

Sheep Need the Shepherd

I. Introduction.

- A. I was raised on a sheep farm in Central Minnesota. I participated in birthing, feeding, shearing, herding, healing, protecting and often rescuing sheep.
- B. When I became a believer in Jesus Christ, I grew in developing a habit of consistent Bible study. I read my Bible. The Bible talked about sheep. In sermons, Sunday School and Bible studies, I heard about sheep and illustrations comparing them to people.

“Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.” **Psalm 100:3**

From my experience, I thought, “Thanks God. I thought you loved me!” But as I studied the Bible, sheep and shepherding in the Bible lands, it wasn’t long before I found out differently. Over time, I realized, in many ways, we are comparable to sheep. Cheer up friends, you and I are sheep.

II. Sheep

A. Sheep are:

- 1. Sheep are defenseless animals. They are vulnerable to predators and adverse weather conditions (floods).

We had a sheep buck named *Old Blue*. He got out of the fence one day, went over to one of our sheds, found an open bag and put his head in it. The bag was not something sheep would love to eat. It was a bag of blue cement dye. His head was blue for a couple of weeks.

Our farm had a small river running through it. My stepfather and a friend took a boat upriver to go duck hunting down the river one day. As they approached our land, they noticed a small bump protruding out of the water. As they approached the bump, they saw that it was a pair of nostrils. It was Old Blue. He was alive. They pulled him out, and he lived through it. Old Blue was saved by a nose! Sheep are vulnerable to predators and adverse circumstances.

- 2. Sheep are helpless in many ways. They often end up in adverse situations.

They need help to feed themselves. Sheep are susceptible to disease and sickness.

Our sheep were getting sick and some of them were dying. A veterinarian prescribed some medicine to help heal them. With a syringe, we shot the medicine down each sheep’s throat. Shortly after giving the medicine, many of the sheep grew worse. 30 more sheep died as a result.

Sheep are helpless in many ways. They are often unable to overcome sickness, troubles and difficulties alone.

- 3. Sheep have a habitual tendency of going astray.

They are not good at traveling by themselves. They wander easily. Their short-sighted decisions can lead to injury, separation or death.

One day, we got a call from a farmer who lived five miles away. He called because there was a herd of sheep in his field. Sure enough, they were our sheep. Normally, there is a leader (a sheep) in the herd. The leader tends to lead the herd astray, because sheep follow their leader. We herded the sheep five miles back home.

Sheep have a habitual tendency of going astray and ending up in places and situations that can be adverse for their well-being.

B. Sheep are not the brightest animals around.

Their decisions often put sheep into compromising situations. They lack the abilities, insights, knowledge, wisdom and experience that would be helpful for their life and well-being. For example:

There were times when pregnant ewes would birth their lambs and leave them. We would normally have a few ewes like this every year. One cold (-20) day, I walked out into the barnyard and found a lamb shivering in its afterbirth on the ground. The ewe who just gave birth to her was not in sight. I ran over to the lamb, picked her up and ran to the house.

My mom was in the kitchen. “Mom, she was in the barnyard alone.” My mother took her to the bathtub and turned the hot water on. I waited in the kitchen. Several minutes later, I heard a faint “Bah” then shortly afterwards I heard loud scream from the lamb. She made it!

We put the lamb in a box in the kitchen and placed a heat lamp over her. In coming days, she was cared for and taught how to take milk supplement from a bottle. Her name was Rosie.

Rosie’s mother did not care for her lamb. She left it to fend for herself, which the lamb was unable to do. Sheep make decisions and follow actions that are often harmful to themselves and other sheep. Sheep need help and guidance outside themselves.

III. Sheep and Shepherds: The West verses The East.

A. The West (North America).

Sheep are in herds (normally). Flocks of sheep are separate from other flocks (usually) because the farmer has enough pasture land on his property to provide for his flock. Sheep are normally herded (driven) by people or sheep dogs to where they should go. The shepherd has his flock fenced in for their safety and protection. The shepherd interacts with the sheep infrequently. The shepherd tends to be less personally involved with the sheep.

B. The contrast of shepherding in the East (the culture of the Bible).

1. The shepherd stands at the center of the flock, calling the sheep to draw near. The sheep listen and go over to the shepherd.
2. Shepherds used a sling to get the attention of sheep wandering away from the flock. They would sling a stone just beyond the sheep to get its attention to come back to the flock. David slew the Philistine Goliath with a pinpoint accurate shot with his sling and one stone:

David reached his hand into the bag and took out a stone. He slung it, striking the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank deeply into his forehead, and he fell down with his face to the ground. **1 Samuel 17:49**

David only had a small area of Goliath's face to hit. Why was David so confident? First, he had God on his side. Second, he had plenty of practice slinging stones precisely at wandering sheep!

3. The flock would not be moved until all in the flock were there. If one sheep was missing, the shepherd would search for it until he found it.

“Which one of you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go look for the one that is lost until he finds it? **Luke 15:4**

4. Sheep know the voice of their shepherd. If a stranger mimics the voice of the shepherd, the sheep will not come.

“When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.” **John 10:4-5**

5. Sheep follow the shepherd. Sheep were not driven, they were led.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. **John 10:27**

- C. The Bible illustrates lessons we can learn from sheep and shepherds.

Sheep and shepherds were an everyday part of life in the Bible. When Jesus spoke using illustrations of sheep and shepherds, His audience generally understood the principles He was conveying. Jesus knew that the tendencies of sheep are similar to human nature in many ways.

IV. Sheep Need the Shepherd.

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray . . .” **Isaiah 53:6**

Sheep are defenseless, vulnerable, helpless, sick, injured, separated, stubborn, weak and lost. They wander and struggle in adversity. They need someone to lead them, care for them, heal them, rescue them and save them. Sheep need a shepherd.

Our human nature has similar characteristics in many ways. Have you ever felt defenseless, vulnerable, helpless, sick, injured, separated, stubborn, weak and lost? Sheep need a Shepherd.

- A. Sheep alone without a shepherd.

Sheep are not equipped to make it alone. All the dilemmas sheep get into are alleviated only by the presence and oversight of the shepherd. Sheep need a shepherd.

- B. I am not an expert, but from my experience, I think I can say with a high degree of accuracy the following:

1. If sheep did not have shepherds, sheep would be at least on the endangered species list.

2. But more probable though without shepherds, sheep would be extinct.
3. Sheep need shepherds.

C. Shepherds are providers, guides, protectors, comforters and constant companions for the sheep.

1. A story of a shepherd and his flock.

This shepherd had 51 ewes plus their lambs. Ewes birth single lambs (most often), twins and triplets (rarely). The shepherd was going to settle down for the night with his flock.

He gets his flock to a sheepfold that other flocks are already in. The shepherd guides his flock into the sheepfold. The mixing of the flocks creates a lot of confusion and commotion. Lambs get separated from their mothers. The lambs scream for their mothers as the ewes search for their lambs.

Things begin to change as this shepherd enters the sheepfold. This shepherd begins by feeling the head of an ewe. By doing this, he discerns who the ewe is and which lamb(s) are hers. He goes through the sheepfold feeling the lambs until he finds the ones that are hers. He works throughout the sheepfold until he reunites all the lambs with their mothers. This shepherd did this reuniting work in the dark of night. He intimately knew his flock.

2. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, intimately knows His flock. As the shepherd's touch brought peace to the animals of his flock, so the Good Shepherd's touch brings assurance, comfort and peace to the individuals of His flock, you and me!

V. The Ministry of the Good Shepherd to His Sheep.

- A. The Lord, the Good Shepherd ministers to His sheep. He cares for His people just as a shepherd cares for his flock. The Good Shepherd provides everything needed for the flock's proper care. Psalm 23 shows the ministry the Good Shepherd has with His sheep.

B. The Good Shepherd's ministry.

1. The Good Shepherd is the Provider. *"The Lord is my Shepherd. I lack nothing"* (v. 1). He gives tender care towards His sheep. Sheep are completely dependent on the Shepherd's care from birth to death. He does everything for the sheep. The Good Shepherd provides for you and me.
2. The Good Shepherd gives rest, comfort and peace. *"He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters"* (v. 2). Sheep lie down to rest in pastures of tender grass. The setting is one of calmness, being fully fed, satisfied and being fully supplied. It is a place of tranquility, peace, safety, delight and plenty. The Shepherd makes provision for our souls. He supports you and me.
3. The Good Shepherd touches and refreshes the heart. *"He refreshes my soul"* (v. 3). The Shepherd restores my soul. My life returns and causes me to live. He quickens, renews and sustains me. Deeper discoveries of His love, His promises in His Word and His Spirit become restorative and renewing. He renews you and me.
4. The Good Shepherd guides us in right ways, righteous ways, His way. *"He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake"* (v. 3). The Shepherd leads and guides me in the path of righteousness. I have nothing to fear because the Good Shepherd is with me. He directs you and me.

5. The Good Shepherd is present with His sheep in their darkest hours. He is present always! *“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil”* (v. 4). The Shepherd leads us through difficult territory. During these dark journeys, our Shepherd is Light:

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” **John 8:12**

The “darkest valley” may be a place we are not comfortable with and do not want to be in. However, it is where the Shepherd is. Being with the Good Shepherd is the safest place to be. We are not alone. He illumines the way for you and me.

6. The Good Shepherd takes action to bring the sheep closer to Him even if they do not want to be close. *“For you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me”* (v. 4). He reassures you and me.
7. The Good Shepherd prepares our way even when enemies and difficulties mark the way. *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”* (v. 5). The Good Shepherd orders our lives. He prepares the way for you and me.
8. The Good Shepherd cares for and abundantly blesses His sheep. *“You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows”* (v. 5). The Good Shepherd consecrates believers for a blessed life and gracious service that builds up people. He equips you and me.
9. The Good Shepherd’s goodness, love and presence are constant for His sheep forever. *“Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever”* (v. 6). God’s favor, care and blessing, come from the Good Shepherd. We are assured that God’s goodness and love will follow us. He blesses you and me.

VI. Jesus Our Shepherd.

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

Jesus saw people like sheep who were harassed and helpless. People were wearied and burdened by external pressures and internal turmoil. They felt troubled and oppressed.

Feelings of harassment, helplessness, weariness, separation and oppression are natural when circumstances are beyond human ability to deal with. We need a Good Shepherd.

- A. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is compassionate with those who are harassed and helpless. His compassion reaches out to people in need. It conveys a deep sense of mercy with tender affection. Jesus responds to the suffering and needs of His flock. Jesus is ready to help.
- B. Jesus the Good Shepherd knows His sheep. Jesus knows you and me.

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me” **John 10:14**

He knows our unique characteristics, feelings, emotions, desires, circumstances and struggles. Jesus knows our hearts.

- C. We need the Shepherd. Sheep need the Shepherd. The Shepherd is inseparable from His sheep. He gathers, leads, tends and carries us.

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**

- D. Jesus the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. **John 10:11**

VII. The Shepherd Speaks.

- A. What is the most distinctive word in Psalm 23? Is it *Shepherd*? No. Is it *sheep*? No. It is the word *my*. The Lord is **MY** Shepherd.

- B. Good Shepherd calls to His sheep!

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” **John 10:27**

1. The Good Shepherd speaks to His sheep.

Over the years, I have met many people who struggle with God speaking to them. These individuals feel that God doesn't speak to them. They feel left out.

With those that struggle with God speaking to them, I usually begin with a conversation about their relationship with Christ and their testimony of what Christ has done in their life. I see where they are at spiritually. Over the years, almost all the conversations I have had with these are believers already, but they are struggling with God's direction and feeling “left out” as a result.

I have a simple Bible study; *God Is Speaking to You*. We go through the study together. Often many come into the study down and depressed. “God doesn't speak to me.” We go through six ways God speaks to us. The “sixth way God speaks” becomes the standard and gives “boundaries” to the other five ways. Let's briefly look at each way Jesus, the Good Shepherd speaks to us.

Jesus speaks to us in many ways. The Bible says,

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. **Hebrews 1:1-2**

- a) Through His blessings. Have you experienced God blessing you in a specific, undeniable way? Think of those blessings you received. Has the Good Shepherd spoke to you through His blessings? Jesus personally speaks to you through His blessings.

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. **Psalm 103:1-5**

- b) Through other Christians. Has a believer encouraged you? Has someone stood with you through a time of difficulty? Have you received comfort and support from another Christian? Has the Good Shepherd spoke to you through other Christians? Jesus personally speaks to you through other Christians.

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. **Ephesians 5:21**

- c) Through spiritual gifts and ministries. Have you ever felt included and connected with other believers as you participate in a ministry? Have you ever been blessed as someone shared their spiritual gift with you? Has the Good Shepherd used spiritual gifts and ministries to speak to you? Jesus personally speaks to you through spiritual gifts and ministries.

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” **Matthew 18:20**

- d) Through songs. Have you ever been in a worship service and one of the songs grabs your attention? You leave the service and continue to think and even sing that song. You are sleeping in the dead of night and at three in the morning you wake up and that song is in your head. You’re thinking to yourself, “I have to get up in a couple of hours and this song is stuck in my head.” Why is that? It is because the Good Shepherd is personally speaking to you, and He wants you to get the truth from that song from only being “words in your head” to be a living truth forged by faith deep in your heart.

speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, **Ephesians 5:19**

- e) Directly to your heart. We sense things in our heart. Through prayer and discernment, God whispers into our heart.

Recently, I was relieving a person for their break at work. A person came into the building and walked past me. As that person went to their office, the Lord spoke directly in my heart to pray for that individual. I did pray several times in the following days. I do not know the person. I have never had a conversation with the person. All I know is that the Good Shepherd spoke to me to pray, and to the best of my ability, I followed His leading. Has the Good Shepherd spoke to your heart giving specific guidance to follow? Jesus personally speaks to you directly to your heart.

Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in your midst? **1 Corinthians 3:16**

- f) Through the Bible. Have spiritual truths come to light in which you understood the implications for your personal life as you listened to or read the Bible? Is there a promise that is precious to you? Has Scripture affirmed you in times of difficulty? Has the Good Shepherd spoke to you through His Word, the Bible? Jesus personally speaks to you through His Word.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness **2 Timothy 3:16**

God’s Word is living. God directs us. His Word is our standard for walking with Christ and taking next steps with Him. We need to have the attitude of the Psalmist,

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. **Psalms 119:18**

God most often speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. All these examples of God speaking to us are beneficial when we weigh and test what we sense with the Bible. Bible study is important to the believer's walk because God speaks to us and directs our lives through it.

After walking through this study, people realize that Jesus has spoken to them in many ways. They came to the study down and depressed and left happy and grateful. Jesus had been speaking to them all along. They just did not understand that He was personally speaking to them.

VIII. The Call of the Good Shepherd.

A. The call of a shepherd.

Every year, we had a number of lambs that needed to be bottle-fed. There were several reasons for this. Some ewes were dry and had no milk to give to their lambs. Some mothers would give birth to their lambs, then get up and leave right after having the lamb. This is what happened to Rosie. For whatever reason, we usually had several lambs each year that needed to be bottle-fed.

On one occasion, it was my turn to feed the bottle lambs. The milk was prepared and warm. Normally we walked out by the barn to feed the lambs, but on that day, I decided stay up by the house. I looked towards the barn and saw the lambs by the manger. They were about 40 yards away. I thought to myself, "Let's have some fun today." I called out "Lambie, Lambie, Lambie!! The lambs heard the shepherd, then looked for the shepherd, saw the shepherd and ran to the shepherd. The lambs were fed and content with their shepherd.

1. His sheep hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.
2. His sheep respond to the Good Shepherd. Sheep hear His voice. Sheep respond to the Good Shepherd's leading.
3. His sheep follow the Good Shepherd.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me" John 10:14

Sheep follow the Good Shepherd by taking a next step with Him. Follow the Shepherd step-by-step.

B. Hear Him! Respond to Him! Follow the Shepherd! The Bible says,

For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:25)