

DCF:

Where do we get our sense of self-worth in our lives? Or, what gives us the confidence to rise and meet the day each morning? Well, there are several different ways that people use to feel good about themselves. Some feel good about what they do. They define themselves by their jobs. “I’m a machinist, a farmer, a teacher.” Some define themselves by how they act. “I’m kind, generous and interested in others.” Still others define themselves by who their family is and take pride in that. And some find value in belonging to a particular group. We see that most often in the armed forces. “I’m a Marine.” Still others find their value in their leaders, whether that’s political, military or some other group.

But what about Christians? Where do we find our value, our sense of self worth? We find it, not in our accomplishments or our jobs, but in our leader, Jesus Christ. He’s the source of our hopes, the source of our joy. He gives our lives value because of His love for us and what He has done for us. My friends, this morning **“TREASURE YOUR SHEPHERD!”** He gave His life for you and He adds to His flock through you.

### ***Part One: He gave His life for you***

Of all the pictures that Jesus uses to describe Himself, the most well known is Jesus as the good shepherd. There are others. He calls Himself the “bread of life”, the “vine” and the “light of the world.” But it’s this picture, as a good shepherd, that immediately springs into mind when we think of Jesus. And the word “good” really means more than just ok. It means “excellent” or of “high moral quality.” Jesus calls Himself “the excellent, or best shepherd.” He used this picture because shepherds were well known in the world at the time. Shepherds were known to be dedicated to their sheep. Shepherds were known to place themselves in danger when their flock was threatened. Shepherds knew each individual sheep by name and cared deeply for them.

We meet up with Jesus as He defends Himself before a crowd. He had healed a man of blindness, and the Pharisees refused to believe that God had a hand in this. So, Jesus uses a common comparison to drive the point home that He cared about others. There were some spiritual shepherds in Jesus’ time who only cared about the pay, like hired hands. When spiritual dangers came their way, they abandoned the sheep. They were in it only for themselves.

Things haven’t really changed in 2,000 years, have they? That’s because the sinful nature is still the sinful nature. We see it in our world today. There are some spiritual shepherds that truly do care about their flock, wanting them to grow in their faith and dedication to the Lord. And, there are some spiritual shepherds that are in it just for the money and the fame. Multi-million dollar mansions, expensive cars, tailored suits and designer sneakers. Some are in it for the money. Some are dedicated to the flock.

Jesus is the ultimate shepherd, the most excellent of all spiritual leaders. He reminds us of His love and His dedication to us when He says three times in these 8 short verses ***“I lay down my life for the sheep.”*** Who has given up more for you than Jesus? He gave up the glories of heaven. He gave up the full use of His divine powers. He gave up His life for you, to keep you safe from the terrors and pain of hell. These words of our good shepherd are echoed in several of Jesus’ statements on the cross. Remember them? ***“It is finished”*** and ***“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”*** He laid down His life for you.

God knows we need His protection and Jesus’ sacrifice. We are conceived and born in sin, which colors and corrupts our entire being. Our co-worker gets a promotion and raise, and how do we react? Rather than rejoice in his or her good fortune, our sinful nature tells us “I deserve that more than he.” Someone disagrees with our political stance and our sinful nature tempts us to think less of them and cut them out of our lives. Our sinful nature comes up with all sorts of excuses not to read God’s Word or pray to Him every day. We start to qualify God’s commands in our lives, rationalizing away His demand to love Him above all things. Oh, yes! We need God’s guidance and the forgiveness that Jesus’ sacrifice brings. We needed Jesus to lay down His life for us. It’s the only way that sin can be paid for and heal the rift between us and our Lord.

Do you appreciate how great a gift this is? Well, let me ask you this. What would you give up for

someone you love? Maybe you're a dad like Jim. Jim worked two jobs for years. He worked at fixing things around the house instead of calling a repairman to save money for their college expenses. He wanted them to have a better life. His wife Mary did the same. She worked second shift at a local gas station, making sure she was home when the kids got home from school. She hadn't bought a new outfit in years. Why? Both of them sacrificed time and energy so their children would have a good life here on earth. They loved them enough to do this for them. A big sacrifice, but not as big as Jesus' sacrifice for you. He laid down His life for your eternal life of peace and joy with Him in heaven. ***"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me"*** Jesus declares.

How do we respond to such a fantastic gift, to such an excellent shepherd? You know, because you know your good shepherd. We know our Shepherd, so we pray to Him. We thank Him for His presence, forgiveness and guidance. We think about Him often in our daily lives, remembering His promises. We live our lives knowing He knows everything that is happening each day. We trust His guidance and power, trusting that everything will work out for our spiritual good even when painful events come. And, we talk about Him with others, knowing that this is what our good Shepherd wants us to do.

That's how He adds to His flock. Through you.

### ***Part Two: He adds to His flock through you***

Let's be honest with ourselves. We're not the only ones that Jesus loves and died for. ***"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."*** We need to be reminded of this often, don't we? Our sinful nature just loves to tempt us towards arrogance. Jesus chose me, not you. We so often care more about those in our Christianity bubble than the unbelievers around us.

Jesus wants those "outsiders" to be part of His family. God so loved the world, not just a small part of it, right? Notice the determination and love that Jesus has for unbelievers. ***"I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also."*** They too are chosen and treasured by our Savior. He will bring His chosen ones into His flock by the power of His Word.

Jesus' determination reminds me of a man who ran into his burning house to save his family. He ignored the pain and the threat to his life. He suffered smoke inhalation and terrible burns to get his family out. He saved them, but later died at the hospital because of his injuries. He gave up his life for his family. Jesus gave up His life for His flock, including the people alive today who do not yet believe in Him as the Good Shepherd. He wants them in His family for eternity.

How does He do that? How does He bring others into His flock? Through you. Go and talk about your Good Shepherd to others. We talk with others about things that are near and dear to our hearts, don't we? Hunters talk about hunting. Gear heads talk about cars. Woodworkers talk about cabinets and furniture. Fishermen talk about fishing. Computer geeks talk about RAM and graphics cards. Music lovers talk about their favorite kind of music. Christians have all sorts of things that interest them, but we have one thing in common - our Great Shepherd.

Talk about how Jesus guides you with His Word. Talk about how Jesus guides you as you made decisions in your life or raised your children. Talk about the peace that you have knowing Jesus is in charge of all the events in this world. Talk about the peace you have knowing your sins are forgiven. Talk about the blessings that Jesus gives you - family, health, hope, peace and joy. It may be uncomfortable sharing those thoughts with unbelievers at first, but just remember what Jesus did for you and share it! Treasure your good Shepherd and tell others. People share what brings them great joy, don't they? What greater joy do you have in life than being part of Jesus' flock?

That's where you will find value, a sense of self-worth in this life. Not in your job. Not in your accomplishments. Not in your actions. Only in Christ. He has washed you clean, clothed you with His perfection and brought you into His eternal flock. ***"TREASURE YOUR SHEPHERD!"***

AMEN