

**Scripture** Revelation 7:9-17  
New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> They cried out in a loud voice, saying,

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb!”

<sup>11</sup> And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup> singing,

*“Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

<sup>13</sup> Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” <sup>14</sup> I said to him, “Sir, you are the one who knows.” Then he said to me, *“These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> For this reason they are before the throne of God and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. <sup>16</sup> They will hunger no more and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat, <sup>17</sup> for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

Raise your hand if you have ever wondered why we are often compared to sheep in the Bible. Is it because we are cute and cuddly, or is there more to the analogy? There has to be a reason why Jesus would refer to himself as the Good Shepherd and us as his sheep.

After much research, I found out why there are so many sheep references in the Scriptures. Some of the reasons are funny and heartwarming while other comparisons are embarrassingly true. Frankly, it is amazing we do some of the same things as these misguided but adorable creatures.

### **5 ways we’re sheepish people**

As a Christian, you have to wonder if God was giggling when he formed these fluffy balls of fur. Perhaps he made them just so we would see ourselves in a non-threatening way and realize we too can’t make it without a shepherd. Check out these five characteristics of sheep and see what I mean:

#### **1. Sheep follow others blindly**

Many people say sheep are stupid. Perhaps they are just “challenged.” I’ll be nice.

For example, I read about a farmer who stretched a rope across the door of a barn and called the sheep out. He let a few sheep jump over the rope as they exited the barn door. He then cut the rope. The remaining sheep continued to jump over the “invisible rope,” not thinking twice.

Here’s another true story: About 1,500 sheep were left unattended for a while. They got scared and started running until they ran off a cliff. The first 400 died while the other 1100 were saved. It turns out the first 400 broke the fall for the remaining 1100.

It’s funny to listen to stories about sheep—until we realize Jesus was talking about us.

We are compared to sheep because we apt to follow anyone without thinking, perhaps having no sense of direction, and cannot defend ourselves in times of trouble.

*“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6 ESV).*

## **2. Sheep are emotional and recognize the shepherd’s voice**

Sheep have a remarkable instinct for knowing the voice of their shepherd as they are emotional creatures. Amazingly, they will fear a stranger’s voice and flee.

Since they are emotional, they also have the ability to build friendships with other sheep. In fact, they can get anxious, distressed, or feel sad when their sheep friends are gone. Sound familiar?

Just like sheep, we get anxious, distressed, and feel sadness. It is important we listen for the shepherd’s voice to keep us calm in times of trouble. Otherwise, we could be led off by a stranger’s voice and encounter real harm.

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).*

## **3. Sheep are not meant to carry burdens**

You will never see sheep carrying a pack on their back. Other animals are good for carrying things, but not sheep. They were not meant to carry a heavy load. In fact, they would be crushed under such a weighty burden. We were not meant to carry our burdens either.

In fact, we are to give Jesus our heavy load so he can carry it for us.  
*“Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22a).*

## **4. Sheep will settle for less**

When sheep are thirsty, they will stop at a dirty puddle right in front of them instead of going for the clean, still waters ten feet ahead. Sadly, they are content with filth, so long as it satisfies at the moment. Furthermore, they will stink and never even know it. Truthfully, they lack discernment and judgment and, frankly, don’t know what is good for them.

How many of us have settled for less and not realized there was clean water ten feet ahead? Perhaps, we are content with filth and don’t know we

stink. This is why we need a shepherd to lead us to better things and clean us up when no one else touches us.

*“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters” (Psalm 23:1–2).*

## **5. Sheep are valuable**

In Jesus’ day, sheep were treated as prized possessions and their shepherds were counted as wealthy they owned large flocks. Why? Because they provided meat, milk, and wool. In addition, they produced offspring. Shepherds made many sacrifices to make sure their flocks were protected. They knew it was their livelihood at stake. How much more precious are we than smelly sheep?

God compares us to sheep in the Bible because we are priceless. So valuable that God came to us as Jesus, willing to give his life for us.

*“The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29).*

False shepherds use their position of authority to serve their own purposes. They forget the flock they serve and the Lord to whom they are accountable. The mission of faithful shepherds is to lead people into greater dependence, grace, and truth with the Good Shepherd and into a more loving relationship with other sheep. The shepherd is accountable for the flock to its master, the Lord. Shepherd leadership therefore requires humility before God and taking responsibility for the flock. It avoids pretense, tyranny, and the abuse of privilege, focusing instead on knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting the sheep. In this way they will hear the voice of the Good Shepherd and will one day enter the fullness of his presence as part of his flock; a flock that is made up of sheep from all nations, which he purchased with his own blood.

Not only are we sheep, but we are also all shepherds and need to share seven concrete that often go against the grain of today's individualistic thinking:

### **1. Know your sheep**

One of the most important roles of a shepherd is to be present (my grandmother's definition). Without presence, a shepherd cannot get to know people and remains a distant character. The shepherd needs to know their flock personally, requiring time, building trust, listening, and giving hospitality.

### **2. Feed your sheep**

Another of the shepherd's main tasks is to teach the Word of God in all its fullness.

- \* We must have a holistic understanding of God's history of redemption, beginning in the Old Testament and continuing to its fulfilment in Christ, as conveyed in the New Testament texts.

- \* We must understand both the necessity of the law and the gospel and the difference between these.

- \* We should have a growing desire to know the scriptures in the light of Christ's work of redemption.

- \* We must feed our sheep with grace from week to week. Only grace can change a person.

### **3. Lead your sheep**

A shepherd leads, motivated by the welfare of the sheep, not self-interest. They are servant leaders, ready to put themselves on the line for others. Leadership is not a position to dominate, but to influence people to go forward where the Jesus calls them to go, trusting in the God's ordained ways and power. Therefore, the shepherd must be proactive rather than reactive in his shepherding.

Leadership becomes infinitely harder if the shepherd finds his identity in his service position rather than in the cross of Christ. Since all humans tends to think of their identity in terms of what they do, it is vital that the shepherd rests his identity on Christ.

### **4. Protect your sheep**

The shepherd's job is to protect and guard the sheep against false

teachers. Fostering the Jesus-way. The shepherd does all this not by controlling, but as one nurturing fellowship.

### **5. Search for more sheep**

Faithful shepherds actively search for sheep by telling people the gospel. Shepherds in the church should actively reach out to others as light and salt, living the Jesus-way.

### **6. Start with your own family and friends**

A person should shepherd among family and friends in love, grace, and truth. Every shepherd must see this close circle as the first people we have the privilege of caring for in love. This does not mean that we are perfect. It means that our circle of trust is guided by the grace of the gospel.

### **7. Be accountable to others**

A shepherd never works alone. We are always accountable to other shepherds and the congregation for our work. We learn by seeking advice from others and putting all our actions into the light. We can and should be vulnerable to each other as believers. For this very reason, the scripture teaches that the local church has many shepherds. In this way, our faith community does not become the reflection of one person's strengths and weaknesses.

### **Why we need a shepherd and to be a shepherd**

Just like sheep, we have no direction without Jesus, the Good Shepherd. We lack protection on every side, and we were never meant to carry a heavy load. Furthermore, we need someone to show us a better way, so we don't settle for less.

Even though sheep are dirty, smelly, and lack sense, God made them valuable. In fact, they are a symbol of great blessing and prosperity. Take a lesson from sheep and run to the Good Shepherd who will lead us to the spring of living waters and show us how to take care of others, that we may truly know our worth as one who is priceless...

*"for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."* (Revelation 7:17). Friends, be like sheep and lead like a shepherd. Amen!