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Lesson 1



Lesson 1: Jesus is our Gate and Good Shepherd



Bible Verses: John 10:1-18, Romans 1:16



Bottom Line: Jesus knows us, loves us, and guides us to good things.



Topics: Knowing Jesus, Following Jesus, Pharisees

introduction

We are so excited that you've joined us for this Bible study all about the seven "I am" statements of Jesus.

What does that mean?

Jesus uses these "I am" statements to describe himself in the Gospel of John.

They aren't the only statements Jesus uses to describe himself, but these are some of the most "famous," or well-known ones, in the Bible.

These statements are all metaphors, but unlike many of the parables, Jesus explains exactly what he means right after he says them.

Jesus uses these statements to illustrate who he is as well as how he relates to both the Father and to us.

Jesus is also intentional about using the phrase "I am" – it's the same phrase that God used when He revealed Himself to Moses centuries before!

This Bible study will help us dive deeper into the character and purpose of Jesus as we explore the beautiful pictures that he paints of himself.

LESSON

This week, we're starting with two "I am" statements that include shepherding imagery.

While we may not be very familiar with shepherding practices, Jesus' audience absolutely would have been!

As we see in scripture, Jesus often used nature and agricultural imagery in his teachings because those were things his audience would be able to understand and relate to.

Don't worry if you've never herded sheep before.

We'll talk about the shepherding practices in today's passages.

Let's dive in!

[Have a student open in prayer if desired.]

Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe yourself using an "I am" statement?
2. What do you know about sheep and/or shepherding?
3. Why do you think Jesus describes himself to us using metaphors?

Read **John 10:1-5** (New Living Translation) – The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

1 "I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber!

2 But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.

3 The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

4 After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice.

5 They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."

Spoiler alert – we are the sheep in today's passages!

Being called a sheep can have a negative connotation.

Today, the term "sheep" usually means someone who is meek and just blindly follows the crowd — someone who conforms.

However, that's not the context of the word "sheep" in this passage.

We see that the sheep here can discern the voice of the gatekeeper and will only follow him.

The sheep know their gatekeeper and won't blindly follow just anyone.

Let's discuss this passage to see what it means for us to be the sheep.

Discussion Questions

1. In these verses, Jesus mentions a thief/robber trying to get to the sheep to harm them. What forces might be trying to harm us?
2. Why are the sheep able to recognize the shepherd's voice?
3. If Jesus is the Shepherd and we are the sheep, how are WE able to recognize Jesus' voice?
4. Verse 3 also says that the shepherd knows each sheep by name. What does it mean to you that Jesus calls you to him by name?
5. Not only do the sheep recognize the shepherd's voice, but they also follow the shepherd and will run away from strangers they don't recognize. Why might they follow the shepherd instead of strangers? What do these verses mean for us?

In these verses, we see that Jesus calls us by name and leads us.

He knows us deeply and wants a relationship with us – Jesus isn't sitting off in the distance hoping we will find our way to him someday.

He calls us by name and seeks us out!

And the more we listen to Jesus, the easier it will be to hear his voice.

Now, let's read more about what happens when we follow him.

Read **John 10:6-10** (New Living Translation) – The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

6 Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant,

7 So he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.

8 All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them.

9 Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures.

10 The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

As we can see, the audience doesn't immediately understand, and so Jesus explains further.

There are a lot of portions of scripture both in the Old and New Testaments where somebody doesn't understand right away, and God doesn't say, "Oh well, that was your one chance. Too bad."

Jesus explains things to his audience in this passage, and he wants us to understand, too.

The audience here would have included normal people as well as Pharisees, the religious leaders at the time who held onto their power through corruption and manipulation.

Pharisees were in charge of upholding God's law and commandments, which at face value is a good thing.

However, we see in scripture that the Pharisees often saw their oral tradition as equal to God's written law.

They upheld the traditions they created at an equal weight with God's divine law.

Jesus called them hypocrites because the Pharisees were so intent on enforcing every detail of the law to show their righteousness before the common people, but they didn't ever focus on mercy and justice.

Christians today do this as well (and we sometimes do this, too) – checking off “faithful things” and appearing righteous to others but not being focused on loving God and loving others.

This isn't how God wants us to live out our faith.

Luckily, by following Jesus, we can learn to live out our faith in the way God wants.

Now, Jesus goes deeper into the differences between the thieves and robbers and the Gate.

Discussion Questions

1. Now, knowing the audience of this passage, who would the thieves and robbers be?
2. Looking at Verse 8, why did the true sheep ignore the thieves and robbers? If we are Jesus' sheep, how can we avoid listening to the “thieves and robbers” in our lives?
3. In this time period, sheep pens were constructed with only one entrance, and the shepherd would stand in it – the shepherd was the door itself! If we look at Verse 9, it says that those who come through the gate will be saved and find good pastures. What might these good pastures be? What does it mean to “be saved” (in your own words)?
4. Why is Jesus the only Gate through which we can be saved?
5. What is a rich and satisfying life found in Jesus? Does this differ from what culture says is a rich and satisfying life, and if so, how?

In this passage, we have the first “I am” statement of Jesus.

He calls himself, "The Gate."

Through Jesus, we are led into good pastures, which is a metaphor for a rich and satisfying life.

Good pastures are safe and have food and water for the sheep.

We know that the world's picture of a rich and satisfying life can be literal riches, fame, success, a family, good friends, and more.

And not all these things are bad things, right?

It's important to remember that the satisfying life we picture might not look exactly like the one God has for us – and that's okay!

We can trust in Jesus and his plan for us because he loves us.

Now, let's look into the second "I am" statement in today's lesson to see how Jesus loves us – Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

Read **John 10: 11-18** (New Living Translation) – The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.

12 A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock.

13 The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me,

15 just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.

16 I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

17 “The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again.

18 No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.”

Shepherding was a dangerous profession because you had to fend off robbers and wild animals that were trying to get to the sheep.

Remember in 1 Samuel 17 when David convinced Saul to let him fight Goliath because he said he killed lions and bears to protect his flock?

Jesus takes it one step further when he says he sacrifices his life for his sheep.

He doesn't abandon the sheep when they are under attack.

He protects them.

Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to you that Jesus sacrificed his life for you?
2. What does this passage say about why Jesus sacrificed his life for us?
3. In this lesson today, we've read that Jesus knows us and calls us by name, and in Verse 14, it says that the sheep also know the shepherd. What does it mean to truly know Jesus? What is the difference between knowing things about Jesus and knowing Jesus himself?
4. Jesus says that there are other sheep not in this sheepfold and that they will join up to become one flock. If Jesus is speaking to Jews in this passage, who are the sheep in the sheepfold already, and who are the sheep that will join? Let's read Romans 1:16 to find out.
5. Verses 17-18 close out our reading for today and highlight how Jesus' sacrifice was voluntary – he chose to die for our sins and had the power to be resurrected! What does it mean to you that Jesus chose to sacrifice himself for you?
6. Thinking back to all we have read and talked about today, what is one thing that stands out to you? How can you apply what you have learned this week?

Out of his love, Jesus sacrificed his life for us so that we could have a relationship with God.

He knows us and loves us.

When we think about knowing Jesus, it can be easy to feel like we know him well simply because we've gone to church a lot or know lots of bible verses.

But as we've discussed, just being around "Jesus-things" doesn't mean we know Jesus himself.

That's like if we had a friend we hung out with a lot but never actually talked to them!

Or every time we were around them, we told them everything on our minds but never stopped to listen to what they had to say.

There are lots of ways to get to know Jesus.

A great start is that when you are praying or reading scripture, make sure you spend time listening for Jesus and what he might tell you – not just having a one-sided conversation.

You can also ask Jesus to reveal himself to you in your life.

Jesus is always working in our lives, and it's a great prayer to ask to see clearly what God is doing!

What's also amazing is that God wants a relationship with all people!

We talked about how Jesus would be gathering more sheep into the sheepfold.

Hundreds and hundreds of years before Jesus, God promised Abraham that his descendants would be God's chosen and special people.

Up until Jesus' time on earth, only the Jewish people had a special relationship with God.

But because of Jesus' sacrifice for all people, everyone – regardless of whether they were Jewish (and descended from Abraham) – could be saved!

Romans 1:16 means not only Greek people could now be a part of the sheepfold, but also that all Gentiles could now have a relationship with God.

We get to be a part of this sheepfold, too.

We've learned a lot about how Jesus is the Gate and our Good Shepherd – the first two “I Am” statements of this Bible study.

These pictures that Jesus paints of himself illustrate just how much he loves us!

Next week, we'll be reading about Jesus as the Light of the World and the True Vine.

[Have a student close in prayer.]