

BGO Sermon for 1-29-17 –The Journey of the Shepherd: The Extravagant Shepherd



Last week, we introduced a year-long plan for our churches called “*The Journey 10x10.*” It brings a different focus each month, calling us to the works that Jesus did, those actions and activities in our lives that will help us build up our faith and draw closer to Christ.

We’ll begin focusing on prayer next week, with February’s challenge to pray 10 more minutes a day. March will focus us on God’s Word, while April helps us look at Christian Conversation. There’s sharing meals together, sharing our faith stories, inviting people to church, serving in mission work, even fasting. We’ll look at our giving, and reach out to others in acts of kindness. Our hope is that this will help us follow Jesus more closely, not just in the upcoming year but on through the rest of our lives. I even went as far as guaranteeing that if we take this to heart, we’ll be amazed at how blessed we’ll be.

1. Pray 10 Minutes Every Day	February
2. Read 10 Books or 10 Minutes Every Day	March
3. Connect 10 Times in Conversation	April
4. Share 10 Meals	May
5. Tell Your Faith Story 10 Times	June
6. Invite 10 People	July
7. Engage in 10 Forms of Mission/Outreach	August
8. Fast 10 Times	September
9. Increase Giving 10%	October
10. Perform 10 Random Acts of Kindness	November

Jesus used many ways to help people know about God’s Kingdom: he’d tell parables, he’d quote Scripture, he’d demonstrate God’s love through miracles. And he’d use word pictures of who He was, to help those who would follow Him to understand – he would tell them, “I am the way, the truth and the life” “I am the light of the world”; “I am the vine.”



The word picture that we used last week was Jesus the Good Shepherd. He’s the one that we need to follow, the one who knows the best path for us, the one who came to lead us to green pastures and still waters here on earth, and most importantly, the one to bring us safely home into His sheepfold.

Back in Bible days, people had their own image of what shepherds were like. If they lived in the time of King David, they might have used words for shepherds like faithful or brave – at least in front of King David. But by the time of Jesus’ birth, the reputation of shepherds had deteriorated, so they were thought of as lazy and dishonest – unfit for respectable company, even unfit to testify in court. It’s no wonder that Jesus had to specify that He was a GOOD Shepherd.

Words describing shepherds: one that wasn't often put with them was "*Extravagant*" – lavish, incredibly generous – or as Webster puts it, exceeding the limits of reason or necessity. The word might fit for kings or the very wealthy; you might even use it to describe the father in the Prodigal Son parable. But not for shepherds.

Thing is, for the world we live in, only an Extravagant Shepherd will lead us safely. Because our world is extravagant all on its own - going well beyond reason or necessity.

It's extravagant in its **temptation**. We are constantly being bombarded with messages that would lead us away from the Shepherd's fold. We keep hearing how this new product or this new activity or this new experience will make our lives so much better; when you get down to it, those are just echoes of the temptation in the garden of Eden: "eat the fruit, you will have it all." And since we like sheep are prone to wander, we can be led astray much too easily.



The world is extravagant in its **anger and hostility**; if you haven't noticed, you haven't been paying attention. From the acts of war in foreign countries, to acts of violence in our streets, even to the hard and harsh words and street protests of our politics, we live in a time when being kind or even civil seems rare.

The world is extravagant in its **judgmental attitude**. The Bible's Book of Judges has that verse that says "all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." These days it's more like "I do what's right, and anything you do is wrong." Don't believe me? Just check out Facebook.

And the world is extravagant in its **pain**. We Christians often say we live in a fallen world, and when the world falls, it falls hard. And it's not just that we see pain and suffering every day, we feel it too; we feel it in our own lives and we feel for others' pain as well.

We could come up with more, but ultimately, the world is extravagant in **sin** – turning away from God in thought, word, and deed – through temptation, because of anger and pain, by judging wrongly about God.

And because of that sin, the world is extravagant in **death**; as the Bible tells us, the wages of sin is death. There's that quote from Ben Franklin: "*Nothing is certain except death and taxes.*" You know, if you go live on a deserted island, you won't find taxes – but you'll still find death; or I guess, if you stay there long enough, death will find you.

But we don't have to be grim and hard in the face of all the world throws at us, we don't have to be shaped by the world's mold, we don't have to dwell on the world's extravagance. Because we have a Good Shepherd who meets the world head on with His own lavish, incredibly generous extravagance.



For every bit of temptation that comes our way, our Shepherd is extravagant in **leading us away from it**. "*My sheep know my voice,*" Jesus says, and so He speaks to us in that still small voice that reminds us of what is good and right. Abraham was chosen to train his future family to observe God's way of life; in much the same way, Jesus trains us in God's way of life.

What's more, our Shepherd lavishes out through the Holy Spirit **the power to resist**. So that we are ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done, as the Apostle Paul writes. It's in 1st Corinthians where Paul tells the believers that when we are tempted, God will show each of us a way out so that we can endure. Paul tells us that God "*throws caution to the winds, giving to the needy in reckless abandon. His right-living, right-giving ways never run out, never wear out.*"

You see, for all of our short comings, for all of the places that the world is extravagant in negative things, Christ—the Good Shepherd—is even more extravagant **in love**.

- ✠ For the world's anger and hostility, Christ is extravagant **in understanding and acceptance**; He know His sheep in only the way Jesus can, as the all-knowing God and as the Son of Man who has lived our life.
- ✠ For judgment, the Good Shepherd is extravagant **in grace**; as Paul says, He pours on the blessings in astonishing ways.
- ✠ For pain, He is extravagant **in plenty** - giving to the needy in reckless abandon.

- ✠ For sin, in righteousness mixed with **extravagant mercy**. Right-living, to be sure, but right-giving, even to the point of giving Himself, laying down His life for His sheep.
- ✠ For death, extravagant **in life** – abundant life, eternal life, resurrection life – because Our Shepherd has taken His life up again on Resurrection morning, and defeated sin and death in the process.

There are so many other ways that Our Savior is extravagant: in bringing joy, in peace like a river, in comfort in trying times. But what has stood out to me the most in this last year, that Christ the GOOD Shepherd is Extravagant in His Goodness. I've said it before in the churches here, folks, and it's still true: Jesus is not just good, He is good in every way that good can be good. He's Christmas morning good – filling us with joy, bring gift upon gift, celebrating new birth with us. He's Good Samaritan Good, stopping to help us when we are in need. He's Good Friend Good, Best Friend Good, walking with us, rejoicing with our highs and holding us up when things are lowest. We are told in scripture again and again of God's goodness, like we see in the Psalms: *according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good. Good and upright is the Lord.*

We're also told that that God is working all things together for good. This doesn't mean that all things will be pleasant or that we will never have hard times. It means that our Shepherd is good and will walk with us in all things and work our lives into beautiful tapestries.

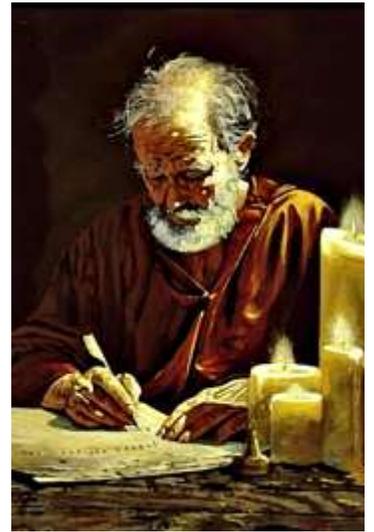


So what should be our response to the Good Shepherd's extravagance? Maybe the best response is for us to be extravagant ourselves. Extravagant in blessing others, extravagant in praise, extravagant

in giving of ourselves, extravagant in reaching out and inviting others in. Take a look at that list from the Journey 10X10 plan in your bulletin. What of those could be your way of being extravagant in giving, as Christ has been extravagant to us?

We talked about sharing our gifts in the Wednesday morning Bible study; we even had someone share the gift of playing the piano, while the rest of us sang. We all have those gifts in our lives, gifts given to bless others. And when we take to heart those gifts that God gives and Jesus demonstrated, we'll find ourselves growing deeper in faith, deeper in joy, and deeper in our relationship with others.

So, a last word from the Apostle Paul, *God “gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.”* Let’s go out this week and look for the extravagant way our Good Shepherd is blessing us, let’s thank God for God’s abundant, extravagant grace, and as Paul says, let’s be generous in every way, producing great praise to God as we freely give.



2 CORINTHIANS 9:8-11 (Message)

⁸⁻¹¹ God can pour on the blessings in astonishing ways so that you’re ready for anything and everything, more than just ready to do what needs to be done.

As one psalmist puts it,

*He throws caution to the winds,
giving to the needy in reckless abandon.*

*His right-living, right-giving ways
never run out, never wear out.*

This most generous God who gives seed to the farmer that becomes bread for your meals is more than extravagant with you. He gives you something you can then give away, which grows into full-formed lives, robust in God, wealthy in every way, so that you can be generous in every way, producing with us great praise to God.

JOHN 10:7-18 (NJKV)

Then Jesus said to them again, “Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who *ever* came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ¹² But a hireling, *he who is not the shepherd*, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. ¹³ The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own. ¹⁵ As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

¹⁷“Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”

GENESIS 18:1-5, 16-19 (Message)

¹⁻² God appeared to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance of his tent. It was the hottest part of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing. He ran from his tent to greet them and bowed before them.

³⁻⁵ He said, “Master, if it please you, stop for a while with your servant. I’ll get some water so you can wash your feet. Rest under this tree. I’ll get some food to refresh you on your way, since your travels have brought you across my path.”

They said, “Certainly. Go ahead.”

¹⁶ When the men got up to leave, they set off for Sodom. Abraham walked with them to say good-bye.

¹⁷⁻¹⁹ Then God said, “Shall I keep back from Abraham what I’m about to do? Abraham is going to become a large and strong nation; all the nations of the world are going to find themselves blessed through him. Yes, I’ve settled on him as the one to train his children and future family to observe God’s way of life, live kindly and generously and fairly, so that God can complete in Abraham what he promised him.”

PSALM 25:7-8 (NIV)

⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.

⁸ Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.

John 8:12 (NLT)

¹² Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, “I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.”

John 14:6 (NIV)

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 15:5-7 (NIV)

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”