



LEADER GUIDE

JOHN

SIGNPOSTS OF
THE SAVIOR

THE SIGN OF HIS CARE

BIG IDEA: Jesus, as our Good Shepherd, knows and cares for His flock.

DATE: Sunday, February 22 and Wednesday, February 25, 2026

SCRIPTURE: John 10:1-21

OPENING QUESTION

Are you a pet owner? *If you have a dog, what tricks can they do? How long did it take to train them to respond to your commands and know your voice?*

There is a special bond between a pet owner and their pet – especially when that pet is a dog. Dogs identify one member of the family as their “primary human.” This is the person they follow – preferring their voice, attention, footsteps and scent. If you have a dog, share a little of the training process – good or bad – and special bond you have developed.

TRANSITION TO LESSON: Today we are going to look at the special relationship between sheep and their shepherd, Jesus and His followers. Jesus, as our Good Shepherd, knows and cares for His flock. We can show our trust in Him by knowing and responding to His voice.

SETTING THE STAGE

In last week’s lesson we ended with the healing of the man who was born blind. Following this miraculous healing, the Pharisees question the man about the source of his healing. Despite the man’s testimony about Jesus’s miraculous act, the Pharisees doubt his story. They begin an investigation into the man’s healing, interrogating him and even bringing in his parents for questioning. Faced with the Pharisees’ skepticism and pressure, the man courageously stands by his testimony, leading to his excommunication from the synagogue. Upon learning of the man’s excommunication, Jesus seeks him out and reveals Himself as the Son of Man, but this is an identity the Pharisees are not willing to accept. It is immediately after this conversation that Jesus speaks about sheep, shepherds, gates and thieves and robbers. So, there is something about this illustration that connects to the events that have just taken place. Today we are not looking at a miracle but one of Jesus’s I AM statements that point to His divinity.

SCRIPTURE READING

John 10:1-21 (CSB)

“Truly I tell you, anyone who doesn’t enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep

follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They will never follow a stranger; instead they will run away from him, because they don't know the voice of strangers." ⁶ Jesus gave them this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. ⁷ Jesus said again, "Truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰ A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, since he is not the shepherd and doesn't own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them. ¹³ This happens because he is a hired hand and doesn't care about the sheep. ¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own. I have the right to lay it down, and I have the right to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father." ¹⁹ Again the Jews were divided because of these words. ²⁰ Many of them were saying, "He has a demon and he's crazy. Why do you listen to him?" ²¹ Others were saying, "These aren't the words of someone who is demon-possessed. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

DISCUSSION

Jesus the Gate

READ: John 10:1-10

What do you learn about each of these? the shepherd; the sheep; thieves and robbers; Jesus's purpose

In this illustration, Jesus depicts a larger courtyard or pen in which the sheep of several flocks belonging to different families are kept. In the morning, the shepherd goes down the path to gather the sheep. He would be recognized by the gatekeeper and granted access to the pen. The shepherd had a unique way of calling or whistling, sometimes using a small flute, that the sheep knew and obeyed. If multiple groups of sheep gathered at a watering place and mixed together, the shepherd could easily separate them again by using his call as he walked away. Some shepherds also gave their sheep names. No sheep would follow a different shepherd (indeed, they would flee anyone else), and no shepherd could lure or call sheep that did not belong to him.

Sheep always go to the shepherd they know, who has cared for them, and flee anyone and anything else.

The metaphor works itself this way:

- Israel is the sheep pen.
- Not all the sheep in the pen belong to Jesus's flock. That is, not all Jews believe Jesus is the Messiah.
- What distinguishes those who do believe from those who do not believe is the ability to hear and respond to His voice.

- Jesus is first gathering His flock from the pen of Israel.
- The thief is associated with Satan, whose intent is to destroy rather than preserve life.

SHARE: What it means for Jesus to be “the gate” in this metaphor. (Use the commentary to explain how the shepherd’s body literally served as the door of the enclosure. He slept across the opening to keep sheep in and predators out.)

- How has Jesus shown Himself to be “the gate” to you? How has he strengthened and deepened your access to God? How has He protected you?
- Jesus is the door to a rich and satisfying life. He wasn’t just talking about giving us a better life experience but giving us life from God found in Him. Would you say you are experiencing the abundant life Jesus offers? Why or why not? How would you describe the “abundant life” to someone?
- Sheep respond to the voice of their shepherd. How are you tuning your heart and mind to hear and respond to Jesus’s voice? (Note it is also what we need to tune out – other voices, the culture, our self-serving nature, emotions, etc. The sheep do not need to learn every voice – just their shepherd’s.)
- What are some practical ways we hear His voice? (Bible reading, study, meditation, memorization; preaching; teaching; through wise Christian brothers and sisters; through the conviction of the Holy Spirit.)

Leaders – point out the contrast between the voice of the Good Shepherd and the voice of Satan the thief – the Holy Spirit CONVICTS while the devil CONDEMNNS. Be careful which voice you let in.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

READ: John 10:11-21

Ezekial 34 is a passage where God rebukes the “shepherds, the leaders of Israel” (v. 2), the religious leaders in Ezekiel’s day who slaughtered the choice animals, clothed themselves in wool, and failed to care for the flock. Here, in contrast, Jesus is referred to as the *Good Shepherd*.

ASK: How is the Good Shepherd described versus how the hired hand is described?

Record responses by drawing this chart on the white board and filling in the blanks.

GOOD SHEPHERD	HIRED HAND
Verse 11	Verse 12
Verse 14-15	Verse 13

While good shepherds serve their flocks in many ways, John emphasized that Jesus came to lay down His life for His sheep. He's not only the Shepherd who leads, He's the Shepherd who serves, sacrificially. That's why we can trust His voice.

It was a rare occurrence for a shepherd to die in the service of sheep. When they did, it was by accident. Yet five times in this account Jesus clearly referenced His sacrificial death (John 10:11, 15, 17-18).

ASK: What is the role of the sheep according to verses 14 and 16?

Sheep know and listen to their master. They need guidance and protection. In the same way, we need the Good Shepherd to lead us. Without Him we are lost. Yet, too often we listen to the voices of culture, other people, or our own fickle feelings.

- How are you doing with listening to the Good Shepherd's direction in your life? Are you following Him?
- How has He shown Himself to be your Good Shepherd? How is He actively caring, guiding and guarding you?
- Jesus knows you more fully than anyone ever could and loves you more fully than anyone ever could. How does this give you confidence to trust and follow Him?

RESPONSE

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus invites us to trust Him with our lives. We are like sheep - prone to wander, in need of guidance, and vulnerable without Him. By recognizing His voice, following His lead, and embracing His care, we find abundant life. Jesus's sacrificial love, care, and unwavering protection assures that in Him, we are safe, loved, and never alone. It takes a trained and trusting ear to know His voice. What steps can you take this week to listen and obey?

READING PLAN

2/22 – Micah 5; 2/23 – Isaiah 7; 2/24 – Isaiah 9; 2/25 – Matthew 1; 2/26 – Matthew 2; 2/27 – Luke 1; 2/28 – Luke 2; Memory Verse – Isaiah 9:6

COMMENTARY

JESUS the GATE

John 10:1-10

To better grasp what it means for Jesus to be the gate, we need to look at the historical and cultural context. During summer, sheep might stay overnight in a pasture inside a simple pen made of stacked rocks. These pens, of course, had no roof or gate, but thorny branches on top of the walls kept wild animals out, and the shepherd would sleep in the entrance to act as the door. That is, the shepherd would act as the gate with his body. Therefore, when Jesus called Himself the gate, He was describing His role as protector (something He will elaborate on later in the passage regarding His identity as the Good Shepherd). But in this text, He also adds something new: **the sheep must enter and exit through Him** (John 10:9). Jesus describes Himself as the exclusive means by which the sheep may enter the safety of the pen or pass into the provision of the pasture. Anyone who trusts in Him will experience safety, freedom, and supply. Think about it

like this: Jesus isn't just another good option among many; He's the *only* way to true salvation and the bridge that connects us back to God.

Jesus Himself said, "I am the gate," emphasizing that He's our access point to God and the pathway to everlasting life. It's not about how well we behave or where we come from; it's all about His divinity and the incredible work He accomplished for us. Perhaps the beauty of it all is that Jesus's exclusivity isn't about shutting people out; it's about opening wide the gates of grace to everyone. Just as only one medicine can cure a specific illness, Jesus is the sole solution to sin. His exclusivity isn't exclusive in a limiting sense; It's about including every soul willing to accept Him as their Lord and Savior, offering eternal life to all who placed their trust in His love and power.

Thieves and Robbers

John 10:10 states, "A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." In contrast with the shepherd who sleeps at the gate to give protection and provision for the sheep, thieves and robbers work to jump the pen and harm the sheep for their own gain with no real concern for the sheep. Jesus was referring to leaders who mislead people and kept them from truly knowing God (the religious leaders, in the immediate context). These leaders rejected Jesus and even cast out the man He healed in John 9, thinking they were separating him from God's people. But Jesus found that man and brought him into his flock, showing He is the true way to salvation.

The shepherd's role includes defending the sheep from predators like wolves. Left to themselves, sheep are vulnerable, easily scattered, and unable to defend themselves. Jesus highlights the hired hands' failure to protect the flock, explaining that He alone stands against danger to ensure the safety of His sheep. He is like a parent who stands in front of their child to shield them from harm. Their love compels them to protect at all costs. Jesus does the same for us, shielding us from the ultimate danger of eternal separation from God. His protection is not temporary or conditional but eternal and secure.

This gets at the heart of verse 10 – "I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10:10b). This abundant life is contrasted with what the thief brings: stealing, killing, and destroying. The thief acts selfishly and harms the sheep, but Jesus gives His life for the sheep to bring them life.

Jesus the Good Shepherd

John 10:11-21

While the shepherd does lie down in the gate to protect and provide for the sheep, there is much more to being a shepherd than this. Likewise, there is more to Jesus than being the gate, and Jesus elaborates on these things by referring to himself as the Good Shepherd. There is overlap in these metaphors, but more can't be known by focusing on this title. So what is it that makes Jesus the Good Shepherd? What qualities, characteristics, or behaviors does Jesus possess or perform that prove Him to be the Good Shepherd? There is one thing that Jesus states and illustrates repeatedly in John 10 that makes Him the Good Shepherd: He lays down his life for the sheep.

Because He Cares for His Sheep

John 10:11-13

To help his doubting audience understand His identity and His purpose, Jesus contrasts Himself with a hired hand working with sheep. A hired worker may guard sheep for pay, but when danger approaches, like a wolf, they abandon the flock. Why? Because they lack ownership and genuine

concern for the sheep's welfare. In contrast, Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, willingly lays down His life for the sheep. His love goes beyond duty or obligation – it is self-sacrificial.

Jesus steps into danger – taking on sin and death – not for His benefit but for ours. The cross becomes the ultimate proof of His love, as He willingly endures suffering to ensure our safety and salvation.

Because He Knows His Sheep and His Sheep Know Him
John 10:14-15

Jesus is the Good Shepherd not only because He cares for His sheep but also because He knows them. He knows them as intimately as He and the Father know one another.

Jesus knows His followers personally – our fears, struggles and joys – and calls us by name. His voice stands out among competing distractions, and His followers are drawn to Him in trust. Are you drawn to Him in this way?

To give us some idea of just how intimate and sure Jesus's knowledge of His sheep is, Jesus compares His relationship with His sheep to the perfect knowledge shared between Himself and the Father. Just as the Father and Son share complete understanding and unity, Jesus offers believers an intimate connection. Jesus invites His followers into such a relationship, one marked by unity and purpose, modeled after His relationship with the Father.

Because He brings other sheep into the flock
John 10:16

The "flock" is Judaism but there is another flock – the Gentiles who are outside the covenants of Israel. In Jesus's early ministry, He concentrated on the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24-27). The church was not to remain a "Jewish flock." Peter took the Gospel to the Gentiles and Paul carried the message to the Gentiles in the far reaches of the Roman Empire. There is but one flock, the people of God who belong to the Good Shepherd. God has His people all over this world and He will call them and gather them together. Jesus refused to defend the exclusivist approach of the Jewish religious leaders. He died for a lost world, and His desire is that His people reach a lost world with the message of eternal life.

Reflection Question: Who do you know that is outside the flock? How can you commit to share the Good Shepherd with them this week?

Because He Wills
John 10:17-18

That Jesus lays down his life for his sheep from a place of care, and a place of intimate knowledge also confirms that He does so willingly. Who would you be willing to lay your life down for? Think of policemen, firemen and the military who are willing to lay down their lives for strangers!

Jesus's strength and kindness are on powerful display in this text. Jesus declares His control over his life and death, a life lived and a death offered for the good of His sheep. Unlike a victim whose life is taken from them, Jesus willingly lays down his life as part of God's redemptive plan. Jesus's death may seem like a loss, but it is a purposeful act of love that leads to ultimate victory over sin and death. Jesus emphasizes, "No one takes it from me" (v. 18.) His death is not forced; it is a

deliberate choice to fulfill the Father's will. This underscores His love and commitment to humanity.

Jesus also states that the Father's love is tied to His obedience; "I've received this command from My Father." This reflects the unity of purpose between the Father and Son. Jesus's actions are not independent but part of a divine plan to redeem the world. Imagine a relay race where each runner's success depends on their cooperation with the team. The Father and Son work in perfect harmony, with Jesus running His leg of the race through His sacrifice, ensuring the completion of God's plan for salvation.

Conclusion - Gracious Exclusivity

As the gate and the Good Shepherd, Jesus shows that He is the only way to enter into a relationship with God and experience salvation. Just as the gate provides access to safety and security for His sheepfold, Jesus offers protection and care for those who follow Him. Jesus protects His followers from spiritual harm and provides them with abundant life. He is both the pathway to salvation and the one who ensures our safety within His care.

This passage invites us to marvel at the intentionality of Jesus to sacrifice and resurrection. It assures us that his death was not a tragic accident but a loving, personal purposeful act of redemption. Just as he willingly laid down his life, he invites us to trust him of ours, knowing he holds ultimate authority over life and death. And this salvation isn't just personal; It's also about being part of a community - the flock of Christ. This community isn't made up of isolated individuals or a nameless group. Instead, it's a family where each person is known, loved, and guided by Jesus. By calling Himself the Good Shepherd, Jesus claimed His role as the leader of this new community, a family that finds life and hope in Him alone.

The Gospel of John: Knowing Jesus through the I AM Statements by LifeWay Press

The Gospel of John: Savoring the Peace of Jesus in a Chaotic World by Melissa Spoelstra, LifeWay Press.

The Bible Exposition Commentary Vol 1 by Warren W. Wiersbe, Victor Books.