

Focus on the Shepherd's Voice

"The sheep follow him because they know his voice" (John 10:4b).

When reading John 10, we are captivated with Jesus' description of Himself as the Door to the sheepfold and the Good Shepherd. The focus is and should be on Him. However, the Shepherd's life revolves around His sheep. That same passage gives the sheep's perspective as well.

Throughout Scripture, mankind is often compared to sheep. *All of us like sheep have gone astray* (Isaiah 53:6). *The Lord is my shepherd* (Psalm 23:1). *We are His people and the sheep of His pasture* (Psalm 100:3). Preachers often remind us that sheep are not very smart. It is true that if the lead sheep steps off a cliff, the rest of the flock is likely to follow. It is also true that a single sheep can get so preoccupied that he can wander off and get lost, unable to find his way home. Sheep definitely need a shepherd.

However, Jesus did not compare us to sheep on order to make us feel dumb. He made the comparison because He wants us to know Him as the Good Shepherd and trust His voice. Sheep are a perfect description of what believers should be because they do trust their shepherd. Maybe sheep aren't so dumb after all. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, tells us:

- The sheep hear his voice (John 10:3).
- They listen for their names (v. 3).
- The sheep know his voice (v. 4).
- The sheep follow him (v. 4).
- They will not follow a stranger (v. 5).
- They will flee from a stranger (v. 5).
- They do not know the voice of a stranger (v. 5).
- They do not hear the strangers (v. 8).
- They know the Good Shepherd (v. 14).
- They are part of One Flock (v. 16).
- They hear his voice and follow him (v. 27).
- They are eternally secure (v. 28-29).

Recognizing the frail nature of sheep, Jesus warned His disciples that as He was sending them out *as sheep in the midst of wolves*, [they needed to be] *shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves* (Matthew 10:16). The sheep that truly belong to His flock need to be aware of strangers, thieves and hirelings who work to make them go astray (John 10). The strangers and hirelings do not know the sheep nor do they care about them.

When Jesus describes His sheep, He is talking about those who believe in Him (John 10:26). James 2:19 states it is not head knowledge that saves you, for even the demons believe in God. Being a true believer, or part of His flock, involves your whole being.

Paul describes that as believing in your heart (Romans 10:9). Matthew 25:31-33 describes a day when Jesus will divide the true believers from those who might appear to be part of the flock, but are not. He describes this time as a separation of the sheep and the goats. He will have to tell some who claimed to be part of His flock, "*I never knew you*" (Matthew 7:23). He said, "*I am the good shepherd; and I know My own and My own know Me*" (John 10:14).

When people are trained to recognize counterfeit money, they do not study counterfeit bills. They are taught to examine every detail of real money so that when the counterfeit appears, they can see the difference. Jesus' sheep will not follow a stranger because they do not recognize the voice of strangers (John 10:5). See also 1 John 4:1. Jesus' sheep know the real Shepherd is the One who died on their behalf.

My children were part of a church family from infancy and were only acquainted with family and friends that they could trust. When they started elementary school, they were understandably upset when they came home from school telling me that they had attended a meeting about "red light, green light" people. The school officials were warning my children about those in society who could do them harm (red light people). They were instructed to only listen to and go with "green light people" (family members or friends who had been identified as those they could trust). There were even signs given out to families to place in their windows indicating that they were "green light people" in case a child needed to find a safe haven on their walk home. As disturbing as it was to have to discuss this with my sons, it was necessary for their safety. Jesus' sheep know to flee from strangers (John 10:5). James tells us to *resist the devil and he will flee from you* (James 4:7). Jesus is the Door to our safe haven.

Jesus' sheep hear His voice. Jesus often said, "*Those who have ears to hear, let him hear.*" He was not talking about people who were physically deaf, but those who were spiritually deaf. There were many who saw Him with their own eyes and heard Him with their own ears, but did not accept Him as Savior and Lord. Jesus' sheep have "ears to hear" the Shepherd's voice. They recognize His voice because they belong to Him.

Jesus' sheep follow Him. Jesus said, "*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*" (John 14:15). The commandments are for the welfare of believers (the sheep). Just as loving parents give boundaries to their children for their protection, benefit and growth, our Good Shepherd does the same for us. Psalm 23 is a beautiful description of the safety and security of following the shepherd. The shepherd's rod was a guide for the sheep while the staff helped pull them back on to the correct path when they strayed. To follow the shepherd was not complicated. The sheep just had to keep their eyes on him and follow him. Jesus' commandments are not complex. He demonstrated them with His life and His death. He puts all the commandments into one simple statement: "*This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you*" (John 15:12).

The gospel of John was written by one who understood Jesus' love. In fact, he describes himself as the *disciple whom Jesus loved* (John 21:20). He wrote four more

books of the New Testament. In 1 John, one of the recurring themes of that letter was the certainty of knowing Jesus. Jesus' sheep know Him. "I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me" (John 10:14).

Reflections for further study:

- ❖ Study John 10 and 1 John side by side. It is as if John took Jesus' words in John 10 and reflected on them and wrote 1 John. How does 1 John help you understand that you know the Good Shepherd?
- ❖ Highlight the number of times the word "know" or "knows" appears in 1 John. In the New American Standard version, the word "know" or "knows" appears thirty-nine times. With few exceptions, the reference is to a believer knowing about his relationship to God.
- ❖ After highlighting "know" and "knows" in your Bible, look through these verses to list the ways that a believer can (there may be more than one verse which applies):
 - Know the love of God
 - Know what truth is
 - Know how to tell you are born of God
 - Know that you shall be like Jesus
 - Know that Jesus came to take away your sins
 - Know that you have passed from death to life
 - Know that Jesus abides in you and you abide in Him
 - Know His Spirit
 - Know that you have eternal life
 - Know that He hears you when you pray
 - Know that He can help you stop sinning
 - Know that the Son of God has come into the world

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (John 10:27-30).

. . . having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end (John 13:1).

Focus on the Shepherd's voice. He only has good for you. He will comfort you, guide you, protect you, and lead you home.

© Stephanie B. Blake

Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.