

Fix Our Eyes on Jesus: Finding Our Focus in Uncertain Times

Good Shepherd

Hello, Everybody! Let me begin with a couple of questions and I invite you to type your answers in the Chat box:

Did you have a good summer?

One bright spot for me: our daughter got married and the wedding ceremony was in our backyard – intimate, cozy, and historic – I got to walk the bride to the front and officiated the wedding.

How do you feel about this Fall/this new school year?

This pandemic has definitely disrupted Cornerstone ministry rhythms and planning! What we had originally planned was disrupted by Covid and we had to pivot and our usual September Vision Sundays are now postponed till November.

Since March, there's widespread economic uncertainty, steady stream of collective anxiety, intensified racial tension, growing angst in interpersonal relationships, increasing numbers of divorce, frequent report of domestic violence, and sustained cynicism toward religion.

If you are parents, teachers and supporting staff, this new school year brings an unrelenting source of anxiety,

worrying so much more about the health and safety as well as the learning experience of the kids.

This Covid pandemic became the perfect storm: every morning we wake up to emotional triggers for anxiety sadness, hurt and frustration, anger and distress, due to our 24/7 media reporting and digital connection.

Author and corporate consultant, Jenni Catron, suggests that there's a significant shift in people's mindset: from valuing success, influence, and status (pre-Covid) to support, safety, and trust (Covid). Do you agree? Type your answer "Disagree/Agree".

In this chaotic and confusing time, we are reminded by God's word not to let the worries of our day drive what we do, but let the way of Jesus determine how we live!

So today we begin a new sermon series, "Fix Our Eyes on Jesus: Finding Our Focus in Uncertain Times," with the aim that these four messages from the Gospel of John will enable us to "come and taste that the Lord is good," hold on to Jesus who is the anchor for our souls, and receive peace in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In this first message we will look at the description of Jesus as the Good Shepherd in Jn. 10. If folks are indeed looking for support, safety, and trust, then the best possible place to be is with Jesus during this challenging time!

Jn. 10:10-11 “I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of. I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd puts the sheep before himself, sacrifices himself if necessary.” (*The Message*)

Here we start with this simple and straight forward truth:
Jesus goes all out for us so we can truly live.

“I came” is a loaded verb because it underscores the devotion and self-giving love of Jesus: the Son of God was the Sent One who forsook the glory of heaven, humbled himself, humiliated and crucified; Jesus accepted the invite, served as the mediator-bridge, and opened the way for all to return to the Father!

Unlike the thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroys, Jesus protects and provides, leads and guides, comforts and strengthens His sheep – doing all these wholeheartedly for the good of the sheep.

The purpose and goal of the good shepherd is to ensure that the sheep to have a full life – a more and better life than we can dream of:

a life that exudes the character of God,

a life that brings goodness and wholesome living

a life that is generous and empowering,

a life that serves and brings out the best in all of God’s creation!

Now, type YES if you want to have the life that Jesus offers. Or talk to one of our prayer team members in the prayer room. Or leave your contact info by filling out our online Welcome Card so we can connect with you.

But do you really believe that Jesus is our GOOD Shepherd, esp. when we are facing health challenges, financial difficulty, job loss, marital conflict, messy relationships, broken dreams, mental illness, discrimination and injustice, violence and hatred?

Our understanding of God’s purpose and goodness is often coloured by what we experience now and what we can or cannot see with our eyes, good or bad. Or we forget that some pain or sufferings are caused by our own lack of wisdom or other’s selfish actions, or by Satan’s attack.

Usually, we have no issue with God when life is smooth; but when things go south we question, doubt, complain, bargain, demand, threaten, and in some extreme cases we give up on God or deny our faith.

We operate with this one size fits all formula – consciously or unconsciously:

Prosperity + Pleasure = God’s Goodness/Blessing

This approach or mindset is not so much different from a child who wants to have everything his/her way; selfish, immediate gratification is the name of the game, the only game there is!

But our perspective is often myopic; we are extremely near-sighted – we just want short term gain and, even better, if there's no pain.

The “I am” in the “I am the good shepherd” is the echo of the name of God: “I AM” (cf. Ex.3).

Jesus the good shepherd is the great “I am”, the One and only God who is sovereign, in control, who is most consistent in working out His purposes and plan, and who remains constant in His characteristic faithfulness and goodness, mercy and grace, holy and just!

The good shepherd, however, never just looks at the present but the whole of eternity past, present, and future! He cares enough to provide all that we need for this life and the life to come, provided that we live on purpose. He loves us – knows us – enough to withhold what we consider good for ourselves but harmful in light of His good purposes.

Tim Keller writes:

“God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we know everything he knows.”

Having the goodness of the good Shepherd doesn't mean the absence of trial and testing, crisis and challenge, but the presence of the good shepherd while walking through the shadow of the valley of death, having all the necessary resource one needs to achieve the life God intended. Jesus is not here to distort, damage, or destroy the God-intended life and purpose!

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Jn.10:11-13).

Jesus the Good Shepherd doesn't runaway when there's danger but stays and fights for the well-being of the sheep and leads them to green pasture and rest beside quiet water!

Here is another heart warming truth:

Jesus cares more about us than we can ever imagine!

Jn. 10:14 I am the good shepherd; ***I know my sheep*** ...

He ***knows*** his sheep; He cares for them and is involved in their lives, i.e., he takes personal interest in each individual sheep and knows each sheep inside out. In fact, He knows more about the sheep than they know about themselves (v.3 – he calls his sheep by name)!

The universal, deep yearning of humanity is to be known and to be loved. If you want to be known and loved, type YES in the Chat.

Everyone wants to be noticed and valued; we want people to take genuine interest in us. None wants to be used as a means to someone else's ends. We all want to have friends who understand how we feel, think, and know why we do what we do; what inspires and motivates us; people who encourage and support us in pursuing our hopes and dreams, being there when we are in the valley as well as on the mountain top! Type YES if you want to have friends who do that.

Blaise Pascal, the 17th century French philosopher-mathematician-physicist-theologian, said:

“Things human must be known to be loved.” So we experience love when we are known. Now what does Jesus say here? “I am the good shepherd ... I **know** my sheep.”

I moved into the fourth floor of the student residence in my first year in bible college. One day during the orientation week I decided to take the elevator down to the 2nd floor to attend a meeting – students were not allowed to use it, but I went for it anyways.

When the door opened, I stepped in and the older man introduced himself, “Hi, I am Vic Adrian.” That's the President of the school – my lucky day to break the rule! Sheepishly I introduced myself and he stared at me responding, “I know who you are; I read your application and testimony.” Feeling guilty, I was stunned and

embarrassed and felt like crawling into a deep hole. But he didn't chastise me and I was floored by his warmth – he remembered and showed interest in me!

What does this have to do with Jesus?

As the good shepherd, God-in-Jesus knows me more than what Dr. Vic Adrian knew about me; in fact, he knows more than what my wife, Libby, knows about me; more than what I know about myself!

See, when Jesus identifies Himself as the good shepherd, the Jewish audience would immediately know that Jesus is equating Himself with the God of their scriptures, in which God is known as the Shepherd of His people, cf. Ps. 23 and Eze. 34.

So when Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd ... I know my sheep ... just as the Father knows me and I know the Father” (vv. 14-15), He is telling the listeners that He has a deep, intimate, knowledge about each individual.

If I experience love when I am known, as Pascal noted, and God-in-Jesus knows me deeply and intimately - more than I know myself - then Jesus must love me more than I love myself! Doesn't that blow you away? It blew me away!

In Ps. 139 David teaches that God the Father-Creator moulds and forms me, knitted me when I was in my

mother's womb, knows all about me – and nothing is or can be hidden from the good shepherd.

The late J.I. Packer writes in his famous book, *Knowing God*: “What matters supremely ... [is] the fact that He knows me. I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind ... there is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when his cares falters.”

So let me summarize the two fundamental truths about Jesus being our good shepherd:

- 1. Jesus goes all out for us so we can truly live.**
- 2. Jesus cares more about us than we can ever imagine.**

Based on these two heart-warming truths, how can we find support, safety, and trust in this good shepherd? How can we turn this Covid pandemic season and, maybe, even our crisis of faith into a growth opportunity? How can we turn this disruption into a discovery and see this “new normal” with “new eyes”?

Jesus provides the answers to these questions:

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and *my sheep know me.*”

Support, safety, and trust are found in a growing relationship with Jesus.

Remember what Blaise Pascal says: “Things human must be known to be loved.” We experience love when we are known.

But there's a second part: “Things divine must be loved to be known.” We know God more – His support, safety, and trust - by loving Him deeply.

And our love for the good shepherd is expressed in two ways, practically speaking:

1. Practice listening to the shepherd's voice: “... the sheep listen to his voice.” There are many voices vying for our attention; but we must intentionally find space and time to set our spiritual antenna to hear His voice - “Be still, and know that I am God.” In his book, *Sanctuary of the Soul*, Richard Foster underlines the need to create “the emotional space that allows God to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart.” In this inner sanctuary of our heart we can express our love to Jesus, to know Him as we listen, interact with His word and His Spirit: **the language of God's love is Scriptures, the voice of His guidance spoken by His Spirit – they go hand-in-hand.**

[I will add an extra section in the sermon notes:
Checkpoints for Discerning the Voice of the Spirit: 6
Practical Steps to Cultivate Spiritual Discernment.]

2. Practice the truths we already know: "... he goes ahead of them and his sheep ***follows*** him because they ***know*** his voice ..." (10:4).

We are not living in a complete vacuum; the good shepherd is not deaf or dumb – He has the word of life. And we do have His book of wisdom and promises that lead us to a "more and better life than they ever dreamed of."

But are we applying what we have learned?

Knowing Jesus – loving Jesus – means we have correct information about Him, regular interaction with Him, intimacy with Him, and imitate His way, truth, and life.

There will not be "fresh revelation" if the "old" ones are not followed.

Conclusion: John Flavel, a 17th century English Puritan, writes: "... the greatest difficulty in conversion is to ***win the heart to God***; and the greatest difficulty after conversion is to ***keep the heart with God***." (Cited by Richard Foster, ***Sanctuary of the Soul***, p. 27.)

It boggles my mind to know that the Creator of the Universe is my good shepherd who invites me into a

relationship of support, safety, and trust – he is the good shepherd who goes all out, lays down His life for me, takes cares and looks out for me. He even seeks after the ones who are lost or have wandered off; He pursues those who are not yet in the fold.

Fix your eyes on Jesus - Seek after and stay with Him. He is a good shepherd in this uncertain time!