

Sheep and Shepherd

Welcome to Harvest Community Church

Series: Psalm 23

Text: Psalm 23:1-6, John 10:11-18, Isaiah 53:6, Psalm 100:3

Psalm 23 is one of the most well known and cherished passages in the Bible. It is known as the Shepherd's Psalm. This is one of the most popular scriptures to read at funerals, yet it is much more than a promise for those who have died in faith. It is filled with promise for those who are living by faith.

Just as a shepherd provides for all the needs of the sheep in his flock, Jesus — our Good Shepherd — faithfully provides us with everything we need to live our lives and bring Him glory. Jesus is both the good Shepherd and He is our great Shepherd.

Hebrews 13:20-21 He is good, kind and caring and what He has done for us is powerful and incredible.

David's choice of this metaphor was birthed from his personal experience serving as a shepherd and spending a great deal of time caring for sheep as a young man. In other places in Scripture, the Lord is referred to as King, Judge, and Deliverer. But here, in the first verse of the 23rd Psalm, He is referred to as a shepherd.

One of the Hebrew names for God is Jehovah- Rohi – “The Lord is My Shepherd”.

A shepherd is a leader and caretaker of the sheep. David identifies our Shepherd as Lord. A Lord is not only the owner but the one responsible to care for all the needs of the sheep.

As he tends the sheep, he feeds them and ensures their basic needs are met. The shepherd also protects the flock from wolves, leading and guiding the sheep where he wants them to go. A shepherd has deep concern and care not only for all his sheep collectively, but also for each one individually. **Matthew 18:12 (NLT)**

The illustration of a shepherd and sheep must be very important to God because the Bible is filled with these references. God clearly wants to show His nature as the Shepherd and our position as His sheep. The Shepherd's nature is to pursue. Jesus lets us know in Matthew 18 that a shepherd *will* spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy pursuing just *one*. Why? Because when it comes to *people*, He wants us to know He won't *ever* move on.

In our society, we may generally accept “one” as a loss and think, *well, we still have ninety-nine. That's good enough to move on.* But when it comes to souls, our Good Shepherd sees the individual beyond the flock. Throughout His time on earth, Jesus declared He was in pursuit of the sick, the blind, the captives, and the oppressed. **Luke 19:10** The action of our Good Shepherd was a work to redeem all humankind *one by one*.

David declared that this is how the Lord cares for us — He is our Good Shepherd. The Bible says He knows each of our comings and goings. **Psalm 139:1-6 (NKJV & NLT)**

He knows the finest details of all our lives. **Luke 12:7** He knows when one of us strays away and gets lost and is mindful of everything that is going on in our lives. And since the Lord is our Shepherd, that makes us His sheep.

There are specific characteristics that apply to sheep everywhere.

- Sheep are stubborn
Have you ever tried to move a sheep? It's like trying to move an elephant. Likewise, if you've ever tried to lead a sheep, you know they can be quite stubborn. People assume that sheep are stupid. They are not. They are vulnerable, but they are intelligent and relational.
- Sheep are dependent on a shepherd
Although many animals can cope and thrive in the wild without any close supervision, sheep cannot. They are totally dependent on their shepherd and cannot live without him. In the same way, as believers we are totally dependent and cannot survive without the tender care of our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ.
- Sheep are virtually defenseless, but they are strong
Don't let their skinny "arms" and "legs" fool you. Although you may think sheep will be easy to handle, they can knock you flat! Shepherds have been flattened by running sheep, knocked on their backs and left face down in the dirt. A sheep's head butting is both a natural and learned behavior. The fact is, sheep can be extremely aggressive and have been known to cause serious injuries, even death, to people. Shepherds understand that sheep also nip and bite each other and will protect one another. Sheep are naturally skittish and easily frightened. This is why that the Bible tells us not to fear around 365 times. Dealing with fear is an everyday battle for sheep.

While we are sheep it is important to understand that God equips us and instructs us for living victorious in the reality of our world. **Matthew 10:16** This is one of the most shocking statements that Jesus ever made to His disciples, to us. Jesus said I am sending you out into the world and you are sheep in the midst of wolves. In the natural, we look like prey, but He wants us, as sheep, to be wise as serpents and innocent and harmless as a dove. Jesus warned us that serving Him in this world was going to put us in difficult situations with people.

Jesus told His disciples that we were not to just be sheep or followers who depended completely on the Shepherd, but we were to have the wisdom of a serpent and the innocence of a dove. This idea of being wise as a serpent confuses us because when we think of serpents we think of snakes, and we think of Satan in the garden. We associate snakes with slithering, biting and killing. We only understand part of the analogy.

Too many Christians confuse the wisdom of a serpent with the character of a snake. There are characteristics that God gave it that teach us how to function in the world we live in wisely. **Genesis 3:1a - Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.**

The serpent had a key personality trait. It was cunning. Cunning speaks of intelligence, shrewdness, cleverness and smarts. We get the idea of sheep and doves, but most Christians do not understand the idea of being wise as serpents because there is very little teaching on it.

The world assumes that we are sheep, stupid, slow, dependent, clean and pure. We need to understand that clean, innocent and pure does not mean naïve. As a matter of fact, a dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit and one of the names of the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Wisdom. If all we see ourselves is as sheep and doves, then we will always be prey for the enemy. All too often Christians operate in the world naively and not wisely. You can be innocent, pure and dependent on God for everything and still be one shrewd cookie.

- Sheep lack a sense of direction. Sheep need to be led to food and water. In the wild rams do fine. We must not confuse sheep and goats. Sheep are domesticated and need to be led to proper nutrition. Left to their own devices they will eat things that will poison them. Part of the job of a shepherd is to keep sheep away from poisonous plants and to lead them away from and protect them from predators. Sheep must be intentionally led by the shepherd to green pastures.

Sheep tend to go astray and get lost, even in a familiar environment. Jesus Himself alluded to this wandering tendency in sheep. **Luke 15:4** And we are just like sheep. The Bible says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way...” (Isaiah 53:6).

Sheep are unpredictable. The moment you think you know the direction sheep are heading, they surprise you and go the opposite way. It’s hard to predict what sheep will do

Sheep tend to follow the crowd. One observer has said, “When one sheep decides to start running, they will all decide to start running.” If you were able to ask one of the sheep, “Why did you start running?” It would say, “Well, because he started running.” And every other sheep in the pack would echo the same reason, one after the other. When you got to the last sheep he would just say, “I don’t know. I saw all the other sheep running and decided to do the same thing.” Indeed, when one sheep moves, the rest will follow — even if it doesn’t seem to be a good idea.

- Sheep can be slow to learn. Any shepherd can tell you countless stories about how sheep can easily get themselves into a very painful situation and yet fail to learn their lesson from it. For instance, a sheep may get caught in barbed wire trying to break through a fence or fall into a ditch and get stuck. After the shepherd painstakingly rescues the sheep, it is not uncommon for that same sheep to go out the very next day and try the exact same thing again. Sheep are slow learners.

- Sheep in the Bible are spiritually clean. Jesus is known as the spotless Lamb of God. **John 1:29, 1 Peter 1:18-19 (NLT)**

Sheep can be stinky and unattractive. The typical illustrations of fluffy, white lambs are not as accurate as you might think. Although some shepherds may tell you otherwise, to most outside observers, sheep are dirty, smelly, and ugly. Sheep are unable to care for themselves – they need the shepherd to keep them clean. Without the help of a shepherd, a sheep will become overwhelmed with the weight of their own wool. It will trap dirt, disease and bugs.

A cultural phenomenon took place in 2004 when a sheep was discovered to have survived several years without a shepherd. You may remember hearing about this sheep whose name was Shrek. Shrek was a lamb in New Zealand who hid around a cave for six years. When found, he was overheating and when sheared his wool weighed over 60 lbs.



- Sheep are demanding, they are needy. Have you ever watched a lamb suckle its mother? Almost as soon as it's born, it begins to violently suck its mother's udders, and that insatiable demand to be fed never leaves them. As they grow, they demand grass, grass, and more grass — day after day and night after night. When snow is on the ground, they aggressively demand food from the shepherd. If their feeding trough is empty even for a short time, they begin to bleat incessantly. They will even stampede their shepherd when he appears, demanding that he feed them.
- Sheep are restless. In fact, they are so restless they will continue to roam about into the wee hours of the night searching for food. Similarly, God's people are restless like sheep. It's hard to get them to be still and rest.
- Sheep are the same everywhere. They all have the same characteristics and behaviors. Likewise, as God's sheep, we share very similar qualities and conducts. Even many of our struggles are the same. Through it all, the Lord is our Shepherd.