

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, August 1, 2024

Today is Thursday, August 1 and we are learning about the rod and the staff of the Shepherd.

OPENING PRAYER

As the sun rises on another day, I listen for the voice of my Shepherd. I still my mind, slow my breath and rest quietly in His love. As we journey together side by side, I have comfort knowing my Lord and Shepherd has my best interests at heart. I look to Him for guidance and direction in the smallest details of the upcoming day. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! People of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. How gracious he will be when you cry for help! As soon as he hears, he will answer you. Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it." Isaiah 30:18-21

REFLECTION

When the shepherd stays with his flock in the remote high country, he brings a minimum of equipment with him. In the Middle East the shepherd carries only a rod and a staff. A shepherd's rod is a relatively short heavy club-like device that a shepherd learns to throw with speed and accuracy. A shepherd's staff is a long, thin carved wooden pole with a round crook or hook at one end. The staff is designed specifically to work with sheep and is used to care for them. The crook is a symbol of concern and compassion. It demonstrates the character of the shepherd as long-suffering, patient and kind.

The staff is used for guiding the sheep. The shepherd uses the tip of the long slender stick and lays it gently against the animal's side. He applies pressure to nudge the sheep the way he wants him to go. Sometimes a shepherd will gently hold his staff alongside a sheep maintaining contact so that they are walking together side by side. It is in this same way that the Holy Spirit guides us in our walk of life. He rests His staff alongside us, walks intimately with us and ensures that we do not go the wrong way.

God's Spirit guides us every minute of every day and directs even the smallest details of daily living. When we become more attentive to the nudges and shoulder-taps of our Shepherd, we can rest assured that we are in good hands and are being led exactly where we need to be. Isaiah tells us that when we veer off the course, or step to the right or left of the path, we will hear the voice of the Spirit guiding us back on the path. Pointing out the proper course. It is the Holy Spirit who gently, tenderly, persistently says to us, "This is the way - walk in it."

In my own life, I consider how attentive I am to the voice of the Shepherd. Am I taking time out of my busy day to pause and ask for directions, to listen for instruction? Perhaps when questions arise and problems present themselves, I rush ahead figuring out a solution in my own limited power. Maybe I think the Spirit has no reason to bother with the mundane details of my life. Perhaps I stubbornly choose to go my own direction and fail to listen. Maybe my mind is so full of the voices of the world that I have drowned out the still, small voice of the Shepherd.

Ask: How can I learn to better listen for the voice of the Shepherd or feel the gentle nudges of His staff? Where might I ask for His help and guidance in my upcoming day?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, be the Shepherd of my soul. Walk alongside me in the ups and downs of the upcoming day. Help me learn to identify Your voice amid the constant noise that clutters my mind and clogs my spirit. Show me what it means to pause, listen and obey Your wisdom in the big and small choices of each day. Remind me to slow down and look to You in all of the challenges, problems, struggles and questions that life brings. Amen.

(This First 15 was inspired by the book: *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, by W. Phillip Keller)