

I am the Great Shepherd



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***The LORD is my shepherd.
I shall not be in want.***

***He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.***

***He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.***

***Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me: your rod and your staff, they comfort me.***

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.***

***Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.***

Psalm 23

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In our activity, I hope all of you enjoyed being shepherds and dumb sheep. A few years ago, I was part of a short term missions team to Tibet, or rather, the province of Qinghai in west China. It may be western China, but there are lots of Tibetans there! Tibetans are largely nomadic until recently, and they don't have sheep but yaks. Yaks, in case you don't know, look ridiculously stupid, and guess what? They are! We were on a bus one time, and understand this is China. So the bus driver was driving at top speed on a bumpy rural road. What do you know? There was a smart yak on the road, just staring at us. The driver honked his horns like crazy, but the yak kept staring at us. When we're about maybe 20 yards away, the driver started slowing down, but he kept honking his horns (like it really made any difference because that yak is so STUPID!) Only when we're about 5 yards from the yak did it decide to move.

When the Bible describes us as sheep, it's not a compliment. Sheep, like yak, are ridiculously stupid. On the Discovery Channel, you see how in many European countries, they use dogs to herd sheep. The dogs don't do much—all they do is run around, and maybe bark if there's a *really* stupid lamb somewhere. Yes—sheep are THAT stupid, even dogs don't need to do much to get them to do something. Why might God call us sheep? We just need to look at the Old Testament at the story of the Israelites. Even though they were children of God, they still continue to disobey! And this is a case where God is actually visible—like, you can see Him very clearly rain or shine.

But we are also like sheep because we are defenseless. Which is why Satan doesn't have that much trouble fooling around with us. We're like that yak on the road. Something bad's heading our way. But instead of moving away, we think "you know what? I'm just gonna have it!" The smarter yaks think, "You know what? All that moving to let busses pass? That's so old and cliché! I'm going to be a rebel and stay on the road!" Your loss.

In the olden days, the good shepherd did not have smart dogs running around. They did the herding themselves, which is why they have shepherds' crooks! The crooks are really for grabbing the sheep by the neck and pulling them towards you. This is useful if any ding-dong sheep decides to walk away and do something absolutely ridiculous. We, like sheep, are like that a lot. We just want to go our own way! But Christ is the great shepherd because **he wants only the best for us**. And we should **trust him** for that because he knows where we're going. He knows where the greenest grasses are. He knows where sunny, warm hills are.

In the olden days, the good shepherd did not have guns to shoot predators with. They did the protecting themselves. Just as a good shepherd protects his sheep, our Great Shepherd protects us from evil! But unlike a good shepherd, who would risk his live to protect his

sheep from hungry predators, Jesus gave his life to forever defeat the Evil One! Satan is powerful, yes, but he still is no match for God. So we have nothing to fear.

But last of all, our Great Shepherd leads with love, not fear. In 1 John 4:18, we see that perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment! Why is that bad? Because if we do things because we're afraid of being punished for not doing, then we live by consequences. You come to youth group not because you love hanging out with each other or learning from God, but you come because if you don't, you get a call from me asking you why you didn't come! You go to school and do well not because you want to learn, but because if you don't do well, your dad's going to give it to you. How tiresome and meaningless is that, living out of fear! But if you come to youth group because you love hanging out with friends and listening to God's word, and you go to school because you love learning, isn't that so much better and more enjoyable? So fear is consequential. Love is virtue.

So what's today's big point? Chris is the Great Shepherd. We should **trust** him and **love** him. And we can't do that without loving others, and we can't do that without loving ourselves. And we can't love ourselves without loving God.

And one more reason why he's the Great Shepherd—without him, we don't know how to love God. Let's pray.