

I Am the Good Shepherd

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[0 : 00] And just a wee word to the young folk before we sing again. Working together is something that's very, very important in life.

And it doesn't matter how old or how young a person is, we often have to work together. Whether it's in the home, or at school, or whether it's in the church, or at your work.

It doesn't matter where it is, working together is important. And you have to learn to get on with people in order to work together. Very, very important.

And the Bible tells us how important it is. And I was reading recently, it's something I found quite amazing, which shows what working together is really like.

And there's a certain bird, and I can't remember the name of this bird. It's like some kind of plover. It's a bird that has a very unusual relationship with a crocodile.

[1 : 08] And that is something which I just found extraordinary. What happens is this. That when the crocodile comes out of the swamp, and decides to have a spot of sunbathing, as they usually do, they come out and they just lie beside the water.

This particular bird comes down and stands on the back of the crocodile, and starts taking off all the parasites that are on the back of the crocodile.

And then it walks down, and the crocodile opens its mouth. And this bird does what probably no other animal or human or bird would do, but it hops in to the crocodile's mouth.

And it begins to pick off all the leeches that are on the teeth of the crocodile and eat them. Now the crocodile, with one snap of these ferocious jaws, would gobble that bird up, and that bird would be history.

But it doesn't. It allows the bird to do that, and then the bird hops off. And so this is a classic case of working together.

[2 : 21] And both are getting something out of it. The crocodile is getting clean teeth, and the bird's getting a meal. And it's, I suppose in a sense, it's an extreme story.

But it shows how even what you would say a crocodile and a bird could never work together. It shows that it can, that they can.

And that shows how important it is for people to work together. And we're told in the Bible that God wants us to do exactly that for one another.

That we are to help one another. And that we're not to live as if we're the only people that matter. And that whatever happens with us, and to us, and whatever we get, is not just for us, but it's for others as well.

And one of the things that God tells us is that when maybe bad things or sad things happen to us, and that God comforts us, and other people comfort us, then when sad things happen to others, then we are to help and to comfort other people in the same way as we have been comforted.

[3 : 46] That's what the Bible tells us. And so the Lord is showing that what you get and what you have isn't just for you. It's for others as well.

So that all the time, and all the different things in life, we're working together. God gave the greatest ever demonstration of that, of working together, where he gave his Son.

God the Father and God the Son work together for our good. That's why we're here today. And God wants us to work together for one another.

Always remember that, it's not just about yourself. I'm going to sing again, this time from Sing Psalms, and Psalm 118.

Psalm 118. And this is from the Sing Psalms. Psalm 118. And in verse 15, it's on page 156 in the first part of the Psalm book.

[4 : 59] Triumphant shouts of joy resound in places where the righteous dwell. The Lord's right hand is lifted high, his mighty hand does all things well.

I shall not die, but I shall live. The Lord's great works I will proclaim. The Lord severely chastened me, but rescued me from death's domain. Throw wide the gates of righteousness, I'll enter and give thanks to God.

This is the gate of God through which the righteous come before the Lord. You answered me, I will give thanks. Salvation comes from you alone. The stone the builders had refused has now become the cornerstone.

The Lord himself has done all this. It is a marvel in our sight. This is the day the Lord has made. In it let us take great delight. These verses of Tunis Wareham, Psalm 118.

15 to 24. Triumphant shouts of joy. The Lord's right hand is lifted high, His mighty hand does all things well.

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Righteous God, before the Lord. You answered me, I will give thanks.

Salvation comes from you alone. The stone the builders had refused.

[8 : 17] Has now become the cornerstone. The Lord himself has done all this.

It is a marvel in our sight. This is the day the Lord has made.

In his blood, let us take great delight. Let's turn to read God's word in John's gospel, chapter 10.

John, chapter 10. And we'll read from the beginning to the end of verse 18. John, chapter 10. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

[9 : 50] When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

All who come before me are thieves and robbers. But the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

[10 : 59] He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me. Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep, and I have other sheep that are not of this fold, I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.

So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again, this charge I have received from my Father. Amen, and may God bless to us this reading of his holy word.

I'm going to sing again in Psalm 95 from the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 95, Scottish Psalter, the tune is Gainsborough.

And that's on page 357. I'm going to sing verses 1 to 7. O come, let us sing to the Lord.

[12 : 19] Come, let us everyone a joyful noise. Make to the rock of our salvation. Let us before his presence come with praise and thankful voice. Let us sing psalms to him with grace and make a joyful noise.

Down to verse 7. For he's O God, the people we of his own pasture are, and of his hands the sheep today, if he his voice will hear. These verses, Psalm 95, 1 to 7, tune is Gainsborough.

Amen. O come, let us sing to the Lord.

Come, let us everyone a joyful noise.

Make to the rock of our salvation. Let us before his presence come with praise and thankful voice.
[13 : 40] Let us sing to the Lord. Let us sing to the Lord. Let us sing songs to him with praise and make a joyful noise.

For God, a great God, a great King, above all gods He is.
Depths of the earth, but in His hand, the strength of His is.
For Him the spacious sea belongs, for He the same did make.
But dry land also from His hands, His form at first to take.
[15 : 05] O come and let us worship Him, let us adorn with all.

And on our knees before the Lord, our Maker let us call.
For He, sir, brought the people free of His own master's heart.
And on His hand, the sheep today, if ye His voice will hear.
Let's turn again to the chapter we read. John's Gospel, chapter 10. John's Gospel, chapter 10. And just looking at these verses, really from the beginning to verse 9.

[16 : 35] I won't read it again, but Jesus says, Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber.

But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep and so on. Now, a shepherd in the days of Jesus was no easy work.

It was a tough, demanding job because you had to take the sheep all over the place.
There were many rocks and ravines, and sometimes it was hard finding good grass for feeding. And it was a job that involved you working day and night.

A lot of your work was guarding the enclosure where the shepherds often slept in the gateway or the doorway to these great big enclosures where they would take the sheep at night.

[17 : 41] The shepherd was somebody who was having to care for the sheep and protect the sheep and provide for the sheep and to lead the sheep.

And it's very obvious how Jesus himself used the picture of the shepherd to describe himself and his own relationship to his people. Because it's very fitting, it's very apt.

And, of course, that's not something that's simply from the New Testament. The Old Testament has also spoken very much of the relationship that the Lord has with his people as that of a shepherd and of sheep.

Because we read, in fact, we were singing there in the Psalms, saying, he is our God and we are his people, of his pasture and sheep of his hand.

You lead your people like a flock, it says in Psalm 77. We know Psalm 23, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. And so Jesus is, in this particular chapter, is highlighting the importance of the shepherd and the sheep.

[18 : 51] But, of course, Jesus also highlights that it's possible that there will be false shepherds. There will be thieves, there will be robbers, there will be wolves. And it's always a danger that within the church there will be those who will lead or try to lead the sheep astray and lead them down into dangerous places.

And that's something that the church must always be wary of and guard against. But Jesus shows how that is a possibility. But we find here that Jesus is saying that, in verse 3, to him the gatekeeper opens, the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. So the shepherd takes the sheep out of the fold.

And why does he do that? Well, one of the reasons he does it is to feed them. That was one of the responsibilities of the shepherd, was to take the sheep to feeding places. And that's what the good shepherd does for us as well.

Jesus is feeding us. That's what he's doing today. And let me say this. The shepherd is keener that we be fed than that we ourselves are fed.

[20 : 14] We often forget that. Sometimes we say, we come maybe to church, and we say, you know, I don't know what's happening here. I'm just, I'm not really getting, I'm not really getting anything.

I'm not getting any nourishment. Has the Lord forgotten about me? No. The Lord is keen. The Lord is keener that you be fed than you are yourself to be fed.

Let us make no doubts about that. It is one of the things the Lord wants for all his people, not some of his people, but all his people, that they will be nourished and that they'll be fed.

Just as we need our food during the day, our natural food, it is vital that we have our spiritual food as well. And we will not grow, we will not be nourished, we will not develop as Christians if we don't feed on the word.

We fool ourselves if we think that somehow that we will be nourished and strengthened and develop and mature and grow if we never open our Bibles. It doesn't work like that.

[21 : 17] It is always through the word. It doesn't mean that we need to read vast sections of God's. I've said this often enough, and I believe it to be true. Yes, it's important to read.

I believe it's important to read right through the Bible. But I also believe it is more important to read a small part of God's word every day prayerfully so that we meditate upon that truth.

I think meditating upon the truth is vital. It is so important for us. To meditate is to chew upon. And as we reflect on the word, ask that the Lord would open our mind, open our heart.

That's what the psalmist said. Shine the light upon the word. Open my eyes, he says, that I might behold wonderful things out of your law.

I wonder, did we, as we come to church today, did we pray that? Did we say to the Lord, Lord, you know, when I come to church today, would you open, open my eyes that I might see wonderful things out of your word?

[22 : 30] And that's what the psalmist prayed. And, you know, sometimes we can come into church and out of church, and we say, oh, well, yeah, I didn't get too much today. But we've never even spoken to the shepherd.

We've never even said to the shepherd, look, Lord, I'm coming today to your house, and I'm going to come under the word. And I know that this is a place of feeding. Touch my soul.

Open my heart. Open my mind. So that I will see. And the Lord loves that prayer. And the Lord will open our minds and open our hearts to enable us to see and to understand because he wants us to feed, to be nourished, to develop, to mature, to grow.

He wants all these things for us. And so it is important that we come to the feeding places, publicly as we do just now and privately as we do in our own private time.

But you'll notice that it says that to him the gatekeeper over the sheep hear his voice. He hears the voice of the shepherd, and he calls his own sheep by name, and he leads them out.

[23 : 40] And it's here we see something of how personal the shepherd's dealings are with the sheep. He calls his own sheep by name.

And that is what the Lord has done for us as well. We're told in the Bible that he tasted death for everyone. And that shows straight away how individual and how personal.

And we often think of us Jesus on Calvary's cross. We tend to think of it in an abstract way. And we see him there in his great role as saviour and as mediator dying in the place of sinners.

But he wants us to think about it personally as if it was just him and you. Think about it. That's what he's saying.

It's just me and you. And it's as if he left heaven for you. He walked through this world for you. He was tempted for you in all points apart from sin.

[24 : 49] He suffered on the floor of Gethsemane as he saw Calvary approaching for you. He went on to the cross and experienced and experienced the wrath of God for you in your place.

It's so personal. And it's important for us to focus like that and to see Jesus in our place. That's what he wants us to see. He tasted death for everyone.

For all those that Jesus died it's as personal as this. He tasted your death. And so we see this. He calls by name. And we're told in the Bible in fact that you are in the Old Testament in Isaiah you are in the palms of his hands ever before him.

And so he calls his own sheep by name. You today are following the Lord because he first called you by name. You have called on the Lord.

You became a Christian when you called on the Lord didn't you? That's what it says whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. You called on the name of the Lord. Why did you call on the name of the Lord?

[26 : 01] You called on the name of the Lord because he first called you. And when you first called upon the name of the Lord you didn't automatically think oh I'm this is I am only coming to the Lord in response to his calling of me.

We're not aware of that at the time. But afterwards we come to see we come to understand and we realize this is the way it works. That he called you he drew you it's with cords of love.

And you'll notice that the good shepherd here and again we've got to remember that in Palestine the shepherds it was different to the way that shepherds or crofters or farmers work here. We tend to apart from in the winter when the sheep are in the croft and are being fed you will often find that maybe you're walking ahead and you've got the food and the sheep will come running after you.

But normally if you're taking the sheep say from the the croft out to the moorland or taking the sheep back from the moor to the croft you drive the sheep you're behind the sheep and you and your dog you're pushing the sheep forward.

[27 : 11] But in Palestine the shepherds went in front and the sheep followed. And that is that is how it is this is a picture that Jesus uses so often that Jesus is drawing us by cords of love and we follow him.

He's our example he's our guide he's our security he's our safety and you know the closer we walk to him the more we discover his friendship his fellowship his love his protection and such like Douglas Macmillan I think we've often used that illustration in this marvelous book I've never seen a better book on Psalm 23 than the Lord our shepherd and I'm sure most of you have it but if you've never read it please do as far as I'm aware the best book ever written because Douglas himself was a shepherd before ever he was a minister and he brought all his own shepherding experience to bear upon the writing of a well it was a series of lectures that he had given but he uses the illustration of how he and his brother were out in November and they were out on the hill and it had been snowing and there must have been a late gathering of some sheep that were still out and there was they went into a snow storm and his brother

Douglas was a big man but his brother was even bigger and they were going on like this for a while and Douglas was out and then the brother said right you come in behind me and Douglas said the moment he started following he just walked in his brother's footsteps and he said I walked really really close to my brother just behind him and he took all the wind the blast of the wind and all the driving snow and everything and I just walked in his shelter and walking became so easy because I just put my foot in his footsteps and he was there taking all the blast of this snow storm for me and he was saying that's the way when we follow Jesus the closer we walk behind Jesus the closer we follow him the more we enjoy all the benefits all the security all the protection all the love further away we are the less benefits remember Peter he followed

Jesus but he followed him afar off and he followed him so far away that he ended up denying Jesus wasn't that Peter ever lost his love for Jesus it wasn't that Peter fell off and was no longer a disciple of Jesus it wasn't that Peter had turned his back on Jesus he was still following but he was following way far off and because he followed far off trouble came and that's the way it is be quite sure of it if you're following it's far harder to fall if you're following close to the Lord than when you're following far off be quite persuaded of that so this is what the Lord tells us and so he's highlighting here that the sheep are those who are going in and out that's what it says when we reach verse 9 he says we're just going through this very quickly he says

I am the door if anyone enters by me he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture does that mean that a person can come into Christ and then go back out of Christ that one day you can be a Christian and tomorrow you're not a Christian no that can't happen now it is possible that somebody may have a some kind of an emotional experience where they say oh I'm a Christian and as time goes on they just they drift away and they they're never to be seen spiritually again but you know the true Christian will always follow the true Christian once in is always in now as I said sometimes we can follow at quite a distance and Jesus himself we say it so often Jesus himself says not every Christian is going to be the same not every Christian is going to be a hundredfold fruit bearing Christian you know there are some

[31 : 55] Christians and they are extraordinary Christians there is a zeal and a fervor and a spirituality about them that is marked and people can see it there's something about them that even when you're in their presence you know this is somebody who lives so close to the Lord they cannot hide the fruit the fruit is as it were bursting out of them but not everybody is a hundredfold Christian some are sixtyfold and so they will have less zeal and less of that fervor and less of that love and Jesus said there are thirtyfold those are the ones and they don't bear an awful lot of fruit but they're still Christians they're still following the good seed is still in their heart and the church must be aware of that oh yes we wish everybody wishes that we were all a hundred fold Christians but Jesus that's what he says some will be a hundred some will be sixty and some will be thirtyfold and

we've always got to recognize that so when it says go in and out it doesn't mean that you can one day be a

Christian the next that you won't be once you are in Christ you see it is impossible for Jesus to save somebody to have someone in his hand and yet lose that passion it's impossible and we put a slight upon our saviour when we think that Jesus can save a passion and yet for a while and then lose that passion Jesus says not one of his people will ever be lost and that is so encouraging to know it's impossible later on in the chapter towards the end that's what Jesus says I give them eternal life and they will never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand my father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand see today as a believer you're in the hand of Christ and you're in the hand of the father and there is no force or anywhere on earth or even in hell that can prize open the hand of

God and take his people out so that is one of the most wonderful things that we have in Jesus which gives us so much security and so much peace going on out while we go into Christ and we go out of ourselves but I think here it is really talking it's just carrying on about where you go into the enclosure and back out for the feeding and so on you see the sheep as we said are in the care of the shepherd but then Jesus there's a lot of things we could say moving moving very quickly here Jesus then in verse 9 he does make one of his other great I am statements where he says I am the door if anyone enters by me he will be saved and we always got to remember that this is the only way into the kingdom of God is in through the door there was no other way into the pen or the enclosure but through the door through the gate and that's who

Jesus is he is the gate and we've got to remember this is a lovely thing when we think of that enclosure and we think of the shepherd at the door the shepherd isn't just at the door he is the door no one can go in or out but through him and it is only he is the one who guards that he is the entrance and you know the great thing is this that the door today is open the door into the kingdom of God today is open Jesus is that door and he is inviting you in now right now the door of your heart might be closed but the door of the kingdom is open and if the door of your heart is closed against the gospel I would urge you right here right now to ask the shepherd of the sheep to come into your heart right now and say

Lord break down this door in my heart it's a door that has so far it's been resistant to you a door that has just it's like it's locked ask ask Jesus to open that door and that he will take you in with him into the kingdom please don't be beside that door and never go through it don't be standing beside the way and never walk on it don't be standing beside the well and never drink from the water that Jesus is all the provision is there and right now Jesus is addressing us and speaking to us and saying look I am the door it is the most awful thing to perish when you are standing beside the door that leads into eternal life and that's where we are right here right now so Jesus is saying

[37 : 33] I am the door and it's one of the great invitations given to us not only does the door speak of entry that's the way in the way in is through the door it also speaks to us of the security and the safety for instance if you had very important documents or jewels or diamonds I'm quite sure you would get a wee safe and you would put them in the safe and you would lock the safe door because you want that thing to be so safe and so secure and that's how our lives are because Jesus tells us all who come I am the door if anyone enters by me he will be saved end of story that's it he will be saved so we see here is this tremendous security that we have in Jesus in fact

Jesus once he is the door into the kingdom but he is also that you could almost say this powerful iron door that where nobody can go out you see once you're in you're in you're safe forever the Lord closes the door there's a picture given to us in Genesis of the Lord locking a door and that's the time of the flood remember when Noah went into the ark Noah and his family and it tells us and the Lord shut the door the Lord shut him in and that meant that Noah couldn't open that door there might have been relatives close relatives outside when the flood came Noah couldn't open that door to go out to get them because the Lord shut that door no longer would it be opened until the flood was over and you know that that door is a picture also of separation not only of protection but of separation because there are those who are inside the door and those who are outside the door please don't be at the door and a too late too late my friend today you're not too late you know what it says about the kingdom yet there is room room for you if you've never come there is room for you today and

Jesus is saying I am the door in and I am the shepherd who will look after you will you today come to Jesus and ask him to take you in to the kingdom to be with him forever let us pray oh gracious

and ever blessed lord we we give thanks for this great gospel this great news that Jesus Christ is the savior of sinners we give thanks for the fact that Jesus is a good shepherd the good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep we pray that we might indeed all of us every single one safety and the security and the peace that is in Jesus watch over us and bless us and bless all whom we love grant us grace in all that lies ahead of us be with us day and night and take us home safely we pray in Jesus name we ask all amen our concluding psalm is the shepherd psalm psalm 23 and we're going to sing from sing psalms we'll psalm 23 and page 28 the lord is my shepherd no want shall I know he makes me lie down where the green pastures grow he leads me to rest where the calm waters flow my wandering steps he brings back to his way in straight paths of righteousness making me stay this he has done his great name to display down to the end so surely your covenant mercy and grace will follow me closely in all of my ways I will dwell in the house of the Lord almighty psalm 23 the Lord is my shepherd the Lord is my shepherd no one shall I know he makes me light where the green pastures grow he leads to rest where the calm waters grow my wandering steps he brings back to his way this strength of all righteousness making me stay and this he has done his great name to display apart though will he have fear you rather from he and he me comfort and cheer.

In the sight of Miami, that day the news spread, the oil of rejoicing you pour on my head.

[44 : 21] My couple word flows and I'm graciously paid. For surely your covenant, mercy and grace, will follow me closely in all of my ways.

I will dwell in the house of the Lord all my days.

Now may the grace, mercy and peace of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.