

The Lord Is My Shepherd

by Danny Bond

Danny Bond's sermon explores the profound relationship between God as our shepherd and us as His sheep, emphasizing His care, guidance, and provision in our lives.

Duration: 57:19

Scripture: Psalm 22:1, Psalm 23:1, Psalm 23:4, Psalm 23:6 - 24:1, Matthew 6:33, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Spiritual Guidance", "Gods Love"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the temptation of the devil and how he tries to deceive us with enticing offers. He compares the devil's tactics to a lush green pasture that looks appealing but ultimately leads to disappointment and emptiness. The preacher emphasizes the importance of following the good shepherd, who leads us to true satisfaction and contentment. He also mentions the concept of God carrying us back to the flock when we have strayed, highlighting God's love and care for us. The sermon concludes with a reminder to be thankful for God's guidance and to approach the Lord's table with gratitude.

Transcript

If you'd like to turn to Psalm 23, tonight we'll be looking at verse 1. Jesus likened our relationship to him as that of a shepherd and sheep. So tonight what we're going to look at is that peculiar relationship that takes place between a shepherd and his sheep. And as we do so, as we see how a real live shepherd takes care of his sheep, you're going to see the analogies there between you and your relationship with Jesus Christ.

You'll notice in this psalm that there is not one petition, not one petition. Many of David's psalms, he's coming before God and he's repenting for sin or he's crying out in anguish from a trial and just calling out on God. But in this psalm, there is not one petition.

It is line after line of David listing for us the many blessings that we have as the children of God and how he works in our lives as the great shepherd. The Lord's Supper is a time for us to gather together and to break bread together and be reminded of all that God has done for us. And as I said, Psalm 23 outlines so much of what God does for us, what the Lord does as our father and as our shepherd in leading us and taking care of us and feeding us and the whole thing that he does.

And I think that it's really important for us as Christians to take time out. We do it once a month. I encourage you to do it more, to take time out just to think about who your Savior is, what your relationship is with him and what he has done for you.

And that is the benefit of tonight's study, just to still our hearts and meditate on who our great shepherd is and how he works with us as his children. Now, by way of introduction to this psalm, you may want to notice that in Psalm 22, we have the picture painted for us of our Redeemer. You may have never seen this before, but then in Psalm 23, we have the picture painted of the reigning king and his glory after Jesus returns at his second coming.

So sandwiched right in the middle, we have the picture of the great shepherd patiently, tenderly tending his sheep and taking care of them right now. And that's us. So we have in Psalm 22, the Redeemer and the sacrifice.

And then in Psalm 23, we have the great shepherd. And then in Psalm 24, we have the great king. So we have the past sacrifice, enabling the present blessing, ensuring then the future glory.

So I thought you might want to know that because of the, it's just an interesting way that the Lord has positioned this psalm in here. And one other important thing that is God has made available for us the tender, full, complete care of Jesus as our great shepherd. But you cannot, as a human being, come under that special, abundant care unless you meet the Redeemer who is outlined in Psalm 22.

You cannot come under the great shepherd as the shepherd of your soul until you meet him as Redeemer. So that's something to keep in mind. Now, tonight, we're going to look at the relationship of the shepherd and his sheep.

And I want to look at just basically two things. The first is the intimate relationship that takes place between a shepherd and his sheep. And the second thing is the care that he shows for his sheep in special times of need.

Because it's important for you and I to understand and have really, in constant remembrance, the intimacy that God desires with you and I. Not only that, but the intimacy that is going on on his level. We wander and drift. He never does.

He's always intimate with us. We're not always intimate with him. So it's good to call to remembrance how intimate he desires to be with us because it gives us confidence to approach him.

And it's also good to call to remembrance the care that he has for us in times of need. And that keys up in our hearts and on our minds, the care he has shown in the past, which gives us the confidence that he will show us that same care today and in the future. And so David said, the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want.

And I believe that what he was saying was I shall not want now and I shall not want in the future. Because now I have his ever-present care, his provision. Seek first the kingdom of God and everything will be added unto you, Jesus said.

And in the future I will be with him in heaven. And the Lord knows we will never want for anything there. So I shall not want now and in the future.

The Lord is my shepherd. Peter said in 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 25, we were all like sheep going astray, but we have now returned to the shepherd and bishop of our souls. The word for shepherd in Hebrew is ra'ah.

And it means literally to tend a flock, to make friendship with, and to keep company with. To tend a flock, make friendship with, and keep company with. That's shepherd.

But Peter said he's also the bishop of our souls. And he linked the two together. And the word for bishop is episkopos.

And it's the Greek word meaning to look or to watch over. And I like to put the two literal renderings together there. Comes up with this.

He keeps company with us as his friends and he tends us as his flock and he's constantly watching over us. Isn't that beautiful? Jesus said, I no longer call you servants, but now I call you my friends. And the Bible tells us that the thoughts that the Lord has toward you and I are more than the grains of sand in the sea.

That's how many thoughts he's thinking toward you as the great shepherd of your life. And so he's constantly overseeing the affairs of your spirit and your soul as his child. Not only that, desiring your companionship.

How's your companionship with the Lord tonight? He earnestly desires that companionship, not just to have you be saved. He longs for that fellowship with you. See, God created you for companionship with him.

That's one of the chief aims of your whole life. So now I'd like to look at the intimate relationship just quickly that goes on between the shepherd and his sheep. And this is not a detailed look.

It's just a few things to remind us. And then I'd like to look at the caring for the sheep in the special times of need. You may know some of this and you may not, but it's just delightful stuff to look at and to think about.

In John chapter 10, Jesus said, the shepherd calls his own sheep by name. He calls his own sheep by name. The way shepherds do this is they'll look at the characteristics of their sheep and they'll decide upon a name for them by their characteristics.

For instance, you might have a striped sheep and the shepherd seeing that striped guy go back and forth now and then will come up with a real neat name for him like striper. Or he might have a black one and call him black. Or he might have one that's a little gray around the ears and called him gray ears.

And we have a few of those with us in our midst. If I was to let my beard grow out, I have some gray right in here. That's why I don't grow it.

But you could be called gray eared. And so by the characteristics of the sheep, he comes up with names for them. And I think that's interesting because Jesus did this.

Jesus called himself the good shepherd. He said, I am the good shepherd. And he did this, which was typical of a shepherd.

He said to John and his brother, he gave them new names. Remember what he called them? The sons of thunder. We always think of John because he's known as the apostle of love, as being this slightly effeminate character, you know, with his sleeves just a little rolled up and walking daintily and saying, just love one another, you know, and everything's beautiful and wonderful and you're all in God's family.

But Jesus called him the son of thunder. And it's John and his brother who said, Lord, with that one city said, let's call down fire from heaven on these guys. They're not repenting.

John was a tough, burly character, fisherman, able to drag in nets. You know, he was a strong individual. So Jesus, seeing this characteristic, this feistiness in John, called him the son of thunder.

I wonder what he calls you tonight. Another characteristic of the intimacy is Jesus said that the sheep hear the shepherd's voice. They know his voice.

One time there was three shepherds crowding around this well with all of their sheep. There was just hundreds of them. And some guys came up from over here.

This was over in the Orient. And they said, how in the world are you going to tell the difference between your sheep and your sheep and your sheep when this is all over and separate all these guys? I mean, they're just lapping up all this water. But how are you going to separate them all out? And one of the shepherds said, it's no problem at all.

Watch this. And so he kind of stepped off to the side and he he yelled out an Aramaic word like Mina or something like that, whatever the word was. And all the sheep that belonged to him just ran to him.

They knew his voice. Jesus said, my sheep know my voice. And you know, what's what is so beautiful about that is that sheep by nature have poor eyesight, but they can hear really well.

And so by knowing the voice of their shepherd, that's how they are able to go from one pastor to the next, you see, and go through all the dangerous conditions in getting there. They rely heavily on the voice of their master. And you and I are like sheep.

We can't see very far ahead, can we? We try, but we can't. We don't know what tomorrow will bring for us. We don't know what next year will bring for us.

We don't even know what the rest of the night is going to bring for us. And so we have to rely on Jesus and his guiding voice to guide us into what lies ahead. We don't know.

We can't see ahead. So we don't even know the decisions that we need to make. So through listening to that still small voice of our great shepherd, we then know the steps to take as he leads us in the paths of righteousness for his namesake.

And we'll study that more in depth in the coming weeks as we get to that verse. But the sign of intimacy is that his sheep know his voice. If you're his child tonight, you know his voice.

You know when God is speaking to you. Another thing is that, I like this, the shepherd will play with the sheep. In other words, as they're out there watching the sheep, now and then life gets a little dull, you know, just sitting around tending the sheep.

And if nothing's going on, things are getting a little mundane and the shepherd is getting a little playful and feisty, he'll jump up and he'll call them all and he'll run off and get their attention and then he'll run off. And they'll all panic and think, oh no, our shepherd's leaving us. Sheep innately know their dependence on their shepherd because he takes care of them for everything.

And as they see him running off, they think, he's leaving us. We'll all die. And they all start chasing after him.

And once they catch up with him, they crowd around him and they're all licking each other and they get all happy and they're licking him because they caught up with him and they're in that secureness, that safety with their shepherd again. And so the shepherd, when he's born, he'll play with them. Now, you and I, God doesn't really play with us, but something similar happens.

And that is that we think he's run off and left us when he hasn't, right? We come to the point where we'll say, oh, there's a few things going wrong in my life. I think God's forsaken me. He must have run off and forgot to call me to go with him or something.

And he's left my life. But you see, as our good shepherd, Jesus said, I will never, ever leave you or forsake you. That's in Hebrews 13, verse 5. So the intimacy that goes on between he and us is that constant abiding with us as he oversees our spirits and our souls and our lives.

And then there's the intimate knowledge that the shepherd has of the sheep. As I said earlier, how he's thinking so many thoughts towards you every minute, every second. One fellow who was one of these real mathematical individuals figured that more than the grains in the sands of the sea would have to be something like eight octillion thoughts towards you every minute.

Eight octillion thoughts. I don't know how much that is. I just know it's a lot.

But the shepherd, a good shepherd will know his sheep so intimately that you can't believe it. I mean, it's just fascinating the way this can happen. When H.R.P. Dickinson visited the desert Arabs, he witnessed an event that revealed the amazing knowledge which some shepherds have.

One evening, shortly after dark, an Arab shepherd began to call out one by one the names of the mother sheep and was then able to pick out each one's little lamb and restore it to its mother. To do this in the light would be a great feat for many shepherds, but this was done in complete darkness and in the midst of all of the noise coming from the ewes crying for their lambs and the lambs crying for their mothers. But you know, no oriental shepherd ever has known their sheep as intimately as Jesus Christ knows you tonight.

Isn't that beautiful? No shepherd has ever known his flock the way Jesus knows us tonight. He said, I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep. We think we come to the Lord so many times and we're telling God what he needs to do for us, as if he doesn't know us, as if he doesn't know how to give us the best.

And so we're rattling off all these things God should be doing for us. And especially if we feel that he's not doing what he should be doing for us. But Jesus knows you more intimately than you know yourself.

And he's working the plan for your life according to that knowledge. That's how he's working with you as his little lamb. And then there's the difference between the shepherd and the hireling.

The hireling, when a shepherd would get so many sheep that he couldn't handle them himself... See, because the shepherd leads the sheep. He doesn't get behind them and drive them. He leads them.

So when he would get more sheep than he could possibly handle, then he'd hire somebody to help him. But because the sheep did not belong to this fellow who had been hired, if an animal came to attack or a robber came to attack, the hireling would just take off. If a lion came, because there was lions in the area in the days of David, he fought with a lion and taking care of the sheep.

There was bears. There aren't either lion or bears in that area anymore. There's wolves and things like that.

But if one of those came, the hireling would just take off. Because he wouldn't have that personal care. But the true shepherd would risk his life for the sheep.

Would risk his life for the sheep. And you know, just to make a quick transition, in the church today, you have, as the pastors being shepherds, you've got good shepherds and you have hirelings. And the hirelings are the ones who are out for the money.

And they fleece the flock of God so that whenever they're preaching or ministering, they'll always hammer away for that plea for money. Because it's not a personal interest in the sheep, in the flock of God that's motivating them. It's the dollar.

And that's the difference between a hireling and a real good shepherd in the church today. But Jesus is not a hireling. He said the hireling will desert the sheep.

And he said, I'll never leave you and I'll never forsake you. So he calls the sheep by his own name. They'll never leave us or forsake us.

We know his voice. He has that intimate knowledge with us. And you know what? He knows you so well that he knows where you're going to run off to when you wander off.

Did you ever wonder why he's so quick to catch you when you wander from him? Why he's so quick to find you and shine his light on you in your times of drifting? It's because he knows you so well. He knows where you're going to run off to. But that's comforting.

That's comforting because we need him to bring us back, don't we? We'll talk about that in a minute. Now, caring for the sheep in special times of need. I really like this.

It shows the tenderness and the love the Lord has for us. When the time comes where sheep are about to give birth to their little baby lambs, those sheep must be kept close to the shepherd for protection because he needs to work very carefully with them as they go from one pasture to the next. But then there's always those little baby lambs that, as they're moving from one place to the next, have a hard time keeping up with the rest of the flock.

And if they lag behind, they'll be picked off by a wolf. So you know what the shepherd does? The shepherd over in the Orient wears an undergarment, which is sort of like linen, and an outer garment, which in the days of David was like camel hair. And that's what John the Baptist had.

And he'd use it as a blanket by night and just as protection. So what the shepherd will do is he'll take that little lamb, or if there's a couple of them, that can't keep up with the rest of the flock, and he'll open up his

outer garment and tuck that little lamb right in there, under his arm, maybe one right in over here, and he'll actually carry them as they move from place to place. Isn't that neat? Because you know what the Bible says? The Bible says in Isaiah 40, he shall feed his flock like a shepherd.

He shall gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom. And he shall gently lead those that are with young. I'll tell you, God really sees us as his sheep.

There's a lot to be learned about our relationship by studying this relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. Now here is one of the most important things of all, and that is that a shepherd will seek and find the lost sheep. When one wanders off, he will seek and find them.

And you know, usually you know where they'll find the sheep. They'll find them in some ravine where there's no water, or they'll find them in some canyon where there's no grass to eat. Someplace, in other words, where they'll perish.

That's where the shepherd usually finds the lost sheep, someplace where they will perish. And so he'll leave all the rest and go find them there. And this is so glorious.

Then he'll take them, and you've probably seen this in pictures or in movies, and he'll put them up over his shoulders and carry them on his big, strong, sturdy shoulders back to the rest of the flock. You ever felt like God has found you way out there and carried you back to the flock? I'd like to read to you something that reminds me of that. Footprints.

You ever seen that little poem, Footprints? Let me refresh you. It goes like this. One night a man had a dream.

He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For in each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand.

One belonged to him and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand, and he noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed it happened at the lowest and saddest times of his life.

This really bothered him, and he questioned the Lord about it. Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way, but I have noticed that in the most troublesome times in my life there was only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me.

The Lord replied, oh my precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During those times of trial and suffering when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you. Isn't that beautiful? And you know what? You know when it is when he most has to carry us, and you know when the times of suffering and sadness are heaviest many times? It's when we've wandered, right? There are times of sadness that come just by way of the Lord allowing us to go through hard times to strengthen us, but by and large and in a general sense the saddest most troublesome times are when we've wandered.

And so for the most part in our lives when we experience that gracious carrying of the Lord is when we've been the most unfaithful to him. And he comes and finds us and puts us on his big old heavy strong shoulders, and he carries us back to where we belong in the straight and narrow so that he can more effectually minister to us and bring us back into that place of blessing. And so when we wander off he goes and finds us and he carries us back on his big shoulders just like the good shepherd.

And then the last thing I want to identify is that a good shepherd will protect his flock from wild animals, and I mentioned this was the difference between a good shepherd. I heard about a Syrian shepherd who a hyena came and drug off one of his little sheep, and so this shepherd took his staff, and the shepherds over there have slings. That's why David had a sling, and they use it as a weapon where they'll throw rocks through their sling.

And he took his staff and his sling and he hunted down this hyena who had taken his lamb. He followed him all the way to the den where he lived, his little cave in the side of the mountain or whatever. And there he began to rant and rave and scream and make all these wild noises, you know like a hyena makes, until the hyena came out of this cave.

And then he started just slinging the rocks at that hyena as fast as he could go, just bombing that guy with these rocks, until he just sort of got over out of the way, and they started beating him with that staff until he was able to get his little sheep back from him and take him back. But you know that was a dangerous task, and it cost him, it cost him to go risk his life like that, to get that little sheep back from that dangerous animal. And you know Amos, in the book of Amos, it tells in chapter 3 verse 12 of a shepherd trying to take his little lamb back out of the mouth of a lion.

Have you ever read that? It says, as the shepherd takes out of the mouth of the lion two legs or a piece of an ear, sounds like he got there too late, that just describes the whole scene of the shepherd fighting with a lion to get his little sheep back. But you know what that does for me, that verse, it reminds me of something. It reminds me that the Bible tells us Satan goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

And Jesus as our good shepherd found us in the jaws of that roaring lion, didn't he? Before Christ found you, where were you? You were bound in the bondage of sin, hopelessly bound. You were led about by the devil, wherever he wanted to take you, whatever he wanted you to think about, you thought about. Because Jesus said, if God isn't your father, the devil's your father.

He was the master and the Lord of your life, and he was dragging you in his powerful jaws right into hell with him. And Jesus came as the good shepherd, not just risking his life to take you out of the mouths of that roaring lion. As the good shepherd, he gave his life.

It cost him his life to get you out of the jaws of the devil. The Bible says that he came to destroy the works of the devil, but it cost him his life to do it. You know, Spurgeon said that sometimes they had to pay a very high price for certain sheep.

Really valuable ones. You know, you're so valuable that God paid the highest price for you as a sheep that was ever paid for a sheep in the history of the world. He had to pay for you, ransom you back from the devil with the blood of his only son and with the broken body of his only son.

I'd like to just close with a quote from a little girl in Sunday school. You know, Jesus said sometimes out of the mouth of babes is perfected praise. One time in Sunday school, the teacher said to this little girl, she said, I want you to quote for me the first verse of Psalm 23.

And the little girl said, the Lord is my shepherd and that's all I want. She got it confused. But you know what? If Jesus is really your shepherd, that is all you want.

The last part of the verse there is I shall not want. And we didn't really talk about that because the whole rest of the Psalm explains what he means by that. The whole rest of the Psalm, every verse.

So we'll be explaining that in weeks to come. But if Jesus is your shepherd tonight, you have no want because he is your portion and he is satisfying your soul. And you're not looking to this world for satisfaction.

You're looking to him to draw closer to him and to his great shepherding care that he has for you. Psalm 23 speaks of the blessings of coming under the guidance of the good shepherd, of our Lord Jesus. And you see, that's the guidance and that's the care and that's the shepherding that God has intended for us from the very beginning, when he created man and put him on the earth.

Tonight, we're looking at the verse that says, he makes me to lie down in green pastures. And this speaks of the security and the contentment that we are to have as believers, as God's sheep, of being well fed and well cared for, and not having the fear of anything around us, but knowing that we are under the constant care of our good shepherd. You know, what I want to do is look at the requirements that sheep have in order to be able to rest and feel secure enough to actually lay down.

You see, it's almost impossible to get a sheep to lay down unless there's four basic requirements that are met. Did you know that? Sheep are a funny little lot of animals. And they've got all kinds of funny little fears.

And unless everything is taken care of for them and they feel secure, they will not lay down. So let's look at these. The first one is that they must be free of all fear in general, free of all fear.

The second thing is they must be free from all friction with others, all of their fellow sheep. The third thing is they must be free from pests, little bugs and things that bother them. And the fourth thing is they must be free from hunger.

Now, the first one then, free from all fear. Sheep naturally have no means of self-defense. They have absolutely no means of self-defense.

They are utterly dependent upon their shepherd to take care of them. They are so timid and so shy and so fearful by nature that even a little jackrabbit can scare a whole flock of sheep. And the reason this happens is because all it takes is one little jackrabbit to dart out of the bushes and one sheep sees it, he panics and the rest of the sheep follow.

And the reason that happens is because they don't bother to look around and see what it was that panicked the original sheep that took off. Sheep have a mob rule mindset. They just follow the leader.

And we're kind of like that too, aren't we? One time there was Philip Keller who wrote the book the 23rd Psalm, was watching his sheep and his car drove up. A friend had come to visit him. And the friend jumps out of the car, you know, saying hi and everything.

And all of a sudden, this little tiny Pekingese, remember those little dogs, Pekingese? This little tiny Pekingese puppy, puppy, they're only this big when they're full grown, puppy, probably could fit in a coffee cup, jumps out of the car and one of the sheep sees it and just panics. And what happened was all 200 of the sheep took off running and just fled in complete terror from a Pekingese puppy. That just gives you an idea of how easily panicked sheep are.

Now, just how defenseless are sheep? I think it's illustrated by the fact that two dogs, two dogs, two wild stray dogs have been known to come in amongst the flock in a night when the shepherd wasn't watching and slaughter as many as 292 sheep. Two dogs. Does that show you how defenseless they are? Now, Jesus said that we need to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing.

And I have seen that all it takes is for one or two dogs or wolves to come into the flock of God. And there's always those who aren't under the care of the good shepherd that are susceptible to the wolves in sheep's clothing. And all it takes is one wolf, one or two wolf, wild dog to come in and you can't believe how many sheep can be slaughtered and devoured in such a short time.

Many times we see churches split and divided and good Christian people that were living just a little too far out from underneath the care of the shepherd are deceived and taken away and devoured by the enemy. That's because unless you're under the care of the good shepherd, you're defenseless. So we need to be very careful to be under the care of our good shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Now, the interesting thing is, is that with all of these enemies around that they have, when they're tending sheep, wild dogs, wolves, bears, and all these kinds of things, the sheep know that if they can see their shepherd, if his presence is there with them, they will be at peace. And their fears that they have naturally will subside and not be there. And so it is with us.

When you're under the care and the love and the guidance and the provision of the good shepherd, when the Holy Spirit is confirming his presence in your life, all of your fears just sort of drift out of your life. Isn't that true? Some of us are more fearful by nature than others. Some of us are more paranoid by nature than others.

But the good shepherd, when he takes control of your life, begins to manifest his lordship to you, just dispels all of your fears. And that's why it tells us in Timothy that God hasn't given us the spirit of fear, but of love and of power and of a sound mind. And so the first thing needs to be taken care of, then, for the sheep to begin to relax so that they can lay down as their fears have to be taken away.

You don't have to worry about a wild dog or a wolf in sheep's clothing coming into the church and deceiving you if you're under the care of the good shepherd. But I'll tell you, I've seen it many, many times where Christians are living on the outer edge of Christianity, and I've seen so many get deceived and follow after false doctrines and false prophets and false teachers. You do need to worry about that if you're not living close to God, but if you are, you don't, because he will provide for you and he will open your eyes to these kinds of attacks.

Now, the second thing is that they need to be free from friction with others. You know, sheep have a funny tendency. They have a tendency to want to have this one-upmanship.

In other words, there's always one old you within the crowd that wants to be the leader. It somehow gets it into their head that they are the ones who should be in charge. And so what they do is they have what's called a budding system, and when they come to some good grass or good pasture or nice watering site, they want to be the first one there, and they want everybody else to know that they're the ones who are in charge, they're the ones who are the strongest.

And so as the other ones come along that are aggressive, they just butt all of them back and back and back and back until everything's clear and they can go up and everybody can stand around and see, wow,

this one is the strong, heavy sheep. Does it sound familiar? The budding system? What the funny thing is, is when the shepherd walks up onto the scene, they stop. Now, if they don't stop, if this one sheep that wants the preeminence doesn't stop, the shepherd takes his rod and starts whacking that guy around.

Sound familiar? You see, many times in the church when we have those that aren't walking under the care and the guidance and the lordship of Jesus Christ, somehow their pride will gain the throne. And there amongst the flock of God, they will decide that they need to have the preeminence, that they need to bless everybody by letting them know how special they are and how they're just natural leaders called of God. One time in a church I was in, there was a brother who said, nobody around here knows it yet, but I am a pastor.

And I said, oh really? He said, yeah, nobody knows it, nobody has recognized this, but God told me. And it's only a matter of time until he manifests my anointing and my authority to all of them. The budding system, wanting the preeminence.

You know, when this happens, I think there's three things that take place that are very similar to what happens with sheep. Number one, it makes everybody else around uncomfortable, doesn't it? Somehow when everyone's fellowshiping after church and you see this brother over there just trying to toot his own horn and gain a little following, you just sense something's not right there in the spirit. And it makes everybody uncomfortable.

And if it happens on a continuous basis, pretty soon everyone's uncomfortable. It can even happen with the pastor. If the pastor is trying to steal all the glory from God, the flock will become uncomfortable.

And so we see that as human beings within our flock, the flock of God, there is the tendency to practice the budding system. You see, it's so contrary to Jesus and everything that Jesus was and said and stood for, isn't it? Jesus made himself of no reputation, but took upon the form of a servant. He said, if you'll follow and be like me, then you'll be a servant too.

And you won't seek to have the praise of men, but rather the praise of God. The Bible tells us in Corinthians that when we compare ourselves amongst ourselves, it's unwise. And yet how we fall into that trap.

But again, it's the presence of the shepherd that stops this kind of behavior. And if you've ever fallen into this, you will have found that when he began to quicken his presence to your heart, as this was going on, and you didn't respond, you began to feel the rod of God come down upon you. You see, he is God and he wants all the glory.

It's as we said last Sunday, he created us to be transmitters of his glory, not our own. And so whenever any one of us begin to practice the budding system, you can be sure that the rod of God is not far off. So you do well to be guided by his eye and by his presence and to repent of such a thing before the rod comes down.

I'd rather not have to deal with the rod of God. I'd rather just be guided by his eye. Now, the next thing is that sheep, then, in order to be able to be peaceful and feel comfortable and secure to lay down, they have to be free of pests.

Now, many times we find in the church what I call pests. Sometimes you've got people that come in and it seems that they've got no desire to serve God. They have no desire to serve the brother, no desire to love

the brother, no desire to love God or his word, and all they do is bother people.

Year in, year out, month in, month out, week in, week out, service after service. And finally, we have to get to the point where we pray them out, because they're just pesting the flock of God. It seems like they've got nothing better to do.

And also, many times, they're the ones that practice the budding system more than anybody else. And it's sad to see that go on, but God is always faithful in the end to get rid of these little bugs, these little pests. But I think that in a more beautiful sense, we get to see the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Remember last week we studied how the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us? Basically, what we studied was how he teaches us to pray. Just in passing, I said that in general, he intercedes on our behalf in our walks with God constantly. The pests would come under the category of the constant intercession of the Holy Spirit.

You see, the things that sheep have to deal with are nasal flies, bot flies, warble flies, and ticks. And we encounter little things like this in our everyday life, don't we? At work, at play, at home. Little things that come up during the day that just bug us.

Perhaps a personality conflict at work. That person across the room from you, and that other desk, or across the partition, or down the hall. The one that somehow, some way, almost every day, you have to come in contact with, and they just seem to rub you the wrong way.

You can come whistling into work down the hall, humming, you know, Great is Thy Faithfulness, and all of a sudden here they come. Lord, couldn't you have had me get here just two minutes earlier? Just to avoid this person. And there the Holy Spirit, if you're walking in the care and guidance of the Good Shepherd, the Holy Spirit will be there to smooth that friction out, to place the love there in your heart that you don't naturally have, and relieve that little pesty situation that's really bugging you.

Isn't that neat? I love that, because you know what, I didn't have that before I was a Christian. Before I was a Christian, those things really got to me. Let's face it, how many people have you talked to that say, Pray for me, I want another job, because there's a pesty situation at work.

This guy's really bugging me, or this lady's driving me crazy. Or how many times have you prayed, Lord, get me out of this situation. The Holy Spirit is there for us as Christians to make that intercession for us, and we never know why he has us on a certain job.

I can't tell you how many times on different jobs I've had where I said, Lord, why am I here? Get me out of here. Obviously, this is an oversight. Obviously, this is a mistake.

Evidently, you know, you were concentrating on someone else's life when I applied for this job. And when I said, Lord, if this isn't you, slam the doors. And then you just forgot.

You didn't even notice what was going on. Lord, have I got your attention? Get me out of here. I can't tell you how many times I've done that, prayed that, experienced that, only to find that somebody at that job will come to Christ, just because I was there walking with the Lord.

Then I understand. And in the meantime, when I stop begging for deliverance from a situation that God has ordained that I be in, I find that intercession of the Holy Spirit to see me through those little pesky,

buggy situations that really tick you off. Now, finally, this requires the constant care of the Holy Spirit, and that's what God gives to us as the Good Shepherd.

But the final thing is that the sheep need to be well-fed before they can lay down. They have to be well-fed. Otherwise, they're nervous, and they're just sort of standing around and just pacing back and forth, looking for some more food to eat.

There's two kinds of pasture. There's the lush green type, and then there's the rocky barren type. Now, it takes a good, dedicated shepherd to constantly be looking for green pasture for his sheep.

While the sheep are feeding, he's got to be going ahead to higher ground or on to another area to find another pasture, because once they've eaten all the grass in this one, they've got to go on to another one. Now, the lazy shepherd will just let his sheep sort of wander around the rocky barren pasture, and his sheep will be ill-fed. We find that in the church.

Men who don't bother to spend any time in the Word of God, and as a result, they don't feed their flocks. It's a lot of work to not give the same message every week. It really is.

But the Good Shepherd's constantly looking for greener pastures, and we see this with our Lord. While he's got us in these lush green pastures over here, he's planning out something for the future to bless us, some future place of blessing and care and rest and security for us. Sometimes, in order to provide, if the shepherd's going to be with his flock in a permanent situation, he will clear off a rocky, barren stretch of land and have to plow it up and plant good, lush grass in order to adequately feed his sheep, and that's a lot of work.

But you see, a Good Shepherd is constantly at work, constantly with his sheep on his mind and their provision and their satisfaction and contentment, and that's how our Lord is with us. It's not unusual if you have lush, green pasture for a newborn sheep to grow at the rate of one pound a day, so that in one hundred days from birth, he weighs one hundred pounds. Have you ever noticed those newborn babes in Christ that really come under the Lordship of Jesus, really give their hearts to the Lord, really are careful to spend that time feeding in his Word? They seem to grow at the rate of at least a spiritual pound a day, and within a couple of months, they're just fat and spiritual and filled with the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

I love that. I love that. I love to be around that, because that just excites me to make sure I'm in that first love relationship with the Lord.

But then on the other hand, you have those that seem to come to Christ, and a hundred days later, they're scrawny-looking, they're nervous, they can't look you in the eye, they haven't touched their Bible the whole time, they've just gone from place to place, and they're ill-fed. Have you ever seen that difference? The Lord would have all of us to come under his lush feeding as he guides us into the greener pastures by his Holy Spirit. Philip Keller said an interesting thing.

He said, A hungry, ill-fed sheep is ever on its feet, on the move, searching for another scanty mouthful of forage to try to satisfy his gnawing hunger. Such sheep are not contented, and they don't thrive, and they are no good to themselves or to their owners, and their languish and lack of vigor and vitality is very evident within them. He went on to say, Because of our own perverseness, we often prefer to feed on the barren ground of the world around us.

You know, they sometimes find sheep, here after the shepherd's gone to all the hard work of preparing a nice green pasture for them, lush, green grass, two feet high, where they can eat and be content and lay down, they'll find some sheep having wandered off to the side, and he leaves that pasture, and there he goes off into the rocky, barren area, and he's just sort of grazing around over there, trying to find something to chew on, when he's got this lush pasture right next to him. We see that in the church, don't we? We see that in our own lives. Here, with the provision of God so full and so rich for us, how many times, because of our own perverseness, does the Lord come looking for us and find us off on some barren stretch of land, near the point of dehydration, hungry, faint, and getting sick spiritually, when all the while, right next to us, was all the food and nurturing we could ever ask for? It's because we give place to our sinful nature.

Our own perverseness leads us to wander off to feed on barren stretches of land. And you know what? The devil, as we study in the Roman 6, is always there shouting across the road, saying, come over here and graze. Notice this lush, it's like a storefront, you know? Lush, green, pasture-age.

You'll come in here, you'll be so delighted, you'll have so much fun, you'll get so fat, this will make you so happy, and you go rushing. It's like those Fuji film signs, you know, as the girl splashes through the boat, and it's a picture. It's kind of like that.

It looks so real. Then you go running over there, only to smash through the picture, and on the other side there's nothing. And you find yourself deceived, hungry, thirsty.

Our Good Shepherd leads us into the green pastures and makes us to lie down, well-fed, well-cared for, and content. Don't be deceived. I know a man who's a Christian, and one time he was there right under the will of God, right under the Shepherd's care, and he began to get it in his head that he needed to go to one of these barren lots with one of these pictures on the front.

And so he left the will of God, and there as he was traveling away, much like Jonah, fleeing from the presence of God, he found himself in a field. This is so hysterical. And there in the field he had to spend the night, because as he was hitchhiking, no one would pick him up.

You know how that goes when you're out of the will of God and nothing goes right? Especially if you're hitchhiking. Nobody will pick you up. And so not having planned this getaway from the presence of the Lord, much like Jonah, he found himself on the highway with no one there to pick him up, no sleeping bag, no food, no provision, and so all he had was a little bag of clothes.

And there he was by a cornfield. And so he goes out and he lays the clothes around. By the way, it's really cold.

He's up in the high desert, you see. And he lays his clothes around and takes a few of these raw ears of corn, and he begins to nibble on them as he's shivering there, trying to cover himself with these clothes. And you know what the Spirit of the Lord said to him? And he did fain fill his belly with the husks.

Remember that scripture from the prodigal son? Came back and he found himself eating pig food, when there just a little way off was his father, his house, the robe, the ring, the party, all that the father wanted to give him. You see, because of our own perverseness and thinking that we know a way that's better than God's way, we find ourselves shivering in a field with no one to pick us up hitchhiking, fain filling our bellies with these husks of raw corn. Right? He wants his sheep to be fat and spiritually happy.

Are you that way tonight? Are you filled with the peace of God? Are you filled with the contentment of God? Can you say tonight, praise God, I love hearing things like this, because only today I was laying down in the fields of grain, content, filled with the provision from the Master. If you can't, we're going to give you an opportunity as we take communion, just to have a still time before the Lord, to come back under the guiding and the provision of the Good Shepherd. I like what Ralph Robinson said in 1656.

He said, Here are many pastures, and every pasture rich, so that it can never be eaten bare. Here are many streams, and every stream so deep and wide that it can never be drawn dry. And the sheep have been eating in these pastures ever since Christ had a church on earth, and yet they are as full of tender grass as ever.

I love that. Richard Baker said, Not only has he green pastures to lead us into, which shows his ability, but he leads me into them which shows his goodness. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't it good to know that you don't have to be the pilot of your life? Isn't it good to know that you don't have to be sitting in the driver's seat all the time? Haven't you found out that when you take the wheel, you end up crashing every time? Let your life come under the care of God.

Let him lead you and guide you. Not only does he have the green pasture, his intention is to take you there, so that you find yourself just overflowing. I'm going to give you one more quote, and then I want to give you a couple of practical things to go away with, to think about.

F. P. Meyer said, talking about this and obedience to the shepherd's lead, The tenderest shepherd cannot bring the flock to rest unless they follow him. The test of following the shepherd's lead is most important. It is by no means a mystery that we lose our rest and our fulfillment when we run hither and thither following the devices and the desires of our own hearts.

All too often we substitute our plans for his plans. We do not look up often enough to see which way he is going and what he would have us to do. And so our rest is broken, and we find ourselves restless, pacing, cranky, ill-fed, with some bit of straw in our mouths as we've wandered off God's green pastures to follow the devices of our own life.

Now, the first practical suggestion I would give you tonight is make sure you are under the care of Jesus the Good Shepherd. If you're not there tonight, take this time of coming to the Lord's table, of partaking of the body and the blood of the Lord, and remembering his sacrifice for you as your Good Shepherd. Take this time to turn back to his guidance, back to his way.

You know, there is one way they do make sheep to lay down when they keep wandering off. Do you know what that is? You ever seen those staffs that the shepherds have, the shepherd's staff? You ever wonder why it's got that little curve on the end? It's because now and then there's a sheep who tends to, no matter how lush the grass, how great the provision of the shepherd, how wonderful everybody is and how happy they are, they'll wander off. So time and again he finds them.

Finally he has to come to that sheep and take his staff, though he doesn't want to, and take that little curved part and on one of his legs break it. Then he carries the sheep back to the lush green grass, and when that sheep's got no alternative but to sit there and feed on the goodness of his shepherd. And as he is fed by the hand of his master, he grows to trust him there in his broken state.

Sometimes God has to break us so we'll stop wandering off. And while we're there broken before him, he's hand feeding us because he wants to show us how much he loves us and how much he cares for us. Maybe you're in that place tonight.

Maybe you're broken right now before the Lord. Maybe you've wandered so many times that he finally had to come after you and pop one of those little legs of yours pick you up and carry you back to the pasture. If that's where you are tonight, thank God.

And as we approach the Lord's table, come with thanksgiving that the Lord loves you enough to break your little legs that keep carrying you away from him. I thank God for that. It's a wonder I can still walk with all the broken legs I've had over the years.

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