

TRUSTING GOD'S PLAN, PURPOSE, AND DESIGN

"What About Sheep?"

June 16, 2024

INTRO.: To all the dads, I say Happy Father's Day. For some this is an extremely meaningful day. It comes with lots of incredibly special memories. For me it brings to mind the many ways my father spent time with me, assuring me that I was special in his eyes. I replay in my mind the times he took me fishing, hiking, and camping. There are the many times he was there at my athletic events even though he was not a sports person, and I was just an average athlete. It brings to mind the many sacrifices he made for the sake of our family. Most of those I didn't realize or appreciate until much later in life. This is my 8th Father's Day since he went home to be with the Lord, and I still miss him. For others this is a difficult and even painful day. Maybe you never even knew your father or had no sense that that he loved you. Maybe as a father you have an estranged child, and this day brings a different sort of pain and heartache. You may have had a child die and you have incredible sorrow when it comes to this day. Others feel they have failed as a father and carry shame with them and don't know how to deal with it. There are some who can't bring themselves to be at church on this day. This morning my goal is to bring words of encouragement to fathers, in particular, and everyone in general. To do this I want to answer this question, "What about sheep?" In the Bible we are referred to as sheep and God the Father is spoken of as a shepherd, and Jesus Christ as the Great Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, and the Chief Shepherd. What is the significance of us being called sheep and God being called the Shepherd? Many here have probably heard of some of the characteristics of sheep. Left to themselves they will often get themselves in trouble and danger. Of all the farm animals' sheep are probably the most vulnerable and in need of the most help. What do sheep need to not just survive, but to thrive? The three things we will look at this morning are: **Sheep Need the Shepherd, Sheep Need Under shepherds, and Sheep Need Other Sheep.** I highly recommend that everyone read Phillip Keller's book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Phillip Keller grew up and lived in East Africa, surrounded by simple native sheep herders whose customs closely resembled those of their counterparts in the Middle East. He made his livelihood for about eight years as a sheep owner and sheep rancher. He became a lay pastor of a community church and shared his insights about sheep and shepherd in his messages on the twenty-third Psalm. We will be looking at Psalm 23; 1 Peter 5, Romans 12 and Hebrews 10.

I. SHEEP NEED THE SHEPHERD

Psalm 23

How important is it that sheep have a shepherd? In Matthew 9 we read this:

Matthew 9:35-36 Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. **36** When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

As Jesus saw the crowds of people He had compassion on them. The word *compassion* literally refers to the intestines or bowels. Today we would say, "from the depths of my heart."

"*harassed*:" severely troubled. "It often connoted the ideas of being battered, bruised, mangled, ripped apart, worn out, and exhausted." (John MacArthur)

"*helpless*:" downcast. "It has the basic meaning of being thrown down prostrate and utterly helpless." (John MacArthur)

Sheep without the Shepherd are in a massive amount of trouble. Psalm 23 speaks of the importance of the Shepherd, who is the Lord. When do we hear Psalm 23 read most often? It is at funeral services but there is so much that we can gain from this Psalm for our everyday lives. Let's begin by reading this in unison and see what you can pick up about the importance of the shepherd. Then, we will look at just the first three verses which are absolutely packed with encouraging truth.

Psalm 23 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

What is the first point that is made by David, who also served as a shepherd?

***Psalm 23:1a** The LORD is my shepherd

Who does David recognize as his shepherd? It is Jehovah, God Almighty! There is a personal relationship here: the Lord is MY shepherd. David, a shepherd in his own right, is speaking here, not as a shepherd, but as one of the sheep. It's almost like he's saying, "Check out who's my shepherd!" The author of the great creation described in Genesis 1 & 2 is David's shepherd. Guess what? He desires to be your shepherd as well. Jesus refers to Himself in John 10:11 as the "Good Shepherd." This shepherd laid down His life for the sheep!! He bought us with a price and when we come to faith we recognize His ownership of us. Each shepherd had a distinctive ear mark that he cut into one of the ears of each of his sheep so you could tell from a distance who owned the sheep. Do others know we belong to the Lord?

***Psalm 23:1b** I shall not want.

With this shepherd, "I shall not want." What does that mean? This tells me that He knows what His sheep need. He is well acquainted with each of His sheep: He created them. There is NO ONE who knows better what you and I need. This whole Psalm tells you and I how much this shepherd cares for us. We can rest in the knowledge of the Lord's care for us. This doesn't mean that you have all kinds of wealth, although compared to some in other parts of the world we are rich.

I will never forget the generosity, kindness, and hospitality shown to us over the years by our brothers and sisters in Christ in Haiti. They had little or nothing but shared what they had with a profound joy of the Lord.

Phillip Keller speaks of the sheep farmer next to him.

In memory I can still see one of the sheep ranches in our district that was operated by a tenant sheepman. He ought never to have been allowed to keep sheep. His stock were always thin, weak, and riddled with disease or parasites. Again and again they would come and stand at the fence staring blankly through the woven wire at the green lush pastures that my flock enjoyed. Had they been able to speak, I am sure they would have said, "Oh, to be set free from this awful owner!"

Have you given your life to the true shepherd? We will never be the husband, father, person God wants us to be without the connection to this Good Shepherd.

***Psalm 23:2a** He makes me to lie down in green pastures

Phillip Keller makes the point that sheep will not lie down unless they are totally free from fear, free from friction among other sheep, free from flies and parasites, and free from hunger. A jackrabbit can make the timid sheep run and the thing that calms them the most is the presence of the shepherd, the one who cares for and protects them. God promises to NEVER leave or forsake His sheep.

A good shepherd needs to continually find green pastures for the sheep to feed on. These are not common in the climate of the Middle East. The shepherd must be ahead of the game because sheep will stay in the same location until they eat all the grass up, including the roots. They will make the ground become barren. The shepherd needs to take care of the fields so the grass will continue to grow and move the sheep to another pasture when they have eaten enough of the grass at their current location.

How was the Promised Land described, the land God wanted to lead Israel to from the bondage they experienced in Egypt?

Exodus 3:8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

***Psalm 23:2b** He leads me beside the still waters.

As you can imagine, water in the Middle East is a valuable commodity, especially in the summer months. When I was there years ago, for the month of July, it did not rain a single time and the temperature was over 100 degrees every day. When sheep are thirsty, they become restless and will search for water, drinking any kind of water they find even if it is muddy, polluted, and full of parasites. Sheep get water from the dew on the grass (available early in the morning), deep wells, springs or streams. We would do well to feed our thirsty souls from the Word of God early in the morning. Men, we need to set the example in the home when it comes to seeking God through prayer and reading, studying, and meditating on the Word of God.

Psalm 23:3a He restores my soul

What is David talking about here? Has anyone here ever gotten dejected, discouraged, felt frustration after giving in to temptation? You begin to feel like a failure, ashamed of what you have thought, done, or said. David experienced this from his own sin and from his enemies as they surrounded him.

People who deal with sheep are apt to be familiar with the term a “cast” sheep or a “cast down” sheep. This describes a sheep that has turned over on its back and can’t get back up on its own. Left in this state it will die in a relatively short amount of time. It is open for predators to attack it for it is defenseless. The shepherd needs to be aware of how many sheep he has and be ready to go looking for any missing sheep. When the shepherd knows a sheep is missing he goes into action to find it because he knows time is of the essence.

When we walk away from God, He will pursue us. Our home group is studying Jonah. God gave him the commission to go and preach to Nineveh, a very violent people who had tortured and killed many Israelites. Jonah ran in the opposite direction (heading some 2500 miles in the opposite direction) but God pursued him. Could God have chosen someone else? Of course, but He wanted Jonah.

Even if the shepherd finds the sheep in time, he can’t just put the sheep right back on its feet. He must turn him to the side and rub its legs, restoring the circulation. Even when he puts the sheep back on its feet, he will have to help the sheep gradually regain its footing.

Doesn’t this verse sound something like what the shepherd does with the sheep?

1 John 1:9 (NKJV) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

None of us have to live in our failure and shame!! God takes great delight in restoring His sheep!! He will pursue and discipline His sheep with the goal of restoring them to the sheep herd.

Psalm 23:3b He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.

Sheep cannot get along just anywhere or on their own. They will follow their own path which can lead to their death.

Phillip Keller, “No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detailed direction, than do sheep. No doubt David, as a shepherd himself, had learned this firsthand from tough experience. He knew beyond dispute that if the flock was to flourish and the owner’s reputation was to be held in high esteem as a good manager, the sheep had to be constantly under his meticulous control and guidance.”

Sheep had to be constantly moved, under the careful direction of the shepherd. He knew the best direction, location, and situation for the sheep. It was Keller’s experience that they had to travel to new ground every week.

Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

Proverbs 3:5–6 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Sheep need THE SHEPHERD, secondly:

SHEEP NEED UNDER SHEPHERDS

1 Peter 5:1–4 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: **2** Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; **3** not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. **4** And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

"shepherd:" this is a command for the elders of the church. All those things we just spoke of in referring to the Lord is also what the shepherds in the church are to be doing. They are called to shepherd the flock under their care.

Every believer needs to be willing to put themselves under the authority of the leadership of a local church. It's so important that we pray for Bill & Joselle to find a local church in their new location. They need to find a place where they can use the gifts, talents, and abilities God has given them like they have done here. This church has a part in praying for them as they follow God's direction.

What is one of the roles of the pastor according to Ephesians 4:11-13?

Ephesians 4:11-13 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **12** to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up **13** until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The shepherd has the role of equipping the sheep to do the work of the ministry. This is why we teach and preach from the Bible, the inerrant, inspired Word of God.

We are grateful that we are able to have our services on the radio and online for those who have physical challenges that make them unable to attend. It is also helpful for those who are away. We know that for some this is the way they were introduced to the church while they were looking for a church. I pray each week that some might find us online or over the radio who don't know the Lord. For those who can make it, it is important that we meet in person.

Do you know your shepherd? Does your shepherd know you? I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting many of you in the parking lot prior to the service. There have been many opportunities to pray with people.

Elders: Tim Eckel, Jim Dressler, Jim Cunfer, Dan Jones, Nevin Gorke, Pastor Dawes Dunham, Pastor Paul Fink, Pastor John Messner, and Pastor Luke Watkins.

Two weeks ago, at the church picnic, we introduced the deacons, and the mini flocks. We encourage you to contact your deacon with prayer requests or other concerns. The mini flocks are divided up according to the first letter of your last name. You don't have to be a member to be part of a mini flock.

Sam Eckel: S, Z

Fred Hess: B, O

Troy Klinger: M, N

Duane Koble: H, Y

Josh Long: J, V, W

Scott Oldfield: E, K, T

Bobby Varholak: D, G, P

Gary Wedde: C, I, L

Omar Yumen: A, F, R

Once again, it makes a huge difference when the father is regularly attending church, involved in learning, growing, and serving. This is important for the whole family. When the father isn't a part of the church it communicates, particularly to sons, that when I reach a certain age, I don't need the church.

Every believer should seek to be mentored by an older, more mature believer. Every sheep needs to have God as the Shepherd (vertical relationship) and the shepherds in the local church (horizontal relationship)

Sheep need the Shepherd, Sheep need Under Shepherds

SHEEP NEED OTHER SHEEP

*Sheep are most vulnerable when they become isolated: predators want to get the sheep alone

This goes against the male macho image that is often portrayed. The culture often declares that men don't need other men. I truly believe that God is doing a work in the men of this church and the elder board is in serious discussion and prayer as to what the next steps should be for the men's ministry. We began advertising a Men's Retreat in October. Women seem to do the connecting with other women better than men do connecting with other men.

*Check out the “one-another’s in Scripture.

Hebrews 10:19–25 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. **25** Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

“let us draw near to God”

“let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess”

“let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds”

“let us not give up meeting together”

“let us encourage one another”

Romans 12:9–13 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. **10** Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. **11** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. **12** Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. **13** Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

“be devoted to one another in brotherly love”

“honor one another above yourselves”

“share with God’s people”

“practice hospitality”

Ephesians 6:18–20 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. **19** Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, **20** for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

“pray for one another”

Galatians 6:1–2 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. **2** Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

“restore one another”

“carry each other’s burdens”

None of the above can be done from a distance. When we practice the one another’s in Scripture we come out of hiding. There is protection for the sheep.

One of the leaders of one of the men’s groups that meets put out the following questions:

Who will I call when a family crisis breaks?

Who will take "the call" when I make it?

Who will meet with me when I ask?

NOTE: Beware of butting sheep who want to divide

SO WHAT???

*Am I one of God’s sheep?

*Have I become regularly involved in the local church, willingly putting myself under the leadership of the shepherds?

*How am I connecting with other sheep?

