

Shepherding Sermons



The Voice You Are Learning to Trust

A Reflection on John 10:1–18

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Introduction

There is a fear that lives quietly in many believers, and it is not the fear of walking away from faith entirely.

It is the fear of being deceived. Of following the wrong voice. Of believing you are walking with God when you are actually being led astray. Of trusting what feels true only to discover, too late, that it was not.

This fear is not abstract. It is fed by real stories—believers who once seemed solid in their faith but gradually embraced teachings that distorted Scripture. People who were sincere but misguided. Communities that started well but ended in places no one intended. And beneath all of these stories is a question that will not go away: How do I know I am hearing the right voice?

The question becomes more urgent when you realize how many voices are speaking. Pastors and teachers with conflicting interpretations. Friends with strong convictions that differ from your own. Authors who claim authority but reach opposite conclusions. And beneath all of them, your own internal voice—sometimes clear, sometimes uncertain, sometimes shaped by fear in ways you cannot easily untangle.

You want to follow Jesus. But the path forward is not always clear. The voices claiming to speak for Him do not always agree. And the possibility that you might be wrong—that you might be following something that feels like His voice but is not—creates a kind of vigilance that never settles.

So you listen carefully. You evaluate constantly. You test every impression, every conviction, every sense of leading against what you have been taught is safe. And you hope that if you are careful enough, discerning enough, anxious enough—you will not be led astray.

But what if the vigilance itself has become the problem? What if the fear of being deceived has made it harder to hear the Shepherd's voice rather than easier? What if trust is not the same thing as certainty, and following is not the same thing as knowing every step before you take it?

John 10 speaks about sheep who know their shepherd's voice. But it does not describe that knowing as anxious evaluation. It describes it as familiarity. As relationship. As trust that has been formed over time, not through constant testing but through presence.

This reflection sits with the difficulty of learning to trust a voice when so many other voices are speaking. Not to dismiss the concern about deception, but to notice how fear can turn

discernment into something that looks less like listening and more like self-protection.

Main Reflection

The fear of being deceived is not unfounded. Scripture itself warns about false teachers, about deception, about wolves in sheep's clothing. The danger is real. The warnings matter. And the desire to avoid being misled is not evidence of weak faith—it is evidence that you take truth seriously.

But somewhere between taking truth seriously and living in constant fear of deception, something shifts. Discernment, which was meant to be a grace that helps you recognize what is true, becomes a burden that makes you question everything. Vigilance, which was meant to protect, becomes anxiety that never rests. And listening for the Shepherd's voice becomes so complicated, so fraught with the possibility of getting it wrong, that you stop being able to hear anything clearly at all.

This happens gradually. At first, the caution feels responsible. You hear a teaching and you test it. You sense a leading and you evaluate it. You feel conviction about something and you examine whether it aligns with Scripture. These are good practices. They reflect a healthy desire to follow truth rather than assumption.

But over time, the testing becomes more than discernment. It becomes suspicion. You begin to assume that every voice—including your own—is probably wrong until proven otherwise. You begin to second-guess not only questionable teachings but also clear ones. You begin to doubt not only your interpretations but also your ability to interpret at all.

And eventually, you find yourself paralyzed. Not by lack of information, but by too much of it. Not by absence of conviction, but by the fear that your convictions might be wrong. Not by silence from God, but by the inability to distinguish His voice from the noise of your own anxiety.

This is where many believers find themselves. Afraid to trust what they sense God is saying because they might be deceived. Afraid to act on conviction because they might be mistaken. Afraid to follow what feels like leading because it might not be leading at all.

The irony is that this fear, which is meant to protect you from deception, can become its own form of captivity. Because when you cannot trust your ability to hear God's voice, you become dependent on external validation for every decision. You need someone else to confirm what God is saying. You need consensus before you can move forward. You need certainty before you can trust.

And the problem is not that you seek wisdom from others—Scripture encourages that. The problem is that you have stopped believing you can hear the Shepherd's voice yourself. You

have concluded that the risk of being wrong is so great that it is safer not to trust your own discernment at all.

But that conclusion creates a different kind of danger. Because if you cannot hear the Shepherd's voice, you are left following voices you hope are reliable. And those voices, no matter how trustworthy, are still mediated. They are still filtered through someone else's understanding. They are still human.

Jesus does not describe a flock that follows Him by consensus or by external validation. He describes sheep who know His voice. Who recognize it. Who follow because they have learned to trust what they hear, not because they have eliminated all possibility of error.

This does not mean discernment is unnecessary. It does not mean every impression is reliable or that testing teaching is unimportant. But it does mean that learning to hear the Shepherd's voice is not primarily about eliminating risk. It is about developing relationship. And relationship requires trust that goes beyond certainty.

The fear of deception tells you that trust is dangerous. That if you are not constantly vigilant, you will be led astray. That the only safe path is one where every step is verified before you take it.

But Jesus describes a different kind of safety. Not the safety of certainty, but the safety of belonging to a Shepherd who knows you. Who calls you by name. Who will not lose you even when the path is unclear.

And that kind of safety requires something the fear of deception resists: the willingness to follow even when you cannot see the whole way forward. The willingness to trust a voice you are still learning to recognize. The willingness to believe that the Shepherd is more committed to keeping you than you are to keeping yourself.

This is not recklessness. It is not naivety. It is not the abandonment of discernment. But it is a different posture than constant suspicion. It is the slow, difficult work of learning to trust that the Shepherd's voice is real, that you can learn to recognize it, and that following Him does not require the kind of certainty that fear demands.

Because fear wants guarantees. It wants to know, before it trusts, that trust is safe. But trust, by its nature, does not come with guarantees. It comes with presence. With relationship. With the slow formation of familiarity that happens when you spend time listening rather than only evaluating.

The fear of being deceived is real. But it is not the only danger. The other danger—the one that often goes unnoticed—is that in your effort to avoid deception, you stop being able to hear the

voice you are trying to follow at all.

Scripture Deep Dive

John 10:1–5 says:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers."

The passage begins with a clear distinction between the shepherd and those who seek to harm the sheep. The thief and robber do not enter through the door. They climb in another way. They do not belong. They do not have legitimate access. And their presence is a threat.

This is important because it acknowledges that danger is real. There are voices that do not belong. There are influences that seek to harm rather than protect. The sheep are right to be wary. But the passage does not describe the sheep as constantly anxious about potential threats. It describes them as familiar with the shepherd's voice.

"The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out." This is not about the sheep analyzing every sound to determine whether it is safe. It is about recognition. About familiarity. About knowing, through relationship, whose voice is whose.

The passage assumes time. It assumes presence. It assumes that the sheep have been with the shepherd long enough that his voice is not foreign. They do not need to evaluate every word to determine whether it is him. They know.

This is very different from the way many believers approach discernment. The assumption is often that every voice must be tested, every impression must be verified, every sense of leading must be scrutinized before it can be trusted. And while testing is important, the passage does not describe the sheep as needing to test the shepherd's voice. They recognize it because they know him.

"A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers." Again, the emphasis is on knowing. The sheep do not follow strangers not because they have carefully analyzed the stranger's teaching and found it wanting, but because the voice itself is unfamiliar. It does not match what they know.

This suggests that discernment is not primarily about intellectual evaluation—though that has its place. It is about relational recognition. About becoming so familiar with the Shepherd's

voice that what does not match becomes obvious.

The passage continues in verses 11–14:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."

The distinction here is not only about whose voice the sheep hear, but about whose commitment is real. The good shepherd does not abandon the sheep when danger comes. The hired hand does. The good shepherd's care is not conditional. The hired hand's is.

This matters for those who fear being deceived. Because the fear often comes from the assumption that if you get it wrong, you will be abandoned. That if you follow the wrong voice, you will be lost. That the Shepherd's care is contingent on your ability to discern perfectly.

But the passage describes a Shepherd whose commitment does not depend on the sheep's perfection. He knows his own. He calls them by name. He lays down his life for them. And that commitment is not conditional on their ability to navigate every threat flawlessly.

This does not eliminate the sheep's responsibility to listen. But it does relocate the source of their safety. Their safety is not primarily in their ability to discern. It is in the Shepherd's commitment to them.

Verses 27–28 reinforce this:

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."

The sheep hear. They follow. But their security is not in their hearing or following—it is in the Shepherd's hand. No one can snatch them out. Not because they are so discerning that they avoid every danger, but because the Shepherd does not let go.

This is what the fear of deception often misses. It assumes that your safety depends on your vigilance. That if you stop being anxious, if you stop testing everything, if you trust too readily—you will be lost.

But the passage describes a different kind of safety. One where the Shepherd knows you. Where He holds you. Where His commitment is not conditional on your perfection but on His

character.

This does not mean discernment is unnecessary. It does not mean all teachings are equally true or that there are no dangers. But it does mean that the foundation of your security is not your ability to avoid every false voice. It is the Shepherd's commitment to keep you even when you are still learning to recognize His voice clearly.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways has the fear of being deceived shaped your relationship with God? Where has vigilance become anxiety?
2. When you sense God speaking—through Scripture, through conviction, through leading—what makes you trust that it is His voice? What makes you doubt?
3. How much of your spiritual security rests on your ability to discern correctly versus the Shepherd's commitment to hold you?
4. Where have you been waiting for certainty before you trust? What would it look like to follow even when the way forward is not completely clear?
5. What would change if you believed that learning to hear the Shepherd's voice is more about relationship than about flawless discernment?

Prayer & Application

Good Shepherd,

You call us by name, and we are still learning to recognize Your voice. You promise to hold us, and we are still afraid of being lost. You lead us forward, and we are still waiting for certainty before we trust.

We confess that we have treated discernment as self-protection rather than relationship. We have made vigilance our security instead of Your commitment. We have been so afraid of being deceived that we have stopped being able to hear You clearly.

Forgive us for the ways we have confused anxiety with faithfulness. For the ways we have demanded certainty when You have offered presence. For the ways we have tested every voice except our own fear.

Teach us what it means to know You. Not just to know about You, but to recognize Your voice when You speak. Not because we have eliminated all risk, but because we have spent time with You.

Help us to trust that You are more committed to keeping us than we are to keeping ourselves. Help us to believe that our safety is not in our vigilance, but in Your hand. Help us to follow even when we cannot see the whole path, because we trust the One who leads.

We do not know how to rest in Your care without feeling irresponsible. We do not know how to trust without certainty. But You do. And so we ask: teach us. Lead us. And help us to hear Your voice above the noise of our own fear.

In the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep and holds them in His hand. Amen.

A Quiet Invitation

If you are weary from constant vigilance, this passage is for you. If you have been so afraid of being deceived that you can no longer hear clearly, this invitation is meant for you. If you have been waiting for certainty before you trust, Jesus is offering something different.

You do not have to eliminate all possibility of error before you follow. You do not have to achieve perfect discernment before you trust. You do not have to carry the weight of your own

spiritual security through constant anxiety.

The Shepherd knows you. He calls you by name. He holds you in His hand. And no one—not even your own imperfect discernment—can snatch you out.

This does not mean you abandon wisdom. It does not mean you stop testing teaching or seeking counsel. But it does mean that the foundation of your security is not your vigilance. It is His faithfulness.

This week, when the fear of being deceived presses in and the voices feel too numerous to sort through, return to this passage. Read it slowly. Not as a test to pass, but as an invitation to relationship.

Because the Shepherd is not waiting for you to prove you can discern perfectly before He leads you. He is calling you now. And learning to hear His voice begins not with certainty, but with trust.

Next Steps

If this reflection has named something you are carrying, we invite you to:

- Spend time this week reading John 10:1–18 slowly, asking the Shepherd to help you distinguish His voice from the noise of fear and anxiety
- Notice where you have been demanding certainty before you trust, and consider what it would mean to follow even when the path is not completely clear
- Visit shepherdingministry.org for additional resources on discernment, trust, and learning to recognize God's voice

These reflections are offered as companions for your journey, not as instructions you must implement immediately. You are free to sit with these questions as long as you need. There is no timeline for learning to trust. No deadline for clarity. No pressure to have everything sorted out.

The Shepherd who calls you by name is patient with the pace at which you learn to recognize His voice. And His commitment to you does not depend on how quickly you arrive at perfect discernment.

About This Series

Shepherding Sermons is a weekly series of short pastoral reflections written for those who want to take Scripture seriously without living anxiously before God.

This series is rooted in the conviction that fear was never meant to govern faith. Scripture invites trust, responsibility, and honest relationship with God—without pressure, panic, or coercion. Each sermon is shaped to be read slowly, with care for those who have been worn down by fear-based teaching or who are learning to trust God again.

Shepherding Sermons does not aim to argue, persuade, or rush spiritual conclusions. It returns again and again to Scripture read in context, allowing God's character—revealed most clearly in Jesus Christ—to remain central. Where faithful Christians have disagreed, this series seeks clarity without hostility and conviction without fear.

These reflections are offered as companions rather than instructions. They are meant to create space for steady faith, thoughtful obedience, and repentance without shame. No urgency is demanded. No emotional response is required.

If you are tired, uncertain, or quietly rebuilding trust, you are welcome here. This series is written to walk alongside—not to drive forward.

Additional resources and related teachings can be found at shepherdingministry.org