

SMALL GROUP • GOSPEL OF JOHN

Week 7 Preparation Guide

The Good Shepherd

John 10:1–18 | Christian Standard Bible | For Thursday

BIG IDEA*Jesus knows His people personally and leads them faithfully.*

Study overview

Jesus has just healed a man born blind, and the religious leaders have answered by questioning and pressuring him. John puts the end of it bluntly: “Then they threw him out” (John 9:34). Jesus finds him, the man believes, and then, with the same leaders still listening, Jesus begins to talk about sheep, shepherds, thieves, and a gate. John 10 is not a new topic. It is Jesus’ answer to John 9: here is what a true shepherd looks like, and here is what happens to the sheep a false one casts aside.

Come ready to think about whose voice you are following, how well you believe Jesus knows you, and what it means that the Shepherd does not only lead the sheep but dies for them.

The three scheduled key points

Jesus knows each of His followers by name. Not as a crowd or a category, but personally (10:3, 14).

His voice brings life and direction. The sheep follow because they know his voice, and he came so they may have life in abundance (10:4, 10).

The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. He says it four times in this passage, and he says no one takes his life from him; he gives it (10:11, 15, 17, 18).

Prayer before study

PRAY

Lord Jesus, you are the Good Shepherd. Quiet the other voices around me so I can hear yours in your word. Thank you that you know me by name and that you laid down your life for me. Lead me where you want me to go, and give me the trust to follow. Amen.

Use this guide in several short sittings. Keep John 9 and 10 open beside you, and leave room for questions as well as answers.

1. Two kinds of shepherds

John 9 • Why Jesus starts talking about sheep

Read John 9 before you begin. A man blind from birth is healed, questioned, pressured, and finally expelled by leaders who should have cared for him. In the Old Testament, Israel's leaders were called shepherds, and God had harsh words for shepherds who fed themselves instead of the flock.

GOD'S CHARGE AGAINST ISRAEL'S LEADERS

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy, and say to them, 'This is what the Lord God says to the shepherds: Woe to the shepherds of Israel, who have been feeding themselves! Shouldn't the shepherds feed their flock?"

Ezekiel 34:2 (CSB)

In the same chapter God promises to do the shepherding himself: to search for the lost, bring back the strays, and bandage the injured (Ezekiel 34:11–16). When Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, he is stepping into that promise.

A PROMISE JESUS FULFILLS

"For this is what the Lord God says: See, I myself will search for my flock and look for them.

Ezekiel 34:11 (CSB)

John 10:1–6 • The sheep pen, the gate, and the voice

Picture a walled enclosure where sheep were kept at night, sometimes several flocks together, with a gatekeeper at the entrance. The real shepherd comes in through the gate. In the morning he calls, and his own sheep sort themselves out from the others and come to him.

HE CALLS HIS OWN BY NAME

The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

John 10:3 (CSB)

Notice the order: the shepherd knows the sheep before the sheep follow. Their following rests on his knowing. Notice too what the sheep do with a stranger (10:5): they run. A healthy sheep is not one that follows every voice, but one that has learned a particular voice.

John adds that the listeners did not understand (10:6). It is honest of the Gospel to tell us that. Some of what Jesus says takes time to understand, and that is all right.

Reflect: The man in John 9 was thrown out by religious leaders and found by Jesus. Where have I felt pushed aside, and what does it mean that Jesus came looking?

2. The gate and the abundant life

John 10:7–9 • “I am the gate for the sheep”

Jesus changes the picture. He is not only the shepherd who comes through the gate; he is the gate itself. The way into safety and pasture is not a set of rules or a religious class. It is a person.

SAFETY AND PASTURE

I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.

John 10:9 (CSB)

“Come in and go out and find pasture” is the language of a settled, secure life: protected at night, fed by day. This is the third of John’s “I am” sayings with an image (after the bread of life in 6:35 and the light of the world in 8:12).

John 10:10 • Thieves and abundant life

WHY JESUS CAME

A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.

John 10:10 (CSB)

In context, the “thief” is first of all the false leader Jesus has just described: anyone who uses the sheep instead of caring for them. The verse is often applied to the devil, and that is not a bad application, but Jesus’ first target is people who claim to speak for God and then take from the flock.

“Life in abundance” does not mean a promise of wealth, comfort, or ease. In John, life means life with God that begins now and does not end at death (John 17:3). It is full because of whose it is, not because of how much is in it.

TWO QUESTIONS TO SIT WITH

Whose voices in my life take more than they give? Whose voice leaves me more alive toward God?

Reflect: What would “life in abundance” look like for me this month, if it is not more stuff or less trouble?

3. “I am the good shepherd”

John 10:11–13 • The shepherd and the hired hand

THE HEART OF THE PASSAGE

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:11 (CSB)

A hired hand may be competent, even kind, but when the wolf comes he runs, because the sheep are not his (10:12–13). The difference between a shepherd and a hired hand shows up in danger. Jesus does not run. He stands between the wolf and the sheep, and it costs him his life.

Psalm 23 begins, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Jesus does not merely point to that Shepherd; he speaks as that Shepherd. And he adds what no psalm could say: the Shepherd will die for the sheep.

John 10:14–15 • Known as the Father knows the Son

KNOWN AND KNOWING

“I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me,

John 10:14 (CSB)

Jesus compares his knowledge of his people to the knowledge between the Father and the Son (10:15). That is the deepest relationship there is. He is not describing information about you; he is describing a bond with you. You are not a face in a crowd to him.

Some of us find that comforting. Some of us find it uncomfortable, because being fully known feels risky. The good news of this passage is that the Shepherd who knows everything about his sheep is the same one who lays down his life for them.

John 10:16–18 • Other sheep, and a life given freely

ONE FLOCK, ONE SHEPHERD

But I have other sheep that are not from this sheep pen; I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd.

John 10:16 (CSB)

Most interpreters understand the “other sheep” as people outside Israel, Gentiles who would come to Jesus. That includes most of us reading this guide. The church was always meant to be one flock gathered from many places.

Then Jesus says something no ordinary shepherd could: no one takes his life from him; he lays it down on his own, and he has the right to take it up again (10:18). His death will not be an accident or a defeat, and it will be followed by resurrection.

Reflect: Which do I find harder to believe: that Jesus knows me fully, or that he loves me fully?

4. Prepare your own answers for Thursday

Prepare an honest answer rather than an impressive one. You may share a small part of your story or keep sensitive details private. Listen to others before offering advice.

Question 1 • What makes it hard to recognize God’s voice?

Some reasons are simple: noise, hurry, and too little time in Scripture. Some are harder: other voices we have learned to trust more, fear of what God might ask, past hurt from people who claimed to speak for God, or simply not knowing what we are listening for.

Notice that in John 10 the sheep recognize the shepherd’s voice because they have heard it many times. Familiarity comes from time spent near him. The surest place to learn Jesus’ voice is in his words, read often and slowly.

BEGIN YOUR ANSWER

“It is hard for me to recognize God’s voice when _____. The voice that tends to be loudest in my head is _____. I hear Jesus most clearly when _____.”

My answer to question 1

Question 2 • When have you experienced God’s guidance?

Guidance is often easier to see looking back than in the moment. Think about a verse that met you at the right time, a wise word from another believer, a door that closed, a conviction that would not go away, or peace in obeying something hard.

You do not need a dramatic story. Quiet, ordinary faithfulness counts. If you cannot point to a moment, that is an honest answer too, and a good thing to bring to the group.

BEGIN YOUR ANSWER

“Looking back, I can see God leading me when _____. At the time it felt _____. What helped me recognize it was _____.”

My answer to question 2

Where Christians differ: All Christians agree that Jesus speaks with certainty and authority through Scripture, and that any sense of leading must agree with Scripture and with Christ’s character. Many believers also expect the Holy Spirit to guide through inner promptings, wise counsel, and circumstances. Others are more

cautious about calling an impression “God’s voice,” preferring to speak of wisdom and providence. Either way, test what you think you are hearing against the Bible, and with trusted people, before acting on it.

5. Following the Shepherd this week

Question 3 • What does trusting the Good Shepherd look like this week?

Trust is concrete. It might mean bringing a worry to him before trying to solve it, obeying something you already know he has said, resting when you would rather keep working, or making a decision without needing to see every step first.

Sheep do not need to know the whole route. They need to stay close to the one who does. Psalm 23 does not promise there will be no dark valley; it promises, “you are with me” (Psalm 23:4).

BEGIN YOUR ANSWER

“This week, trusting Jesus would look like _____. The hardest part of that for me is _____. One thing I can do is _____.”

My answer to question 3

An additional deeper group question

DISCUSS TOGETHER

Jesus said the hired hand runs because he does not care about the sheep. Who has shepherded you well, in your family, church, or work, and what did they do that reminded you of Jesus? Where are you called to shepherd others?

This question gently turns the passage outward. Parents, leaders, and friends all care for someone. None of us is the Good Shepherd, but all of us can follow his pattern: know people by name, stay when it is hard, and give ourselves for their good.

Practical application for this week

Learn the voice. Choose one short passage, John 10:1–18 or Psalm 23, and read it slowly each day this week. Read it once, pause, and read it again, listening for one phrase. Carry that phrase with you through the day.

Name the other voices. Once this week, write down the messages you most often hear in your head (from fear, ambition, criticism, or comparison). Then hold each one up to what Jesus says in John 10. Which ones sound like the Shepherd, and which sound like a stranger?

6. Between now and Thursday

Use these four short readings in order, about 10–15 minutes each. If Thursday is close, combine the first two sittings and finish with the final reading before your group meets.

First sitting • See the setting

Read John 9 in the CSB. Notice how the man born blind is treated by the leaders and how Jesus treats him. Write one observation about Jesus and one about the leaders.

Second sitting • Hear the Shepherd

Read John 10:1–18 without stopping. Then reread verses 1–10. Mark every action of the shepherd and every action of the sheep. Prepare your answer to “What makes it hard to recognize God’s voice?”

Third sitting • Read the background

Read Ezekiel 34:1–16 and Psalm 23. Notice what God promises to do for his flock. Then reread John 10:11–18 and prepare your answers to the second and third questions. Optional: read Luke 15:1–7.

Before Thursday’s group • Come ready

Reread John 10:1–18 and pray Psalm 23 slowly, one line at a time. Bring one insight about Jesus, one question, and one honest answer you are comfortable sharing.

SCHEDULED CHALLENGE

Spend ten quiet minutes each day listening in prayer before speaking.

How to begin: open with a short passage (John 10:14 or Psalm 23:1), then sit quietly. You are not trying to empty your mind or produce a feeling. You are attending to God before talking to him. If your mind wanders, read the verse again. Afterward, pray about what came to mind, and test any sense of leading against Scripture.

When and where I will take my ten minutes: _____

A verse I will start with: _____

Closing prayer

Good Shepherd, thank you that you know me by name and that you came looking for me. Forgive me for following other voices and for running when I should have stayed. Teach me to know your voice in your word. When the wolf comes, keep me close. Thank you for laying down your life for me and taking it up again. Lead me this week, and help me follow. Amen.

One insight or question to bring on Thursday

Sources: Small Group Schedule.txt, Week 7; CSB text of John 9–10 and cross-references (Ezekiel 34:2, 11–16; Psalm 23:1, 4; John 6:35; John 8:12; John 17:3; Luke 15:1–7). Schedule wording is preserved; explanations and prompts are study commentary.

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