

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Richard Wuong once wrote a prayer that went like this...

Bless our home,
Father that we
cherish the bread
before there is none,
discover each other
before we leave,
and enjoy each
other for what
we are while
we have time.*

Too often we take things for granted, or lose something of great value before we even realize how really valuable it is to us. Today I want to talk about something of great value, to our Father.

Matthew 18:11 For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.
12 How think you? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety and nine, and go into the mountains, and seek that which is gone astray?
13 And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoices more of that *sheep*, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray.

These verses are book-ended by verses talking about children...

Matthew 18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

And verse **14** Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

However, keep in mind that this can also relate to '**little in the faith**'.

Luke 15:1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receives sinners, and eats with them.

Jesus knew what they were saying. The murmurs and gossip.

Luke 15:3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he finds it?

5 And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he comes home, he calls 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 repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

It's interesting that the word 'Pastor' comes from Latin and means 'Shepherd'. Someone who looks after a flock.

Jeremiah 3:15 And I will give you pastors (Hebrew raah 'raw aw') according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

Copiapo Mining accident in Chile Aug. 5th 2010.

This 121 yr. old mine is in one of the driest, harshest regions of the world, the Atacama Desert. The collapse happened on the 5th, but it was unknown if anyone was alive until the 22nd, when the men trapped left a note on the end of an exploratory drill bit. They had already gone 17 days without food. Their family's most likely giving up all hope of ever seeing them alive again. These men were know as 'The 33'. To each of their families they were 'lost'. Even then, on the 22nd, after a brief flash of relief, few of those families would ever expect them to see the light of day again, because they were **2,300 feet underground**. Close to ½ a mile. And because the way down was through a series of spiraling ramps, they were **3 miles from the entrance**.

Their loss was felt by millions the world over. The incident was televised around the world. When a shaft was finally sunk – incredibly accurately I might add – right into their refuge area, over a **BILLION** people watched around the world as they were pulled out, one at a time. It was a time of great elation. High emotion. Victory! I can remember watching it with tears of joy.

This is the rejoicing of our Father in heaven when he finds the lost sheep.

Biblical value of sheep.

Today, a sheep has very little value to us. We visited Ireland in June and I have always been amazed with the stories about the potato famine of 1845 because the island is covered in sheep. How could over a million people starve to death while there were so many sheep around? The bottom line was that most everyone was on land owned by some Baron or other. The Baron would tell them what they could grow or farm on their land. If your land was reserved for potatoes then that was all you grew and all you basically lived off. When the blight came through, whole crops would turn black in not much more than a day. Nothing could be saved. The Baron owned the sheep and if you stole from him you would be met with capital punishment. There's one story of 600 people in 1849, starving to death, walking 12 miles from Louisburgh to Delphi Lodge to get food from their landlord. They were turned away and on the walk back close to 200 died on the side of the road. Irelands population was 8 million before the famine. 1 million died of starvation, 1 million sailed overseas for better lives – many of which died of disease and starvation while still on the ships. The population has never recovered and sits around 6.4 million. But the sheep.... they're still everywhere. And the pictures you see of cars stopped on the road while sheep wander is absolutely accurate.

Sheep have never been wild. They have always been domesticated. Right from the start Abel kept sheep. Adam and Eve were still in the garden when God made them coats of skins to clothe them. What skins would you suspect the clothes were made from? Most likely sheep or goat.

What is your value.

If you go for a mortgage, the lender wants to know what your worth. Current and future. So they ask you all sorts of questions to see if you're a good risk.

How do you measure your worth? Well we look at income, what's in our bank accounts, what we have in stocks & bonds. What are our assets, our house, our land. But...how did people use to measure wealth in biblical times? Then it was all assets. Land, sheep, cattle, camels, bulls, servants, etc. etc..

Genesis 12:16 And he entreated Abram well for her sake: **and he had sheep, and oxen, and he asses, and menservants, and maidservants, and she asses, and camels.**

12 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him.

13 And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great:

And how do we know he was rich.... Well, because....

14 For he had possession of **flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants:** and the Philistines envied him.

There is nothing wrong with being wealthy. With being a good steward with your money. Money should never be first in your life, or second or third for that matter. But being poor does not make you a better person. Actually the bible tells us to be good stewards with what we've been blessed with.

Proverbs 27:23 Be you diligent to know the state of your flocks, *and* look well to your herds.

24 For riches *are* not for ever: and does the crown *endure* to every generation?

Notice the connection between vs's 23 & 24 where these things are described as your riches. **Perishable riches.**

5.

People guarded these animals very carefully because they were valuable. The sheep feed them, clothed them with their wool, they were sacrificed to God.

Isaac and Rebecca had twins Esau, a hunter, and Jacob, a farmer – a shepherd. See Gen. 27:8. Esau married a Hittite woman and made his parents sad. His choice grieved them. But, what did Jacob do? Well Isaac and Rebecca were a little more direct and said ‘Don’t marry a Canaanite, go to Padanaram instead and pick a wife from where his uncle Laban lived. He does this and over the course of time falls in love with his cousin Rachel and wants to marry her. What did he have to do first? Serve as a shepherd to Laban his uncle for 7 years. Then he took a sucker punch and was conned into marrying Leah, her sister, instead.

So here’s a good lesson on sin. God may forgive you sin, but you may still have to live with its effects – sometimes for the rest of your life. This case I think there may have been a little too much tipping involved to even recognize who he was ‘sleeping’ with. So another result of this sin, was that he had to work **another 7 years** to get his true love. He paid for his wives with 14 yrs of shepherding. Hard work!

Genesis 31:38 "For twenty years I have been with you, caring for your flocks. In all that time your sheep and goats never miscarried. In all those years I never used a single ram of yours for food.

39 If any were attacked and killed by wild animals, I never showed you the carcass and asked you to reduce the count of your flock. No, I took the loss myself! You made me pay for every stolen animal, whether it was taken in broad daylight or in the dark of night.

40 "I worked for you through the scorching heat of the day and through cold and sleepless nights.

41 Yes, for twenty years I slaved in your house! I worked for fourteen years earning your two daughters, and then six more years for your flock. And you changed my wages ten times!

Moses is another example...(Exodus 2:) Worked as a shepherd for Jethro to pay for his daughter Zipporah. (Moses’ wife).

6.

Shepherd would often name their sheep. They would constantly count them to make sure they were all accounted for. Fence them off. Probably even had dogs back then to protect them. Then if one was missing, go, and search for it as the sun was setting. He leaves behind the flock and searches for **ONE** because it is **valuable**.

There's the lesson... **One is valuable.**

We read in **John 3:16** For God so loved **the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

'The world' is a big group. Literally billions. You need to do yourself a favor and bring this verse home. 'For God so loved ME, that he gave his only begotten Son.... Back in Luke 15 we read...

Luke 15:4 What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose **one** of them, does not leave the ninety nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he finds it?

There's another reason I think they always had dogs. If you leave 99 sheep in the wilderness unattended they will...

“ scatter like sheep ”.

But not with a good Border Collie.

Matthew 12:11 And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have **one sheep**, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift *it* out?

How many people can you think of that view their dog as a member of the family? To have a great love for a family pet is very common. Unfortunately there are many stories of dogs going through the ice or into fast flowing water where the owner tries to save them and dies too.

Rule number one... **The rescuer should never become the victim.** But... out of love, we risk our lives to save that which may be lost.

Three weeks ago we read of two fathers and a mother that died in a river in Saint-Fulgence Quebec trying to save their young boys.

A six-year-old boy and his eight-year-old cousin were playing with a rubber duck at the river's edge when the toy fell into the water around 6 p.m. Saturday.

The boys went in to try and retrieve it and their fathers jumped into the river after them. The eight-year-old's father was able to pull his son out of the water but jumped back in to try and save his brother and nephew.

The mother of the six-year-old also entered the river.

Provincial police spokeswoman Helene Nepton said the mother of the eight-year-old got life-jackets and was able to save the other child.

The two fathers and the six-year-old's mother did not make it out of the water.

The woman's body was pulled out of the river Saturday evening. The bodies of the two fathers were found early Sunday morning.

The point is this, we will risk our lives for things very important to us... to a point. If you **KNOW** you are going to die. Then that's a different story. If you went camping and a Grizzly bear grabbed your dog, what would you do? I don't think too many of us would take on the bear.

David was another shepherd in the bible. And... talking about dangerous jobs let's turn to 1 Samuel 17...

1Samuel 17:34 And David said to Saul, Your servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took **a lamb** out of the flock:

35 And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered *it* out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught *him* by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.

36 Your servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine will be as one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God.

Now there is a very dedicated shepherd. He could empathize with someone who cared for sheep. So along comes Nathan the prophet and he approaches David with a parable.

2Samuel 12:1 And the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.

2 The rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds:

3 But the poor *man* had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.

4 And there came a traveller to the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that had come to him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.

5 And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, *As* the LORD lives, the man that has done this *thing* shall surely die:

6 And he will restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

David knew the value of that one lamb to that family. That's why when he was confronted with the situation he was in with Bathsheba and Uriah the Hittite, it hit home.

Should we care less about a lost sheep than Jesus does? When Worldwide imploded, and hundreds of thousands of God's sheep scattered, did you reach out to any of them? Are you so angry at 'large groups' now, that you will only meet with small fellowships whose whole focus is internal development? Do you have an outreach program to help those who are lost? Or do we see the sheep and picture the lion and the bear and run the other way?

Shepherds are sacrificial.

Jesus said...

John 10:11 *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep.*

It's amazing what a shepherd will do for the sheep.

Do you think you love your children more than God does? When one of your children goes astray and their life goes down the toilet, do you have a family meal and notice that 1 empty chair and just shrug it off because your other children are still there. Or do you count your blessings and still mourn for the loss of something so very dear to all of us. That one life that means **even more** to God.

Straying Sheep

These two quotes we read in Mathew 18 and Luke 15 are actually tied into **Isaiah 53** which says...

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

Jesus tells about looking for the 'lost' sheep. But how did it get lost? **It went astray**. It wandered off. It didn't just see a large woods and say "Wow, I'm going to go get lost in there! That looks sooo cool!" We've seen this first hand. The sheep is completely about that next tuft of grass. Oh, this grass is soo good! Wait! Look at that one! Oh ya, this is even better. Oh ya! Come to mamma!!!! And then the sheep sticks it head through the fence to get that 'greener grass' on the other side. But soon that's gone and they stumble upon a wee little gap in the gate they can JUST squeeze through. And then it's back to Wow, that's clover over there and the dog is nowhere to be found. This is great! And they nibble themselves into being completely lost.

Do you know where we see this in today's society, displayed **EXACTLY** the same, and yet so many are completely oblivious to what they are actually doing? When it comes to addictions.

The addict.

No teenager wakes up one day, and says, "Hey, I've got it, I know exactly what I want to be, a wino in the gutter that lives in a cardboard box! I'm going to get my own grocery cart! This is going to be great!!"

No one wakes up and says that. Instead, it's a whole series of small bad choices. Each one taking you a little farther astray.

No one wakes up and wants to be a junkie. But after the first time you always need a little more to get that same high you got the first time. Ever see a junkie up close with no teeth and terrible skin. There are drugs that will age you at approx. 10x the rate of a normal person. No one that has ever visited a meth clinic wants to experience that road in life. But like the sheep, they go astray. They move from one tuft of grass, to the next, and on to the next, never picking their head up, never noticing that their lives have gone to ruin.

I tried to get a lone sheep back into the pasture once and failed miserably. My wife thought it was hilarious. I got it cornered but couldn't catch it or encourage it to go through the gate. Those little puffs balls are fast. That, and I didn't know if it would bite, so I finally gave up.

But this process of 'bit by bit' hits us in the church exactly the same way. That is how sin is too. A lot of people who stop going to church don't just wake up and say "Today is the day I'm going to stop going." Some do, but most don't. First they miss the odd sabbath at church. They're too tired, maybe a bit of a headache because they drank just a little too much last night. Then they make a few more weeks and miss two more in a row. Then they make one and miss a month straight. All of a sudden they have a completely different routine in their lives on the sabbath and soon it's no longer a priority.

Or, you have "*ONE* indiscretion", and say, "It's not a big thing because I'm not going to do it again". But you do. And slowly it becomes more often. What ever it is, little by little we nibble ourselves totally out of sight of the flock and the shepherd.

We stand alone.

That's why it's called 'Back Sliding'. It's a slippery slope. Some get offended, annoyed, angry and just make the jump all at once, but most just slip slide away.

1Peter 2:25 For you were going astray like sheep; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

And the word 'Bishop' simply means 'overseer or guardian' of our souls.

Let's talk about Breeding

Sheep have been very highly bred over the years. Why? What are we looking for in a sheep?

1. Good wool. The amount of wool. The colour. The texture.
2. Size, as is related to quantity of meat. (mutton, or lamb) And...
3. Some are even bred for their milk.

But, **no one breeds sheep for intelligence**. The result is, they are not too smart. They don't last long in the wild. They will actually try to push their way through the briars, the thorns, to get to the 'greener grass' on the other side and they get so entangled that they will actually die on their feet. Once lost, a sheep is entirely dependant on help to get back to the fold.

Once separated from the flock, we too are entirely dependant on our Shepherd to redeem us. To find us. To reach out to us both spiritually and physically. Our salvation is entirely dependant on the initiative of the shepherd. Without him we are lost.

Christ Jesus is our Shepherd. When he counts his sheep and sees one missing, He knows which one by name.

2Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

He pursues us relentlessly. Determined that none of us should perish. No matter the storm, no matter the wind and cold. The bears and lions don't deter Him. Demons and addictions don't dissuade Him.

Sheep are social animals, they huddle together in a flock. They need each other. They comfort each other. Out on their own, they are **VERY VULNERABLE**. The Shepherd **does not** give up on the lost sheep. He risks himself to find it. When he hears it bleating in the distance, the call getting weaker and weaker as it struggles in the briars, he'll find it and carry it home. If the sheep is too weak, he'll carry it on his shoulders. If it's too cold he'll gather it in his arms and share his body heat. He doesn't drive it, or whip it. He cradles it in love, overjoyed to have it back.

There is a difference between the two seemingly identical stories we read in **Matthew. 18 and Luke 15**. In Luke it says “**when he finds it**” but in Matthew. it says.. “**if he finds it..**”. It’s the initiative of the Shepherd that finds us, but there is something the sheep must do. If the sheep is on a precipice and the shepherd reaches for it, it **CAN jump to it’s death !**

The fastest ram ever recorded was clocked at 38 miles an hour. That’s a lot faster than you or I. If the sheep doesn’t want to be caught it can run away from the Shepherd.

Some of us have been running for a long time.

The sheep needs to submit. It needs to give in. Sometimes it has to get so weak it can’t struggle. Sometimes we struggle on our own so long we become so weak we need to ... surrender. We need to say those famous words... “**I surrender all.**” What a beautiful song. (A perfect song for baptisms.)

James 4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded.

9 Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness.

10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

The best part of the story is the ending found in Matthew 18:14 where Jesus says...

Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Let’s hammer that point home for a moment. There is a popular teaching that speaks on predestination and what that means, another on ‘Once saved, Always saved’, and still another that says ‘some are elected to be saved and some are not’. In other words God has chosen some to be saved and some not to be. Like God is an accomplice in the failures of some we see lost.

But this verse, and others we've read today, say God is not willing that **ANYONE should perish**. So if He's not willing, whose will is it? He's giving you **the freedom to choose**. It's His will to pursue you, to find you, to call you. But we are free to turn away, to run, and keep running from the Shepherd. If we're not saved, it's not because the Shepherd doesn't love us. If a sheep is lost and stays lost, it's not because the Shepherd didn't come back for it and look hard enough and long enough. Usually it's because the sheep just kept on running. Kept resisting. Refused to surrender. If we co-operate with Jesus, he'll pick us up in his arms and take us home. This is the 'Good News'.

Here's a good story.

There once was a shepherd who was leading his flock to a new pasture when he came to a cold, fast flowing creek. It wasn't deep but it scared the sheep. Well the shepherd went across and turned around to call the sheep and lure them across, but they wouldn't budge. So he went back through the creek and grabbed a couple lambs, one under each arm, and went across the creek again. Well two of the sheep saw their lambs on the other side and jumped into the creek and waded across and get to them, and the rest of the flock followed behind.

And the moral of the story....

If we can keep the lambs in the church, we can usually keep the sheep too. We need to be careful about how we 'parent' our children, how we 'nurture' them in the church. We need to always make a place for them to grow and belong. Then they too, will be a positive influence on us !

One of my favorite stats in sports is the plus/minus. It's the stat that says... " Joe Blow was on the ice for 3 of our goals! But... he was also on the ice or in the penalty box for 5 of theirs!" His plus/minus is negative 2.

Can he get goals scored? YES! But how many games slip away because he can't stop the other team from scoring too?

So many churches are so consumed about their 'numbers'. They don't care how they get the numbers, just as long as those numbers keep going up. It doesn't matter if they're getting

members of one church of God movement to leave where they are, so they can join them. It's just all about the numbers.

"Look at us and how we're growing."

But have more hearts turned to God? No. Or, are we just "shuffling the cards" so to speak? Growth is good. Real growth is very good. **But even more important** is being there to help the ones God has already given us. And when someone struggles, being there to help them through it. Church should not just be a revolving door. Our plus minus stat should be a huge **PLUS**. And we don't avoid a minus stat by simply staying on the bench. We have to get out and play. We have to do the job God has given us to do. And when I say, 'Get out and play', this is exactly what I mean...

Hebrews 10:25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of His return is drawing near.

Again, the best part of our story today is that there **IS** a happy ending.

Luke 15:6 When he arrives at home, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.'

Now seriously, can you picture any of us doing that? You've got a flock of a hundred sheep, your missing one and you say to your friends "Hey, I'm missing a sheep, pray for me that I find it." You go out and find it and return home and tell everyone you know...

"I've found it! Let's have a party! WooHoo!" People would have a party for you all right. And the game would be, 'let's see if you can slip your arms into this special jacket I have for you'.

But I think that is part of the message God is sending us. Our thinking gets lost in 'the multitude'. There are so many good people around us why would God be interested in me? Why would he go out his way for just 'me'. For 'one'.

With us the individual can get lost in the crowd, but for God **EVERY 'ONE' OF US IS IMPORTANT**. Every single one.

It doesn't matter if you're struggling, if you're on a high, if you're on a low, if you're confused, if you're having a revelation, no matter where you are; You are important to God and he wants you in his fold. He will go out and find you.

God's greatness, his magnificence, is so far beyond our ability to understand. Sometimes I'll catch myself pondering how little we really know about the vastness that is GOD. But, there are aspects to God that he wants you to understand. Characteristics that He has, that he is adamant that we comprehend. Things like...

'God is love'.

'God is merciful'.

That he thinks of us the way a 'Father' does his children.

And he wants us to understand, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that..

We are important to him.

In my opinion verse 7 in Luke 15 that says...

In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

... is only there to absolutely show you how important that relationship really is to God. That beings that are in heaven right now, who know God so much better than we possibly can at this point in time, see His happiness and celebrate with Him.

There is "Joy In Heaven" !!!!

Knowing God will always be there for you is the greatest peace of mind you can have.

As the end of this age approaches, there will be a time when things will be worse than at any other time in the history of mankind. Many will die. Many will struggle with their commitment to God. Many will need all the help they can get. This next verse is very symbolic to me. Moses was talking to the Israelites as they were about to go into the promise land, over the Jordan river, and up against many nations that they would have to war against. That is what the future holds for us as we patiently long for the return of our Lord and Saviour.

Deuteronomy 31:5 says...

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."