Conversations with Jesus

Lisa Scheffler, author

Week 4 | John 10:1–21

In our final week of our Conversations with Jesus series, we’ll see Jesus confront the Pharisees over their rejection of him and their mistreatment of the people. At Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, Messiah, the declare himself the good shepherd who looks after his sheep.

# Day 1

## Read

### John 10:1–6 (NIV)

“Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

## Study

In John 10 we’re listening in on a conversation already in progress. To get the most out of this passage, read [John 9](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Jn9.1) to see what the Pharisees are questioning Jesus about and think about why he responds with a story about shepherds and sheep.

## Think about

In Jesus’ day, it was common for towns to have communal pens where several flocks mixed together at night so they could be guarded and protected. In the morning the shepherd would come and call his sheep, and they would recognize his voice and come to him. He would lead his flock out of the pen to graze in nearby fields.

In many parts of the world, sheep are herded by sheep dogs that bark and nip at their heels. The sheep’s innate fear is being used to control them. They are being driven, not led, and they move because they’re afraid.

The Jewish leaders, like the Pharisees Jesus confronts in John 10, were supposed to lead the people in the ways of the Lord. But, instead of gently guiding, they often employed fear tactics to control. They used their authority to intimidate and shame rather than teach and exhort. They used the Law of God to separate and exclude rather than to gather and bless. In John 9 we see them casting a man Jesus healed out of the synagogue for defying them, which would have excluded him from the community.

Jesus, the true Shepherd, leads with his voice. He doesn’t drive the sheep with fear and intimidation. His sheep respond to their Shepherd’s call because they know him and trust that he will take care of them. As Psalm 23 says, he will lead them to lie in green pastures beside still waters where they can find nourishment and rest. Jesus knows his sheep and they know him. With Jesus, we are fully known and fully loved.

## Pray

Turn to your Shepherd today. Sit quietly before him in prayer and ask him for the ability to tune out other voices that encourage you to wander or insist you follow them on the wrong path. Pray that the Spirit will give you ears to hear your Shepherd’s voice and the will to respond to his leading. Ask him to lead you to green pastures and still waters, whatever that may look like for you today.

## Talk about

Have a meaningful conversation about this passage with one of your CF Encouragers, your small group, or join us virtually in the Faithlife Community. (Search groups for Engage God Daily. For full instructions, [click here](https://cfhome-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/lscheffler_cfhome_org/EYNh8cUxJRxClFV-Wt6QNe0BtkK34MHJDqeHamAwxlGmbQ?e=RL3RSh).)

* Talk about what it means to you to “hear” Jesus’ voice today. Discuss how you find guidance through prayer, the Bible, your church community, and other means.

# Day 2

## Read

### John 10:6–10

Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

## Study

The Pharisees don’t understand what Jesus is talking about, so he comes at it from another angle. This time he calls himself the gate.

In Jesus’ day, during certain times of the year, the shepherds would leave their towns and stay out in the pastures with their sheep while they grazed. We picture this at Christmas when we hear of the shepherds “out in the fields taking care of their flock by night” when the angels announce Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:8). Shepherds would sometimes make pens out of brush or rocks and they would sleep across the opening to guard the sheep from predators and thieves and also keeping the sheep from answering their own foolish urge to wander into the dark night. The shepherd became the gate.

## Think about

We all want a full life and many voices in our world claim to offer it. These voices can seem even louder at Christmas. They promise comfort and satisfaction through consumerism, or motivate us with a fear of scarcity. What we have is never enough, and what others have, we must want. Driven by these voices, we can feel like we’re stuck on a treadmill set at too high a setting, running for a finish line that keeps moving farther and farther away. But that’s not where the Good Shepherd’s voice leads us. Jesus says I will freely give you the gift of abundant life.

## Pray

Our Good Shepherd watches over us. Allow Psalm 121 to guide your prayers today:

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains—*

*where does my help come from?*

*My help comes from the Lord,*

*the Maker of heaven and earth.*

*He will not let your foot slip—*

*he who watches over you will not slumber;*

*indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

*The Lord watches over you—*

*the Lord is your shade at your right hand;*

*the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.*

*The Lord will keep you from all harm—*

*he will watch over your life;*

*the Lord will watch over your coming and going*

*both now and forevermore.*

## Talk about

* Once again Jesus is using ordinary, familiar things to help people understand who he is and what he is offering. How can we do something similar in our conversations with people?

# Day 3

## Read

### John 10:11–15

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

## Study

Jesus makes one more attempt at explaining himself to the Pharisees and this time he is very direct. I am the Good Shepherd. If they hadn’t gotten it already, alarm bells would have gone off in the heads of the Pharisees. They knew their Scriptures well, even if they understood them little. God compares himself to the Good Shepherd over and over again. Read a few examples: [Psalm 100:3](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Ps100.3), [Ezekiel 34:31](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Eze34.31), [Isaiah 40:11](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Is40.11), and [Psalm 23:1–4](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Ps23). What astonishing claim is Jesus making in front of the Pharisees?

## Think about

The Good Shepherd would lay his life down for the sheep. Sacrifice himself for the sheep. The Pharisees weren’t prepared to do that. They expected a Messiah who would come, defeat the Romans, and install the religious leaders as lords to rule over the people. No one expected the Messiah to be executed and die. But here Jesus explains what the true King looks like. He is the one who will die for you. He is the one who will sacrifice everything to keep you safe, happy, and resting in green pastures. When you find the Good Shepherd – that’s whose voice you follow.

You follow the voice who said “let there be light” and there was light. The one who’s voice boomed like thunder when he spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. The voice who said “Be still” to the storm and called Lazarus out of the grave. You follow the one who said “let the little children come to me” and raised a child from the dead with a gentle, “little girl, come.” You trust the voice that called out in anguish from the cross – my God why have you forsaken me – as he bore the penalty for our sins. That’s the voice you listen to and the one you follow no matter where it calls you and no matter what the cost.

## Pray

Go before the Lord in prayer and invite the Spirit to convict you of areas where you are wandering. Be honest about your struggles to follow Jesus. Allow the Good Shepherd’s voice to call you back to the right path.

## Talk about

* What does it mean to you that the Lord is your Shepherd? How should his role as Shepherd affect your thoughts, emotions, and actions during Christmas?

# Day 4

Have you given our [Pastors Pregame podcast](https://subsplash.com/christfellowship-tx/lb/ms/+hg732gk) a try? We go deeper into the sermon topic for each week. You can find it on our website, [cfhome.org/pregame](https://subsplash.com/christfellowship-tx/lb/ms/+hg732gk) or subscribe through the Apple Podcast App.

## Read

### John 10:16–21

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

The Jews who heard these words were again divided. Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?” But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

## Study

According to N.T. Wright, “The original ‘sheep’ are the people of Israel. Jesus is calling them, and those from among his Jewish contemporaries who are ready for the call are hearing his voice, trusting him and coming to him. But, as Israel’s prophets and wise writers had always hinted, the God of Israel was never interested *only* in Israel. His call to Israel was for the sake of the whole world. The ‘other sheep’ are that great company, from every nation under **heaven**, that God intends to save, and to save through Jesus. The Jewish **Messiah** is to become the Lord, the shepherd, of the whole world.[[1]](#footnote-2)

## Think about

The Pharisees were so focused on their own exclusive standing with God that they missed the reality that large parts of their own scriptures were pointing to. Through Israel, the Savior of the whole world would come. The prophets had announced that God was doing an amazing work through his chosen people. He would invite people from every tribe and every nation his eternal Kingdom. That’s what Jesus is trying to remind them when he says he must bring in other sheep who will also listen to his voice. He is making us all one flock with one shepherd.

The Good Shepherd sacrificed himself for his flock. His goodness is undeniable. “When he calls, people want to come. When they realize he has died for them, they want to even more. The point of calling Jesus ‘the good shepherd’ is to emphasize the strange, compelling power of his love.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

## Pray

Praise the Good Shepherd for the flock. He has gifted us with a beautiful, diverse community of believers from all over the world. Pray for unity in Christ’s church and the opportunity to help more people find and follow Christ.

## Talk about

* Why do you think the Pharisees missed God’s intentions for the world so badly? Discuss how pride, prejudice, stubbornness, and rebellion may have played a part. What part do they play in our blind spots today?

# Day 5

Christmas is so close! Let’s close out the week with a different story about shepherds, the ones to whom the angels come to announce the glorious birth of our Savior!

## Read

### Luke 2:8–12 (NIV)

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

## Study

The guests who were invited to celebrate at the world’s most remarkable birthday celebration would not have been welcomed to dine in many homes. Among the Jewish people, shepherds were looked down on, and not just because they did hard, dirty, back-breaking labor that left them smelling like the sheep. The nature of their work did not allow them to keep the ceremonial law. Even more problematic was their reputation for being dishonest. According to rabbinical teaching, shepherds were not to be allowed to testify in law-courts because, as a class, they were considered unreliable.[[3]](#footnote-4) Yet, God sent angels to a group of Shepherds to announce Christ’s birth. Not only that, but as we’ve learned this week, he considers himself the Good Shepherd.

## Think about

Our cities are full of bright and buzzing streetlights and the 24-hour din of traffic noise. Those of us who live in a city must use our imaginations to picture the dark and “silent night” Christ was born. Of course, the shepherds who camped outside of the village of Bethlehem were quite familiar with such nights. Keeping watch in fields illuminated only by the sparkle of distant stars, the only sounds the shepherds were used to hearing were the bleating and rustling of the sheep. How astonished they must have been on the night Jesus was born!

Their seemingly ordinary night was joyfully disrupted when a host of angels penetrated the silence and pealed back the darkness. Their glory shining like the sun and their voices raised in exultant proclamation, the angels announced the best possible news for humanity — the Messiah had arrived!

## Pray

In prayer, reflect on the love of your Good Shepherd. After all, who could have anticipated the lengths to which God would go to redeem us? It’s astounding! Like those shepherds in the field, there is nothing that makes us intrinsically worthy to receive such kindness. We are loved by God because he chooses to love us. By the Spirit’s power, we should love others the same way — unselfishly and without prejudice. May those startled shepherds remind us of the grace we’ve been shown, and may we show that grace to others.

## Talk about

Pray together for the move of the Spirit in your life, your family, your church, and your community. Ask the Spirit to reduce anxiety, addiction, and loneliness in our area this Christmas and ask for opportunities to be a part of what God is doing in so many lives this season. Pray for more and more meaningful conversations where people experience Christ in us.

1. Tom Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-10* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Tom Wright, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)