



June 29, 2026

The Sheep

Sheep are interesting creatures. Unlike other types of livestock, they require endless attention around the clock. Sheep are characteristically timid, fearful, stubborn, lack intelligence, mindlessly follow each other, and develop poor habits. They get lost easily, sometime eat or drink the wrong things, and panic in unfamiliar situations. Based on their fragile nature, sheep refuse to calm unless they are free of fear, hunger, irritation from pests, or tension with other sheep. Even if able to rest, there is still risk. A sheep can become cast, by accidentally rolling onto it's back. With legs toward the sky, it has no way to right itself. If left that way, it will die within a matter of hours. In short, sheep are a lot of work.

Recently, a friend gifted me with a copy of *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by Phillip W. Keller. As a sheep owner himself, the author weaves his knowledge of the deeper meanings behind the imagery of the verses of the Psalm. It becomes clear, the vital role of the shepherd is key; sheep are notoriously helpless and vulnerable to prey. The needs, health, and safety of the herd are completely dependent on the character and vigilance of the one in charge of them. The overall visible condition of a herd soon becomes evident, and reflects the degree of love and nurturing care, or not, put into their wellbeing.

Because sheep tend to wander away, each one bears the marking of its owner, so it can be identified and returned to the correct fold. Throughout the day and night, they are counted regularly, in case one has gone missing. It may have fallen in a ravine, or be caught in a thicket somewhere. If so, the concerned shepherd hurries to locate and rescue it. For their safety, some flocks are gathered into gated pens by day's end, but the shepherd remains vigilant against predators even then. It's a full-time job.

Years before becoming king, David, the youngest of seven sons, took care of his father Jesse's sheep. The Bible story describes him as handsome and fit and responsible. In an arid land he led the sheep to quiet water, and found green

places for them to graze and find rest. He found them shade from the scorching sun, risked his life to slay a lion and a bear when each came to steal one of the flock. He proved himself to be wise and brave; believing firmly in the help of the God he served. When he wrote Psalm 23, he knew something about sheep from experience.

In Acts 13, David is described as a man after God's own heart. There is reason for that. He protected the weak, gently corrected the unruly with his staff, led the flock along right paths, and was ever watchful of danger. He knew the sheep he cared for by name, and they knew him. They behaved better when he was nearby; skittish sheep run away from strangers. David wasn't a hired hand, he had a closer bond with the sheep because his father was the owner. Each one was valuable because it was marked and belonged to the flock.

Historically, sheep herders were not among society's notables. It was a lowly calling, but a frequent occupation among the Hebrew people for generations. Already in Genesis, Joseph explains to his brothers why they would settle in the lush but distant region of Goshen, “...for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.” Humble shepherds were still watching over their sheep in the fields the night Jesus was born. It's not surprising then, that Jesus calls himself the good shepherd, come to save his sheep. It was a description easily understood by the common person. Sheep need saving, because they're foolish and get into trouble when on their own.

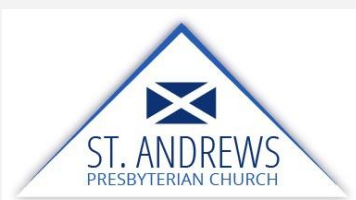
Jesus explained it more clearly to his opponents in John 10:27-30

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one will ever snatch them from my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”

Comforting words of assurance. We, the sheep, aren't abandoned. Our Good Shepherd, who never slumbers or sleeps, has already laid down his life for us, and keeps count of each one of his own so not one is lost or forgotten. We are secure in His loving presence, even through the valleys, because there's nothing to fear. The Good Shepherd walks with us. Our souls are restored in the promise that there will be no more wandering. A table and permanent dwelling are prepared for us with Him. For eternity.

~Written by Char Kamper

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