

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

John 10:1-13 (Key verse 11b)

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Today's message is the third special lecture to prepare ourselves spiritually for 2022. Can you still remember what the other two special lectures were about? Yes, the first lecture was based on Daniel 3, through which we learned from shp Desmond that the Lord our God is able to save us from any situation, challenge or danger we may face this year. Then last week, shp Khomo encouraged us based on Mathew 6 with the second special lecture, by telling us not to worry about our lives in 2022. Instead of worrying, we must seek God first. For God knows what we need and will surely take care of us this year. Through these two lectures, I believe God planted the seed of faith in our hearts, to confidently look ahead at all that await us in 2022.

The focus of today's passage is different. In today's passage we want to think about the attitude of the Good Shepherd towards the sheep. The Good Shepherd has **the right attitude towards the sheep. An attitude of laying down his life for the sheep.** This attitude is the exact same attitude Jesus has towards sinners like you and me. It is an attitude that God wants you and me, as spiritual leaders, to imitate as we look after those under our care. May Jesus' Good Shepherd heart, move our hearts today, so we too can be **Good Shepherds** in 2022 for those God has placed under our care. Amen!

Let's look at verses 1-2. Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. Jesus wanted to explain to the Pharisees, how to be good spiritual leaders for people under their care. So he used this extended metaphor of sheep, the Good Shepherd, and the thief and robber. Unlike the Pharisees, I am no expert when it comes to sheep or being a shepherd; in the literal sense of the word. I, therefore, had absolutely no framework within which to understand this metaphor. But after doing a bit of research this week, I realised a crucial fact in understanding this metaphor. **To be a Good Shepherd is very difficult! There are 4 reasons for this.**

Firstly, **to be a Good Shepherd is very difficult, because it requires selflessness.** As we know, sheep are **weak in nature.** Most animals have some form of defence mechanism against those who want to harm them. But sheep have nothing at all. They do not have claws or sharp teeth. With their short legs and woolly bodies they can't even run away when predators attack. All they can do is huddle up in a group, crying out in fear! **Then the shepherd must put his OWN LIFE on the line to chase the ferocious predator away.** This requires selflessness.

Secondly, **to be a Good Shepherd is very difficult, because sheep requires CONSTANT personal love and care. Let me explain. Did you know that sheep can..... at any time.... suffer from one or more of 70 different diseases!!** They get abscesses in their mouths.....abscesses in their hooves and lymph nodes. Blowfly maggots can infest the flesh of the sheep to make them suffer from fly strike. They suffer from **worm** infections, **bacterial** infections, measles, milk fever, pink eyes, rabies, club lamb fungus, wool rot, sore mouths and..... the list goes on and on!!¹ Unless, a shepherd sees and treats a sick sheep, it will die. So the shepherd must constantly observe every sheep in the flock, to ensure they are healthy at all the times. This requires **CONSTANT personal love and care.**

Thirdly, **to be a Good Shepherd is very difficult, because** it requires a lot of patience. Did you know that sheep are stubbornly wayward and directionless! This means they **easily wander off and get lost.** Even if you put

¹ <http://www.sheep101.info/201/diseasesa-z.html#:~:text=Sheep%20can%20be%20infected%20with,types%20C%20%26%20D%20and%20tetanus.>

sheep in an absolutely perfect environment with everything they need (things like green pastures and still waters), sooner or later they will just wander off on their own. Moreover, sheep have a strong instinct to follow the sheep in front of them. When one sheep decides to go somewhere, the rest of the flock usually follows, even if they all go in the wrong direction.² So the shepherd must be patiently keep an eye out for straying sheep, and gently bring them back to safety. This requires **a lot of patience**.

Lastly, to be a Good Shepherd is very difficult, because it is a huge responsibility to nourish and feed sheep. You see, sheep need plenty of water and pastures. Yet, they do not know where to find it themselves. So the shepherd, must daily lead the sheep out to green pastures and cool waters. Then he must bring them safely back to the protection of the sheep pen. If he fails to do so, they will get sick and surely die. So we can see, to be a Good Shepherd **is a matter of life or death.....and therefore a huge responsibility**.

The point is, to be a Good Shepherd is very difficult! So, to be a Good Shepherd, requires an extraordinary attitude....or should I say.....heart.....towards the sheep to bear with them, love them, care for them and serve them. Isn't it? What makes things even more difficult is the fact that sheep cannot repay a Good Shepherd for all his effort, sacrifices and trouble of taking care of them!!! Consequently, many who enjoyed the title of a "shepherd" were in fact thieves and robbers. Though they pretended to have the right attitude towards the sheep, in reality they cared nothing for the sheep. They cared only about themselves and how they can personally benefit from the sheep. They secretly enjoyed **eating curds** made from the sheep's milk.....and secretly clothed themselves with the wool from the sheep. While out in the open field they slaughtered the choice animals where no one could see them, to feast on or sell the meat. All the while, not **taking care of a single sheep. They did not spend time with the sheep. In fact they had no interest in the sheep. They did not** strengthen the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. They did not bring back the strays or search for the lost. Instead, the thief and robber **ruled the sheep harshly and brutally. Because they cared only for themselves! And cared nothing for the sheep.** (Ezekiel 34:1-4)

Of course, not all so called "shepherds" were thieves and robbers. Some shepherds were just in it for the money. Jesus called them "the hired hand." Look at verse 12. (Read) Sadly, the hired hand was no better than the thief and robber. Although, unlike the thief and robber, the hired hand expressed some interest in the wellbeing of the sheep, **ultimately he too cared nothing for the sheep, just like a thief and robber. All that mattered was getting a pay cheque...so he could live his own life.** (Eze 34:4) That is why, when the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away to save his own life. Then the wolf attacks and preys on the scattered flock. (12)

I think we will all agree, that a shepherd **who has the attitude of a thief and robberor the attitude of a hired hand.....**is the worst kind of shepherd that sheep can ever have. Right? Surely, the fate of the sheep under the care of such men and women is one of sickness..... Misery and ultimately death.

So why did Jesus share this metaphor with the Pharisees? It was because..... although the Pharisees had positions of leadership in Israel.....and although they carried titles like bible teacher, shepherd and leaders in society.....and although they looked so religious by faithfully performing their duties in the synagogues and temple.....the truth was..... they had the very same attitude of the thief and robber and the hired hand towards the people under their care. Deep down, the Pharisees cared absolutely nothing for people. Their effort and service was all for their own glory. In fact, like thieves and robbers, they stole God's glory for themselves and used God's people for personal benefit. So like sheep suffering at the hands of thieves and robbers, so the people suffered tremendously at the hands of demons, and the pangs of sin and death.

Jesus' heart was broken when he saw this. Nevertheless, Jesus was patient with the Pharisees. He still had hope for the Pharisees, to become good spiritual leaders. So he told them about the Good Shepherd. **Look at today's key verse, verse 11b. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** But what exactly does this mean? Generally, we will immediately answer by saying that this verse refers to Jesus who died for our sins on

² reference: sheep101.info, savvyfarmlife.com

the cross. Right? And you will be right in saying so. **Indeed, in context of today's passage, Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate expression of His loving and caring attitude towards people.** But when Jesus told the Pharisees that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, he did not mean that they should physically die for people. Instead, Jesus wanted the Pharisees to discover **the same attitude....and motive with which Jesus loved and cared for people.** For the Good Shepherd's attitude towards sheep is the complete opposite to that of the thief and robber and hired hand.....**Whereas the thief and robber and hired hand cared nothing for the sheep, and cared only for themselves.....the Good Shepherd cared so deeply for the sheep that he lays down his life for them.**

Look at verses 3-5. (Read) Here we should ask ourselves, how the sheep practically came to know and trust the Good Shepherd so well, that they follow him when he calls? The answer is quite obvious. He has the right attitude towards the sheep. When he is with the sheep he is selfless, offers constant love and care, exercise a lot of patience and take full responsibility for the sheep's wellbeing. That is why, he spends a lot of time with the sheep to strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured. He also brings back the strays and searches for the lost. All while he rules them gently and patiently. (Eze 34:4) In doing all these things, the shepherd builds a personal and unique relationship with each of his sheep. So when he calls out to his sheep, he calls [them] by name. (3b)

Now sheep might not be the smartest animals in the world, but they are not stupid either. When they practically see and experience the shepherd's love and care, they instinctively trust and follow him anywhere and anytime. Because they know he is their Good Shepherd who will never abandon or neglect them. The question is, what made the sheep to open their hearts to the Good Shepherd? Yes, it is the shepherd's warm and loving attitude towards the sheep. **An attitude of laying down his life for the sheep by taking a genuine interest..... not only in the wellbeing of every sheep.....but also taking a genuine interest in the sheep themselves by establishing a personal relationship with each of them.**

Look again at verse 4. When the good shepherd has brought out all his own, he leads his sheep by going on ahead of them. Sheep are very interesting creatures. If they are pushed hard from behind, they become more stubborn than before. But when a good shepherd goes on ahead of them, they follow very well. Again, going ahead of sheep is much easier said than done. If there is danger ahead, a shepherd must confront it first. When the way is uncertain, he must find the best route until he can bring the sheep to safety. When the sheep lacks pasture or cool water, it is all on the shepherd to scout where to move next. The wellbeing of the entire flock is on the shepherd. But the good shepherd **has the right attitude towards the sheep. An attitude of laying down his life for the sheep by** always..... goes first and ahead of the sheep, to show them the right way.....and so lead by example.

Lastly, look again at verse 12. Unlike the hired hand, when the Good Shepherd sees the wolf coming, he does not abandon the sheep by running away. Instead, he **has the right attitude towards the sheep. An attitude of laying down his life for the sheep. Therefore, when the wolf attacks the sheep,** the Good Shepherd puts his own life on the line, by standing between the wolf and the sheep. Then the Good Shepherd fights off the wolf to save the sheep. I think we will all agree, that **a Good Shepherd.....is the best kind of shepherd that sheep can ever ask for, right?** For surely under the care of a Good Shepherd, the sheep will safely come in and go out, and find pasture. (9) They will enjoy life.....they will be healthy.....happy.....safe and at peace. This is only possible, because the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **Or put differently, the sacrificed life of the shepherd, results in the prosperous life of the sheep! Sadly, the converse is also true. If the shepherd fails to lay down his life for the sheep, then it results in misery, sickness and death of the sheep.**

Jesus wanted the Pharisees to be **Good shepherds who lays down their lives for the sheep. But they were far from it!! "Why was that," we may ask?** For surely, we do not want to be like the Pharisees, right? We find the answer in verses 1-2. (Read) The reason the Pharisees behaves like thieves and robbers, were because they did not enter God's service in the right way. Indeed, there is only one correct way to become a spiritual leader..... and that is by personally accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and adopting His Good Shepherd heart towards people. Here, Jesus symbolizes the gate of the sheep pen. Instead of approaching God's people

through Jesus, the Pharisees climbed in by some other way. **Consequently, they did not have any idea about taking care of people.** As a result, instead of helping people grow in God, they oppressed people with countless laws that they themselves were unable to keep.

God has called you and me to be spiritual leaders for His people in this generation. We must ask ourselves, are we like the thief and robber? Did we enter God's service to steal from God's glory and use his ministry to benefit ourselves? Or are we like the hired hand who pretend to take care of God's flock while in truth we care absolutely nothing for those under our care? But abandon them the moment our lives are threatened by adverse situations or challenges? I think we merely have to look at the spiritual wellbeing of those under our care and their attitude towards us to answer this question.

Sadly, if we are honest with ourselves, our attitude towards God's sheep is in one way or another, like the thief and robber, and hired hand. But just like with the Pharisees, Jesus is patient with us. And through this passage wants to help us to become Good Shepherds for his sheep in 2022. Spiritual leaders who have the same attitude.....the same heart.....and motive.....in serving in His ministry.....as the Good shepherd had in taking care of the sheep.....

But how can selfish sinners like us be changed from a thief and robber into a Good Shepherd? How can we share such deep love for our sheep that we lay down our lives for them? There is only one way! We must personally experience Jesus' shepherd heart in our lives. Jesus laid down His life for us by coming down from heaven to earth. He emptied himself of all glory, honor and power to become a mere human being. And just like Jesus patiently served and took care of people from all walks of life while He was on earth, so Jesus still patiently takes care of you and me today. With great compassion, Jesus calls and heals us from our life problems. Like the Good Shepherd knew his sheep so well that he called each one by name, so Jesus likewise, affectionately called you and me by name. Indeed, Jesus knows us completely. He knows what we are thinking and what our desires are. He knows our background. He knows our future. He knows all our weaknesses and sins. Yet, knowing this, He still loves us. Moreover, He sees us with hope to become good spiritual leaders for His people in this generation.

I met the Lord Jesus in 2007, through bible study. The Lord has been my Good Shepherd ever since. Looking back at the last 14 years, I can say that I have not always been the easiest sheep to take care of. While I was in Korea in 2011 to attend UBF's 50th Anniversary, I deeply received God's calling to take care of God's sheep as a UBF shepherd. I was so convicted that after returning to South Africa, shp Sarah and I established a house church for campus ministry that same year. Though, somehow I knew at the time that I would have to make some sacrifices to obey' God's call, I was happy to obey the Lord's direction. Nevertheless, over time, the reality of those sacrifices began a reality to me. For example, it has not always been easy for me and shepherdess Sarah to live as a mixed racial couple in South Africa. My friends and family are all Afrikaans, which made things awkward for shp Sarah whenever we socialised with them. She always felt like an outsider. The same went for me whenever we were among Korean missionaries, especially just after getting married, as I too felt isolated and like a foreigner in my own country. But in context of this passage, I came to realise that by establishing a house church with shp Sarah was my way of laying down my life for God's sheep in the UBF ministry.

I have also been struggling over the last 14 years with how the Lord has led my working career. Though I am a Law graduate from the University of Pretoria, the Lord has not allowed me to pursue a career as an attorney. Then when I tried to pursue a career in academics at the University of Pretoria, I was asked to take over the directorship from missionary Jacob in our ministry. So I failed to complete my masters. For the last three years I have attempted to build up a digital marketing business to generate foreign currency income from abroad. However, during this time I realised that was definitely not called to be a business man. With my shepherd hearts, I seemed to have given my clients more money than they gave to me. So as usual, I begin the year without a stable job, a stable career or a business of my own. Nevertheless, God has always been providing for me and shepherdess Sarah, by blessing shp Sarah's tutoring business. I must confess, sometime I was so jealous of her, doing so well as a business woman. Also, I was jealous of other shepherds who progressed steadily in their careers. They made me wonder if there is something wrong with me that I am unable to progress

professionally. I even became bitter towards God for not allowing me to be the breadwinner that I so desperately want to be. However, through this passage, I am beginning to accept that when I committed my life to God as a campus shepherd and later a director in the WITS ministry, I was always going to have to lay down my life by letting go of ambitions and dreams of being an excellent breadwinner for our family.

Indeed, when things were especially difficult, and my heart discouraged and frustrated by my inability to earn a stable income as well as the fact that shepherdess Sarah and I seemingly do not fit in anywhere in society in South Africa, I on many occasions just wanted to pack my bags and leave the country, the ministry and my life in SA behind. But surely, this is not God's way. In fact, by leaving South Africa I will be no different from the thief and robber or the hired hand. Jesus laid down his life for me so that I can have life and have it to the full. Likewise, as a campus shepherd and director of this ministry, I want to also lay down my life for God's sheep, by sacrificially serving him in Wits UBF with all my heart, all my soul and all my strength. Then God can use my life to benefit and give life to students in this generations. Amen.

In conclusion. We were all called to be spiritual leaders of God's sheep in this generation. Indeed, to be a spiritual leader is as hard as being a shepherd of stubborn, wayward and helpless sheep. That is why there are so many thieves and robbers and hired hands that are abusing their positions as leaders in God's church, and not care for people under their care. Today, the Lord has called upon you and me to have a different attitude towards His people under our care. To sincerely love and care for students and each other that we lay down our lives for them. This was Jesus' attitude towards you and me when he laid down his life for us on the cross. So this is the same attitude with which we must serve as bible teachers and shepherds in this ministry. May the Lord's shepherd heart move our hearts to sincerely lay down our lives for campus mission in 2022!

Conclusion

To be a Good Shepherd is very difficult! There are 4 reasons for this.

- This requires selflessness
- **CONSTANT personal love and care.**
- This requires **a lot of patience.**
- **is a matter of life or death.....and therefore a huge responsibility.**

The point is, to be a Good Shepherd is very difficult! So, to be a Good Shepherd, requires an extraordinary attitude....or should I say.....heart.....towards the sheep to bear with them, love them, care for them and serve them. Isn't it? What makes things even more difficult is the fact that sheep cannot repay a Good Shepherd for all his effort, sacrifices and trouble of taking care of them!!!

I think we will all agree, that a shepherd **who has the attitude of a thief and robberor the attitude of a hired hand.....**is the worst kind of shepherd that sheep can ever have. Right? Surely, the fate of the sheep under the care of such men and women is one of sickness..... misery and and ultimately death.

If we carefully think about Jesus as our Good Shepherd, something amazing happens. Our hearts towards others naturally change.....as Jesus' love for us begin to fill up in our hearts.....and then overflows to those under our care.