

LESSON 8

*February 14-20

The Good Shepherd



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 7:1–10:21.*

Memory Text: “‘I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep’” (*John 10:11, NIV*).

Key Thought: As the Good Shepherd, Jesus offers everything we need for an abundant life.

Our life springs from His death. At the direction of His Father, Jesus belatedly attends the Feast of Tabernacles at the temple in Jerusalem. He comes as the living presence of the great I AM. He offers Himself as the embodiment of the water and light that the feast celebrated (*John 7:37-39, 8:12, 9:5*), but He is largely rejected by those in attendance. Having failed to make a positive impact at the heart of the religious system, He reaches out to a blind man, an outcast of that system, and creates a living parable of the Good Shepherd, who cares for even the outcasts. In reaching out to the blind man, Jesus “showed the contrast between His own character and that of the leaders in Israel.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 477.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus offers life to those who have struggled to find it elsewhere. He promises that His sheep will “‘know his voice’” (*John 10:4, NIV*). Those who commit everything to Jesus receive the privilege of a deep and intimate relationship with Him. He is the caring Friend who will never leave us nor forsake us. He will guide us in our thoughts and impressions. And He will provide life to the full, an abundance of meaning, joy, and fulfillment.

*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 21.

SUNDAY *February 15*

The Feast of Tabernacles *(John 7 and 8).*

In John 7–10 Jesus participates in the Feast of Tabernacles at the temple in Jerusalem. His presence at the feast draws Him into repeated confrontations with the religious leadership. These confrontations are recorded in the Gospel of John, because they offer the opportunity for Jesus to clarify His mission.

In Palestine there are two basic seasons of the year, an extremely dry summer of four to five months (virtually no rain) and a rainy season of equal length spanning the winter. The Feast of Tabernacles comes at that time of year when the summer drought is usually ending (our months of September and October). The winter grains are planted and the harvest of summer fruits is celebrated.

The Feast of Tabernacles commemorated the Exodus and the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness (*Lev. 23:43*), when God provided Israel with water and light (*Exod. 13:21, 22; 17:1-7*). So two major themes of the feast were water (a water ceremony was a major feature of each day's festivities) and light (torchlight processions at night). People lived outside in temporary structures, tents made from palm branches, reminding them of God's watchcare in the wilderness. They were to remember that just as God provided water, light, and food to Israel in the wilderness, so He can provide for the needs of the present, as well.

What does Jesus offer in place of the water ceremonies of the feast?
John 7:37-39.

According to Jesus, what did the theme of light at the feast represent? *John 8:12.*

By His announcements at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus made it clear that He is what the feast was all about. The mighty acts of God celebrated at the Feast of Tabernacles become present realities in the person and teachings of Jesus. God is willing to do so much more for us than merely provide food, water, and natural light. In Christ the mighty power of the Exodus becomes real in our lives through the divine presence of the Holy Spirit. More than this, Spirit-filled Christians are enabled to pass the Spirit on to others.

Christ made statements concerning Himself (*John 7:37-39 and 8:12*). **If someone asked you what it means to do the things Jesus said here, what would you answer? How have you experienced these statements and promises in your own life? How has your life been changed by them?**

MONDAY February 16

The Great “I AM” (*John 8:24, 28, 58*).

In John 7 and 8 Jesus engages in a number of debates with His brothers, with the religious leadership, and with various segments of the crowd. One of the major features of this section is the presence of a number of special “I AM” statements on the part of Jesus.

How important does Jesus consider the “I AM” concept? What promise is found in those words? What is Jesus telling us with that claim? *John 8:24, 28, 58.*

The words “ ‘the one I claim to be’ ” in the NIV represent a helpful interpretation supplied by the translators; the original simply says “I AM.”

In the Old Testament, “I AM” statements are applied to God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus applies the “I AM” statements of the Old Testament to Himself. The future salvation that was promised in the books of the Old Testament prophets has become a present reality in Him. He is the Good Shepherd revealed in Ezekiel 34 (*John 10:11*). He is the divine One (*John 8:24, 28, 58*) who knows the future (*Isa. 46:9, 10; John 13:19*).

In Jesus’ “I AM” statements we see an assertion of His divinity. He is the Yahweh of the Old Testament, come down to shepherd His people just as He promised through the prophets. He is fully and truly God in the highest sense, even while walking on earth clothed in human flesh. He has preexisted throughout eternity (*John 8:58*).

In Christ’s “I AM” statements is the assertion that the future has become present in Christ. He can deliver the promised glories of the Old Testament future kingdom to those who believe in Him now. To be in relationship with Jesus is to have the abundance of the future kingdom now by faith. In a real sense, we are already living in heavenly places in Christ Jesus (*Eph. 2:6*). In Old Testament times God did mighty things on earth from time to time. But on account of the Cross and through the work of the Spirit, God’s mighty acts are now available everywhere to everyone who is in Christ.

Look up each of the following texts. What are they telling us about Christ? *Isa. 9:6; Mic. 5:2; John 3:13, 31, 32; Col. 1:16.* What does this truth mean to us? What does it tell us about our God?

TUESDAY February 17

An Amusing Blind Man (*John 9:1-41*).

John 9:1 through 10:21 continues John's description of events during Jesus' visit to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Jesus heals a blind man and then uses the experience as a living parable to illustrate His life and teachings.

Describe the healing and its investigation by the Pharisees in John 9:1-34. What are a few spiritual lessons we can learn from this story? In what ways can we see ourselves in the Pharisees?

By healing the man, Jesus offered a living parable to illustrate His earlier statement, "I am the light of the world" (*John 8:12, NIV; 9:5*). As the Light of the world, Jesus brings physical sight to a man who was born blind. But there is a deeper meaning behind this story.

The healing creates a serious dilemma for the Pharisees. On the one hand, the healing points to the work of a man approved by God. But by a nonemergency healing on the Sabbath, Jesus appears to be acting like a false prophet (*Deut. 13:1-5*). The humor of the story lies in its biting irony. The man who was blind sees more and more clearly that Jesus represents the true God of Israel. On the other hand, the Pharisees, who see clearly in the physical sense, and who are supposed to be the guardians of the faith of Israel, become more and more blinded to the truth about Jesus.

How does Jesus apply the living parable of the blind man's experience to the Pharisees? *John 9:39-41*.

The Pharisees' rejection of the healing symbolizes their rejection of the truth about God, which Jesus brought into the world. Their rejection was rooted in their willful blindness with regard to the claims of Jesus.

Even today, few people reject Jesus out of a lack of evidence. Usually they reject Him out of an unwillingness to let Him "tamper" with their lifestyle. It is easy to find excuses not to believe when we are protecting some cherished sin or attitude (*John 3:20, 21*). The root reality of the unbeliever is unconfessed and unforsaken sin. These things "blind" one to the truths about Jesus. How do you help someone who seems to be in this spiritual trap?

Jesus, the Good Shepherd *(John 10:1-21)*

Read John 10:1-21; in your own words, describe what Jesus is telling us here. As you read, ask yourself the following questions: (1) How many ways of salvation does Jesus present? (2) How is the great controversy illustrated here? (3) What distinguishes the shepherd from the hireling?

Verses 35-41 of chapter 9 set the stage for the Good Shepherd discourse of John 10. Jesus cares for the outcasts. When the leaders of a religious system cast people out on the basis of the leaders' enmity for Jesus, they demonstrate their own blindness (*John 9:39-41*) and give Jesus the opportunity to collect these outcasts for Himself.

John 10:1-21 is made up of two parts. First, there is the story of shepherds and their sheep (*vss. 1-5*), the closest thing to a parable in the Gospel of John. Then, Jesus reflects on the meaning of the story in verses 7-21.

What is John 10:17, 18 referring to? Does that act qualify Him as the Good Shepherd, or will this happen because He already is the Good Shepherd? Explain your answer.

Sheep pens in ancient Palestine were usually natural caves. The sheep would be led into the cave in the evening, and the shepherd would take his position at the entrance to the cave and sleep there. Any robber or wild animal that physically sought access to the sheep would have to get past the shepherd to do it. Where caves were not available, a fieldstone enclosure would be built with an opening at one end just big enough for the shepherd to block with his body as he slept. So, when Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd and as the gate for the sheep, listeners would have recognized that these concepts were two different ways of describing the same activity.

When Jesus describes Himself as the Gate through which the sheep must pass in order to be saved, He is replacing all other methods of salvation. There is no other way into the sheepfold, except by the Gate.

Read John 10:1-5. How do the sheep know the voice of the shepherd? How do you know the voice of your Shepherd, as opposed to the voice of a stranger, a hireling, or a wolf?

THURSDAY *February 19*

Hired Hands and Thieves *(John 10:1, 5, 10-13).*

What do the thieves and robbers do to the sheep? What do the hirelings do to the sheep? Contrast this to what Jesus promises to do to the sheep.

Jesus contrasts the Good Shepherd with two other types of people who relate to sheep. One type is the thieves and robbers. These invest nothing in the sheep; they are interested only in what they can gain for themselves. Jesus probably had in mind the chief priests of the temple who put on a show of piety in order to receive the offerings and fees the worshipers brought to the temple with them.

The other contrasting type is the hired hand, who does not own the sheep, and, therefore, has no personal concern for them. He watches them only to make a living. When a wild animal comes, he protects the only thing that really matters to him, which is himself. Jesus probably had in mind the Pharisees of chapter 9. Although more involved in the needs and concerns of the people than the chief priests were, they did not truly care for the sheep. They did not know them intimately nor were they willing to lay down their lives, nor even their reputations, for the sheep.

Do we see these types of people manifested in the Christian church today? If so, how are these characteristics manifested?

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus claimed the outcasts of the religious leaders for Himself (*John 9:34-38*). The Good Shepherd story was a rebuke to those who, in their rough handling of the man born blind, betrayed their true character as hired hands (*John 9:40*).

Jesus invites us to have the same kind of caring concern for others as the Good Shepherd has for His sheep. The one who truly cares about family, neighbors, and friends will never be pushy and abusive (as the Pharisees were in John 9) but will seek to act out of caring concern for the benefit of others. The world is full of sorrow, crying, pain, and dying. There is a bottomless need for people who, out of the strength they have received in Christ, will reach out to build up and encourage others. Such undershepherds will find, in this work, abundant life for themselves, as well.

Maybe we are not pastors, but in what ways can we act the part of a shepherd? How can we guard against, even unwittingly, becoming either a thief or a hireling?

Further Study: “The Pharisees had just driven one from the fold, because he dared to bear witness to the power of Christ. . . . In this they had shown themselves ignorant of the work committed to them, and unworthy of their trust as shepherds of the flock. Jesus now set before them the contrast between them and the Good Shepherd, and He pointed to Himself as the real keeper of the Lord’s flock.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 477.

Compare John 10:1-21 with two other sheep-and-shepherd stories in the Gospels (*Matt. 18:10-14 and Luke 15:3-7*). Note both the similarities between all three passages and the unique features of each. Who plays the role of shepherd in each of these other accounts, and how do the lessons of Matthew and Luke compare with the lesson of John 10?

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ How do we get the kind of discernment needed to be able to tell the difference between the true Shepherd and hirelings or even thieves?
- ❷ Compare what happens to the sheep when the hireling or the thief gets hold of them. What’s the difference?
- ❸ In what ways are sheep like or unlike human beings? Which aspect of sheep behavior is most likely to have caused Jesus to draw the analogy He did?
- ❹ Is your church a friendly place for “outcasts”? Are some types of people in your church more “acceptable” than others? Why is that so?

Summary: “Many of those who heard Jesus [at the Feast of Tabernacles in the temple] were mourners over disappointed hopes, many were nourishing a secret grief, many were seeking to satisfy their restless longing with the things of the world and the praise of men; but when all was gained, they found that they had toiled only to reach a broken cistern, from which they could not quench their thirst.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 454.

To those who have been bruised and battered by the world, the Gospel offers Jesus as the key to an abundant life (*John 10:10*). He is the Water and the Light, the Gate, and the Good Shepherd.

Out of the Muck

by JOEL SANDOVAL

For Joel and his family, life in Honduras was difficult. His father drank and often did not come home for weeks at a time. When he did, he often beat Joel, the eldest son. Joel's classmates at school took drugs and offered Joel drugs, just to try them. But Joel refused. He was not a Christian, but he knew drugs and alcohol messed up people's minds and lives, and he wanted nothing to do with them.

When Joel's father beat his mother, she often took Joel to the local church to pray. Joel sensed that religion was key to a more stable life. He began going on his own and made friends at the church. Joel wanted to know more about Jesus and God's plan for his life.

Then his father had an accident that nearly killed him. As he recovered in the hospital, he began to realize that he needed to change his life. And when Christians offered him Bible studies, he accepted.

An Adventist man visited the family and prayed with them. Joel wanted to know more about what this man's church taught. The family studied the Bible together and grew in their knowledge of God and their faith in Jesus. His father gave up his alcohol, and the family began attending the Adventist church. Soon they were baptized.

Joel was thirsty to know more about God. He studied his Bible and grew in faith and in knowledge. He became a deacon at age 14 and began to preach when the pastor was away. He became the youth leader while still a youth himself. Joel's pastor saw potential in Joel and urged the boy to consider preparing for the ministry. Joel felt unworthy of the calling, but he agreed to pray about it. Joel accepted God's call, but how could he afford university? His family was very poor.

Joel prayed that God would provide the tuition for his studies. A man who was visiting Joel's area took an interest in Joel, and told him, "If you decide to become a minister, let me know." When Joel wrote him to ask for help, the man responded that his tuition had already been paid.

Tears come to Joel's eyes when he recounts how God has changed his life. "Jesus picked me out of the pit and placed my feet on solid ground. How can I ever repay him?"



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