



SESSION 1

WITH THE SHEPHERDESS

Encountering God as Good Shepherd



Like stinky cheese and fine wine, some ideas just get better with time. Though it's been nearly a decade since I first met Lynne, I'm still haunted by our chance conversation. I was in Sitka, Alaska, tending my aunt's bed and breakfast while she took a much-needed respite. Countless loads of laundry and dishes tried to temper my romantic notions of life at a three-bedroom inn. Nevertheless, I set the alarm extra early to pick fresh berries for rainbow-colored Alaskan scones designed to make Rachael Ray proud should she ever choose to visit.

The morning conversations with guests varied widely, but after only a few weeks they steadily became rote. Most of the dialogue involved answering questions about life in Alaska, places to shop, and the best hidden trails.

So went my initial conversation with Lynne. She and her husband, Tom, were on their inaugural trip to Alaska, one they dreamed about for years. In between bites of scone, I randomly asked what Lynne did with her free time.

"I'm a shepherdess," she said.

"Uh . . . what?" I asked quizzically.

"I have more than a dozen Shetland sheep that I breed and take care of," she said.



If you ever want to visit Alaska, taking a cruise is a great way to see much of the beauty the state offers. May is one of the best months to travel there, since it tends to rain less.



Shetland sheep originated in the Shetland Isles. They are one of the smallest breeds, but are known for their fine and soft wool. They have no wool on their face, nose, legs, or ears. Each shade and pattern of wool has its own name based off of the original Shetland dialect. The rams can be 90 to 125 pounds, whereas the ewes may weigh between 75 and 100 pounds.



The dictionary definition of “sheep” is as follows: “Any of various usually horned ruminant mammals of the genus *Ovis*, especially the domesticated species *O. aries* bred for its wool, edible flesh, or skin.”¹ Sheep are the most frequently mentioned animal in the Bible.

Lynne explained that they had an open space behind their home where the sheep grazed and a barn to keep them safe at night. Intrigued by her passion for these woolly creatures, I couldn’t hold back one particular question.

“Do you ever read the Bible?” I asked awkwardly.

“I’ve read it before,” she said suspiciously.

“I recently read John 10 where Jesus talks about being the Good Shepherd,” I said hesitantly, secretly hoping I wasn’t sounding like one of *those* people. “Is it really true that sheep know their shepherd’s voice?”

Lynne began sharing tales from her shepherding experience, drawing rich parallels between shepherding and God. I found myself hanging on her every word, but before we knew it she had to leave to catch a flight. On her way out the door, she offered to send me a collection of writings on sheep from a spiritual perspective.

I secretly hoped she wouldn’t forget.

Three weeks later a manila file of articles arrived in the mail. As I read through the collection, I experienced a series of “Aha!” moments. If the truths of Scripture are like diamonds, then they were shifting ever so slightly to reveal a more captivating brilliance. I began understanding the biblical references to shepherding in a new light.

Have you ever met anyone who because of their experience or profession helped illuminate a portion of Scripture for you?

When was the last time you were around someone who made you hungry to know God and His Word even more? What about that person drew you to God?

On a scale of 1 to 10, how hungry are you to know God and His Word right now? What steps can you take to stir up the hunger in your own heart to know God and His Word?

RECONNECTING WITH THE SHEPHERDESS

Nearly 10 years have passed since that fateful morning with Lynne. I ended up moving to the great white north and marrying an extra-tall Alaskan. Then I moved again—this time to my home state of Colorado with my husband, Leif—and I stumbled upon the shepherdess’ gift tucked deep in a file drawer of miscellaneous articles and memorabilia. As I flipped through the writings, the familiar hunger swelled inside of me. I wanted to experience shepherding firsthand. I wanted to live the story, celebrate the insights, and once again become captivated by our breathtakingly beautiful God.

I needed to track down Lynne. Where was she living? Was she still a shepherdess? Would she remember me? Googling Lynne’s name and the word “sheep,” I was delighted to discover a series of articles about Lynne and her farm—one of which listed her contact information. Getting the information was easy, but how do you go about reconnecting with someone you met once and haven’t seen for years? Understanding that this wasn’t the norm, I sent two e-mails in an attempt to warmly reintroduce myself and jog her memory of our initial encounter. They went without reply. I bravely picked up the phone.

Without an answer after three rings, I left a voicemail message that felt disjointed and rambling, a humble attempt to refresh her memory of their stay in my aunt’s bed and breakfast years before. I expressed an interest in her shepherding, secretly hoping I didn’t sound strange, or worse, like some kind of wool-stalker. Hanging up, I spoke a soft prayer.

Lynne called later that afternoon. Upon hearing her voice, I felt a rush of relief. While she clearly remembered her Alaskan adventures, Lynne only vaguely remembered our encounter, and she never received my e-mails. I gently reminded her of our discussion and the articles she mailed.

“Is there any way I could spend an afternoon with you and the sheep?” I asked, unsure if I crossed the line into forced hospitality.



While taking care of her aunt’s bed and breakfast, Margaret met her future husband, Leif, who was born and raised in Sitka, Alaska. He’s 6’8” tall. She’s only 5’6”.



Start your own *Scouting the Divine* study group on Facebook. Invite your friends to join. Share observations and comments about your experience as you dig into the study.

"I think we could make that happen," she offered.

Over the next few weeks, we determined that the weekend after Memorial Day would be our best chance for good weather. Lynne and Tom graciously extended their invitation to include dinner and an overnight stay in their home. We agreed to bring juicy steaks and gourmet chocolates for dessert. I beamed at the beautiful irony of life: The two people I served at a bed and breakfast years earlier now opened their home to us.

SHEEP THROUGHOUT SCRIPTURE

Before packing for my trip to spend time with Lynne, I spent a great deal of time diving into the Scriptures to see the Bible's perspective on these woolly creatures—and it had a lot to say! With nearly 700 references to sheep and shepherds, ewes and lambs, and the various predators they face, I was taken back by how often sheep are mentioned in the Bible.

Have you ever considered how many different places sheep are mentioned in Scripture? Why do you think these animals are so prominent in the Bible?

What are your favorite Scriptures that mention sheep?

Why do you think the Bible so often describes people as sheep instead of some other kind of animal?



For an insightful book on the biblical emphasis on shepherding, consider reading *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by Phillip Keller.



Be sure to check out the *Scouting the Divine* book that accompanies this Bible study. Through your reading, you'll not only learn more about Margaret's travels, you'll discover more insights into Scripture, too.

From the beginning, sheep line the pages of Genesis. Though sheep are not specifically mentioned in the account of creation, God made these animals as a source of food and clothing. Because of their value, they often became the center of contention and strife. The original bloody conflict between Cain and Abel was over an offering—the acceptable gift from the flock versus a rejected gift of the field (Genesis 4:2-5). The split between Lot and Abram was also sheep-related as the duo discovered the land wouldn't sustain their flocks (Genesis 13:4-6). And Abram's son, Isaac, made the Philistines jealous with his abundant flocks (Genesis 26:14).

But sheep were also used to garner goodwill. When Pharaoh wanted to win favor with Abram, he gave him sheep among other gifts (Genesis 12:14-16). Abram's grandson, Jacob, fell head over heels in love with a shepherdess named Rachel. Their initial love connection was at a well while watering sheep (Genesis 29:9-11). Though Jacob was a rascal, he eventually became who he was created to become: Israel. Toward the end of his life when he blessed his sons, he called on "the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day" (Genesis 48:15-16). Though wild and rebellious in nature, something about his time in the fields with the flock made him acknowledge God as shepherd.

Interestingly, Joseph also pastured the flocks. While on his way to see his brothers in the fields, he was waylaid by them and thrown into a pit (Genesis 37:12-24). Yet the prophetic dream of ruling over his brothers still came true. When Joseph was reunited with his family years later, it was his knowledge of shepherding that saved them. Joseph carefully instructed his brothers what to tell Pharaoh regarding the livestock. The information secured their position and provision in the land of Goshen, because every shepherd was loathsome to the Egyptians (Genesis 46:33-34).

Shortly after the story of the exodus began, Moses was on the run after his anger over an injustice got the best of him. Settling in the land of Midian, he saw another injustice: the daughters of the local priest struggling to water their flocks because of pushy shepherds. Moses helped them and was taken in by the family, marrying one of the daughters and becoming the very thing the Egyptians despised: a shepherd (Exodus 2:15-22). In fact, it was while Moses was pasturing a flock that God appeared to him as a blazing fire in the midst of a bush and called him to set the Israelites free (Exodus 3:1-3,10). Through a wild series of miracles, Pharaoh finally granted Moses' demand. God's people were set free but without their flocks or herds.



Abel sacrificed the firstborn of his flock. It can be inferred from the text that Cain's offering was not of the first fruits of his crop. God looked down upon Cain's offering, which made him very jealous of his brother, Abel. Read the full story in Genesis 4:2-8.



In the land of Canaan, there were few water sources and limited grazing regions, so it's no wonder Abram and Lot outgrew the region. Lot took his flock east, into the plains of the Jordan—near Sodom and Gomorrah. Abram stayed in Canaan with his flock. To read about their split, visit Genesis 13:2-18.



The Midianites were descendants of Abraham through his wife Keturah. These are the same people who earlier bought Joseph from his brothers and sold him into slavery. They were a nomadic people living in the desert. It was unusual for the Midianites to extend hospitality to Moses, a Jew, since the Midianites were a people hostile to Israel.



Though he was far from perfect, King David had an incredible love and appreciation for the laws and commandments of God. A great example of this is Psalm 119. This psalm is an acrostic poem; each stanza begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and the verses of each stanza begin with that same letter.

The books of the Law, presumably written by Moses, are filled with rules regarding livestock, particularly in regard to offerings, and the final book of the Torah informs readers what to do if they see a neighbor's sheep straying (Bring it back, of course!) (Deuteronomy 22:1).

Read Deuteronomy 22:1. How is obeying this command a fulfillment of Luke 10:27 and Deuteronomy 6:5?

King David, described as “a man after God’s own heart,” spent years on rocky hillsides caring for sheep. His life story as well as the Psalms abound with references to shepherding and sheep (Psalms 78, 79, 100, 119). This is the man who inspired the words:

“Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand” (Psalm 95:6-7).

Job’s grand loss and even grander restoration involved sheep. Job lost (almost) everything. When the Lord chose to bless Job again, He doubled his portion to include 14,000 sheep—twice as many as before his testing (Job 1:3,16; 42:12).

In the wise King Solomon’s wooing of the Shulammite woman, he referred to her teeth as “a flock of ewes” (Song of Songs 6:6), a sheepish way of admiring her ivory smile. Isaiah wrote that in heaven we will find lambs resting alongside wolves in the age to come (Isaiah 11:6). The prophet painted a rich portrait of God as a tender shepherd caring for His people (Isaiah 40:10-12). Indeed, many of the prophets including Hosea (Hosea 4:16), Jeremiah (Jeremiah 3:14-16), Ezekiel (Ezekiel 34), Micah (Micah 2:12-13), Nahum (Nahum 3:18), and Zechariah (Zechariah 10:3) used shepherd imagery. Even Amos, one of the quirkiest guys in the Bible, was a shepherd turned prophet (Amos 1:1).

Maybe the most compelling use for sheep in the Old Testament, however, centers on their use as sacrifices. In that time, the sheep was the animal God chose to be symbolic of His deliverance and redemption. It was the animal that pointed to salvation. On their way

out of slavery, the Israelites shared an unforgettable meal: the Passover lamb. Smearing the blood of lambs on the doorways of their houses caused the plague of death to “pass over” them.

But even before the exodus, in that unforgettable moment when Abraham raised his knife on his own son, he looked behind him to discover a ram caught by the horns in a nearby thicket. The ram became a substitute offering and Abraham named the place “The LORD Will Provide” (Genesis 22:13-14).

Centuries later, God did indeed provide. Waiting for the Messiah, the people eagerly anticipated the one who would “shepherd My people Israel” (Micah 5:4; Matthew 2:6). The promised one was the Son of God.

With God’s calling clearly displayed in so many shepherds’ lives, it should be no wonder that shepherds were included at Jesus’ birth (Luke 2:8-18). Upon seeing his cousin, John the Baptist declared, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (John 1:32-36). Throughout His teaching, Jesus referred to shepherds and sheep regularly and painted vivid concepts the people understood. Paul and Peter referred to these animals and their tender care in their writings. Imprisoned on the island of Patmos, John continued mentioning the Lamb he kept seeing in his apocalyptic visions. From Genesis to Revelation, the presence—and importance—of sheep in the Bible is unmistakable.

THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP

After our arrival, Lynne and Tom graciously invited us into their home. After we settled into the guest room, Lynne invited me to go meet her sheep. I jumped at the chance. I followed her out of the back of their house, through a barn, and up a muddy path. One of the first things I noticed was that as we passed through the various gates along the way, Lynne carefully opened and closed them, double-checking they were secure.

“You always have to be careful with gates,” Lynne said. “For the animals, it’s crucial to their survival. Not only do they keep the animals in—they keep the predators out.”

Lynne’s words reminded me of something I had been reading about. In ancient times the flock had to be kept in a stone or wood area overnight and then led to a new field for grazing each day. Shepherds often slept across the openings of their homemade sheepfolds, guarding the animals from predators and thieves with their own



Passover, or Pesach, is still celebrated within Jewish communities today. One of the observances of this holiday is the removal of all leaven bread from the home. It serves as a reminder that the Jews who fled Egypt were in such a hurry that there was no time to let their bread rise. At a deeper level, leaven is symbolic of pride, arrogance, or “puffiness.” Passover is a time to remember the humbling truth that God delivers His people not because of their goodness but because of His mercy and to get rid of the spiritual leaven in our lives.



To learn more about sacrificial offerings of sheep, including their wool, read “1.12 The Best” in *Scouting the Divine*.

“All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain” (Revelation 13:8).



Listen to “Shepherd” by Todd Agnew from the Scouting the Divine playlist. Your group leader can e-mail you the whole playlist, or you can download it at threadsmedia.com/scoutingthedivine.



“The utility of the law is, that it convinces man of his weakness, and compels him to apply for the medicine of grace, which is in Christ.”²

—Augustine of Hippo

bodies. When Jesus described Himself as “the gate [or door]” of the sheep in John 10:9, He was painting a rich portrait of being both protector and provider.

In what ways have you experienced Jesus as your protector and provider?

Do you feel like Jesus usually has to keep you in or the predators out? Why?

Have you ever experienced a time when, like the shepherds of ancient days, you felt God was protecting you from harm? If so, explain.

THE HIDDEN GIFT OF BOUNDARIES

Though rules and regulations can be aggravating, boundaries are essential to a sheep’s survival—and our own. From a sheep’s perspective, the fences only prevent them from enjoying greener grass; from a shepherd’s perspective, the fences ensure their protection, provision, and a long, good life. This is particularly true of the Ten Commandments. When Moses traveled up Mount Sinai, God gave him 10 specific directives or boundaries for the people.

Read Exodus 20:1-17. When you read the Ten Commandments, do you tend to view them from a sheep’s perspective—the commandments only prevent you from enjoying greener grass—or from a shepherd’s perspective—the fences ensure your protection, provision, and a long, good life? Why?

Which perspective—the sheep’s or the shepherd’s—makes you want to obey God’s commands more? Why do you think perspective is so important when it comes to walking in obedience to God?

In the following chart, fill in how each of God’s commandments helps protect, provide, and ensure a long life for you.

No.	Commandment:	Reward of Obedience:
1	No other gods	Example: Obeying this command helps us not get distracted by false gods with false promises who will only disappoint, hurt, and fail to save. Remaining true to God is a proper response to God’s promise to remain true to us and never leave or forsake us.
2	No idols	
3	Don’t take the Lord’s name in vain	
4	Remember the Sabbath Day	
5	Honor your father and your mother	



At first glance, the First and Second Commandments seem to teach the same thing—a prohibition of idols. But during the Reformation, a popular interpretation of the Second Commandment involved physical images of God, like religious pictures and statues. Consequently, many Reformation-era churches removed all art.



The Ten Commandments starring Charlton Heston remains one of the greatest motion pictures of all time. This 1956 production was nominated for seven Academy Awards and is still shown on television in conjunction with Easter.



Listen to the audio segment called “Meet Lynne the Shepherdess—Part 1” this week. Your group leader will send it to you via e-mail, or you can download it at threadsmedia.com/scoutingthedivine. These audio recordings are designed to help you connect more deeply with the Good Shepherd as you spend time Scouting the Divine.

6	Don't murder
7	Don't commit adultery
8	Don't steal
9	Don't lie
10	Don't covet

How often do you think about the “why” behind God’s commands? Why is that?

Does reflecting on the rewards and promises of obeying God give you a greater appreciation for the boundaries He establishes for you? Why or why not?

THE VOICE OF THE SHEPHERDESS

As we crested the hill, Lynne tugged the final gate closed and we looked out on the upper field. Sheep dotted the grassy expanses. Those closest to us stared at us—their mouths rhythmically moving—chewing fresh grass. Those in the distance remained undisturbed. “As soon as they hear my voice, they’ll come running,” Lynne whispered to ensure the sheep couldn’t hear her.

Lynne was simply stating a fact that she knew to be true. She was a shepherdess. These were her sheep. For her, the statement was just cause and effect. For me, the statement was a defining moment in my spiritual adventure. Were the words of Jesus—the promise that like sheep we will hear and recognize His voice—really true? I felt a lump swell in my throat.

“Sheep, sheep, sheep,” Lynne said.

At the sound of the first syllable, the flock bolted toward her. The sheep were responding to the voice of their shepherd.

The scene confirmed what Jesus described in John 10. This particular passage comes at an intriguing time. In the previous chapter, we read that Jesus performed an amazing miracle—He healed a man born blind. This one act set off a storm of controversy, in part because Jesus chose to heal the man on the Sabbath. The Pharisees, ever the sticklers for rules, had such a hard time with this man’s healing that they interrogated him about what had happened. Unable to accept his responses or his healing, they excommunicated him. Yet Jesus found the man and affirmed to him that He was the Son of God. The man’s response was simply, “Lord, I believe” (John 9:38).



The healing of the blind man wasn’t the only time when Jesus brought up the issue of sheep and shepherding in the context of healing on the Sabbath. Take Matthew 12:9-14, for example. The Pharisees were supposed to be the shepherds of the sheep of Israel, and yet they proved themselves to be untrustworthy. Perhaps that’s why Jesus kept using the imagery of shepherding when speaking to the religious leaders.



Read more about hearing and discerning God's voice in another resource from Margaret Feinberg called *The Sacred Echo: Hearing God's Voice in Every Area of Your Life*.



Luke 15 could be called "The Lost Parables" since it contains three of Jesus' stories about things that were lost and found: the sheep, a coin, and a son. In each instance, the one seeking after what was lost throws a lavish celebration when what was lost is found.

After the healing and transformation of the blind man, Jesus addressed the issue of spiritual blindness. The Pharisees were the first to speak up and ask, "We are not blind too, are we?" (John 9:40).

Interestingly, at this point, Jesus shifted the topic from spiritual blindness to the importance of spiritual hearing and listening to the voice of God.

Read John 9:41–10:5 *aloud*. How do you recognize the voice of God in your own life?

How do you discern that the voice you're hearing is truly from God and not from a stranger? What are some of the distinctive characteristics of the voice of God?

Time and trust. That was why Lynne's sheep recognized her. It was because she was willing to put in the hard work of developing a relationship with them—even when they might not have wanted one with her. Throughout their lives, she was there. She called to them, cared for them, and acted in their best interest. And now? They knew her voice. But even more than knowing her voice, they knew she could be trusted. I couldn't help but wonder, *Do I feel the same way about Jesus?*

THE MISSING SHEEP

The sheep followed the muddy path down the trail. Lynne stood still and alert, never allowing her eyes to wander from the sheep. "I'm always counting because you never know when one will remain in the field from sickness or injury," she said.

You and Jesus both, I thought.

Jesus knew what it was like to search for a missing sheep. He even told a parable illustrating this idea. In Luke 15, Jesus described a shepherd who had a hundred sheep and lost one of them. He left the 99 to search for the lost sheep and when he found it, he placed it on his shoulders and carried it home. Then he gathered all of his friends and neighbors together and retold the story in celebration. Then Jesus compared the rejoicing in the community to the rejoicing in heaven when one person who is away from God repents and returns to a vibrant relationship with Him.

In ancient Israel, a flock of a hundred sheep represented a great deal of wealth. Some Bible scholars believe that many sheep may have represented the collective animals of an entire community. It's unlikely that the shepherd was working alone; he probably had a few assistants alongside him. When the sheep disappeared, he didn't abandon the rest of the flock. That would've been foolish. Instead he left them in the care of one of the flock's other overseers.

Now there's a good chance that the news of the lost sheep would've quickly become a village concern. If this was the community's flock, then the entire community was waiting for the shepherd's return.

Meanwhile the shepherd searched for the lost animal. He hiked up steep hills and into dark ravines. When he found the sheep, he placed the 50-plus pound animal on his back and began the long journey home—no small feat when navigating tough terrain.

When he returned home, he announced the good news to his friends and neighbors. Without access to television or modern entertainment, the shepherd's story was probably the talk of the town. People wanted to hear every juicy detail. He probably told the story countless times.

Though I had read the story from Luke 15 many times before, I never realized until watching Lynne that shepherds carefully keep track of their flocks by constantly counting. That's why the shepherd in the parable knew a sheep was missing. He was carefully watching and counting. When he discovered that one of the sheep was gone, he set out to bring it back.

In the silence, I found myself with a new appreciation for God's faithfulness and goodness. Second Chronicles 16:9 describes the eyes of the Lord moving "to and fro throughout the earth" looking to strongly support those whose hearts are completely His. Maybe that's why Jesus said, "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one



Watch the teaching segment "Encountering God as Good Shepherd" from the *Scouting the Divine* DVD to see Margaret expand even more on encountering God as the Good Shepherd. You can watch the video during your *Scouting the Divine* study group or download it for yourself at threadsmedia.com/scoutingthedivine.

"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained; what is man that You take thought of him, and the son of man that You care for him? Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and You crown him with glory and majesty!" (Psalm 8:3-5).



For a funny video clip of what some shepherds in Wales tried with their sheep, search for the “Extreme Sheep LED Art” post on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com).



To read about Lynne’s first encounter holding a baby ewe named Swan, read “1.10 A Shepherd’s Embrace” in *Scouting the Divine*.

of them is forgotten before God,” and declared, “The very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Luke 12:6-7). God carefully watches everything; He is always scanning—noticing the tiniest details. Indeed, we don’t serve a God who is far off, but One who is near and more involved in leading, guiding, and protecting us than we realize.

Read Luke 15:4-6 *aloud*. After arriving home safely with the sheep, what’s the first thing the shepherd does?

Why is community—in both the high and low moments—so important to our spiritual journeys?

Jesus drew a comparison between the celebration of the shepherd and the celebration of God when one person repents and changes his or her life. How does the shepherd imagery of the parable illustrate this point?

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

God isn’t just a shepherd—He’s a *good* shepherd. A good shepherd is willing to risk himself as the door of the sheep to protect them. A good shepherd carefully watches over and keeps count of the sheep to make sure they are all safe. A good shepherd always watches the gates to make sure the sheep are protected and don’t wander into harm’s way. A good shepherd knows his sheep and the sheep know their shepherd. The sheep respond to the shepherd’s voice. And a good shepherd is willing to take great risks to go after a single lost sheep.

How “good” of a shepherd do you really think God is?

What experiences have you had that have shaped your beliefs? Are there any areas in which you’re struggling to trust God as the Good Shepherd?

Why is knowing God as the Good Shepherd so important? How will you respond to God if you think He is a bad shepherd?

Watching Lynne interact with her sheep—the way she called them by name, fed them, and cared for their needs—revealed that she was a good and loving shepherd. But I couldn’t help but wonder how she would respond to Jesus describing Himself as the Good Shepherd. Consider John 10:11-15:

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

“What do you think of this?” I asked.

“I think it’s a great picture of being a shepherd,” Lynne said. “It’s all true. He who enters by the door is indeed the shepherd. He calls his sheep by name. He leads them out. He goes before them and the sheep follow. If a stranger came and opened my gate the sheep would run away. They really would flee. This is all a great metaphor.”

Yet when Jesus spoke these words in John 10, they weren’t just a great metaphor, but a tangible portrait of our God. A God who loves us



Jesus made several “I am” statements in the Book of John, the most controversial coming in John 8. In that chapter, Jesus claimed that before the days of Abraham, “I am” (v. 58). The Jews interpreted this as blasphemy, since Jesus was applying the sacred name of God as revealed in Exodus 3 to Himself. In Exodus 3, God said His name was *Yahweh*, roughly translated as “I Am.”



In John 10, Jesus made the distinction of a “hireling” and the owner of the sheep. The hireling is a paid hand, and the difference in the two would be seen when danger comes. The hireling would run, reasoning that it’s just a job and not worth his life. But for the owner, the sheep are more important. He stays and fights for what are his.



Remember the children's movie, *Babe*? The little pig learns to be a good shepherd with the help of his sheep and dog friends. He learns to shepherd not by demands or rude language, but instead by guiding the sheep with kindness and love.

more than we can know. A God who watches over us more than we can imagine. A God who cares for our individual needs more than we can hope. Indeed, Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

Later on in John 10, Jesus compared His followers to sheep and made a bold declaration. Look up John 10:27-28 and read it aloud. But let's not stop there—try re-reading verse 28 and inserting your own name in each blank:

I give eternal life to (insert your name) _____,
and (insert your name) _____ will never perish;
and no one will snatch (insert your name) _____
out of My hand.

Spend a few moments meditating on the Scripture above. Do you really think Jesus' promise is true? Why or why not?

Is there anything holding you back from fully trusting Jesus' promise? Explain.

EMBRACING THE GOD-INFUSED LIFE

Knowing God as the Good Shepherd forces me to come to terms with my defenselessness and recognize just how much I need Him. It means knowing and trusting in His provision in every area of my life. At times,

as the psalmist reflects in Psalm 23, God forcibly makes me lie down in green pastures, which is important because I have a natural propensity to skip the good things—including rest—He provides. Gently, He leads me beside quiet waters—special places where His spirit hovers, refreshing my own. In the stillness I become more attuned to His voice, myself, and all those around me. In this place, He restores my soul from the wear and tear—the weary and the teary—of everyday life.

In honor of His name, the Good Shepherd guides me in the paths of righteousness—the trails God has established rather than the ones I try to forge myself. Though there will be times I'll walk through some scary valleys, I'm not afraid because I know my Shepherd and my Shepherd knows me. He is near. His eyes are always scanning, I will not be picked off by predator or pestilence. Sometimes His rod disciplines me, other times His staff saves me. Though different from my own ways, I find comfort in His.

Though wolves and coyotes howl in the distance, I know when I'm close to my Shepherd I can safely enjoy the bounty of the field. In tenderness, my Shepherd even anoints my head with oil so the flies don't bug me, and my cup, the provision of the Shepherd's hand, overflows. As long as I am with my Shepherd, goodness and lovingkindness will accompany me every day, and I will dwell in the house of my God forever.

Apart from a healthy understanding of God as the Good Shepherd, I can never walk in the fullness of all He has called and created me to be. None of us can.



Lord, I want to know You as the Good Shepherd. Like a sheep, I'm completely and utterly dependent on You, the Good Shepherd, for everything. I ask You to remove the doubts and fears I have about following wherever You want to lead. Holy Spirit, I ask that You reveal distorted beliefs or misconceptions I have about You that lead me to believe You aren't really the Good Shepherd. Give me a fresh and clear picture of who You are through Scripture. Captivate me once again with your love. In Jesus' name, amen.



"When you can't sleep, don't count sheep. Talk to the Shepherd."

—Unknown

ACTIVITY

Spend some time prayerfully meditating on Psalm 23. Then, on a blank sheet of paper rewrite the psalm as a personal prayer to God. Ask God to lead you, guide you, and protect you. It's a prayer God won't refuse!

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep"
(John 10:14-15).

SCOUTING THE DIVINE

As you go through the upcoming week, pay attention to things you encounter in everyday life that reflect on themes in the Bible. You may drive by a farm and think about the various agricultural themes in Scripture. Or you may pass by your county or state's government buildings and consider the widely varying political climates found in the Bible. Or you may be spending time with kids and think about children who are mentioned in the Bible. Spend some time in Scripture studying your own theme—go ahead and scout the Divine.