

THE FIRST 15

Friday, August 2, 2024

Today is Friday, August 2 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

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. John 10:10-15

REFLECTION

A shepherd's staff is a long, thin carved wooden pole with a round crook or hook at one end. The staff has many purposes - one is to guide the sheep and another is to rescue the sheep. The crook of the staff fits perfectly around a sheep so the shepherd can pull or lift the sheep to safety. Shepherds continually find themselves rescuing sheep who have gotten into trouble through their own poor choices. A greedy sheep will blindly munch on more and more clumps of green grass to the point of climbing down steep hillsides where they might slip and fall and injure themselves. In such a circumstance, the shepherd uses the crook of his staff to lift the sheep out of danger so he can minister to the wounds. Sheep are apt to push farther and farther under a thorny bush just to find a few more mouthfuls of yummy grass. Their woolly coats get caught in the brambles and they are unable to extricate themselves. The shepherd uses his staff to free them from their entanglement.

So it is the same for you and me. Many of life's problems are a result of our own doing. Our stubbornness, greed, poor choices, and rash decision making can lead us to injure ourselves, harm our relationships or trap us in thorny situations. We continually push ourselves into places we should not go, blindly munching on sweeter and sweeter clumps of grass, oblivious to the potentially negative outcomes. Thankfully, our Good Shepherd is patient, compassionate and tender. He comes to us expertly wielding the crook of His staff to rescue us from every circumstance. Sometimes it happens quickly, but it also may take some time. Regardless, our Shepherd never gives up on us.

We have an enemy who like a thief comes to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). We need a Shepherd to protect us from the one who is looking to deceive us and lead us into sin and harm.

We have a Good Shepherd. A Shepherd who came so that we may have life, and have it abundantly. We don't have a hired hand who doesn't know his sheep and who cares nothing for us. Our Shepherd is not a hired hand who abandons us in the face of danger and runs away when we get ourselves in a predicament. We have a Shepherd who knows us and loves us. A Shepherd who leaves the 99 and goes to find the one. A Shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for us.

Ask: Where do I need the Shepherd's help today? How can I name my entrapment, my injury, my misstep or my fear?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You are my Good Shepherd. Thank You for faithfully and patiently walking with me on this journey of life. Thank You for loving me, even when I am stubborn, careless, obstinate and downright unlovable. As I examine my heart this morning and consider the upcoming events of my day, I share every joy and invite You into every concern. Lead me where I should go, rescue me from harm, comfort my fears and remind me to rest in Your goodness. Amen.

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