

The Good Shepherd

Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my shepherd."

John 10:11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Let's pray together:

Dear Lord, we come to You. We can confess freely how we have been Your sheep, and You have found us and rescued us. Lord, we worship You and thank You for the cleansing of the precious blood. Lord, we thank You for laying down Your life for us, Your people, for Your sheep. Lord, we thank You for rescuing us and also not leaving us alone and not leaving us lost. We thank You for Your great love, and we trust in You. We pray right now as we are in Your Word that You would fellowship with us and You would share Your heart with us, and that You would lead us right now as our good Shepherd. In Jesus' name. Amen.

All of us like sheep have gone astray. Isaiah 52-53 is another famous set of passages that talk about us as sheep and how all of us have sinned, all of us have need of a Saviour. Our sins were put upon our Savior, the Lord Jesus. As the good Shepherd He has laid down His life for us. I think this is something that is pretty well-known among Christians. Actually it is our foundation that He died for our sins. Now if you are a believer, there is a strong Amen in your heart.

Jesus Laid Down His Life for My Sins

Sometimes if you are a God-fearer, like I was for years, you know this is true, but there is a disconnect. And the connection that needs to happen is that I know He died for the sins of the world, but then you have your own personal sins, and the connection needs to be that you take them and allow Him to cleanse you from your sins. So that experience of 'I am a lost sheep' is known among every soul, but the experience of Him dying for my sins personally happens when I bring them to Him. That is when you find out that He is a good Shepherd. That is when you personally know Him as the good Shepherd. You know that He not only laid down His life for the sins of the world, but the major gap is that He also laid down His life for my sins. You know it in your mind, but you do not really know it until your heart is willing to bring those sins directly to Him and say, "Me too, Lord. Take my sins, also."

Sometimes you are kind of like a believer with a big gap. You know that you are meant to be His sheep, but you are just at that spot of needing to be rescued. It is at that moment that you just cry out to the Lord, "Lord, me too," and He hears your voice. Then you begin to hear His voice as He comes and picks you up and rescues you and saves you from your sins.

The Chief Shepherd Does All the Shepherding

One time, not long ago, we were looking into this concept of shepherding, and we found a phrase in I Peter 5 where Jesus is called the Chief Shepherd. In that portion we borrowed that phrase to talk about how even when believers do a little bit of shepherding and caring for each other, it is always that the Chief Shepherd is first. He is in charge of any kind of shepherding experiences that we have. So even if I am called to love my brother or I am called to care for one another or I am going to call someone on the phone and pray with them or I am going to

remember somebody in prayer or I am just going to spend some time with someone who is feeling lonely and needs a friend, we connect with the chief Shepherd, and He says, “Amen, let’s do this together.”

Sometimes I feel like it is very easy to think of shepherding as a specific responsibility or something that I am doing right now. But I miss the fact that the Chief Shepherd does all of the shepherding. It is the Chief Shepherd alone who shepherds the sheep—only Him. So when there is any experience in the church of real shepherding, it actually is Christ Himself who is doing it. He is doing it through somebody, but He is doing it. So when there is any other kind of experience, there is something wrong with it. So today we are going to look into how the Lord shepherds us, especially in this area of Him as the good Shepherd.

Now that which is connected with Him as the good Shepherd is that He lays down His life for His sheep. So if you can pair those two things together as the good Shepherd, it especially has to do with how He lays down His life for His sheep. When we think of a good person, sometimes the way we say it is different, “Now there is a good person.” We do not always think of how the Bible thinks of a good person. Maybe you would think that a good person is someone who does not sin that much or a good person is someone who does good or has been good, but there is a little distinction made in the Bible between a righteous man and a good man. For example, in Romans 5, it talks about how God has loved us so much, even while we were sinners. It also says, “Maybe for a good man somebody might die.” Before that it says, “For a righteous man, nobody would die.” Nobody would even die for a righteous man, but maybe for a good man someone would die. Nevertheless, while we were even sinners, while we were not being righteous, and we were not really being good, as far as God is concerned, we are His enemies. But He laid down His life for us as well.

There is a difference made with a righteous man and a good man. If someone is righteous, they are right before God. You might know someone who is righteous or it seems like they are righteous. So let’s say that I know of someone and their relationship with God or rather I cannot see that they have done any sin. It seems like they are a righteous person, but if you know someone who has done some good to you or to other people, your heart is touched a little bit more. So for a good man that goodness has to do with them being good to other people. That is why someone might die for a good man. It is not because they are good before God; it is because of the goodness that they have done. It is that they have laid down their life for other people. That is an important person. There is someone who matters. How do they matter? You are not really thinking of how they matter because they have not done a bunch of wrong things. You are thinking of how they matter because of how they have helped other people. So for a good man that has happened. People will die for others, especially if it is a good person. That phrase “a good man” that someone might die for, which is rare anyway, is because they are good to other people. So when we talk about the Lord as the good Shepherd, we are especially thinking of Him and how He has done something, how He lays down His life for the sheep. He has laid down his life for the sheep historically on the cross, but He is also right now the good Shepherd regularly.

The Lord is my Shepherd, and this is something all of us can say today. It is not that the Lord was my Shepherd; the Lord *is* my Shepherd right now. If you know Him as the good Shepherd

right now as a believer, you have the foundation, such as the remembering of Him in the breaking of bread, that He died for me, He rose from the dead, He laid down His life, and He is alive right now. But you also know of some goodness that the Lord has done in your life, maybe this week. You know how He has been praying for you as it says in Hebrews 7:25. He is risen from the dead, He is alive, and He is active and is actively praying for you. He is also the good Shepherd because He does these good things to us, even tangibly.

The Lord Uses His Church to do the Shepherding

Now how does He do it today since He is ascended and is at the right hand of the Father? The way that He does a lot of His goodness today is through the church. He does it through His body. The church is called the body of Christ, so when there are His hands, His feet, His mouth and His eyes available in the church, He works through them. So part of Him being our Shepherd even now is that He is doing it through the church. Who is the good Shepherd? It is Christ. If you experience being part of the body of Christ, you are going to experience the flow of the good Shepherd working through you to do some goodness for others, and that goodness ends up being that you lay down your life a little bit for the brethren. I am the good Shepherd, and I lay down My life for these sheep. This is the way of the Lord.

The Lord Laid Down His Life for the Sheep

This phrase, “I lay down my life for the sheep,” is in a verse in John 15 which has this similar experience in which His life has been laid down for us, and we are also involved in this. In John 15, which is the chapter about abiding in Christ, in verse 4 He says: “Abide in me and I in you.” There is this circle of abiding-experience where you are in the Lord’s presence, and His presence is also in you. His life is in you, and He lives through you.

V. 12: “This is my commandment, that you love one another, (there is the command of the Lord to love each other) as I have loved you.”

He goes on to describe how He has loved us. He says, “No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you practice whatever I command you.”

Notice the way He has loved us; He laid down His life for us, and He actually calls us His friends. Who are His friends? No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends. If the Lord laid now His life for you, then you are His friend; this is His love. He laid down His life for His friends, and you get to experience that. You know that He has called you His friend, but He is also at the same moment saying, “I am commanding you to love one another.” Then He says, “You are my friend if you do what I command you to do.” It is like a double friendship experience. One is that I have received His friendship. He laid down His life for me; therefore that means I am His friend, for He lays down His life for His friends. I know that I am His friend because He died for me, and He brought me near to Him. He is the friend of sinners, and He has brought me near to Him like that of a friend.

Then He says, “Be my friend. You are my friend; you are doing the friendship thing *if* you also do what I command you.” What has He commanded us? To love someone, love one another the

same way. What is the way that He loved us? He laid down His life for us. So what He is commanding us to do is love each other by laying down our lives for each other. You can see that circle of the experience. I am constantly receiving His friendship and realizing that He has laid down His life for me, and at the same time there is a response. I respond by loving Him back because I am so glad and appreciative. But there is another response when I hear His command saying, "Do this, do the same thing. Love the others, and lay down your life for them. This is the way that I have loved you; you do the same thing." So this experience of the good Shepherd laying down His life for the sheep is also a calling for us as the sheep to join in His shepherding and lay down our lives for one another.

The church is Called to Lay Down Our Lives

Now that is going to be our emphasis, looking at shepherding not mainly with the focus of how we have experienced Him laying down His life for us, but mainly we want to look at how we are to join in this same thing with each other in the church, and how we are going to become a part of it. I think the two actually help us to consider.

In I John 3:16 It says, "Hereby we have known love, (this is how we have actually known love. We have actually experienced love.) because he has laid down his life for us; (here is how we know love. Do you yet know that love? If you can sit back and say, 'Yes, I know that love. He laid down His life for me.) and we ought for the brethren lay down our lives."

Just to over emphasize this spot; not only do we as Christians experience the love of God for us in having Him lay down His life for us, which seems like everything, but there is a joining in the flow of that love. He wants to flow His love through us today. He wants us to experience more of Him, more of His life in us, walk together with Him, and lay down our lives for the brethren. We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren because He has loved us.

The next verse is on the specific practical level, letting you know that this has to do with doing something good or it has to do with doing something to help someone.

In verse 17 it says, "Whoever has the world's substance (clothing, money, a place for someone to stay, you have something) and see his brother having need, and shut up his bowels or heart from him, (you really do not care for that person), how does the love of God abide in him?"

So when there is some goodness to do, and you run from it; you do not want to answer that phone call or you do not want to help out, and you hide from it. Is the love of God residing inside of you? That flow is cut off because part of the flow is that I have received love, and now it is to flow out of me by laying down my life for the brethren.

So that is the concept of a good Shepherd. His goodness has to do with what He does for us, especially the major thing that the Lord has done, which is the finished work of dying on the cross. However, it is also the current laying down of His life for us, and this call for us to lay down our lives for one another which brings us into the work of the good Shepherd. It brings us into the laying down of our lives for one another and experiencing the love of the brethren. So we get to join in this good shepherding. When I thought of that phrase 'the good Shepherd,' I

immediately thought of the story of the shepherd in Luke 15 in which He leaves the ninety-nine and goes after the one sheep. This is well known, but it is almost like it belongs with this concept of a good shepherd.

The Ninety-Nine Sheep

When you read Luke 15, it starts out with a couple of grumbings from the people. Some are upset and bothered that the Lord is eating with sinners and spending time with lost people, such as tax gatherers and sinners. These righteous people, like the Pharisees or Israeli leaders at the time, are trying to do what is right. They are living their lives the best they know how, trying not to break the rules. Then they see Him spending time with the sinners, instead of talking with them because they are really trying it seems like to do a lot more of the correct things. He is spending time with absolute sinners, known sinners which means their sins are worn on their sleeves. It is things like tax collectors, who were really known sinners, prostitutes and others, and He is spending time with them.

In Luke 15 they are so bothered, and then He tells them three stories of something that is lost. He starts with the lost sheep, then the lost coin and then a lost son. There is always a rejoicing when what is lost is found and brought back in. There is always this realization that to God when something is found, He is filled with joy. But in the story of the sheep, what about the ninety-nine sheep? I do not know if you have ever felt bothered by the Lord focusing on someone else and not you. Or even when another believer is taking care of someone, maybe they are very needy or maybe they are brand-new, but you would rather those believers pay more attention to you. I have felt this way before, and I have seen it happen many times, so I have been on both ends of it. But you are kind of bothered, "What about me? I feel like I am left out. All of this attention is on this wandering sheep. Why spend so much time with that person? I am actually showing up, I am doing all these things. But you will spend hours with this person that is not even around much, who is really sinning and messing up." You get bothered and almost a little jealous of other people's attention on someone else.

That is the feeling of the ninety-nine. So you get this question: "What about the ninety-nine? Are you just leaving them in the wilderness? Who is going to take care of them? Who is going to protect them? And what about these ninety-nine? What about the rest of us, Lord?" It is really our own picture of the story that is completely backwards. Our whole mindset is missing where we are in the picture.

As I have said, all of us have the foundation, this knowledge that we are the lost sheep. Even if you are a Christian, and you are doing really well today, even if your outward sins are really minor, you know that you have been the lost sheep and He has found you. You know about that rejoicing, that salvation. We remember that when we remember the Lord. So you do know that, but sometimes you do not feel it because you feel like you have been doing pretty well, at least compared to this person who is really sinning. Now that person might be an unbeliever or they might be a believer who is a little wayward right now who is walking distantly. But you know it foundationally, so I just want to bring that to remembrance.

You are actually the one; you are always the one. You are never part of the ninety-nine. To think of yourself as part of the ninety-nine is really the wrong mind set. In this story Jesus is calling those others the ninety-nine, the ones who were grumbling on the side, the ones who were saying, "Why are you eating with sinners?" Those were actually the ninety-nine, all of the sinners are the ones who need a Savior. Do you need a Savior? Yes, you know that you have need of a Savior. You are part of the one. But for this moment someone who needs rescuing is not you at the moment. Are you still part of the one? You have been the one; you are currently in need of your Savior. No matter how good you are doing, how well you are doing, you need Him. You need Him every hour. This is what you are learning. Every failure that you have you realize, "I am that lost sheep. However good other people think I am, I know I am the lost sheep, and thank You, Lord, for saving me again today. Maybe you are about to sin, but the Lord saves you. If you call on His name He saves you, and you overcome; you conquer! What were you? You are not the ninety-nine; you are the one who has been rescued that moment by the good Shepherd. He just snatched you. You are always the one. If the Lord is your Shepherd, He is the Shepherd of the one. The ninety-nine are the ones who have no need of salvation. Are there really people like that? That is the realization; that is the discovery. These guys really did need to find out that they were lost as well. So that is part of the discovery.

There is another part also in this story. Another place to be is in the rejoicing. As the Shepherd is going out and he brings back the sheep, the angels are all rejoicing. Or in the next story the woman searches her house and she finds the coin. She calls up her friends, and they all rejoice with her. We are also called to be the Lord's friend. Remember in John 15 where He said, "You are my friends if you practice what I command you." Why would she call up her friends? Maybe she had already called them about her loss. It is like they are in on the searching, and they know. So when she calls them to tell them the coin has been found, there is rejoicing with everybody. It is like that with the Lord. He shares with his friends what He wants to do. He shares with us, "I want to rescue this person." So this is part of our calling in this shepherding work that He is doing. Maybe someone needs drastic rescuing right now or one of the sheep has become sick and needs extra attention; we are called to be the friends of Jesus. We might be directly involved, but you also may be part of that team who is praying. You are part of those people who care that the person gets rescued. You rejoice when the Lord calls you up and says, "They are back; I found the coin." And you can rejoice with Him.

A Friend of Jesus

What is it like to be a friend of Jesus? God described Abraham as "the friend of God." One of the things that God said when He was talking about Abraham was, "Shouldn't I show him what I am going to do? Shouldn't I show him?" That is kind of the friendship experience. He shows you because He knows that you know His heart, and He shows you because you might pray for what He is actually praying for. So in Abraham's case He is praying for the town where his nephew Lot lived. Lot was lost. He is called a righteous Lot, but he was tormented in the city that he was in which was surrounded by sin. He was righteous Lot, but he was in a mess. He was lost, but Abraham was not jealous that God was even talking to him about another city. He was not saying, "What about the area where I am; what about this area right here? What about me, God?" Instead, he prays, "Oh, Lord, have mercy. Do not destroy this city if there are some righteous

people there.” It ended up being only one righteous which was Lot, but God did rescue Lot and heard the heart’s prayer. That is the friendship experience.

What is a friend like with Jesus? John the Baptist had to tell his own disciples, “I am not getting jealous because Jesus is getting more disciples, and He is baptizing more who are flocking to Him. The friend of the Bridegroom just rejoices. I am His friend.” So you find yourself on the side, even though you are not on the side; you are on the team. You are His friend, and in this good shepherding work that the Lord is doing in the church, whenever it is not you who is ultimately in the experience of lostness this moment, you are drawing near to the Lord as a friend. That is the difference. Instead, if you find yourself getting bothered and jealous and feeling like you are neglected, then look to the Lord: “Lord, let me be Your friend.” What is happening is that you are leaning toward that ninety-nine style, that way that gets bothered: “Lord, why are You spending so much time with him? Why are the saints helping the sinners so much instead of me? Why am I neglected right here?” The Lord wants to upgrade us in this shepherding experience. The first experience is that you get brought in; you get rescued. But the second layer is that you get to become His friend. You get to be on the rejoicing team.

The Lost Son

You remember the lost son who got rescued. The father goes out and grabs him as he sees him coming. He clothes him and brings him back into the house, and there is so much rejoicing. Everyone is rejoicing in the household, but the other son, the older brother is so bothered. And he said, “I did not get the fatted calf. No one is excited about me because I showed up to work today. I have been daily with you, and you are not doing all of this for me.” That is the feeling of those who feel like they are righteous, and who have not shared the heart of the father. If the older brother had been on that prayer team with the father, who was praying and watching daily for his son, he could have been rejoicing. Suppose that older son had stepped out there and spent some time with the father. Then the father could say, “Son, let’s pray for your brother,” and they would pray every day. Do you know what his experience would have been when his brother came back? He would have no thought for himself; he would not have been bothered at all. He would have been right there on the porch with tears in his eyes and said, “Father, he is here.” He and his father would have been hugging, and together they would have hugged that other brother. That is the difference. When you join into the heart of the Father, then you are not even thinking about yourself because together you have been praying for that lost person, and as he comes back in, you are rejoicing together. You are part of the experience of God as the good Shepherd when He brings somebody in.

Another real experience of the good Shepherd is when He goes to grab the sheep and puts the lost sheep on His shoulders. He goes a far distance which is difficult, but he brings the sheep home. Sometimes we are part of this experience as the body of the good Shepherd. In I Corinthians 12 there are many members, there are many parts of the body, and there are different functions, but this is described in verse 12: “So also is *the* Christ.” We know of Christ who came as the Man, died on the cross, rose from the dead, ascended, who is alive and is at the right hand of the Father. But there is also *the* Christ who is connected to the body of Christ, the church. Spiritually He is larger and His life flows within the church, and now His hands and His

feet in a spiritual sense are His people. Maybe He wants to rescue a lost sheep by the voice of someone in this room who says something helpful or shares the Word with that person, or by the feet of someone in this room who goes to someone and helps them, or by the hands of someone who is doing something to help, and that kindness touches their heart. Sometimes it may be that you are at the house, and you are ready to rejoice when the sheep comes in. But the Lord is actually directly using you to do some laying down of your life to walk, to find and to rescue. In the laying down of your life by the weight on your shoulders where you bear one another's burdens in love, you actually feel the sense of the Lord's burden as He is carrying that lost sheep on His heart and is praying for them. You too are praying for them, bearing that burden as you bring them home. Maybe it is through prayer, maybe sometimes it is through talking to them by sharing, but it is because you are on the Lord's side and part of the Lord's body. It is Him who is the good Shepherd, and even that lost sheep can say, "The Lord has rescued me. He used this brother or sister, but the Lord Himself is my good Shepherd. That is how it should work. So you can see how we have this part to play in all of this.

There is another time where the ninety-nine are mentioned. In Matthew 18 Jesus is again saying how God cares for the one, and will even leave the ninety-nine just as a shepherd would leave the ninety-nine to go after the one. But it is a different context. They are asking Him about who is the greatest in the kingdom? And He mentions how you need to become like a child. These children have their angels whose faces are before the Father. God cares so much for these children, and the Lord turns this around and begins to talk about His people. They seem like children to Him, and He warns against stumbling one of these little children. Now He is not just talking about children in age; He is talking about all of His people. They are all like children.

Then He shares how the Shepherd will go after the one. There is much offense and stumbling that people can cause, but as far as He is concerned, if you would become higher in the kingdom, in a sense, you realize that you are that child that He goes after and takes care of. But it is more than that because in Matthew 18 the next thing that He says after the ninety-nine and the one is, "If someone has sinned against you, go to your brother that you might restore him." That is going after the one. So He is showing them that it is not only that you are the child that needs to be cared for, and God also cares so much for, you are brought into going after your brother to restore him. That is really laying down your life for them. It includes forgiving somebody, not being bitter. It includes the Lord's life coming through you. It includes some compassion; I actually want to restore this person even though they were my enemy, even though they did something wrong to me, someone has sinned against me. That is just like Jesus. He laid down His life for us while we were sinners, while we were His enemies.

The Good Shepherd

Now I want to go back to John 10 and talk about some concepts that we would experience the Lord doing as He is the good Shepherd in the church. So here is really where the phrase 'good Shepherd' is used more than once. It is all to do with Him laying down His life for the sheep, but there is a lot of principles or specifics. If you want to get into the right experience in the church of shepherding, one part of it has to do with this good Shepherd shepherding. Now there is an experience of shepherding that is more like working with sheep that are growing, and the Lord

does that with us. He will lead us to some green pastures, He will give us some water, He will bring us to more and more maturity, and that is called shepherding. But there is another experience where it is more like you are rescuing someone. For example, a brand new believer or a lost person who is becoming a believer is more of the good Shepherd shepherding. So I can use that phrase just to be more specific in the areas of shepherding. There is more to do with shepherding in bringing disciples to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ.

But this should be our first foundational stance in shepherding in the church. We have experienced it first, and this is also the Lord's call to us first. It is really similar to witnessing and gospel preaching. If you do it right it is almost the same type of experience because you are rescuing someone who is lost. For example, Peter was a lost sheep when he denied the Lord three times before He went to the cross. The Lord rescued him and had a private meeting with Peter and restored him. We do not know the story but we are told by the disciples, even Thomas, that Peter saw Jesus privately. But then in John 21 Peter is restored in a larger way. But the way that the Lord restored him was to bring him into shepherding. So even though Peter was the lost sheep and was restored, he did not need to act like he was a beat-up lost sheep. He needed to join the team with the Lord. So the Lord said to Peter, "Feed these little lambs." For a brand-new Christian or a baby Christian feeding is like a direct goodness. You are actually giving them something directly, and it is so personally connected.

Then He said, "Shepherd the sheep." Now I would say that spot is like the normal growth of sheep. You might say, "Here is some grass; I found that it is good to eat, so let's all eat over here." It is not the direct feeding though. It is not as much help because it is a sheep not a lamb. They do not need spoon feeding or that kind of food. But then He said, "Feed the sheep also." So sometimes we will use that picture to say that sometimes the sheep get so sick that they are just lying there. They cannot chew on the grass, and the shepherd actually has to spoon feed them again. That happens among God's people. When we see one of God's people who have wandered off a little bit, it is time they get fed; it is time they get treated almost like a brand-new Christian. There are those two types of shepherding, but it should kick in with us whenever we see someone getting on the lost side of things and going away from the Lord. Even if they have been mature, even if they have been sheep, now they are a sick sheep so you treat them like you would a brand-new lamb, a brand-new believer. You have to help them a little extra. That is the good shepherding concept.

In John 10:1-6 he starts out telling them this story and nobody really understands so then He goes on to explain it.

"Truly, truly I say to you, he that enters not in by the door to the fold of the sheep, but mounts up elsewhere, he is a thief and a robber; but he that enters in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter opens; and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. When he has put forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, because they know his voice. But they will not follow a stranger, but will flee from him, because they know not the voice of strangers. This allegory Jesus spoke to them, but they did not know what he spoke about."

The Two Sides of Shepherding

We are going to go through His interpretation, but we want to look at it on both sides, both as our experience with Him as the good Shepherd to us, but also how we experience His good shepherding with one another or with a brand-new believer. How we are to lay down our lives for the brethren as well.

Verse 7: “Truly, Truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.” (There is something big to catch right here to start with—He is the door of the sheep.) All whoever came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: if anyone enter in by me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and shall go out and shall find pasture.”

A major principle with shepherding as good shepherds is that the only way is through the Lord Himself. The only way anyone will be saved, the only way anyone will be rescued from lostness, from darkness is through Jesus Himself as the door. He mentioned that anyone who comes in before me are thieves and robbers. If they came in that other way, it is something different than Christ. There are ways to help people that do not include Christ, but it is like stealing. You are not only stealing from the Lord, you are stealing from these people. Do you really save them and rescue them as they ought to be or do you draw them to something else? This is something foundational for us to catch; however you help someone, you are to bring them to Christ. You are to bring them in through Christ; everything has to go through Him as the door. There is no other way for us. It does not matter if you know the psychology of repairing someone’s wrong mindset, if it is not through Christ, then you may temporarily fix their minds to where they can function in their lives, but they are still lost; they are not saved. So there is a type of robbery or stealing that happens right here. These people are called thieves and robbers.

Then He says and this one is more famous in John 10:10: “The thief comes not but that he may steal, and kill, and destroy: I am come that they might have life, and might have it abundantly.”

Thieves and Robbers

I think we know this as the thief being Satan, and our Lord giving us life and giving it more abundantly. Let’s look at it in the shepherding experience because He mentions here also those others were like thieves and robbers. So yes, they have this same style as the thief, Satan. Satan is destroying and killing and robbing on purpose. But sometimes believers are people who accidentally are thieves. Sometimes when we are helping other people, and we do not do it through Christ, what you are doing is robbing them of something. What happens when you rob someone? If you steal money, it is your money now. If you steal a bicycle it is your bicycle now, and you ride it and enjoy it. If you steal a sheep is it your sheep now? This is what happens with some disciple-making or shepherding when it is not Christ as the door. You may be spending a lot of time with someone, but really it is more like a thief and not because of Christ. When you do it, they get attached to you instead of attached to Christ. It is okay that you do not become someone’s walking stick. It is okay that you are not the crutch for someone because you are not meant to be. The only walking stick is meant to be Christ Himself. So you have your limitation. You are not meant to lay down your life to where you become their Christ. You are meant to lay

down your life as the Lord is with you, and you are doing it with Him as the door. You are meant to do it so they can find Him as the One who rescues them. So that also limits the amount, and it kind of creates some safety for us also because someone will cling to us. But then you realize, "Don't cling to me."

It is like when John lost his mind in the book of Revelation and he falls down to worship an angels The angel said, "No, no, no, we are servants just like you; we worship God alone." He was just overwhelmed, and that happens. When you help someone in the Lord who is lost and they find Christ who really helped him, there are tears in their eyes. At first they see you and they say, "You are awesome! You are amazing!" And it is at that time you can either steal or destroy their spiritual life or you can say, "No, no, not me. I am just like you. I am a lost sinner that has been rescued. Let's go to the Lord in prayer. Let's go through the door, and let's thank the Lord for rescuing you. Let's thank the Lord for enlightening you about this problem." Then you get on your knees and pray together, and they say, "Thank You, Lord." Then suddenly the Shepherd is directly seen, and it is beautiful. Their lives are not destroyed, and they get life and life more abundantly. You did not steal the sheep or even steal the glory of being the Savior, you did not steal anything. You did not rob them of any goodness of finding Christ. Instead, you blessed them. You did not get anything out of that person. It is important that you are not helping someone to get something out of them. Instead, the whole heart is, "Bring them through the door; the Lord is the door." That is the safety experience. Are they finding Christ?

I do this also when I am thinking of helping a person first find Christ. I need to make sure that they are not merely going to change their lives to show up to the church meetings every week. That does not really rescue them. It makes me look good, but that would be like stealing and destroying. If I can get ten friends to always come to my Bible study group at home, it makes my Bible study group look big and great, but is that my goal? Is that what I am after? No, it cannot be because I want to bring them through the door which is Christ. It is not enough to do any other things. It is not enough to get their lives to change. Some people emphasize to others helping teenagers. A teenager starts off usually as a mess, unless the parents have done well with cleaning them up a lot. But usually by the time we see them in high school, they are already a little messy and funny looking. So they would look nicer if we quickly fixed how they looked and how they behaved. They would look closer to sheep, and that is a temptation. However, we have to emphasize helping them find Christ even while they look funny because then Christ will actually clean them up. Christ will fix whatever we are doing wrong. It does include sometimes talking about that stuff, but I hope you get my point that first you are always finding the door which is Christ.

Verse 11: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, but he who serves for wages, and who is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf seizes them and scatters the sheep." Now he who serves for wages flees because he serves for wages, (It just makes sense, I am not paid enough to do this, to fight a wolf. That is how you would say it if you are working at the cash register. I am not paid enough to fight this robber. It is not your business; it is not your place.) he is not concerned about the sheep. (That is a biggie right there, not actually concerned about the

sheep.) I am the good shepherd; and I know those that are mine, and am known of those that are mine.”

Here we have a wolf. Personally, we know the enemy and all of his darkness is like wolves. Sometimes, as in Acts 20, Paul said to the elders in Ephesus, “Some wolves are going to come into the church. They are going to mess things up.” He even said that some among you are those wolves. Something has happened. Now these are believers, but they turned into wolves, and they are taking the sheep away from the Shepherd. Something bad happened with that. So that is our normal concept of a wolf. Someone comes in, they are biting the sheep, and the phrase that is used is that they get scattered. They get scattered away from the shepherd when the wolf comes.

Serving for Wages

Now what about those who serve for wages? These are the shepherds, employees who are there, and they serve for wages by helping out. They are not going to lay down their lives for the sheep. None of us are called to serve for wages when it comes to shepherding. I know that does happen, but it is not our calling. If you serve for wages, you do not care for the sheep, as it says, “You are not concerned about the sheep.”

Now how do you know if you are serving for wages? Maybe your serving has to do with either a title or some praise or it might even have to do with money sometimes. “Okay, I am being paid to do this so I am going to do this.” I think that is more rare in this church group, but it does happen.

How about a title? I remember going on mission trips in college, and at that time as a young believer I had been preaching the Gospel in my town, but I knew some of the other college students who never did anything. And we went on this mission trip, and they all turned into these awesome missionaries. They were preaching the Gospel everywhere we went. I said, “What got into you all?” They said, “We are on a mission trip.” So if I am given the title of whatever it might be, such as Shepherd so and so, then I feel like, “I am Shepherd so and so, and I need to shepherd the sheep.”

What if you have no title? What if you are not on a mission trip? How can you actually get into shepherding? It does not work if you only serve for wages. It only works if the sheep belong to the Shepherd and you are on His team. That is the real way that it works. I don’t know if you have ever been asked, “Are you a This? Some of the people in this room might be asked, “Are you a missionary, are you a pastor, or something else?” Every time I am reading my Bible on the airplane, people ask me, “Are you a pastor?” So I have to tell them, “No, I am a nobody; I am just a believer. Do you know that believers read the Bible even when they are not pastors?” It always makes for a good conversation, but it is really true. It is our mindset that says, “I need to study the Bible because I have a sermon to preach or because I am a this.” No, when it comes to real shepherding, and the Shepherd owns the sheep, He cares about them. We are bent towards serving for wages; it is natural. If you are by yourself, you are like, “I will do that if it is my turn.”

Here is a great example I thought of. I used to be in Kenny’s Bible study group, and we eventually just told them, “You do not need to open the Bible Study group ever because he prepared as if he was opening the study group every time. Whereas, the rest of us prepared a lot

when it was our turn to lead. Do you see the difference? That was something the Lord was teaching everybody, "Prepare as if you are leading even when you are not given the title to lead the Bible study." Now what got into that man to do that all the time? Nobody was paying him to do it. I think it is this kind of concept; you step into the Lord's heart for God's people, and you step into this responsibility mindset. If you catch it, you do all these things without it being your turn. I think we know that concept.

To get out of serving for wages we join with the Lord and become part of His rejoicing team. We become part of His prayer team, and then something changes in our hearts and we become concerned about the sheep. Normally we are not concerned about the sheep. You may have a great big heart naturally, and you may be an outgoing person. It might be that you are that type of person naturally. If that is the case, it may seem that you are more concerned than others because you are really a loving person, but genuine concern for others is hard to find. Paul said of Timothy in the Philippian letter, "I have no one like-minded who will care with genuine feeling how you are getting on." Timothy genuinely cared how the Philippians were doing. He genuinely cared.

Now Paul could have asked someone, "Join with me on the mission to visit Philippi; let's do this. At first they will get this 'serve for wages experience.'" "I am on a mission trip with the apostle Paul. I better live right, I better say things right, I better help out." And they will, and that is not a bad thing. But what will happen is that when they are daily on their knees with Paul, and listen to him pray, they sense the Lord's prayer and begin to pray with Paul. Timothy was daily praying with Paul, and gradually that concern for the believers in Philippi was upon him, and he was genuinely concerned for those sheep. He was with the Shepherd, and the Shepherd's heart was there with him. He would lay down his life for those sheep. He would die for them. He would spend his time for them. He would spend his prayers for them because of the Shepherd's life inside of him, and not because he is now a missionary or a junior missionary with Paul. He genuinely cared how they were doing, so Paul could send him to help the Philippian believers. That is the thing that has to change.

You will notice that you are serving for wages when you do things differently when people are watching or if you suddenly have a certain responsibility. It is nice when we get an email with a Scripture about the breaking of bread time the next day. It is nice because some people take it up and pray, and you can tell that from their prayers sometime. I heard a prayer today, and you could tell on their own time they had been reading this verse. When they prayed, you had that feeling as if they were sharing the opening word. But my point is, they were not serving for wages; they just took it up. These are the kind of things the Lord leads us into to, to get us out of serving for wages. He gets us into this different mindset where we actually care with genuine feeling what is going on. If you have no care for something, the way to begin is to pray for that thing.

I have no concern for the sister's meeting personally because I will never be there, but the way I got some genuine care about how it goes is from praying with the Kaungs in the morning for the sister's prayer meeting. That is actually how I got helped with that, otherwise, it was just like a thing on the board. But as we were praying I actually caught it, and I could have care for it. But I had nothing in it for myself because I cannot even go, rightly so. That is the thing the Lord

brings us into as the good Shepherd, and it changes your whole mindset where you can know them.

Know the Sheep

Verse 14: "I know those that are mine, and I am known of those that are mine."

To remember everyone's names in the room in a church gathering is to pray for those people. To know people is actually to see that they are the Lord's sheep, and you begin to actually know them. If it is just a general thought like, "Lord, I pray that You would bless the Bible study." But when you show up and you see people and do not know their names, that is not the Lord's way. The Lord sees everyone as the one. He does not see us as the ninety-nine; He sees everyone of us as having a name. You are known, and you are cared for, and you are loved. So as the Lord brings you into some of this experience, in your measure there will be those that you really know. There will be those that you have some genuine concern for. Our capacities are different, but I think the Lord will give everyone the capacity to care about one more person, to have this experience for one more person that is besides themselves. As you pray for that one more person you begin to know them, even if you do not totally know what is going on in their lives. You know them because you know the Lord's heart for them. You might know more about them than they know about themselves even though you have not learned their favorite color yet. You have not had enough talks with them, but the Lord puts on your heart to pray for this person. You really do not know them, but maybe you pray daily just for that one person, and as you are praying for them you know the Lord's heart for them. Then maybe as you sit at a meal to talk to them you are the best listener because you can hear them talk about their hobby, and you actually genuinely care how they are doing. You are not just putting up with it so you can get to talk about the Bible. You genuinely care because you care about that person.

We know that the Lord numbers every hair on our heads. The children and I were talking about this recently, and it was kind of funny. But He numbers our hairs; He knows every detail about us. He knows the things that you like, and He actually cares. That is a wonderful thing. He is the good Shepherd, and He actually cares. He cares that you like to walk in the woods. He cares that you like to look at birds; He cares about these things, and He shares that same Shepherd's care with us as we begin to pray for people. We join with Him, and you gradually become a person who cares, at least for this one person that the Lord has put on your heart. You begin to care about their hobby a little bit. It does not mean you need to like their sport's team or whatever it is. It just means that when you listen, you genuinely care. It may hit you odd if what they are into is something sinful, but you genuinely care. So there is a sorrow in your heart instead of saying, "Oh, that is bad, right?" Instead, you might even have tears, but this thing is entrapping you. You genuinely care as you hear their story and what is going on, and you know their name, and that is what the Lord is bringing us into.

In John 10:14-15 He says, "I know those that are mine, and am known of those that are mine, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Let me just go on a tangent for a moment. "I have other sheep not of this fold" (see 10:16). This fold here is talking about the Jews technically. In the beginning of the church they were all

Jewish, but then the Lord brought in Samaritans and Gentiles, and these were not of that fold. That means they were not of that background. He has other sheep with different backgrounds. So for us too it is just like that. The Lord broadens our hearts to go beyond those who are like us. But He might start with finding somebody that is a little similar to us so it is not so difficult, but then He might even put on our heart someone who is drastically different—other sheep not of this fold. Then He said, “They will be one flock.” That is the experience that we come into as we care for people.

Laying Down Our Lives for the Brethren

17-18: “On this account the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it again. I have received this commandment of my Father.”

Of course, Jesus is talking about the experience that is coming when, by His own authority, by His own choice, He will lay down His life at the cross, and He will rise from the dead. He did lose His life, but His life overcame death, and His life came out more abundantly, in which He could actually share His life with others. So part of the laying down of our lives for the brethren is not merely death. Laying down our lives for the brethren especially has to do with lots of resurrection, lots of rising from the dead. You do spend yourself and become spent it seems, but what happens as a result is that life in the other people comes back to you. That is your greatest joy. Your greatest joy is when the sinner repents. There is no greater joy than that unbeliever who you have been praying for comes to Christ. It feels better than your own salvation. It is just the best. Or maybe it is when a wayward Christian that has broken your heart comes through. It is just the best joy that you can have. As John the apostle said, “I have no greater joy than when I find my children walking in the truth.” That is the greatest joy. So that is part of the resurrection life that comes as a result of laying down your life for others. It is life back to you from that person when they get helped.

It is like in Matthew 18 when your brother who has sinned against you is restored and you get your brother back; that is life from the dead. You get that fellowship back with him. It is resurrection life. The Lord died on the cross for our sins, but He also rose from the dead that we could receive eternal life and have life more abundantly.

So with this experience with the good Shepherd, it means a lot of time spent in laying down your life for the brethren, but you receive back. Now it does not always come in the form of the person responding, for so many never respond. The Lord has died for so many in this world who have never responded, and never believed. This is the sorrow of God’s heart. But the resurrection experience is when we lay down our lives for the brethren, and we did that with the Lord. What does the Lord do with us? He gives us resurrection life. If He is with us in it and we are not just doing it for wages or doing it for some other reason, maybe to gain some glory, if we are doing it with the Lord, He will make sure that He shares some fellowship of life with us.

As Paul said in Philippians 3: “I want to know Him. I do not want anything else but just to know Him. I want to know the power of His resurrection. I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings. I want to be conformed to Him in the likeness of His death that I can arrive at that

resurrection from among the dead.” The two are always going together. Yes, you are fellowshiping with Him in His sufferings, in a sense, and there is death in laying down your life for the brethren, but this is actually how you as the sheep are fed. As we are walking with the Lord we actually grow by experiencing the laying down of our lives for our brethren. Jesus said, “If you are going to be my disciple you also must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me.” This is the experience. A big portion of this command that He is giving us to follow Him is to love one another. “You are my friend if you do what I command you. I have commanded you to love one another.” When we love, we love as He loved us, and the way He loved us was to lay down His life for His friends.

So this is not a heavy experience; it is actually where you are going to find your feeding. It is where you are going to find your joy, and where also you are going to find the abundance of life because with a little bit of the laying down of our lives for the brethren, the Lord will make sure to share His resurrection life with us. The Lord will make sure that our needs are met. If you stand on the side and say, “What about me, Lord? Why are You paying so much attention to this person? What about my needs?” What the Lord is doing is redirecting our attention.

At that time when Peter was a fallen sheep, he had been a wayward sheep, and then he had been a little bit restored. But again in John chapter 21 it seems as if he is messing up and is just going fishing. He said, “What about helping me right now?” Instead, the Lord says, “Go and shepherd my sheep, feed them and care for them.” That is your way through. That is how you are going to come through. You do have needs, and you are a little bit lost right now. You even sense, “I am struggling with something right now, Lord, and why do You want to use me to help someone else?” But what you find when you help someone else, the Lord will actually turn it around, and that is when you find real help has come. So many times you are delivered from your problem of sin because you have helped someone else who is sinning. It is actually your way through. So if you will stand on that portion of rejoicing with God, stand in His shoes with the Shepherd and be His hands and His feet, the Lord will meet all of your needs as His sheep, and we will get to join in the joy of the Lord in the house of the Lord.

Let’s pray together:

Lord, all of us like sheep have gone astray. We have gone our own wayward course, and we dare not look around at anyone that we know, at any fallen believer, anyone who is in a dark path. Instead, we look to You and say, ‘Good Shepherd, rescue that soul. Rescue our friends, rescue our family who are struggling. Lord, we come to You and we pray that You would share afresh Your heart with us. We pray for all of those who have needs that You would meet their needs. We pray that You would reach those who need to be reached. Lord, we pray that You would share Your resurrection life with us that we can be brought into this, that we can know You and know You in abundance as the good, good Shepherd. In Jesus’ name. Amen.