

## The Good Shepherd

by Bayless Conley

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I want to talk to you today about the Good Shepherd, John 10, and I'm going to read verse 1–16. Jesus is speaking. He said,

<sup>1</sup> “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. <sup>3</sup> To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup> And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. <sup>5</sup> Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” <sup>6</sup> Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. <sup>7</sup> Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. <sup>9</sup> I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. <sup>11</sup> “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. <sup>13</sup> The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. <sup>15</sup> As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.

Now, that final verse, when He talked about “this fold I have,” He’s talking about the Jewish nation, but He says, “I have other sheep.” In other words, the Gentile world, the unsaved world, the non-Jewish world, “They’re going to hear My voice, and they’re going to come and be part of the flock as well.” And thank God for that. We are part of that great flock.

I want to share with you seven things about the Great Shepherd. Seven aspects of His shepherding, the way He shepherds, who He is, and what He does. First thing is this, the personal care of the Shepherd. We read in verse 14, He said, “I’m the good Shepherd, and I know My sheep and am known by My own. I know My sheep.”

In verse 3, He said to them, “The doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear His voice, and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out.” He calls His own sheep by name. Shepherd knows the names of every sheep. When Sarah couldn’t get pregnant, she went to her husband, Abraham, said, “Look, I got an idea. I’ve got this young servant girl, Hagar. Look, have relations with her. She’ll be a surrogate mother.” It just surprised me so much; no pushback at all from Abraham. He just immediately agrees.

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Hagar gets pregnant, and starts to despise Sarah. The Bible says Sarah treated her harshly, and Hagar runs away into the wilderness. She's distraught. She's a teenage girl. She's been thrown into circumstances beyond her control. It wasn't a matter of her even having a choice. She's thinking, "What am I going to do?" And out there in the wilderness by herself, the angel of the Lord came to her and said, "Hagar, where have you come from? Where are you going?" Pretty profound question. There's a lot to it. But He called her by name.

When young Samuel went to live with the priest, Eli, as a little boy, the Lord awakened Samuel by calling his name, "Samuel. Samuel." After the crucifixion, Mary went to the tomb. It's empty. She sees somebody standing there, thinks it's the gardener, her eyes are still veiled. She says, "They've taken my Master. I don't know where He is. Did you take Him?" She didn't know who it was until He said one word to her, "Mary."

He was calling His sheep by name. The greatest persecutor of the Church was stunned when on the road to Damascus, the Lord said to him, "Saul, Saul." Called his name. Listen, the Lord knows us inside and out.

When Philip brought Nathaniel to meet Jesus, Jesus greeted him with these words, "An Israelite indeed in whom there's no deceit." It's interesting the Greek word deceit literally means "a bait for fish." In other words, Nathaniel, there's no trickery in you. There's no deceit in you. You don't put on airs. There's no pretense. You're not trying to be something you're not. What you see is what you get with this man. He's just an honest man. Nathaniel said, "How do you know me?" Jesus said, "Before Philip called you when you were sitting under the fig tree, I saw you." The Shepherd sees everything. He knows everything. He knows the good. He knows the bad. He knows what's real about you, and He knows what's not real about you.

I had a friend when I was a young Christian. She said, "Bayless, my brother's coming to live with me for a few months, and I was wondering if you could come over and meet him. He's agnostic. He's not very warm toward the gospel at all." I said, "Sure." I spent some time praying about it. Came over one morning, and I'm having breakfast with him. We're having a cup of coffee sitting at the breakfast table, and the Lord spoke to me. I heard it in here. He said, "He's an artist." I said, "You're an artist, aren't you?" He cocked his head and said, "As a matter of fact, I am." He said, "You want to see some of my paintings?" I said, "Sure." Takes me in the garage. Half of the garage is taken up with his paintings.

He starts uncovering, taking these canvases off of these pictures and showing me. He says, "How'd you know I was an artist? Did my sister tell you?" I said, "No. Actually, when we were sitting at the table drinking our coffee, the Lord told me you're an artist." He said, "Come on." I said, "No, you can ask your sister." I said, "The Lord told me you're an artist." He was stunned, and he couldn't get away from that. God knew him. Within three weeks, he'd given his life to Christ and was all in for Jesus.

The Lord, the Shepherd, He does know us inside and out. You are not some number on an endless list to Him. You're not a faceless person in a sea of people. He knows you. I received a letter about 13 months ago. I've only shared this with a very few people. From a guy, I hadn't heard of him before, but I researched him. And the guy's legit. He had some very significant ministry here in the US and most significant ministry overseas. And he was doing some things actually, with Daystar television at the time that he wrote this to me. Interesting. I want to read it to you.

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“Dear Pastor Conley, you and I have never met. And until 3:00 AM this morning, December 9th, I had never heard your name before, even though you have been on Daystar television. For whatever reason, I had a dream about you and your church in the wee hours of the morning. I actually had the same dream with a slight variation in each dream three times, and then I woke up. I dreamed I was standing outside the main entrance of your church, around 20 yards away. Out of nowhere, a lion began walking toward the front door. He was quite large, majestic, and powerful, with a large flowing mane.

As he walked, he did so with authority. He neither looked left nor right. He was focused on your front door, on your church, and on you. When he was within a few yards of your door, the Lord said to me in the dream, ‘Tell Bayless Conley that I’m coming.’ In the second dream, He said to tell you, ‘I’m coming to heal.’ In the third dream, as the lion stood at your door, I heard, ‘Tell him I’m coming to heal, to help, and to bring fresh hope over the coming days.’

After the dream had ended, I woke up. I had a sense something had happened to you or possibly the church. Maybe the enemy did and will try and slip in and do harm. Whatever the situation was or will be, I believe the dream was from the Lord, and He will show up at your front door. My wife said to me, ‘Write it down so you don’t forget his name.’ And like a typical male, I said, ‘I won’t forget it because it’s so unusual.’ But by the time I got to my office, all I could remember was something that sounded like Basel Coneley.

But as I prayed, the Lord brought your name back to memory. After a quick Google search, here we are. We may never meet this side of glory, but you’ll be in my prayers over the coming days. I’m excited to see what the Lion of the Tribe of Judah has in store for you, your family, and church.” I do believe we are on the cusp of a visitation from the Lord. It was encouraging, but the most encouraging thing in this whole letter is that the Lord knows my name. He woke a man up on the other side of the country that had never even heard of me, and the Lord spoke my name. He knows your name. He sees you. He cares for you.

The second thing I’d like to talk to you about is the paths of the Shepherd. Verse 3, Jesus said that, “He leads the sheep.” In verse 4, He said, “And when He brings out His own sheep, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him for they know His voice, and they will by no means follow a stranger but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” He said, “My sheep know My voice.” Question, where is it that we hear His voice? Romans 8:16 says, “The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit.”

He doesn’t bear witness with our mind. He doesn’t bear witness with our bodies. It’s been said, “Reason is the voice of the mind. Feelings are the voice of the body. Conscience is the voice of your spirit.” And that place where your conscience works, that is where the Holy Spirit, the Great Shepherd, talks to you. That’s where He talks to me. He said, “My sheep know My voice.”

The psalmist said, “I commune with my own heart on my bed, and my spirit makes a diligent search.” It’s a shame, but some of God’s people are great strangers to their own heart. Their whole life is lived up here and out here. Very little is lived in here, but that’s the place where the Shepherd talks to you. When He guides you, He does it through His Spirit.

When He reveals things to you, He talks to your spirit. Jesus said, “My sheep don’t know the voice of strangers.” I think about that, and I know when the devil’s talking to me. If it’s doubt, if it’s unbelief, if it’s fear, if it’s depression, that comes from the devil. When the devil speaks to you, he speaks to your mind. When the Lord speaks to you, He speaks to your spirit. I don’t

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know the devil's voice in my spirit. That's why it's so important to learn to connect with your own spirit. Be sensitive to the place where God leads you and where He will talk to you from.

I was desperately looking for the truth. I'd had a 12-year-old boy tell me about Jesus. I didn't get saved right away. I was full of questions. Moved down to Mexico City, was living there for a while, and getting in a lot of trouble. Ended up coming back to Oregon, where I lived to find that kid and his family. And began to just pepper them with questions, and started to read the Bible, but I was frustrated. I had legitimate questions I didn't have answers for. I remember staying with some friends. They lived back in the mountains along an old dirt road. I went out late at night, laid across the hood of my truck, and for the first time in my life, I prayed.

I was in my 20s. I said, "God, if the gospel's real, if this whole thing about Jesus is real, if He's Your Son, what about this?" I asked one of my questions, no answer. Asked another question, no answer. I got mad. I'm crying. I yelled a few more questions at God. Long bit of a story, but the next morning—and I heard nothing, nothing—next morning when I woke up, God spoke to me. I can't tell you how I knew it was God, but I intuitively knew. I heard it in my heart, the place the voice of the Holy Spirit comes. He said, "I want you to go to so-and-so's house."—the mother of the little boy that had told me about Jesus. So I went, knocked on the door.

They're in the kitchen, getting ready to go somewhere. I'm standing there; I go, "Where are you going?" Said, "We're going to a mission in the next town over. They're having a service in a street mission." God speaks to me a second time, standing in their kitchen. And I knew it was God, I heard the Voice in my spirit. He said, "I want you to go with them." You think the second time a man ever heard God speak, he would obey, but I didn't.

I argued. In my heart, I said, "I don't think so." Just internally, I said, "God, I'll tell you what, I'll make you a deal. They invite me, I'll go." Immediately, the woman wheels around, says, "Will you come with us?" I said, "Sure." I went that night, and they were having a service. They're supposed to have testimonies. I have no idea what that means. But instead of testimonies, people got up, and one after another, they shared word for word the questions that I'd asked God the night before on the hood of my pickup truck way back in the mountains. And then shared the answer from the Scripture, one after another. Even the questions I yelled at God, they quoted and then shared the answer from the Bible.

I was on the front row sobbing. I was the only one that responded to the invitation that night. Here's my point, intuitively, I knew that God was speaking to me. Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice." Think of this, Psalm 23:1–3,

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me...

Everybody say, "He leads me."

He leads me beside the still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

We're talking about the paths of the Shepherd. He leads us in the paths of righteousness. Other translations will say, "He leads me along the right paths." He leads me in the right way when it comes to morally. He leads me in the right way between right and wrong. He leads me in the right paths when it comes to strategically. When it comes to wisdom versus foolishness, He leads me in the right way. He leads me in the way of wisdom.

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Someone says, "How does He do it?" Let me give you three basic ways. Number one, through His Word. That's the main way He leads His people. If it's clear in the Word, you don't even have to pray about it. You just need to do it. I had a lady come to me one day years ago, "Pastor, I need some counsel." I said, "What's going on?" She says, "Well, I'm in this relationship with this married man. And he keeps telling me he is going to divorce his wife and leave his wife and kids. But he's stringing me along. And I just need to know what to do." This was the shortest counseling appointment I ever had.

I said, "That's easy, stop it! Repent. You're in adultery. You're ruining a family. Stop it! There's nothing to pray about. There's nothing to counsel about. The Word of God is very clear on this. You need to repent." There's a whole lot of other things that are just as clear as that, by the way, and if it's clear, just do it. Second way He leads us is through integrity. Everybody say, "Integrity." I want to read to you from Psalm 78 if I might do that. Psalm 78, beginning in verses 70–72, says,

<sup>70</sup> He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; <sup>71</sup> From following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. <sup>72</sup> So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.

He shepherded them. He led them. He provided for them according to integrity. Proverbs 11:3 says,

<sup>3</sup> The integrity of the upright shall guide them.

When you determine to be led by integrity, two-thirds of life's decisions are automatically already made for you. In other words, if it causes me to violate my integrity in any way, the answer is no.

I don't need to pray about it. I don't need to think about it. The integrity of the upright shall guide them. The Great Wall of China, Chinese emperors called it the Wall of 10,000 miles. It was breached by the Mongols. How did they breach the Great Wall of China? Did they go over it? No. Did they go around it? No. They bribed the gatekeepers. True. It was a breach of integrity that let the enemy in. Pause and calmly think on that.

I was doing a conference in Australia many years ago. I had the family with me, and we had a free day. And a friend of mine said, "Look, I got a little boat out on the river. Let's go." We took our families and picnicked by this river. And there were these cliffs about 30 feet high over the river, and the older boys are jumping off the cliffs into the water. I go up there with Spencer; he's like 10 years old. I'm holding his hand. There's my friend down below in the boat. Listen, if you don't think 30 feet is high looking down the river, it's a long way up.

He goes, "Spencer, jump." Spencer goes, "No way." He said, "I'll give you \$5 if you jump." Spencer goes, "No." He said, "I'll give you \$10 if you jump." He's down there in the boat. Spencer goes, "No." "Spencer, I'll give you \$15 if you jump." Spencer goes, "No. No way." "I'll give you \$20 if you jump." He's, "No, I'm not doing it." He says, "I'll give you \$25." Spencer goes, "Is that Australian dollars or US?" It's what he said. US dollars' worth a fair bit more than an Aussie dollar at the time. He says, "I'll give you US dollars." Spencer jumps off. The devil will always keep upping the reward to get you to violate your integrity, but it shouldn't be for sale at any price.

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The integrity of the upright shall guide them. Someone says, “All right. Pastor, what if it’s not something that’s clear in the Word, and there’s not a clear command or principle to follow, and if it’s not a matter of integrity? It’s a big thing with my business. It’s where I should move to and live. It’s about who I should associate with or refrain from hanging around. How do I know?” That’s when the Spirit will speak to you by His voice. My sheep know My voice. He’ll bear witness with you in your spirit, or He’ll speak to you. He will guide you.

Now, there’s certainly other things that God can do. He can give visions and dreams. But the normal ways He leads us is through His word, through integrity, and then by the Holy Spirit prompting us, bearing witness with our spirit, and speaking to us.

All right, let’s move to the third thing, the provision of the Shepherd. The provision of the Shepherd. Jesus said in verse 10 of John 10, “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly.”

Here’s a great line of demarcation that Jesus drew there. The thief, the enemy, the devil, he comes to steal, kill, and destroy. If it steals, if it kills, if it destroys, it didn’t come from God. It’s from the thief. Jesus came to give abundant life. Life in all of its aspects: spiritually, emotionally, socially, materially. The Passion Translation puts it this way, (John 10:10)

<sup>10</sup> “I have come to give you everything in abundance, more than you expect—life in its fullness until you overflow!”

Now, certainly, the spiritual aspects of that like joy and peace, they’re the most important. But we shouldn’t overlook the temporal blessings as some people do. Someone will relegate everything to the sweet by and by. Those are the things we only can enjoy when we get to heaven, and they’re not available now. Wait a minute. In Psalm 23, David said, “The Lord is my Shepherd, and He prepares a table, prepares a banquet for me.” Where? “In the presence of my enemies.” I don’t have any enemies in heaven. I will not have any enemies in heaven. That banquet table is for this life, for here and now.

He said, “My cup runs over.” That’s here and now. Meaning there’s a surplus enough for me and enough to help somebody else. “Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life,”—that’s this life—“and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” That’s the life to come. Thank God the lion’s share of our inheritance is on the other side, but let us not overlook the promised blessings that the Shepherd brings in this life. He does provide for His sheep.

I was in a meeting probably 46 years ago. I hadn’t been saved long. There was an evangelist preaching, and they’re taking up an offering. And he said, “Why don’t you take a minute and ask God what you should do in the offering?” So, I did. Closed my eyes, and I earnestly prayed, “Lord, what do you want me to give?” I had a vision. I saw the funniest thing. I saw a \$10 bill, but it was folded into a tiny little triangle, and the only thing you could see was the number 10. I knew it was a \$10 bill. I’d never seen anything like it in my life. Just a tiny, tiny little triangle, and you see the 10. I thought, certainly, I’m supposed to give \$10 in the offering.

I pulled my wallet out, and to my surprise, I don’t have a \$10 bill in there. So, I gave something else in the offering and just puzzled over it. This may be a day, a couple days later, I’m with some friends driving my van, and I’m stopped at a crosswalk. There’re people going back and forth in the crosswalk. A breeze came, and suddenly a little paper flipped up in the air.

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People were walking right over it. They didn't see it. I told my friend, I said, "I saw something just flip up in the air in the crosswalk. Would you mind getting out and see what that is?" He hops out of my van, runs over, picks something up, comes back. He says, "How weird," and he hands me a little folded triangle of a \$10 bill. The only thing you could see is the number 10. And I felt like the Lord whispered to me, "If you serve Me, I'll take care of you. If you serve Me, I'll meet your needs."

That's been 47 years, and He's been faithful to do that. He has. Now, He hasn't always settled up on the 1st and the 15th of every month. But I look back, and I've never gone without. I'm still standing. He's been faithful. He's provided for me. He will provide for you. The Shepherd does provide for His sheep.

Alright, let's move to the fourth point, the protection of the Shepherd. John 10:27–30, Jesus said,

<sup>27</sup> "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup> And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and My Father are one."

The Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:38–39,

<sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He wrote in Colossians 3:3,

<sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

My friend, that's security. Just think about it. This is my wedding ring here. This represents your life; it represents my life. All right. Now Jesus said, "No one takes My sheep out of My hand, and no one can pluck them out of My Father's hand." That's security, my life it's hidden with Christ in God.

I don't need to fear any demon. I don't need to fear any person with dark designs or ill-intentions. I don't need to fear what's going to happen with the economy. I don't need to fear what's happening in the world. My life is hidden with Christ in God.

No one can take me out of the Shepherd's hand. No one can take me out of the Father's hand. The Lord will not leave me. He will not forsake me. Therefore, I can boldly say, "The Lord is my helper. I will not fear. What can man do unto me?" said the writer of Hebrews.

He is a shield. He is a high tower. He is our protector, which brings us to the fifth point, the passion of the Shepherd. Jesus said "The good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep." In verse 17–18 of John 10, He said,

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<sup>17</sup> “Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again.

<sup>18</sup> No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

Jesus, the Great Shepherd, died for His sheep. He did not leave us in the jaws of demons or in the jaws of damnation, but He took the punishment for our sins upon Himself. He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us. He was wounded for our transgressions. And the stroke of God’s wrath against the sin of mankind fell upon His own Son when He took our place upon the cross. He died in your stead, He was punished in my stead, and He did it because He loves us.

The Bible says, “If God did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?” Someone asked, “Lord, how much do you love me?” “This much,” He said, “and He opened His arms wide on the cross, and He died.” Which brings us to the sixth point, the portal of the Shepherd. The portal of the Shepherd. John 10:1-2,

<sup>1</sup> “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door,”

A door is a portal.

“but climbs up some other way, the same as a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup> But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.”

Verse 7, John 10:7–9,

<sup>7</sup> Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. <sup>8</sup> All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. <sup>9</sup> I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”

Jesus is the door. In ancient times and still in many regions of the world now, they would have the place where the sheepfold—it would either be like a natural area with rocks around, or they would stack up rocks so a bear or wolves couldn’t get in. There would be one small entrance they might gather brush all around and pile it up high, and the sheep would be there in the sheepfold. There’s only one way in.

The shepherd at night would lay down in the entrance, literally becoming the door. No other way in, no other way out. One way into the sheepfold, through the shepherd, who was the door. In John 14:6,

<sup>6</sup> Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Every other way is false. Everyone that claims another way, according to Jesus, is a thief and a robber. One way into a relationship with God, it’s through Jesus Christ. Jesus said this in Matthew 7:13–14,

<sup>13</sup> “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. <sup>14</sup> Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”



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I mentioned about the kid that had shared Christ with me. It was my first interaction that I had with Christians, at least that I knew about. I'm sure I worked with some. They just never talked about Jesus. I didn't know they were Christians. I was over at the kid's house talking to his mother, and she'd invited a friend of theirs over. His name was Dana. I still remember, I'm leaning on the fireplace mantle, and we're having a conversation with this Christian man named Dana. And he's going on and on about Jesus.

I said, "Look, Dana, there's lots of ways to God. Jesus is your way, and that's good. You know, I applaud you. But there's a lot of different ways." He said, "Bayless, that's a lie." I said, "Excuse me?" He said, "That's a lie. There's not many ways to God. There's only one way to God." I remember thinking how narrow, how narrow. But Jesus said, "Narrow is the gate," Dana was right. He is the door. He's the only one. "If anyone comes through the door," Jesus said, "They will be saved." This might shock you, but heaven is not all-inclusive. Heaven's borders are not open to just anyone.

They're not open to all. There's certain requirements that must be met. Which brings us to the final point, and that is the property of the Shepherd. The property of the Shepherd. Several times in John 10, Jesus said of the sheep that, "He led His own sheep out." He said, "When the wolf comes, the hireling flees because he doesn't own the sheep, but the Shepherd does own the sheep." He said, "I know My sheep." It denotes ownership. We must be able to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

Before we can do that, this issue of ownership must be settled. The Bible says, "If we believe in our heart God raised Jesus from the dead and we confess Him with our mouth as Lord..." That's no small word. There's nothing casual about that. It means boss; it means master. It means all in or not in at all. It simply doesn't work any other way. Jesus gave up His life for you on the cross. Now, what does He want in return? He wants your life, and He wants all of it.

He demands all of it. That's what calling Him Lord means, that I died to my rights of independent living. I thought Joel brought up a brilliant point a few weeks ago when we were doing the Colossians study. He talked about a neighbor of his; it's sort of this good ol' boy. He's got a good family, works a good job, nice neighbor. Yet the Bible speaks of the unsaved as being enemies of God. That before we knew Christ, we were God's enemies. Jesus died for us when we were enemies. Joel said "I think a lot of us would have a hard time calling somebody like that an enemy."

What it boils down to, and his point was this, the unsaved person is fighting with God regarding the ownership of their life. Fighting with God, at war with God, an enemy with God when it comes to who's lord here. Who has the right of ownership here? You see, we want to say, "I'll tell you what I think about it. This is what I think. This is my final authority." Whatever your final authority is on any given subject, that's your god on that subject. When we say yes to Jesus, it's a complete sellout. That His Word becomes the final authority on all matters of conscience and living.

As the psalmist said in Psalm 119, "I consider all of your precepts concerning all things to be right, and I hate every false way." Listen, giving your all to Jesus; it's no little thing. But listen, He is a good Shepherd. There's no other way into a relationship with God. I want to give an invitation to you if I might do that. Maybe you're out on the plaza now. Maybe you're sitting in a pub in Ireland with a Guinness in your hand.

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Maybe you're at some resort down in Mexico, and for whatever reason, you've tuned us in, and you're about ready to throw back another shot of tequila. You may be sitting on the end of your bed in your bedroom. Wherever you are, in here or outside, if you've never gone all in for Jesus, I want to give you the opportunity to do it. Again, it just doesn't work any other way.

There's nothing, nothing casual about this invitation. He's asking for everything, everything. But oh, what He gives in return. He gives us beauty for ashes. The oil of joy for mourning, a garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Oh, what He offers in return. He's our protector, our provider, our guide. He gives us tender and loving care. He leads us in the right paths. The only way to know those things is to know Him as Shepherd.

If you've never done it, I want to give you an opportunity in just a minute. But I want to just broaden the invitation a little bit if I might. If you're listening to me right now and you're a backslider, listen, truth is if you're not going forward, you are sliding back. There's no such thing as being static. We're swimming upstream in a downstream world. God gives us the ability by His Spirit to swim upstream in a downstream world.

The moment you stop going forward, the current of culture, the current zeitgeist of this world, will pull you back. And pretty soon, your views, and your beliefs, and your values are going to start lining up with the world. Because absolutely, you will be pulled in the current of this world if you're not swimming upstream for Christ. I thank God that by His Holy Spirit, and as we feed upon His Word and gather with the saints, it enables us to go out there every day of the week with the things we face, and do it right and to do it for God.

Maybe you've been pulled along in that current of the world, and your values and things have shifted. You're sort of like the prodigal son. You may come to church sometimes. You may go through some of the rituals, but you know your heart is miles from God. I have great news. God's not mad at you. He's not mad. But it's time to come home, prodigal son. Time to stop messing around and come home, prodigal daughter.

Yes, you may have to make some hard decisions, but God will help you. Because one of the things that happens when we live out on the perimeter is our hearts become dull. Our hearts become hard. It becomes less and less easy to discern the Shepherd's voice the longer we stay out on the outside. We become less and less sensitive to His promptings, and His wooings. We lose our hunger for spiritual things little by little by little.

To the prodigals that are out there, it's time for you to come home. Yes, I want to commend you for being here, whether you're outside or inside. Maybe someone that you looked up to in the church—In fact, I feel like I'm talking to somebody here—was a leader that you looked up to, someone else that was important in your world, and they screwed up big time. Maybe they even sinned against you personally, and somehow that became a wedge that the devil drove between you and God.

Friend, we started the service with saying, if you're looking for a perfect church, this is the wrong one. We've got to keep our eyes on the Shepherd. Keep your eyes on the Shepherd. I want to pray with you. What we're going to do, I'm going to ask you to close your eyes in just a second. If you're willing to go all in for Jesus—this is between you and God—I'll ask you to raise your hand in a minute. I'll acknowledge any hands that are up. By that uplifted hand, you'd just be saying, "I want in on that prayer; I need to do this. From my heart of hearts, I want to go all in."

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Here's the good news. You might be thinking, "Look, Bayless, I don't want to be a hypocrite. I know myself pretty well. I can't sustain this. I'm moved to respond, but I don't want to be a hypocrite because I know I got stuff going on. I know myself pretty well, and I'm going to be feeling worse when I mess up." Here's the deal. It's not something that we do by the power of our own will or just by human effort. When we say yes to Him, the Holy Spirit comes and changes us, and He empowers us.

My life is no longer my responsibility, but it becomes my response to His ability. There's a big difference between the two. He'll help you. No, I'm telling you, you can't do it on your own. No, you can't, but He'll help you. Why don't you, just right now, just close your eyes for a minute. If you feel like the Lord's been talking to your heart that you need to respond to this, I'm going to ask you. Just right now, you say, "Yes, I'm going all in, going all in. I'm going to pray this prayer."

I'm serious, just put your hand up, outside on the plaza, inside in the auditorium. No one else can do this for you. This is between you and God. Pretty sacred thing we're doing right now. This is holy, friend. Doesn't get any more serious than this. All right, a lot of hands up throughout the auditorium. Go ahead and put them down. Okay, I want you to look up this way. A couple of things, I'm not done, we're going to pray. After we pray for people, I'm going to share just a little bit, and I would like everyone to just stay, if you can, for a few minutes, outside, inside. We're going to end the service today by putting Psalm 23 up on the screen. I just felt like we should read it aloud together before we go. Right now, here's what I would like.

In a minute, not yet, I'm going to ask every person that lifted a hand to stand up. Every head up, every eye open, everybody's looking around. I think it'll help you. You don't need to do it to have God hear you. Obviously, He looks on the heart. It doesn't matter if you're sitting, standing, in your car, back at your apartment, walking in the parks, sitting in a restaurant; if you talk to God from your heart, He'll hear you, and He'll answer you.

Somebody says, "Why would you have me stand up in front of all these people?" Because I think it'll help you. The Bible talks about the fear of man, and it basically means that I got my peace in somebody else's head. That I'm so worried about what you think of me or how you're going to interpret my actions, that it restricts me. That I'm fearful of how I'm going to look or what somebody might think. It's a terrible way to live your life.

The truth is, if we're afraid of what other people think of us, or how they might respond, or how they might interpret what we do, we'll never truly be able to serve God like we should. And so, by standing up, it's in one way, just a way to break the chains of the fear of man. In a sense, you'll be saying, "You know what? If the whole world wants to look right now, let them look, I don't care. God, what you think about me is more important."

Why don't you just stand, I think, to honor God. The truth is, you're in a very affirming "we're for you" environment in this place. When you stand, I'll have everyone else stand just a few seconds later, and then we're going to pray together, and we'll recite Psalm 23 together. If you're one that lifted your hand inside, outside of the plaza, would you stand up right now? Just stand up. Come on. No shame.

This is wonderful. Awesome. Awesome. So good. Yes. So good. All right. Let's stand with them, okay? God sees you. You know that He sees you. He sees you. Let's talk to God. Say,

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“Oh, God, I come to You. I bow my heart before You. I put my trust in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Wash me clean. Jesus, I believe You were raised from the dead. I confess You as my Lord. You’re my Good Shepherd. Wherever You lead me, I’ll follow. I trust You, Jesus.”

I just thought it would be good for us, together, to read Psalm 23. They’re going to put it up on the screen. Let’s start,

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. <sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Have a good day, guys. God bless you!

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