

Meditation: What can shepherding teach us about God and our relationship with him? At the end of each day the shepherd brought his sheep into shelter. They knew the voice of their shepherd and came at his beckoning. So familiar was the shepherd and his sheep, that each was called by a distinct name. In the winter the sheep were usually brought to a communal village shelter which was locked and kept secure by a guardian. In the summer months the sheep were usually kept out in the fields and then gathered into a fold at night which was guarded by a shepherd throughout the night. He was literally the *door* through which the sheep had to pass. The scriptures describe God as a shepherd who brings security and peace to his people. *The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and for evermore* (Psalm 120:8). Even the leaders of God's people are called shepherds: *they shall lead them out and bring them in; that the congregation of the Lord may not be as sheep which have no shepherd* (Numbers 27:17). Just as a shepherd kept watch over his sheep and protected them from danger, so Jesus stands watch over his people as the *Shepherd and Guardian of our souls* (1 Peter 2:25). Do you know the peace and security of a life fully submitted to God?

Augustine writes: "He has accomplished what he taught us: He has shown us what He commanded us to do. He laid down his own life for his sheep, that within our mystery he might change his body and blood into food, and nourish the sheep he had redeemed with the food of his own flesh. He has shown us the way we must follow, despite fear of death. He has laid down the pattern to which we must conform ourselves. The first duty laid on us is to use our worldly goods in mercy for the needs of his sheep, and then, if necessary, give even our lives for them. He that will not give of his substance for his sheep, how shall he lay down his life for them?" (Tr. 46 in John, 5th century). Do you look to Jesus the Good Shepherd, to receive the strength and courage you need to live and serve as his disciple?

"Lord, you always lead me in the way of peace and safety. May I never doubt your care nor stray from your ways. Keep me safe in the shelter of your presence."

He will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture: Jesus described the settled, satisfied life enjoyed by His sheep, those over whom He exercises a shepherd's care.

i. **Go in and out:** "This phrase, in the style of the Hebrews, points out all the actions of a man's life, and the liberty he has of acting, or not acting." (Clarke)

ii. "To 'go out and in' is the common O.T. expression to denote the free activity of daily life. [Jeremiah 37:4](#), [Psalm 121:8](#), [Deuteronomy 28:6](#)." (Dods)

e. **I have come that they may have life, and they may have it more abundantly:** Jesus said this to contrast His shepherd-like care with unfaithful and illegitimate leaders. They come to **steal, and to kill, and to destroy**. Jesus comes to bring **life** to His people.

i. "The Greek word for 'abundance,' *perissos*, has a mathematical meaning and generally denotes a surplus...The abundant life is above all the contented life, in which our contentment is based upon the fact that God is equal to every emergency and is able to supply all our needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus." (Boice)

Abundant life isn't an especially long life.

· Abundant life isn't an easy, comfortable life.

· Abundant life is a life of satisfaction and contentment in Jesus.

ii. "Life is a matter of degrees. Some have life, but it flickers like a dying candle, and is indistinct as the fire in the smoking flax; others are full of life, and are bright and vehement." (Spurgeon)

· Someone with a lot of life has *stamina*.

· Someone with a lot of life has *increased energy*.

· Someone with a lot of life has *a large sphere of living*.

· Someone with a lot of life has *the ability to do things*.

· Someone with a lot of life has *an overflow of enjoyment*.

Someone with a lot of life has *what it takes to win*.

iii. Abundant life sheep give honor to the shepherd. They are a credit to him.

Jesus may have had in mind **messianic pretenders** (cf. Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22),

<https://friarmusings.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/john-10v11-18.pdf>

What is the sheepfold?

The sheepfold was a place every city, or village, where all the shepherds would come and put their sheep in it for the night.

It had a wall about 12' high around it.

The sheepfold had a door where the shepherds would take their sheep and the door was guarded by a gatekeeper or a doorkeeper.

the gatekeeper/doorkeeper would keep the sheep safe from predators, wild animals, and thieves throughout the night.

When morning came the gatekeeper would allow the shepherds to come to the door and call out his sheep.

The shepherds sheep would hear the voice of their shepherd and come follow him out of the sheepfold.

they would only respond to their shepherds voice.

<https://sermons.logos.com/sermons/832574-john-10:1-10>

You and I might not understand every fine detail related to shepherding, but I do understand one thing: the sheep/shepherd metaphor is one that comes up over and over and over particularly in the Old Testament.

And John is making a rather significant statement in verse 6, which is, the Jewish religious elites, the people who claimed to be experts in the Old Testament, didn't understand what Jesus was talking about!

And yet, the Pharisees completely missed it. They didn't understand because they weren't believers.

Sheep pens in Jesus' era were constructed with sturdy walls and a single doorway. This allowed easy control over what animals got in or out, and which people could access the sheep. The gatekeeper was not merely minding the opening. There were often no physical barriers across that opening; a gatekeeper was always on duty. To rest, or even to sleep, the gatekeeper would literally lay across the gap. This will be used in Jesus' second metaphor, where He claims to be "the door of the sheep."

The gatekeeper of the pen would ensure that only approved shepherds—those who had claim on a flock inside—could get in or out. Anyone trying to climb over the walls was, by definition, up to no good. Those allowed in by the gatekeeper were legitimately allowed to be there. Multiple flocks would be kept in a single pen. To get his flock out, all that shepherd had to do was call. The sheep, having been raised and cared for by that single person, would respond. Members of other flocks would not come in response to that voice.

Jesus is using this analogy in response to the religious leaders of Jerusalem. They obstinately refuse to recognize His miracles and His message. In plain terms, these men don't listen to His voice because they are not "His" flock. They are, as Jesus pointed out in other discussions, subjects of Satan ([John 8:42–47](#)).

According to the Church lectionary, today is Good Shepherd Sunday and the Gospel reading for today is John 10:1-10. In this passage Jesus uses figurative language to describe himself in v1-6 as the Shepherd and in v7-9 as the Gate.

The Shepherd

The first six verses of today's Gospel reading contrast a shepherd with a person who is a robber of sheep and a stranger to the sheep. There is a correct way to enter a sheep pen and that is by the gate and that is the way the shepherd enters. The robber enters by climbing the wall of the pen as there is a watchman on the gate to prevent people like him from entering. The sheep will follow the shepherd because they listen to his voice, he calls them by name, he acts as their leader and they follow him because they know his voice. They would never follow a stranger because they don't recognise a stranger's voice. So the only way a stranger can get a sheep without purchasing it, is by stealing.

In a small first century Palestinian village. It would be quite the norm for a family to own but a few sheep. The sheep were sources of income (wool) and clothing, and so the animals were protected usually within small walled courtyards next to or connected to the house. If each family had only a few sheep, a shepherd for each household was not justified, so several households would have one shepherd to look after their sheep. Often the shepherding was done by a child from one of these families. If no child was available a person was hired. Early each morning the sheep would be taken out to graze in the open country. The shepherd moved from house to house, and because he was known to the doorkeepers they opened their courtyard doors to allow him to call out the sheep. The sheep knew his voice and eagerly followed him into the open country to feed. The walls of the courtyards would be substantially high, thus anyone who was not the shepherd, who had ulterior motives, would have to climb over the walls because the doorkeeper would not admit him and, of course, the sheep would not recognize his call and would flee from him. While this practice was not always the case it was, according to scripture scholars, fairly typical.

Using figurative language Jesus is comparing God's people to sheep. This isn't particularly complimentary. as sheep aren't considered the most intelligent of creatures but they were the common livestock of Jesus day. Not as intelligent as dogs, but like dogs, they do respond to being called by their master. (Growing up we had a dog as a pet, but no sheep. Although my brother and I petted the dog, its master was our father. It responded much more obediently and respectfully to him than to us. He had the voice of authority. My brother and I were our dog's playmates. Our father was our dog's master.) For sheep their master is their shepherd; they recognise their shepherd's voice. Sheep aren't animals that are particularly able to look after themselves. They are not particularly strong or aggressive, they are pretty much defenceless. They don't have claws to protect them and their teeth aren't very sharp, so they can easily fall victim to predators. In Jesus day that could have been wolves, bears and lions. They rely upon the shepherd's protective care. Sheep can get

themselves into difficult situations and are then at a loss as to know how to get out. (Remember Genesis 22:13 where a ram was caught in a thicket by its horns and became the sacrifice that Abraham offered to God). Sheep rely upon a caring shepherd to unravel any predicament they fall into.

In the ancient world, shepherding was a common job. Moses spent some time as a shepherd, Rachel, before she became Jacob's wife, was a shepherdess, and obviously David was a shepherd. They would have been shepherds who were seen as good people. The people of Jesus time would have known passages of scripture where God was portrayed as a shepherd and the people of Israel as his sheep.

Some passages that come to mind are:

Psalms 23:1, *"The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want."*

Psalms 79:13, *"But we your people, the sheep of your pasture..."*

Psalms 80:1, *"Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock."*

Isaiah 40:11, *"He tends his flock like a shepherd; he gathers the lambs in his arms; and carries them close to his heart and gently leads those that have young."*

And only the night before last when reading a passage of scripture where Jacob blesses his son Joseph and Joseph's two sons, Jacob refers to God as *"the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day"* (Genesis 48:15b)

And that's just the start. There are many other passages that employ the sheep/shepherd analogy for Israel and God. It runs right throughout the Old Testament.

So after Jesus, having told his listeners the story of the shepherd and the sheep in v1-5, we read in v6 that *"they did not understand what he was telling them.* It is more than likely they understood that God was the shepherd and, they the Jews, the people of God were the sheep, but maybe they didn't understand who the robbers and the thieves were.

To help us understand we need to go back to John 9, to the chapter preceding these verses. In Chapter 9 Jesus had healed a man who had been blind from birth. The man was brought before the Pharisees who refused to believe that Jesus had cured him of his blindness. Their hearts were hardened against recognising the good that Jesus was doing and certainly from recognising Jesus as God's servant and resolutely they failed to recognise Jesus as the Messiah. They questioned, intimidated and frightened the blind man's parents. In 9:22 we read that the Pharisees had ruled that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. They were putting up barriers to prevent people from following Jesus. They were impeding Jesus' mission. They were doing all they could to prevent him from being recognised as the Messiah. The robbers and the thieves of the sheep are the Pharisees and the Jewish hierarchy who refuse to recognise that Jesus is God incarnate. They are people who fail to recognise that Jesus is the shepherd in the story and they are the thieves. They try to prevent Jesus' sheep from following him. They metaphorically "steal" his sheep, the people of Israel by preventing them from following Jesus, the shepherd.

Robbers and thieves of the flock continue to exist today. They are people who teach that Jesus is not the Christ, that He is not the Son of God. Even in the early church people misled God's people by teaching false doctrine. They were people who did not teach the same as the apostles. The letters to the Galatians, 2 Peter, 1 John and Jude all warn of the dangers of false teachers in the church. The blind man in John 9 was one sheep that would not be stolen and would not follow a stranger. He heard and recognised the shepherd's voice and followed Jesus, the shepherd.

It remains important that we listen for the Voice of Jesus. There are many people offering their opinions on many issues but in spite of this our focus should be on what God says through Jesus. It is a reminder of the importance of meditative prayer, Christian fellowship and studying the scriptures. More than important, we really need to prioritise these channels through which we hear God's voice both as individuals and as a church.

The Gate

In the second part of the passage, John 10:7-10 Jesus continues to use figurative language but he now describes himself as the gate for the sheep.

Some commentators see that a change of scene has taken place. Whereas they see the analogy of verses 1-6 as being within a village, now the setting for verses 7-10 is the open country. In the summer months shepherds led their sheep for grazing into the open country, where the shepherds and sheep might spend the night. Overnight the sheep were placed in roughly constructed round stone-walled enclosures. The top of the dry-stone wall was covered with thorns to keep out wild animals. Inside the enclosure the sheep were safe so long as the entrance was secured by the shepherd. A shepherd slept across the entrance as there was no door and no doorkeeper. He was the gate that let the sheep in and out. At night he was their protection from wild animals. By day he watched over them as they fed on outside pastures. If Jesus is the gate to the sheep pen, then through Jesus came food and protection. As a closed gate he provided the security of protection, as an open gate he provided access to food and water. As a gate he saved the sheep from harm and provided them with their daily needs.

In v7 Jesus says, *"I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep."* We may be inclined to overlook the words, *"I tell you the truth,"* but they are very significant. What Jesus is implying is that *"It is I who am, NOT ANYONE ELSE, IT IS ME ALONE who is the gate for the sheep."*

The use of the word gate would also have held special significance for the Jews. The gate idea was used in the ancient world as entry to heaven. It was used in Jewish thought from the time that the Lord spoke to Jacob in a dream about a stairway reaching to heaven. When Jacob awoke from the dream, he declared, *"How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the GATE of heaven"* (Genesis 28:17)

Remember also the words of the psalm, *“Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in” (Psalm 24:7)*

And Jesus teaching in Matthew 7:13-14, *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.”*

So when Jesus refers to himself as the gate, he means he is the entry into heaven. Through him alone do we enter heaven.

In 10:8 Jesus tells his listeners that in the past *“all whoever came before me were thieves and robbers.”* Who were the thieves and robbers he referred to this time?

Well, it was people from the O.T. Although he says *“ALL whoever came before me were thieves and robbers”* it can't be a sweeping rejection of all OT figures – especially given that Jesus has already made references to Moses (5:45-46) and Abraham (8:56) as being positive witnesses to him. The OT passage from Ezekiel that Lana read this morning gives us some idea of who he may have been thinking of.

Both in Ezekiel 34:1-10 and in Jeremiah 23:1–8 the prophets pronounced judgment upon the so-called shepherds of Israel, the people who were in positions of power and responsibility, for they failed to care for the people. They were as good as thieves and robbers.

But then again, Jesus may have also had in mind the Jews, who treated the man born blind so badly. Perhaps He also had in mind foreign powers that in the past had invaded Israel and taken its people into captivity and brought about the dispersion of the Jewish people.

In v9 Jesus reiterates that he is the gate, *“I am the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture.”* Jesus makes very clear that as the “gate” he is the source of salvation. The words “going in and out” represents all the activities of a person's life. Finding pasture speaks of finding a place of peace, refreshment and growth, a place; where our spiritual needs are met. It symbolizes the abundance and satisfaction that comes from a relationship with Jesus. So, in our everyday activities He provides for our souls in ways the world cannot.

In the final verse of the passage, 10:10, Jesus explicitly contrasts the himself with the thief. He is not using the shepherd or the gate analogy. He contrasts himself with those who prevent others from entering eternal life. *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come they may have life and have it to the full.” (or as some versions put it, “more abundantly.”)*

The abundant life is above all the contented life, based upon the fact that God is able to supply all our needs through Christ Jesus. It isn't an especially long life, it isn't necessarily an easy or comfortable life. It is something more meaningful than material wealth and prosperity. (Matthew 6:25–32;).

An abundant life is, primarily, eternal life (John 17:3). The abundant life means gaining a heavenly perspective as opposed to an earthly one. (Romans 12:2). It is a life where we

grow in trust and knowledge of God (2 Peter 3:18). It is a life full of the fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). It is a life of satisfaction and contentment in Jesus. Just as sheep trust their shepherd to lead them to green pastures and protect them from harm, we who follow Christ can rest assured that He will provide for our needs and guide us to spiritual nourishment.

The promise that those who entered by Jesus will go in and out and find pasture speaks of freedom, safety and provision.

- **Identification:** Jesus taught that they are known by their fruits—their character and results—not their appearance (Matthew 7:15-20). They often promote pride, immorality, and greed (e.g., the way of Balaam).
- **Methods:** They infiltrate the church quietly to distort Scripture, creating divisions and leading people toward destruction rather than salvation. They are often described as hypocrites who focus on human traditions over God's commands (Matthew 23).
- **Theology:** They deny the divinity or lordship of Jesus Christ.
- **The Apostolic Test:** True teaching aligns with the apostles' teachings. Teachers who do not hold to the gospel taught by Paul and the Apostles are considered false (Galatians 1:8-9).

Desiring God +5

Commands for Believers:

- **Beware & Test:** Believers are commanded to be alert and discerning, testing spirits to see if they are from God (1 John 4:1).
- **Avoid Them:** The New Testament instructs Christians to avoid those who cause divisions and teach contrary to established doctrine (Romans 16:17).

Expose and Rebuke: Leaders are told to rebuke false teachers to stop them from damaging the faith of others.(Titus 1:10-13)

Books focussing on this are 2 Peter, 1 John, Jude, and Galatians

There are lots of ways to define a false teacher, but the easiest way to define a false teacher is someone who wants to direct you away from Jesus Christ. That's precisely what happened in chapter 9! The religious leaders were doing everything in their power to turn people away from Jesus Christ! And what were they doing when they did that? They were deliberately directing people away from the door to eternal life!

You see, Jesus will give you life, but false teachers will lead you to death. The message that Jesus teaches and preaches about himself is so different from what the world would have you and me believe about him. The world wants you and I believe that Christianity is life draining. Or at least life-restricting.

They certainly don't want you to believe that faith in Christ is life-giving.

The events recorded in John's gospel are not thought to be in the exact order in which they occurred in Jesus life. Rather, John took events from Jesus life and arranged them for the purpose of showing Jesus to be the Messiah and the Son of God and to inspire belief.

I am the door by me if any man enter in he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture. Jesus declares himself as the door, using a metaphor to describe his role as the sole means of salvation. In biblical times sheep pens often had a single entry point guarded by the shepherd. The shepherd would sometimes even lie across the entrance, literally becoming the door that protected the sheep. Jesus is painting this picture to show that he is the one, and only way to salvation and eternal life. When Jesus says if any man enters by him he shall be saved it

emphasises that salvation is available to anyone who chooses to trust and follow him. There is no other path to reconciliation with God or the promise of eternal life. This verse aligns with other scriptures like John 14:6 where Jesus states that he is the way, the truth and the life. The promise that those who entered by Jesus will go in and out and find pasture speaks of freedom, safety and provision. Going in and out represents a life lived in the care of the good shepherd. Just as sheep trust their shepherd to lead them to green pastures and protect them from harm, believers who follow Christ can rest assured that He will provide for their needs and guide them to spiritual nourishment. Finding pasture symbolizes the abundance and satisfaction that comes from a relationship with Jesus. He provides for our souls in ways the world cannot. The pasture is a place of peace, refreshment and growth reflecting the fulfillment that only Christ can offer. This verse also highlights the contrast between Jesus and false teachers or leaders. In the verses surrounding John 10 verse 9 Jesus warns about thieves and Robbers who come to harm the sheep. These represent anyone or anything that leads people away from the truth of Christ. By calling himself the door Jesus makes it clear that only through him can people experience true salvation. As believers his first challenges us to examine where we place our trust. Do we rely on Jesus as the door to our salvation or are we tempted to look for other ways to find meaning and fulfillment? The assurance in this verse is that when we choose Christ we are saved, protected and provided for.