

The Living God Ministry

"A Ministry of Reconciliation"

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

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The Lord Is My Shepherd

by Whit Moorer

AWAKENING

Often awakening from a good night's rest I would remember nothing of the past seven hours, no dreams or awareness of anything that had happened during the night. And I've been giving a lot of thought to who is "The Good Shepherd" and who is "watching over me" while I'm sleeping or while I'm doing anything else for that matter. We wake every day thinking how busy we are in such a hectic world. The world that we live in seems gigantic by comparison to our little corner of life, but the truth is if we were light years in distance from the earth we would not be able to see our tiny planet! When we begin to think of the vast universe, the space that we occupy becomes insignificant by comparison! So now I really want to get to know "the ONE" who made it all - - Our Shepherd.

This awareness caused me to reflect on Psalm 23. This is a passage that I have repeated from memory since childhood. I found myself asking whether I have ever really understood what this short chapter is teaching us. I also reflected on other commonly used "prayers" and asked if they have any real meaning to any of us today. An example of this is the little prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep."

To whet your interest a little more, let me pose a few questions. First, what does Psalm 23 really teach us that we can actually use in our daily lives? Second, why would any of us need or want a "Shepherd" to guide our lives? Third, are not the words of Psalm 23 mere "ambiguous generalities?" Fourth, Psalm 23 implies a profound relationship between a human being and his Maker - - **but what is that relationship and how can it benefit me and add meaning to my life?**

STIRRED TO ACTION

These thoughts and questions should stir our innermost spirit and hopefully quicken our own awareness of life and the purpose of life. The central theme in Psalm 23 conveys enormous dignity to the recipient of the blessings summarized here - - a physical awakening plus a deeper spiritual awakening.

When David said, in Psalm 23, ¹*The Lord is my ^dshepherd; I shall not ^ewant*, he was not speaking as the shepherd, **even though he was a shepherd**, but he spoke as one of the sheep. Since David was a shepherd, he understood the relationship between the shepherd and sheep. When he declared, "The Lord is my Shepherd" he said it as a declaration because he knew who took care of him! David experienced life as a shepherd and knew very well that the welfare of sheep was totally dependent on the shepherd. So, when David said "the Lord is my Shepherd," to

whom was he referring? He was referring to The Lord God of Israel [Jehovah], the “One” that not only took care of him but made him, sustained him and blessed him with a future that has greatly impacted you and me today. I suddenly found myself wanting to better understand this “Good Shepherd” and develop a deeper personal relationship with Him.

But who is this Creator of all life? Too often our view of Him is **far** too small, too cramped, and too human. And because it is, we feel unwilling to allow Him to have authority or control — much less submit ourselves to Him completely and voluntarily.

He it was who was directly responsible for the creation of all things both natural and supernatural. Should we not have a burning desire to know Him better?

GOD AS GOD

Colossians 1:15-20

15 ⁱHe is the image of the invisible God, ^kthe firstborn of all creation. **16** For by ^ohim all things were created, ^lin heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether ^mthrones or ⁿdominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created ^othrough him and for him. **17** And ^phe is before all things, and in him all things ^qhold together. **18** And ^rhe is the head of the body, the church. He is ^sthe beginning, ^tthe firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. **19** For ^uin him all the ^vfullness of God was pleased to dwell, **20** and ^wthrough him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, ^xmaking peace ^yby the blood of his cross.

If we pause long enough to reflect on the person of Christ — on His power and His achievements — suddenly, like David, we will be glad to state, “the Lord — He is my shepherd!” David **knew** God was the One guiding and protecting him.

Now the beautiful relationships given to us repeatedly in scripture between God and man are those of **a father to his children** and **a shepherd to his sheep**. These concepts were first conceived in the mind of God our Father. They were made possible and practical through the work of Christ.

So when the simple statement is made by a man or woman that “the Lord is my shepherd,” it immediately implies a profound yet practical working relationship between a human being and his Maker. It links a lump of common clay to a future — it means a mere mortal becomes the cherished object of the divine life giver. Are we beginning to see the real meaning of Psalm 23?

GOING DEEPER

How often do we realize that God is deeply concerned about us as a particular person? This should immediately give us great purpose and enormous meaning to our short physical existence on this earth. And the greater, the wider, and the more majestic our comprehension of God — the more vital will be our relationship with Him. Obviously, David, in this Psalm, is speaking, not as the shepherd, but rather as one of the flock - - as a human to His Divine Shepherd. He spoke with a strong sense of devotion and admiration. It was as though he literally boasted aloud, **“Look at who my shepherd is - - my owner- - my manager - - my provider and my protector!”** After all, David knew from firsthand experience that the lot in life of any particular sheep depended on the type of shepherd who owned it - - some men are gentle, kind, intelligent, brave, and selfless in their devotion to their stock. Under one-man sheep would struggle, starve, and suffer endless hardship. In another’s care they would flourish and thrive. So, the question is, who are we allowing to manage us?

God’s ownership of me as a human being is very real — simply because it is He who brought me into being and no one is better able to care for me. I belong to Him simply because He deliberately, with purpose, chose to create me as the object of His own affection. It is too often the case that most men and women refuse to acknowledge this fact. His or her deliberate

attempts to deny that such a relationship even exists or could exist between a man and his Maker demonstrates that we want no one telling us what to do - - not even our Creator.

I know I have missed so much of the meaning of Psalm 23 because I am not a shepherd and I have known very little about shepherding and that it is probably true for most. So, I've been researching to better understand the relationship between the "shepherd" and the "sheep" from the perspective of a shepherd. I want so badly to understand how He **desires** to take care of me!

I've come across several books and articles written by men that have the occupation of a shepherd. The following is a transcript from a lecture given by a shepherd who was invited by a pastor to come and speak to his congregation.

A PROFOUND LECTURE

"Shalom my friends. My name is Yeshua ben Yosef. I am from the ancient land of Palestine and I'm a shepherd by trade. It is an honor for a man of my occupation to be allowed to stand here and speak with you today. You see in my nation shepherding is not looked upon with favor. For most of my countrymen it is a job to be avoided rather than sought. The hours are long. The work is dirty and backbreaking. You should see the thick calluses on my feet. And the pay ... well let's just say you'll never get rich tending sheep for a living. I learned the trade from my father and I continue the family tradition.

"Your pastor thought it would be helpful for me to come and speak with you today about my lowly occupation. I'm not really sure what a humble man such as I could teach you, but I'll tell you everything that I know.

"Did you know that in the Bible you read, God refers to his people, you and me, as sheep nearly two hundred times? You may have never considered the significance of that comparison but I have because I work with sheep day and night. Let me tell you it's not a compliment to be called a sheep. Why not rather eagles - majestic, swift and beautiful? No, God calls us his sheep. Why not lions - strong, fearless, terrifying? No, instead, God calls us his sheep. Oh they're unique, but to be compared to one is nearly an insult. A sheep is perhaps the stupidest animal on the face of the earth. Have you ever seen a trained sheep in the circus? You'll see elephants, horses, bears, seals even hippos, but not sheep. They're too stupid to train."

*[This writer would like to take a moment to clarify this statement. I'm sure that the gentleman, Mr. Yeshua ben Yosef, giving this testimony of sheep would probably clarify this statement by saying that sheep perhaps are difficult to train. By his own admission latter in his speech he was able to teach a young sheep not to wander off but to follow his shepherd. I quote Mr. Yeshua ben Yosef, "**Jake learned to trust and to follow.**" I wanted to clarify this because we too are compared to sheep and many of us have now come to feel that we are too stupid to be taught. That's exactly what the "god" of this world (Satan) wants us to believe. Our great and loving Father created us so that we could experience pain so that we could learn! With that we will go back to the lecture.]*

"Sheep are also quite filthy. The wool that you see in clothing has been cleaned thoroughly. The fluffy white sheep that you view on your television sets didn't get that way on their own. **Sheep will not and cannot clean themselves. The shepherd** or his hired hands **must do it for them.** Not only are they dumb and dirty, sheep are utterly defenseless. They have no claws, no fangs, and no wings. They can't run fast or scare an enemy off with a loud roar or spray a predator with a noxious scent. All they can do is bleat.

"**Sheep are completely reliant on their shepherds.** Their lives and well-being depend on the person who oversees them each day. If God calls us his sheep I wonder just what he's trying to say?

"Maybe you would understand God a little better if you spent a day with me. Come with me on a journey shepherding sheep. The day begins early, before dawn. It is my job to **provide**

food and water for my sheep. This is not an easy task. You see in my country the land is parched and dry. We have nothing like the vast green pasture lands that your sheep and cattle enjoy here. You can just turn your animals loose and they have all the food they need, but not in my country. Oh no. Grass can be found only in narrow strips separated by long stretches of rock and dust. Except during the rainy season, water is provided by natural springs or wells spread out here and there. I sometimes have to lead my sheep miles just for a few yards of grass or a quick drink of water. It is for that reason that we arise early. It takes all day to find the nourishment my sheep need.

“I know the area like the back of my hand. I’ve walked every square foot of it many times. **This is how I’m able to lead my sheep.** You may have imagined that shepherding is like those old Westerns you’ve seen where the cowboys, riding their horses behind the herd, drive the cattle forward. **Shepherding is somewhat different. I walk in front of the herd and they follow me.** Wherever I go they go. If I was unfamiliar with the land or the sheep were left on their own they’d starve to death. But **I lead them. I know where the grass is. I’ve been there beforehand**”.

[I really appreciate this last comment! Consider that our Great and Awesome Shepherd is leading us to a future that He’s already present in! Imagine that, He’s already been there so He knows where and how to lead us!]

“We spend the entire morning traveling from pasture to pasture. By mid-day the sheep are exhausted and thirsty. They need refreshing or they will die. Along the route I know the location of several oases. These places have shade and lush pasture for the sheep to rest. I make them lie down and drink. Speaking of which, did you know that sheep will not drink from just any water source. Oh no. They will only drink from quiet still pools. They have a natural fear of fast moving water and for good reason. If a sheep should slip into a river or stream its wool would soon soak up the water and become completely saturated. Sheep are poor swimmers anyway, but the weight of the water in their wool would cause them to sink and drown. That’s why the waters must be gentle and still. If I can’t find a pool I have to create one by diverting water from a stream. Now you’re beginning to understand what hard work shepherding is.

“My sheep will be fine and have everything that they need as long as they follow me. I lead them along well-worn paths where I know we will find food and water. They need my **guidance**. My sheep also need my **protection**. The land where we travel is fraught with dangers. Predators like lions and bears stalk the herds. There’s the occasional pack of wild dogs. Some harmless looking plants, though tasty, prove to be poisonous. A sheep might easily stumble over a cliff or fall into a ravine and die. But my sheep have no need to fear. I watch out for them. If they begin to wander off in the wrong direction I have my trusty shepherd’s staff to prod them back in the right direction. If they should fall into a pit or a ravine I use the other end of my staff to reach down and lift them to safety. I carry two sticks, though. One is a staff, but the other is a club. The staff is for my sheep, but the club is for predators. My sheep may be dumb, but I’m quite attached to them. I’ll fight tooth and nail for their lives. Some of the hirelings and other shepherds I’m acquainted with have seen me battle a few of those big carnivores. They laugh and joke and tell me that some day one of those lions or bears will have me for lunch. That may be true, but I can tell you that I won’t look the other way or run the other way like those cowards. No, that’s **the difference between a good and a bad shepherd. A good shepherd will lay down his life for his sheep.**”

John 10

11^fI am the good shepherd. The good shepherd^g lays down his life for the sheep. 12 He who is^h a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming andⁱ leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and^j scatters them. 13 He flees because^k he is a hired hand and^l cares nothing for the sheep. 14^mI am the good shepherd. ⁿI know my own and^o my own know me, 15^p just as

the Father knows me and I know the Father; and ^qI lay down my life for the sheep. 16 And ^rI have other sheep that are not of this fold. ^sI must bring them also, and ^tthey will listen to my voice. So there will be ^uone flock, ^vone shepherd.

“As long as they follow me I guide and protect my sheep. It’s tough work, but I always make sure my sheep have food to eat. I always check out the fields before I allow them to graze. If there are poisonous plants in the area and go through and weed out everyone by hand. I also check the ground for snake holes. I told you it’s dangerous in my land. We have tiny little vipers that live underground in some of the pasturelands. When they sense the sheep grazing, they pop their ugly heads out of the ground and bite the sheep on the nose. The infection or venom from the bite could kill them. But I have a remedy for those viscous little enemies. I walk off the entire area looking for snake holes. When I find them I **pour a little olive oil into the entrance of the hole**. Then I anoint the head and nose of each sheep with the same oil and allow them to graze. **The oil prevents the slick bodies of the snakes from crawling out of their holes**. They’re powerless to harm my sheep. It makes me laugh to watch my little lambs have a picnic in the very presence of their enemies.”

Psalm 23

5 You ^pprepare a table before me
in ^qthe presence of my enemies;
you ^ranoint my head with oil;

“By evening we return to the sheepfold. One by one I examine each of them. If I find any cuts or scrapes on their bodies I apply healing ointment to their wounds. I make sure they have water to drink. If I find one nearly overcome with thirst I have a special cup-shaped bucket and let him drink by himself. Sometimes those sheep are so thirsty that they stick their heads in too fast and too far and the water overflows and wets their heads. Before bedding down for the night I always count my flock. Occasionally one of the lambs will stray, and there’s nothing more vulnerable than a sheep without it’s shepherd. I go immediately to find it and bring it back to the sheepfold. Every once in a while one of my lambs will develop a habit of straying. I remember one little fellow. I named him Jake. He came from a fine family. His grandfather was one of my very first sheep. I called him Old Abe. Jake’s father was Isaac. Both Old Abe and Isaac faithfully followed me and stayed on the path, but not that little rascal Jake. He turned up missing more times than I could count. Sometimes he was in search of greener pastures while at other times I found him chasing butterflies. **He never realized the danger he was in**, but I understood it clearly.

“Something had to be done. We shepherds have developed a technique guaranteed to prevent straying. It is used only **as a last resort** -- when a sheep refuses to stay with the flock. The last time I caught him straying I used it on little Jake. No doubt **you will think that it’s cruel, but it saves the life** of my sheep. At the end of the day I found little Jake wandering dangerously toward a steep gorge. I picked him up, put him on my shoulders and carried him back to the sheepfold. He didn’t struggle. Jake just looked at me with only trust in his eyes. I sat him down and quickly placed his right front leg across my staff. With one swift motion I pulled down on the long bone of his leg and broke it. Wild-eyed, Jake struggled to get away. He immediately fell to the ground in pain. **He couldn’t understand. The one who provided for him and rescued him, the one who he trusted was inflicting the most excruciating suffering he’d ever endured. I didn’t want to, but I had to do it to save his life.**

“Over the next few days, little Jake could barely get up. As the flocks moved from pasture to pasture I **carried him** every step of the way. I **held him close** in those days. He was suffering with that broken leg, but all the while I **carried him close** to my heart. I **sat him down** to eat and drink. Gradually he was able to walk again, but **the smallest hill looked like a mountain to him and the shallowest stream like a mile-wide river. Whenever he encountered and**

obstacle all he could do was stop and look to me. Then I'd pick him up and help him over. **Jake learned** to trust and to follow. **I had to break him to save his life.** It worked. Jake is **still with me today and one of my most loyal sheep.** Well that's a day in the life of a shepherd. It's not glamorous, but it's a living. As undignified as my profession is, it still amazes me that **God compares himself to a shepherd and his people to sheep.** I can see the truth in it though. After all **he meets our needs by providing the necessities of life, by guiding us each day** and by **protecting us.** I guess we would be **as content and at peace** as my sheep **if we'd just learn to trust and follow him. Even if we don't understand** where he's leading or what he's doing in our lives, **if we'd just trust him and follow him** we'd be satisfied.

"Thank you for listening. I've got to get back to work. This shepherding is a never-ending job if you know what I mean?" [End of his lecture.]

A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

WOW! I'm beginning to have a new and deeper understanding of the relationship we should and could have with "our Good Shepherd". God demonstrated, when He gave His life for each of us, the deep desire of His heart to have men come under His care. He Himself took the penalty for our perverseness, stating clearly that "we all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Isaiah 53

- 5** ^o *But he was wounded for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
^p and with his stripes we are healed.*
- 6** ^q *All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
^r and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

I am beginning to understand as I'm learning to look through the eyes of the shepherd that **I really don't belong to myself but to the one who bought me with His life!** And it is through His life that I have life! In a very great sense I'm an extension of Him! I don't have the right to withhold forgiveness, to aggravate, to be judgmental, to be hateful or anything else that causes the flock to "be unsettled." The enemy of this world (our predator) wants us to stray from the fold of the Almighty so that he may devour us! (1 Peter 5:8)

In his book entitled "A Shepherd Looks At The 23rd Psalm", Phillip Keller, stated, "I recall quite clearly how in my first venture with sheep, the question of paying a price for my ewes was so terribly important. They belonged to me only by virtue of the fact that I paid hard cash for them. It was money earned by the blood and sweat and tears drawn from my own body during the desperate grinding years of the Depression. And when I bought that first small flock I was buying them literally with my own body, which had been laid down with this day in mind. Because of this I felt in a special way that they were in very truth a part of me and I a part of them. There was an intimate identity involved, which, though not apparent on the surface to the casual observer, nonetheless made those thirty ewes exceedingly precious to me. But the day I bought them I also realized that this was but the first stage in a long, lasting endeavor in which from then on, I would, as their owner, have to **continually** lay down my life for them **if they were to flourish and prosper.** Sheep do not "just take care of themselves" as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care."

"It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways as will be seen in further chapters. Our mass mind (or mob

instincts), our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are all parallels of profound importance. Yet despite these adverse characteristics Christ chooses us, buys us, calls us by name, makes us His own, and delights in caring for us. It is this last aspect, which is really the third reason why we are under obligation to recognize His ownership of us. He literally lays Himself out for us continually. He is ever interceding for us; He is ever guiding us by His gracious spirit; He is ever working on our behalf to ensure that we will benefit from His care. In fact, Psalm 23 might well be called “David’s Hymn of Praise to Divine Diligence.” For the entire poem goes on to recount the manner in which the Good Shepherd spares no pains for the welfare of His sheep. Little wonder that the poet took pride in belonging to the Good Shepherd. Why shouldn’t he? In memory I can still see one of the sheep ranches in our district, which was operated by a tenant sheep man. 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, which 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!” This is a picture which has never left my memory. It is a picture of pathetic people the world over who have not known what it is to belong to the Good Shepherd . . . who suffer instead under sin and Satan. How amazing it is that individual men and women vehemently refuse and reject the claims of Christ on their lives. They fear that to acknowledge His ownership is to come under the rule of a tyrant. This is difficult to comprehend when one pauses to consider the character of Christ. Admittedly there have been many false caricatures of this Person, but an unbiased look at His life quickly reveals an individual of enormous compassion and incredible integrity. He was the most balanced and perhaps the most beloved being ever to enter the society of men.”

“There are many comparisons between us and sheep. One being we become entangled in (the brambles of) life. There is a term shepherds use to describe sheep when they are in a position to not help themselves called being cast. By nature sheep are top heavy and especially when their wool becomes wet with water or heavy dew. Because they are top heavy and unstable creatures and the terrain around them is not easy to maneuver around on many sheep become “cast” or they fall over on their backs, **not able to get up on their own**. Sound familiar? How many times have we “become cast” in life through circumstances, trials, or self-inflicted problems? How often do we struggle trying to get ourselves “upright” only to find ourselves tired, weak and helpless? There is a reason we have a Shepherd. There is a reason for staying close to Him, in His care. Too often we feel we can “make it on our own” only to find ourselves in harm’s way. The “wolf” of this world is waiting to find us “cast” that he may devour us.”

BEING SET FREE

We read in Galatians that Christ set us free from the burdens and snares of sin. Notice the meaning of the words freedom, free and submit in Gal. 5:1.

Galatians 5

*1 For ^s**freedom** Christ has ^tset us **free**; ^ustand firm therefore, and do not **submit** again to ^va yoke of ^wslavery.*

freedom 1657 ἐλευθερία [*eleutheria* /el-yoo-ther-ee-ah/] n f. From 1658; TDNT 2:487; TDNTA 224; GK 1800; **1 liberty Liberty: A state of being free from oppressive restrictions on your way of life.**

free 1659 ἐλευθερώω [*eleutheroo* /el-yoo-ther-o-o/] v. From 1658; TDNT 2:487; TDNTA 224; GK 1802; **2 set at liberty: from the dominion of sin.**

submit 1758 ἐνέχω [*enecho* /en-ekh-o/] v. From 1722 and 2192; TDNT 2:828; TDNTA 286; GK 1923; **1a to be held, entangled, be held ensnared.**

Notice the camaraderie Paul expresses in verse 13

13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. ^qOnly do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love ^rserve one another. **14** For ^sthe whole law is fulfilled in one word: ^t “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” **15** But if you ^ubite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

brothers 80 ἀδελφός [adelphos /ad-el-fos/] n m. From 1 (as a connective particle) and delphus (the womb); TDNT 1:144; TDNTA 22; GK 81; **4** a fellow believer, united to another by the bond of affection.

Romans 8

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ¹ **2** For the law of ^hthe Spirit of life ⁱhas set you ²free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. **3** For ^jGod has done what the law, ^kweakened by the flesh, ^lcould not do. ^mBy sending his own Son ⁿin the likeness of sinful flesh and ^ofor sin, ³ he condemned sin in the flesh, **4** in order that ^pthe righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, ^qwho walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. **5** For ^rthose who live according to the flesh set their minds on ^sthe things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on ^{the} things of the Spirit. **6** To set ^uthe mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. **7** For the mind that is set on the flesh is ^vhostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; ^windeed, it cannot. **8** Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

submit 5293 ὑποτάσσω [hupotasso /hoop-ot-as-so/] v. From 5259 and 5021; TDNT 8:39; TDNTA 1156; GK 5718; **1** to arrange under, to subordinate. **2** to subject, put in subjection. (Under the authority of) **3** to subject one’s self, obey. **4** to submit to one’s control. **5** to yield to one’s admonition or advice. **6** to obey, be subject.

please 700 ἀρέσκω [aresko /ar-es-ko/] v. Probably from 142 (through the idea of exciting emotion); TDNT 1:455; TDNTA 77; GK 743; 17 occurrences; **2a** to accommodate one’s self to the desires and interests of God.

9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact ^xthe Spirit of God dwells in you. ^yAnyone who does not have ^zthe Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. **10** But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. **11** If the Spirit of ^ahim who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies ^bthrough his Spirit who dwells in you.

Heirs with Christ

12 So then, brothers, ⁴we are debtors, ^cnot to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. **13** For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you ^dput to death the deeds of the body, you will live. **14** For all who are ^eled by the Spirit of God are ^fsons ⁵of God. **15** For ^gyou did not receive ^hthe spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of ⁱadoption as sons, by whom we cry, ^j“Abba! Father!” **16** ^kThe Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, **17** and if children, then ^lheirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, ^mprovided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

TRUE UNWAVERING FAITH

Notice in verse 12, (above), Paul once again expresses camaraderie that we are debtors, together, putting to death the deeds of the flesh, together we have come under His care! So, when we say that the Lord is my Shepherd and I shall not want it implies that we have **come under** (to submit) the care of “a good shepherd” and there is a peace, a trust, a faith that He will continue to provide for us. It means we’re following Him and we don’t have fears about where He is leading us. It means we’re not craving or desiring anything more, not deficient in

anything. And it also implies **we're content in His care**. This may seem strange if we're only thinking about it in the physical sense. But it won't if we're thinking in the spirit. We can assume that David had physical wants in a fleshly body but we must realize that the Spirit of God is more, much more than flesh for it was the power of God by faith that all things were created! We see this in Hebrews 11-

LIVING FAITH

Hebrews 11

3 *By faith we understand that the universe was created by^fthe word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of^gthings that are visible.*

When David wrote this Psalm his “life scale” was leaning toward God more than the flesh. Often we are encouraged to have a balanced approach to life but when I think of the word “balance” I think of it meaning the same on both sides, and it can mean that, but the balance I’m referring to is when there is a condition in which different elements are in the **correct proportions**.

So even when we are in the middle of hardships we should still be able to boast, “I shall not want”, because our spiritual eyes should be focused on the direction our Shepherd is leading us. But if we feel that we’re in want then perhaps we’re thinking about serving the flesh more than serving in the spirit. The book of Daniel gives us an example of this kind of trust in God. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced **impossible odds** - - a fiery furnace that would surely snuff out their lives. Their approach (their faith) was, “We do not know if God will spare our human lives but **what we do know is that we will not fail to meet this challenge because we choose to place and keep our lives totally in His care.**” Should that not be our goal and intent?

Jesus Himself took great pain to point out to anyone who contemplated following Him (The Good Shepherd) that it was quite impossible to serve two masters. Remember what Jesus Christ stated in scripture what it meant to serve one master or another.

Matthew 6

24 c *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will **hate** the one and **love** the other, or he will be **devoted** to the one and **despise** the other.*

Notice the meaning of the word “serve” in this verse. When you think about it, it makes since that you can’t follow two people in two different directions.

serve **1398** δουλεύω [douleuo /dool·yoo·o/] v. From 1401; TDNT 2:261; TDNTA 182; GK 1526; 25 occurrences; **2** metaph. **to obey, submit to. 2a to yield obedience. To come under.**

FENCE CRAWLERS

Phillip Keller stated in his book *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23* “beware to those half christians — one might almost call them “fence crawlers” who want the best of both worlds. I once owned a ewe whose conduct exactly typified this sort of person. She was one of the most attractive sheep that ever belonged to me. Her body was beautifully proportioned. She had a strong constitution and an excellent coat of wool. Her head was clean, alert, well-set with bright eyes. She bore sturdy lambs that matured rapidly. But in spite of all these attractive attributes she had one pronounced fault, she was restless — discontent — a fence crawler. So much so that I came to call her “Mrs. Gad-about.” This one ewe produced more problems for me than almost all the rest of the flock combined. No matter what field or pasture the sheep were in, she would search all along the fences or shoreline (we lived by the sea) looking for a loophole she could crawl through and start to feed on the other side. It was not that she lacked pasturage.

My fields were my joy and delight. No sheep in the district had better grazing. With “Mrs. Gad-about” it was an ingrained habit. She was simply never contented with things as they were. Often when she had forced her way through such a spot in a fence or found a way around the end of the wire at low tide on the beaches, she would end up feeding on bare, brown, burned up pasturage of a most inferior sort. But she never learned her lesson and continued to fence crawl time after time. Now it would have been bad enough if she were the only one who did this. It was a sufficient problem to find her and bring her back. But the further point was that she taught her lambs the same tricks. They simply followed her example and soon were as skilled at escaping as their mother. Even worse, however, was the example she set for the other sheep. In short time she began to **lead** others through the same holes and over the same dangerous paths down by the sea. After putting up with her perverseness for a summer, I finally came to the conclusion that to save the rest of the flock from becoming unsettled, she would have to go. I could not allow one obstinate, discontented ewe to ruin the whole ranch operation. It was a difficult decision to make; for I loved her in the same way I loved the rest. Her strength and beauty and alertness were a delight to the eye. But I couldn’t allow it any longer, so, one morning I took the killing knife in hand and butchered her. Her career of fence crawling was cut short. It was the only solution to the dilemma. She was a sheep, who, in spite of all that I had done to give her the very best care, still wanted something else. She was not like the one who said, “the Lord is my shepherd — I shall not be in want.” It is a solemn warning to the carnal Christian — backslider — the half christian, the one who wants the best of both worlds.”

[To paraphrase what we just read from Mr. Keller, let me use a common term that illustrates the point. This term is “**mug wumper**” - - our “mug” on one side of the fence and our “wump” on the other side. The point is that the Good Shepherd does not tolerate “mug wumpers” or “fence crawlers.” We must either be on God’s side of the fence or He will dispose of us. [Back to quote.]

“Before sheep will lie down they need four requirements met. And only the shepherd can provide these conditions for his sheep.

1. Free from friction with others of their kind.
2. Free from pests.
3. Free from hunger.
4. Free from fear.

“In every animal society there is an established order of dominance or status within the group. In a pen full of chickens it is referred to as the “pecking order.” With cattle it is called the “horning order.” Among sheep we speak of the “butting order.” Generally an arrogant, cunning, and domineering old ewe will be boss of any bunch of sheep. She maintains her position of prestige by butting and driving other ewes or lambs away from the best grazing or favorite bed grounds. Succeeding her in precise order the other sheep all establish and maintain their exact position in the flock by using the same tactics of butting and thrusting at those below and around them. A vivid and accurate word picture of this process is given to us in Ezekiel 34:15 – 16 and 20 – 22.

Ezekiel 34

15^e*I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. 16*^f*I will seek the lost, ^gand I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and ^hthe fat and the strong I will destroy.¹ I will feed them in justice.*

20 *“Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: Behold, I, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21 Because you push with side and shoulder, and ^lthrust at all the*

*^mweak with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad, **22** I will rescue² my flock; ⁿthey shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep.*

RIVALRIES

“Because of this rivalry, tension, and competition for status and self-assertion, there is friction in the flock. The sheep cannot lie down and rest in contentment in this state. Always they must stand up and defend their rights and contest the challenge of the intruder. Hundreds and hundreds of times I have watched an austere old ewe walk up to a younger one that might have been feeding contentedly or resting quietly in some sheltered spot. She would arch her neck, tilt her head, dilate her eyes, and approach the other with a stiff-legged gait. All of this was saying in unmistakable terms, ‘Move over! Out of my way! Give ground or else!’ And if the other ewe did not immediately leap to her feet in self-defense, she would be butted unmercifully. Or if she did rise to accept the challenge, one or two strong thrusts would soon send her scurrying for safety. This continuous conflict and jealousy within the flock can be a most detrimental thing. The sheep become edgy, tense, discontented, and restless. They lose weight and become irritable. **But one point that always interested me very much was that whenever I, the shepherd, came into view and my presence attracted their attention, the sheep quickly forgot their foolish rivalries and stopped their fighting. The shepherd’s presence made all the difference in their behavior.** This, to me, has always been a graphic picture of the struggle for status in human society. There is the eternal competition “to keep up with the Jones” or, as it is now — “to keep up with the Jones’ kids.” In any business firm, any office, any family, any community, any church, any organization or group, be it large or small, the struggle for self-assertion and self-recognition goes on. Most of us fight to be “top sheep.” We butt and quarrel and compete to “get ahead.” And in the process people are hurt. It is here that much jealousy arises. This is where pet peeves grow into horrible hate. It is where ill will and contempt come into being, the place where heated rivalry and deep discontent is born. It is here that discontent gradually grows into a covetous way of life where one has to be forever “standing up” for himself, for his rights, “standing up” just to get ahead of the crowd.

GOD’S CONTRASTING VIEW

“In contrast to this, the picture in the Psalm shows us God’s people lying down in quiet contentment. One of the outstanding marks of a Christian should be a serene sense of gentle contentment. “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” Paul put it this way, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances,” and certainly this applies to my status in society. There is endless unrest generated in the individual who is always trying to “get ahead” of the crowd, who is attempting always to be top man or woman on the totem pole. In His own unique way, Jesus Christ, the Great shepherd, in His earthly life pointed out that the last would be first and the first would be last. It is the humble heart walking quietly and contentedly in the close and intimate companionship of Christ that is at rest, which can relax, simply let the Shepherd lead. When my eyes are on my Master they are not on those around me. This is the place of peace.”

So, who’s care are we under? Can we, like David in Psalm 23, say with confidence that the Lord is MY Shepherd? And I shall not want! Individually we must learn to live the true message of Psalm 23. Listen to the voice of our Shepherd, know His voice, follow His voice and allow Him to lead us to everlasting LIFE!!!

Postscript: On page three of this article Mr. Keller pointed out how helpless sheep are in caring for and defending themselves. I am attaching two photographs that will help illustrate this point. The first is a ewe with a young lamb. Study this photograph very carefully and you can see how defenseless both the mother and the lamb would be from predators.

The other photograph is of a special “shepherd dog” that has been bred and trained to specifically live in the field with the flock day and night without human contact. This dog has been trained to be very protective of the sheep and is extremely aggressive toward any predator or even humans who are strangers. This shows that it is the shepherd who must care for and protect the sheep by whatever means are available to him. The Good Shepherd has His guardian angels to protect His flock - - and we are His flock!

