

The Gospel of John, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 15: The Good Shepherd

John 10:1-42

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

John 10 gives us the beloved image of the Good Shepherd, and it contains the great promise of the security of the sheep (vv. 27-29). The teacher must handle this with care. The wonderful assurance Jesus gives, that no one can snatch His sheep out of His hand, is real comfort for those who hear His voice and follow Him; it is not a guarantee of the doctrine of "once saved, always saved." Notice that the promise is given precisely to those who keep hearing and following (v. 27): "My sheep hear my voice... and they follow me." Christ powerfully holds His own; the warning of Scripture is to those who turn away and refuse to follow, who are nowhere promised they remain safe (Hebrews 3:12-14). The heaviest doctrinal block belongs at Question 9, with significant weight at Questions 1 and 5.

Doctrinally, the chapter also presents Jesus as the only door into the flock, the Shepherd who freely lays down His life and takes it up again (a claim of power over His own death and a clear claim of deity), the gatherer of one flock from many folds, and the giver of abundant life. The teacher should help students see both the tenderness and the deity of the Shepherd.

At the same time, the chapter is profoundly comforting and formational. It calls us to recognize and follow the Shepherd's voice amid competing voices, to live as those personally known and died for, and to rest in His unbreakable care. So aim at both: a sound understanding of the security of the sheep (assurance for those who follow, not license to fall away), and a heart that hears, follows, and rests in the Good Shepherd.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus said, "I am the door of the sheep" and "If anyone enters by me, he will be saved" (vv. 7, 9). What does it mean that Jesus is the only door into the safety of God's flock, and how does this fit with His claim elsewhere to be the only way to the Father?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus calls Himself "the door of the sheep": "If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture" (vv. 7, 9). In the sheepfold, the door was the only legitimate way in; anyone climbing in another way was a thief. Jesus claims to be that one door into the safety and life of God's flock.

Draw out the exclusivity, kindly but clearly. Jesus does not present Himself as one door among many but as the door. This fits His claim in 14:6 to be the only way to the Father. Salvation is found in entering through Him; there is no other legitimate entrance into God's flock.

Address the modern objection that exclusivity is narrow or arrogant. Help students see that Jesus is not being arrogant but truthful, and that the one door is a door, an open invitation: "if anyone enters by me, he will be saved." The exclusivity of the way is matched by the wideness of the welcome. Anyone may come, but all must come through Him.

Apply it. The one door is good news, not bad: there is a sure and certain way into safety, and it is open to all. Help students rest in the security of having entered through Christ and feel the urgency of pointing others to the one door. Ask how they would lovingly explain to a friend why Jesus is the only way in.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the only door into the safety and life of God's flock (John 10:7, 9).
- The exclusivity of Christ as the way of salvation (John 14:6).
- The wide welcome matched to the one way ("if anyone enters").
- Salvation found by entering through Christ alone.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Jesus is the only door into God's flock?
- How does this fit with His claim to be the only way to the Father?
- How would you lovingly explain this to a friend?

Question 2

Student Question:

Jesus contrasts His sheep, who know His voice, with strangers whose voice they will not follow (vv. 4–5). What competing voices most tempt you to follow them instead of Christ, and how can you grow more attentive to His voice?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the Shepherd's voice. "The sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow... for they do not know the voice of strangers" (vv. 4–5). Christ's sheep recognize and follow His voice amid many others.

Help students name the competing voices. The world is full of voices calling for our allegiance: the voice of culture, of advertising, of fear, of our own desires, of accusers and flatterers. Many of these voices are loud, plausible, and constant. Learning to distinguish the Shepherd's voice is a vital skill of discipleship.

Show how we learn His voice. Sheep know the shepherd's voice through familiarity, by spending time with him. We come to know Christ's voice by saturating ourselves in His word, where He speaks, and by walking with Him in prayer and obedience over time. The more familiar we are with Scripture, the more readily we recognize what is and is not His voice.

Press for specifics. Ask each student which competing voices most tempt them away from Christ and what would help them grow more attentive to His voice, more time in Scripture, more prayer, more attentiveness to the Spirit working through the word. The aim is sheep who can tell the Shepherd's voice from the strangers'.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's sheep recognizing and following His voice (John 10:4-5).
- The many competing voices of the world.
- Knowing the Shepherd's voice through familiarity with His word.
- Discernment as a fruit of walking closely with Christ.

Discussion Prompts

- What competing voices most tempt you away from Christ?
- How do we learn to recognize the Shepherd's voice?
- What would help you grow more attentive to His voice?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (v. 11). How is Jesus different from the hired hand who flees, and what does His willingness to die reveal about His heart toward us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (v. 11). Jesus contrasts Himself with the hired hand who, when the wolf comes, "flees... because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep" (vv. 12-13). The difference is ownership and love.

Draw out the contrast. The hired hand works for pay and self-interest; when danger comes, he protects himself and abandons the sheep. The good shepherd owns the sheep and loves them; when danger comes, he stands between them and the wolf, even to the point of death. Jesus is no hired hand.

Stress what His willingness to die reveals. A shepherd risking his life shows the depth of his commitment, but Jesus goes further: He lays down His life for the sheep. This is the measure of His love. He does not merely care about us from a safe distance; He gives Himself for us. The cross is the proof of the Shepherd's heart.

Apply it personally. Help students feel the love behind the doctrine. The Good Shepherd did not flee when the wolf came for us; He took the wolf's fury on Himself. This is how He feels about each of His sheep. Ask students how knowing they have such a Shepherd, one who died rather than abandon them, changes the way they trust Him in danger and difficulty.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).
- The contrast with the hired hand who flees in danger.
- The cross as the measure and proof of the Shepherd's love.
- Christ's ownership of and commitment to His sheep.

Discussion Prompts

- How is Jesus different from the hired hand?
- What does His willingness to die reveal about His heart for you?
- How does having such a Shepherd change the way you trust Him?

Question 4

Student Question:

Jesus knows His sheep by name and they know Him (v. 14). What would change in your daily life if you truly lived as one who is personally known and loved by the Shepherd?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the intimacy of the Shepherd's knowledge: "I know my own and my own know me" (v. 14). Jesus knows His sheep individually, by name (v. 3). This is not generic care but personal knowledge and love.

Help students feel the weight of being personally known. In a world where we can feel like a number, anonymous and overlooked, the Shepherd knows each of His sheep by name. He is not managing a faceless herd; He knows you, your story, your struggles, your name. This is staggering intimacy.

Draw out how this changes daily life. To live as one personally known and loved by the Shepherd is to be freed from the desperate need to be noticed by others, to face loneliness with the knowledge that we are never truly alone, and to bring our specific concerns to One who knows them already. It steadies the heart.

Press for application. Ask each student what would change in their ordinary life if they truly lived as one personally known and loved by Christ. Would they be less anxious for attention, more secure, more willing to bring their real selves to Him? Invite them to walk through this week as a named, known, loved sheep of the Good Shepherd.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Shepherd's personal, individual knowledge of His sheep (John 10:3, 14).
- Being known by name as the cure for anonymity and loneliness.
- Security and freedom that flow from being personally loved by Christ.
- Bringing our specific concerns to the One who already knows them.

Discussion Prompts

- How does it affect you to be personally known and loved by the Shepherd?
- What would change if you truly lived as one He knows by name?
- Where do you most need to feel His personal care this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus said, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (vv. 17-18). What does this teach about the cross as Jesus' free choice rather than a tragedy that overtook Him, and about His power over His own death?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus makes a remarkable claim about His death: "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again" (vv. 17-18). The cross is His free choice, and He has power over His own death and resurrection.

Correct a common misperception. The cross was not a tragedy that overtook Jesus, not a good man overpowered by His enemies. Jesus says plainly that no one takes His life from Him; He lays it down voluntarily. The soldiers and leaders were the instruments, but the initiative was His. He went to the cross by choice, in obedience to the Father and in love for the sheep.

Draw out the claim to deity. Jesus claims authority both to lay down His life and to take it up again, that is, to raise Himself. Power over one's own death and resurrection belongs to God alone. This is another quiet but profound claim to deity woven into the Shepherd discourse.

Apply it to our security and worship. Because the cross was Jesus' free, loving choice, we can never doubt His willingness to save us; He was not forced into it. And because He has authority over death, the Shepherd who died for us lives to keep us forever. Ask students how seeing the cross as Christ's free choice deepens their gratitude and trust.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as Jesus' free, voluntary choice, not a tragedy (John 10:18).
- Christ's authority over His own death and resurrection, a claim of deity.

- The Shepherd's death as an act of obedience to the Father and love for the sheep.
- The risen Shepherd living to keep His own.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Jesus laid down His life of His own accord?
- How is His authority over death a claim to deity?
- How does the cross as His free choice deepen your trust?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus spoke of "other sheep that are not of this fold" whom He must also bring, so there will be "one flock, one shepherd" (v. 16). How does this shape your vision of the church as one people gathered from every background under one Shepherd?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus speaks of "other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also... So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (v. 16). The "other sheep" point beyond Israel to the Gentiles, all who would come to Christ from every nation. The Shepherd is gathering one flock from many backgrounds.

Draw out the vision of the church. Christ's flock is not limited to one ethnicity, culture, or background. He gathers one people from every nation under one Shepherd. This is the church, the one body of Christ, united not by human similarity but by belonging to the same Lord (Ephesians 2:11–22).

Stress the unity. There is one flock and one Shepherd, not many competing flocks. The diversity of backgrounds does not fracture the church; the one Shepherd unites it. This guards against both a narrow, tribal vision of God's people and the divisions that human pride creates.

Apply it. Help students see the church as Christ intends it: one people, gathered from every background, belonging to one Shepherd. This shapes how they value fellow believers different from themselves and how they long for the lost from every nation to be brought into the fold. Ask how this vision enlarges their love for the church and the world.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Shepherd gathering one flock from many backgrounds (John 10:16).
- The church as one body united by belonging to Christ (Ephesians 2:11–22).
- Unity under one Shepherd rather than tribal division.
- A vision of God's people drawn from every nation.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the “one flock, one shepherd” shape your view of the church?
- How should this affect the way you value believers different from you?
- How does it enlarge your heart for the lost of every nation?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (v. 10), in contrast to the thief who comes to steal and destroy. What is the abundant life Jesus gives, and how is it different from what the world promises?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Jesus contrasts Himself with the thief: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly” (v. 10). The Shepherd gives not just life but life in fullness.

Define the abundant life rightly. It is not a promise of wealth, ease, or trouble-free living, the prosperity distortion. It is the rich, full life of belonging to God, of being known and loved by the Shepherd, of purpose, peace, and eternal life. It is life as it was meant to be lived, in fellowship with God, even amid hardship.

Contrast it with the world’s promise. The world, like the thief, promises life and fullness through possessions, pleasure, status, and self-indulgence, but these steal, kill, and destroy in the end. The abundant life of the Shepherd is deeper and more lasting, and it does not depend on circumstances.

Apply it. Help students examine where they have looked for abundant life in the thief’s offerings rather than the Shepherd’s. The fullness Christ gives is found in Him, in relationship, in being His sheep, not in accumulating what the world sells. Ask students what the abundant life looks like in their own experience of following the Shepherd.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The abundant life Christ gives, full life in fellowship with God (John 10:10).
- The abundant life distinguished from prosperity or ease.
- The thief’s counterfeit offer that steals, kills, and destroys.
- Fullness of life found in the Shepherd, not in worldly accumulation.

Discussion Prompts

- What is the abundant life Jesus gives?
- How is it different from what the world promises?
- Where have you sought fullness in the thief’s offerings instead?

Question 8

Student Question:

When opinions about Jesus divided the crowd, some said He had a demon and others pointed to His works (vv. 19–21). When you encounter strong division or opposition about Jesus, how do you hold steady, and what keeps you anchored?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question takes up the division Jesus' words provoked: "There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, 'He has a demon...' Others said, 'These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon'" (vv. 19–21). Strong opposition and division swirled around Jesus.

Help students recognize that division over Jesus is normal and not a sign that something has gone wrong. Wherever Christ is truly presented, people divide; some believe, some scoff, some accuse. The presence of opposition does not mean we are off track; it often means the truth is being heard.

Explore what keeps us steady amid division. The healed man of chapter 9 stayed anchored to what he knew of Christ; the sheep of chapter 10 stay anchored by knowing the Shepherd's voice. When opposition and conflicting opinions swirl, our stability comes from knowing Christ Himself, not from the absence of controversy.

Press for application. Ask students how they hold steady when faith is opposed or when strong disagreements about Jesus arise, in the culture, online, even among acquaintances. Encourage them that being anchored in the Shepherd, His word, His voice, His proven love, keeps the sheep steady when the voices around them are loud and divided.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Division over Jesus as a normal response to the truth (John 10:19–21).
- Opposition not necessarily a sign of being off track.
- Stability found in knowing Christ Himself amid controversy.
- Anchoring in the Shepherd's voice when voices are loud and divided.

Discussion Prompts

- How do you hold steady when faith is opposed or disputed?
- Why is division over Jesus not necessarily a bad sign?
- What keeps you anchored when the voices around you are loud?

Question 9

Student Question:

This is the great promise of the chapter, and it must be understood rightly: Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand” (vv. 27–28). What real security does the Shepherd give to those who hear and follow Him, and how is this assurance different from the idea that a person is eternally safe regardless of whether they continue to follow Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it requires careful, balanced handling. Jesus gives a magnificent promise: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (vv. 27–29). This is real, profound security, and the teacher should let students feel its comfort fully.

State the genuine assurance first. For those who are Christ’s sheep, the promise is unbreakable: no external enemy, no wolf, no thief, no power, can snatch them out of the Shepherd’s hand or the Father’s. The believer who follows Christ does not need to live in anxious fear that some power will steal them away from God. Christ holds His own securely, and His grip is stronger than every threat. This is wonderful, settled assurance.

Now handle the misuse carefully and kindly. Some take these verses to teach “once saved, always saved,” the idea that a person who has once believed is eternally secure no matter how they later live, even if they abandon Christ entirely. But notice what the passage actually says. The promise is given to those who “hear my voice... and follow me” (v. 27). It describes the ongoing life of a sheep that keeps following the Shepherd. It is a promise that no one will snatch the following sheep away; it is not a promise that a sheep who deliberately turns and runs from the Shepherd, refusing to follow, is still safe.

Bring in the wider testimony of Scripture to keep the balance. The same Bible that promises the security of the sheep also warns believers, soberly and repeatedly, that they must hold fast and can fall away if they turn from Christ in unbelief (Hebrews 3:12–14; 6:4–6; 10:26–31; 2 Peter 2:20–22; Galatians 5:4). Jesus Himself, later in this very Gospel, warns that a branch that does not abide in Him is cast off and burned (15:6). So the security is real and the warnings are real, and they are not contradictory: Christ faithfully keeps all who keep following Him, and no power can tear them away; but those who refuse to follow, who turn away and will not hear His voice, are not the sheep this promise protects.

Land the application in assurance, not anxiety, and not presumption. The point is not to make following Christians fearful that they might accidentally lose their salvation; the Shepherd is utterly faithful, and the trembling, following sheep is wonderfully safe. The point is to anchor our security in Christ while continuing to follow Him, and to refuse the false comfort that says we may live however we please because of a past decision. Help students rest deeply in the

Shepherd's unbreakable hold and, precisely because of that love, keep following His voice. The hand that holds us is strong; the call is to stay in it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The real, profound security of the sheep: no power can snatch them from the Shepherd's hand (John 10:28–29).
- The promise given to those who hear and follow (John 10:27), describing the ongoing life of a sheep.
- A clear rejection of “once saved, always saved” as a guarantee regardless of continued following.
- The biblical warnings that believers must hold fast and can fall away (Hebrews 3:12–14; John 15:6; Galatians 5:4).
- Christ's faithful keeping and the believer's continued following held together.
- Assurance grounded in the Shepherd, without presumption or anxiety.

Discussion Prompts

- What real security does the Shepherd give to those who follow Him?
- How is this different from the idea that one is safe regardless of whether they keep following?
- How do we rest in Christ's keeping while continuing to follow His voice?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this chapter and the voice of the Shepherd at its center. What is one specific way Jesus is forming you to hear His voice, follow Him closely, and rest in His care?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the chapter into the life of a sheep: hearing the Shepherd's voice, following Him closely, and resting in His care. These are the marks of the disciple this chapter forms.

Help students see how the three fit together. We rest in the Shepherd's care precisely because we hear His voice and follow Him. The security of the previous question is not passive; it is the experience of a sheep that keeps following the One who holds it. Hearing, following, and resting are one life.

Make it concrete. Ask each student to name one way they will grow in hearing the Shepherd's voice (perhaps a renewed habit in His word), one way they will follow Him more closely (an obedience, a turning), and one area where they most need to rest in His care rather than carry anxiety alone.

Close in the comfort of the chapter. The same Shepherd who knows them by name, who laid down His life for them, and who holds them in a hand nothing can open, is calling them by His voice. Let students leave both deeply assured of His care and freshly committed to following His voice. The Good Shepherd is faithful; the sheep are called to follow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unified life of a sheep: hearing, following, and resting in the Shepherd.
- Security experienced through continued following.
- Hearing His voice grounded in His word.
- Concrete, specific formation as the goal of the lesson.

Discussion Prompts

- How will you grow in hearing the Shepherd's voice?
- Where is He calling you to follow Him more closely?
- Where do you most need to rest in His care this week?