

The Lord is My Shepherd - Part 1 - SHEEP

## PSALM 23

*23 The LORD is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.*

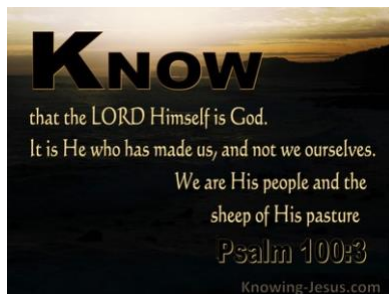
*<sup>2</sup> He makes me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside the still waters.*

*<sup>3</sup> He restores my soul;  
He leads me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name's sake.*

*<sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil;  
For You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

*<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
My cup runs over.*

*<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
All the days of my life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
Forever.*



These are some of the most beautiful words spoken in the Bible. They are familiar to Christians from every walk of life. I've known them so long that I do not even remember learning them. David, the shepherd king, had spent his youth on the hills of Judea. It was there he had learned to care for his sheep. It was while tending his flock that David learned and understood why God described His human creation as "sheep."

If the Lord is our Shepherd, then I guess that makes us sheep. To be called a "sheep" is not necessarily a complimentary thing. God could have called human beings just about any other animal. He could have called us gazelles that are graceful and swift. He could have called us lions that are bold and strong. He could have called us horses, dogs, or monkeys, all of which can be trained to do spectacular things. Instead, He called us sheep.

Sheep were a major source of income and wealth in ancient Israel, yet shepherding was one of the lowliest occupations. The job of shepherding was jobbed out to boys and men who were

unqualified for higher occupations. The youngest child in a family often was the person who took care of the flock. You will remember that this was the case in the life of David. He was off tending the sheep and his father, Jesse, felt that he was so unimportant that he would be the least qualified of all of his sons to be the king (1 Samuel 16).

The humble status of a shepherd may be one reason that Jesus chose to be identified as a shepherd, the Good Shepherd that came to take care of His sheep (John 10:14).

The Bible is full of references to human beings as sheep, and this is no accident. This morning we will look at ways that sheep and human beings are similar.

**1. Sheep are WAYWARD.** It means that they just tend to wander off. A sheep will graze awhile and then look up. It has no idea where it's ended up. It looks around and says, in effect, "Where am I?" A sheep will nibble here and browse there and get lost. It wanders off from the rest of the herd time after time and doesn't know how to get back to the sheep fold unless the shepherd goes and brings him back. Sheep just keep on going, wandering, going, eating, and they don't come back to the fold. Dogs and cats can find their way home. A horse can be miles from home and find its way back to the barn, but such isn't the case for the sheep. Unless it is penned in to a catch or unless a shepherd brings it back, it will be lost.

This sounds a little bit like us doesn't it? The prophet Isaiah said it, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."* (Isaiah 53:6, NKJV).

We humans have a propensity (tendency, desire) to get into trouble. We get easily lost. We wander off. We chase this "greener grass" over here or there, and we lose the plot of our lives. We need the sheepfold of the Church. We need a shepherd (a pastor) to help feed us the Word, and we need THE PASTOR that is Jesus to be Lord of our lives. Yes, we are wayward like sheep.

**2. Sheep are WITLESS.** That is to say they are pretty dumb on the intelligence scale. We train dogs, birds, horses, lions, and a whole lot of other animals, but I've never heard of anyone training a sheep to do anything. Mankind has achieved some amazing things, but most humans are spiritually starving to death and they do not realize it. Even those of us who are believers get too busy or we get distracted by the things of the world. It's like our brains turn off, and we stop feeding on the riches of God's word daily. Believer and unbeliever alike get attracted to things that are not good for us. We become easily distracted from those things that are real and precious, and are good for us. We just don't have a clue. Again and again we prove that we just aren't smart enough to realize just how much we need Jesus in our day to day lives. We're so distracted by this tidbit or that tidbit of "grass" that looks appealing to us. We have trouble following God's basic directions for our lives. Remember when Jesus told Peter to come out on the water, Peter got distracted and took his eyes off of Jesus. Instead, he focused on the wind and the waves and he began to sink (Matthew 14). In many ways we are as witless as sheep.

**3. Sheep are WEAK.** A sheep has no way to protect himself. A horse can kick or stomp, a cat can scratch, a dog can bite, a rabbit can run, but a sheep can't do anything but just stand there and

get eaten alive by a predator. Without a shepherd stepping in, the sheep is toast. The wolf comes and all the poor sheep can do is stand there and get killed and eaten.

We too are desperately weak. Without Jesus the Good Shepherd, the world, the flesh, and the devil have us cornered. Peter tells us, "<sup>8</sup>*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" (1 Peter 5:8, NKJV).

Sheep are indeed helpless without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36, Numbers 27:17). The first line of Psalm 23 reflects the magnificent truth that God Himself is our defense. The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing! Without the Lord as our shepherd we are helpless and vulnerable (2 Thessalonians 3:3).

If it were not for the Lord and the power of his grace, we would be toast and we'd be eaten alive. We like to think we're strong. We have armies. We amass political power. We store up great wealth and other acquisitions, we but we're pretty helpless. But even as pitiful as we might seem, we have GREAT WORTH.

**4. Sheep are WORTHWHILE animals.** The sheep is a valued animal. In Jesus' day many a man counted his wealth by sheep. Sheep give meat and milk, and they produce lambs and wool. Shepherds made many sacrifices in Jesus' day to breed, herd, and protect these valuable animals. Much effort was poured into them because they were worthwhile and were worthy. It was worthwhile to the shepherd to invest time and countless hours of effort into them. And so it is with us. We may not feel worthy at times, but we were worth saving because the Lord paid the price of our redemption. "<sup>16</sup>*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16, NKJV). Peter, who was known to do the dumb thing on more than one occasion, spoke of the great cost that Jesus endured to redeem each of us. <sup>18</sup>*knowing that you were not redeemed with [a]corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, <sup>19</sup>but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.* (1 Peter 1:18-19, NKJV).

**5. Sheep WALK together.** Sheep flock together, and thus are safer. To be a solitary sheep is dangerous. It's a good way to get devoured. I like to say, "Satan wants to isolate you so he can assassinate you". We are warned repeatedly in scripture to not let our guard down. That is why we are told to not forsake the gathering together. That means we are to go to church and be with the others because there is strength in the Body of Christ. We should be strengthened, encouraged, and emboldened when we come to services. The scriptures also say *But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up.* (Ecclesiastes 4:10, NKJV). Sheep are not supposed to go off on their own, and neither are we.

We are called to be part of a flock and to be under the care of a shepherd. Most of us realize this is a local church setting. God puts us under the care of a pastor. He has three main functions: (1) to oversee the flock, (2) to be an elder in the faith and the mysteries of God, and (3) to be a shepherd who cares for his sheep, and gives them spiritual nourishment from God's word. The pastor is the spiritual leader of the local church, but Jesus is the head of the church and He is the Good Shepherd to the local pastor and to the local church. Scripture tells us to not separate

ourselves from the local flock because WE NEED IT. Getting separated from the flock puts us in danger.

**6. Sheep are WARY.** Jesus says, *2But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. 3To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. 5A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.*" (John 10:2-5, ESV). Sheep have the remarkable quality of knowing their master's voice and of instinctively fearing any other voice and fleeing from it.

Larry, our music minister, used to raise sheep for FFA and he told us how his brother would come in among the flock and upon hearing his voice, they would scatter. But if Larry returned to the flock and spoke calmly, they would all return. In this way, real sheep are smarter than most of us. For we do not flee voices contrary to Christ. Instead we draw close and say, "Tell me more." In fact, we spend a lot of time and money to listen to other voices. We spend huge amounts of money to buy televisions so that the enemy's voice can influence us and our families. We spend large amounts of time with TV, radio, and internet.

Yes, we can so easily be distracted by the enemy's voice. We can so easily be attracted to those things that will bring danger and destruction into our lives. And not only do we *NOT* flee from it, but we feast on it. Instead of rebuking the things of the world, we turn and rebuke the voice of God. We should all be more wary like sheep, and we should be in touch with the Shepherd's voice, and run from voices that are not from Him.

## SUMMARY

In review, we like sheep are wayward and are prone to wander. Isaiah says, "All we like sheep have gone astray." Throughout history, human beings have shown that they are gullible when an attractive charismatic leader comes along. People have followed every kind of crazy thing that could possibly be followed. This shows that we possess a "herd mentality." We wander like this because we are witless. That means we're just sort of dumb. We spy "greener grass" in another direction and we become rebellious and hell-bent on getting to what we think will taste better. The greener the grass, the more livestock (of any kind) will do anything to get to it.

We are weak and defenseless without a shepherd to run off the predators. But God graciously provides us with the protection we need. One of Jesus' most famous parables is about a lamb that strayed so far it became lost. The wonderful Good Shepherd, left the ninety-nine sheep in the sheepfold and went in search of the one lost lamb. You and I are that lost lamb, and He will go to great lengths to find us and bring us home (Luke 15:2-7).

In spite of their lowly place among the animals, sheep are blessed! They were the first animals to witness a sky filled with angels announcing the arrival of the baby Jesus, the King of all Kings. God could have announced this in the temple or in the king's court or palace. He could have done it in so many other ways, but He chose to reveal His arrival on earth to lowly shepherds

and to lowly sheep. God does describe us as sheep, and you know what? We're in good company. Jesus Himself is described as a sheep.

Jesus is the Lamb that takes away the sins of the world. He's a lamb AND He's our shepherd all at the same time. As Rabbi Daniel has taught us, Jesus is compared to a lamb because He was meek and non-threatening (John 1:29), but when the Day of the Lord arrives, Jesus will be a Lamb that pours out His wrath like a Lion upon those that oppose Him (Revelation 6:16, 14:9-11).

Sheep are significant throughout all of scripture. When we learn about sheep, we learn a lot about ourselves and our own nature. From them we learn about our helplessness and hopelessness without Jesus. We learn about the awful nature of sin by seeing the shocking consequences when an innocent lamb is slaughtered and sacrificed to atone for the guilty. We also learn about God's tender mercies in dealing with us like a Good Shepherd. Isaiah tells 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, NIV).

Over the next few weeks as we study Psalm 23, you will gain a better understanding of how you are a sheep that is so incredibly loved and taken care of by the Good Shepherd.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at [uniongrove362@gmail.com](mailto:uniongrove362@gmail.com) or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.