
LIKE NO OTHER RELATIONSHIP

I've often wondered what story or illustration JESUS would use today to help us understand our relationship with HIM.

- In HIS day, JESUS used, among other things, the shepherd and the sheep.
- But few of us today can fully understand this illustration because few of us, if any, have spent much time around sheep. (Anyone?)
 - Truthfully, if we had, we might feel a bit offended by the comparison of us as sheep—though, in some ways, it's right on.

You see, sheep aren't very smart.

- They only know eating and drinking.
- They frighten easily (that's why the Psalmist says they have to drink from still waters).
- If a sheep gets stuck on its back in a rut, it can't right itself.
- Sheep wander off.
 - (And if that happens too many times, the shepherd will break the small bone in the leg, then carry the sheep until it heals, but during that time the sheep learns to depend on the shepherd.)
- Sheep need someone to look after them.
- Sheep need a shepherd; that's why JESUS used this description.

But rather than focus on the sheep, let's think about the shepherd.

- Let's start with the job description JESUS gives for the shepherd.

JESUS tells us a great deal about the job of the shepherd.

v. 12 Shepherding can be a dangerous business.

- You might have to fight off wolves, or even lions.

v. 15 The shepherd is willing to risk his life for the sheep.

vv. 12-13 Gives a contrast between the shepherd and the hired man:

- The hired man has no real commitment; he's only in it for the money.
 - When things get tough, the hired man runs away.
 - The hired man cares nothing for the sheep.
- The shepherd, on the other hand, puts the lives and safety of the sheep ahead of self.
 - In a sense, the sheep become more valuable than the shepherd because of the shepherd.

Now who takes a job like that?

- Someone who loves sheep?
- Someone who has great loyalty or obligation to the owner of the sheep?
 - In the case of JESUS, with JESUS as the SHEPHERD and us as the sheep, both are true:
 - JESUS loves us and is loyal to GOD our CREATOR.
 - JESUS loves the sheep because JESUS loves the FATHER and the FATHER loves the sheep.
 - The FATHER loves the sheep so much that the FATHER sends the very best person possible to take care of them.
 - John 3:16: *For GOD so loved the world that GOD gave GOD's one and only SON, that whoever believes in HIM shall not perish but have eternal life.*
- That's how much the FATHER loves the sheep.
- That's how important they are to the FATHER.

So, how is the relationship between the SHEPHERD and the sheep described?

v. 14 “I know MY sheep and MY sheep know ME.”

v. 16 “They will listen to MY voice.”

This is a two-way relationship:

- First, the SHEPHERD knows us.
 - HE knows our hopes, desires, and dreams.
 - HE knows our fears and our joys.
 - HE knows our successes and our failures—everything about us.
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While traveling in the Holy Land, an acquaintance of mine came upon a watering hole where three shepherds had come with their flocks.

- The three groups of sheep were intermingling and my friend asked one of the shepherds how he would determine which sheep belonged to him.
 - Just then, one of the other shepherds began calling out and all of his sheep stopped their drinking and followed him.
 - My friend again asked how and the shepherd said, “They know the voice of their shepherd.”
 - My friend asked the shepherd if he could borrow his outer robe and call to them to see if they would listen.
 - The shepherd agreed, but when my friend called, nothing.
 - Then the shepherd spoke to the sheep and they stopped and began to move toward him, even without his robe.
 - The sheep know the shepherd’s voice.
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- Second, we can know our SHEPHERD.

- We need to recognize HIS voice, so we know when HE is calling us.
 - We need to trust HIS vision, so we can end up where HE wants us to be.
 - It’s dangerous for us and our future if we do not.
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A tour guide in the Holy Land was telling his group about shepherds as their bus was coming into sheep country.

- “In the Holy Land,” he explained, “the shepherd leads the sheep.”
 - “In other places, the shepherd drives the sheep from behind.”
 - The tour bus came around a curve and encountered a flock of sheep.
 - However, the flock was being driven from behind.
 - The group laughed at the guide for a few moments and then he explained, “That is not the shepherd. That is the butcher.”
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The relationship between shepherd and sheep is close, intimate.

- Our SHEPHERD’s love for us is so great that HE will give up HIS life for us.
 - And, as HIS sheep, hopefully, we love our SHEPHERD.
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Let’s consider His overall purpose.

- We know that HE seeks to know HIS sheep and for them to know HIM.
- We know that HE will risk and even give up HIS life to save the lives of HIS sheep.
- And at the end of this passage, JESUS the GOOD SHEPHERD gives us a glimpse into HIS overall goal.

v. 16 “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.”

- Who might those other sheep be?

- In JESUS’s day, perhaps this was a reference to those outside of Judaism—the Gentiles.
- For we who are Christians—part of the flock—who might these other sheep be who will also listen to HIS voice and need to be part of the one flock?
 - Jews? Buddhists? Hindus? Muslims? Atheists? Just any who will hear the good news and then believe?

To help us understand HIS primary purpose and how HE will accomplish it, JESUS repeats, “I lay down MY life for the sheep.”

- For whom in our world did JESUS lay down HIS life?

- Well...everyone, right? These are HIS sheep.
- And HE did so by HIS own choice—HIS own authority.
 - “No one takes MY life from ME, but I lay it down of MY own accord.”

This is why the FATHER loves HIM: because HE was willing to do this.

- How remarkable! The FATHER didn’t make HIM give up HIS life.
- HE chose to do it. Why? Because HE loves us and all HIS sheep.

That’s what makes our relationship with JESUS like no other.

Damon and Pythias lived in Sicily in the 4th century BC and were close friends.

- Pythias criticized the tyranny of King Dionysius and was sentenced to death.
 - He wished to say goodbye to his family but was not allowed—not until Damon offered to stay in prison and even go to execution in his place.
 - When Pythias failed to return by the prescribed time, Damon was taken to be executed.
 - At the last moment, Pythias returned and told of both shipwreck and bandits that delayed him.
 - But now he was ready to die so that Damon would not have to.
 - King Dionysius was so moved by their friendship, that he set them both free.
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Who in your life would you be willing to die for?

- Spouse? Child? Extended family member? Friend? Neighbor?
- How about a stranger?

Consider also, “Who would be willing to die for you?”

JESUS died for you and HE did it because HE loves you.

- In John 15:13, JESUS says, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for his friends.”
 - And JESUS calls us HIS friends.

JESUS gives up HIS life for us—for the dumb, easily scared, falling in a rut and can’t get out sheep.

- Your life is now as valuable as the SHEPHERD’s because the SHEPHERD, by laying down HIS life for you has shown how much HE loves you.

This is our relationship with the SHEPHERD.

This is our relationship with CHRIST JESUS.

- It is a relationship that many cannot understand, but it is a relationship JESUS wants with everyone.
- JESUS needs us to tell others about the SHEPHERD who gives up HIS life for the sheep—for us and for them.
- JESUS needs us to tell them about HIS relationship with the sheep.
 - JESUS needs us to explain this relationship that indeed is like no other.