

## Celebration of Discipline 5: STUDY

Rather than study about study, we're actually going to...well, study. The topic is Jesus as our shepherd and we as sheep. Read the following three sections aloud, and then answer the questions.

*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So, when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 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—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. (John 10:11-16, 27)*

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters; he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Ps 23:1-4)*

When Jesus said, 'I know my sheep,' He didn't just mean, 'I know who they are,' but also 'I know sheep.' He knows sheep are **helpless**. They often get stuck on their backs like turtles, unable to move, and in warm weather they can die in that position in only a few hours. He knows sheep are **clueless**. They're so indiscriminating in their choice of foods that they'll eat anything, including harmful weeds and poisonous roots. He knows sheep are **defenseless**. They have no natural means of self-protection and are often so terrified by predators that they'll stand silently, without bleating, until they are attacked and killed. He knows sheep are **brainless**. They are so dumb that they often get weighed down by the water that their wool absorbs and are swept away by swift currents. He knows sheep are **directionless**. They can have excellent pasture, but if there is a tiny opening in a fence, they'll find it, wriggle through it, and wander away to less ample fields and potential danger. But he also knows sheep are **useful**. Each year, under proper management, they produce a valuable crop of wool. (Adapted from James M. Boice, *The Gospel of John*)

1. **REMEMBERING** Ask *at least* two people from the group—at least one male and one female—to retell the story of the Good Shepherd in their own words. Have them emphasize the points that were most striking to them.
2. **REFLECTING** What are some of the lessons you learned by examining these two passages combined with the background information about sheep?
3. **DISCOVERING** In what areas of your life are you presently feeling "sheep-like?"
4. **CONNECTING** What is it that you need from the Good Shepherd or from others? Discuss how you might go about obtaining those things this week.
5. **RESPONDING** What study could you undertake that might be helpful? If time permits, pray supportively for one another regarding these things.

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**There is no study that is not capable of delighting us after a little application to it.**

- Alexander Pope, 18<sup>th</sup> century English poet