

The Good Shepherd

Announce Walk Thru the Bible date.

What makes a bad Shepherd?

I've never been a shepherd, but I think even I can figure this out. Don't **keep track** of the sheep, don't **feed** the sheep, don't **protect the sheep**.

But what if he or she isn't a **good communicator**? Don't care. Can he do those three things? She can do those three things. But this woman has a **great resume**, with references. She has a **degree in sheep biology**. She can **diagnose sickness** by simply examining a sheep's excrement. She can distinguish different kinds of sheep **just by looking at the eyes and smelling** them. She can even tell what their **different "baah's"** mean. She even has **posters of sheep in her room**. She is the president of the **"Ending violence toward Sheep initiative."**

But there are a couple of problems. **She gets completely distracted** by her phone and she loses track of time and place. And yes, any sight or sound that might be a **wolf triggers panic attacks** where she is completely disabled, unable to think straight, speak, or move.

Sorry, all that stuff doesn't matter because she will either lose the sheep or stand by while predators feast and the sheep eat at the buffet.

Throughout the Bible and Israel's history their kings were described as shepherds for God's people. That was a **common image** for describing what a king was supposed to be about. He wasn't just about **the pomp and circumstance**. He wasn't just about the **power for power's sake**. He wasn't just about making them into a **great nation, putting them on top** in that part of the world. He wasn't even about **becoming famous and having things built in his honor** with his name on it. **The king was supposed to be a shepherd and shepherds do three things**, they direct the sheep, they make sure the sheep are fed and he keeps them safe.

When God's people had bad shepherds, those same three things weren't true about many of them, particularly the ones near the end. But **the way they failed** in these three areas was because they **didn't lead the people in following God's covenant**. "I will be your God and **you will be my people**." You won't have any other **allegiances** or gods. You will follow the laws that I passed down to you from Moses. And as you live the way these laws describe, you will **reflect my holiness and goodness and the nations** of the world will see who I am. You will be a **blessing to the nations**.

The kingdom that had David on the throne in Jerusalem became **two kingdoms**; Israel in the north and Judah in the south is now no kingdom at all. It is simply territory controlled by Babylon. **The brightest and best** have been taken away into captivity because they could be useful. **There are a few left, mostly the poor**, after the city of Jerusalem is **destroyed, its walls torn down**, and its temple first gutted of all its valuables and then destroyed.

There is no king and there is no throne. The people of Israel have **had bad shepherds** and **now they have no shepherd** to lead them. They are **scattered** all over the map from what used to be Judah, to Egypt, and to Babylon. **Sheep without a shepherd tend to scatter.**

Now for some good news. God's response to this. God's answer to Israel's bad shepherds: (Ezekiel 34:11-16)

As I read this, **mark any phrases** that you see repeated. ¹¹“For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: **I myself will search and find my sheep.** ¹²**I will be like a shepherd** looking for his scattered flock. **I will find my sheep and rescue them** from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. ¹³**I will bring them back home** to their own land of Israel from among the peoples and nations. **I will feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers** and in all the places where people live. ¹⁴**Yes, I will give them good pastureland** on the high hills of Israel. There they will lie down in pleasant places and feed in the lush pastures of the hills. ¹⁵**I myself will tend my sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace,** says the Sovereign Lord. ¹⁶**I will search for my lost ones** who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. **I will bandage the injured and strengthen the weak.** But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them, yes—feed them justice! Ezekiel 34:11-16

So, what was the phrase that was repeated over and over? It was **“I will,”** in some form or another. Twice it is emphasized even more by saying **“I, myself”**. That means there was **no outside assistance needed, no middleman** who does the work.

- **I myself will** search and find my sheep.
- **I will** be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock.
- **I will** find my sheep and rescue them.
- **I will** bring them back home.
- **I will** feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers.
- **Yes, I will** give them good pastureland.
- **I myself will** tend my sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace,
- **I will** search for my lost ones.
- **I will** bandage the injured and strengthen the weak.
- **But I will** destroy those who are fat and powerful.
- **I will** feed them, yes—feed them justice!

What is God saying here? He doesn't need a king in between him and his people. God is saying...“I'm cutting out the middleman.”

When Robin was pregnant with Quinten, we had really bad insurance because we were in a small church that couldn't afford any more and we didn't want all of our money going to insurance. **You can't eat insurance.** So, what we decided to do was **pay the doctor and hospital directly.** We cut out the middleman. **Why,** because we found out that to add a pregnancy rider to our **thrift store insurance policy** was about the same as paying directly to the people who were helping Robin bring our son into the world. **We cut out the middleman.** It cleaned things up, **making it clear and simple.**

To make a long story short, **we made payments** to the hospital. After a certain time, we noticed that **we weren't getting any more bills**. Robin **called to find out** what was going on because we certainly didn't want to get into any trouble for not paying a bill. Come to find out, that **because we made so little money** that the hospital forgave the rest of the balance. For us cutting out the middleman made sense and **it actually worked in our favor**.

In the case of Ezekiel's story, **the middlemen are these kings and religious leaders** God has put in charge of shepherding his people. **Even the best of them only turned things around for a short time**. Soon a bad king would come around who encouraged them to **worship other gods and live selfishly taking advantage of the vulnerable**. They were **not effective** in the **very basic things that God had delegated** for them to do on his behalf.

"I will do this myself." I will do all the things a good shepherd does, and a bad shepherd doesn't.

This is a move that cuts out a lot of waste, potential misunderstanding, as well as lowering costs in the end. It streamlines the process by which God directs his people.

This is how it was to be **from the beginning**. It was the people who **wanted a king on a throne, an earthly shepherd like the other nations**. God **warned them** that these kings would **tax them** to pay for all the stuff a king needs and they will enslave you to do their bidding, particularly when they want to go to war.

Wow, this is a new concept, God being the king! This is groundbreaking. **Why didn't someone think of this earlier?** Well, He did. **He knew that they didn't need a different shepherd** to lead, protect, and feed; **they only needed to trust him**.

What if someone wrote a catchy passage laying all of this out for us. Maybe something that **could be sung or spoken to God and to one another**. Oh, yes, **David the ultimate** in Israel's history of shepherds/kings. He was what all others were compared to. He was the one who had a **heart like God's**. He was the one who was **promised to have a line** of kings/shepherds for God's people that will never end. **Yes, that guy wrote this...The Lord is my shepherd**; I have all that I need. ²He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. ³He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. ⁴Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. ⁵You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. ⁶Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23

It's God saying, **"If you want something right, do it yourself."** After the obligatory, **"Don't make me come down there."** He decided that **he would do just that**. He would be the **shepherd of the sheep he created** and loved, no middle management. **He's going to do what he says he's going to do in this psalm**. He's not going to use a king anymore. That's the world's way, not His way.

This is God being faithful to the promise that he gave in his covenant with Israel. I will be your God and you will be my people. I will **provide** for you and **protect** you. **Just obey what Moses told you** to do because all of that was from me.

This also keeps another promise. God's response to the bad shepherds is, **"I'm cutting out the middleman, no more kings, just me."** His second response is...**"I'm keeping my promise to David, so pay attention!"** **In other words, I'm going to do it in a way that doesn't put another middleman in place.** I'm **not taking suggestions** or **polling my people** to see what they think about their next shepherd.

²⁰ "Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will surely judge between the fat sheep and the scrawny sheep. ²¹ For you fat sheep pushed and butted and crowded my sick and hungry flock until you scattered them to distant lands. ²² So I will rescue my flock, and they will no longer be abused. I will judge between one animal of the flock and another. ²³ And I will set over them **one shepherd, my servant David.** He will feed them and be a shepherd to them. ²⁴ And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be a prince among my people. I, the Lord, have spoken! Ezekiel 34:20-24

What was the promise to King David? That there would be a **descendant of David on the throne** over God's people forever. This is a **never-ending dynasty.**

How can he do this? There is **no throne** in Jerusalem anymore. That's all rubble. **There isn't a nation** anymore, they are scattered all over the map. **How is it possible to keep this promise to David,** the greatest King, the greatest shepherd Israel has ever had.

So, what made David so great? It was said that he had a heart after **God's heart.** Another way to say that is, he had **attributes** that were like God's, and **he desired what God desired.** It sounds like this new king/shepherd for God's people will be **designed after David.** Here's the curve ball. **It's the exact opposite.** David was patterned after the perfect Shepherd. **This shepherd is God coming down to live with his people.** This is **Messiah,** this is Jesus.

That brings us to John, chapter 10, in **Jesus' own words.** 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. John 10:2b-3

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep." John 10:11

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.** John 10:14-16

Jesus is this new David. He is from David's lineage. That keeps God's promise to King David. **The one on the throne shepherding Israel will be a part of his never-ending dynasty.** What makes it never ending is that Jesus **was alive, then dead, and then alive forever.** The promise to King David has been fulfilled in Jesus, the new eternal David.

So, God's people have God as their shepherd, and he has kept the promise to David. What's left? Oh, there's more. God's response to the bad shepherd kings was to:

- Cut out the middleman.
- And still keep his promise to David, and his final answer.

“Then you will experience my covenant peace” What is “Covenant Peace?”

²⁵ **“I will make a covenant of peace with my people** and drive away the dangerous animals from the land. Then they will be able to camp safely in the wildest places and sleep in the woods without fear. ²⁶ I will bless my people and their homes around my holy hill. And in the proper season I will send the showers they need. There will be showers of blessing. ²⁷ The orchards and fields of my people will yield bumper crops, and everyone will live in safety. When I have broken their chains of slavery and rescued them from those who enslaved them, then they will know that I am the Lord. ²⁸ They will no longer be prey for other nations, and wild animals will no longer devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will frighten them. Ezekiel 34: 25-28

“Covenant peace” opposite of “Sinai curse.” This is what God told them when they **first received his covenant promise**. He was to be their God and they were to be his people. They were to be completely loyal to him by following the laws Moses had given them on Mt. Sinai. **By keeping them, he would always be with them as their shepherd in the land** he was giving them. That’s the promise. **The curse is what will happen if they aren’t completely loyal**, and they break the laws Moses has given them. **Curse is different from the normal hardships of living in this broken world**, it is directly given by God. **The curse is the natural consequence of leaving God’s protective covenant relationship**. All bad things that God has kept at bay will now be released. **Gates and the wall protecting them are gone**. They are **completely vulnerable** to all kinds of evil and suffering.

Back to Jesus’ words about the shepherd, the sheep and the gate. ¹⁰ The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. John 10:10

This covenant promise has become the rich and satisfying life to the full that Jesus is promising. Now if anyone, whether Jew or **anyone who puts their trust and complete loyalty in this new David**, this eternal shepherd will have this promise. **Yes, the imagery Ezekiel uses makes it sound like nothing bad will happen** when we experience this covenant promise. **But keep in mind, this was the image that they would have understood**. We know that in the broken world, bad things will get to us, **but we can still have this rich life that begins here and extends into eternity** where there will be no evil or suffering.

Here’s how the NIV Application Commentary says it. “The state of experiencing the blessings that flow from a harmonious relationship with God is what makes this distinctively a ‘covenant peace.’”

The word that best describes this “harmonious relationship with God” is peace or shalom. Here’s the Apostle Paul’s words to the church in Rome. Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Romans 5:1

We are no longer enemies of God. But better than that peace **really means wholeness, completeness**. We are made whole and complete because of what Jesus did for us. **We are in harmony with God**.

If we add this all together, this is what we get... Now the good shepherd is the promised king!

“That is why they stand in front of God’s throne and serve him day and night in his Temple. And **he who sits on the throne will give them shelter.** ¹⁶They will never again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun. ¹⁷**For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd.** He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.” Revelations 7:15-17

When people blindly follow a leader without questioning what that leader says or does, we call them sheep. And that isn’t a compliment. **We are saying they are weak and mindless.** They either **can’t or won’t think for themselves.**

That is completely true unless your leader is both the good shepherd and the righteous all powerful king. For those who follow Jesus, the new David, the shepherd king, **being called sheep is a compliment.** So, let’s...Start acting like a sheep. How do we do this? **It’s not complicated.** We do this **when we begin following Jesus when we repent** and believe or put our trust in him. **But it’s something that continually must be reaffirmed** because we are like those people back in Israel, we are prone to wander.

1. Admit your need for a shepherd.
2. Surrender to Jesus as your King.

Here’s how I want to challenge us to do this. I’m going to send home with you **a card** that has Psalm 23 on one side and a prayer on the other.

We need to be reminded that we need a shepherd, one that is good. That is what **Psalm 23** tells us. Now we know that this is describing what Jesus brings to its fullness. **Then there’s a prayer.** I want to ask you to place this card somewhere where you will see it. **Start your day and end your day** by reading these words and pray this prayer.

Let’s do this together. I’m going to read Psalm 23 and emphasize certain words. If there is a word that speaks to you, I want you to say that word with me as I read. Then we will read this prayer together as our response.

The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. ²He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. ³He renews my strength. He guides me along the right paths, bringing honor to his name. ⁴Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me. ⁵You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. ⁶Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever. Psalm 23

Jesus, I confess to you that I need a shepherd. I am easily distracted or discouraged and that’s when I wander from you. You are the one who saves me, sustains me, and loves me. But you can only be my shepherd when you are my Lord and King. I submit to you and ask for your will to be done in my life today. You are a good shepherd and the only legitimate king.