

Renewal overview 4. The Good Shepherd and the Sheep. John 10
We can't fully appreciate Jesus' teaching about the good shepherd in John 10 without looking at his miracle that precedes it in John 9. Here Jesus heals a man blind from birth, only to be condemned by the religious authorities for working on the Sabbath (a holy day of rest). Their cynicism regarding this miracle was so severe that they even called in the man's parents to prove that he had actually been blind in the first place (9:18 - 19). But even in the face of visible evidence, these Pharisees stubbornly refused to see the hand of God in Jesus' miraculous work - begging the question of this story, who is blind and who can see? (John 9:39)

Christ's heated dispute with this group of Pharisees prompted Jesus to teach them about the nature of the good shepherd and his flock. Central to this teaching is Jesus' statement, *"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father"* (John 10:14 - 15). So what did Jesus mean by this statement?

In regard to the identity of the good shepherd: This title should draw our minds back to the 23rd Psalm which begins, *"The Lord is my shepherd..."* By calling himself, 'the good shepherd', Jesus identifies himself with the Lord of this well-known Psalm. In fact, in John 5, Jesus explained why he did another of his great miracles on The Sabbath Day by saying, *"My Father is always at work to this very day, and I, too, am working."* In other words, the good shepherd never stops caring for his sheep. Some of the people who heard Jesus say this were ready to stone him to death for equating his work with the work of the Lord God (5:17 - 18). But despite their refusal to believe in him, Jesus kept insisting that in him, the Lord had come to earth to take care of his sheep.

This leads us to Christ's teaching regarding the nature of the good shepherd's flock. Jesus said that his sheep know his voice and follow him (10:3). It's important to notice that even before the blind man saw Jesus with his newly opened eyes, he had already heard and responded to Christ's voice (9:6 - 7). However, we must also consider John's statement that many of the other people who heard Jesus didn't even understand what he was talking about (10:6). Some even made the claim, *"He's demon possessed and raving mad!"* (10:19 - 20) Today people still have these dramatically different responses when they hear the words of Jesus being proclaimed.

A flock's relationship with its shepherd is one of mutual trust. A good shepherd not only cares for his sheep, he will even lay down his life for them (10:15). In return, the sheep are willing to respond to the strong and caring voice of the shepherd. However, sheep won't recognise the voice of a stranger, but will run away from it (10:5). Our good shepherd has come to care for us and even lay down his life for us. How will you respond to the shepherd's voice?

Renewal study 4. The Good Shepherd and the Sheep. John 10:1 - 18

1. In Jesus' parable of the good shepherd, who are the thieves who come to steal from his flock? (10:1 - 6)
2. In what way is Jesus like the gate to the sheep pen? (10:7 - 9)
3. What does Jesus mean that he has come to give 'life to the full'? (10:10)
4. How does the good shepherd lay down his life for his sheep? (10:11)
5. Who are the hired hands; and why is their commitment to the flock different to that of the shepherd? (10:12 - 13)
6. What does Jesus mean by his statement, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me - just as the Father knows me and I know the Father..."? (10:14 - 15)
7. Who are 'the other sheep that are not of this pen', that Jesus speaks about; and what is his goal for these sheep? (10:16)
8. Read Psalm 23. Spend some time reflecting on the similarities between this Psalm and Jesus teaching about the good shepherd?