

SESSION 6: JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD

6.0 OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this course called *Walking the Good Path*.

In this course, we are trying to discover who Jesus is, not in a religious or “churchy” way, but as a real person who walked the good path of God the Creator, whom He called Father.

From early times, the people who followed Jesus became known as ***people of the way*** because they lived and acted in the ways that Jesus lived and acted in relation to God and to others. What Jesus taught and how He lived was all about helping people and showing people how to walk the good path of life with God their Creator and Father. He said, *“I am the Great Spirit’s pathway, the truth about who He really is, and the life of beauty and harmony He offers to all. There is no other guide who can take you to the Father. To know Me is to know My Father”* (John 14:6 FNV).

We are looking at Jesus as described in the Gospel of John (John’s story about Jesus) which is in the Bible and contains stories about the life and teachings of Jesus. It is called the Gospel of John because it was written by John, who was one of the earliest followers of Jesus. The word gospel means good news. For John, the life of Jesus was good news because Jesus showed him how to walk the good path of life. In this course we are looking at what John discovered about Jesus.

During our previous sessions, we discovered Jesus as:

1. The Word – Jesus was sent by God the Creator to us. He is the message of God’s love.
2. The Truth – Jesus spoke the truth and is the truth. He is trustworthy.
3. The Way – Jesus taught and showed us the way of living in God’s love.
4. The Life – Jesus came from God the Creator to offer fullness of life to all people.
5. The Light – Jesus illuminates the way to fullness of life, life on the good path of God’s love.

6.1 REVIEW SESSION 5

In the last session, we discussed Jesus the Light of the world – giving light in the darkness so people can see their way to the good path and enlightening their minds to see the difference between the dark path and the good path.

At the end of the last session, you were asked to look for examples of how Jesus brought light into people’s lives by His love, care, compassion, mercy, and help for all people regardless of their status or condition.

Discussion:

- *Is there a particular story or teaching that you found particularly interesting or significant? Share and discuss.*

In today’s session we will look at Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who leads and looks after us as a shepherd leads and looks after the sheep. We will keep these stories and sayings of Jesus in mind as examples of His deep love and care for each one of us.

6.2 SHEEP AND SHEPHERDS

Being a shepherd is not a common occupation like it was during the time of Jesus. Most people today have never met a shepherd or seen a shepherd in action. But in the time of Jesus, there were a lot of shepherds; it was one of the most common jobs. So, when Jesus identified himself as the Good Shepherd, people knew what He was talking about. It is not that He spent His time out in the fields with sheep, but that He cared for people like a shepherd would care for His sheep.

Also, in times past, sheep were allowed to roam the hills and countryside to feed off the grass and drink from the streams. Today, sheep are usually kept in fenced pastures and in feedlots where food and water are provided for them. During the time of Jesus, it was different. Try to imagine what it would have been like.

Exercise:

Let’s divide into two groups. *One group will be called “shepherds” and the other group “sheep.”*

The shepherds group:

Imagine that your full-time job (24/7) is being a shepherd. You are responsible for a large flock of sheep in which in which there are older sheep as well as young lambs,

some of them just newly born. Some of the female sheep are ready to give birth. The flock is grazing in the hill country where grass is not plentiful, but there are some hillsides with good grass and other hillsides with patches of grass and a lot of bare rocky areas. There are also some valleys with flowing streams. It is not always possible to get to the streams directly because of the steep hillsides and cliffs. Sometimes, during hot weather, the streams dry up and the grasses begin dying off. Often, some of the sheep wander off on their own looking for greener grass and water. They can get lost. When night comes, the whole flock is in danger from wolves and thieves. The sheep are easily spooked, and the young ones can be easy prey.

1. *List all the things that you would do to care for the sheep in the flock. (Write each one on a separate sticky note.)*
2. *How will the sheep know that you are a good shepherd?*

The sheep group:

Imagine that you are part of a large flock of sheep in an isolated area of hills and valleys. There is no pasture as such, but there is grass on some of the hillsides and in the valleys. The hillsides are rocky and steep. It can be difficult and dangerous to get down to the valley where there is water, and sometimes you are very thirsty. At other times, the grass is not plentiful where you are, and it can become dried out in the hot sun. Some of the sheep in the flock always seem to wander off to find better grass, and sometimes they get lost and even hurt. At the end of the day when it gets dark and cold, you can hear wolves prowling nearby. The young lambs in the flock can be easy prey for them. And sometimes strangers sneak up to steal some of the sheep.

1. *Make a list of things you think the shepherd should do for you and the other sheep in the flock. (Write each one on a separate note)*
2. *How will you know that the shepherd is good and really cares for you?*

6.3 THE WAY OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

When Jesus said that He is a Good Shepherd, people knew what He was talking about. They were familiar with the things we have just talked about, how a good shepherd cares for the well-being of sheep and leads them in a good way.

Jesus says that He is a Good Shepherd, not like other shepherds who don't really care for the sheep - those who might steal or mislead the sheep and who are more interested in their own profit and wellbeing than in the sheep. Not every shepherd is

a good shepherd, just like not every leader, or guide, or mentor, or coach is a good one.

Read John 10:1-15. Let's think about the ways in which Jesus is a good shepherd compared to those who are not. (Discuss)

6.4 THE SHEPHERD KNOWS THE SHEEP

One of the things Jesus says about the Good Shepherd is that He knows each of the sheep and calls them by name (John 10:3). What Jesus means is that He knows you and me. We matter to Him. He knows our names. We belong to Him.

When we see a flock of sheep, they all pretty much look the same to us. Even if they don't all look the same, they are all just sheep to us; we don't know them as individual sheep, each with their own unique traits. Sometimes we look at groups of people that way too - we see them as all being Newfoundlanders, or Quebeckers, or Stampeder fans, or Leaf fans, or Americans. But something happens when we get to know people personally, by name. We begin seeing them as individuals in their own right, with their own personalities, ways of walking and talking, habits etc. If you and I really care about them, we call them our friends.

Discussion:

- *What does it mean for you and me that Jesus knows each of us and knows us by name?*
- *Why does the Good Shepherd care for even the sheep that are difficult and wander, or always seem to get lost?*

Jesus knows us well; rather than basing His understanding of us on one or two characteristics, as others might, He knows all about us. He knows us by name. We are His "sheep," part of His flock, we are in His care. Regardless of what He knows about us, He cares for our well-being.

Even though He knows the sheep who are prone to wandering off on their own, and those that tend to slip and fall, and those that are always looking for greener grass - they are still His sheep. They still belong to Him. He calls them by name and leads them on the good path.

6.5 TRUSTING THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Jesus said, *“My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me.”* (John 10:27 NIV)

Read John 10:11-14, 27-28. The sheep know the Shepherd’s voice, they trust Him, and they go where He leads them. His intention for them is good. He will not lead them astray, or abandon them, or feed them to the wolves, or sell them out. The Shepherd knows the way to good water and nourishing pasture and the sheep trust Him because He has always led them there.

There are voices we know well and have learned to trust. There are other voices that we think we know well, so we trust, but they are not good voices. We may be fooled because of the promises they make, the flattery they use, or just because others are following them. But these voices are out to take advantage of us and use us.

A voice is not just a sound without any meaning. A person uses their voice to communicate with people and even animals. A dog knows its master’s voice and is likely to respond to the command of the owner, but not to the command of an unfamiliar person. In much the same way, we respond to the words of someone we have a relationship with and whom we trust. Their words mean something to us, and we tend to respond to their words of advice, and comfort, and even to their helpful criticism. We trust their words to us because we know them – we recognize their voice, their tone of voice, and their expressions or the special words they use.

Discussion:

- *What voices do you tend to listen to? Why?*
- *Have you ever listened to the voice of a person who has misled you and taken advantage of you?*
- *Are you likely to continue listening to and trusting that voice?*

Often it is easy for us to respond to the voices that are around us, the voice of a friend, a politician, a salesperson, a sports hero, or some other celebrity. But it is difficult to respond to the voice of Jesus because we don’t see Him, and we don’t really hear Him in the way that we hear other voices.

Break into small groups to discuss the following:

- *What are some of the issues, problems, or concerns people have in seriously listening to Jesus?*

6.6 FOLLOWING THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Those who follow Him know His voice and trust Him to lead them on the good path of life. John calls Jesus *The Word* that was from the beginning with God the Creator. Jesus is trustworthy because His message is true and everything He did and said was consistent. So, the words that Jesus spoke don't stand alone. They were proven by how He lived and how He treated people. This is just like a good shepherd. The sheep know and trust the shepherd's voice when He calls them because they know He treats them well and will lead them to good grass and water.

Jesus told His followers that His words are like nourishing grass and fresh water for sheep. Jesus' words to us are life-giving. ***"The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life."*** (John 6:63). When some people did not believe what Jesus was saying, they walked away. But Peter (one of the disciples) responded, ***"Who else would we walk the road with? You have the words that give the life of the world to come, full of beauty and harmony. We have come to know and trust in you"*** (John 6:69 FNV) See also MSG and NIV:

MSG: ***"Master, to whom would we go? You have the words of real life, eternal life. We've already committed ourselves, confident that you are the Holy One of God."***

NIV: ***"We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."***

Another time when people thought they were good to follow their own way or just follow the ways and traditions of their ancestors, Jesus told them that was not going to get them on the good path. The way to the good path, Jesus told them, is to trust Him and to follow His teachings. Every word Jesus speaks comes from God the Father (John 8:12-30).

Please break into small groups and discuss these questions:

- 1. Name one good reason to follow Jesus as our Good Shepherd. What difference does that make?*
- 2. How does a person follow Jesus? Name one or two things.*

6.7 KNOWING JESUS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD

Jesus said, *“I am the Good Shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me”* (John 10:14 NIV); *“My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life”* (John 10:27-28 NIV).

To know someone and to be known by someone just as we are, is a gift, where it reflects a mutual relationship of acceptance, trust, and love. That is how Jesus describes His relationship with those who hear His voice and follow Him. Jesus knows His followers and His followers know Jesus.

“Believe” is a word Jesus often used when it came to following Him. When Jesus met people along the way, He often challenged their way of thinking and their way of life by inviting them to believe in Him. We see this when Jesus:

1. Met Nicodemus (John 3:1-21);
2. Spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4);
3. Helped the woman accused of adultery (John 8:1-11);
4. Gave sight to the beggar who was blind since birth (John 9);
5. Visited Mary and Martha and raised their brother Lazarus who had died (John 11);
6. Reassured the disciples who were worried about the future (John 14);
7. Prayed for His disciples (John 17);
8. Met with the disciples after His death and resurrection (John 21).

On these occasions and many others when He was teaching people, Jesus called on them to believe.

Please break into small groups. Each group will answer the questions for one of the following passages in John’s Gospel: John 1:12; John 3:14-16; John 5:24; John 11:25; John 14:1; John 14:11-12; John 20:20-21; John 20:27-31.

1. *What does it mean for someone to believe in Jesus as their Good Shepherd?*
2. *How do people show that they believe in Jesus as their Good Shepherd?*

6.8 WRAP UP AND ASSIGNMENT

Before our next session, think about what we have discussed – knowing the Shepherd, trusting the voice of the Shepherd, and following the Shepherd. Jesus is

the Good Shepherd who leads us onto the good path of life. Jesus calls us to believe in Him, to respond to His voice.

Think about the teachings and the words that Jesus spoke to people. What particular words or teachings did people who followed Jesus respond to? How were those words life-giving to the people who met Jesus? Give an example from John's gospel.

Are there any words or teachings you find particularly meaningful or inspiring?