

# The God who wants to comfort us

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[ 0 : 00 ] When you think of a shepherd, what picture comes to mind? If you've been exposed to Christian art in kids' Bibles, you might have a picture like this.

You know, a pasty, gentle guy in a dress, stroking some sheep. Or maybe a typical European shepherd, like this one, with a walking stick and a flute.

You know, that's typically the idea that people have when they think of a shepherd in our culture.

The whole idea of a shepherd seems, I mean, let's be honest, a little bit namby-pamby.

You know, these sort of effeminate guys walking around stroking sheep. And that's how we'd think, unless you'd met a shepherd of ancient Israel.

You see, these guys are very different to what we might think of when we think of shepherds. Your picture of shepherding would have changed if you met one of these guys. You see, these guys in the culture were the main manna.

[ 0 : 58 ] They were the tough, rugged, fighting men of the day. And they needed to be. Because let me tell you, a day in the life of an average Israelite shepherd, it could involve anything from scaling cliffs without a rope to rescue a missing sheep, to fighting off a pack of wolves or a bear, in this case, with nothing but a stick.

It involved most nights sleeping among rocks and thorn bushes in the desert with very little water. You needed your survival skills at hand. You needed to be, you know, Bear Grylls, all your ancient, if you know who Bear Grylls is, the survivalist.

And he needed to be ready to defend the flock from armed bandits. Many bands of armed men would come and try to steal sheep because sheep were the main form of currency in those days. And so, effectively, a shepherd's job was kind of a cross between a park ranger, mountain rescue, and cash-in-transit security guard.

All rolled into one. It was quite a job. And you needed to be a real tough guy to be a shepherd back then. And that really, understanding that, gives us quite a new perspective on what Jesus means when he calls himself a shepherd.

When he calls himself a shepherd, he's not talking about the namby-pamby guy with a white nightie holding sheep that we often see in the pictures. No. He's talking about this kind of warrior shepherd who fights for his sheep.

[ 2 : 20 ] And so, when we understand that, it gives us a new perspective on the type of relationship that Jesus says that he has with his people, which I want us to see this morning.

How does he describe the relationship that he has with his people, who he calls his sheep, we see in both passages that were read for us. Which, by the way, isn't too flattering because sheep are typically smelly, dumb animals.

And that's what Jesus calls us. So, you know, we're not meant to take that as a compliment, but it is meant to describe to us the kind of relationship that God has with his people. And Jesus uses this picture of an Israelite warrior shepherd to teach us something very important about his relationship with us, which I hope will encourage you this morning.

And so, let's see what he tells us. Firstly, what he tells us about his relationship with us is that this shepherd leads his sheep by his voice. It's a very important point he makes in this description of the shepherd and his sheep.

So, not only were these ancient Israelite shepherds tough, but they guided their sheep very differently to how shepherds do today. You know, today shepherds drive their sheep.

[ 3 : 30 ] They use threats. They use shouts. They use sheepdogs to bark at their sheep and get them all scared and corralled up where they want to go. But back then, that's not how shepherds led their sheep.

Back then, shepherds led their sheep by calling them. It was very different, not driving them, but standing in front and calling them. And that's the first thing Jesus wants to highlight about his relationship with his people.

And it's very important we understand what he means. Let's look at what he says again from verse 2. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him and the sheep listen to his voice.

He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all of his own, he goes ahead of them and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

But they will never follow a stranger. In fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. All right, now, Jesus often used parables that were just day-to-day stuff in the daily life of the people he was talking to, to describe spiritual realities.

[ 4 : 37 ] And here he's doing exactly the same thing. He's using a parable. And so we've got to understand what shepherding involved back then. We've got to understand a bit of the context. So you see, back in those days, sheep would be, everybody would have some sheep.

That would be their bank account. Okay, they wouldn't have bank account at Absa and Standard Bank. They would have sheep in their back garden. That would be their bank account. That would be their wealth. And what would happen is because not everybody had a place to keep their sheep, there would be a common village pen, a common sheep pen, where in the evening, everybody would bring their sheep so that they could be protected from bandits and from predators and stuff. And they would put it in a common village pen, and they would employ someone, a watchman, to guard the sheep, to make sure that none were stolen. But in the morning then, after sunrise, or actually before sunrise, as the morning's breaking, each of the shepherds would come back to the sheep pen and call his own flock to himself.

And so you've got this picture of each of the shepherds standing there outside of the pen calling their sheep. And each of their sheep recognizes their own shepherd's voice and comes to that shepherd and gathers around their own shepherd.

And so, even though they were stupid animals, I mean, if you've ever seen a sheep, they're not the sharpest tool in the shed. But they still, despite that, had the ability to recognize a particular voice and follow it.

[ 5 : 58 ] They couldn't do much else, but they could recognize one voice. And that's all they needed to do, because that shepherd would lead them, that shepherd would protect them. All they needed to do was recognize the voice. So you see where this is going?

You see what Jesus is describing about his people? We don't have to be amazing. We don't have to be amazing Christians. We don't have to be skilled or able to serve Jesus particularly well or navigate life.

All we've got to do is be able to recognize the voice of our shepherd, and he'll do the rest. Isn't that a comforting picture? It is for me. I don't know about you. But you see, Jesus says the same that is true of those sheep coming to their shepherd is true of those who follow him spiritually.

And it also tells us something else. It tells us that Jesus doesn't force anyone to follow him. See, these shepherds didn't force their sheep to follow them. The sheep wanted to follow them because this was the guy that they relied on.

This was the guy who protected them and led them and led them to pasture. And so, in the same way, Jesus doesn't force his sheep, his true sheep, to follow him. Rather, he simply speaks words, and those who are his sheep will hear, and they will respond naturally.

[ 7 : 16 ] And that's really how you can tell that someone belongs to Jesus. Not whether they call themselves a Christian or go to church. Anybody can do that, let's be honest. No, you can tell that someone belongs to Jesus by how they respond to his words when they hear his voice.

So, an example of one of these followers, someone that heard the voice of Jesus and responded to it, we read of in the chapter before this, John chapter 9.

We read about a man who responded to Jesus' voice. In fact, the whole teaching of the sheep here was inspired by the events that just transpired. And I encourage you, when you get home today, maybe over lunch, after lunch, read John chapter 9, so you can read more of the story that happened just before this parable that Jesus gave.

But I'll tell you the summary. Basically, there was a man sitting on the street begging. He was a man probably in his mid-30s or so, and he was born blind. He had never seen anything in his life before.

He had been born totally blind. Jesus comes along and has compassion on this man, and he kneels down. He makes mud out of his spit and out of the sand on the ground.

[ 8 : 26 ] He pastes this on the man's eyes, and he tells the man to go wash in a pool. Everybody's looking at Jesus like, what are you doing? That's pretty weird. Anyway, this man goes and washes, and he comes up from the water, and he opens his eyes.

And for the first time in his life, he sees. He sees people around him. He sees the sky. He sees the city, things that he's never seen before. He sees colors. He sees light. He's amazed, and everybody else is amazed.

Everybody is shocked. They'd never seen anything like this. And unfortunately, this man didn't really have much time to celebrate his healing because he was soon dragged before the Pharisees, before the court, who were the Jewish leaders of the day, and they interrogated him, and they actually wanted him to deny what had happened because they didn't want Jesus to get popularity. And they wanted him to deny that he was healed, and they wanted him to deny who Jesus was. And they even brought in his parents as witnesses. But he stood his ground in this interrogation. And the question you read about it, it's actually really humorous to read, how this sort of poor guy in poverty standing before the chief leaders of the day, and he's just telling them off. It's a great little passage.

[ 9 : 41 ] But he stood his ground, and he simply said, listen, if this guy's not from God, how could he heal me? And they were stumped. They couldn't really answer him. And so, as anybody who can't answer a question does, they banished him.

They excommunicated him from the synagogue because he wouldn't deny Jesus. And then he met Jesus again, and he followed him. He said, I believe. And he became one of Jesus' followers. Even though that wasn't easy. Even though he knew he was going to be punished for that. But the point is, you know, this guy didn't have to be forced to follow Jesus. That was one of the main points of the story.

He followed him because Jesus, all Jesus needed to do was speak, and a miracle happened, and this man followed him. Jesus didn't force him to follow him. In fact, he found Jesus out, and he recognized him, and he followed him.

Jesus didn't have to compel him or sell him the idea, you know, to follow him. And it's the same today with all of Jesus' true disciples. Just as it was back then. We don't have to come and try to sell people the idea of becoming a Christian, and show them all the features, like we might sell a TV to someone.

[ 10 : 51 ] No, because you don't have to force or compel a follower of Jesus to listen to him and obey him, because a true follower has had a miracle happen in their life.

That's how someone becomes a follower of Jesus. They've come to see who Jesus is for the first time. And they've had their spiritual eyes open so they could see spiritual realities for the first time. And as a result, they want to follow Jesus.

They can't but listen to his voice when they hear him speak. They can't but respond. That is a true follower of Jesus. Jesus says, his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

That is the definition of a true Christian. And so how do his sheep hear his voice? Today, I mean, okay, that blind guy, or who wasn't blind, could hear his voice because Jesus was standing in front of him.

He could literally hear his voice and follow him. How do we do that today? How do people follow Jesus today? Well, we hear his voice in the Bible. And if you've been coming to this church for any length of time, you'll know that that's what we stand on.

[ 11 : 49 ] That this is no book. This is no collection of human words. This is the voice of Jesus Christ, the Creator. This is the voice of God to us. That's why we make such a big thing of opening the Bible and reading it every Sunday.

This is the voice of God to us. And a true follower of Jesus is someone, therefore, who can't help but to respond to what they read and hear in the Bible. And so whether you are a true follower of Jesus, and that's kind of one of the questions I want you to be asking this morning.

Am I, you know, according to the Bible, according to what Jesus is, am I a true follower of Jesus? Or am I just going through the motions? Very important question to ask yourself. And whether you are a true follower of Jesus is not seen by how much you come to church and hear the Bible on a Sunday.

No, it's seen in how much you go out from church and do what the Bible says Monday to Saturday. And that is a true follower of Jesus. Someone who can't help but respond and change when they hear the voice of their shepherd.

And so I'm not going to force you to do what the Bible says as a pastor. That's not my job. I'm not going to compel you, force you to do it under duress.

[13:03] And if you do obey what the Bible says, you shouldn't, as a Christian, force anyone else to obey what it says. Because you know what Jesus goes on to say in verse 29, if you look a few verses further.

Talking about his sheep, this is very important. This is later on from the passage that Richard read for us. But have a look at verse 29. It's a very important thing. He says, my father who has, he's talking about his sheep, my father who has given them to me is greater than all.

No one can snatch them out of my father's hand. Jesus teaches that his father has given him his sheep. And so he's teaching us here that we don't decide who becomes a follower of Jesus.

God does. God decides who his sheep are, who will follow his voice. We don't decide. Only God can decide that. And so we therefore need to pray that God will cause a miracle to happen in people's lives so that they do follow Jesus.

We can't force them to. We can't make them out of any clever argument we might present to them. We can talk to them until we're blue in the face. Only God can cause someone to truly hear the voice of Jesus and follow.

[14:20] And that's the only way they will. Not by us forcing them or compelling them or making them feel guilty, which is often some of the tactics that preachers use in churches. You come to church and you're made to feel guilty.

So you go out and you go, I better follow Jesus this week because otherwise, you know, bad things are coming my way. No. Because the reason we shouldn't do that, the reason we shouldn't force people out of guilt or compulsion is because unless a miracle happens, none of that will make any difference to the person's life.

And if a miracle does happen in their heart and their eyes are open to see who Jesus is, then they will respond to Jesus' voice anyway. They can't but respond. And so all we've got to do is bring them to hear that voice.

That is our sole responsibility. That is our sole job. It's to bring the Bible into people's lives so that they hear the voice of Jesus. But our job is not to force them to listen to it, you see, because not even Jesus forces his sheep to follow him.

He just speaks and those whom God has chosen will hear and they will obey. But now, maybe you're sitting here and you're thinking to yourself, yeah, well, maybe I'm not a real sheep then.

[15:34] Maybe I'm not a follower of Jesus, if that's the definition of a follower of Jesus. I don't really obey his voice in my life, you know, Monday to Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

But to be honest, you know, I don't really want to be a sheep. Who wants to be a sheep? I mean, I'd rather live my own life. I'd rather call the shots in my life. Well, to that, which is a common response to people who, you know, there's many people sitting in church right now, Sunday morning, and that's what's going through their minds.

They're listening to the voice of Jesus, but they're going, yeah, nah. You know what? I think I still want to call the shots this week. I think I still want to rule my life. I'm not going to be a follower.

I'm not going to be a sheep. Well, to you, I say, you're already a sheep. That's the thing. People don't realize. We're all sheep to something or someone.

We're all following something or someone. We're all chasing after something outside of ourselves to fulfill our desires. We can't fulfill our desires in and of ourselves. So we all chase something.

[16:40] We all chase after something. And you chase after something. I chase after something. We all follow something. And so we're all sheep at the end of the day. The only question is, what are you going to choose to follow after?

You're going to follow after something. But Jesus comes and gives us the choice to follow after him, to be his sheep. Because I want to tell you this morning, there is nothing and no one worth following more than Jesus.

That's what I hope that you will understand this morning. And the reason is, the second point I want to talk about is that this shepherd wants the best for his sheep. This is something that we need to realize.

This shepherd wants the best for his sheep. And he is able to give it to us better than anything or anyone else could. We see that in what he says next from verse 7.

Have a look. Therefore Jesus said again, very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved.

[17:42] They will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

Let's think for a moment what Jesus is saying here. Okay. He says that he is the gate through which people can find two things.

Did you notice in that passage? He says he is the gate through which people can find both protection, salvation. And by that he means rescue from sins. Rescue from the consequence of our sins which we've all committed and which all need to be punished.

Jesus says he is the gate through which we can find salvation. But he also says he is the gate through which we can find pasture. You know, the sheep go in and come out and they go out and they find pasture. And so by that, by pasture, he means life and peace and happiness.

You know, those things that we're all searching for. Jesus says, no, I'm the gate to those things. I'm the gate to life and to life to the full, he says in verse 10. But then what he does is he contrasts himself with these other shady characters who he calls thieves and robbers.

[18:56] People who have come before him, he says. And he says he's not like them. And so what does he mean? Who does he mean when he's talking about these thieves and robbers? Well, he seems to be talking about other leaders and teachers back in those days who promised people life and hope and happiness and salvation.

If only they would follow them, but who never were able to deliver on their promises. And they were really only doing it to line their own pockets or to gain popularity.

Of course, that doesn't happen today, does it? Of course it does. I mean, you just got to turn on, you know, God TV or whatever it is on DSTV and you see it all over the place. There are people all over the place doing exactly the same thing as in Jesus' day.

Thieves and robbers, he calls them. And flashy, compelling religious leaders who speak really compellingly and you really want to listen to them and they sound like they know what they're talking about.

And they call people to follow them with all sorts of promises like health and wealth and prosperity. All you've got to do is pay them enough. And then you get all of those things they promise.

[20:01] Or actually you don't. Or they could be teachers of religion teaching other ways to heaven and what you must do for them in order to get to heaven.

All these boxes you must tick to make the teacher more important. Or, you know, you even see it in the secular world, outside of the religious world. Secular teachers showing you how you can have fullness of life and satisfaction in your own strength.

All you've got to do is get their, you know, 30-day course for a thousand rand or whatever it is. Which is really just another form of religion. All these books you see about promoting health and happiness and prosperity and fulfillment.

And it's just another form of religion. It's just another of the many supposed shepherds that want sheep to follow him. You know what Jesus says about them?

Thieves and robbers. Jesus doesn't mince his words. Because these people don't give you what they promise. They can't. All they do is take.

[21:08] In fact, there's only one teacher in history who has proven beyond any doubt that he comes to give and not to take. And that is Jesus himself. Look at what he says in verse 7. Sorry, verse 11. As opposed to all the thieves and robbers, he says, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. What a thought. What a thought. I mean, what shepherd in his right mind would willingly give his life to save smelly, dirty, stupid sheep?

I mean, think about it. What shepherd would lay down his life for his sheep? It's a shocking picture. But it's the picture Jesus uses to prove to us he is not coming with false promises.

He is not coming to get something from us. He is coming to give something to us. Jesus says he would be a shepherd.

He was a shepherd who laid down his life for his sheep. When he died on the cross, willingly for sinners like us, he laid down his life. He says at the end of this passage, just a few verses later, he

says, I lay down my life and I take it up again.

[ 22 : 18 ] Nobody forced Jesus to die on the cross. Not even the Roman soldiers and the Jewish Sanhedrin who it looked like. No. Jesus was in full control and he laid down his life and he did it.

Why did he do that? Why did he die? Why did he go through all that pain and suffering? Because he was thinking of his sheep and all of their dirtiness and all of their sin which he could take on himself. And that's what he did when he died on the cross.

He took the penalty for the sins that we deserve to be punished more. Let's get that right. We deserve to be punished for our sins far worse than we think. And he did that all.

He took that so that we can come into right relationship with God and enjoy the life that God wants to give us and made us to live. Abundant, thrilling, full, eternal life. That's the life he wants us to live. And that's why Jesus says, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. Have it abundantly. That's what Jesus says. And only Jesus who died for sins can give that to us.

[ 23 : 19 ] No one else can. I mean, I don't know about you, but nobody else that I know have ever died for the sins of others apart from Jesus. And that's why he's the gate.

And nobody could die for the sins of others except the Son of God who was sinless. And that's why he's the gate to salvation and life.

Note, not a gate. He doesn't say, I'm a gate. Like, the world would have you believe. Jesus is one way, but there's many other ways and everybody has a different sort of element of truth. No, Jesus says, I'm the gate.

The gate. The only gate. But you know what else Jesus shows us here? Why it's so worth following him? You know, because Jesus died for his sheep, not only is he the gate to eternal life, but he has proven.

Now, this kind of hit me like a ton of bricks when I was preparing this week. Jesus, in his death, has proven that he would give anything for the good of his sheep. He proved to us in his death how much he loves his sheep.

[ 24 : 23 ] I mean, just like a shepherd that stands in front of the bear and dies for the sake of his sheep proves how much he values those sheep. That is what Jesus is saying to you and I today. That to him we're valuable.

Think about that. And he has our best interests at heart, always. And so if you are one of his sheep, if you are one of the sheep that we saw was defined earlier, a true follower of Jesus, you know what that means for you?

It means, just think about this, it means that the Son of God, the creator of the cosmos, the person who flung the stars into space, the person who made you and your body, the person who is in control of this entire universe, God himself, is thinking of your good right now, is wanting the best for you right now.

He who controls all the circumstances of your life, he who has infinite resources at his disposal, is working for your good right now, and he's thinking what is best for you.

What can he do that's best for you right now? He has your best interests at heart. He wouldn't have laid down his life for you if he didn't. He wants to comfort you.

[ 25 : 45 ] He wants you to be happy. The creator of this universe wants you to be happy. He wants you to enjoy life and enjoy it to the full, abundantly. How could you not follow a shepherd like that?

How could you not follow a shepherd who has infinite resources at his disposal and infinitely wants the best for you, more than you could ever want for yourself? How could you not follow a shepherd like that?

Why would you not want to be one of his sheep? Please tell me. Please tell me. Why would you want to follow after anything else? All the thieves and the robbers in this world who can't deliver a life that you so desperately want.

Why would you follow after them for life and happiness when Jesus has proven to us that he is the gate, he is the way. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, let alone has abundant life, apart from him.

And then thirdly, not only does Jesus want the best for his sheep, but another point which is related to that is that he actually wants relationship with his sheep. Did you notice that? He calls them by name.

[ 26 : 47 ] He actually wants to have a relationship with his sheep, which again is a shocking picture. What shepherd would want to have a relationship with each one of his smelly sheep? No,

well, Jesus says he wants to have a relationship.

Look at verse 14 onwards. He says, I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep. I know my sheep. And my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay my life down for the sheep.

I have other sheep also who are not of the sheep, and I must bring them in also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me, the reason my Father loves me, is that I lay down my life only to take it up again.

And so here Jesus is explaining why he came to earth, and why he was willing to die for his sheep. Not only his sheep in Israel, but his sheep around the world who would respond to his voice, and a miracle would happen in their lives.

And they would be part of this one flock, which right now in this world Jesus is gathering. That's the stage of history we're in. Jesus is gathering his worldwide flock of true sheep to himself.

[ 27 : 49 ] That's what this is all about, this world that we're living in, this age that we're living in. But here Jesus explains why he died. And notice, now this is also quite a surprise.

It wasn't primarily because of the relationship he had with us, but primarily it was because of the relationship he had with his Father that he died. Did you notice that? It was out of love for his Father, and because of his Father's love for him, that he chose to come and die and suffer for us. He says in verse 17, again, The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life. You see, he was actually thinking primarily of his relationship with his Father. Now, when he says that the reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life, he doesn't mean that he had to earn his Father's love by dying.

No, the Father has always loved the Son in eternity past. What he means is that Jesus, dying for his people, has always been part and parcel of the relationship that he has with his Father.

Because right in eternity past, they both knew that he was going to do that. Jesus' willingness to die for his sheep is a characteristic that he's always had, that the Father has always loved. Okay?

[ 28 : 59 ] And it's also, when he came to earth to do it, it's an act of the Son to show his love for the Father. So, Jesus dying for us is actually an act of love that the Son was showing for his Father.

And so, you could even say that him coming to earth to die for us wasn't really about us at all. It was about the relationship Jesus had with his Father.

But, by dying for us, that perfect relationship now overflows to us. We get to experience and be part of this amazing heavenly relationship that has always existed in eternity past.

Let me illustrate it like this. It's like one of those champagne fountains. Anybody here been to a fancy party recently? No, you don't go to fancy parties. Okay, well, fine. But, if you did go to a fancy party, often you'd find one of these champagne fountains.

I don't know if you've ever seen one in action. But, what happens is that all the champagne glasses are balanced into a big pyramid. Sometimes it can, you know, go like the height of two or three people. And there's one glass at the top, just one.

[ 30 : 05 ] And then you pour the champagne into the glass at the top. But, there's so much champagne that it overflows into the glasses below. And then they get filled up and they overflow into the ones below them.

And so, more and more glasses are filled until all the glasses are filled with champagne. But, I think, you know, the champagne fountain is a great illustration of the love that exists between the Father and the Son.

There's so much of it. And there was so much in eternity past. This pure, you know, white-hot love that existed. From which, by the way, all love that we experience on earth is just a small, little shard of that great source of love which exists in eternity past.

You know, the love that we experience, which is the greatest experience we can ever have, is only a poor shadow of the love that exists in eternity past, in the Godhead, between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But, there's so much, and it's so intense that it overflows. It overflows not only into the creation of the world, which, by the way, God the Father created this universe out of love for His Son, because He made this world for His Son to rule.

[ 31 : 15 ] It was kind of like a birthday present for Jesus, this entire universe. But, even more, not only does that love overflow into creation, but it overflows into the salvation of you and me.

Jesus died as an overflow of the love He has with the Father that has overflowed to us and to our salvation, because now He wants us to come into that relationship and experience that intense, white-hot love.

He desires for us to have that same intensity of relationship with Him as He has with the Father. That's why He says, verse 14, I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

He's enjoyed this amazing, thrilling relationship with the Father, and now He wants people to enjoy that as well. You know when you have a great experience? I don't know, you go tobogganing at the toboggan park, and you're just super excited about it.

So you want to tell others, you want them to come along and experience the enjoyment that you experience. That's typically what you do when you have an enjoyable experience. You want others to come. Well, Jesus, for eternity past, has had the enjoyment of relationship with His Father, and He comes to earth to save us so that we can have that same relationship, and He wants to convince us of how amazing that relationship is.

[ 32 : 40 ] But think about that. Jesus wants relationship with you. He wants you to experience that relationship with Him. And that means that there is someone who longs for an intense relationship with you.

So when you're sitting in your room, alone, feeling sorry for yourself, no one loves me, remember there is someone who actually longs for a deeper relationship than you've ever had with you, and He longs for that.

He knows you by name, and He wants relationship with you. And it's not just anyone. It's Jesus, your Creator. And He gave His life to have that relationship with you.

That's how much He wants that relationship with you. That's how valuable you are to Him. And so you never need feel unloved again if you are one of His sheep. Let me assure you.

And when you grasp this, when you grasp the amount of intense love that Jesus has for you, and He knows you by name, how can you not for a moment not want to reciprocate that?

[ 33 : 45 ] And pursue that relationship from your side. Jesus has done so much from His side to pursue that relationship. What are you going to do this week to reciprocate and pursue that relationship from your side?

With all your being, how could you not want to prioritize that relationship over all other things?

Because, in closing, God wants you to experience real abundant life in relationship with Him.

He wants to comfort you. He wants the best for you. Believe that if you are one of His sheep. But for that to happen, you need to follow the voice of the shepherd that He sent.

Jesus, the warrior shepherd, who has fought off all your enemies to save you and to bring you to eternal life. And so follow that voice. Okay? Just ignore all the rest of the voices you hear every day. And follow that voice. No matter where it leads you. Even if it leads you through the valley of the shadow of death. As David says in Psalm 23. Follow that voice.

[ 34 : 51 ] And seek relationship with Him. Seek the relationship with Him that He desires to have with you. And follow that voice into life and life to the full.

Let's pray that God would help us to do that. Lord God, we thank You for sending Jesus to earth to be our warrior shepherd.

We thank You, Jesus, for laying down Your life to show us how much You desire relationship with us. Lord, help us to reciprocate.

Help us to pursue relationship with You. Help us not to ignore Your desire to have relationship with us. And help us, Lord, to truly believe that it's through following You that we can have life and have it to the full.

And Lord, we do pray that You would help us to do that. Help us to follow You. Help us to drown out the other voices and to listen to Your voice in this coming week. And this coming month. And this coming year.

[ 35 : 49 ] And for the rest of our lives. Until we see You face to face. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.