

Last month we looked at the importance of relationship in the light of Jehovah God being our shepherd. Knowing God as our personal shepherd brings comfort and encouragement particularly in difficult times where we have experienced God's wonderful love and care.



I read a great story about knowing the shepherd which involves a cruise ship and its passengers. It reads ... One day a group were discussing all sorts of issues and eventually got onto religious matters and in particular, what Bible passages they knew. A professional actor stated his favourite passage was Psalm 23, to which a retiring missionary acknowledged it was his also.

The group prompted the actor to recite the psalm. He got a Bible and started to read with great gusto. He was careful to have the right diction and modulation. As he finished the group responded to his interpretation with a rousing applause.

Out of respect, the retiring missionary was asked to give his rendition of the psalm. As he began to read it wasn't long before he stopped as tears filled his eyes remembering how God had been his shepherd on the mission field, and how God had cared for and protected him. It seemed he would hardly get through a verse before he was choked by emotion as he recalled God's grace through his years on the mission field. Eventually he finished reading and instead of applause, there was stunned silence. After what seemed an eternity, the actor broke the silence by announcing, "The difference between your reading and mine was, I know the psalm, but you my friend, know the shepherd".

When David used the image of a shepherd, he was really looking to give a clear image of how God cares for those who know and love Him. However, in today's world some of this significance has been lost. Some time ago, I was visiting a farming friend, who at the time was running 2,500 sheep. When moving the sheep, he would head off in his vehicle with his trusty sheep dog to herd them into another paddock. Eventually after racing around the paddock, and screaming instructions to his sheep dog, the sheep, somewhat reluctantly, moved into a new piece of pasture. This could not be further from the biblical model of a shepherd.

A biblical shepherd never raced around chasing his sheep, or scream instructions to a sheep dog to get the job done. Firstly, the shepherd knew his sheep by name. Now that may seem strange in the light of modern farming practices. Most shepherds had a flock

PRAISE the Lord for:

- Another part-time journalist (Harriett Coombe) joining the Challenge team
- A new volunteer joining our team for the monthly Australian edition wrap
- Crossroad Prison Ministries (USA) receiving over 1000 responses (2020) in partnership with Challenge paper

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of around 100 sheep. They were very precious as the flock was their means of income. A shepherd not only knew his sheep but also knew their personality quirks, similar to a household pet.

Unlike today's farmers, who drive their sheep from behind, a biblical shepherd would lead his sheep to the right pasture. John chapter 10 gives us some excellent insights into the role and life of the shepherd. The shepherd is able to lead his sheep because they willingly respond to his voice.

The analogy speaks for itself because we have the King of Kings as our shepherd. He knows us better than we know ourselves, and like the biblical shepherd, is vitally concerned for our well-being. He is very aware of our quirks and personality traits. He knows our needs even before we do. He is not a shepherd screaming instructions at us. He is a shepherd who always does what is best for us and ever so graciously and gently leads us in obedience to Himself because as John 10:11 describes Jesus as: "...the good shepherd."

Another important quality of a biblical shepherd was his willingness to put his life on the line for his sheep. This was clearly illustrated by David when he confronted the arrogant Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:34-36. He was giving his credentials to Saul so he might be considered a suitable person to deal with Goliath's taunts. "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear..."

PRAYER needed for:

- Our regular writers as they look to the Lord for guidance and inspiration for each edition
- The re-commencement of Challenge distribution in Malawi and Kenya
- The commencement of our new project in Philippines (still in lockdown)
- Upcoming Impact WA trips for July (weekend) and October (week) as we look to encourage country churches with outreach into their communities

Not sure about you, but the idea of tackling a lion who has stolen one of my sheep, does not appeal to me at all. The fact that a shepherd was willing to do this indicates how valued even one sheep was by the shepherd. We have a shepherd who put His life on the line for us. Jesus Christ willingly went to the cross of Calvary, died and rose again on the third day, conquering sin and death.

As the good shepherd Jesus also delivered us from the power and penalty of sin so we don't wander from His flock. However, this is not a reality if you don't know Jesus as your personal Lord and Saviour. Once you take that step you can experience the overwhelming love, care and protection of Jesus, the GOOD SHEPHERD.

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