

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

I had my sheep for about two weeks when I learned the truth of this quote from Jesus. Every day, multiple times each day, I feed my sheep. I give them hay and top off their water. But for the first couple of weeks, my sheep never came near me.

Then one day they were at the top of the hill chewing on some grass when I came calling. They heard me and something inside of them had changed. They had learned from my daily feedings that I was actually their caretaker and a member of their flock. So, this day, when I called, they ran to me. They leaped and jumped for joy. They let out loud “ba’s” calling back to me. They ran full speed towards me, not away, as if their life depended on it.

That picture of them running with absolute and genuine joy is forever stamped into my mind. When Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice,” this is the picture he had in mind. It’s not like a dog that comes if you yell loud enough or a child that comes if they decide they want to. This is like a sheep. And when they hear their shepherd’s voice, they come full of joy and anticipation, trusting the heart of their shepherd to care for them. I now know I can run to Jesus, too.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

I also had heard this line from Jesus countless times as I grew up in church. But I didn’t understand its true essence, until a pack of coyotes came through my farm. I was in the kitchen doing dishes. I had shorts, a t-shirt, and socks on. It was winter and dark and the ground was wet with rain. And I heard in the distance the sound of a pack of coyotes. It’s a loud and raucous sound full of ferocity and raw energy. And I had in my field my flock of sheep with two newborn baby lambs.

Instinct completely overtook my body. I dropped the dish in my hand and jetted out the door in my socks. I ran through the mud, the rain, and the cold. But never felt a thing. I had no real plan. I only had pictures of wild coyotes eating my baby lambs overwhelming my imaginations. I ran past my woodshed where I picked up my axe. I didn’t know what I would find when I reached the top of my hill, but I was ready to throw my body and my axe into

the middle of it. But when I got there, I could see my fence had held. No coyotes had gotten in and my lambs were safe.

Jesus said he offered his life to save ours. But I often wondered if it was a chore for him to do this. Did he prefer not to, but somehow felt he needed to? But now I understand. I ran up in my socks in the mud and the rain with nothing but an axe to face a pack of wild coyotes. And I did this without a second thought. Why? Because I love my sheep and this is what good shepherds do. This is what Jesus does for us.