



Out of the Shepherd's Fold

Devotion

"What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (Matthew 18:12-14).

The weather is changing. The warmth of summer is cooling, sleeveless shirts are migrating to long-sleeved, and my favorite sweater has made its way back into my early morning routine. Routines will also change with the season's shorter days: kids are back in school; summer harvests will change to fall harvests; the lower pastures will dry up and turn brown; and maybe, just maybe, the "pasture over the hill" will look greener and sweeter.

Have you ever asked yourself the question, "How far off of the green hill and out of His safe pasture has the Lord looked for me?" Honestly, my answer makes me squirm a bit - there have been times when I know He's had to leave the "ninety-nine" to go looking yet again! Oh yes, my heart wants to be safe in the fold; my mind tells me it's best there. But the world sometimes grabs my attention and tempts me to "greener pastures" where it seems I can romp and frolic with no one watching. That's when I realize that my words, my actions, and my human, sinful nature have caused the Shepherd to look outside His precious fold for this wandering and disobedient child.

Signs of wandering away from the Lord's will for our lives can be bitterness, resentment, jealousy, and a "hard" and unforgiving heart. These attitudes and actions are NOT what please the Lord. If anyone is entitled to own those sentiments for the way we treated Him, it is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But, He willingly accepted the hate, the hurt, the physical torture, the mental anguish, and the condemnation of mankind in His last days. He loved us so much that He was willing to sacrifice His life and die for our sins. So, how can we possibly darken our hearts against any of His children with anger, bitterness, or anything but LOVE? We are commanded to forgive and to love one another: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15: 12).

I was wandering and lost, but He found me; I was worthless, but He loves me and gives me worth only by His grace; I was alone, but He gave me a godly husband and sweet, godly children, as well as a precious Christian church family and friends to encourage and "enfold" me. The third verse of the beautiful hymn "The King of Love My Shepherd Is" tells us: "Perverse and foolish oft I strayed, But yet in love he sought me And on his shoulder gently laid And home rejoicing brought me" (LW 412). Have you been off of His hill or out of His safe pasture lately?

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