

SHEPHERDED BY JESUS

John 10:1-10

Parenting is a good way to describe the relationship of Jesus as our shepherd. He speaks about being the shepherd who comes to the sheep through the gate. There are many ways that you can get people to do things. But we see in Jesus a shepherd who guides us that way a good parent does—by love.

Parents can use cleverness to get their kids to toe the line. Some child psychologists recommend using humor in disciplining. How would you discipline an angry child of 5 who called you a "poopyhead" (or worse) for insisting that he clean up his room or eat his vegetables? Would you:

- a. Demand an immediate apology
- b. Put him in time out
- c. Give him a spanking
- d. Say, Shhh! You can't tell anyone my secret name!"

"d." is an example of parenting by humor. You get the child's attention through doing what he/she doesn't expect. Here are some other examples:

Voice yourself. Walk into your child's room and ask them to clean it -- in a fake opera voice at the top of your lungs. Funny voices and using different characters are a great way to diffuse tension.

Fall down. A lot. Especially with toddlers; they think it's hilarious when adults fall down, since they do it a lot themselves.

False cry -- especially with boys. There's such a taboo against crying with boys that I do it all the time. Kids will experiment with teasing or some mild aggression, and I'll go 'WAAAAAAHHHH!' They'll laugh and laugh and want to do it over and over again.

Game it. Set up games where they can be symbolically aggressive without it being over the top, such as play wrestling and pillow fights.

Jesus could get us to follow Him through cleverness. He was the one who drew crowds with His miracles. Think of the performance He could put on if He decided to come to Stephens or Hilton Coliseum or even better Jack Trice stadium. He could "wow" everyone into believing in Him.

But Jesus does not enter the sheepfold by trickery, like a thief. He comes to us directly without any cover up. He is the One who calls us to a cross, not an easy, attractive life. What we see in Him is what we get—a real, live human being who came not with wealth, military might, or entertainment, but with His unlimited love.

Similar to using humor is to use reverse psychology. You tell a child to do what you don't want them to do, and then they do the opposite. For instance:

"How on earth can you see the TV sitting so far back?"

"Yeah, I used to skip school a lot, too"

"Just leave all the lights on ... it makes the house look more cheery"

"Let me smell that shirt -- Yeah, it's good for another week"

"Go ahead and keep that stray dog, honey. I'll be glad to feed and walk him every day"

"Well, if Bluto's mamma says it's OK, that's good enough for me."

"The curfew is just a general time to shoot for. It's not like I'm running a prison around here."

"I don't have a tissue with me ... just use your sleeve."

"Don't bother wearing a jacket - the wind-chill is bound to improve."

People often think that when Jesus healed people and told them not to tell anyone that He was using reverse psychology—tell them to be quiet so they do the opposite and get the word around about Jesus. But Jesus truly did not want them to tell others. Reverse psychology works when you get people to freely make a choice to do what you really want them to do. As shepherd Jesus knows we can't make a choice. On our own we will always go our own way.

Parents could simply force us to what we are to do. There is the simple idea of "I said so," which demands total obedience. That can be backed up by "time outs," taking away privileges, having dad reinforce it, and not wanting to hear mom complain.

Jesus could have forced us as a shepherd. It is the way we shepherd in the western world, like with cattle. You go behind the sheep with the help of a horse and

a barking dog and force the sheep in the direction you want them to go. As God, Jesus could make us do anything. He could control us so that we never went astray. For instance, remember how Pinocchio's nose grew when he lied? God could place sensors in us that would make us feel pain anytime we lied. The lying would stop. We would be perfect little robots.

But Jesus didn't do that. Instead, He says, "The shepherd calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice." In the eastern world where Jesus lived, shepherds do not herd their sheep from behind, pushing them in the direction they want them to go. Instead, they lead the sheep, and the sheep follow. In that part of the world sheep from several different flocks can be penned together. They are separated not by the shepherds individually dividing them, but simply by the shepherd calling to the sheep. The sheep of his flock recognize his voice and gather to him. The other sheep stay away, because they don't recognize that voice. We think of David as a shepherd and as a writer of songs we call Psalms. Shepherds use songs to project loudly to their sheep so the sheep stay close to him.

Jesus leads us to Him by talking to us. It is His Word that made us in the first place. That same Word remade us through baptism. That Word is what gave us the faith to recognize that voice and want to follow it. So, Jesus' way of calling and keeping us to Him is His Word. That is why He calls us in the Bible, in our worship services, in hymns, in the daily living of our baptisms, in His Supper, in other Christians. And He does it openly, not through fancy words or magic or trickery or sophisticated psychology. It is not the flashy call of success, wealth, or popularity. It is the call of one who enters, not as a thief or robber, to take advantage of us; but the one who comes to love us.

Think of those who want our attention—politicians wanting a vote, companies wanting us to buy their products, the government who wants our tax revenue and good citizenship, charities that want our help. But what does Jesus want from us? Nothing, except ourselves, not because He needs us, but to love us.

Next month's Mother's Day is a good day to see Jesus as our shepherd. Mothers can raise us through humor, reverse psychology, cleverness, and sheer force. But for most of us, when we see our mothers we see someone who loved us, who guided us openly by that love even when it meant spitting on a piece of Kleenex to wipe dirt from our face, reminding us to brush our teeth, getting us to make our bed or turn our socks the right way when throwing them in the laundry, or coming to supper on time.

That is what we see in Jesus. Our Gospel lesson stops with verse 10 where Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” That is a wonderful promise, but what really makes it wonderful is that it is true. And what makes it true is the next verse where Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” We look at the cross and see how Jesus gets us to follow Him, not by trickery, show, or force, but by His love poured out for us on the cross.