

Shepherdology 101
Lesson Three

Shepherdology is my name for what the Bible says about Shepherds. It organizes what ten NT passages (that speak at length to the subject) tell us about six key shepherd topics. But before we get into the theology of shepherding grounded in these 10 passages, let's consider **The Fundamentals**.

Fundamental 1: Jesus, Our Lord

Fundamental 2: Jesus' Word, Our Effective Guide

Fundamental 3: Jesus, Our Model Shepherd

1 Peter 5:1–4: “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

A. Jesus' Identity as Shepherd

1. Called “Shepherd” by Others

Micah 5:2: “AND YOU, BETHLEHEM, LAND OF JUDAH, / ARE BY NO MEANS LEAST AMONG THE LEADERS OF JUDAH; / FOR OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH A RULER / WHO WILL SHEPHERD MY PEOPLE ISRAEL” (Matthew 2:6).

Hebrews 13:20-21: “Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will.”

1 Peter 2:25: "For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls" (1 Peter 2:25).

It is clear that in the New Testament Jesus is explicitly identified by others as the **ultimate** shepherd.

2. Self Designation as "Shepherd"

Jesus referred to Himself as a shepherd: "Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, "I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered"' (Matthew 26:31).

In the gospel that bears his name, John recounts an extended teaching session in which Jesus made numerous self-references. At the center of this presentation is the sublime declaration, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

Embedded in this passage are principles that describe a good shepherd and distinguish Jesus as just such a shepherd.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers" (John 10:1-5).

Principle:

“This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. So Jesus said to them again, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep’” (John 10:6–11).

Principle:

“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’” (John 10:12–15).

Principle:

“I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father’” (John 10:16–18).

Principle:

B. Jesus’ Direction as Chief Shepherd

After His death and resurrection, Jesus gave specific direction to His flock. At a designated appointment in Galilee (Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:15–18) and again near

Jerusalem prior to His ascension (Luke 24:45–49; Acts 1:7–8), Jesus explained what His followers should be about in the time until His return. Think of these four passages as flock instructions.

There is a fifth passage that explains what should happen after Jesus' departure, but it consists of shepherd instructions given to Peter.

“So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My lambs.’ He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Shepherd My sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Tend My sheep’ (John 21:15–17).

In John 21, Jesus is preparing for His departure.

Peter is to follow Jesus' lead and shepherd Jesus' flock in a way that honors the Chief Shepherd. Given the example Jesus presented as explained in John 10 and demonstrated at Calvary, this is no small order.

Peter, in turn, drew others into this circle of shepherds: “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:1–3).

Just as Jesus once told him to “shepherd My sheep” (John 21:16), so he now exhorts his fellow elders to “shepherd the flock of God among you” (1 Peter 5:2).

Summary

Benefit

Our Chief Shepherd is a great guide! “For the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:17).

Proverbs warns that picking the wrong associate can prove costly: “He who walks with wise men will be wise, / But the companion of fools will suffer harm” (Proverbs 13:20).

When someone asks why we should study what Jesus says in His word about shepherding, my reply is simple: This is our opportunity to be personally mentored by the greatest shepherd of all time.

Benefit Summary

Why study shepherding?

- ✓ Give a gift to Jesus that is just what He yearns for.
- ✓ Do what is wise in the present.
- ✓ Do what Jesus will commend when He returns.
- ✓ Access divine power that produces remarkable and enduring results.
- ✓ Benefit from the greatest shepherding mentor of all time.

Discussion Guide

Discussion Question: Jesus' earthly mission was a shepherd's task. In what specific ways do the duties of a shepherd describe what Jesus accomplished in His first advent? In other words, what did Jesus do that reflects what a shepherd does? What do you see in the Good Shepherd that encourages you? Inspires you? Humbles you? Challenges you?

Discussion Question: Read these words from Paul: "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father" (Philippians 2:19–22). Although the word "shepherd" is not used of Timothy in this passage, in what ways does Timothy reflect qualities that Jesus demonstrated as a good shepherd? Recall an experience from your past in which someone was a "Timothy" for you?

Discussion Question: In John 10:1–18, Jesus identifies other characters who stand in stark contrast to a good shepherd, namely the thief, robber, stranger, hired hand, and wolf. What would be defining characteristics of each of these negative examples? For example, when a shepherd behaves like a "hired hand," what would that look like?

Discussion Question: Who from your past has demonstrated himself/herself as a good model of Jesus' approach to shepherding? Describe your situation and what someone did that echoed Jesus' example of what a good shepherd does.

Discussion Question: As you consider your personal life, what are the chief hindrances to you becoming an answer to Jesus' prayer request?

Study Questions

Here are six of twenty questions that can be used to evaluate your mastery of the content from Shepherdology 101.

1. What kind of laborers does Jesus want us to ask the Lord of the Harvest to supply? How do you know your answer is correct?
2. How does the fact that Jesus is Lord of the church relate to the question of understanding what shepherds do?
3. Explain what is meant by the sufficiency, necessity, and clarity of God's word. What single statement captures the essence of all three?
4. How do the sufficiency, necessity, and clarity of God's word relate to the study of shepherdology?
5. What advantages are associated with a word-driven practice of shepherding?
6. Name at least three characteristics Jesus associates with a good shepherd in John 10.