

INTRODUCTION

For those who may be visiting or new to our church, I am teaching through the entire book of Luke verse by verse. I started in June of 2000 and this is the 59th message in this series. Luke has 24 chapters, so we are nearing the halfway mark! I believe the best way to grow a healthy congregation is to feed them the Word of God one bite at a time.

The message of Luke 12 is "don't worry" and "don't be afraid." In verse 4 Jesus told us "do not fear" those who are only able to kill the body. In verse 11, He said, "do not worry" about what to say when you are called upon to speak. In that moment the Holy Spirit will give you the words to say. Beginning in verse 13, He told the story of a rich man who thought he could "eat, drink, and be merry" but He wasn't ready to die—and God called that man a fool. Then, in verse 22, Jesus again says, "Do not worry!" Now we come to verse 32 and Jesus repeats His theme: Don't be afraid!

Fear is a real problem in America. People are afraid of a variety of perceived threats. The five top fears of Americans are:

1. Speaking in front of a crowd (Topophobia)
2. Heights (acrophobia)
3. Fear of bugs and insects (entomophobia)
4. Fear of financial ruin (atephobia)
5. Fear of disease (pathophobia)

Fear comes in all forms.

One of my favorite stories is about the country preacher who used to visit a widow in his church named Mrs. Jones. He liked to visit her around lunchtime because she had a vegetable garden and she loved to cook fresh vegetables for her pastor. One day the preacher arrived at lunch, and knocked on Mrs. Jones' door, but she didn't answer. So he walked through her garden calling, "Mrs. Jones, Mrs. Jones." He was perplexed because the back door was open and he could see food cooking on the stove, but he didn't see Mrs. Jones. Knowing her sense of humor, he left his card on her door with this note: "Dear Mrs. Jones, Read Revelation 3:20." That verse says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock and if anyone will hear my voice I will come in and eat with them." He thought that was pretty funny.

What he didn't realize was that about the time he showed up, Mrs. Jones was getting out of the bathtub, and she was too embarrassed to answer the door, so she hid behind the door until he left. After reading the pastor's card, she wrote him a note and left it on his desk the next Sunday. It said, "Dear Pastor, I got your card. Read Genesis 3:10." "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid myself."

So since Adam and Eve hid from God in the Garden of Eden, fear has been a part of the human experience. Let's read Luke 12:32-34:

Do not be afraid little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

I've always been fascinated with words and phrases. In verse 32, you will find a great example of a mixed metaphor. A mixed metaphor occurs when a speaker or writer employs two or more disjointed concepts. The result is confusing—and often humorous. Here are a few examples of mixed metaphors:

1. You've buttered your bread, now lie in it
2. He opened a Pandora's box of worms
3. It's as easy as falling off a piece of cake
4. Keep your ear to the grindstone
5. Running around like a chicken with its legs cut off
6. He's got too many oars in the fire.

A mixed metaphor is considered a grammatical error. If you employ a mixed metaphor in a term paper, the grader or professor will probably subtract points for it. Verse 32 contains one of the best examples of mixed metaphors in all of literature. I would suggest every English teacher use this example in your classes. However, Jesus didn't make a mistake. I believe He *intentionally* employed a mixed metaphor to teach us a profound lesson about the character of God. He switches metaphors in the middle of the sentence—not once, but twice. Look at it again: He speaks of sheep, then of a Father, then of a kingdom; three totally different metaphors.

You may not be an atheist, but if you have a faulty concept of who God is, you are no better off than an atheist. It's not enough to just *believe* in God, you must believe in the God Jesus came to reveal. Some people believe God is some harsh, cruel deity who is just waiting for you to make a mistake so He can catch you and punish you. Others think God is a sentimental old man with a long beard who will one day just welcome everyone into heaven regardless of what they believe or how they've behaved. Neither of those pictures of God reflects what Jesus taught. Let's allow Jesus to teach us about God by looking at these three different portraits. In the process we'll also discover three good reasons why we don't have to be afraid!

I. GOD IS YOUR STRONG SHEPHERD ...

First, Jesus employs the metaphor of a flock of sheep. He calls His disciples a "little flock" which signifies that His true followers will always be a small, intimate group compared to the entire world's population. If we are a flock of sheep, then, that makes God our Shepherd. I love the simple words of Psalm 23:1, "The Lord is my Shepherd..." Maybe you need a Shepherd today. Let's consider a couple of times when you need God to be a Shepherd for you.

1. When you are lost

Have you ever wondered why we are most often compared to sheep in the Bible? A real-life shepherd once wrote that sheep display three unique characteristics: they are **DUMB**; they are

DIRECTIONLESS; and they are **DEFENSELESS**. You won't see sheep used in a circus act, because they are too dumb to be trained to perform tricks. Sheep wander off and can't find their way back to the flock. Homing pigeons, and even dogs and cats can find their way home—but have you ever heard of a homing lamb? Most animals have teeth, claws, or a shell for defense; a poor sheep doesn't have any natural means of defense. We are a lot like sheep.

Athletic teams have mascots such as Tigers, Lions, Eagles, and Bears. But have you ever known a school anywhere called the Fighting Lambs or the Mighty Sheep? But God has chosen the Lamb to be the mascot of the human race. The Bible says "all we like sheep have gone astray. We have all turned to our own way." (Isaiah 53:6) Without Christ we are dumb, directionless and defenseless. Just as sheep need a shepherd, we need a Savior.

But never fear, because God wants to be your Shepherd! What must Jesus be thinking as He looks over this crowd today of several thousand people? We look around and we see rich people, poor people, big people little people, old people, and young people. But I believe Matthew 9:36 reveals what Jesus sees when He looks over us today: When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

If you don't have a personal relationship with God, you are like a lost lamb without a shepherd. The Bible uses the word "lost" to describe the condition of a person without Jesus. The Bible says Jesus came to this planet "to seek and to save that which is lost." (Luke 19:10)

Perhaps you are ready to admit your life has gotten off track and you have wandered away from God's plan for your life. Jesus has gone to amazing lengths to find you and rescue you.

We learn in Luke 15 that God is like a shepherd who has 100 sheep, and if only one wanders away, He will leave the other 99 to go and seek the one lost lamb. In other words, God loves you so much that if you were the *only* lost person on planet earth, Jesus would still go to the cross and suffer and die just to seek and save YOU. Will you let the Shepherd find you today? Or you may need a Shepherd

2. When you are lonely

Sheep don't do well alone, that's why they need a flock. People don't do well alone either, they need to be in a group of folks where they can be loved and helped. Many years ago, I used to sing a Simon and Garfunkle song entitled "I am Rock" which speaks of the loneliness of individualism. One line says, "Hiding in my room, safe within my womb, I touch no one and no one touches me. I am a rock, I am an island ... for a rock feels no pain ... and an island never cries."

Someone has said city is a place where thousands of people can be lonely together.

Maybe you came here today feeling you are all alone. There is a verse in Isaiah 40:11 that gives us a beautiful picture of God the Shepherd. It says: He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

Do you long to sense the Creator of the universe, the Good Shepherd is gathering you in His arms of love and carrying you close to His heart? His arms are found right here in the church—the Body of Christ. You need a flock where some other sheep can be there for you. All of us here are dumb, directionless, and defenseless sheep. But we have a Shepherd who leads us and feeds us and loves us. If you need a flock, I invite you to join this little flock called Green Acres. All sheep like green acres!

Years ago before the age of radio and television, oratory was entertainment. Crowds used to fill auditoriums to hear orators express their vocal skills by quoting or reading pieces of literature. In one particular gathering a well-known orator thrilled the crowd with his masterful use of his voice. As an encore, he asked for requests from the audience. A well-known old pastor stood up and asked the orator to quote the 23rd Psalm. The orator, who was a Christian, accepted the request on the condition that after he quoted Psalm 23 the preacher would also quote it.

The orator sipped his water, gathered his thoughts, and then began to speak in a melodious voice, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside the still water ..." As he quoted the Psalm his voice would change timber, inflection, and volume—the audience was spellbound. When he came to the last verse, his voice rose in a controlled crescendo, and the crowd jumped to their feet and gave him a thunderous ovation.

When the applause died down, he invited the old pastor to quote the same Psalm. The Pastor began "The Lord IS my Shepherd, I shall not want ..." His voice was worn and weak from thousands of sermons, and he had the twang of a country dialect, but there was something special about the way he delivered it. As he said, "He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul." the crowd grew silent and attentive. Finally he finished quietly, "surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." A hush descended on the crowd. The silence was finally broken as the famous orator wiped a tear from his eye and said, "Do you know the difference? I know the Psalm, but this man knows the Shepherd."

Do you know God as your strong Shepherd? Can you say today, "the Lord is MY Shepherd" or does it seem to you that the Lord is "a" Shepherd or "the" Shepherd. The Shepherd is seeking you today if you are lost and He will carry to His flock if you are lonely. When you know Him as a Strong Shepherd, you don't have to be afraid of anything or anybody!

II. GOD IS YOUR LOVING FATHER ...

Next, Jesus changes metaphors from sheep to a Father. From the Model Prayer we learned Jesus' teaching about God being a Father was revolutionary. You won't find God portrayed as a Father in Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism or Confucianism—or any of the other "isms." Vance Havner used to say that one day all those "isms" are going to be "wasims!"

In the teachings of Jesus, He referred to God as Father more than any other figure. And He didn't call God by the formal word *pater*, He said we could know God as *abba*. *Abba* is not some old

Swedish rock group, it's an Aramaic word meaning "daddy" or "pappa" – a term of intimate endearment. You need a loving Father

1. When you feel unloved

People are hungry for love. An old country song says, "looking for love in all the wrong places." Multitudes of folks have done that and continue to do that in East Texas. They think some kind of physical relationship will fill gnawing emptiness inside. Studies show one of the most basic emotional needs all humans possess is the *need* to be loved. That's why Jesus came, to show us that God is a loving Father.

Little Chad was a shy, quiet young fellow. One day he came home and told his mother, he'd like to make a valentine for everyone in his class. Her heart sank. She thought, "I wish he wouldn't do that!" because she had watched the children when they walked home from school. Her Chad was always behind them. The other children laughed and hung on to each other and talked to each other. But Chad was never included. Nevertheless, she decided she would go along with her son. So she purchased the paper and glue and crayons. For three whole weeks, night after night, Chad painstakingly made thirty-five valentines. Valentines Day dawned and Chad was beside himself with excitement! He carefully stacked them up, put them in a bag, and bolted out the door. His mom decided to bake him his favorite cookies and serve them up warm and nice with a cool glass of milk when he came home from school. She just knew he'd be disappointed; maybe that would ease the pain a little. It hurt her to think he wouldn't get many valentines—maybe none at all. That afternoon she had the cookies and milk out on the window. Sure enough here they came, laughing and having the best time. And, as always, there was Chad in the rear. He walked a little faster than usual. She fully expected him to burst into tears as soon as he got inside. His arms were empty, she noticed, and when the door opened she choked back the tears. "Mommy has some warm cookies and milk for you." But he hardly heard her words. He just marched right on by, his face aglow, and all he could say was: "Not a one...not a one." Her heart sank. And then he added, "I didn't forget a one—not a single one!"

God didn't forget to love you. You are precious to God! 1 John 3:1 tells us how much God loves us: How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

I learned more about God in the first five seconds of being a father than I did from all my years of college and seminary. I remember that from the moment my daughters were born, I had an instinctive love for them unlike any other. I didn't have to learn to love them, or decide whether or not I should love them—I just loved them. They didn't do anything to *deserve* or *earn* my love. In fact, over the first few weeks of their lives, they were rude to me. They woke me up at night, cried in my ear for what seemed like hours, spit baby food on my clean clothes, and demanded that I keep them fed on one end and clean on the other end. But that didn't make me stop loving them. That's when I first began to realize just how much God the Father loves me ... even when I am rude to Him.

No earthly father or mother is perfect. And there are parents who mistreat, abandon, and abuse their children—but they have to ignore their parental instincts to do that. If you were raised in a home where your mom or dad didn't really love you, don't let that prevent you from appreciating

God as your Father. In fact, before you can truly accept the love of the heavenly Father, you must first *forgive* your earthly parents. You may feel guilty because you think you couldn't *earn* your parents' love. With God you may have the same fear that you don't *deserve* His love—and the truth is *you aren't* worthy and you *don't* deserve it. So get over it! It's just His nature to love you.

Remember it's not about *you* it's about God. Say that to your neighbor, "It's not about me, it's all about God." He loves you with an unconditional love that is everlasting and stubborn. Will you accept His love today? You need a loving Father

2. When you fear the unknown

When you were a child, didn't you think your dad was a tough guy, and could protect you? I heard about two kids at school arguing about their dads. One said, "My daddy can beat up your daddy." And the other kid goes, "Big deal! So can my Mom."

When I was little, I thought my dad could do anything. I thought he was superman. When he was around, I wasn't afraid. One of my earliest memories was when I was about 5 or 6. My mom was a nurse and she sometimes worked the night shift, and when she did, us kids fought over who got to sleep with daddy. I was in bed with my dad and it was in the middle of the night. I felt my dad sit straight up in bed and then I heard somebody open the screen door outside of our wooden front door. After a second, the screen door slammed shut. My dad didn't move, he just sat still listening. Now, as I think back on that, it could have been a frightening experience for a little kid. But because I was there with my dad and he was paying attention to it, I just went right back to sleep because I knew my dad was right there with me and he would protect me.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could have the same kind of trust in God our Father? God invites us to trust Him like a Father when we are afraid. In Isaiah 41:10, God says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

What are you afraid of today? Go ahead—face your fears. Name them and confront them. Look at them in the broad daylight of God's care and love and you will see they aren't that scary after all. Don't be afraid, because you have a Father who loves you. Jesus has talked about sheep, a Father, and next He refers to a Kingdom. God is not only a Shepherd and a Father,

III. GOD IS YOUR MIGHTY KING ...

According to verse 31, the best way to avoid worry is to "seek God's kingdom." If you thought that was difficult, and that God is playing cosmic hide-and-seek, you are wrong. He is the One who is seeking you and He is willing to GIVE you the Kingdom. Why? Because it gives Him pleasure to do it. Jesus said, "The Father is PLEASED to give you the kingdom." Now we have neither the means nor the power to "do what we please" but God *can* do anything He pleases. And it pleases Him to lavish love on you!

To have a kingdom, you must have a king. And God will be a Mighty King for you

1. When you are a weary soldier

Kings have armies and armies have soldiers. Not only are we sheep, and children, but we are soldiers. Maybe you've heard the kids sing: "I may never march in the infantry, ride in the calvary ..." you know the rest.

Now, I used to think all the battles in the Bible were actual military warfare. But we fight battles on several fronts. We fight in spiritual warfare against the devil and his organized, demonized, mobilized army. But we also fight emotional and personal battles. And God is there as our Commander-in-Chief when we fight these personal battles.

Jeremiah was called the weeping prophet. He faced opposition and persecution. People hated him because he had the boldness to speak God's truth when it was unpopular. See if his battle doesn't sound like something you've experienced. "All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, 'Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him ...' But the Lord is with me like a MIGHTY WARRIOR; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail." (Jeremiah 20:10-11)

God promises He will be a mighty warrior on our behalf when we face struggles. Do you get weary sometimes in the struggle? I do. For years, I've loved a song Twila Paris wrote and recorded years ago entitled "The Warrior is a Child." It's one of those songs I can hardly listen to without crying because it so powerfully expresses the way I feel sometimes. The words say:

Lately I've been winning battles left and right;
But even winners can get wounded in the fight.
People say that I'm amazing—strong beyond my years,
But they don't see inside of me, I'm hiding all the tears.

They don't know that I go runnin' home when I fall down.
They don't know who picks up when no one is around.
I drop my sword and cry for just awhile,
'Cause deep inside this armor, the warrior is a child.

Maybe you are a wounded soldier. Someone once said the Christian army is the only army that shoots its wounded. We have folks in our church who have had unpleasant, disgusting experiences in other churches. Some are former staff members, others are folks who were mistreated and hurt by people who call themselves Christians. Isn't it sad that some of the meanest folks you'll ever meet are church folks?

Maybe today, God is waiting to heal you so you can return to the frontlines. Will you take your eyes off the enemy and the other soldiers and look into the face of the King? It's time for some of you to say, "King Jesus, I've had enough R&R, I am ready to be sent back into the battle."

God will also be your Mighty King

2. If you are a willing servant

All the other conditions I've mentioned said "when" but I've intentionally used the word *if* here. God desires to be your strong Shepherd and your loving Father and your mighty King, but you must be *willing* to have a relationship with God.

In a kingdom, faithful subjects offer their lives to serve their king. God is a king because the Bible says we can approach His throne of grace. Kings are on thrones, but we don't have to crawl up to the King—we may approach Him boldly. But we don't approach Him to ask a favor, but to offer our lives to Him to serve Him. As you seek to please the King, He will insure all the needs of your life are met.

What do you think we'll be doing in heaven? Floating around on clouds with angel's wings eating Milky Way Candy bars? No. We'll be serving the King. Revelation 7:15-17 says, "They are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them ... for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd ... and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

So if you want to experience heaven right now—start serving the King. If you start doing *now* what you'll be doing *then*, God will start doing *now* what He'll be doing *then*—He'll be wiping the tears from your eyes. In this life you will cry a river of tears, but as long as you have a Shepherd, a Father, a King who is wiping them from your eyes, then your tears become just another point of contact with God.

CONCLUSION

Jesus isn't just mixing metaphors here; He's trying to show us what God is like so we can have a relationship with the Creator. Do you want to go to heaven when you die? Theoretically there are only three ways to get into heaven when you die: First, if you die before the age where you are accountable before God, before you are old enough to make the choice to sin, then we believe God takes his precious children to heaven. But if you are in this service, understanding my words, chances are you have already passed that possibility.

The second theoretical way to get to heaven is to live a perfect life from the time you are born until the time you die—never have an evil thought, or commit a wicked act or speak a sinful word. If you do, then God might be obligated to let you sit beside His Son. Anybody qualify on that count?

There is one more way. You can admit you are a sinner, be willing to turn from your sins and accept God's free gift of love and forgiveness. Then live your life following your Shepherd, a part of the flock; enjoying the Father's love, a part of His family; and serving the King as part of His kingdom. When you do that, *you don't have to be afraid!*

OUTLINE

I. GOD IS YOUR STRONG SHEPHERD ...

1. When you are lost

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. *Matthew 9:36*

2. When you are lonely

He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. *Isaiah 40:11*

II. GOD IS YOUR LOVING FATHER ...

1. When you feel unloved

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! / *John 3:1*

2. When you fear the unknown

God says, "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." *Isaiah 41:10*

III. GOD IS YOUR MIGHTY KING ...

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2. If you are a willing servant

They are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them...for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their Shepherd...and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. *Revelation 7:15-17*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes