

I Know My Own

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who takes care of His sheep.

JOHN 10:7-14,25-30

MEMORY VERSE: JOHN 10:14

STUDY John 10:7-14,25-30, noting the ways Jesus described Himself. Use Explore the Text on pages 125-129 to gain insight into the meaning behind the metaphors of the gate and the shepherd. Reflect on how Jesus promised to take care of His people.

CREATE a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 130-132. Focus on helping the group better understand what it means to know Jesus and to be known by Him. Consider using a teaching approach you have yet to use this quarter. (See p. 132 for ideas.)

GATHER the following items:

- Extra *Personal Study Guides* (PSGs)
- Pictures depicting a sheepfold (pen) with an opening for the shepherd to guard
- Any materials needed for the options on page 132

Prepare to display:

Pack Item 4

(Poster: First-Century Jewish Factions)

Make copies of:

Pack Item 8

(Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark)

CONSULT the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* for additional commentary and biblical insights related to the focal passages (available for purchase from Lifeway.com).

REINFORCE the session by following up with anyone who has expressed doubts or anxiety about the security of their salvation or lack of peace. Pray with this person, encouraging them to place their trust in Jesus for the first time or to rest in a state of ongoing trust.

FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

God's Purpose and Grace

Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. (See Malachi 3:6; 2 Timothy 1:12.)

Home security is a huge business. We can install a security system ourselves or use professionals to install it, and we can self-monitor or use a company. We want to feel we are secure and the things we possess are secure. In Bible times, shepherds served as security systems that protected sheep. Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd, explaining that He protected His sheep.

(In PSG, p. 109) **List products and systems people use to keep their homes secure. How would you rate the items you listed from most effective to least effective?**

BIBLE SKILL

Use other Scripture to help understand a Bible passage.

On a separate sheet of paper, create a two-column list. In the first column include descriptions of the sheep and the Good Shepherd from John 10. In the second column, write aspects found in Psalm 23. What insights from Psalm 23 help you appreciate John 10?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

JOHN 10:1-42

Jesus often used parables, metaphors, and similes to teach spiritual truths in ways that ordinary people could understand easily. As He continued speaking to His disciples and others in John 10, Jesus employed two important word pictures. He likened Himself to a gate and to a Good Shepherd. Jesus was both the gate by which the sheep entered the pen and the Shepherd who called them forth. No one can legitimately enter without going through the gate—Jesus.

Jesus condemned false prophets who tried to steal sheep by climbing over the wall. The thief sought to steal, kill, and destroy. In contrast, Jesus came to give eternal and abundant life. This life is eternal because it can never be taken away or lost. Believers enjoy the protective care of Jesus and the Father because the two of them are one, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand.

This life is also abundant. It does not begin at death but at the moment a person is saved by faith in Christ. Jesus does not want His children merely making it through the day. He wants us to experience the overflowing joy of His presence through the Holy Spirit.

Unlike the thief who wants to harm the sheep, the Good Shepherd came to love, protect, and care for the sheep. The sheep represent believers who know Jesus. When He calls His sheep, they follow Him because they know His voice. They are familiar with Him and know He loves them.

Jesus loves His flock so much that He laid down His life for them. He is not a hired hand who flees when threatened by a predator. The hireling runs because the sheep are not his. The Good Shepherd isn't looking to escape. He protects His flock even at the cost of His own life.

Interrupting Jesus, the Pharisees demanded He clearly state if He was the Messiah. Jesus had already made His identity clear, but they refused to believe. They became enraged when He claimed to be one with the Father. They tried to kill Jesus, but He escaped and traveled to the area around the Jordan River. People there remarked that even John the Baptist never did works like Jesus, and many of them believed in Him.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE GATE (JOHN 10:7-10)

Verses 7-8

Many children have heard their parents say, “I’m going to tell you just one more time.” That statement means the child needs to pay close attention. Similarly, **Jesus said again**, repeating and building on the truths found in verses 1-6. Jesus continued to use the word portrait of sheep introduced in verse 1 to describe His relationship to believers.

The term **truly** translates two Greek words that could be transliterated as “amen, amen.” This phrase asserts the importance of the spiritual truth that followed. Jesus emphasized the point by including **“I tell you.”** The statement was valid, and it was vital because it was spoken by the Messiah about Himself.

Jesus described Himself as **the gate for the sheep** (“door” ESV, KJV). In His day, sheep often pastured in open fields, guarded by shepherds much like the ones associated with Jesus’s birth (Luke 2:8-9). Other times, sheep were kept in folds or pens to protect them from predators. Enclosed by stone walls, an opening was used as a gate, and the shepherd would sleep across the doorway. Anyone or anything wanting to harm the sheep had to climb the wall or overcome the guardian.

Earlier, Jesus had related the common experience of a sheepfold, the importance of the gate, and the relationship of the true shepherd and his sheep. In verse 7, He applied the parable to Himself. The term translated **I** and the syntax of the sentence connote exclusivity. Only He provides legitimate access to the sheepfold, a metaphor for the kingdom of God.

Jesus addressed not only His closest disciples, but also His most determined opponents. He depicted **all who came before me** as **thieves and robbers**. Jewish historians recorded various false prophets who claimed to be the Messiah. Other imposters would appear after Jesus’s earthly ministry. Jesus warned against anyone who sought to gather followers through deception (Matt. 24:23-24).

In the opening parable, Jesus emphasized that the sheep only followed the voice of their shepherd. They **didn’t listen to** a stranger because they knew the voice of the true shepherd. This statement does not mean that no one was deceived by the false prophets or phony Messiahs. Rather, He noted that true sheep (believers) could discern between pretenders and the true Shepherd.

VERSES 7-8

⁷ Jesus said again, “Truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.

⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn’t listen to them.

VERSE 9

⁹ I am the gate. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture.

Verse 9

Hebrew literature often used repetition for emphasis. Jesus again employed the **I am** statement in relationship to His role as the **gate** to the kingdom (sheepfold). Anyone desiring to be part of God's kingdom **enters by me**. As He told Thomas later, no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). He is the only **gate**. Postmodern assertions that there are many ways to heaven are false; otherwise, Jesus didn't need to die on the cross.

Jesus's use of **if** introduced a conditional clause. Not everyone will accept Him as Savior and Lord. However, *if* a person comes to Jesus by faith, that individual **will be saved**. Some scholars relate this term primarily to being delivered from physical danger, disease, or disability. Certainly, Jesus healed many sick people and freed others from the bondage of Satan's demons. But Jesus used *saved* in this context to mean eternal life.

Will come in and go out does not mean believers can somehow lose their relationship with the Shepherd. Once someone is saved, that person stands secure in Christ (John 10:28-30). Instead, Jesus focused on the promise that believers will **find pasture**. This metaphor portrays God's protection, peace, and provision.

Verse 10

VERSE 10

¹⁰ A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.

Jesus contrasted the intentions of a **thief** (false Messiahs) and Himself. Anyone who does not enter through the gate (Jesus) **comes only to steal and kill and destroy**. Self-centered frauds are not interested in the sheep's welfare. Like their master, Satan, they hate God's people. They would *steal* them, if possible, through deceitful doctrine and tempting enticements. The enemy wants to *kill* them and *destroy* their influence lest others hear, believe, and find salvation.

Jesus, however, came to offer **life**. This term can relate to physical or spiritual life. Jesus's primary purpose on earth was not to teach, heal, or even provide an example to follow. First and foremost, He came to sacrifice His life so we can receive forgiveness and eternal life by faith in Him.

Jesus wants us to have life **in abundance**. Eternal life not only involves a quantity of days (living forever), but also a quality now and in eternity. *Abundance* involves overflow or having more than expected. Jesus gives us His abundant life through the Holy Spirit. The syntax of the double use of **have** and its verb form convey the idea that the believer not only possesses this kind of life but has it continually.

Believers find abundant life through faith in Jesus. People try to have fuller lives through possessions, positions, power, or pleasure. But we experience full peace and joy only through Him.

(In PSG, p. 112) **How does Jesus serve as the gate into abundant life?**

THE TRUE SHEPHERD (JOHN 10:11-14)

Verse 11

Using the *I am* statement again, Jesus referred to Himself as **the good shepherd**. This would be likely a familiar idea to Jesus's listeners. In the Old Testament, the psalmist used a similar illustration to describe the relationship God has with His people (Pss. 23:1-3; 95:7; 100:3). In addition, some prophets used shepherding imagery to contrast evil leaders with God's loving guidance (Ezek. 34:1-31; Jer. 23:1-4).

In John's context, the definite article (*the*) addresses Jesus's uniqueness. He was not one good shepherd among many; rather, He was the only *good shepherd*. The term *good* translates a word often conveying a moral quality. In this context, it also connotes the concept of legitimacy. Jesus is the unique and true Shepherd.

As the *good shepherd*, Jesus **lays down his life for the sheep**. When predators attacked the sheep, a shepherd either fought or fled. Only the Good Shepherd was willing to risk his life to protect the flock. Moving beyond the metaphor, Jesus was connecting His death with salvation.

Jesus was not a victim of religious or political persecution. As God's Son, no one had the power to take His life. Instead, He willingly sacrificed for us (John 10:18). The term *for* refers not only to dying on behalf of the sheep, but also to dying in place of the sheep—a direct reference to Jesus's substitutionary death. Through His death, humans can receive life.

Verses 12-13

Contrasted with the good shepherd, the **hired hand** does not stay and protect the sheep. Instead he **runs away**. Danger frightens him, and his meager wages are not worth injury or death. He **is not the shepherd**. This statement does not mean the hired hand does not have responsibilities, but he **doesn't own the sheep**. He essentially works for a paycheck, not because he loves the sheep. Consequently, his loyalty is limited.

The *hired hand* represented the Pharisees and other religious figures who did not bear true love for God's people. They enjoyed position, prosperity, and power, but they were not willing to sacrifice themselves for the spiritual flock. Without a committed shepherd, the **wolf**, representing Satan, **snatches and scatters them**.

We should not read too much into the metaphor. Satan cannot steal a believer's salvation (John 10:28-30). However, unless pastors and teachers emulate the model of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, they leave their churches vulnerable to the onslaught of the enemy.

Jesus emphasized the reason behind the hireling's cowardice. He flees because he is **a hired hand**. As noted, this worker labored solely for wages. He really didn't **care about the sheep**. This portrait contrasts starkly with the Good Shepherd who surrendered everything.

Verse 14

Jesus repeated His self-description as **the good shepherd** and emphasized the personal relationship He has with believers. Unlike the hired hand,

VERSE 11

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

VERSES 12-13

¹² The hired hand, since he is not the shepherd and doesn't own the sheep, leaves them and runs away when he sees a wolf coming. The wolf then snatches and scatters them. ¹³ This happens because he is a hired hand and doesn't care about the sheep.

VERSE 14

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me,

He laid down His life for them because He loves them. They are His **own**. They belong to Him, but He also belongs to them. Referring to the analogy of verses 3-5, the Good Shepherd and the sheep **know** each other. They recognize His voice, and He knows each of them.

Believers can trust Jesus to protect them. Since He loved us enough to lay down His life for us on the cross, He will withhold nothing good from us. We need not fear the attacks of evil people or quake at harmful circumstances we face. Our Shepherd remains close at hand to provide, lead, care, and defend. He is always in control.

(In PSG, p. 113) **How do people recognize Jesus as the true Shepherd?**

THE SECURING SHEPHERD (JOHN 10:25-30)

Verses 25-27

VERSES 25-27

²⁵ “I did tell you and you don’t believe,” Jesus answered them. “The works that I do in my Father’s name testify about me. ²⁶ But you don’t believe because you are not of my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me.

John shifted his scene to the Festival of Dedication. As Jesus walked along the eastern porch of the temple known as Solomon’s Colonnade, some Jewish leaders demanded that He clearly say whether He was the Messiah. Repeatedly, He had declared Himself to be God’s Son, the Christ. So, He reminded them of this fact: ***I did tell you and you don’t believe***. The problem was not with His lack of clarity but with their stubborn refusal. The phrase *don’t believe* suggests more than doubt due to lack of evidence. It implies a determination to reject what He said and who He was.

Jesus referred them to ***the works*** that He did in His ***Father’s name***, again emphasizing the unity of the Father and the Son. Jesus consistently asserted the relationship between His actions and the will of His Father (John 5:19-30), and His miraculous signs would ***testify*** to His identity as the Messiah. The word *testify* means to bear witness. It comes from a legal term that demands the highest form of evidence.

The problem was not a lack of validation or substantiating testimonials. These people did not believe simply ***because*** they were not Jesus’s ***sheep***. The word *because* can mean “in light of,” offering the reading: “You do not believe in light of the fact that you are not my sheep.”

Jesus’s response must be seen in context with the intervening verses. He described people who were not of this sheepfold, but He also noted that Gentiles would be saved by believing in Him (John 10:16). While Jesus would receive anyone who followed Him in faith, the Jews who confronted Him were not from His flock. Repeating His statement from verse 25, He said they ***don’t believe*** or, more accurately, they refused to believe. Such a lack of faith is a deal breaker when it comes to entering God’s kingdom.

For the third time in this chapter, Jesus referred to His personal relationship with His ***sheep***. Multiple use of personal pronouns asserted His connection to believers: ***My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me***. The sheep recognized the Good Shepherd as He called

them. They were not merely a flock, but Christ knew each one of them. Though believers number in the billions over the millennia, He knows each of us individually and loves us. Consequently, we should follow Him gladly.

Verses 28-30

The word **them** refers to the sheep who believe and follow Jesus. He gives them **eternal life**. This simple statement contains several important truths. First, eternal life is a gift. We do not deserve it and cannot earn it. Second, this gift comes from God through Christ. It cannot be gained elsewhere. Third, this life is *eternal*, both in quality and quantity.

As a result of Christ's gift, believers rest in the secure knowledge that their salvation is kept by Him. **They will never perish**. Jesus did not promise that Christians will never die physically. However, the saved soul transitions into Christ's presence.

Nor can the enemy **snatch them out of** Christ's **hand**. Jesus's divine qualities include omnipotence, so the devil cannot wrest us from His grasp. We are secure in His righteousness and power.

Some readers may focus on the interjection **who has given them to me** rather than the main clause: **My Father . . . is greater than all**. Jesus emphasized that the security of believers is a result of the Father's power. The statement contains several important points. First, the Father is Jesus's Father. God also becomes our Father when we receive the Son by faith. Second, the Father is the source of our salvation through Jesus. He gives believers to Christ as they believe in Him. Third, because of the Father's omnipotence, it's impossible **to snatch them out of the Father's hand**. Neither Satan nor sin can separate us from God (Rom. 8:31-39).

We have this confidence because of the unity between the Father and the Son. The Jewish leaders wanted Jesus to state plainly if He was the Messiah. Jesus declared, **I and the Father are one**. Some scholars see this oneness as relating to intent, while others believe it relates to their fundamental nature. Regardless, this truth is not just a metaphor like the oneness of Christ's body, the church (Rom. 12:4-5).

Human logic cannot grasp how God expresses Himself in three Persons while being one God. In His infinite being, God exists outside the realm of human understanding. The Jews understood that Jesus was claiming equality with God and sought to kill Him for blasphemy. What they could not comprehend, they condemned.

But believers rest in Jesus's hand. He and the Father embrace us with unrelenting power and love. As is often stated, God does the saving, and God does the securing. Our role is to respond in faith.

(In PSG, p. 116) **How does Jesus's promise of eternal life bring peace to a person's life?**

VERSES 28-30

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION

BEGIN: As the group arrives, invite them to share with a partner a time when they protected someone or something. Encourage them to discuss what motivated them to the task.

DISCUSS: Invite volunteers to share interesting stories or insights from their discussion. Affirm that people are more committed if they have a personal interest in what they are protecting.

INTRODUCE: Summarize the opening paragraph on page 109 of the *Personal Study Guide* (PSG). Explain how shepherds protected their sheep in the first century. Ask: ***What would happen if a shepherd abandoned the sheep when danger arose?***

TRANSITION: *Shepherds who abandon their sheep really aren't shepherds at all. They're just taking a paycheck as long as things are safe and secure. Today's study examines how Jesus serves as the Good Shepherd for His flock. He never abandons His sheep.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REVIEW: Direct the group to silently scan Understand the Context (PSG, p. 110). Highlight ideas like shepherds, thieves, and hired hands. Ask: ***From what we've learned from John's Gospel, where have you seen Jesus act like a loving shepherd?*** Mention examples such as healing people, helping the Samaritan woman, and showing compassion toward the adulterous woman.

TRANSITION: *Jesus will draw a stark contrast between Himself and the religious leaders of His day. As you study today's verses, consider how Jesus has been a "gate" to protect you and a Good Shepherd who provides for you.*

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud John 10:7-10, as the group listens for how Jesus described His purpose.

EXPLAIN: Display the pictures you have printed ahead of time that show an ancient sheepfold with an opening for the shepherd to guard. Share that Jesus is the gate, while believers are the sheep and false religious leaders are the thieves and robbers. Use information from pages 125-126 of the Leader Guide and pages 111-112 of the the PSG to provide more information on these terms.

EXPLORE: Guide the group to consider the actions of the sheep. Help them see that the sheep (believers) ignore the voices of thieves and robbers. Emphasize how believers choose to follow Jesus's voice, rejecting false teachers.

ASK: How does Jesus serve as the gate into abundant life? (PSG, p. 112) ***What does an abundant life look like?*** Draw attention to verse 9 and Jesus's description of the sheep's freedom. Frame abundant life as primarily eternal, not just earthly. Note that Jesus was not focusing on health or wealth. Share that the benefits of an abundant life here on earth are more about purpose, peace, and contentment.

TRANSITION: *So, Jesus serves as the Gate, protecting His sheep, those who follow His voice. But shepherds in the first century did more than just guard the sheep pen. Sometimes, they had to make sacrifices for the flock. The next set of verses make it clear that Jesus was more than willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for His sheep.*

READ: Call on someone to read John 10:11-14. Direct the group to pay attention to how Jesus set up the contrast between the true Shepherd and the hired hand.

STUDY: Invite the group to circle all the uses of “I” in verses 11-14. Explain why Jesus focused on Himself in these verses.

ASK: *How does the contrast between the hired hand and the Good Shepherd help us understand Jesus’s purpose?* Emphasize the voluntary and sacrificial nature of Jesus laying down His life for His sheep.

DISCOVER: Direct the group to scan the content for verses 12-14 (PSG, pp. 113-114) to discover the meaning of “know.” Guide them to locate this week’s memory verse on **Pack Item 8** (*Handout: Memory Verse Bookmark*). Instruct them to work in teams of two or three to paraphrase verse 14, using the information about “know” and the Good Shepherd.

TRANSITION: *Jesus’s words again created tension with the religious leaders, mostly because they knew He was portraying them as false shepherds. But Jesus stated that His sheep know Him and are secure in Him.*

READ: Before you read aloud John 10:25-30, point out that these verses are in response to the Jews asking Jesus if He was the Messiah. After you have read the verses, call attention to **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: First-Century Jewish Factions*) and point out why leaders would have been concerned about His claim to be the Messiah. Focus on how Jesus’s response answered their question.

ASSERT: *This is essentially Jesus’s last public teaching in John’s Gospel. That makes this an important passage that wraps up three-plus years of public ministry.*

ASK: Invite the group to discuss these questions with a partner: *What did Jesus say to validate His Messianic claim? Why did so many fail to recognize Him as the Messiah?* Encourage the group to reference the text for answers and then scan the comments for verses 25-27 for additional insight (PSG, p. 115).

PROBE: *What might keep a person from hearing the voice of Jesus and following Him?*

EXAMINE: Direct the group to scan verses 28-30, underlining the promises Jesus made. Talk about why believers can be confident that Jesus can keep those promises. Encourage the group to offer one word that summarizes how they feel when they consider Jesus’s promises here.

REVIEW: Read verse 29 again and highlight Jesus’s promise to hold believers. *How does Jesus’s promise of eternal life bring peace to a person’s life?* (PSG, p. 116) Emphasize the security of salvation and God’s power to protect those who follow Him.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

REVIEW: Call attention to the application statements found under Apply the Text (PSG, p. 117). Direct the group to look over each statement and consider in which area they are most lacking peace. Encourage them to scan today’s verses and to choose one that speaks to the peace Jesus promises in that area. Encourage them to refer back to this verse during their prayer time this week.

RESPOND: Lead a discussion of the second set of questions under Apply the Text on page 117 of the PSG: *What hinders us from hearing the voice of Jesus and following Him? What changes might you need to make this week to walk more closely to Him so you can more easily hear His voice?* Challenge them to silently consider their answers. Encourage them to revisit this section regularly during the week.

PRAY: Close in prayer, thanking God for the security He provides and asking Him to help each person recognize His voice.

OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

MUSIC

Secure a copy of Phil Wickham singing “Psalm 23.” Invite the group to meditate on the idea of Jesus as the Good Shepherd while listening to this song.

VERBAL

Invite the group to read aloud, in unison, the Key Doctrine: ***Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end.*** (PSG, p. 116) Lead the group to discuss how this relates to Jesus’s promises in today’s verses. Note that while this is a marvelous promise, it only applies to those who have come to Christ, the sheep who know and follow His voice. Direct attention to the Plan of Salvation on the inside front cover of the PSG. Briefly go through the Plan of Salvation, encouraging anyone who has not accepted Christ as their Savior to make that decision today. Affirm that you will be available to talk with anyone who has questions following the group time.

BRAINSTORM

Share that Jesus was great at connecting with people by using illustrations they understood. Guide the group in suggesting some modern-day metaphors that are similar to the job of a shepherd. Encourage them to emphasize current occupations that involve protection, provision, and guidance. Write their responses on a large sheet of paper. Point out why these metaphors could work well with contemporary listeners. Lead the group to discuss what it would look like for Jesus to apply this metaphor to Himself.

DRAMATIC PRESENTATION

Pre-enlist a volunteer to prepare a dramatic reading of Ezekiel 34. After the reading, point out the similarities of this passage and John 10, especially the idea of false shepherds and one true Shepherd. Facilitate a discussion of how the promises made to Israel were fulfilled in Jesus. Allow the group to consider how the promises will be more completely fulfilled in the future.

SHARE

Create teams of three or four. Invite each team to discuss practical methods that can help a believer recognize the voice of Jesus and reject the voice of false shepherds. Encourage the teams to identify specific practices they have employed in their lives. Call teams back together and invite volunteers to share their insights with the entire group. Lead the group to identify ways your Bible study group can work together to better recognize the voice of Jesus as a body and as individuals.

CASE STUDY

Prior to the group time, prepare a case study focused on a believer who has experienced a significant loss and is now doubting Jesus’s ability or willingness to protect him or her. Allow the group a few minutes to read and reflect on this case study. Guide a discussion about how other believers could come alongside the person who is suffering and help him or her find rest in Jesus’s protection.