

# I am the good Shepherd

**Question:** "What did Jesus mean when He said 'I am the good Shepherd?'"

**Answer:** "I am the good Shepherd" ([John 10:11](#)) is the fourth of seven "I am" declarations of Jesus recorded only in John's gospel. **These "I am" proclamations point to His unique divine identity and purpose.** Immediately after declaring that He is "the door" in [John 10:7](#), here Jesus declares "I am the good shepherd." He describes Himself as not only "the shepherd," but the "good shepherd." What does this mean?

**It should be understood that Jesus is "the" good shepherd, not simply "a" good shepherd, as others may be, but He is unique in character** (Psalm 23; Zechariah 13:7; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 1 Peter 5:4). The Greek word *kalos* translated **"good" describes that which is noble, wholesome, good, and beautiful, in contrast with that which is wicked, mean, foul and unlovely.** It signifies not only that which is good inwardly—character—but also that which is **attractive outwardly. It is an innate goodness. Therefore, in using the phrase "the good shepherd," Jesus is referencing His inherent goodness, His righteousness, and His beauty. As shepherd of the sheep, He is the one who protects, guides, and nurtures His flock.**

As He did in declaring that He is **"the door of the sheep"** in [John 10:7](#), Jesus is making a contrast between **Himself and the religious leaders**, the Pharisees ([John 10:12-13](#)). He compares them to a "hireling" or "hired hand" who don't really care about the sheep. In [John 10:9](#), Jesus speaks of thieves and robbers who sought to enter the sheepfold stealthily. In that passage the Jewish leaders (Pharisees) were contrasted with Christ who is the Door. Here, in [John 10:12](#), the hireling is contrasted with the true or faithful shepherd who willingly gives up his life for the sheep. He who is a "hireling" works for wages, which are his main consideration. His concern is not for the sheep but for himself. Interestingly enough, the shepherds of ancient times were not usually the owners of the flock. Nevertheless, they were expected to exercise the same care and concern the owners would. This was characteristic of a true shepherd. However, some of the hirelings thought only of themselves. As a result, when a wolf appeared—the most common threat to sheep in that day—the hireling abandoned the flock and fled, leaving the sheep to be scattered or killed ([John 10:12-13](#)).

First, to better understand the purpose of a shepherd during the ancient times of Jesus, it is helpful to realize that sheep are utterly defenceless and totally dependent upon the Shepherd. Sheep are always subject to danger and must always be under the watchful eye of the shepherd as they graze. Rushing walls of water down the valleys from sudden heavy rainfalls may sweep them away, robbers may steal them, and wolves may attack the flock. David tells how he killed a lion and a bear while defending his father's flock as a shepherd boy ([1 Samuel 17:36](#)). Driving snow in the winter, blinding dust and burning sands in summer, long lonely hours each day, all these the shepherd patiently endures for the welfare of the flock. In fact, shepherds were frequently subjected to grave danger, sometimes even giving their lives to protect their sheep.

Likewise, Jesus gave His life on the cross as "The Good Shepherd" for his own. He who would save others, though He had the power, did not choose to save Himself. "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" ([Matthew 20:28](#)). Through His willing sacrifice the Lord made salvation possible for all who come to Him in faith. In proclaiming that He is the good shepherd, Jesus speaks of "laying down" His life for His sheep ([John 10:15](#), [17-18](#)).

Jesus' death was divinely appointed. It is only through Him that we receive salvation. "I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own" ([John 10:14](#)). Furthermore, Jesus makes it clear that it wasn't just for the Jews that he laid down His life, but also for the "other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" ([John 10:16](#)). The "other sheep" clearly refers to the Gentiles. As a result, Jesus is the Good Shepherd over all, both Jew and Gentile, who come to believe upon Him ([John 3:16](#)).

**Recommended Resources:** [Logos Bible Software](#) and [Jesus: The Greatest Life of All](#) by Charles Swindoll.