

# THE FIRST 15

Tuesday, June 11, 2024

Today is Tuesday, June 11 and we are studying what the Bible says about shepherds and sheep.

## OPENING PRAYER

*In the morning, I come to this quiet place and listen for the voice of my Shepherd. I calm my scattered thoughts and slow my breath. I dwell in safety under the Shepherd's thoughtful eye and loving care. He watches over my comings and goings, guides me to places of peace in a busy day, and leads me to discover the joy of a Sabbath heart. Amen.*

## SCRIPTURE

***For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. Ezekiel 34:11-16a***

## REFLECTION

The prophet Ezekiel presents God as the good Shepherd of his people. He promises that God will rescue the scattered exiles and return them to their own pastures to be cared for and loved. God himself will take on the role of Shepherd to his people. His job will be to find the strays, rescue the lost, feed and tend the entire flock, and care for those who are weak, sick or injured. This passage beautifully illustrates the tender, loving qualities of God. This is who God is.

The image of a good Shepherd who loves me and cares for me informs my understanding of my relationship with the divine Creator. I have a God who looks after me. When there were days of darkness in my life, cloudy days, God noticed. When there were days when my soul was scattered, my heart was wandering or a poor choice caused me to lose my way, God noticed. I suffered consequences for poor decisions and missteps on my life's path. I have a God who searches for me and rescues me from those dark places, who rejoices to gather me in his arms and bring me home to him. I have a God who watches over my life and tends after me - blessing me with rich pastures and encouraging me to lie down and rest in his goodness. Whenever I have endured harm or injury, God is the one who binds my wounds. Wherever I am weak, God is the one who strengthens me. I can trust God to care for me. He knows exactly what I need and will guide me to what is best.

I consider the emotions this image of the Shepherd evokes in me. How does it make me feel? What current circumstances am I dealing with that this passage informs? I consider how God

has shepherded me in the past. I remember a time when I was scattered, lost or astray. I recall how God searched for me, rescued me and tended to me. I consider how I need God to shepherd me in the present. Perhaps there is a part of my life that is veering off course and I need a guiding hand. Maybe I am carrying old wounds from the past that still need to be healed. Perhaps I need to “lie down” in God’s green pastures and enjoy the heart of Sabbath rest. Maybe I have developed weaknesses in my character and God wants to strengthen me.

**Ask:** Where in my life do I need a Shepherd? How might God want me to slow down and rest in his love?

**Pause and Pray**

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Holy and loving God, come and be the Shepherd of my wayward soul. Teach me to lie down in your green pastures and enjoy the blessings you provide. Heal my woundedness and bind up the cares of my heart. Strengthen my legs so I can walk boldly in your paths of righteousness. Nourish me with good spiritual food and look after my life. Like a little lamb held in your mighty arms, I trust you to care for me and instruct me in the way I should go. Amen.*