

THE FIRST 15

Wednesday, July 31, 2024

Today is Wednesday, July 31 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

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. Psalm 139:1-5, 23-24

REFLECTION

The shepherd uses his rod and his staff as tools of the trade to help the sheep. The rod is used to count and inspect the sheep. A responsible shepherd will occasionally make a careful examination of each individual sheep. He uses his rod to open the heavy fleece of the sheep and inspect the skin for any kind of trouble. He runs his hands over the coat and looks for hidden problems. When the shepherd observes signs or disease, injury or illness he catches it early and treats the sheep promptly to prevent the problem from becoming worse.

In the same way, God examines us. If we allow him to do so, when we invite him to do so, His Holy Spirit will come and make a thorough examination of our soul. The Psalmist cries out, "Search me, God, know my heart, test me, know my thoughts." When God examines us, sin is revealed. When sin is revealed and evil intentions are exposed, they can be forgiven, cleansed and corrected. Sheep have long hairy coats and many problems can be hidden from a shepherd who doesn't take the time and effort to carefully examine his flock. We humans have an uncanny tendency to hide our sins and faults as well, even from God. The first thing that Adam and Eve did when they disobeyed God in the Garden was to hide (Genesis 3:10).

God sees everything and knows all of our thoughts. He is completely aware of our intentions and understands our motivations. When we invite him to make a close examination of our body, mind, soul and spirit, things that we want to remain hidden come into the bright light of truth. If we are hiding hurt and brokenness, God will heal us. If we are hiding sin and evil intention, God will correct us. If we are hiding secrets, God will expose them. When all is out in the open before God, just like when the shepherd sees what is under the wooly coat of an ailing sheep, we are on our way to restoration, healing and wholeness.

Ask: How might I invite the Holy Spirit to do a thorough examination of me? What might I be hiding that needs to be revealed before God or others?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, examine me with the rod of the Shepherd. Shine Your light on the deep dark recesses of my soul, reveal my intentions, and expose my motivations. Bring my hurts and heart aches to the surface, uncover places of disease and brokenness. Unmask what is hidden. Great Shepherd, heal me in Your love. Forgive me in Your grace. Comfort me in Your mercy. Amen.

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