

The Good Shepherd



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 14

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 7–10.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I [Jesus] am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep’ ” (John 10:11, NIV).

IMPORTANT THOUGHT: As the Good Shepherd, Jesus offers us everything we need for a fruitful life.

OUR LIFE SPRINGS (COMES) FROM JESUS' DEATH. Under His Father's orders, Jesus attended the Feast of Tabernacles at the temple in Jerusalem. He went as the Living Presence of the great I AM (God). He offered Himself as the Water and Light that the feast celebrated (John 7:37-39; John 8:12; John 9:5). But the people refused to accept Him. Jesus failed to make a positive influence on the heart of the people's religious system. So He reached out to a blind man, who was an outcast¹ of that religious system. Jesus created a living parable² of the Good Shepherd, who cares for outcasts. In reaching out to the blind man, Jesus “showed the difference between His own character and the character of the religious leaders in Israel.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 477.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus offers life to people who have struggled to find life in other places. He promises that His sheep will “know his voice” (John 10:4). People who decide to obey Jesus receive a close relationship with Him. Jesus is the caring Friend who will never leave us. He will guide us in our thoughts. And He will give to each of us life, joy, and satisfaction.

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

¹outcast—a person who is not popular or accepted by other people.

²living parable—a story of things that really happened. We use a living parable to teach a truth.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 15

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES (John 7; 8).

In John 7–10, Jesus takes part in the Feast of Tabernacles at the temple in Jerusalem. Being there puts Jesus in conflict with the religious leaders. John records these conflicts, because these conflicts make Jesus' mission clearer to other people.

In Palestine, there are two seasons of the year: (1) a very dry summer of four to five months and (2) a rainy season of four to five months through the winter. The Feast of Tabernacles comes at the time of year when the summer season is coming to a close. The people have planted the winter grains and are celebrating the harvest of summer fruits.

The Feast of Tabernacles celebrated the Exodus³ and the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:43). The celebration honored God, who gave them water and light (Exodus 13:21, 22; Exodus 17:1-7). So two important themes of the feast were water and light. A water ceremony was an important part of each day's festivities. There also were torchlight marches at night. People lived outside in temporary tents made from palm branches. The tents reminded them of God's watchcare in the wilderness. The people were to remember that just as God gave them water, light, and food in the wilderness, so He can care for the needs of the present.



A tent for the Feast of Tabernacles.

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

According to Jesus, what was the light an example of? John 8:12.

Jesus made it clear that He was what the feast was all about. The powerful acts of God celebrated at the Feast of Tabernacles had become real in the person and teachings of Jesus. God is willing to do so much more for us than just give us food, water, and light. In Jesus, the mighty power of the Exodus becomes real in our lives through the Holy Spirit. God can help faithful Christians pass the Holy Spirit on to other people.

If someone asked you what it means to do the things Jesus said in John 7:37-39 and John 8:12, how would you answer? How have you experienced these promises in your life?

³Exodus—the escape of the people of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 15:5-31).

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 16

**THE GREAT “I AM”
(John 8:24, 28, 58).**

In John 7 and 8, Jesus became involved in several debates with His brothers, the religious leaders, and the different groups in the crowd. The important parts of John 8 are the “I AM” comments Jesus made.

How important is the “I AM” idea to Jesus? What promise is found in the words “I AM”? What is Jesus telling us by saying that He is the “I AM”? John 8:24, 28, 58.

The words, “the one I [Jesus] claim to be” in the NIV are a helpful interpretation. The KJV simply says, “I AM.”

In the Old Testament, “I AM” means God. In the book of John, Jesus uses the I AM of the Old Testament to mean Himself. The future salvation that was promised in the Old Testament prophets has become real through Jesus. He is the Good Shepherd shown in Ezekiel 34 (John 10:11). He is the God (John 8:24, 28, 58) who knows the future ahead of time (Isaiah 46:9, 10; John 13:19).

In Jesus’ “I AM” comments, we see a strong claim to His being God. Jesus is the Yahweh (God) of the Old Testament who has come down to shepherd His people just as He promised through the prophets. He is fully and truly God,

even while walking on earth in a human body. He has always been alive throughout eternity⁴ (John 8:58).

In Jesus’ “I AM” comments is the claim that the future has become present in Him. The people then could have the promised future glories of the Old Testament, because Jesus could deliver those glories to them. For us, to have a relationship with Jesus is to have the wealth of heaven *now* by faith. We already are living in heavenly places in Jesus (Ephesians 2:6). There is nothing out of reach to people who have a relationship with Him. In Old Testament times, God did powerful acts on earth. But because of the Cross, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, God’s powerful acts are still available everywhere to everyone who is in Jesus.



Because of the Cross, and through the work of the Holy Spirit, God’s power is still available to us.

⁴eternity—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

What do each of the following verses tell us about Jesus? Isaiah 9:6; Micah 5:2; John 3:13, 31, 32; Colossians 1:16. What do these truths mean to us? What do these truths tell us about our God?

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 17

AN INTERESTING BLIND MAN (John 9:1-41).

John 9:1 through John 10:21 continues John's description of events⁵ during Jesus' visit to the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem. Jesus heals a blind man as a living parable to explain His life and teachings.

Describe the healing and what the Pharisees⁶ did about it. John 9:1-34. What are some 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 explain his earlier comment, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12, NIV; John 9:5). As the Light of the world, Jesus helps a man who was born blind to see again. But this story has a deeper meaning.

The story creates a serious problem for the Pharisees. The healing

points to the work of a man (Jesus) who has God's approval. But by doing a nonemergency healing on the Sabbath, Jesus seems to be acting like a false prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). The story is humorous (funny), because the man who was blind sees more and more clearly that Jesus represents the true God of Israel. But the Pharisees, who can see clearly, become more blind to the truth about Jesus. And they are supposed to be the guardians of the faith of Israel!

How does Jesus use the living parable of the blind man's experience to show what the Pharisees were? John 9:39-41.

The Pharisees refused to accept the healing as the work of God. This shows they refused to accept the truth about God, which Jesus brought into the world. This also shows that they were blind to the claims of Jesus about who He was.

Even today, people refuse to accept Jesus because they are not willing to let Him "change their lifestyle." It is easy to find excuses not to believe when we are protecting some cherished sin or attitude⁷ (John 3:20, 21). The real problem of the unbelievers is unconfessed⁸ sin they cannot

⁵events—things that happen.

⁶Pharisees—religious leaders of Jesus' day who believed a person must keep God's law to be saved.

⁷attitude—how you feel and think about something or someone.

⁸unconfessed—when we refuse to admit our sins and say that we want to stop sinning.

let go. Unconfessed sins “blind” one to the truths about Jesus. How do you help someone who will not confess⁹ their sins?

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 18

JESUS, THE GOOD SHEPHERD (John 10:1-21).

Read John 10:1-21. Describe what Jesus is telling us here. As you read, ask yourself the following questions: (1) How many ways of salvation does Jesus offer? (2) How is the great controversy¹⁰ shown in these verses? (3) What separates the shepherd from the person hired to care for sheep?

John 9:35-41 introduces the Good Shepherd sermon of John 10. Jesus cares for outcasts. The leaders of a religious system throw people out because the leaders hate Jesus. When they throw people out, they show their own blindness (John 9:39-41). And they give Jesus the opportunity to collect these outcasts for Himself.

John 10:1-21 has two parts. First, there is the story of shepherds and their sheep (John 10:1-5). This is the closest thing to a parable¹¹ in the book of John. Second, Jesus explains the meaning of the story in John 10:7-21.

What act is John 10:17, 18 speaking about? Does that act qualify Jesus as the Good Shepherd? Or will this act happen because He already is the Good Shepherd? Explain your answer.

Sheep pens in old Palestine were natural caves. The shepherd would lead the sheep into the cave in the evening. Then the shepherd would take his position at the opening of the cave and sleep there. Any robber or wild animal that tried to get to the sheep would have to get past the shepherd. When caves were not available, a pen with walls would be built with an opening at one end. The opening would be just big enough for the shepherd to block with his body as he slept. Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd and as the Gate for the sheep. So listeners would have known that these ideas were two different ways of describing the same work.

Jesus describes Himself as the Gate that the sheep must go through to be saved. This means He is replacing all other methods of salvation. There is no other way into the sheepfold (pen), except by the gate. There is no other way we can be saved.

Read John 10:1-5. How do the sheep know the voice of the shepherd? How do you know the voice of your Shepherd?

⁹confess—to admit that you have sinned.

¹⁰the great controversy—the great struggle (war) between Jesus and Satan.

¹¹parable—a short fiction (did not really happen) story that teaches a truth. For example, read Luke 15:8-10. This story did not really happen. But Jesus told this story to teach us about the joy of salvation.



Jesus is the Good Shepherd
whom we want to follow.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 19

HIRED HANDS (WORKERS) AND THIEVES (John 10:1, 5, 10-13).

What do the thieves do to the sheep? What do the hired workers do to the sheep? How is this different from what Jesus promises to do to the sheep?

Jesus contrasts¹² the Good Shepherd with two other kinds of people who work with sheep. One kind of people is the same as the thieves. They invest nothing in the sheep. They are interested only in what they can get for themselves. The thieves were like the chief priests of the temple who pretended to be holy so they would receive the offerings and fees the worshipers brought.

The other people are the same as the hired workers, who do not own the sheep. So they have no personal inter-

est in the sheep. They watch the sheep only to make money. When a wild animal comes, they protect the only thing that is really important to them—themselves. The hired hands were like the Pharisees of John 9. The Pharisees were more involved in the needs and interests of the people than the chief priests were. But the Pharisees did not truly care for the people. They did not know the people closely. They were not willing to give up their lives for the people.

Do we see these kinds of people in the church today? If so, how do they show their character?

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus claimed the outcasts (John 9:34-38). The Good Shepherd story was a rebuke (scolding) to the Pharisees who showed their true character as hired workers. The Pharisees showed their true character when they handled the blind man roughly (John 9:40).

Jesus invites us to show the same kind of care for other people as the good shepherd does for his sheep. People who truly care about family, neighbors, and friends will never be pushy and abusive as the Pharisees were in John 9. People who care will work to show that they care about other people. The world is full of sorrow, crying, pain, and death. There is a great need for people who, with Jesus' help, will reach out to build up and encour-

¹²contrasts—shows how things are different.

age other people. Such people will find, in this work, a fruitful life for themselves.

In what ways can we do the work of a shepherd? How can we guard against becoming either a thief or a hired hand?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 20

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The Pharisees had just driven out the blind man. Why? He dared to talk about the power of Jesus. . . . The Pharisees showed they failed to understand the work given to them. They were not worthy to be shepherds of the flock. Jesus now set before them the big difference between them and the Good Shepherd. He pointed to Himself as the real keeper of God’s flock.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 477.

Read Matthew 18:11-14; Luke 15:3-7. Who plays the part of the shepherd in each of these other stories? How do the lessons of Matthew and Luke compare¹³ with the lesson of John 10:1-21?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How do we get the kind of wisdom we need to be able to tell the difference between the true Shepherd and hired workers and thieves?
2. Contrast¹⁴ what happens to the sheep when the hired worker or the thief becomes responsible for the sheep.

¹³Compare—show how things are the same.

¹⁴Contrast—show how things are different.

3. In what ways are sheep the same as humans? How are sheep different from humans? Which part of sheep behavior (action) may have caused Jesus to say we are the same as sheep?
4. Is your church a friendly place for outcasts? Are some kinds of people in your church more “acceptable” than other kinds of people? Why is that so? What can your church do to be more friendly to outcasts?

SUMMARY: “Many of the people who heard Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles in the temple were sad because of disappointed hopes. Many people were hiding a secret grief. Many people were trying to satisfy their desire for the things of the world and the praise of people. But when they got all their desires, they found that they had received no satisfaction.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 454.

Many people have been beaten by life. But the book of John offers Jesus as the key to a better life (John 10:10). Jesus is the Water and Light, the Gate and the Good Shepherd.

