

Bite Size Bible Study

Our Shepherd #158

By Pastor Lee

In writing one of the lessons for our Saturday Bible Study on Shepherds, I learned a lot about sheep and now I understand better why we as God's children, are considered sheep.

The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very make-up it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met. To be at rest the sheep must have a definite sense of freedom from fear, tension, aggravation and hunger.

Fear It is not generally known that sheep are so timid and easily panicked that even a stray jackrabbit suddenly bounding from behind a bush can stampede a whole flock. When one startled sheep runs in fright a dozen others will bolt with it in blind fear, not waiting to see what frightened them.

Tension The second source is that of tension, rivalry, and cruel competition within the flock itself. In every animal society there is established an order of dominance or status, within the group. Often an arrogant, cunning and domineering old ewe will be boss of any bunch of sheep. She maintains her position of prestige by butting and driving other ewes or lambs away from the best grazing or favorite bedding grounds. Because of this rivalry, tension, and competition for status and self-assertion, there is friction in a flock. The sheep cannot lie down and rest in contentment. Always they must stand up and defend their rights and contest the challenge of the intruder.

Aggravation Sheep, especially in the summer, can be driven to absolute distraction by insects. When tormented by these pests it is literally impossible for them to lie down and rest. Instead they are up and on their feet, stamping their legs, shaking their heads, beat their heads against trees, rocks, posts, or brush.

Food Finally, to produce the conditions necessary for a sheep to lie down there must be freedom from the fear of hunger. This of course is clearly implied in the statement, "*He makes me to lie down in green pastures.*" Green pastures are essential to success with sheep. When lambs are maturing and the ewes need green, succulent feed for a heavy milk flow, there is no substitute for good pasturage. A hungry, ill-fed sheep is always on its feet, on the move, searching for another scanty mouthful of forage to try and satisfy its gnawing hunger. They languish and lack vigor and vitality.

Water Even though sheep thrive in dry, semi-arid country, they require water. Where water can be obtained lies with the shepherd. He knows where the

best drinking places are. When sheep are thirsty they become restless and set out in search of water to satisfy their thirst. Water may come from: 1) dew on the grass, 2) deep wells, 3) springs and streams.

The shepherd's presence makes all the difference in their behavior. Nothing so quiets and reassures the sheep as the presence of their master and protector. Whenever the shepherd comes into view, the sheep quickly forget their fear, foolish rivalries, aggravations and thoughts of hunger. And no sight so satisfies the shepherd as to see his flock well and quietly fed on rich green forage, able to lie down, rest, ruminate and grow.

*The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.
He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.*

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house (family) of the Lord forever (for years and years to come). (Psalm 23)

Just as sheep need these four requirements, so do we as humans. When any of these is missing we tend to become irritable and unable to cope with many of life's many issues.

When we are **afraid** we may tend to pull back into ourselves and not trust anyone – even God. When things in life produce **tension**, as many do, we may tend to act to right the wrongs and become aggressive and hostile to others. When something **aggravates** us we tend to strike out at anything or anyone who is near. When we deprived of the necessary **food** for our body, we may become irritable or languish in our perceived worthlessness. When deprived of **water** our thought processes are impaired and reason and actions are "out the door".

We are like sheep in many ways and Jesus, our shepherd, is keenly aware of our condition. His presence can calm us if we are aware of Him. His ability and desire to care for us is unfailing. He will not allow us to be cast down and forgotten. He has promised to provide for all of our needs (not necessarily wants) and provide a future that is beyond our current comprehension.

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