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**LIFE IN HIS NAME**  
**I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD**

John 10:1-21

I would like to read the first 18 verses of John 10.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”

I have discovered that people generally know two passages of scripture. If you have any experience around Christianity or Christian tradition, if you grew up at all in that tradition, quite frequently people know two passages. One is the Lord's Prayer -- we sometimes call it the Model

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Prayer. The other is Psalm 23, the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm. In fact, the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm may be the best known chapter of scripture in the entire bible for most of us. At funerals, if there is a graveside portion of the service, I will typically share the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm there by the side of the grave in the conclusion of the ceremonies of the day. Frequently, those that are gathered there will start to recite the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm as I share it.

The reason that this passage is so well known and so famous, if you will, is because it expresses the protection and the provision that is ours in God. It's a passage of amazing comfort, just comprehensively and beautifully telling us of God's care and provision. When we face death, when we face the loss of someone we love very much, we are especially aware of our need. In fact in those moments, more than at any other time, we have to set aside the whole idea that we are self-sufficient. I've got this thing called life covered. I can do life.

Well, when we face death and the loss of someone that we love, we are brought into a very keen awareness that that's just not the case. We have within our hearts a desire for more than one life. As the author of Ecclesiastes tells us, "God has put eternity into our hearts," and when we face death, we know this is not the way it's supposed to be. We are not supposed to be separated from the people we love the most. And when we consider death for our own lives, we see it as an enemy. Apart from Christ, apart from what God promises us in scripture, we see it - that's the reality - as an enemy.

So, in those moments we admit we all need help. We all need someone to protect us and we all need someone to provide for us. Psalm 23 captures that truth and helps us to say it. With that rich imagery from the Old Testament in mind (it's recorded in other passages), Jesus stands up and proclaims this truth: "I am the good shepherd. I am the one who will protect you. I am the one who will provide for you. I am the one that you can trust with everything for body and soul for this life and for eternity." And in that regard, Christianity is unlike any other religion. It is the one world religion that focuses not on what you do to get to God, not on what you do for God, but on what God has done for you -- that God has made you, that God removes that which separates you from him so that you can be brought into a relationship with him because of what Jesus Christ has done for you.

It's placed here in John Chapter 10 in a very strategic place. We've just seen this really horrific depiction of the leadership there in Jerusalem, the Jewish religious leadership. A man is healed

that's been blind all his life. He was born blind. He has suffered immensely. Jesus heals him and they're not even happy for him. Instead of trying to focus on how to care for the people, they are focused on "How do I protect my position, my power, my influence?" In contrast to that, Jesus shares what is called a figure of speech. It's a metaphor, a word picture to give us assurance and promises about how Jesus takes care of us.

This is what we're going to do. We are going to start by just listing out the characteristics of Jesus' ministry as the good shepherd. I'm going to give you seven characteristics of Jesus' ministry, Jesus as the good shepherd. Let me list them out for you. The first one is this:

1. Legitimacy.

That's how the text really begins. He is focusing now, he is drawing a contrast between himself and the other religious leaders. He says, "I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber." Jesus is making a claim to say that his claim on your life is legitimate. He made you. He gives his life. He sacrifices himself for you. He doesn't steal his way illegitimately into your life.

2. Identity.

3. Intimacy.

Jesus calls them by name. He says, "My sheep know my voice. They are mine. Jesus knows us by name. He puts his name on us. We know his voice. He knows us. And he explains to us in verse 15 that the intimacy that we share with Christ as his followers is actually the intimacy that the Father and the Son know in the Trinity. If you look at verse 15 there, Jesus states, "...just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." Do you see that picture? Jesus is describing this very personal relationship that we have.

I don't know if any of you are shepherds by trade. I'm going to guess that's not the case. We probably don't know a lot about that whole "industry" and certainly not how it would have been done 2000 years ago, but there would be a sheep pen, and there might be multiple sheepfolds within that pen. The image that Jesus first uses to share this word picture is that there is a gatekeeper. The shepherd comes to the gate and the gatekeeper knows he's legitimate. He has sheep here. The shepherd calls his sheep and they follow him. Jesus is emphasizing here identity, intimacy, relationship, and telling us that the care that he provides for us is legitimate.

### 4. Humility.

There is an emphasis on humility. Jesus doesn't drive the sheep, but they know his voice and they follow him.

### 5. Faithfulness.

There is an emphasis here on the faithfulness of Christ in his provision and care and protection. He leads his sheep out to pasture. He cares for them. All that we love about the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm in terms of the serene picture of God leading us beside the still waters and leading us to rich pasture, protecting us in the valley of the shadow of death, protecting us in the presence of our enemies -- all of that is recalled now in this image of security and safety and provision. Jesus is faithful.

### 6. Love.

There is an emphasis on Jesus' love. He tells us that there is one flock and one shepherd, and yet he tells us that his vision, his mission is for much more than those that are hearing his voice on that day when he spoke these words, that he has a mission. He says, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold." Almost certainly Jesus is talking about the Gentiles. He is talking about most of us who are here this morning. He is saying, "Listen, my Father's vision for the kingdom of God is much larger than you can imagine. My love is vast. My flock is one and united." Jesus is telling us that out of that love he will lay down his life for the sheep.

Just a word about that. I don't know what you think when you think about a shepherd risking his life. I don't think that it was a frequent occurrence where a shepherd died protecting the sheep, but it was risky business. There were wild animals and dangers. They were in the outdoors. You heard as we read the text -- the emphasis throughout is that the one who owns the sheep, where there is that identity, is not a hireling. He is not a thief coming in some illegitimate way. He takes that risk gladly and protects and provides.

Jesus takes that image, then of course by the time he finishes the teaching he extends it now to an intentional giving of his life for our sins. He doesn't just risk his life; he voluntarily gives his life as a sacrifice for our sin, toward the goal of taking his life up again in resurrection to defeat our greatest enemy - death. So, the driving motivation of love is seen in the ministry of Jesus.

### 7. Authority.

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Jesus wants us to understand that his life will not be taken from him against his will, that he has the authority from the Father to lay it down, then the authority to take it up again. It is important, again, for this whole image of God's willingness and ability to care for us and protect us.

So, just an overview:

- Legitimacy
- Identity
- Intimacy
- Humility
- Faithfulness
- Love
- Authority

Jesus is the good shepherd. He provides. He protects. He cares for us.

Now let's look at the other side. Let's look at the seven characteristics of your response -- seven things that you will need to follow Jesus. Since we are not familiar with sheep, we are not really familiar with the whole idea of what it means to be sheep, we need to understand that - it's hard to say, but sheep are not the brightest animals. They are a little slow. The reality is that many of the animals that we enjoy and the pets that we have -- if we don't domesticate them, if we don't have them, many of them will fend for themselves and find a way to survive. Sheep will die. It's just the reality. They must be cared for. The push behind that idea is our dependence on God, our need for God. So with that in mind, let me give you a list.

1. A Jesus focus.

The first is a Jesus focus, a focus upon Jesus himself. If we build on the ministry that we've just seen described for Jesus himself, then we understand that there's a flow of identity. I find my identity in Christ. We celebrated it in worship today and in prayer. Jesus Christ pays the penalty of my sin. My sin, my guilt, my condemnation is placed upon Jesus. Though he had never sinned, he offered himself, paying the penalty for my sin on the cross. Then in exchange, his perfect righteousness is placed on me. I am in Christ and Christ is in me. When God looks at me, when the Father looks at me, by faith in Jesus Christ, what he sees is the righteousness of Christ. So Paul can say in Romans 8:1: "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Many of you have heard my own personal testimony in this regard. For a long time in my Christian life as a young man fighting against all kinds of temptation, I would have this ideal in mind. I would say, "You know, if I could just be faithful to share Jesus with other people, if I could just be faithful to have a prayer time, if I could be faithful to be in the word, if I could not fall to this kind of temptation, if I could always be patient..." I had a very vivid description. I had two descriptions that I could have actually written out for you. One was a description of what I ought to be in life, and the other description was what my wife ought to be. I had this list that I was praying for, and I would bring it before God. I was really conscious of the second list in terms of, "Lord, I'm looking for you to provide for me the right spouse. Since I'm putting in my order, here's what I'm asking for."

But you know what? I wasn't really aware consciously of the first list. In the first list I was thinking, "This is what I have to be in order for God to really love me and use me." The description that Jesus gives is: He saves us, changes our identity, brings us into intimacy with him, and leads us into mission and purpose. What you do, your mission, your purpose in life flow from identity and intimacy. You belong to Christ. Christ has put his righteousness on you. That's how the Father sees you. You have intimacy with God. You have relationship. And out of that, he has work for you to do.

Isn't it true that the reality for most of us is we flip that? Here's what we say: "If I do the right thing, if I can do this list, if I am faithful in having my quiet time, if I share Jesus, if I do all the things that I know God wants me to do, if I am faithful in mission and purpose and behavior, then I will have intimacy with God, and then I will really be a Christian." The truth is, we will never have the spiritual resource. We will never have the ability to fulfill our mission and purpose apart from our understanding of our identity in Christ and intimacy with him. So our response begins with a Jesus focus. It's on what Christ has done -- his sufficiency in our lives.

### 2. Listen to his voice.

We are told that as his sheep we hear his voice. We recognize his voice. Paul tells us that as Christians we have the mind of Christ, and that our minds are being renewed according to his truth. This is where I think today's study can really help us. If you're not a Christian, I'm going to give you a description of what it looks like to walk in relationship with Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, my hope is that this grand truth - Jesus is your good shepherd - that this truth can now be fleshed out

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practically in your life in terms of what it looks like, that you can live with the peace in your heart to know “Jesus is my protector and he is shepherding me through this life.”

I have phrased it this way: Listen to his voice. I want to stretch you a little bit about what that looks like in life. There are times where I’m making a big decision or I’m really needing God’s guidance, or I’m tempted to be anxious about something, and I’ll go to the Lord in prayer. Here is what I’ll do. I’m just sharing my personal testimony in how I work this out. I will begin to pour my heart out to the Lord. Now, when I say “pour your heart out to the Lord,” have you ever been in a situation where you are telling someone about how frustrated you are? Someone you really trust? Maybe it’s your spouse, or your best friend, or someone you can be totally unguarded with and just dump everything out there? That’s what I mean by “pour your heart out before the Lord.” A lot of times we try to sanitize our hearts before we bring them to God, as if God doesn’t know what’s in there. Right? No, no, no, no, no. “Lord, I am frustrated. I don’t know. I’m discouraged. I feel this \_\_\_\_\_.” Just put it all out there before the Lord. Then, try to distill it down to: “What is it I need God to show me in this moment? What is the guidance I need? What is the understanding I need? What is the provision?”

Let’s just say you are a single young man and you are praying about marrying someone. I would say that’s a big decision. I’m speaking to the front row here. Sorry, guys. I wouldn’t hesitate to bring that before the Lord. Here’s what happens. Here’s the argument that I’m contending. If you belong to Christ, there comes a point where God’s truth resonates in your heart in a way where you experience God’s protection, provision, guidance, and care in very practical ways.

You’ve got to listen very carefully. I don’t think you are going to necessarily get a word from heaven: “Marry the person over there. Marry that girl in the checkered dress.” Okay? I wouldn’t look for that kind of revelation. Remember, I’ve told you that generally God gives that kind of specificity only when a huge trial is about to follow. God spoke to Paul very clearly. He appeared to him on the Damascus Road. He had this majestic vision. Then what did he tell Ananias? “Go over and lay hands on him. Tell him how much he’s going to suffer for me.” Alright?

If you want God to audibly speak to you, it may come with “Marry her and I’m going to show you how much you’re going to suffer for me.” I just don’t recommend that as a practice. Instead, we make godly choices. Men and women in the Lord have the courage to choose godliness. The whole idea that I don’t have to make any decisions is not biblical. It’s not right. We are men and

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women of character. But we do have the mind of Christ, and God does lead us. What does that look like?

This is what I would do in various situations. I would write that question in my journal then I would just really try to quiet my heart before the Lord. Then I would write out what I know to be true deep within me. Again, I'm emphasizing it's not that I think that's the voice of the Lord. I think it's the Lord helping me to push out all the commotion and emotion and all the noise to just get silent before God and allow his truth to really inform what I know to be true. Here's the assumption below that whole activity: It's that as we fill ourselves with the word of God, there's not as much confusion about which direction we should go once we remove the noise, if we'll just be honest before the Lord.

The next four things on this list are all things that are necessary for you to do the first two, for you to keep your focus on Jesus and for you to be able to really learn to trust the voice of God in your own spirit. Let me give those to you. Here are the seven things you need for your response.

### 3. God's word.

You've got to fill yourself with the truth of God. God's word renews our minds. God's word organizes new chambers within the heart for God's truths, God's ideals, God's values to fill us. For us to be renewed in our thinking, we must be renewed according to the word of God, so that God's truth about who he is and who we are and the world that we live in and the battle that we fight in are all informed and defined according to the word of God.

### 4. An openness to the Holy Spirit.

An understanding that we experience the kingdom of God now by the Spirit of God, that we walk in relationship with God, with the Spirit of God, that the promise of God is for the Spirit to fill us, and that in personal relationship with the Lord we can quench the Spirit of God, we can grieve the Spirit of God. We can seek and walk in his fullness.

Do you remember that list that I gave you back in the beginning? Here is what the perfect Christian is and here is what I need to look at? I can't make that my identity. That belongs over in the mission and purpose category. Where I find my identity is in who Christ is and what he has done, and I receive that as a gift. That opens the door to intimacy. That leads me into the progression of walking out my Christian life. We understand that. Are you with me? However, I'm in a

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relationship with the Spirit of God. If I take that understanding of identity, intimacy, mission, and I say, "Okay, well, I don't need that list. Let me tear it up. I don't care." No, no, no, no. That belongs over here in the mission category, purpose category. If I just ignore my identity and I just live like I don't belong to God and I'm always putting things in my mind that are not helpful, and I'm always cultivating gossip and fear and anxiety, well I live like I have a split personality then. I'm not living true to my identity. We need to learn to cultivate in faith the fullness of the Spirit of God. That's my point -- to desire his fullness as precious in our lives.

### 5. Humility.

We began with the whole idea of a Jesus focus, and I am understanding now, here in this point, I'm focusing on my dependency on God and having a certain healthy distrust of myself apart from God. My kids will tell you that as they grew up and became teens and early 20's and we would have those discussions about what they could do and what they couldn't do, and where they could go as they were kind of branching out and establishing their independence, there would be times when I would ask them not to do something. Once in a while, not often, I would get this response: "Well, Dad, don't you trust me?" Have your kids ever said that to you? Or in weaker moments: "You don't trust me!" My response typically is, "Well, you know, son, it's not that I don't trust you, I just don't want you to trust yourself." Or to my daughter: "Sweetheart, I want you to have a healthy sense of your own need of the Lord and to be teachable and to receive godly input and counsel, though it may come through very imperfect vessels."

There is a place, Christian, speaking now to those who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we don't live as islands. We don't live independently. We cultivate fellowship and meaningful relationship in humility, though it's very difficult. It can even be hurtful at times, but we recognize: "I need this because I need the Lord's help and he brings it to me in these various ways."

Now you see, it's not just me sitting in a corner with a journal: "God, speak to me. Push out all the other noise. Alright, what's my heart telling me as the word of God is welling up and resonating and taking application in various places." That's one aspect of knowing the will of the Lord. Now we're introducing aspects of godly counsel. Who is an authority in your life? Who are you joined with? What are the circumstances that are going on? And now in humility, I am learning from these other sources. That leads us to #6.

### 6. Courage.

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I list courage specifically, because often walking out the will of the Lord comes down to having the courage to do what we know we need to do. If we just get honest before God, God like any good father is going to do everything he can to make his direction clear to us. Then it just takes the courage for us to do it. That leads to #7.

### 7. Trust.

This is really the bottom line summary. I think if you wanted to list it out in one word, it is trust. That's what Psalm 23 invokes for us, right? Just trust in the Lord! He is your shepherd. Jesus states it this way in verse 10 of our passage. John 10:10 is a great verse for you to memorize, by the way. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Jesus is saying to you: "Trust in my plan for your life. Trust in my purpose for your life. I am offering to you abundant life."

Why is it then, if Jesus is the good shepherd, and the response for us that's needed is just simple trust, though we've tried to break it down and unpack it, it comes down to this one word: Trust. Why is it we struggle to know the voice of God? Why is it we struggle to know God's will? Jesus said, "I came that you might have life and have it abundantly." Why is it sometimes difficult?

Well, he gives us a clue in the passage. He tells us that there are thieves and there are hirelings that illegitimately force their way into our lives. In part, he is talking about the religious leaders in his day who have not done their job. He is talking about false messiahs that have come and promised things and then they haven't delivered. Jesus is setting himself up as a contrast to that poor, selfish, prideful leadership. The reality is: For you and me there are thieves and hirelings in our lives. There are those that have tried to steal illegitimately from us. Then there are those who have been in positions where, "Yeah, we should have been able to trust them, but in the end we realize that they were actually only in it for themselves." I am speaking very candidly, but many of you have had those types of experiences. What we don't understand is that we often do this to ourselves. We often look to false hopes, false saviors that prove to be thieves and hirelings. I think the best way for me to illustrate this is to just speak to parents for a minute. I'll make this application to parents.

I have found as a dad, we really enjoyed the teenage years. We found the teenage years to be a great time in life and a great time in our family, very full, very active. But what happens when your kids start to emerge as teenagers is they really want to do their own thing. They want to be adults.

They want to be men. They want to be women. They think they're ready. And they often think they're ready before you think they're ready, parents. That's my experience, at least. That, in general, is healthy. It's a healthy dimension of them wanting to do life. There's that expression of them beginning to establish independence, but then there's also almost always in all of us a temptation to illegitimately grab that, to rebel or to resist leadership and influence in our lives. The tension that we face as parents, often, is to know what the balance is with that and how to deal with what I perceive to be unhealthy rebellion. Is it just me, or has no one else ever experienced that as a parent?

Here's what happens. In that moment where you are not quite comfortable with the level of independence and the way it's being expressed, you can take a couple of different tracks. You can say, "Alright, that's just fine. Go ahead. Destroy your life." I don't recommend that. That is an abdication of the responsibility that God has given you. And God will view that as sin, as unfaithfulness on our parts.

Another track you can take is to revert to full authority. You can push your authority lever all the way down. You can say, "Hey, you can't do this, and you can't do that, and the reason is 'I told you.'" And when they object, "Yes, but I have the power of the wallet. I support you financially and therefore I own you. I control you."

It's not that we never play that card as parents. There are probably moments in teens and older teens where we just say, "Listen, no -- that's not going to happen." And we have it out if we have to. But on the whole, at some point your relationship with your son or daughter has to morph into more of a discipleship relationship. As a parent, you need the courage when they are little to control their lives. I'm going to speak candidly to you. You are the parent. They are the child. They are little. You are big. Take charge. Not in an abusive way, but they really don't know what's best at 2. They just don't. You have a strong measure of God-given authority that you are to use in a loving way, and to have the confidence to do it. That diminishes, now, as they get older. Here's what happens. If we are afraid to do that when they are young, we often overcompensate when they are older and we've got everything in reverse. Have I lost you? Are you with me?

Now, this truth is the single most helpful truth when you are trying to talk to another adult, or a child who is now becoming or has become an adult. What is that truth? Is Jesus the good shepherd of your life? Are you looking to Jesus to provide for ultimately everything? Or are you

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looking at a thief and a hireling that you are mistaking as something that can provide the ultimate for your life?

See, sweetheart, you are running after this relationship and you are compromising in the way that you are trying to get to it, and it cannot be God in your life. It cannot shepherd you, protect you, care for you. Only God can do that. You, son, you've got a little bit of freedom and you are enjoying that liberty in this particular activity. But it is not pleasing to God for you to \_\_\_\_\_, and you fill in the blank. If you have taught them the word of God, they may be able to come back and give you an exhortation on God's grace and against legalism and all kinds of things. They will use your own words against you, trust me.

But that's alright, because the gospel is very powerful. It says, "Listen, your identity is found in Jesus Christ!" I know that you can't earn your way to that identity. And your intimacy flows out of your understanding of that. But as soon as that connects in your life, you understand, you know the voice of God, you know what a Jesus focus looks like in your life. Let's be honest. You are looking to this pleasure, you are looking to this relationship, you are looking to even this good thing of athletics, or academics, or whatever it may be to be ultimate in your life. Listen, it's a hireling. It's a thief. It will eventually use you up and spit you out. Jesus alone can be trusted.

That, in one word picture, is how this good shepherd reality works out in our lives and in the people we love. I know we have a lot of guests here and I'm so glad you're here. We have some individuals who wouldn't consider themselves Christians. I'm so glad that you're here. I want to just speak for a moment to Christians. God wants you to get serious about your faith and to be a part of a community where in relationship you are fleshing that out, because it's a battle for all of us! It's a battle against self, against the world, against the enemy, and we need one another to help speak in a forgiving, loving, patient way those realities. That was not a sufficient "Amen." Okay.

I'm going to end. It has been a full morning and I am going to end by encouraging you with this return just to identity, intimacy, mission, and purpose. Do you know Jesus Christ? Is he your righteousness? Are you walking in intimacy based on what he has done, allowing him to lead you into his mission and purpose?

Let's pray.

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