

The Good Shepherd

Once when I was doing a study of the 23rd Psalm, I read a book about shepherds. In it I learned a lot about the special relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. A shepherd is a manager and a caretaker. He is the owner of his sheep...and he loves them.

One thing I learned is that a shepherd marks his sheep with an instrument called a “killing knife.” Now, it may not sound very loving, but understand that sheep do not instinctively take care of themselves. It may hurt them, but the shepherd knows the temporary pain is ultimately good for the sheep. So he makes a distinct mark in their ear that identifies them as his own and cares for them almost like his own children.

As Christians we are “marked” by the Holy Spirit. In much the same way, many of the trials and tests we go through can be quite painful while He subdues the parts of our nature that are not like God. However, the Holy Spirit knows that what He is doing in us is for our good and is bringing us to greater spiritual maturity. The question is, which do you think is worse: the pain of change or the pain of staying the same?

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In John 10:11 (AMPC), Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd risks and lays down His [own] life for the sheep.” There is so much we can learn about our relationship with Christ from the lesson about the shepherd and his sheep.

In the first verse of Psalm 23, David says, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing” (NIV). He lacked nothing because he knew that God was with him, always working in his life, changing and maturing him. It doesn’t mean that we will always have every little thing we want. But while we are waiting on

things we're praying and believing God for, we can be content knowing that He is always with us and will provide exactly what we need.

Verse 2 says, "He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters." This is a reference to entering the rest of God. It's not about resting from activity...but resting in our activity. In other words, there is a peace that comes from trusting in the ability and power that God gives us to do what He's called us to do. It is this rest that causes us to step out in faith and do great things in His name. It's faith in God's faithfulness. Are you asking God to do great things through you? Then learn to rest in Him.

When you're resting in God, He will lead you "along the right paths for his name's sake" (v. 3). One of the things I learned about sheep is that they will choose the soft ground, the comfortable and easy places to wander into. But they can get into trouble and become easy prey for other animals. They will stay in the same pasture forever unless the shepherd moves them. And he will move them regularly so they can stay healthy.

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Do you feel like you are in a rut? Are you in a comfort zone you could easily stay in? Be open to change, a challenge...a new pasture. This could mean a new church, a different job, or maybe even other friends. Trust the Holy Spirit to "move" you when you need to move. On the path of righteousness, He will lead you to the right place or to do the right thing at the right time.

This is true even when you “walk through the darkest valley...” (v. 4). The Amplified Bible says, “Yes, though I walk through the [deep, sunless] valley of the shadow of death, I will fear or dread no evil, for You are with me; Your rod [to protect] and Your staff [to guide], they comfort me.” These are words of great comfort, trust, and peace.

A shepherd carries a rod and a staff, which he uses in different ways for different reasons. The rod is just a big, long stick with a little knob at the top of it, while a staff has more of a hook at the end of it.

The shepherd practices diligently so that he can accurately throw that rod at a predator or even at an unruly sheep to keep it in line. Sometimes an animal will wander off too far from the others, and the staff is used to hook the wayward sheep and lead it back into the fold. At other times, it’s used as an examining tool to check the animals for parasites or other ailments.

The Holy Spirit sometimes has to use a rod of correction on us. Yet, it’s good to know that whenever we lose our way, He will use His staff to lovingly and gently guide us back onto the right path.

It’s so wonderful to think we have the Good Shepherd who takes care of us! So what are you asking God to do in your life? Whatever it is, know that He will always be with you...and He will always provide just what you need. He is the Good Shepherd and He has already laid down His life for yours!

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*For more on this topic, order Joyce’s four-part teaching resource **Psalm 23: The Lord Is My Shepherd**. You can also contact us to receive our free magazine, Enjoying Everyday Life, by calling (800) 727-9673 or visiting*

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