

***“Following Jesus”***  
**Stewarding the Presence Series, Part 10**

Three recruiters were to address high school seniors. Each recruiter represented a branch of the military (the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps) and was to have fifteen minutes. The Army and Navy recruiters got carried away, so when it came time for the Marine to speak, he had just two minutes. He walked up and stood utterly silent for a full sixty seconds, half of his time. Then he said, “I doubt whether there are two or three of you in this room who would even stand a chance in the Marine Corps. But I want to see those two or three immediately in the dining hall when we are dismissed.” He turned smartly and sat down. When he arrived in the dining hall, there was a crowd of students interested in the Marines. The recruiter knew that commitment cannot take place without recognizing the potential for difficulty.

When you and I decided to follow Jesus, we signed up to give our all to Him. The call of the Christian life is a call to die to self. Praise God, He is easy to love and easy to place our trust in Him because He is so good and so big. However, we have an unrelenting enemy whose sole desire is to destroy our relationship with the Father. We are going to see today from John chapter 10, that Jesus brings life, and the thief only comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

We are in part ten of our series through the Gospel of John. The whole purpose of this series is to learn from Jesus and study how He was able to keep an abiding relationship with the Father in all He encounter while on earth. In John chapter 10 Jesus is continuing through the opposition of the Pharisees and religious leaders. There is no break from chapter nine where we see the man healed who was born blind. Jesus is battling against phony pharisees who only care about the law and looking good before men. So, Jesus uses an analogy to explain the hardness of the heart. Jesus was a Master at using imagery that people could relate to in order to make a powerful Spiritual point. In this case He uses sheep.

I’m not an expert in shepherding but I did some study on what shepherding sheep would have been like in Jesus’ day. I have a picture here for you of what a sheepfold would have looked like in the days of Jesus. I found that there were two types of sheep folds or enclosures. The first is the kind that in within the city in personal property. The second kind is a larger enclosure on the countryside. These were more of community enclosures where multiple shepherds could keep their sheep together for the night. A watchman would stand guard all night long to guard against thieves and predatory animals. In the morning, the shepherds would come to the sheep gate and speak to their sheep. The sheep belonging to that shepherd would recognize the voice and begin to follow the shepherd.

Sheep knew the Master’s voice. It is like our dogs today. They not only know our voice, but they know the tone of our voice. We don’t talk to our dogs normally. We say all kinds of baby voices to our dogs and spoil them. But if they do something bad like chew up a pillow like my 5-month-old puppy the tone changes. We say, “Who did this?” In a deeper stern voice. I heard one story from an author of Old Testament studies that one day he was out on a pasture and there was a simple sheep enclosure. It was made out of rocks, dead branches, and other materials. The author noticed that there was no gate, just an opening. He asked why there wasn’t a gate and the Shepherd responded, “I am the gate.” He proceeded to demonstrate. The shepherd laid down at

the opening and in a sense became the door. No sheep could leave without getting past the shepherd. No predator could get to the sheep except through the shepherd.

Jesus is contrasting who He is and what the true intentions of the Pharisees were. They were fake shepherds who really didn't care about the sheep. Jesus was willing to lay down His life. Sheep are really dumb and defensiveness. They literally have no defensive without a human. It is not just that it is a good idea to follow the Good Shepherd, without following the Shepherd the sheep would die. Think about how King David before facing Goliath described why he was not afraid. He said he killed a lion and a bear to protect the sheep. Likewise, following Jesus is simply not an option. In the way Jesus abided in the Father, you and I must abide in Him. So, let's pick up the story in John chapter 10 beginning in verse 1:

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. 2 But he who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them. 7 So Jesus said to them again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. 11 “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. 12 He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.” 19 A division occurred again among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them were saying, “He has a demon and is insane. Why do you listen to Him?” 21 Others were saying, “These are not the sayings of one demon-possessed. A demon cannot open the eyes of the blind, can he?”— John 10:1-21 NASB1995*

The first church I served in back in 1999-2007 was a mega-church and they used John 10:10 as the mission statement. This church's mission was “Helping People find Christ, and live life to its fullest.” Since that time serving at that church, I have always referred to the “thief” in John 10:10 as the devil. The devil is an enemy, he is a robber, he is a thief. But in the context of John chapters 9 and 10 I believe Jesus is referring more to the pharisees and their evil intentions. Jesus is being clear that He is the only way and the only true Shepherd for God's people. Notice there was a need to have to say this because people were being led astray both with legalism with the Law and with secular Greek influence. Whenever there is a popular figure, there are going to be

copycats trying to think they are something. In Acts the religious leaders said, “If this movement is not of God, it will fall apart like the others. But if it is from God, there is nothing we can do about it.

Let me ask you a question this morning, how well are you following Jesus today? We know that we have so many attacks and distractions from the enemy, but we can also fail at following Jesus because of our sin, laziness, or fear. Salvation is free but following Jesus will cost you everything. Let’s look at a few things that will keep you from following Jesus, like Jesus followed the Father.

*You Fail to Follow Jesus When You Fail to Give Him...*

**POINT #1 – Your Time.**

In verses 3-4 it says that the Sheep know the voice of the Good Shepherd and follow Him. The Greek word for “know” here is translated “to perceive.” It means that they hear clearly and understand what Jesus is saying to them. Sheep can understand the voice of the shepherd because there is history between the sheep and the shepherd. If you truly want to follow Jesus, you have to give Him this very costly thing called you time. The thieves and robber could not get sheep to follow them because they have no history with the sheep. The sheep do not know their voice. You don’t want to be a robber or thief and try to get form God without any history or intimacy.

I have a picture here for you. We get 168 hours in the week. We sleep a third of that, or 56 hours. We work 40 hours of what’s left. Then we have 56 hours of stuff like errands to run, kids to taxi, and houses to clean. Somehow in all of that we need to make time for God. Sadly, many wait until there’s barely any time left before spending tie with God. According to Lifeway Research the average Christian spends only 27 minutes with God in the week. You are tired, worn out, and honestly probably not that focused. I’m not a genius but I know that if you only spend 27 minutes a week doing anything, you won’t get better at that. If I only spent 27 minutes a week with my wife, we wouldn’t have the best relationship. I can’t preach to you enough about the power of time with God. In order to stay close to the voice of Jesus it will require time. Which means it is going to require you to plan.

I say often that there is power in a lot of little things adding up to a big thing. There are so many pockets of time throughout the day where you can pray, worship, or study the Word. If you are struggling in this area, I want to encourage you to make small measurable goals. Why are small measurable goals important? Let me give you an example. When I counsel married people who are struggling in their relationship, I will work to install hope as quickly as possible. I like to give them a small measurable goal they can accomplish that day. Because if they can accomplish one thing...they can accomplish many things. But you need that victory under your belt to instill hope which is a powerful motivator for faith. Make small goals with consistency (that’s the key) and then expand from there. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 5:15-17:

***15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. – Ephesians 5:15-17 NASB1995***

## **POINT #2 – Your Treasures.**

The pharisees would not follow Jesus. They were offended and wanted Jesus dead. Why? Because Jesus was attacking their treasure. Their treasure was the Law, their treasure was their outward appearance. When this was attacked, they wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Some scholars believe the book of Job is actually the oldest written book in the Bible. In this account we see the devil saying that Job only serves God because of all his stuff. If you take all that away he would curse God. We all know the story and Job remained faithful when everything was taken from him. I am hoping that you and I can be the same. That we can easily give God our treasure and not make our stuff, our opinions, or our calling more important than God. It is easy to say, “Those things are definitely not more important than God.” But the proof is in the pudding. Do you stress out, fall apart emotionally when something bad happens in your life? Do you question God’s goodness when you see evil in the world? Matthew 6:19-21 says this:

***19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. – Matthew 6:19-21 NASB1995***

## **POINT #3 – Your Traumas.**

Let’s be honest, many of us do not follow Jesus fully because of fear. And there is fear only because you are not fully convinced that God is in control. We are not convinced of His protection. As long as there is a devil on this planet, there will be difficulties, evil, and trauma. Jesus said, “the thief comes only to kill, steal, and destroy but I have come that they may have life and life in abundance.” Notice the tension. The enemy will try to steal and kill at the same time that Jesus is giving life. We have to have comfortable being uncomfortable. We need to have joy and confidence in the middle of suffering. Jesus says this in Luke 9:23:

***23 And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. – Luke 9:23 NASB1995***

There is a large presence-driven church in California that learned something cool during covid. As you can imagine, covid was way harder for churches in California than here in Texas. One of the things this church did was to do church old school revival style with a very, very large tent. The pastor said, “It was cold, it was raining, there were no sides to the tent, the tent leaked in different spots. There were children in multiple layers of blankets. And it was *packed*. There was a fresh desperation. People were not in air conditioning, or comfortable chairs, they were cold and wet, but they were doing it for the Lord.” We have to be careful in our comfort that we forget to live as a sacrifice and to strive (in a good way) for more of the Lord.

Now, hear me clearly, comfort in itself is not a bad thing. The Holy Spirit Himself is called the Comforter. The reason Holy Spirit is called Comforter is because as a believer that lays their life down...they’re gonna need comfort! They are going to need comfort in crisis, chaos, and

courage. Comfort is not the problem, it's when we desire to live in comfort and never leave it. When we do this, we go from being comforted to living complacent.

When you decide to follow Jesus fully like He followed the Father it is going to cost you something. It will require taking risks in the faith. It will require you to be severely *uncomfortable* at times. But it is always worth it when we sacrifice for Jesus. It is always worth it when we step out in obedience and faith even when it is scary or uncomfortable.

So, what do we do about this? You turn complacency around with expectancy. Information has choked out desperation.

***Expectancy, in a biblical context, refers to the anticipation and hope that believers hold regarding the fulfillment of God's promises and the unfolding of His divine plan. This concept is deeply rooted in the faith and trust that God's word is true and that His promises will come to pass. Expectancy is a vital aspect of the Christian life, encouraging believers to live in a state of readiness and hope. – Topical Bible Encyclopedia***

Have you ever heard of a person bringing a suitcase to their baptism? There was a Texas pastor named Jim Denison who when he was in college, served as a summer missionary in East Malaysia. While there he attended a small church. At one of the church's worship services, a teenage girl came forward to announce her decision to follow Christ and be baptized. During the service, Denison noticed some worn-out luggage leaning against the wall of the church building. He asked the pastor about it. The pastor pointed to the girl who had just been baptized and told Denison, "Her father said that if she was baptized as a Christian she could never go home again. So, she brought her luggage."