

Spiritual Practices for Thriving Life

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Serial Killer

What harmful substance of life has the devil deceived you to believe is better than God's pastures?

How did you learn it was toxic and accept rescue from it?

How do you train yourself to know the voice of the Good Shepherd and to run from all unknown voices?

John 10:7-10 – ⁷So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. ¹⁰The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

I) Secure Your Treasure...

Thievery is a craft. It does not target trivial objects. It aims at fortune and fame found in the priceless. Legendary thieves are portrayed as craving conquest rather than spoils. It is an act of opposition against the powerful. Many entertaining narratives have been spun that first portray the powerful as illegitimate, so the thief is dignified, thievery justified. These tales build from this base to reveal the diligence, patience, and wiliness of the master thief as they seek the opening to unnoticeably attain their end. Discard the façade and we see the act for what it is: a selfish desire to glorify oneself relative to another. *Ha!, I overcame your defenses and now I possess the object of glory.* Beware the thief.

◆ **Thieves take:** Deception is central to the thieving craft. The thief pretends to belong somewhere that provides access to the object of

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desire. Trusted access in which it is assumed the intent is proper and good. Thieves prey on our lack of concern, knowledge, and observational power. Thievery depends on this deception because inspection reveals an intent to dominate. Jesus describes those entering creation deceptively as “thieves and bandits (John 10:8),” whose intent is “only to steal... (v10).” Thieves entering a sheepfold are there to take the sheep. Satan intends to steal us from God. He will not lift and carry us away. He entices us with words to follow him out. He counts on our complacency to not “run from him because [we] do not know the voice of strangers (v5).” We secure our treasure by distancing ourselves from those with unknown voices.

♦**Shepherds serve:** Trust is the core of shepherding. Protecting, providing, and training takes cooperation from the one being served. Domestication results from intense scrutiny yielding to trust through consistency over time. The Good Shepherd builds trust with actions. He is “the gate,” through which people “will come in and go out and find pasture (v9),” this being the provision of life. The shepherd is glorified by the wellbeing of His sheep, not His domination over them. Jesus invites us by this metaphor to exercise our observational power as we decide whether He is trustworthy. As we do, He becomes known.

II) Be Alert...

Our lack of concern betrays our ignorance of the severity of the threat. The thief is not out to steal from us. The thief wants to steal *us* from God. We are the object of glory. His lack of regard for us is proven by his desire to remove us from the pasture. Sheep cannot survive away from the grasslands. Satan’s insatiable appetite to steal from God necessitates murderous behavior. He may gorge us on junk, but it fattens, sickens, and kills us. His enticing words foretell death.

♦**Murderers kill:** This form of thievery is human trafficking. It is easy to distinguish from rescue. Those being rescued know they are suffering harm and want relief. Deception isn’t needed because they long to escape. Those being trafficked are taken by force or deception. Victims would not willingly go under the full knowledge of the truth that suffering would be the result. We are open to deception when we do not practice gratitude for the provision of our pasture. The thief’s deception that the surrounding forest is healthy is accepted and he is now able to “steal and kill (v10).” Satan steals from God and kills us in the same act.

♦**Caretakers heal:** Caretakers do not remove us from sources of wellbeing. They guide their charge to healthy behaviors and provisions. They invest themselves in knowing what is good, where it is found, and how to navigate shifting seasons to ensure continual access to life’s necessities. They are easily identified because they do not take us from goodness into harm. We recognize the need to move. Jesus says, “I am the gate (v7),” a voluntarily accessed way to move in the world. “Whoever enters by me will be saved (v9),” because He “came that they may have life (v10).” A caretaker needs no deceit and will be known by the restoration and continuation of wellbeing of those under His care.

III) Avoid Danger...

Civilization recognizes the difference between crimes of passion and utter wickedness. An angry outburst of murder is terrible. Sadistic torture is an abomination. The thief craves the glory of domination. It is unsatisfying that we die—he will sustain our worship of him to the last possible moment. The curtain of deception draws back revealing the horror of enslavement. Enslavement that will slowly crush us until we are destroyed at last.

♦**Tyrants torture:** The quality that makes the thief pure evil is the absoluteness of his greed. There is no mercy in him. His goal requires the fullest opposition to our wellbeing. He needs us as zombies, continually worshipping creation and infecting others with desire to do the same. He is depicted as “a roaring lion” who “prowls around, looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).” This is one sustained by our destruction. The danger encoded in deceptive words of unknown voices is to be ensnared by a tyrant and tortured to death because it is his only remaining source of life. Heed the words of Jesus that “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy (John 10:10).”

♦**Kings protect:** Not kings. Kings speak with honor and integrity. They earn trust by caring for their kingdom. They ensure a constant supply of resources and defense adequate to outside enemies. They rule with justice for the good of all. The King saves not to sustain Himself by the tortuous draining of life, but “that they may have life (v10).” The glory of the King is the joy and wellbeing of His subjects, who willingly obey Him in faith that He protects and provides for them. We “come in and go out and find pasture (v9),” that does more than sustain—“they may have life, and have it abundantly (v10).” Be wary, be skeptical, be alert, and respond to the voice of One that restores rather than destroys.