

# THE GOOD SHEPHERD

SERIES: I AM: GETTING TO KNOW  
JESUS



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John 10:11-18  
Fourth Message  
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John 10:11-18

While riding in the back seat of a car with his brother Charley, Terry Malloy, a former prizefighter, looks back on his career with regret.

Charley tells Terry that his manager brought him along too fast. However, Terry blames Charley for persuading him to intentionally lose fights for gambling money. With losses on his record, he was never able to advance through the ranks.

Terry tells Charley: “You was my brother, Charley. You should have looked out for me a little bit. You should have taken care of me so I wouldn’t have to take them dives for the short-end money . . . I could’ve had class. I could’ve have been a contender. I could’ve been somebody, instead of a bum, which is what I am; let’s face it.”

So unfolds the classic scene in the movie *On the Waterfront*, starring Marlon Brando as Terry and Rod Steiger as Charley. Has someone like Charley ever let you down?

We come, in our series on the “I am” statements of Jesus, to this: “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14). What makes him good? And how can we benefit from his care?

## The hired hand flees

John 10:11-13:

**“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.”**

Jesus, who has already intimated in John 10 that he is “the shepherd of the sheep” (John 10:2), now declares himself to be “the good shepherd.” In case we don’t get

the idea, he declares himself to be the good shepherd twice, in verse 11 and verse 14.

As the good shepherd, Jesus lays down his life for the sheep, sacrificing his life so that they might be safe from the wolf, so to speak. The good shepherd takes on the fate that would otherwise befall the sheep.

By contrast, a hired hand is more committed to his own welfare and therefore saves his own life when danger is near, leaving the sheep at the mercy of the wolf. The hired hands are people or institutions that stand by your side and promise to have your back but “turn and run farther when the fast bullets fly,” as Bob Dylan sings, leaving us at the mercy of the wolves.

Perhaps there have been people or institutions in your life, like Charley in *On the Waterfront*, who should have looked out for you a little bit, who should have taken care of you, but didn’t. Some people, like Charley, are more interested in profiting from those in their charge than caring for him.

The hired hands who abandon us can make us feel alone in a coldly indifferent world. What’s the result? Frederick Buechner writes, “The original, shimmering self gets buried so deep that most of us end up hardly living out of it at all.”<sup>1</sup>

## The divine and Davidic shepherd

In Ezekiel 34, the Lord accused the shepherds, or leaders, of Israel of feeding themselves instead of the sheep and even of feeding themselves from the sheep. The Lord told them: “The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.” Therefore, the sheep were scattered, “with none to search or seek for them.”

With none to search or seek for the sheep, the Lord said, “Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out,” binding up the injured and strengthening the weak. “And I will set up over them one shepherd,

my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd.”

Jesus is both the divine shepherd and the Davidic shepherd who was anticipated by Ezekiel (Acts 2:29-36, 13:32-36). In contrast to the hired hand, Jesus is the good shepherd.

## The good shepherd lays down his life

**John 10:14-15:**

**“I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”**

As the good shepherd, Jesus knows the sheep—well enough to call them each by name (John 10:3). Moreover, the sheep know Jesus in such a way that they “know his voice” (John 10:4).

Jesus’ relationship with the sheep mirrors the Father’s relationship with him. Jesus knows the sheep the way the Father knows him, and they know Jesus the way Jesus knows the Father. The kind of intimacy that Jesus enjoys with the Father is the same kind of intimacy that he enjoys with his sheep.

Jesus’ relationship with the Father is such that he lays down his life for the sheep. Moreover, Jesus’ relationship with the sheep is such that he lays down his life for them. Motivated by his relationships both with the Father and with the sheep, Jesus lays down his life for the sheep. He lays down his life not for unknown sheep but for sheep he knows, for sheep who know him.

## The beautiful shepherd

When we see one person sacrificing himself or herself for another person, how do we react? Such a sacrifice has the capacity to touch something deep in our hearts. We might say something like, “That’s beautiful.”

Jesus is the “good” shepherd. The word translated “good” can also be translated “beautiful.” It contains the concept of beauty in it. What the good shepherd does—laying down his life for the sheep—is beautiful.

Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities* is a classic not least because it features one man taking the place of another, in fact laying down his life for the life of a rival, and concluding, famously, “It is a far, far better thing that

I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.”

*A Tale of Two Cities*: Beautiful. *On the Waterfront*: Not beautiful.

Jesus is the beautiful shepherd—so beautiful, in fact, that he wants to reach out to the whole world.

## One flock

**John 10:16:**

**“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”**

Who are the sheep in Jesus’ fold? They’re Jews who listen to his voice. Now Jesus says he has “other sheep that are not of this fold,” Gentiles, whom he must bring into the fold. Gentiles too will listen to his voice.

Jesus doesn’t envision shepherding two flocks: one for Jews and one for Gentiles. No, he is the shepherd of one flock, which includes both Jews and Gentiles.

In the book of Acts, Luke chronicles the opening of the gospel to Gentiles. In his letters to the Romans, the Galatians, and the Ephesians, Paul is emphatic that the gospel is not only for all who believe in Christ but also that it unites everyone who believes in Christ.

The good shepherd lays down his life for all the sheep to unite them in one flock. Jesus died to “gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:51-52). There is one shepherd and one flock. Beautiful.

Jesus is the good shepherd: he lays down his life. But he doesn’t just lay down his life.

## The good shepherd takes up his life

**John 10:17:**

**“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.”**

Jesus doesn’t earn the Father’s love by laying down his life for the sheep; no, the Father’s love for Jesus is evident in that he lays down his life for the sheep. It is also evident in that Jesus takes up his life. (The word translated “because” is evidential, not causal.)

Jesus doesn't simply lay down his life; he lays down his life for the purpose of taking it up. After all, what good to the sheep is a dead shepherd? If a wolf kills the shepherd who is defending the sheep, the shepherd has only temporarily fended off the wolf. Jesus here envisions his resurrection and his ongoing presence for the sheep. He is risen!

Jesus is the good shepherd: he lays down his life and he takes it up, and he does so because he chooses to do so.

## **The authority of the good shepherd**

**John 10:18:**

**“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”**

Although his enemies apprehended him and crucified him, Jesus says that he chose to lay down his life. Indeed, he often managed to avoid arrest, knowing that it was not yet his time (John 7:30, 8:20, 10:39).

When his enemies finally came to apprehend him, Jesus waited in Gethsemane for them. In fact, when they came for him, he moved toward them and said, “Whom do you seek?” When they answered, “Jesus of Nazareth,” Jesus made it easy for them by saying, “I am he” (John 18:4-5).

Jesus' disciples, his sheep, were with him, and they were also in danger of being apprehended. Jesus said to those who came for him, “So, if you seek me, let these men go” (John 18:4-8). Indeed, the good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep.

Even when he died, Jesus did so volitionally, for he “gave up his spirit” (John 19:30).

The apostle Peter, without absolving the enemies of Jesus of guilt, observes that they did what God had planned and predestined to take place (Acts 4:27-28).

## **The only one who takes**

Jesus' authority comes from the Father. Everything he does is with the authority of the Father. With the authority the Father gives him, Jesus lays down his life. It's one thing to say you have the authority to lay down your life, but it's quite another to say you have the authority to take it up.

No one “takes” Jesus' life from him, but he has authority to “take” it up. Jesus is the only one who “takes” with respect to his life, and after he lays it down, he takes it up.

Jesus dies for the sheep and he rises for the sheep. God “brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep” (Hebrews 13:20).

The “charge” that Jesus refers to is the charge from the Father to both lay down his life and to take it up. Apart from the resurrection of Jesus, the death of Jesus means nothing. Last month we celebrated both Good Friday and Easter Sunday. One without the other is incomplete.

What makes Jesus good? Jesus lays down his life for us and takes it up for us to be our shepherd now and forever: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (John 10:28). Jesus shepherds his flock not only in this age but also in the age to come, so that each of us enjoys his care eternally.

## **Listen to his voice**

One of the ways that Jesus shepherds us today is by teaching us in the gospels. Mark writes, “When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.” (Mark 6:34).

As a shepherd, Jesus teaches us. He speaks with knowledge of your heart. He speaks to your heart. He speaks to the deepest places of your heart. Your shimmering self: it may be deeply buried, but it's still shimmering. The voice of Jesus penetrates through all the layers of your heart, all the way down to your shimmering self.

How do we benefit from Jesus' care? We listen to his voice.

Can you hear him? Can you hear the voice of the good shepherd speaking to your heart? He's speaking to you even now, as you listen to him in John 10. Listen to his good and beautiful voice; it's coming from his good and beautiful heart:

— “The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3).

— “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11).

— “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me . . .” (John 10:14).

— “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

## Sheep to be slaughtered

Some might say, “Well, if Jesus laid down his life and took it up to be our shepherd, sometimes it doesn’t seem like he’s doing much to protect us from the hired hands, not to mention the thieves and robbers and wolves.” Indeed, it may seem that followers of Jesus are getting slaughtered just as much as everyone else—even more slaughtered sometimes.

The apostle Paul agrees—to a point. Quoting Psalm 44:22, he writes, “For your [God’s] sake we are being killed all the day long; / we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

Yes, but what else does he say? Because of Jesus, the good shepherd, “in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:36-37). Jesus loved us, of course, by laying down his life for us and taking it up to be our shepherd now and always. As Jesus says later in the gospel of John, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

The good shepherd makes us “more than conquerors,” which means that we actually benefit from that which would destroy us, as the Lord turns defeat into victory. Defeat becomes victory, just as the defeat of the cross became the victory of the resurrection.

The death and resurrection of Christ guarantees that we will emerge victorious in the resurrection. Moreover, our certain future gives us every reason to live as conquerors even now, in the middle of suffering.

## Stunning conclusion

Mike Yaconelli came to a stunning midlife conclusion: he discovered that he didn’t believe what he thought he believed. “For me, it took fifty years to suddenly discover that I didn’t believe that God loved me,” said

Yaconelli, who was widely known as a youth leader. “I was frenzied. The only way I knew that God loved me was by continually doing things.”

Although he was a believer in Jesus Christ for decades, Yaconelli had been resistant to the love of God without even being aware that he was resistant. Perhaps the same can be said of many of us.

After Yaconelli finally acknowledged that he didn’t believe that God loved him, here’s what happened:

*I had to finally come to the end of that dreary road. I had to finally exhaust myself to the point that I realized I couldn’t do enough and that the more I did, the more I had to do. I realized that Jesus had been running after me, continually trying to get my attention, whispering in my ear, ‘Mike, I love you. I’ll always love you. Would you just let me love you?’ It took me fifty years to learn that.”*

If Jesus calls us by name, if he lays down his life for us, and if there is no greater love than laying down your life for your friends, then you use your imagination. Use your imagination and listen to Jesus speak your name and say, “\_\_\_\_\_, I love you.”

Jesus lays down his life and takes it up to be our shepherd now and forever.

## Endnotes

1. Frederick Buechner, *Telling Secrets* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2000).
2. Michael J. Cusick, “A Conversation with Mike Yaconelli,” *Mars Hill Review* (May 1995), 78.