

The Story of the Good Shepherd as Told by a Little Lamb

I awoke with a start, unusually stiff, cold and terribly uncomfortable. The ground I slept on last night was not the soft, dense grass I was accustomed to. This was hard with patches of prickly weed poking me even through my thick wool. Where was I and how did I get there?

As I struggled to my feet and looked around, I suddenly remembered my folly of yesterday. I had ventured away from my pasture, traveling to what I thought was a plush grass with a beautiful view and a small, clear brook in the distance. Everything had looked so inviting, but my eyes had deceived me. Now I realized what I believed was a path to a better place had been a mirage.

What would I do now? How would I get back to my mother, my family and the good shepherd? At the end of the evening, the good shepherd counts every one of us and calls us by name back into the sheepfold for the night's rest. I knew they would be missing me by now. I didn't know which direction to go, but I decided to head back toward the way I thought I might have come from.

My spirit did not get better as I tried to find my way home, for I was frightened and all alone. It wasn't too long before I found myself in a patch of briar bushes. The thorns were so sharp I started to bleed. I couldn't seem to go forward and I couldn't turn around. I was hopelessly caught in the bushes.

My struggle was halted, though, with a dread unlike anything I had ever felt before. I felt hot, fast breathing behind me and the smell that filled my nostrils took my breath away. My heart started beating so hard I thought it could be heard for miles. Although I didn't want to look, I knew I had to see what was behind me. I twisted and tried to turn, falling into the bush in the process. My worst fears were confirmed. Coming slowly toward me was a wolf.

Oh, the thoughts that filled my mind. If only I had paid attention to my mother's words. "Never wander outside the fold. Don't leave the protection of your family. Keep your eyes on the good shepherd. He knows how to take care of us." How I wish I had taken heed of that advice yesterday. I would not be facing my certain death today!

Just as the wolf was about to make his lunge for my neck, he fell to the ground right in front of me. I had closed my eyes for the inevitable, but when I heard the loud thump of his body, I opened them again to see the wolf, dead, no longer able to have me for his dinner.

Then I saw the good shepherd with the slingshot in his hand. He put it back in his belt, looked at me lovingly and said, "Little lamb, there you are. I have been looking for you." Relief filled my heart. His was the voice I knew so well and had been longing to hear. As he gently lifted me, taking care to pull the thorns from my wool and some from my flesh, his eyes were tender, not at all condemning me.

I had gone astray through my own foolishness, and yet he did not mention it. All the loneliness and fear left me immediately as the strength and security of his loving arms cradled my sore, weary body close to his heart. I rested my head on his chest, silently vowing never to stray again. Not only was I sure I never wanted to ever feel so scared, but I did not want my mother and the good shepherd to pay the price of worry and sacrifice for my own foolishness.

I must have wandered far away from home because it took us quite awhile before we came close to our own green pastures. At the edge of the field, the good shepherd set me down by the still waters I knew so well. He tended all my wounds, taking care to wash away the blood from my fur. Even though he said nothing to me, I knew he wanted to make sure

my mother did not see me in the condition in which he found me. After he finished cleaning me and making sure I had quenched my thirst, he lifted me again, cradling me into the crook of his arm where I fell asleep.

The next thing I knew, the good shepherd was laying me down next to my mother. She was rejoicing and thanking him for finding me. Her eyes met his and he knew that she would remind me again of the treasure of knowing that he was always with us and his rod and staff were our guide and comfort.

I begged mom's forgiveness and told her I had learned my lesson the hard way. The things that look so good on the outside can be so deceptive. She had reminded me many times before that sheep are defenseless animals. We need our shepherd. Now I knew that firsthand. I would never again take my eyes off the good shepherd.

The years went by and I frolicked and played with my family and friends. Fall turned into winter, winter into spring, spring into summer, and summer back into fall again. Every night, the good shepherd led us into the sheepfold with other flocks and posted his own body as guard at the gate. In the morning, he gathered us from among the other sheep by calling our names aloud, one by one.

How wonderful it was to hear his voice call my name, "Little lamb, follow me to the pasture." The good shepherd always made sure we did not want for anything. Sometimes we had to journey onto other green pastures, but we kept our eyes on his staff as we traveled. If our feet wandered from the rest of the flock, his staff lovingly brought us back. When he found another place with the resources we needed, he lowered his staff and we made pasture there.

As time went on, I had lambs of my own. I echoed the teachings of my mother and paid close attention to my lambs so they would not leave the abundant pasture of the day and the secure fold of the night. My lambs tried to stray occasionally, of course, as lambs are prone to do. I had made a pledge to myself, though, that as long as my sights were on the good shepherd I could call him to bring them back if I needed to.

One day, as my lambs were playing together at the other end of the pasture, I saw a new sheep come into our pasture. It was so unusual to see someone I didn't know. The entire flock was familiar to me, but this one was a stranger. More than curiosity was getting the better of me. I just couldn't believe there was a sheep I had not met yet.

This sheep did not seem to want to mix and mingle with the rest of us, but I was determined to make his acquaintance and started walking toward this new arrival. The closer I got, however, the more uneasy I felt. He was larger than most with a walk that was more like stalking than the accustomed slow meander of my friends and family.

Then my heart felt like it was turning to stone. I stopped dead in my tracks. This was no sheep. I caught a look into his eyes and recognized the kind of gaze that had frightened me those many years ago. This was a wolf, disguising himself as one of my very own. As his eyes caught mine, I felt the same immobilizing fear I thought I would never experience again.

The wolf was taking his time coming toward me enjoying my fright. I was frozen in my steps unable to make a move or a sound. Then I saw the good shepherd come between us. My savior again! He would kill the wolf and the flock would again be safe. To my horror and amazement, the good shepherd did not kill the wolf. In fact, it became obvious he did not intend to kill him. Instead, as the wolf glared at him with teeth bared and ready for attack, the good shepherd transformed in front of us both. My good shepherd became a lamb just like me. He turned his head briefly and gave me a look of deep devotion and compassion, then lay

down in between the wolf and me and willingly sacrificed himself to the devouring appetite of the evil wolf. I could not believe my eyes. How could this be?

After the wolf had his pleasure with the meal that was set before him, he seemed to lose interest in the rest of us and walked confidently and triumphantly out of the pasture. He seemed to be satisfied for the moment.

My feelings of devastation were beyond description. My good shepherd was gone. He has given his life in my place. What would I do? What would we do? We had always had the guidance and protection of our good shepherd and now he was gone, having sacrificed himself for me. I didn't understand. I was so helpless and afraid. What would become of us?

As tears filled my eyes, I laid down in deep despair. Grief overtook me and I could not even contemplate what life would be like without the good shepherd. I knew I was not capable of protecting my little lambs.

As sobs shook my body, I suddenly felt a firm, strong hand on my shoulder. I looked up – the good shepherd! No, it was not the good shepherd that had just given his life for mine, but another shepherd. He wiped my tears and sat on the cool grass and placed my head in his lap. He said, "Grieve no more, little lamb, for the sacrifice you witnessed was not a mistake. I, too, have been the recipient of his redemption. I am one of the under-shepherds the good shepherd has been training for this very day. He told us about his sacrifice and how it would be necessary to satisfy the evil wolf. He said if we all trusted him he would continue to protect us. There are other under-shepherds as well and he commissioned all of us to take care of his lambs. We will all keep in remembrance what he has done for us. I will be here for you and we will remember him and his sacrifice together." Although I didn't thoroughly understand, I believed the under-shepherd and knew that the good shepherd was still there, providing and caring for us all.

As the years went on, my family grew. My lambs had lambs of their own. As each little lamb grew old enough to hear the story, I would tell of the good shepherd and how he gave his life for mine. How I loved telling that story. Each time I told it, I couldn't help but feel tears of gratitude well up in my eyes. Sometimes my lambs would ask if I was crying. I would always say, "Not from sadness, my children, but from the joy of gratitude for the gift we have all received." I would tell them of his provision for us here now and forever in the future. I watched as my lamb's lambs played in the security of the green pastures.

My pace slowed as I got older, but I followed the under-shepherd each night into the fold where other flocks rested with the other shepherds that the good shepherd had prepared in advance. Now, instead of the good shepherd always taking the watch at the door of the fold, the under-shepherds took turns making sure we were all safe and secure from dangers of the dark.

One beautiful spring day, I was the last of the flock to leave the fold following the under-shepherd to the green pasture. On that particular day, I was drawn back to the very spot where the good shepherd had given his life for mine. I always felt a sense of amazement when I approached that spot. I had never deserved the kind of love my good shepherd showed to me. I had been so disobedient as a little lamb, but he willingly forgave me. What an incredibly unselfish love he had for me and all my kind. I loved the under-shepherd, to be sure, but I missed the physical presence of the good shepherd and longed to see his face once more. Sometimes coming to this spot helped me feel closer to him.

As I settled down on the cool, soft grass, I felt more weary than I had ever felt before. My family was grown, and I had stayed true to my promise to keep them ever mindful of the wonderful gift of life and love we had all received from the sacrifice of my good shepherd.

He died that day allowing not only me to live, but all the generations beyond me. I longed to say, "Thank you," in person. I laid my head down feeling a peaceful sense of contentment and drifted off into my last sleep.

As I opened my eyes, there was no sense of drowsiness. The tiredness was completely gone. I felt like a young lamb again. An inexpressible joy filled my heart. Then I realized I was no longer in the same pasture. This one was different in a way I could not describe. Excitement filled my heart as I became aware of the wonderful surroundings.

There was no sheepfold here, just goodness, mercy and peace. There was not just a stream here but a river of pure water, clear as crystal. Everything around me was light, but there was a light in the middle of the pasture that was brighter than all. My gaze was drawn to that light. I started to run as I recognized a familiar face, the face of my Savior. My sacrificial lamb, the good shepherd, was sitting on a throne. As I reached him, I fell down on my knees and cried out with joy, "Thank you, thank you, thank you." He said to me with the look of kindness on his face that I remember so well, "You are welcome, little lamb. Welcome home."

. . . for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters (Revelation 7:17a).

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