

11. Jesus Gave His Life for His Sheep

In John 10:11, Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” As we help developing spiritual leaders in their spiritual development, we want to help them learn to follow the example of Christ. This is very important. Otherwise, they will be like hirelings, rather than faithful servants of the chief Shepherd. We will look first at the warning Christ gave about a hireling shepherd.

In John 10:12-13, we read, “But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.” In these verses, we see several characteristics of a hireling. First, we see that a hireling is not a shepherd. A hireling is a hired person who is only working for his own benefit. It is possible for a developing leader to only be concerned about what will benefit him. This type of person will not make an effective spiritual leader because he is not concerned about those he is supposed to be leading. In fact, a hired person will drive the sheep, instead of leading them.

Second, a hireling is more concerned about his own safety and security than he is about the sheep. When the hireling sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep. Matthew 7:15 gives the following warning about false prophets and false teachers, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.” At the very time the sheep need protection from false teachers, the hireling leaves the sheep (especially the newer Christians), because he is more concerned about his own safety and security. If a developing spiritual leader develops such an attitude, he will focus on his own success, instead of the needs of the less mature Christians. He will focus on counting decisions, instead of obeying our great commission to make disciples.

Third, we see that the hireling allows the wolf to catch and scatter the sheep. When a developing leader is focused on his own success, this phrase tells us there will be two negative results. First, false teachers will catch the sheep. Many new or immature Christians have been deceived by false teachers and cults, because no shepherd was helping them in their spiritual care and growth. Next, we see that many new or immature Christians will be scattered and never develop into healthy reproducing Christians.

Fourth, we see that the real problem of the hireling is his own attitude. The hireling does not care for the sheep. One of the greatest dangers, that a developing spiritual leader faces, is a failure to love the sheep that Christ has entrusted to his or her care. That is true whether the person is a Bible study leader, a women's ministries leader, a pastor, or some other spiritual leader in a church. Christ is the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. A godly leader will develop the same attitudes that caused Christ to give His life for the sheep.

As we go on in John 10, Christ describes what it means to give His life for the sheep. John 10:14 says, “I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.” The word that is translated “know” means *to become acquainted with, to come to know and to understand each*

person. A developing leader must be shown how to really get to know and understand those he will be leading. A developing leader needs to be shown how to ask questions and listen so that he or she gets to know the needs and concerns of each of those he or she is leading. Developing leaders will develop into effective leaders if they take the time to get to know, and understand, the people that they are leading.

John 10:15 says, “As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.” In this verse, we see two keys that are important as a developing leader learns to follow the example of Christ. First, the developing leader must make it an important part of his or her life to get to know the Father better each day. Second, a developing leader must learn to make sacrifices in his own life in order to minister effectively to those he or she is leading. Paul describes this attitude so well in 1 Thessalonians 2:9, where we read: “For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.” Here, we see that two of the attitudes Paul demonstrated were a willingness to work hard and a willingness to be available night and day.

John 10:16 says, “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.” This verse teaches us several things that are important for a developing leader as he learns to follow the example of Christ. First, we see that Christ had a concern for those sheep who were not a part of this fold. Since Christ was talking to the Jews, this was talking about His concern for the Gentiles. Christ had a tremendous concern for both the Jews and the Gentiles. In the same way, we want to help developing leaders learn to develop a great concern for people of other cultures and ethnic groups, by our own example.

Second, we see that in addition to having a great concern for people of other cultures and ethnic groups, Christ was also concerned to bring those people to the Father. This speaks of His concern to help the people of other cultures and ethnic groups come to a true understanding of what is meant by repentance and forgiveness of sins. In order to bring people of other cultures and ethnic groups to repentance, Christ chose to go to the people, not just wait for people of other cultures to come to Him. John 4:3-4 says, “He left Judea and departed again to Galilee. But He needed to go through Samaria.” John 4:5-42 shows that the reason Christ needed to go through Samaria was to help the people of Samaria learn how to have forgiveness of sins.

Third, we see that Jesus said the Gentiles would hear His voice. Peter was traveling with Christ, and saw the concern of Christ for people of other cultures. Because he had seen the example of Christ, Peter also began to reach out to people of other cultures. Acts 10:34-35 says, “Then Peter opened his mouth and said: ‘In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.’” As a developing leader, Peter had come to realize that Christ wanted to reach people from every tribe and nation. As a result, Peter followed the example of Christ and took the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Fourth, we see that Christ had a great concern to help both Jews and Gentiles become a part of the same fold. The last part of verse 16 says, “...and there will be one flock and one shepherd.”

Ephesians 2:13-18 says, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

In these verses, we see that Christ broke down the wall that separated the Jews from the Gentiles. In Christ we have all become one. One of the things we want to help developing leaders learn is how to help new Christians learn to break down the barriers that previously existed between themselves and others. For many new Christians, there are barriers that exist between themselves and other members of their own families. We want to show such individuals the importance of forgiving one another. To do this, we help them to understand why they forgive. Ephesians 4:32 says, “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.” God forgave us because of what Christ did for us on the cross. In the same way, we help others learn to forgive because of the fact that God forgave them for Christ’s sake.

We also help developing leaders learn to help people of various cultures become one in Christ. This means that we help them learn to take down the barriers between themselves and others, and replace those barriers with bridges. We help developing leaders learn that Christ has given Christians of different cultures and ethnic groups the same Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives all Christians the same access to the Father. If ten Christians from ten different ethnic groups are together, it is possible for them to have unity, because all ten have the same Holy Spirit. If each of the ten is yielding to the Holy Spirit, there will be unity. We help developing leaders learn to develop unity between Christians of different cultures, languages, and ethnic groups as we help those developing leaders learn to show people how to yield their human spirits to the Holy Spirit.

Just as Christ gave His life for His sheep, we want to help developing leaders learn to give their lives to serve those Christ has given them to lead, as His under-shepherds. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to follow the example of Christ, as they lead His sheep.