

John 10:11-18(ESV) ¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²He 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. ¹³He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶And 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. ¹⁷For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸No 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.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Please hear this. When you read that verse or memorize it, it is vital to know that there is a comma after the word Shepherd. If you read it too fast and leave out the comma it changes the meaning entirely. The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want. It sounds like I don't want the Lord as my Shepherd. The Lord is my Shepherd that I don't want. And if you read it that way and misinterpret the verse entirely, as I did as a child, the next part tells you why you do not want the Lord as your Shepherd. “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” In other words, you do not want the Lord as your shepherd because he makes you take naps outside on the grass. Who wants that, especially during the cold winter?

Friends, it is possible to misinterpret the Bible. We are not free to make the Bible say anything we want it to say. In seminary we are taught rules, principles, and guidelines how to properly interpret the Bible. One of those guidelines is this. The Word of God cannot mean today what it did not mean to the original readers. In other words, we seek out the original meaning of a word, a verse, a passage and that is the proper way to interpret Scripture. What did the original authors intend for us to hear and respond too. It cannot mean today what it never meant then. Original intention is the guideline. Another tool we learn in seminary comes from Martin Luther. “Scripture Interprets Scripture.” In other words, we use the easier portions of the Bible to help us properly interpret the more difficult portions of the Bible. Luther himself

was deaf and blind to the Good News of Jesus Christ. When he finally discovered the original meaning of what Paul meant in Romans 1, Luther was never the same and his understanding of the original intent of the author of Romans sparked the reformation and is still bearing fruit well over 500 years later. The righteousness that God requires of us to be saved is a gift given to us by faith in Jesus Christ. Luther knew enough Greek to properly translate and interpret the verse into German and the rest, as they say, is history. The proper interpretation of Scripture is no small issue. For Bible-believing Christians, we base the most important decisions of our lives on what the Bible says and promises. To misinterpret the Bible could end up putting one's life on the wrong course. What did the original author intend for us to hear?

Study Bibles and Life Application Bibles do their best to help us discover the original meaning as do Bible commentaries written by men and women who believe the Bible to be the true word of God, such as our own Bob Yarbrough. My office is filled with Biblical commentaries, Greek and Hebrew dictionaries and lexicons, the most important tools I have for proper interpretation. If you have a new way to interpret a Bible passage that no one else has ever thought of, please keep it to yourself.

In the Gospel of John Jesus speaks of Himself 8 times in this way. "I am the bread of life I am the light of the world; I am the gate; I am the good shepherd, I am the resurrection and the life; I am the way the truth and the life; I am the true vine. In the Old Testament God's name is "I am." So, every time Jesus refers to Himself as I AM He is proclaiming loud and crystal clear that He is God, the same God of the Old Testament. He is the I am. What ticked off the religious leaders more than anything Jesus said was this, "Before Abraham was, I Am (John 8:58). The religious leaders picked up stones to kill Jesus for claiming to be God. The Bible says somehow Jesus slipped through the crowd. It was not his time to die yet.

In the Gospel of Mark Jesus spoke these words, "*Why do you call me good, Jesus asked? "No one is good except God alone"* (Mark 10:18). I am absolutely thrilled to the bone to

proclaim to you this day that Jesus affirmed that He was not only a human being, but Jesus also proclaimed to be God. First he says, "I am," giving himself the name, which God named Himself in the Old Testament. Secondly, Jesus says in Mark only God is truly good. So, when Jesus says "I Am the Good shepherd, he is proclaiming Himself to be God twice in one short sentence. If you want to know what God is like, read the Gospels. No one reveals the Father better than Jesus and Jesus was with the Father before time began. They have always worked perfectly well together and have never been in disagreement. This is also true of God the Holy Spirit.

Friends, all of us need the Good Shepherd in our lives more than ever. When you have the Lord as your Shepherd you will find in Him all that you need. You will not be in want. The Good Shepherd knows exactly what you need and is doing His best for you to receive it. As a pastor I hear a lot, an awful lot, about human suffering. Belonging to the Shepherd, being one of His sheep does not alleviate the pain of suffering, the struggles of living in a fallen world. I so admire Christians who have spent their lifetime growing in the Christian faith listening to the Good Shepherd and obeying his every lead. I look up to them. I admire them and I want to model my life after theirs. I want to be like them. I want to grow old gracefully and not become an old poop.

A few years ago, during the rummage sale, I stopped and spoke to an elderly gentlemen who had found a seat to sit on while his wife shopped. I was wearing what I call my farm clothes, so he did not know that I was a pastor. I looked like a typical shopper. I looked over to him and asked him how he was doing. I regretted doing it. For the next 10 minutes or so he listed every single ailment he had experienced in the last five years. I kept hoping someone else would need me for something so I could get away. He had more hospitalizations than he had fingers. This is my point. He summarized his life to be by his ailments. Yes, I did pray with him and left.

Same story, different person. I saw an elderly person shopping and she caught my eye. She had a spark in her eye that only comes from growing in Christ for years, growing old gracefully. As she walked she looked like she had arthritis but that did not stop her. I asked her the same question. "How are you doing?" Her answer was so uplifting. "You know what, God is so good." I love Him more than ever and He meets all of my needs." I wanted her to keep talking. Those two sentences were like having Jesus standing with you face to face.

With the Lord Jesus as your Shepherd, you find in Christ everything that you need, even when your health is failing. You have learned the art of receiving from the Shepherd all that you need. With Jesus as your Shepherd, your ailments do not define you. With Jesus as your Shepherd, what defines you is your close relationship with Jesus, the Shepherd of your soul. Your complete identity is being a sheep, following the lead of the Shepherd. Every ailment, every difficulty provides more opportunity for the Shepherd to take care of you. You have followed his leading your entire life and you know He will always take care of you up unto the very end and then He will carry you right into heaven. You can't lose.

Sheep have a keen ability to recognize the voice of their Shepherd. Sheep are not the smartest of animals and will literally walk off a cliff when following the herd in front of them. This is why recognizing the voice of the Shepherd is an ability that literally saves their lives. The Shepherd gives his all to keep sheep alive and saves them out of everything that would destroy them, even putting His own life at risk. If one of the sheep strays away from the flock, the Shepherd will seek out the lost sheep and bring it back into the fold.

One day you heard the voice of the Shepherd. God spoke to you and you listened. You heard the voice of love, of care, of tenderness speaking to your very soul. You picked up that there really is a Shepherd, and His name is Jesus. The Shepherd spoke to you and asked you to follow Him. You listened and you have been following the Good Shepherd ever since. You know the tender care of the Shepherd and you see how he meets your needs. You have green

pastures to rest on, to graze upon, and you have plenty of water that quenches your thirst. The Good Shepherd has given to you living water. Once you drink you will never thirst again for the living water is drinking in God's grace that rescues you and saves you for eternity. The Good Shepherd never stops providing for you.

Years ago I was invited to a party that I did not want to go to. I would not know anyone and I was not in the mood to be social with a group of people who were strangers to me. I was standing all by myself in a room of over 100 people when I heard something that changed my entire bad attitude. I heard my Father's voice. Dad was there. He had told me I had to go but he was not able to be there. When I heard his voice, my insides relaxed. I was not alone. My father had a way to talking to everyone. He always had so much to say. Once I felt relaxed on the inside and safe with a bunch of strangers I had a great time. I started talking to as many as possible. It was the voice of my father that let me know all was well and I was safe. I could relax, let go of the stress, and have joy in the place I did not want to be.

There is an art at learning how to hear and recognize the voice of the Shepherd. It takes years of being in the Bible, day in and day out, praying to the Shepherd and then listening to His voice. God's Word has what our souls in pain are crying out for. The question is are we listening.

You can't hear when you avoid God's voice by ignoring the Bible. Friends, the Shepherd cannot keep from us the pain of living in this fallen world. Corrie Ten Boom listened to the voice of the Shepherd from the time she was 5 until the day she died in her 90's. Hiding God's chosen people, the Jews from the Nazis during world war II, she found herself in the German concentration camp of Ravensbruck, the closest place to hell on earth. There was a crematorium that all could see sending out smoke of those that were deliberately put to death. Corrie's sister Betsy died at Ravensbruck. The smoke meant instant death after people were gassed.

Inside the barracks Corrie and Betsy held Bible studies and prayer meetings with people who were starving to death. The voice of the Good Shepherd spoke through Corrie and Betsy to people whose lives could be taken at any time. Corrie and Betsy were defined and had their identity in being a follower of Jesus the Good Shepherd. They experienced the goodness of God in the worse situations any human being could find themselves. They had grown close to the Shepherd for decades and knew His voice well. They had matured in the grace of God and knew that there was no pit so deep that God's love isn't deeper still. They were well acquainted with suffering but knew the rod and the staff of the Good Shepherd directing their very lives. The ministry that they did in the concentration camp, listening and following the Good Shepherd is still bearing fruit to this day. Through people they led to Christ you still hear stories how the testimony of Corrie and Betsy changed lives of the hearers and then the new converts carried on and they themselves led people to Christ to this very day. And of course, Corrie's books are all available for us to read. One important part of my calling is to keep retelling her story.

When you hear and know the Voice of the Good Shepherd you know you are not alone. You know the Good Shepherd will always be with you. You have an inner confidence that no matter is happening in your life the Shepherd will bring good out of it. Even when you are close to death you have nothing to fear for the Shepherd is with you. "Thou art with me," the Bible says.

Please listen to this. There is an art, a work that we must do in order to hear the voice of the Shepherd. And it is an art and a work that must never be put off. The elderly gentleman that I met at the rummage sale defined his life by his bouts with suffering. The elderly lady I spoke to defined her life by the grace of God that has brought her thus far and will lead her home. She learned to listen to the Shepherd and to follow his leading young in life. She knew obeying the Shepherd meant experiencing the goodness of God no matter how difficult the circumstances, even with poor health. She lived the art of walking by faith knowing her best days are always in front of her as long as she stays close to her Shepherd. There is always

more of the Shepherds goodness to experience until the day we enter the fullness of His Presence.

Friends, the Good Shepherd willingly laid down His life for you. He willingly laid his life down for the sheep in order to take it up again. "We are his people the sheep of his pasture" (Psalm 100:3). He purchased us on the cross. We belong to Him. He knows you by name. And there are more sheep that the Shepherd wants to bring into the flock. Amen and Amen.