

Firm Foundation Bible Study
TOPIC: Following the Example of the Great Shepherd
Exegesis of John 10:11-15

John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12) But he who is a hireling and 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. 13) The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14) I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15) As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

Context and Setting

John 10 follows Jesus’ confrontation with the Pharisees in John 9, where He healed a man born blind. The Pharisees’ spiritual blindness and lack of compassion exposed their false shepherding. This background informs the metaphor of the *good shepherd*, contrasting Jesus’ self-giving leadership with the self-serving religious leaders of the time.

- **Cultural backdrop:**
Shepherd imagery was common in Jewish life and Scripture. Shepherds lived among their sheep, led them personally, and protected them from danger.
 - OT references: Psalm 23 (“The Lord is my shepherd”), Ezekiel 34 (God condemns Israel’s false shepherds and promises to raise up one true shepherd).
- **Apostle John’s theme:**
John consistently presents Jesus as both the *revealer of God* and *the fulfillment* of Israel’s hopes—thus, Jesus isn’t merely *like* a shepherd but *the* Shepherd promised by God Himself.

2. Verse-by-Verse

Verse 11 — “I am the good shepherd.”

- The Greek phrase **ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός** (**egō eimi ho poimēn ho kalos**) uses the emphatic “I AM” (ἐγὼ εἰμι), echoing the divine self-identification of Yahweh in Exodus 3:14 (“I AM WHO I AM”).
- **“Good” (kalos)** means more than morally upright—it conveys beauty, worthiness, and authenticity. Jesus is the *noble, ideal, and authentic* shepherd.
- Jesus fulfills the prophecy of **Ezekiel 34:23–24**, where God says, “I will set up one shepherd over them—My servant David.”

Theological insight:

Jesus identifies Himself as the divine Shepherd, not merely a teacher or prophet. His character and mission reflect God’s own care and covenantal faithfulness.

Verse 11b — “The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”

- **“Gives” (τίθησιν, tithēsín)** means “to lay down” or “to place.” This is *voluntary sacrifice*, not mere martyrdom.
- Jesus anticipates His death on the cross—an act of substitutionary atonement.
- Unlike hired laborers, the true shepherd risks and surrenders His life because of *love* and *ownership* of the flock.

Cross reference:

John 15:13 — “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”

Isaiah 53 — The Suffering Servant who bears the iniquities of many.

Verses 12–13 — The Hireling

“But he who is a hireling and not the shepherd... leaves the sheep and flees...”

- **Hireling (μισθωτός, *misthōtos*)** — literally “one hired for wages.” This figure represents leaders who serve for personal benefit, not covenantal love. When danger comes, their lack of commitment is exposed.
- The **wolf** symbolizes destructive forces—false teaching, persecution, or Satan himself (cf. Matt. 7:15).
- The contrast emphasizes relational *ownership* and *devotion*—the good shepherd *owns* and *knows* his sheep; the hireling merely performs a function.

Pastoral application:

Ministry done for reward, recognition, or convenience collapses under pressure. True shepherding demands sacrifice born of love, not duty.

Verse 14 — “I know My sheep, and am known by My own.”

- The Greek **γινώσκω (*ginōskō*)** implies intimate, experiential knowledge—not just awareness.
- Jesus’ relationship with His people mirrors the mutual knowledge between Him and the Father (v. 15).
- This describes *reciprocal relationship*—a covenantal knowing that defines Christian discipleship.

Cross reference:

2 Timothy 2:19 — “The Lord knows those who are His.”

John 17:3 — “This is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Verse 15 — “As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

- Jesus grounds His shepherding in the **divine relationship** between Himself and the Father.
- His knowledge of the Father ensures His obedience, love, and mission.
- The repetition of “I lay down My life” reinforces the *voluntariness* of His sacrifice (expanded again in vv. 17–18).

Christological significance:

Jesus’ willingness to die is not weakness but divine authority expressed through love. The shepherd’s death secures the life of the flock.

3. Themes

a. Sacrificial Love

Jesus’ self-giving reveals the divine nature as love-in-action. The cross is the fullest expression of God’s shepherding heart.

b. Covenant Relationship

The shepherd–sheep bond is covenantal. Knowing and being known by Christ marks true discipleship, contrasting superficial religious affiliation.

c. Leadership and Integrity

The passage rebukes spiritual leaders who serve out of obligation or self-interest. True ministry requires ownership, intimacy, and sacrifice.

d. Christ’s Divinity and Authority

The “I AM” declaration and the voluntary laying down of life affirm Jesus as God incarnate, exercising authority over life and death (cf. John 10:18).

4. Practical Insights

1. **Christ’s model of care** — Ministry flows from relationship, not transaction.
2. **Spiritual security** — Believers can rest in the Shepherd who never abandons His flock.

3. **Call to imitation** — Christian leaders are called to shepherd with Christlike compassion and courage.
4. **Identity in Christ** — To be “known” by Jesus is to live under His personal, attentive care.

Summary

John 10:11–15 presents one of the most intimate portraits of Jesus: the *Good Shepherd* who knows, loves, protects, and dies for His sheep. In contrast to hirelings, His leadership is marked by *sacrificial love* and *divine intimacy*. This passage invites believers not only to trust in His protection but to reflect His shepherding heart in serving others.

Biblical References

Holy Bible, New King James Version. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982.

Cross-references: Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34:1–24; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:1–4; Zechariah 11:17; John 9:35–41; John 15:13–14; 1 Peter 2:25; Hebrews 13:20; Revelation 7:17.

II. Greek and Lexical Resources

Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene A. Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989.

Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Vol. 1. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964.

III. Commentaries on the Gospel of John

Barclay, William. *The Gospel of John*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975.

Brown, Raymond E. *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 1: Chapters 1–12*. Anchor Yale Bible 29. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

Bruce, F. F. *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983.

Carson, D. A. *The Gospel According to John*. Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Keener, Craig S. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Vol. 1. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003.

Köstenberger, Andreas J. *John*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Morris, Leon. *The Gospel According to John*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971.

Schnackenburg, Rudolf. *The Gospel According to St. John*. Vol. 2. New York: Crossroad, 1982.

IV. Theological and Historical Works

Aquinas, Thomas. *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers*. Vol. 6. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1845.

Augustine. *Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 46*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 7. Edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics*. Vol. IV/2. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958.

Bavinck, Herman. *Reformed Dogmatics*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

Calvin, John. *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*. Translated by William Pringle. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949.