

THE LOOKOUT

JANUARY 2024

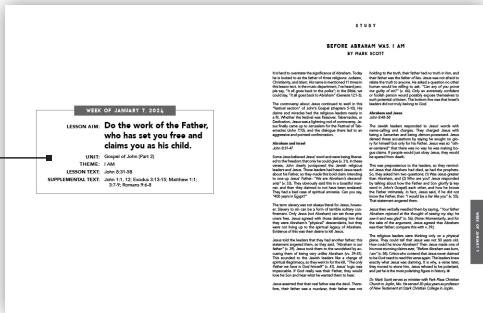
Unit: Gospel of John (Part 2)

Theme: I AM

Overview: Jesus made several claims about himself in the Gospel of John. These claims connected the dots between his name, his identity, and his mission. They all have Old Testament antecedents with additional connections to Israel. In Part 2 of this three-month study in the Gospel of John, students will learn of Jesus' superiority to Abraham, how Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the exclusive way of salvation, and the true vine (new Israel). This LORD is the great I AM.

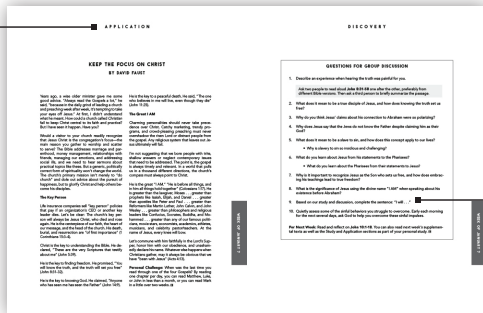
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JANUARY 14, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Pray, study, and meditate
so when you hear Jesus'
voice, you will recognize it.**

UNIT: Gospel of John (Part 2)

THEME: I AM

LESSON TEXT: John 10:1-18

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: John 10:19-30; Ezekiel 34; Psalm 23;
Luke 15:1-6; 1 John 3:16

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

BY MARK SCOTT

Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson sang, “Mommas Don’t Let your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys.” In the ancient biblical world, they would have substituted the word *shepherds* for *cowboys*. The biblical world had a love/hate relationship with shepherds. Shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:34), and by the first century BC they were the ragamuffins of society (Luke 2:8-20). But Scripture has high regard for shepherds. God is viewed as a shepherd (Psalm 23; Luke 15:3-7), and the leaders of God’s people are expected to be good shepherds (Jeremiah 23:1-8; Ezekiel 34).

Our lesson in John’s text takes place sometime between the Festival of Tabernacles and Festival of Dedication (7:10; 10:22). Jesus had already claimed to be the bread of life, the water of life (implied), and the light of the world (6:35; 7:37; 8:12, respectively). In this passage, he claimed to be the *gate* (door) and the *good shepherd*—using both metaphors twice each. These 18 verses are packed with Pharisees, gatekeepers, thieves, robbers, hired men, shepherds (6 times), and sheep or flock (14 times).

The Shepherd Is the Gate*John 10:1-10*

After the blind man was healed and vindicated by Jesus (John 9), the Pharisees set up Jesus by asking, “Are we blind too?” (9:40). Jesus affirmed that they were spiritually blind (9:41). They had neither the eyes to see nor the ears to hear and accept the “Son of Man” (9:35).

The *sheep pen* was well known in the ancient Near East. It was not uncommon for several flocks to be joined together at night so the shepherds could take turns watching the sheep. The shepherd would often lie down at the entrance of the pen, his body essentially becoming the gate; anyone who tried to get in by some other way was called a *thief* or a *robber*. A *wolf* and a *hired hand* are also mentioned later. Metaphorically speaking, these could be good people like John the Baptist (compared to Jesus, he would be lesser and thus a robber) or these could refer to false teachers (like the religious leaders taking issue with Jesus in John 5–10). The metaphor gets mixed here in that the shepherd is the gate at times, and

then also the one whom the gatekeeper allows to enter. The *figure of speech* can go either way (10:6).

This shepherd has an intimate relationship with his sheep. He knows them *by name*, he *leads them*, they *follow him*, and they *know his voice*. In fact, they know him so well they will not follow any other shepherd. Jesus crossed over from the analogy to the spiritual dimension when he spoke about the sheep being saved. In addition, they will be secure—that is, they will be able to freely go in and out in the pasture. Others would only hurt the sheep, but the shepherd who is the gate wants to give the sheep life to the full.

The Shepherd Is the Sacrifice*John 10:11-18*

Sheep typically were raised for consumption or for sacrifice, but this shepherd will offer himself for the sheep because of his love for them. So, Jesus is not only the entrance to eternal life, he also is the means by which they will receive eternal life (through his vicarious, once-for-all, substitutionary death on the cross). *Hired hand* probably is a reference to the religious leaders of Jesus’ day.

The most stunning thing about this shepherd is that he sacrifices himself for the sheep—something that is mentioned four times in the text. The *wolf* (devil?) *attacks the flock and scatters it*. But the sheep know the shepherd, and importantly, they know the shepherd on the same order as the Father knows the Son; that relationship in the triune God is a strong theme in the Gospel of John.

This shepherd’s sacrifice knows no boundaries. Jesus said he has *other sheep*. This must have been offensive to the religious leaders. To think that this Good Shepherd cared about other sheep—such as Gentiles—would have been blasphemous to them. These other sheep would listen to the Shepherd in the way that Israel was supposed to listen. The shepherd’s sacrifice was not done under compulsion. Rather it was accomplished by the pure volition of the Shepherd.

Jesus is the gate to eternal life and the gift of God for the sacrifice for our sins, so why would anyone not want to hear his voice and respond accordingly? ■

APPLICATION

CARE FOR THE FLOCK

BY DAVID FAUST

Jesus didn't happen to notice some sheep grazing nearby and remark offhandedly, "I am the good shepherd." The Lord was addressing the Pharisees when he made this bold claim, and for emphasis, he said it more than once (John 10:11, 14). Jesus deliberately identified himself with Scriptures like Psalm 23:1 ("The Lord is my shepherd"), Psalm 100:3 ("Know that the Lord is God. . . . We are his people, the sheep of his pasture"), and Isaiah 40:11 ("He tends his flock like a shepherd").

And by claiming to be "the good shepherd," Jesus pointed to Ezekiel 34, which denounced evil shepherds who cared for themselves at the expense of God's flock. That same chapter predicted God would send a leader who "will tend them . . . and be their shepherd" (Ezekiel 34:23). The title "good shepherd" had not only messianic implications, but Jesus also was contrasting himself with the self-serving Pharisees. They were bad shepherds—"hired hands" who would run away when wolves attacked the sheep—or worse, they were "thieves and robbers" who "steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:8-13).

Pastor Is a Verb

Everyone needs shepherding, even those who lead the church. Do you know anyone who is "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matthew 9:36)? Is there a "flock" in your family, workplace, church, small group, or neighborhood that relies on you to nurture their faith, protect them from spiritual harm, and guide them in the right direction?

Pastor should be a verb before it's a noun. It's an action to do, not just a title to wear. In the New Testament, shepherding was a ministry to fulfill, not merely an office to hold. Unless leaders actively shepherd the flock, it's inaccurate to call them pastors.

Why do so many Christians—even elders and church staff members—resist the work of shepherding?

It's messy. Animal sheep produce manure. Human sheep produce complex questions, troubled marriages, chronic illnesses, tense interpersonal conflicts, and countless other problems. Eugene Peterson described pastoral leadership by citing William Faulkner's description for how he went about writing a book. Faulkner said, "It's like building a chicken coop in a high wind. You grab any board or shingle flying by or loose on the ground and nail it down fast."

It's inconvenient. Shepherding is unpredictable. You can't always confine it to your office and schedule it on your calendar. Searching for lost sheep will take you to uncomfortable places and awkward situations. Sometimes the flock needs attention in the evening, on weekends, and during holidays. Shepherding may require difficult conversations, late-night emergency room visits, and heart-wrenching funerals.

It can't be learned from books alone. Bible college and seminary professors do their best to impart pastoral skills to their ministry students, but many shepherding lessons are best learned through observation and personal experience.

Shepherding Has Its Rewards

Although it's wearisome at times, tending God's sheep can be incredibly rewarding. There is joy in heaven and on earth when you find a lost sheep and bring it home to a well-fed, well-led flock.

Peter exhorted first-century elders, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them," and then he promised, "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (1 Peter 5:2, 4).

Personal Challenge: Who depends on you for spiritual leadership and protection? Ask God to help you shepherd your flock well. ■

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Have you spent much time around sheep? Share some of your personal observations and knowledge about sheep.

Ask two people to read aloud **John 10:1-18** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. In Mark Scott's lesson, he described how "the shepherd would often lie down at the entrance of the pen, his body essentially becoming the gate." What symbolism does that hold when we think of Jesus, our Good Shepherd?
3. What can you do to train yourself to recognize Jesus' voice?
4. When Jesus says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (v. 10), what does he mean?
 - Earlier in v. 10, he says, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." Who is he talking about?
5. Can you identify times when you've encountered someone or something behaving like a "hired hand" or "thief/robber" in your faith journey?
6. Share some incidents from Jesus' life when he stood up to "wolf attacks."
7. Focus on verses 14 and 15, which effectively say that we can know Jesus as well as Jesus knows his Father.
 - How does that make you feel?
 - What spiritual disciplines or practices have helped you the most as you have come to know Jesus better?
8. Verses 15 to 18 are packed with symbolism that those listening to Jesus in the moment almost certainly did not completely understand. Discuss what Jesus likely meant or was alluding to when he said the following:
 - "I lay down my life for the sheep" (v. 15).
 - "There shall be one flock and one shepherd" (v. 16).
 - "No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again" (v. 18).
9. Why is Jesus' mention of having "other sheep" significant, and how does this concept challenge the religious leaders of the time?
10. How does the idea of Jesus gathering different sheep into one flock convey unity?
 - What steps can you take in your own life to promote unity among fellow believers, regardless of your differences? Take some steps toward unity with other Christians this week.

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **John 14:1-21, 27**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■