

John Chapter 10

Here, Jesus uses the picture of a shepherd and his sheep to describe his relationship to those who love God. In this illustration, Jesus points to himself as the good shepherd, the only one who truly loves the sheep and puts their wellbeing above his own.

Of course, as we've grown used to hearing, we are the sheep in this story. Most of us don't realize just how demeaning that description should feel. Sheep are not the most intelligent of animals. A sheep will blindly follow the sheep in front of him, even if that path will take them over the edge of a cliff. So dumb.

But Jesus doesn't intend to offend. He is simply highlighting our need for a good shepherd. How desperately we need someone to care for us and guide us. And Jesus uses this picture, one that his listeners could easily grasp since they were very familiar with the relationship between shepherd and sheep, to make sure everyone recognizes his role. Jesus wants his listeners to know he cares for them and is willing to do anything necessary for their good.

To help us recognize how important it is for us to have a good shepherd watching over us, Jesus describes two different kinds of people that will try to harm us. The first are the thieves and robbers, those who sneak in, uninvited, and want to destroy the sheep.

There are some people out there who want to harm Christians. They intentionally try to destroy our faith and break down anything that points to Jesus. They intentionally misdirect those who want to follow Jesus and put obstacles in their paths. In many cases, these false prophets simply want to get rich and powerful by deceiving people.

The second group Jesus warns us to look out for are the hired hands. This group is not necessarily trying to hurt the sheep, but they end up doing so anyway. Often, these are pastors who started with pure intentions and commitments, but now they only lead out of obligation. They might assume that, since the church has gotten the job done up to this point, there's no need to be open to new ideas. They want to work for God, but they aren't prepared to recognize that Jesus moves in different ways.

Those who work for Jesus with open eyes will be willing and eager to follow him in new ways. Even if those new ways are uncomfortable.

And, just as his words create division among the Jews listening to him speak, they continue to cause division today. The robbers of today don't want to admit they have harmful intentions. The hired hands of today don't even recognize that their unwillingness to follow Jesus in different ways is damaging. And, those who recognize and follow the Good Shepherd continually have to be careful not to be trapped by either group.

After Jesus finishes talking, the Jews go right back to where they left off. They keep asking Jesus to prove himself to them. Now they want him to tell them if he is the Christ, even though they've already made up their minds about the answer. They simply want to hear him say that he is, so they can try to kill him for blasphemy. These are not genuine requests. They are nothing more than misguided attempts to discredit Jesus.

We can point our fingers at the Jews and talk disparagingly about them for their tactics, but we do the same thing today. When we talk to others who we know have different beliefs than we do, we often will ask them why they believe what they do. But this question doesn't come out of a genuine, innocent interest. Often, we just want to hear the reason for a particular belief so we can tell them why we disagree and to know what we need to say to change their minds. Worse, the purpose for these conversations can be to make sure people know we disagree with them.

Why do we feel the need to do this? Do we do it to divide people? These conversations rarely result in anybody actually changing their mind. So, why do we do it so often? Is our goal simply to know who is in and who is out; who agrees with our theology and who disagrees?

Ask yourself this question the next time you talk to someone you disagree with: Is it really worth bringing up your areas of disagreement?

Sometimes it is, but sometimes we have selfish reasons and we are only stirring up division.

Just like the Jews who wanted Jesus to show them a sign.