and thrive (compare [John 4:13, 14](#); [6:27, 55](#)). The shepherd’s gift to them is life, and they have it only because of the shepherd.

*What Do You Think?*

What are some specific ways your church can better express the truth that Christ is the only means of access to eternal life?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In modification of tradition or routine
- In special times of the year
- In church discipline
- In curriculum selection
- Other

**10. “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**

When we watch how *the thief* behaves toward the sheep, we see only self-interest. Thieves, by definition, do not act in the best interest of the sheep. Rather, they take advantage of the sheep. They bring death. Serving as examples are the religious leaders who seek to dissuade people from faith in Jesus ([John 9:22-34](#)). They are thieves who act out of self-interest, even at the expense of covering up the truth ([11:48](#)).

But the true shepherd does the opposite. He doesn’t take, but gives. Jesus gives life where others give death. He protects and provides for his flock. And not just a little! Life from Jesus is abundant, like the overflowing cup in the Shepherd Psalm ([Psalm 23:5](#)). Jesus gives not just what is necessary for survival but what results in life in its divinely intended fullness.

*What Do You Think?*

In what specific ways can and should the nature of a Christian’s abundant life in Christ be apparent to others?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding what unbelievers see, considering [1 Corinthians 9:20; 10:27, 32; Philippians 1:13; Colossians 4:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12; 1 Timothy 3:7; 5:13](#); etc.
- Regarding what fellow believers see, considering [Matthew 6:1-18, 25; John 13:14-17; Romans 14:1, 13; 1 Corinthians 10:32; 11:1; Philippians 1:14; Hebrews 10:25](#); etc.

## II. Jesus the Good Shepherd

([JOHN 10:11-15](#))

### A. Giving and Caring ([vv. 11-13](#))

**11a “I am the good shepherd.**

Jesus now changes the metaphor slightly, making in the process a claim that is even more direct and audacious. As before, the phrase *I am the* carries the implications noted in the Lesson Background, particularly with the added descriptor *good*. The term *shepherd* is used in Israel’s Scriptures for God or his promised messianic king. Jesus’ claim of it for himself indicates fulfillment (see [Genesis 49:24; Psalm 80:1; Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24](#); etc.).

**11b “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.**

Some Old Testament kings and priests were good at being shepherds of the people in a relative sense (example: [Psalm 78:70-72](#)). But Jesus is good in an exceptional way. Not only does he lead, feed, and protect the sheep, he also willingly *lays down his life* for them.

Certainly this description strikes Jesus’ audience as astonishing! They know that a shepherd takes risks to protect the sheep, his most valuable possession. But dying for one’s sheep is out of the question. The sheep live for the shepherd, not the other way around. But Jesus is a shepherd like no other.

Time will be needed for Jesus’ meaning to be clear. When he is arrested, Jesus will insist that the soldiers let his followers go free as he surrenders himself willingly ([John 18:3-9](#)). His death will not be a case in which someone else takes his life; he will lay it down himself. It will

be an act of sacrifice that serves as “a ransom for many” ([Mark 10:45](#)).

<sup>12, 13.</sup> **“The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.**

Again Jesus depicts figures to contrast with the shepherd. These figures serve to emphasize the shepherd’s one-of-a-kind nature. Certainly we would expect a thief or robber ([John 10:1](#)) to have no concern for the sheep. But even a hired undershepherd—one who does not own the flock but is paid to care for it—lacks the shepherd’s commitment. This hireling is just there to do a job; he has no personal interest in the sheep.

As fine as other leaders of God’s people may be, only Jesus is the good shepherd in an absolute sense. No one but he places the flock’s well-being first. As the good shepherd, Jesus will give his very life for the sake of his people.

### WHO CARES?

A hallmark of the Great Recession that began in 2007 was home foreclosures. These resulted when many people allowed themselves to be lured into taking out larger mortgages than they could afford.

The unscrupulous lenders, mortgage brokers, etc., who did the luring were said to have engaged in predatory lending practices. These practices thrived in commission-driven environments that lacked accountability. Many, many home buyers trusted their assurances that housing prices would climb forever. No one seemed to have the client’s best interest at heart, as self-interest ruled. The resulting foreclosures became a tidal wave across the stumbling economy—not just in America, but also in funds worldwide that had invested in mortgages.

Jesus’ contrast between himself and those merely hired to do a job still applies. But where do we fit in that illustration? We are not the good shepherd himself, of course. But neither are we to be the hireling who runs away at the first sign of danger. It’s impossible for us to know and care for Jesus’ flock as he does. Peter received instructions in this regard (see [John 21:15-17](#)), and he has passed them along to us: “To the elders among you, I appeal ... Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them” ([1 Peter 5:1, 2](#)).—C. R. B.

### B. Knows and Known ([vv. 14, 15](#))

<sup>14.</sup> **“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—**

A second time Jesus states that he is *the good shepherd*, again underlining the claim to be and do what only God is and does. The fact that he knows his sheep is a further implication of being able to call them by name ([John 10:3](#), above).

The knowing is reciprocal: those whom Jesus knows as his sheep know him as shepherd in return. A precise example is the blind man just healed ([John 9:35-38](#)). Jesus knows the difference between true believers and those superficially impressed with him and his miracles ([2:23-25](#)). Those who know him as the shepherd are his true sheep, by his declaration, because they acknowledge him.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What are some specific ways to exhibit confidence that Christ knows us as his sheep?

#### Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In what we do routinely
- In how we react to special opportunities
- In what we think
- In what we say
- Other

<sup>15.</sup> **“just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.”**

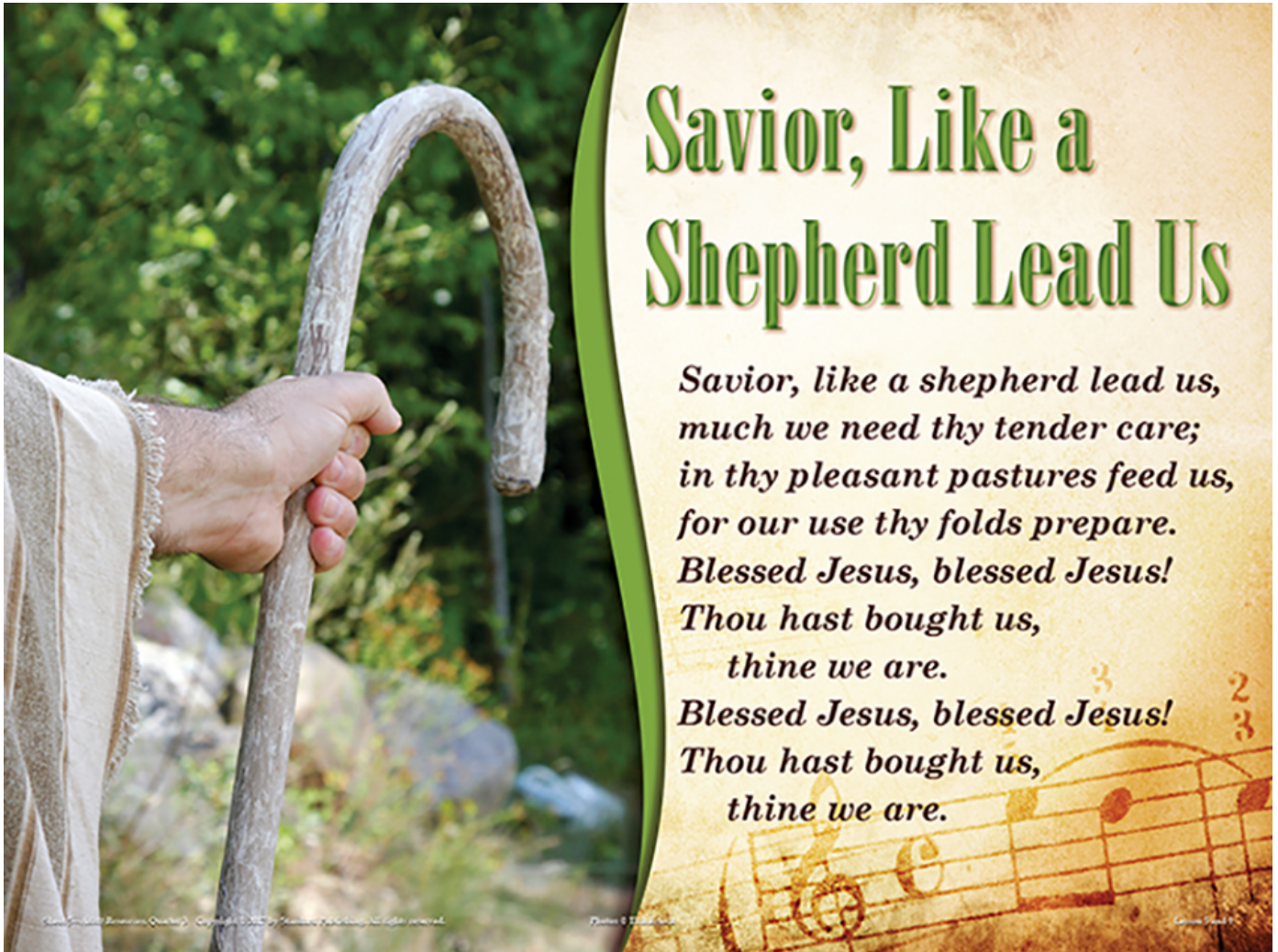
The knowledge of the shepherd and the sheep for each other is mirrored in the knowledge of *the Father* for the Son. Jesus’ reference to God as Father is noteworthy. In John’s Gospel, this is one means by which Jesus affirms his knowledge of God.

That knowledge is based on something different than others’ knowledge of God. Jesus knows God not by teaching, but by personal experience that no one else has ([John 3:13; 7:28, 29; 8:14, 23, 54-58](#)).

As a son knows his father, Jesus the Son knows God the Father. As the one who comes from Heaven, Jesus knows God the Father, the one who abides in Heaven. And as Jesus does and claims to be what only God can do and who he alone is, Jesus shows that he knows God because he *is* God. Jesus’ authority is greater than that of any other, in his own time or in any other.

So—how awestruck are we with this one who is very God, the one who willingly surrenders his life for the sake of his sheep? How different is he from any other shepherd—good or bad—of our experience? How far beyond our expectation is his love for us?





Visual for Lessons 5 & 9. Lead the class in singing this familiar hymn as a preliminary to posing the question associated with [verse 14](#).

## Conclusion

### A. Follow the True Shepherd

Today's text is both disturbing and reassuring. It is disturbing because we prefer to think that there are many ways to find God. Yet Jesus says that he is the one who is the shepherd, the gate to the sheep pen. Apart from him, there is no abundant life.

But that message is also reassuring. We do not need to discover our own path to God. We do not need to work a plan by which we find real life for ourselves. We need merely to listen to the true shepherd and follow him. He leads, provides, and protects. We follow, receive, and trust. That is the way of abundant life, the way for true sheep of the good shepherd.

### B. Prayer

Father, we commit ourselves to follow your Son, to be secure in what he provides, to honor the life he gave for us as we give freely of ourselves for others. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Accept no substitute shepherd.

# INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

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## Into the Lesson

Write this phrase on the board: *You don't own a house; a house owns you.*

Ask, "How would you react to the statement on the board?" Students may want to share a story about the responsibilities of home ownership. Time permitting, you may substitute "car," "pet," or "business" for "house" to solicit more reactions.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Who's the Boss?" activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually or in pairs.

After either activity, lead into the Bible study by saying, "We take on big responsibilities when we own a business or buy a house. These things may bring the owner great joy, but having such a great responsibility requires a lot of work.

"The Bible uses another image to illustrate such responsibility and sacrifice. A shepherd in Jesus' day could not just let his sheep fend for themselves! The sheep needed the shepherd to provide constant care for them. This image pictures the kind of sheltering love Jesus has for those belonging to him."

## Into the Word

Divide your class into groups of three to five students. Give each group paper and pens. Say, "Today most people live in urban or suburban settings and are therefore unfamiliar with sheep and shepherds. Think of other analogies that could be used today. Some examples are a good boss, teacher, babysitter, and coach. Then write a parable using that analogy. *Option:* Read one of the two examples that follow to get them started.

### The Good Teacher

It's the truth. The teacher who is not dedicated to her class is no more than a bad substitute teacher. The good teacher knows her class. She calls each student by name. She knows their personalities, problems, and potential. Those students follow because the good teacher has taken the time to really know them. A bad substitute teacher just sees a bunch of rowdy students. She doesn't take time to know them, so they don't bother to get to know her. After all, she'll be here today and gone tomorrow, so the class does not follow her leading.

### The Good Babysitter

I am the good babysitter. The good babysitter puts her life on the line for the kids she watches. A poor babysitter only cares about the money she will earn—not the kids she watches. So if a robber breaks in or the house catches on fire during her watch, she's out of there! She might call 911 from somewhere down the road, but those kids are on their own! After all, she's not being paid enough to put herself in danger, is she?

Allow time for groups to share their revised parables.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "How to Spot a Good Shepherd" activity from the reproducible page. Have students work individually or in pairs to pick out the main facts from the Bible text.

## Into Life

Have a student read [John 10:9](#) aloud. Ask, "In what ways does Jesus function as a door or gateway? Is it by giving access? by protecting? by providing a way out? by saving?"

Encourage students to make the connections between the functions of a gate and Jesus' saying, "I am the gate." Distribute index cards and markers to students. Instruct them to draw a picture of a gate on one side of the index card. On the back of the card, instruct them to write, "Jesus is the gateway to Heaven for me." Encourage students to post the card somewhere at work or home as a reminder of today's lesson.