

THE FIRST 15

Tuesday, July 30, 2024

Today is Tuesday, July 30 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

But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. 1 Samuel 17:34-36

REFLECTION

Wandering off the good path can lead unwary sheep into danger. By veering off the trail and failing to follow the shepherd, a sheep could become lost, fall and sustain an injury or encounter a pack of hungry wolves. Our Good Shepherd protects us from danger, keeps us safe and prevents us from harming ourselves or others.

The author of Psalm 23, David, grew up shepherding his father Jesse’s sheep. He knew the potential dangers for sheep all too well. David killed lions and bears protecting his sheep from predators. When he went to fight the giant Philistine Goliath, King Saul told him he was too young and inexperienced. David responded with these words, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it.”

I imagine the young David up in the high country alone in the late summer, carrying only his rod and staff. At a moment's notice he leapt into action to rescue a sheep, using his powerful club-like weapon to aggressively attack predators - even ones as fierce as a bear or a lion. He struck the lion with his rod and rescued the sheep from the jaws of death.

In the New Testament, Peter compares the devil to a roaring lion and warns us to be on guard against danger. “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Jesus says our enemy comes like a thief with every intention to steal, kill and destroy (John 10:10). The evil one comes to steal our health, destroy our marriages, rob us of happiness and ruin our relationships. We need a Shepherd to protect us from an enemy who is looking to deceive us, lead us into sin, guide us into harm's way and ruin our lives.

We need a Shepherd. We tend to be swept away by waters we should have avoided. We have no defense against the evil lion who prowls about seeking whom he might devour. We wander away from the path. We go our own way and get lost. Thank God we have a Good Shepherd. A Good Shepherd who is willing to lay down his life for the sheep. A Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 and goes to find the one. A Good Shepherd like David who when a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. A Good Shepherd who rescues us and brings us home, even when we continually persist in straying off course. We have a Good Shepherd - Jesus.

Ask: Am I closely following my Good Shepherd in paths of righteousness? How and when might I be straying from the good path and placing myself or my relationships in danger?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You are my Good Shepherd. Keep me walking on the good way, traversing on solid ground and following You in paths of righteousness. Guard my steps and keep me from straying from Your watchful eye. Keep me alert to deception and temptation. Rescue me from harm, protect me from despair, and guide me on the right trails. Shine Your light on the way I should go and keep me in Your love. Amen.

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