Hi,

A writer in today’s *Wall Street Journal* asks if this crisis could be [the catalyst for a great spiritual awakening](https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-coronavirus-great-awakening-11585262324). Let’s hope so.

* I’ve made the changes to my website, [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org). The page “[Hope in Christ](http://scottengle.org/hopeinchrist/)” is the archive of all the daily emails I’ve sent out during the crisis. The page “[Scott’s Classes](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/)” has the links for the on-line classes on Facebook Live, the recordings of those classes, and the podcasts.
* The class schedule is as follows: my Monday class on Matthew will again be at 3pm and my Tuesday class on Genesis will again be at 11:45. These will be on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle), using Facebook Live. I hope you can join us! As before, I will be on-line a few minutes early so we can all make sure we are at the right place.

I imagine we all feel the need for a shepherd, a good shepherd. So, let’s take a look at one of Jesus’ seven “I am” statements from John’s gospel.

***Psalm 23 (NRSV)***

**1The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.**

**2He makes me lie down in green pastures;**

**he leads me beside still waters;**

**3he restores my soul.**

**He leads me in right paths**

**for his name’s sake.**

**4Even though I walk through the darkest valley,**

**I fear no evil;**

**for you are with me;**

**your rod and your staff—**

**they comfort me.**

**5You prepare a table before me**

**in the presence of my enemies;**

**you anoint my head with oil;**

**my cup overflows.**

**6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me**

**all the days of my life,**

**and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord**

**my whole life long.**

***John 10:11-18 (NRSV)***

**11“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”**

Jesus’ simple statement, “I am the good shepherd,” poses a problem for us. We think we “get it,” that we have here just a plain-spoken statement of comfort and guidance. Very soft and warm – cute lambs leaping here and there, led by a kindly shepherd who gently cares for them, even carrying the lambs on his shoulders if need be. Very pastoral – and very shallow! As with all the “I am . . .” statements of Jesus, there is much more lying right below the surface.

One way to get deeper into any Bible passage is to read it carefully. This process of careful reading is called “exegesis,” from the Greek word for “leading out.” We strive to begin with the text and let it lead us to its meaning, rather than our reading meaning into the text.

Michael Gorman suggests that we think of exegesis as *investigation*, *conversation*, and *art*. Exegesis is the careful investigation of the many dimensions of the text, its historical/geographical/cultural setting, context, grammar, vocabulary, and so on. Exegesis is also a conversation with other readers of the text, including those who have come before us. They too have sought to discern the meaning of the text. Finally, good exegesis is an art, needing imagination, sensitivity, and intuition. So let’s take a closer look at today’s passage from John -- a little exegesis.

*A closer look*

First, we have to set aside some of what we think we know about shepherds. Then, as now, those who personally herd sheep have to be strong and tough, working hard in often difficult conditions to guide and protect their herds. On occasions, the shepherds have to confront a wild animal that threatens the sheep. Some even die in the line of duty.

Next, Don Carson notes that even the adjective “good” can get us off track. It is the typical translation of the Greek, *kalos*, which “suggests perhaps nobility or worth: the noble shepherd or the worthy shepherd.” Jesus is contrasting himself to hired hands who have no real attachment to their sheep, who are unworthy shepherds – unworthy of the responsibility given them.

Jesus is the “good shepherd” who “lays down his life for his life.” The worthy shepherds of the ancient near east may have sometimes been killed in the line of duty, but none of them intended to die. But, Carson suggests, Jesus’ strong language here is not merely about Jesus’ willingness to die for his sheep, but about his intention to do so, in line with the Father’s will (v. 17-18).

Even the preposition in v. 11, “*for* the sheep,” conveys this self-sacrificing act. In John’s gospel, the Greek preposition always occurs in a sacrificial context. In his analysis of this passage, Carson notes that:

“In no case does this suggest a death with merely exemplary significance; the shepherd does not die as an example for his sheep, throwing himself off a cliff in a grotesque and futile display while bellowing, ‘See how much I love you!’ No, the assumption is that the sheep are in mortal danger; that in their defense the shepherd loses his life; that by his death they are saved. That, and that alone, is what makes him *the good shepherd*.”

How intimate is the relationship between Jesus, the good shepherd, and his sheep? It is the intimacy shared by Jesus and his Father! (v. 15). There are even sheep that do not belong to Jesus, whom he “must” bring also, presumably a reference to Gentiles.

*Stepping back*

There is a larger context at work in all of seven of Jesus’ “I am . . .” statements. As we saw last week, the most important background is Ezekiel 34 and the “shepherds of Israel,” in which God promises to raise up a good shepherd from the house of David. Clearly, in today’s passage, Jesus claims to be the fulfillment of that promise. But there is more.

God as the Good Shepherd is one of the dominant portraits of God in the Scriptures, cutting across both the Old and New Testaments. Psalm 23 is certainly the most well-known, but, like Ezekiel, the prophets Jeremiah and Micah also make use of the good shepherd imagery (Jer. 23:1-3, Micah 5:2,4). There are numerous times that the biblical writers refer to God’s people as the sheep who need a shepherd.

These images of shepherd and sheep help us to grasp that Jesus’ statement, “I am the good shepherd,” is more than a statement about his identity. It focuses us on the relationship between Jesus and his followers, those who have placed their faith in this shepherd. We have heard his voice and we follow him. As the writer of Hebrews put it, Jesus is “the great shepherd of the sheep” (13:20).

As Gail O’Day reminds us in her commentary on John, the images that Jesus gives us are intensely relational; they have no meaning without the sheep. Each of us is among those for whom Jesus is willing to die. Who we are cannot be separated from who Jesus is. May we hear evermore clearly our shepherd’s voice.

Finally, here are a few words on Psalm 23 from P. C. Craigie:

“There are few psalms in the Psalter which are so well-loved and well-known as Psalm 23. Its appeal lies partly in the simplicity and beauty of its poetry, strengthened by the serene confidence which it exudes. But more than that, the genius of the psalmist is to be found in his extraordinary expression of a trusting relationship with God. To express such a relationship in simple language is no easy task; on the one hand, the psalm could sink to a monotonous repetition of affirmations, while on the other hand it could defy the abilities of language for articulate expression as a consequence of its profundity. The psalmist has avoided the extremes and found a middle path which is at once simple, yet also profound. The simplicity arises from the use of the shepherd metaphor, involving language which would be understood readily by all living in a world where the landscape was dotted with sheep and shepherds. The profundity emerges in the beauty of the poetry, which transforms simple metaphor into profoundly spiritual expression. And the appeal of the psalm has continued through subsequent generations, partly because the beauty of the poetry has survived the process of translation, and partly because (until very recently) the pastoral metaphor has retained its significance and accessibility to the majority of human beings. The psalm is written consistently from the perspective of the sheep; that is, its expression of trust and confidence presupposes an awareness of helplessness and need on the part of the one who trusts. In a distinctive fashion, the psalmist has set forth the fundamentals of the covenant relationship, not in terms of Lord and servant, but in the more intimate language of shepherd and sheep.”

*A site to check out*

Here’s site for those of you who are fascinated by the origins of words. It is an [online etymological dictionary](https://www.etymonline.com/) and is fun to prowl around.

*Movie recommendation*

Here’s another off-beat movie recommendation: Lars and the Real Girl. It tells the story of a socially awkard (to say the least) young man who finds a new companion -- a sex doll. I know -- like I said, off-beat. But it is a very “preachable” movie and if you will give it a chance, I’m pretty sure you will like it. Besides, Patti wanted me to tell all the “gals” that it stars Ryan Gosling.

*Book Recommendation*

I’ve always enjoyed science fiction, so long as it isn’t too weird and pretentious. I thoroughly enjoyed a trilogy by Dennis Taylor, the first book of which is *We are Legion (We are Bob).* If you do decide to give it a try and you have Audible or an equivalent service, you should definitely listen to it. The reader, Ray Porter, is astounding. It is hard to believe it is all only a single actor. It has been awhile since I finished the series, but I can’t remember anything in it that would need a warning. It is strange, but I was sorry to see Bob and the rest go when I finished the last book. This is something that might keep teenage boys busy (Rev. Kim!) if they listen to the whole thing (nearly 30 hours total!).

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott