

Core Study #8

Jesus as the Good Shepherd

Passage: John 10:1-21

Background Summary:

John 10 is all about Jesus' love for his followers, spoken during an intense time of opposition and conflict in Jesus' ministry. Here, he uses the illustration of a good shepherd taking care of his sheep to model his love for us. Some background about shepherding will be helpful for you as you prepare this study:

Shepherds in the biblical era were in charge of protecting their flocks from wolves and other predators, and of supervising their flock as they migrated from pasture to pasture. The sheepfold in the first century was a place of security, and was likely either a circular or square enclosure constructed out of stones. There would have been one break in the wall that the shepherd or watchman/guard would lie in at night to serve as a protector for the sheep and a gate to the sheepfold. While we often think of shepherds driving their sheep using dogs, in the ancient Middle East shepherds led their sheep by the sound of their voice. Palestinian shepherds frequently had pet names for their sheep based on their individual characteristics. The sheep would recognize their shepherd's voice and respond to his call.

Leaders' Preparation:

Pray and then read through the passage and surrounding passages a few times in different translations. Jot down any questions you may have as you read, as well as any interesting things that stand out to you. Here are some questions you may want to try to answer as you prepare your core study:

- a) Is there a relationship between the passage on spiritual blindness that precedes this story of the sheep and good shepherd?

Although the imagery changes between Chapter 9 and 10, the writing is still a form of dispute against the Pharisees (the religious leaders of the day) and contrasts Jesus' style of leadership with theirs. In Chapter 9, the Pharisees throw out the man who was blind, yet Jesus finds him and leads him to safe pasture (9:35). And like Jesus' sheep in the story, the man does not listen to the Pharisees but instead recognizes the voice of his true master (9:38).

- b) Why does Jesus call the good shepherd? Why does he call his followers sheep?
Jesus alone determines who may enter the sheepfold, he guards the sheep and provides for them, he leads them by his voice, and cares for them. Even more than that, the shepherd is willing to lay down his life to protect his sheep from lions, thieves, and other dangers. Sheep, on the other hand, are not the most intelligent animals and require much care. They are utterly dependent on the shepherd for everything.

Core Study #8

Jesus as the Good Shepherd

Introductory Question:

- What do you think of when you hear the word “sheep” or “shepherd”?
This is a great opportunity for people in your group to share what they know about shepherding in the 1st century. You can fill in the gaps with the info given in the Leaders Preparation section before digging into the passage.

Discussion Questions (selection to choose from):

- In this passage, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees. He contrasts the current spiritual leadership of Israel (which included the Pharisees) with his own way of leading. What two negative images does he use to describe their leadership (in verses 7-10, 11-13)? What is he saying about their leadership?
He mentions thieves and robbers in verses 1, 7-10 who come to steal and kill and destroy. He also mentions hired hands in verses 11-13, those who do not own the sheep and therefore have no vested interest in keeping them safe.
- Why does Jesus call himself the good shepherd? What can this illustration teach us about the Father’s love and Jesus’ love for us?
- What does Jesus mean in verse 10 when he says that we (the sheep) may have life, and have it to the full?
- What does it mean to be “saved” or “kept safe” (vs. 9)? From what?
 - Can we say that Jesus keeps us safe when we live in a world where Christians often suffer?
- Why do you think that Jesus calls himself the gate in verse 7?
- Who are the sheep “not of this sheep pen” that Jesus refers to in verse 16? What can Jesus’ desire to bring these sheep teach us about God’s love for us and the world?
Most scholars believe that this verse refers to Gentile believers, who would become part of the Lord’s people through the proclamation of the gospel. As we have learned from previous studies, salvation is not just for the Jews. That Jesus must bring all of the sheep to the one flock emphasizes the unity that is hoped for amongst Christ followers: there is only one flock, one body of Christ, and this unity is created in and by Jesus.

Application Questions (selection to choose from):

- What are some ways that we can learn to recognize the voice of the good shepherd, and distinguish his voice from those of strangers/theives/robbers?

Core Study #8

Jesus as the Good Shepherd

- In verse 17, Jesus says that the Father loves him because he lays down his life voluntarily for his sheep. In John 15:13, Jesus says that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends. We may not ever have to physically die for our friends, but how can we show this kind of selfless love (modeled by Jesus) to others at UBC?