

I have a pretty thick skin and things tend not to bother me much. You really have to have a thick skin to do ministry as a vocation. If you don't, either you won't last long or you'll always be licking your wounds. One of my life values is to be increasingly thick-skinned but also tender-hearted. These two characteristics have to go together. If your heart is very tender and your skin is thin, you're gonna get beat up. But if your skin is as thick as leather and so is your heart, you'll never be effective. So a tender heart and a thick skin must go hand in hand. If one progresses much faster than the other, you'll be imbalanced.

So I hope that my heart is getting more tender as my skin is getting thicker, but there is one thing that bothers me greatly. There is one way that I have been deeply hurt by all of you. I have been with you for almost sixteen years and in all that time, not a single person has ever asked me for farming advice. Not one. ;-)

You all know full well that I don't have any farming advice to give in the first place! Most of what I know about farming I have learned from some of you in bits and pieces. One thing I have heard, though, is about shepherds and their sheep. As Jesus said in John 10, *The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.* I have heard that this is actually true of sheep and so I found [a video which illustrates this truth](#).

That's pretty impressive stuff but far more impressive is what Jesus does with *his* flock. Let's read about the Good Shepherd in John chapter ten.

1 "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. 2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3 To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and

the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5 A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” 6 This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.

7 So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 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. 13 He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 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. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of 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.”

19 There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. 20 Many of them said, “He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to him?” 21 Others said, “These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

This is the well-known good shepherd passage, which means that you and I are sheep. Are you offended to be called a sheep? There is a pejorative term that is popular—sheeple. It means a group of people who mindlessly follow a bad leader or a bad idea. Since we just finished the Republican National Convention, someone might say, “Ah, they’re just a bunch of sheeple in the Republican party!”

In 2010 in Turkey, a herd of sheep were being led to a location for a Muslim holiday where they were to be sacrificed. 52 sheep jumped off a cliff in Turkey.¹ One sheep leapt off the cliff and 51 more followed close behind. The local shepherds were left with 52 sheep carcasses and no income.

But that sheep mass suicide pales in comparison that took place five years earlier. This also took place in Turkey but this time, 1500 sheep plunged off a cliff. Once again, one sheep jumped and the rest just mindlessly followed the leader. Only 450 of the 1500 sheep died because the others jumped into a pile of fluffy dead and living sheep. The more sheep that jumped, the pile got higher and made the fall shorter.²



Sheep are not smart animals but apparently they are not all that dumb either. But they are hard-wired to run together. They are programmed to follow a leader or a shepherd. When they sense danger, they run together as a unit. They also get lost easily if they are not fenced in or with their shepherd. In January of this year, a sheep in Australia named Sheila was found after being lost for six years! The

owner found Sheila along the side of the road. Her wool was so heavy she could barely move. Her wool weighed 93 pounds!³ I bet John and Virginia would like to get a hold of that fleece!

So the point is that sheep need the protection and guidance of a shepherd. That's just the way God made them. So when Jesus calls us sheep, he is not saying we are dumb, but rather that we desperately need a shepherd. So in everyday life, being a sheeple or a sheep, is not a bad thing, it's a wonderful thing. If someone accused us of blindly following the good shepherd, that would be one of the highest compliments you will ever receive! This text in John ten is dripping with truth and application about our Good Shepherd and how he cares for us, his flock.

1. The Identity of the Shepherd.

This point might seem obvious and redundant. The identity of the shepherd is the good shepherd. It's as simple as that. But it's not actually that simple. In this chapter we see two of Jesus' seven "I am" statements in this gospel.

- **"I am the light of the world.** Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." John 8:12
- **"I am the bread of life;** he who comes to Me shall not hunger." John 6:35
- **"I am the gate;** if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." John 10:9
- **"I am the good shepherd;** the good shepherd lays down His life for His sheep." John 10:11
- **"I am the resurrection and the life;** he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies." John 11:25
- **"I am the way, and the truth, and the life;** no one comes to the Father, but through Me." John 14:6
- **"I am the true vine,** and My Father is the vinedresser." John 15:1

It gets just a little confusing since Jesus is both the gate to the sheep pen and the good shepherd who leads the sheep. So there is a sort of mixture of metaphors here. Jesus is the gate and Jesus is the good shepherd. The rest of my 13 points will draw out what it means for Jesus to be the gate and the good shepherd, so we'll leave it there for now.

2. The Eternal Relationship of the Shepherd.

Like all truth, it is always necessary to understand its foundation, how it came about in the first place. Our relationship with the shepherd did not start when the sheep came into the world. That may seem strange because it's kind of like saying my relationship with you started before you were born. Jesus role as the good shepherd began with and is based upon his relationship with his Father.

14 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. The phrase “just as” is really important. We know Jesus and Jesus knows us just as Jesus knows the Father and the Father knows the Son.

Moses recorded the creation of mankind. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). There's a lot of significance packed into what it means to be created in the image of God. But it all starts with relationship. God said “Let **us** make man in **our** own image.” You almost certainly know that his is Trinitarian language. This is plural language—one God but eternally existing in three persons. This was the Father, Son and Spirit having a divine conversation. Our very being, our existence as humans, began with a desire within the relationship of the eternal Godhead. Their relationship was eternal. There was never a beginning to it. Their relationship was perfect. Conflict or disagreement are impossible. Their relationship was orderly. As we have seen many times, the Son perfectly submitted to the Father. The Greek pantheon of gods were always fighting. They fought with each other and they fought with earthlings. They are jealous, vindictive rulers who don't even like one another let alone us.

But in the eternal Godhead, not only is there an absence of competition, but there is collaboration with submission. They don't merely work in unison, they work in submission to one another. The Son submits to the Father and the Spirit does the work of the Son. This perfect, eternal relationship is the foundation of Jesus' role as good shepherd. Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” We were created into a perfect relationship. A perfect relationship with God and a perfect relationship with others.

Our original perfect relationship with God was modeled after the perfect relationship of the Trinity. This perfect relationship was a corporate entity. It was the Father, Son, Spirit, Adam and Eve. This was the original flock of God. Had they had children before they sinned, then the flock would have been larger. Let's say there were four or five generations before sin entered the world, then there would have been thousands of men, women and children in this original flock. Unless we understand this foundation, we will never understand what the final goal of the good shepherd. The goal of the good shepherd is not simply to save us, but to bring us into his flock. Everyone is saved personally. Each person is individually responsible to repent and believe in Christ for salvation. But there is a strong corporate part to our salvation. We are saved out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of light. When we are saved, we go from being outside of God's flock to being inside the flock.

3. The Goal of the Shepherd.

The good shepherd is gathering sheep, but for what purpose? His sheep know his voice and will follow him. But there's even more sheep. *16 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.*

Who are these other sheep? Before we know the identity of the “other sheep we need to know who is already in his flock.

Ezekiel 34 is clear about this.

And they shall know that I am the Lord their God with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, declares the Lord God. And you are my sheep, human sheep of my pasture, and I am your God, declares the Lord God” (Ezekiel 34:30-31). In the context of John chapter ten, Jesus is talking to the Jews. Ezekiel is clear that the Lord’s sheep are the believing Jews of Israel—human sheep as it says here.

So if the sheep are the Jews, then the other sheep are...the Gentiles. The Bible is clear that the kingdom of God will consist of men and women from every tribe, nation, people and language. Even the Old testament teaches this truth, as we see in Isaiah.

*The Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares,
“I will gather yet others to him
besides those already gathered.”* (Isaiah 56:8)

The same passage where the Lord’s sheep are the Jews gives a greater promise.
And I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. (Ezekiel 34:23)

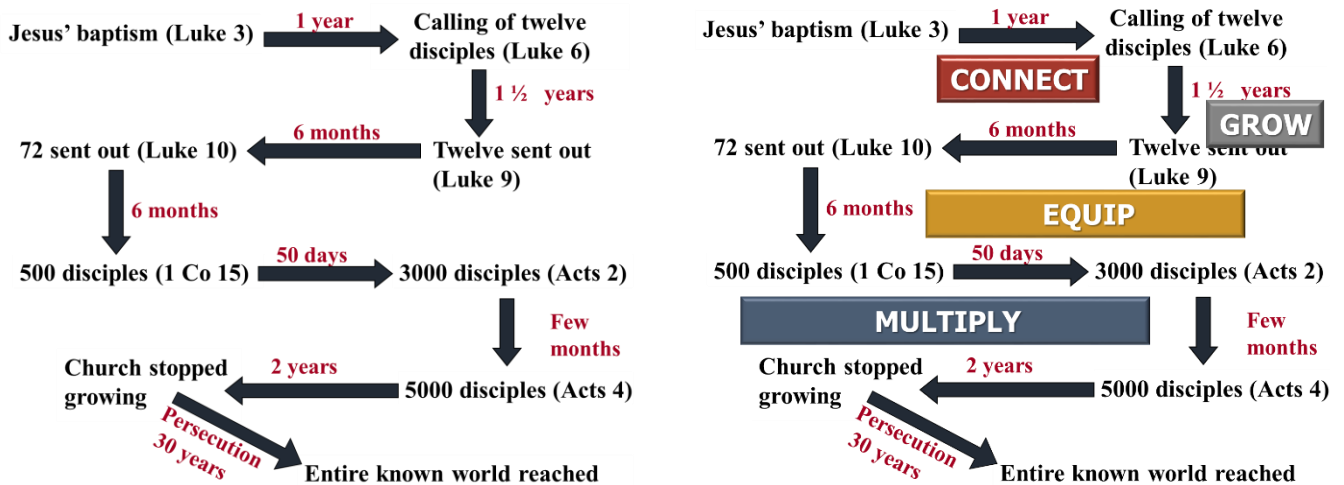
Ezekiel was written more than 400 years after David was king of Israel. How does that work? Jesus, of course, is the fulfillment of the King David as shepherd. So the ultimate goal of the shepherd is to have one shepherd and one flock. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost but in so doing, his ultimate goal was not merely a group of individual believers but one flock.

Do you see, here is how the eternal relationship of the shepherd relates to the goal of the shepherd? You start with the eternal, perfect relationship of the Trinity. We were added into that relationship and in perfect harmony with the flock of God. We were one flock at that point. But sin shattered the relationship and scattered the flock. So ever since the Lord has been on a rescue mission to gather his flock from every tribe, nation, people and language.

This is why being a part of the larger body of Christ is so important. Let’s face it. Being a Christian is a messy endeavor and when you put a bunch of messy people into the local church, it gets messier still. But this is exactly the way God intended it to be. God obviously did not intend the messy part. That’s on us. But He did intend that we be one flock. The end goal of our salvation is not just to be saved and to be with Jesus, but rather to be with Jesus *and his flock*. So if being one flock is the end goal for all eternity, then being one flock now ought to be our priority as well.

But some might think that a local church in little Viroqua has little to do with the one flock of Jesus the shepherd for all eternity. After all, the one flock is perfect and its universal. Jesus is referring to the universal church, not the local church. Jesus said one flock and not many little flocks, so what does his one flock teaching have to do with Grace Church?

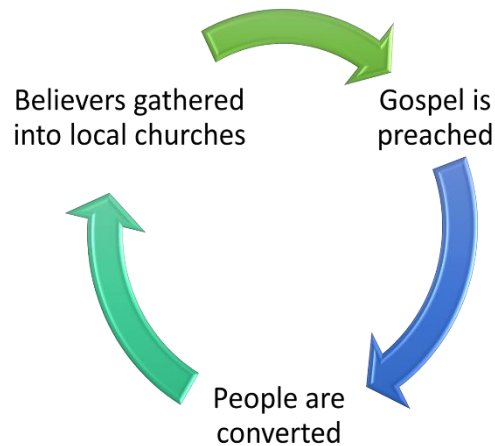
It has everything to do with Grace Church. Did you know that more than 80% of the time the word “church” is used in the New Testament it refers to the local church? The universal church is equivalent to the one flock here in John 10. So there is no doubt that the universal church is God’s ultimate goal. Grace Church will not exist in heaven. So the ultimate goal is one flock and one shepherd. That’s the universal church, the entire body of Christ with Jesus Christ as the head. But until Jesus comes again, the local church is the strategy for building the universal church. If you still do not see it, let me remind you of Jesus’ strategy during his 3 ½ years of earthly ministry.



Of course we have to continually dig deep into each chapter when we work our way through a book of the Bible. That’s the only way to understand and apply the truth. However, this can cause us to miss the bigger picture. Jesus had 3 ½ years of ministry. He was near the twelve disciple but did not officially call them until a full year later. Now keep in mind that Jesus could have used any strategy for reaching the world that he wanted. There were no limitations on him. He wasn’t following any playbook except his own and that of his Father. But the one he chose was what we might call slow and deliberate. Find 12 guys and pour your life into them for 2 ½ years. When we look at the big picture, we can see Jesus’ overall strategy.

Every bit of it was purely deliberate. It was a strategy, do you see? It was not just a nice guy moving from town to town healing a few people and teaching the crowds. His real ministry was with the twelve, preparing them. He walked them through a period of growth. They were raw, new converts some of them. They walked with him, stayed with him, watched him, learned from him and failed in front of him. Then he started releasing them out on their own. He sent out twelve and they came back and reported to Jesus. Then he did the same thing with the 72.

When he ascended to heaven Paul records that there were about 500 true believers. That’s not very many. Not many at all. But then, just filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter preached in Jerusalem and 3000 were saved in one day. A few months alter the number was up to 5000. Jesus is up in heaven, mind you. He’s gone but yet his ministry multiplied more than ever.



Once this core group was trained and released, their ministry model was simple. They preached the gospel, people were converted and then they gathered those converts into local churches. Then the process started all over again. Within 30 years the entire Roman world was reached with the gospel message.

What Jesus started and what the disciples continued is the model for doing ministry in our local church uses: Connect, Grow, Equip and Multiply. It is a local church model. Jesus and the disciples did not start parachurch ministries. Parachurch ministries have tremendous value in Kingdom work but they are not

central to what Christ started.

So put another way, the goal of the shepherd is one flock but until that happens and is complete, his goal is for local churches to do all of his ministry. This is the shepherd's master plan. There is no Plan B. There's only this plan and he continually invites every one of you into his plan.

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.

Rich Maurer
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¹ <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/50-sheep-commit-mass-suicide-jumping-cliff-turkey-article-1.455912>

² http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/offbeat/2005-07-08-sheep-suicide_x.htm

³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/12079887/Overgrown-sheep-is-sheared-after-getting-lost-for-6-years.html>