
I don't know what kind of person you are in your friend group or family, but I'm one of those people who can be easily influenced by the right person about the right subject. I'm an expert in very (very) few things and I know my limits, so when someone comes along and has knowledge, credentials, education, and experience about something I know nothing about, I tend to listen.

There are a few people in my life though that fit into multiple categories of things I listen to them about, and you probably have this person in your life, too—whether you know them in real life or not, their perspectives mean a lot to you and you can probably be easily swayed one way or another based on what they think. This is how I am with my sister-in-law, Sheyenne. Anyone who knows me knows that I am not the person to ask to go to garage sales or bargain hunting with. I'm just not your gal. I'd rather have one shirt for a year than keep shopping for 10, you know what I mean? Sorry kids, that's your outfit this year. That's more my vibe.

But because I know my kids need clothes, I rely on my trusted bargain friends and family when they tell me something is a good deal. Sheyenne is this. So a few years ago on family vacation, one night she says, "Oh wow! Tomorrow is 'pay your age day' at Build-a-Bear, we HAVE to go! This is a crazy good deal!" I believed her.

Some of you already know what day I'm talking about because you followed the headlines of the massive failure this was, and you saw all the people in line for a cheap bear and thought to yourself, "What kind of person stood in line for a bear that day?" ME. I am apparently that kind of person. We got there EARLY, I mean maybe 10 minutes after the doors opened that day, and already there were probably 1,000 people in line. [show picture] Sheyenne's determination to see it through gave me confidence. The brutal truth is: we stayed there for 6 hours, left with no bear, and easily spent more money than we ever would have by just walking into Build-a-Bear on a normal day. Here you can see two of our kids leaving with a toy we purchased at a different store as a prize for their patience.

TENSION

Now maybe you've never done something that dumb, but I do think what I observe that a lot of us miss is that we are being influenced all the time. By influenced I also mean disciplined. The original meaning of the word disciple could also be translated as "learner," and we are learning all the time. We're not only being disciplined when we sit down to intentionally read our Bible or spend time with God, or when we're in small group or attend church, we're being disciplined when we're on our phones, when we're scrolling social media, when we're with our friends. The average American spends almost 3 hours a day on social media of some kind. What we read, what we intake, who we follow, who we admire, it all shapes us. So my question for you as we

get going: *what and who disciples you?* What voices guide your life? Who and what shape your thoughts? Who leads you?

I ask you because the text we're going to be in today, which is John 10, is a leadership conversation—Jesus is talking with the Pharisees (religious leaders) about leadership and the kind of leader he is versus who they are. John's gospel was written in the context of suffering—he wanted to portray that Jesus is God and someone you can really put your confidence in. And in John 10, Jesus is talking to the Pharisees about who his people (who he refers to as sheep) are influenced by, who leads them, whose voice they recognize and follow.

Usually when you hear someone teach on this passage, they will spend a lot of time talking to you about sheep and how dumb they are. And it's true—they are dumb. And Jesus compares us to them. But I think we all kind of know this, right? Back in 2005 there was a story of an entire herd of Turkish sheep—almost 1,600 sheep—who walked off the side of a cliff together. Seriously! One sheep went over the edge and they all followed, 400 died and cushioned the fall of the other 1,200! The entire village's sheep walked right off the edge of a cliff.

I'm not going to spend my time talking about sheep. Today I want to talk to you about how Jesus describes himself as the Door (or 'the Gate') and the Shepherd, because in this passage Jesus compares himself to both, and knowing he is both our Shepherd and the Door can change how we live, follow, and love forever. Let's hop right in & read John 10:1-11:

TRUTH

"I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."

Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who come before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal, kill, and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."

What's Jesus talking about here? The context here is that Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees—the religious leaders of his day, who were obsessed with the law and making sure everyone measured up. This is also a politically loaded and charged environment—the scene would have been pretty intense. Between the Old Testament and where we're at right here was 400 years of silence from God. And during this time in history, Alexander the Great conquered the world and took over where the Jewish community was. Alexander's vision was to conquer people through the military and through culture—he wanted Greek culture to take over everywhere.

What does that have to do with any of this? Actually, a lot. The Jewish people were looking for the Messiah to do a similar takeover—and Jesus looked nothing like they were expecting. So much could be said about this, but what you need to know: the entire story of the Bible is about a clash of kingdoms—of God constantly trying to invade our kingdom and save us from ourselves, and of us constantly wanting to push God out of the equation. And the Jewish people were expecting Jesus' coming as King and his Kingdom to look like a sudden, dramatic, revolutionary change. And here, Jesus refers to himself as a Shepherd. Not really the kind of power move they were imagining from the King of Kings.

Notice in the first verse how he talks about bringing in the sheep to a sheepfold? In the wilderness in the ancient near-east, if the sheep were exposed at night, they would be very vulnerable. So shepherds would bring them into these sheepfolds to be kept safe. The primary purpose of a pen was to protect sheep from hostile animals or other intruders like wolves, or even people. He's establishing that he's the kind of shepherd and leader who would lay in the door and be the one who cares for them so they can flourish.

But notice then later how Jesus mentions the constant presence of a thief and a robber? Look at the thief's goal in vs. 10—to steal, kill, and destroy—which is what a thief does—crosses legitimate boundaries set up to guard and protect with the motive to steal, kill, or destroy. And throughout the Bible and in our own human history, there are two ways the enemy consistently jumps over the wall for us: **self-righteousness** and **rebellion**.

Self-righteousness: Remember here that Jesus is talking to the Pharisees—and they saw themselves as the gold standard. And because self-righteousness (thinking you're better than everyone else, or that you can make it on your own because you're that great), can be the default mode of the human heart, what started as a desire to serve God led them to a place of thinking they're above other people, and some of you know what I'm talking about. Either because you have been wounded by this person, or if you're honest, you can tend to be this person. And Jesus tells the self-righteous: you're stealing, killing, and destroying people. This isn't my way.

Rebellion: James 1:13-15 describes rebellion and sin this way, *"Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful action. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death."* (James 1:13-15) You see the pattern? Temptation—desire—sin—death. See when you're tempted, you don't know you're headed for desire. When you're in desire, you don't sense sin, and when you're in sin, you don't sense spiritual death—until you're there.

If you watched the Fyre Festival a couple of years ago, you saw this pattern play out. [show picture] In summary, in 2017 a guy named Billy fooled a bunch of people into buying tickets to a music festival that was advertised as the best thing they'd ever been a part of in their lives, and it was all a fraud. Advertised to be gourmet food accommodations, tons of celebrities. Billy is now in prison for 6 years for fraud and theft. We do this all the time—it's the perfect picture of how the thief and robber works in our lives. The thief lied and we bought the tickets,

and then we found ourselves surrounded by loneliness & broken relationships until we realized we bought tickets to the illusion of the satisfying life apart from God.

But- Jesus offers us a way to a rich and satisfying life: Himself.

He wants to be our leader. And when he truly is our leader, our shepherd, three things happen for us that he shares in this passage:

We listen to his voice and know his voice.

Shepherds have an incredible relationship with their sheep. There was a story in the 1980s of officers in charge of a village in Palestine who confiscated all of the sheep in the town. And the soldier who was in charge was confronted by a woman who came up and begged for her sheep back—she was a widow and this was her livelihood. So he says to her: look behind me? What do you want me to do? You think you can find your specific sheep—they're not labeled or named, good luck. So he tells her: if you can get them out, they're yours. So her son shows up and has a little flute and they all look up and are like BAAAAA—that's our song! And they follow him home! They'd spent so much time together and recognized their own call, that *in a sea of sheep, they were able to know and be known.*

The shepherd are around the sheep, and the sheep are around the shepherd. Do we listen to Jesus' voice enough, know him enough, to know and distinguish his voice from other things? Pastor and author Rich Villodas said it like this—If Jesus spent 8 hours a day, every day, for three years with his disciples, he would have had 8,000 hours with them. And after all that time, they still had major gaps. 1 hour a week on Sunday is not enough—we need a life that abides in him, with the support of others.

We all have voices in our heads that drive us to do what we do and believe what we believe—not just about God but about ourselves, other people, everything, really. And some of you right now are on paths you hate because you think you have no other choice. Some of you have entered into relationships with people you know are bad for you but you've believed a voice that's told you no one will love you so the first people who came along you latched onto and you're unhappy but at least you're not alone. Some of you believe that your whole life has to be about success, money, your name, and deep down you're empty. Some of you have decided that being bitter and full of grudges is just in your DNA and you're going to stay angry the rest of your life, and to all of us Jesus says—come back to me, trust me, let me lead you. Let me show you a different way to live.

And he does this personally. Because what we also see in this passage: **He knows us by name and leads us.**

In the beginning of John, in chapter 1:38, the very first words Jesus speaks are: *"What do you want?"* In Psalm 23, when David describes the Lord as our shepherd, he says, *"I shall not want."* To the degree that we find ourselves wanting and wanting is the same place we are refusing God to tend to our souls. And he leads us, personally. He knows us by name—he knows what we want and how to fulfill our deepest desires.

Where does he lead us? There's another phrase in Psalm 23 that David uses that speaks to the shepherd's individual care and leadership of the sheep, which is when he says, "You refresh my head with oil." See the shepherd would anoint the sheep's head with oil [show picture], because in the summertime there would be these things called nasal flies, little tiny flies that would buzz around the heads of these sheep. Without the oil, the flies would land on the mucus part or get in their ears, and the larva would turn into these wormlike things and those worms would make their way up to the passages through the ear canals and burrow into the brain. And the sheep would go insane—they'd bang their heads against trees, rocks, become so irritated and distracted, the pain would destroy them. So shepherds would put oil on their heads because even if they had just begun to make their way up there, the oil would change their make-up.

Isn't this just like God? In Scripture, the enemy is called the father of lies, and these lies come in and around our ears and our minds and Jesus offers protection so that the lies can't nest. Those bugs for us look like bitterness, shame, confusion, rejection, anger, doubt, guilt, fear, impure thoughts, gossip—it goes in and becomes a frustration and you can't think about anything else. That's what the enemy does—steals, kills, destroys. And God says, I am your shepherd. Let me lead you. I will protect you. I will lead you into a rich and satisfying life, make your soul's home in me.

Check this out: in some places, shepherds would make dips and make the sheep go through the dip so they'd be completely immersed with this oil—so *that even when they'd butt heads with each other and those ram horns would lock and sometimes hurt or kill each other, the oil would cause them to slip right off of each other so that they didn't bring harm to the other sheep.* Jesus changes us. When he leads us, he changes us—even down to our relationships with people. He changes how we see, our perspective, our anger, he reminds us that everyone has unsurpassable worth and is a person he died for.

And not only does he lead us personally, but he leads us in a way unlike anyone else in all of human history. How?

He laid down his life so that we could have life to the full.

Jesus keeps going, and contrasts himself to another kind of leader:

"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them, and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know my father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not of this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock, and one shepherd. The father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again." (John 10:11-17)

The hired hand was someone who was called on to watch over the sheep at night, but really wasn't in it because they knew the sheep, but just there to earn some money. Maybe you've had a job like this, or a leader like this before. And what this meant for the sheep was that at the sight of danger they'd run off and let the sheep be devoured, or throw one over the wall to let it be a sacrifice. If you've ever watched National Geographic, you know what this looks like. No matter where they are—land, sea, or sky—some animal is going to die. I've tried to several times with my son, but honestly I can barely handle it. Even this last week was Shark Week and my son was all in and I was watching with the blanket over my face—some animal is always dying, in every episode.

Just like the hired hand, this is what self-righteousness will do—sacrifice you to preserve itself. The moment you stop measuring up, you'll be cut off. This is what rebellion and sin will do—it will lure you with the illusion that you'll be satisfied without God, but leave you alone when you realize you're empty. *The hired hands represent those who care more about themselves than they do the sheep, and **Jesus is nothing like them.***

Notice in these verses, 5 times Jesus says, "I lay down my life." See when sin was coming to hunt us down, when hell was coming to hunt us down, Jesus threw himself between us and our enemies and he was devoured so that we may escape and may live abundantly—both now and forever. And that's why he says—I am the Good Shepherd—he willingly gave up his life, he's different than any other way, he won't use his power to destroy people or use people up to spit them out. He loves us so much he died for us.

Over and over again, Jesus showed up on the scene and contrasted the practice of the leaders of the day with his own way, and over and over again, it looked like love and service to others. This is at the center of his vision for people who follow Jesus: the Son of God didn't come to be waited on, but to sacrifice himself. This is the cross-like love Jesus gave for us, and it's the same kind of love Jesus leads us to again and again.

See just a few chapters later, in John 13, Jesus says—*this is how the world will know who I am, by the way you love people—and this is what love looks like. Now go and love one another.* Jesus healed the sick, moved towards the broken and the poor, and it all came together in the moment of the clash of Kingdoms when Jesus was given a crown, a robe, and was exalted and lifted up as King, but on a cross. To Jesus, love is ultimately agreeing with God that every person has unsurpassable worth because it's a person he laid down his life for. Our central task when Jesus leads us is to agree with God about who he is (looks like Jesus), who we are (what Jesus did for us), and who other people are (Jesus died for them, no ifs, ands, or buts.) Everything hangs on loving God, ourselves, and other people. **When Jesus leads us, we look like love. This is Christianity 101, and Christianity PhD.**

And there's no way to live life agreeing with God about other people's worth if we are like the *hired hands*, using people for ourselves. The core of Jesus' teaching is to be loved, so that from that love, we can love everyone. See the God of all power who could have done anything

put a towel around his waist and washed his disciples feet, even the ones he knew who were going to betray him. The God of all power who could have done anything compared himself to a shepherd, a leader who knew their pain, their cries, and their names. He's the God of the universe and he knows you, and he knows me, and he says: I know, I love you, let me lead you. By Jesus' standards, it's this insane idea that **We can transform the world not by conquering it, but by loving it.** The real power lies in cross-like love towards all people, at all times, in all situations.

So I just want to ask you this question:

**Is Jesus your Shepherd?
Are you led by Jesus?
Do you listen to his voice and follow him?**

At the very beginning I asked you—who or what is discipling you? Who leads you? Who else is there in all of human history like Jesus, who sacrifices himself for us? Who else can mend our relationships and our deepest wounds? Who can refresh our heads and our weary souls? Who can be our closest friend when people let us down? Let me just ask you: what do you want right now? What do you need? Do you need more joy? Do you need more peace? Do you need more freedom? Do you need wisdom? Jesus came 2,000 years ago not just to go to heaven but so that you could be free right now.

When we're being led by Jesus, who's in charge? Jesus. Our problem is we want to lead ourselves. We want to forgive when we want to. We want to serve when we feel like it. We want to do what we want to do, so we're not being led by Jesus—because the flesh feels good when it's in control. It's why we lack the power of God in our lives because we're not really willing to be led, we want to go back to our own control. To be led by the Spirit, he needs to lead, we need to be in the #2 position. So many of us are in the #1 position and we wonder our lives are full of chaos. We need to be led by Jesus. Let him lead you by putting yourself in a regular practice to hear from him through his word, by saying yes to things that stretch your faith, and by being surrounded by people who follow him and can remind you of his truth.

I want to close today just by reading this over us – and whatever you have to do to focus, whether it's close your eyes, look at the words along the screen, or in your own Bible, I want to remind us of the Shepherd's care from Psalm 23. This is how our God wants to lead us:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He takes me to lush pastures, he leads me to refreshing water. He restores my strength. He leads me down the right paths for the sake of his reputation.

Even when I must walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff reassure me. You prepare a feast before me in plain sight of my enemies. You refresh my head with oil; my cup is completely full. Surely your goodness and faithfulness will pursue me all my days, and I will live in the Lord's house for the rest of my life.

(Psalm 23, NET)