

Pastor Tom Aug 9 2026

About the dress code for today. You guys have failed me. And you know what the worst part about this is? We put these online, and in about six months, somebody's gonna come along this sermon and put it up and it's gonna be like, what is wrong with that church? But I mean, there's a reason, right?

We've been on an Irish journey through Psalm 23, and people love this passage. But I don't think this verse is quite as flattering as you might think. And that happens to me all the time when I'm reading the Bible. I'm going along, I'm feeling good about myself. Then I come to a verse.

I think, wait a second, is that talking about me? Right? Because I was thinking about how the Bible calls us sheep not just once or twice, but more than 200 times throughout the Bible. And that isn't a compliment, right? God created all the animals.

He knows which ones are strong and majestic, and he talks about them all through scripture. The lion is described in Proverbs 30 as the mightiest of beasts. And God talks about the power and soaring strength of eagles and the fearlessness and strength of war horses. He says that deer are short footed, that oxen are dependable and strong. He even praises the wisdom of ants and the persistence of lizards.

There are tons of these. And God, he looks out at all the animals that he created. And then he looks at us and he says, sheep? Really, God? Not lions or bears or tigers or something?

I'd be happy being a golden retriever. But no, we get to be sheep. And the more you study sheep, the worse it is. They are probably the most poorly designed animal that there is. And listen, God doesn't make mistakes, right?

But I think he may have designed sheep the way that he did just so he could poke fun at us. If you start researching sheep, you're going to learn two things. They are helpless and they are dumb. Think about it. Pretty much every animal out there has some kind of defense mechanism.

It's dangerous being on the food chain. And there are tons of different ways they protect themselves. Some of them have claws and fangs and things like that. But even a deer can outrun you. And some animals blend into their surroundings.

So you don't see them. Porcupines have quills and skunks have, you know. Right? But what do sheep have? Wool, like, prepare to be slightly itchier.

That's their superpower. There's no claws, no fangs. They can't climb a tree. They can't run fast. They don't blend into Their surroundings.

They're basically giant marshmallows out in a green field begging to be eaten. But that's not the worst part about being a sheep, because sheep are unbelievably dumb. I mean, way worse than you're thinking. God didn't give them a lot to work with upstairs. Sheep have no sense of direction.

They can literally get lost in a field. And I'm not talking about a jungle or forest or anything like that. I'm talking a flat, grassy area. And the sheep will get lost because it just keeps its head down, eating grass until it doesn't know where it is. And it's worse than that.

Have you ever heard about a cast sheep I had until this week? Apparently, some sheep lie down and they roll over, and they just get stuck like that. They will kick their feet in the air and they will literally die if somebody doesn't come along and roll them over. I have felt like that at times, but it's not, you know? And sheep are followers.

Where one sheep goes, all the rest goes. Back in 2005, in Turkey, there's a flock of 1500 sheep. They wandered too close to the edge of a steep ravine, and one of them fell over and. And then all 1500 leapt after them. This is true.

You can look it up. The crazy thing is, a thousand of them survived because they were landing on the fluffy corpses that had fallen before them. Sheep are dumb. I watched this video right here.

Isn't that unbelievable? But listen, that's one sheep. Surely they aren't all that bad. We'll watch one more.

Whee. All right. And listen, God says I'm a sheep. So why the comparison? Is he just trying to show us how dumb we are?

No, the reason he compares us to sheep is because sheep are completely dependent. They cannot survive on their own. They need someone to lead them and protect them and feed them and rescue them. Sheep need a shepherd. And that's exactly how Psalm 23 begins.

It says, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. And in this psalm, David isn't telling us what kind of sheep we need to become. This is one of the best known passages in the entire Bible. Everybody knows it. Everybody recognizes it.

People who've never stepped foot in the church before could hear this, and they'll recognize it. But what you may not realize is this isn't some new illustration that David just came up with. We see it over and over and over again throughout the Bible. One example is in Genesis 48. It says, the God before whom, my fathers Abraham and Isaac, Walked the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day.

This is Jacob, who's at the very end of his life. He was over 100 years old. He. He had seen and experienced all kinds of amazing things. He looks back over his life and he describes God as being his shepherd.

And he absolutely knew what that meant. Do you know why? Because guess what he did for a living? He raised sheep. But I think the best picture of this comes from Isaiah, chapter 40.

It says, behold, the Lord God comes with might and his arm rules for him. Behold, his reward is with him and his recompense before him. He will tend his flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in his arms, he will carry them in his bosom and gently lead those that are with young. I mean, what a beautiful picture.

See, God doesn't merely lead his people. He gathers them up, he carries them in his arms. And that is one of the chief jobs of a shepherd. It is keeping his flock together. Because sheep tend to wander and get lost.

And when you look through the Old Testament, that is exactly what keeps happening to God's sheep. Israel wanders, and the kings wander, and the priests wander. And again and again and again, God has to go and get them and bring them back. And the crazy thing is, the sheep never realize they're off course. See, that's the point.

We tend to think that we have it figured out and that we're gonna. We're going the right way, but we get it wrong. Proverbs 14 says, There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is a way of death. We are prone to wander. Look at what it says in Isaiah 53.

It says, all we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way. And I hope you can see the issue here. See, our problem isn't that we're weak or ignorant. It isn't that life is hard.

The problem is that we have decided that our way is better than God's way. That is the essence of sin. That was Adam, and it was Israel, and. And it is us. Romans 3, 10, 12 says the same thing.

It says, none is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside.

Together they have become worthless. No one does good, not even one. Every one of us has wandered like a sheep from its shepherd. And we see a picture of this in the book of Ezekiel. By the time we get to this, it's the 34th chapter.

Israel is a disaster. Their kings and priests and spiritual leaders had all failed them. And they were the ones who were supposed to shepherd God's people. They were the under shepherds. And look how God describes them.

In verse 4 through 6 it says, the weak, you have not strengthened the sick, you have not healed the injured, you have not bound up the strayed, you have not brought back the lost, you have not sought. And with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered, they wandered, over all the mountains and over every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth with none to search or seek for them.

It sounds like sheep, doesn't it? Injured, scattered and wandering. And that is exactly what we do spiritually. See, left to ourselves, we don't drift towards God. We don't naturally pursue holiness.

We serve ourselves. That's the human condition. But listen to God's response to this. If you get to verse 11, he says, for thus says the Lord God, behold I. I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep and I will rescue them from all the places they have been scattered.

On a day of clouds and thick darkness, God declared that he will take care of his sheep, that he will seek them out, that he will rescue them. And then in verse 15, he says it explicitly. He says, I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord. See, the Lord has promised to shepherd his people, and he did so by sending his son. You see, 600 years later, a carpenter from Nazareth stood before a crowd and he declared that he was the one.

John, chapter 10. He says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep. And Jesus isn't just using an illustration here. He isn't just saying that he would be a good shepherd.

He is identifying himself as the shepherd that God had promised back in Ezekiel. He's identifying himself as the shepherd that Jacob trusted, the the shepherd that David sang about and the shepherd that Isaiah described. God promised to shepherd his people. And Jesus says, I am that shepherd. And then he told us what made him a good shepherd.

It wasn't that he was a great teacher or because he performed miracles. He says it right there. He says, a good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. And that isn't something that shepherds usually do. They protect the sheep.

They fight for the Sheep. But Jesus goes infinitely further. He dies for his sheep. And why does he have to die? The answer is sin.

The Bible says in Romans 6, 23 that the wages of sin is death. That's what we earn with our sin. Somebody has to bear that penalty. That's why I love the second half of Isaiah 53. 6.

We already read the first half. All we, like sheep, have gone astray. But don't stop there. You got to finish the verse. It says, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Talking about Jesus. And you see what Isaiah is saying. He's saying that the sheep wandered, but the shepherd paid. The sheep deserved judgment, but the shepherd stood in their place. That is exactly what happened on the cross.

Jesus, the good shepherd, didn't merely come to show us a way. He is the way. He didn't simply call lost sheep, he came looking for them. And think about that for a moment. Every other religion tells you to go looking for God, to climb higher, to try harder, to be better.

But Christianity says something entirely different. It says that God came down looking for you, that the shepherd left heaven and entered this world to rescue wandering sheep. And how did he do that? By taking their place. First Peter 2 says, he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

By your wounds, by his wounds you have been healed. Second Corinthians 5 says, for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. Think about what happened on the cross. Jesus wasn't dying for his own sin. He didn't have any.

He lived the perfect life. That Adam failed to live and that Israel failed to live, and that you and I failed to live. And when he hung on that cross, he was taking our punishment and enduring our judgment. The shepherd stood between the sheep and the wrath of God that they had earned. And when he cried out, it is finished.

He wasn't saying that he was done. He was saying that the debt had been paid, that justice had been satisfied. But the story doesn't end there. See? Three days later, the tomb was empty.

He had risen again and proved that death and sin had been defeated. The good shepherd who laid down his life took it up again, just like he promised. That's why Jesus isn't just some religious leader. Because Muhammad is still in the grave and Buddha is still in the grave. But Jesus Christ is alive today.

He conquered the one thing that no one has ever conquered. And that is death itself. And he did it for you. And so here is the question this morning. It's not, are you a sheep?

God's already answered that. The question is, who is your shepherd? Because maybe you've spent your whole life trying to be good enough. Maybe you've trusted the fact that you come to church or that you're a decent person. Maybe you've compared yourself to people that are worse than you and said, I'm pretty good.

But listen, sheep don't save themselves. Jesus doesn't tell us that good sheep inherit eternal life. What he says in John 10:27, he says, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. This is the invitation of the gospel. Stop wandering.

Stop trusting yourself. Stop trying to earn what Christ has already purchased. Turn from your sin. Put your faith in Jesus Christ alone. Trust that when he died, it was for you and for your sin.

And trust that when he rose again, he conquered your greatest enemy. Trust him not as a teacher, not as a great example, but trust him as your shepherd. Trust him as your Savior. Peter summarizes the whole story in one verse, chapter two, verse 25. It says, for you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your soul.

This is the Gospel. We were wandering and Christ came looking. We were guilty and he took our place. We were lost and he brought us home. So I want to ask you the question that flows from the 23rd Psalm.

Can you honestly say, the Lord is my shepherd? Because the good shepherd is still calling sheep today. And there is no better place than in the hands of the shepherd who loved his sheep enough to lay down his life for them. Have you please stand for our closing hymn. We changed it because this was sung by the VBS people.

So it is number six 88 in your hymnal. It is, Savior, like a shepherd, lead us.