

His Sheep Devotion

... and I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:15).

W. Phillip Keller's book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), provides an interesting look at the roles of the shepherd and the personalities of those in His care. I had always thought of sheep as soft and cuddly loveable animals. Not so. They are dumb, dirty, and easily led creatures. And I had never thought how similar I am to those woolly beasts before examining Keller's many anecdotes. Just like the dumb, dirty sheep, who need a protector and guide, I too must rely on the Good Shepherd for my safety and security both now and for eternity.

In the front of our church, matching the intricate altar carvings, hangs a large plaque of Christ as the shepherd. On His left a large sheep rubs against His staff. On His right stand two others. Cradled in His right arm rests a small lamb. Every Sunday I look at that carving as I prepare for worship. It brings comfort and hope to me as I contemplate my personal relationship with Christ.

Some Sundays, I behave like the large sheep. I feel good. I'm on top of the world. Everything is going great; I've accomplished so much this week and I want to show Him. I nudge the staff to tell Him I'm present. I like being in this spot – secure, comfortable, knowing my shepherd has been watching over me. I enjoy my place of importance close to His side, and I want everyone to know how close we are. I trust in His goodness; I've seen it in my life.

In other worship services, I feel more like the two sheep on Christ's other side. I look up at Him longingly and brush against His garment for attention. I need the assurance that He recognizes my presence. A pat on the head will do. I stay close because I know I need His guidance and protection. I know He cares for me and wants me to stay by His side. I feel a little insecure and vulnerable and want to stay close for whatever problems loom on the horizon.

Other times, my gaze falls immediately on the little lamb in the shepherd's arms. Sometimes that is the only place where comfort comes. I feel so alone, so lost, so unloved that in His arms and close to His heart is the only spot where I will recover. And He holds me with one arm. His strength calms me. No one can reach me or harm me. He has surrounded me with His love and protection. I nestle into the folds of His robe.

Circumstances in life put us in different positions with different needs. Like sheep, we often allow ourselves to be tempted away from Him who protects us and helps us grow. We don't always see the danger signals and the enemies prowling around. Within the folds of His garment and with the touch of His staff we know our Good Shepherd will always guide, protect, and love us. He gave His life for all of His sheep no matter the condition of their coats, their needs, or their indiscretions. What joy and comfort we have in knowing He recognizes our daily needs! What joy and comfort we have in knowing He recognizes our eternal needs!

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