

“The Lord is My Shepherd”

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By Pastor Peter F. Paine

Hear ye, hear ye, the court is now in session: Today is the case of dependence vs. independence.

Pastor Paine asked each of us: What if that phrase was blared over a loud speaker first thing in the morning every day of our lives? Would we find ourselves to be dependent or independent? In America, we tend think of ourselves as very independent. We say what we want to say because of freedom of speech. We don't have laws that dictate where we go, who we associate with, how we dress, or what we do for a living.

With the invention of the self-check-out, it's not uncommon to go out into our community, gather the things we need for our next week, pay for them, load them up, bring them back home, and never depend on another person for interaction or support. So in this culture of independence it's no wonder we struggle with the idea of fully depending on God.

Sheep are not very exciting animals, and frankly most people don't think of them as being very smart. So why does God want us to be like sheep? Doesn't that fight every instinct we have built into us by our culture to be progressive, leaders, and exciting people? Well, in a word, yes. Christians are called to be peculiar people (I Peter 2:9). Most people view Christians as very timid and boring people, but that is not the case. People who truly rely on Christ and follow him every day have a great purpose to stand up and make a difference in the world while they depend on God. We are described as sheep because we learn how to accept the guidance and care that God provides us.

Psalms 23

1. [[A Psalm of David.]] The LORD [is] my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou [art] with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Look at all the peace God offers us in this passage of scripture if we will just depend on him. In verse one, we read about a life without want. What would life be like if we were released from the wants that control our actions and allowed God to provide for us at every step of the way? In verse two, we read about an amazing place that is running with

still waters. Some of us have lived by troubled waters so long that we have forgotten what still water even looks like. God offers that kind of peace in our lives daily if we depend on him.

The Bible teaches us that God is our shepherd. He can take care of us better than we can take care of ourselves. When we start to gain the perspective that “I can’t do this on my own. I need God because only He has the big picture,” we can start develop that trusting relationship God designed us to have with him.

There is a Book out on the market that is *A Shepherd’s Look At Psalms 23*. The author, Phillip Keller, discusses the difference between a shepherd that is a resident and owns the sheep he tends and the land on which they live as opposed to a tenant shepherd. He contrasts the quality of the grass in the fields, and the quality and amount of attention the sheep receive. He notes that it is easy to see which shepherd owns the sheep and land because he takes MUCH better care of them. God is our owner. He’s not just a tenant that is looking out for us for a while. He created us in his image and loves us, so as our shepherd, he takes better care of us than anyone or anything else ever could.

Isaiah 53:6

6. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Pastor Paine told a story about a man who lost one of his sheep, and when he went looking for it, he found it at a local auction house. The man went to the auctioneer and explained that this was *his* sheep and he wanted it back. The auctioneer told him if he was going to get his sheep back, he would have to bid on it like everyone else. The man out bid everyone there until he won his sheep back, and then took his sheep back home.

The man had to buy that sheep twice. At the beginning of the story, he already owned it, which implies he must have gotten it a first time. Then, through the sheep’s desire to run away, he was forced to pay for it again (and probably a very high price since he had to beat out other bidders). The sheep was doubly his! So what significance does that have for us in our spiritual lives? We are doubly God’s. He created us in the first place, and as our creator, he owns us. Then, because of our rebellion and sin, He paid the price for our salvation with his blood on Calvary. It is amazing that God loves us just like that shepherd loved his sheep and was willing to do anything to keep it.

Have you ever heard someone say, “It’s arrogant to say that you’re a Christian. How can you be so sure that you’re following Jesus Christ? How can you say that when you’re supposed to be a sinner saved by grace?” Probably so. But when Christians stop fighting for our spiritual independence and start to rely on God as their shepherd, the relationship starts to come into clearer focus. Children never have any problem saying, “That’s my Mom” or “That’s my Dad”. The same should be true of us if we are living as children of

Christ. Being His makes us secure. Being Christians who declare our dependence on God makes us able to declare our relationship with him with certainty so saying “I’m a Christian” is not a sign of arrogance, it’s a sign of dependence.

God gives us free choice. Because of that, we have the option to choose or reject our shepherd and go without the care and protection he offers. The Bible teaches us that God stands at the door of our hearts and does not barge in. He knocks. He allows us to choose him. We make the choice to allow him to be our shepherd or not through our actions.

Luke 15:1-23

1. Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.
2. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.
3. And he spake this parable unto them, saying,.
4. What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?
5. And when he hath found [it], he layeth [it] on his shoulders, rejoicing.
6. And when he cometh home, he calleth together [his] friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.
7. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.
8. Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find [it]?
9. And when she hath found [it], she calleth [her] friends and [her] neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.
10. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.
11. And he said, A certain man had two sons:
12. And the younger of them said to [his] father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth [to me]. And he divided unto them [his] living.
13. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.
14. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.
15. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.
16. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.
17. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
18. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
19. And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.
20. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.
22. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put [it] on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on [his] feet:
23. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill [it]; and let us eat, and be merry:

If any of us have exercised our free will and declared our independence from God, he is just like the father in the story found in Luke who not only accepted his son again, but was waiting patiently for him to return. God *wants* to care for us. He wants to be our shepherd and bring us to a peaceful wonderful place like the one that is described in Psalms 23. If we find ourselves far from God it is not because he has walked away from us, but instead that we have wandered away from him.

If you find yourself reading this today and are far from God, reach out to him and get close again. As your shepherd and Heavenly Father, he wants you to be close to him and part of the “fold”. If you are reading this today and know that you are right with God and are part of his family and sheepfold that is a great reason to rejoice! But no matter where you are in your walk with God, right now is the right time to make a declaration of dependence.