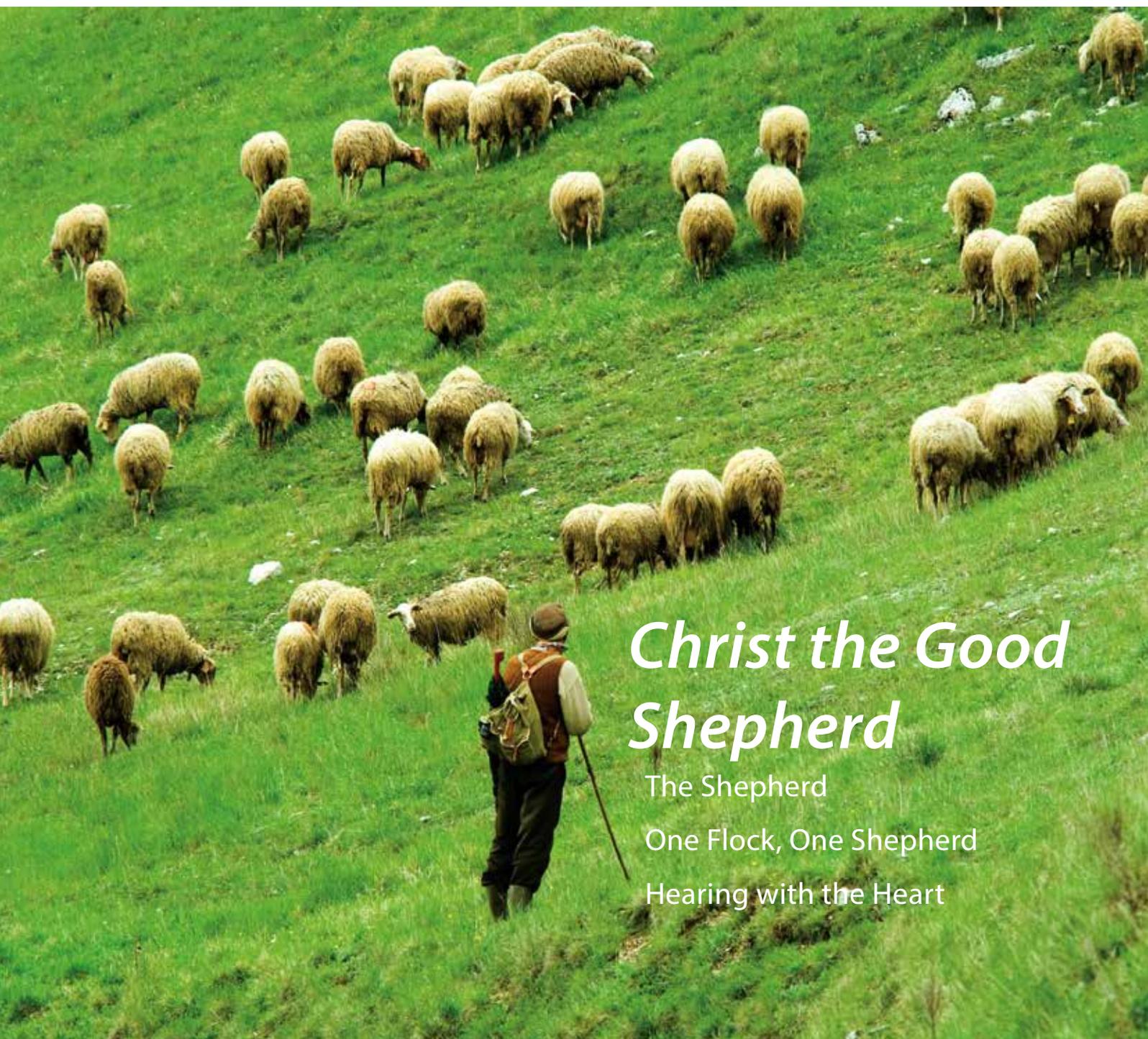
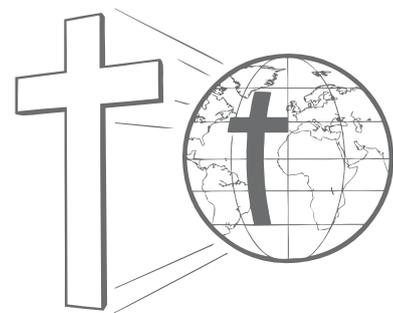


Foundation of Faith



Christ the Good Shepherd

The Shepherd

One Flock, One Shepherd

Hearing with the Heart

April 2013

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Editorial

My earliest memories about God's Word include the wonderful expressions "God is love" and "The Lord is my shepherd". When I was in grade school, I committed the Shepherd Psalm to memory. When I was 24, I committed my heart and life to the Good Shepherd Himself.

The Lord had been searching for me for years. There were times when my soul felt a strong desire for something deeper, something eternally meaningful. It was not until I confessed my sin, and the burden of my sin rolled away at the feet of the Good Shepherd, that I realized Jesus had given His life for me, His lost sheep. He had redeemed me and carried me back to His fold, the church of the living God. Today, the Lord is truly my Shepherd; I belong to Him, bought with His own precious blood!

Certain passages from Ezekiel 34:11-31 have become very meaningful and precious to me. Here, God's great plan of salvation is pictured using the shepherd and his sheep. Twenty-two times we read the divine "I will!" Here are just a few examples:

"Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out..."

"As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day He is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them..."

"I will feed them in good pasture..."

"I will establish one shepherd over them, and He shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd."

"I will make a covenant of peace with them..."

"And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries..."

You too, my friend, are being sought by the Good Shepherd. He wants to rescue you! He wants to bless, carry, and lead you already in this life! And, He wants to receive you one day into eternal glory!

H.D. Nimz

Sickly Sheep

A tourist visiting the land of Palestine enjoyed watching the great herds of sheep that are common in those regions. He was impressed with the manner of the shepherds, and especially the faithfulness and trust of the sheep that followed them.

One particular shepherd stood out especially in his care for his flock. He had given each of his individual sheep its own name. When he called out a sheep's name, the animal would come running. The tourist was intrigued. He wondered if the sheep would respond to him in the same way. Approaching the shepherd, he asked him for his coat, hat, and walking stick.

The shepherd obliged and the tourist, now having the appearance of the shepherd, began calling out the name of a particular sheep, just as he had heard the shepherd do. However, instead of running to

him, the sheep whose name he was calling ran away, and the rest of the sheep with it!

Puzzled, he asked the shepherd, "Do none of the sheep respond to the call of a stranger?"

"None," said the shepherd, "except those that are sick. Sick sheep cannot discern the voice of their shepherd and are prone to follow a stranger."

As this shepherd was known by his sheep, so Jesus is known by His followers. Only His sickly sheep, those who have become separated from their Shepherd by the deceitfulness of sin, will respond to the call of a stranger. Sadly, the stranger, Satan, is always the enemy of the true Shepherd, Jesus Christ, and his purpose is to deceive sick and feeble sheep from following their Savior and Lord.

Under His Wings

The following inspirational story, first appearing in 1945, is used to illustrate Jesus' giving of His life so that we might be saved.

A group of park rangers were ascending a burned-out mountain trail in order to determine the cause of a recent forest fire.

As they made their way to the peak, one of the men noticed the charred remains of a small bird next to a blackened tree. Upon turning the carcass over with his stick, the ranger was surprised to find three little living chicks. Their mother, having sensed imminent danger, had removed her young from the nest in the tree above and covered them with her body on the ground below. Instead of saving herself

from the scorching flames, as she easily could have, she chose to protect her young. When the wall of fire engulfed her, her outstretched wings provided emergency shelter for her little dependants cowering beneath her. She was willing to die so that those who looked to her for protection might live.

In the same way, Jesus gave His life so that all who seek refuge beneath His wings might live. The Bible employs this imagery of God's protective wings in a number of places. "As a hen gathers her chicks," He seeks to draw His children into His protective care (Luke 13:34). No other place provides the shelter we need from the storms of life and the flames of temptation. Beneath God's wings we are safe and secure.

His Sheep Know His Voice

Many years ago, when shepherds still grazed their sheep in unfenced meadows, a shepherd in the German town of Württemberg noticed that two of his lambs were missing. He went looking for them, and asked many other shepherds if they had seen his lost lambs. After a long search, he found his lambs in another flock. The shepherd of this flock did not willingly return the lambs, so he was forced to bring the matter to the local judge. The judge laughed at his claim. "Your complaint is a waste of time and money," he advised the shepherd. "How are you going to prove that two lambs in a large flock are your own?" The shepherd insisted that he would provide proof.

The judge and shepherd approached the second shepherd. The judge began by asking if he had any sheep that did not belong to his herd. "No, sir!" replied the shepherd. The judge then turned to the shepherd who had brought forth the complaint. "Tell me," he challenged, "which are your sheep?" Immediately the shepherd gave a special call to the flock of sheep. Most of the sheep continued to graze without any reaction whatsoever to the unfamiliar call. Only two lambs reacted to the call. They moved toward the shepherd, whose voice they recognized, while the other sheep continued quietly grazing. The shepherd had found his sheep. Those two lambs, familiar with the voice of their shepherd, had proven to all watching that they did indeed belong to him. As God's children, that is how well we should know the voice of our Shepherd. Do you recognize His call?

Stay with Me

A little boy was in the surgical ward about to have an operation. The surgeon had given his permission for the father to stay with the child, and so his father was there with him. "Daddy, I'm not scared when you stay with me," he said. "Don't worry, son," said the father, "I'm staying right here with you." The father held the little hand of his boy.

Now the anesthetic was beginning to have its effect. "Are you still there, daddy?" asked the child. "I'm not going anywhere, son," his father replied. When the boy was fully unconscious, the doctor said softly, "You may go now, sir." "Doctor, if you don't mind, I'll stay with him like I promised." The doctor consented.

The surgery was successful, and when the boy slowly came to, there was his father, still holding his hand. "I knew you would stay with me," he smiled. Our Heavenly Father always stays. He holds us by the hand, even when ours is rendered powerless.

My Heart and Hands are Yours

Antoine Winterberg, a mother of ten children, was very sick. She was suffering from a lot of pain and was anticipating a long period of illness. She was struggling emotionally as well. After a soul-searching battle, she determined to put herself into God's hands without any reservations. She gained a new resolve and experienced comfort in her soul. She expressed the thoughts of her heart in a poem:

*I give my heart to you Lord,
I lay my hands in thine.
My strength must come from your Word,
I'm at the end of mine.*

*I am your lamb, dear Shepherd,
So carry me today;
And help me with whatever
Leaves worry and dismay.*

*Your will be done, dear Savior,
My life is in your hands.
Your love will show me favor,
I know you understand.*

*You are my sun and glory,
And I'll see heaven bright,
Where there are no more worries,
For I'm a child of light.*

Translation: G. Mielke

The next morning the miracle happened. She got up and discovered the pain was gone. Jesus had provided her with His healing touch, overflowing from the power of His resurrection.

The Shepherd

What is the nature of God's relationship with those who follow Him? Jesus provides a fitting illustration of this relationship when He depicts Himself as the Good Shepherd. "I am the Good Shepherd!" What a privilege to be under His care...

The ancestors of the Jews were nomads whose history is rich with pastoral scenes from shepherd life. An oriental shepherd was often exposed to hardship and danger. We find many accounts of how various shepherds fared in the Bible. The shepherd was often exposed to the elements (Genesis 31:40). His sustenance often consisted of what little nature offered, such as the fruit of the Sycamore tree (Amos 7:14). He faced attacks by wild animals (1 Samuel 17:34). He was also subject to ambushes by bandits.

Early in the morning, the shepherd let his sheep out of the fold, leading the way to the pasture (John 10:3). Out in the pasture, he kept watch over the herd. If any sheep had gone lost, he had to search for them until he found them. He watered them at the spring or out of a flowing fountain. In the evening, he brought them back to the fold, where he served as the doorkeeper (John 10:3). He also had to care for the young and weak sheep (Isaiah 40:11). On large properties there were different ranks of shepherds. The leading ones were called "chief shepherds". In the church of God, Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, or the head: "And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away" (1 Peter 5:4). Christ alone is the head of the church. He purchased this title with His bitter suffering and death.

The Good Shepherd

Jesus says of Himself: "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them" (John 10:11-12).

Pastors are to be shepherds in the churches; the believers are the sheep, and the new converts are the lambs. What is the present state of the church as far as its shepherds are concerned? Many shepherds are just after

the wool of their sheep and have no desire to properly feed them. And because these sheep have no access to good pasture, they are spiritually malnourished.

The Great Shepherd

We find the title, the Great Shepherd, in Hebrews 13:20-21, where we read: "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

The Shepherd Knows His Sheep

"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own" (John 10:14). Statements like: "I hope I am a Christian" and others like it are not enough. The Shepherd knows His sheep and they know Him, and He calls His sheep: "To Him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out" (John 10:3). Blessed is that person whose name is known by the Lord Jesus! Jesus only recognizes those as members of His flock whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. What infinite, wonderful goodness and kindness is given to us in the following words: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine ... For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isaiah 43:1-3).

He Gathers His Sheep into One Flock

Jesus makes it clear that He alone wants to be our Shepherd: "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). And if we are one single flock then we will be nourished by the same food which our faithful Savior

richly offers in His Word. Jesus leads His sheep. "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake" (Psalm 23:2-3). Yes, Jesus – the Good Shepherd – He feeds His flock on green pastures!

He has the best gifts for His children. He has the best pastures if we live by every word that proceeds from His mouth. May we always allow ourselves to be led as it pleases Him! May we always live only in His will!

He Provides For His Sheep

He who enters through Him "...will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture" (John 10:9). What wonderful, refreshing nourishment is the Word of the Lord for our hungry souls. Our reserves will never be depleted, just like the widow's jar of oil and barrel of flour never went empty. In His storehouse we can purchase at no cost. Whosoever will may sit at the table He has set and be strengthened and satisfied. His table gives our soul the strength and power we need to overcome all the tribulations of this life.

He Loves His Sheep

The prophet Isaiah speaks of the Good Shepherd who carries the lambs in His arms and leads those who are with young (Isaiah 40:11). We have a Shepherd who does not cast us out when we are discouraged; rather, His patience and love are inexhaustible. This Shepherd shows no prejudice. He does not lavish His attention on the rich; instead, He goes where His help is needed the most. He loves "to visit orphans and widows in their trouble" (James 1:27).

He Gave His Life for His Sheep

"Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: "I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered" ' " (Matthew 26:31). And in John 10:15 we read: "I lay down My life for the sheep."

He Gives Them Eternal Life

"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). This gives us the assurance that we can and should rely fully on the Lord. And all who have recognized Him as Shepherd and have dedicated themselves to Him have life and have it more abundantly.

"And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one" (John 10:28-30).

Are you known to the Good Shepherd, and do you follow Him faithfully?

- adapted from *Evangelium Posaune*, May 30, 1958 Edition



One Flock, One Shepherd

The Good Shepherd not only has a relationship with His individual sheep, but He relates to the flock as a whole. Even the members of the flock have a relationship with one another. God's Word uses this pastoral illustration to reveal truths about the church of God and the course it has taken through historical periods of both light and darkness.

“And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

“Other sheep” refers to those who are from the Gentiles and believe in the Lord Jesus. “Of this fold” refers to the Jews. But Jesus clearly tells us here that the time is coming when there will be only one flock and one Shepherd.

The wonderful fulfillment of Jesus’ statement could already be seen in the time of the apostles. The believing Jews living in Jerusalem were scattered in all directions during the great persecution. God’s Word tells us that they proclaimed the Gospel wherever they went. From that time on, believers from the Jews and the Gentiles were added to the one flock, the church of God.

Jesus says: “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9). He is saying: There is only one door into this “sheepfold”, or into His church.

Sheep are contrasted with goats in the Holy Scriptures. “Sheep” refers to Christians and “goats” refers to sinners. Because Jesus Himself is the door to the flock or to the church, we can be sure that He will not admit any “goats” until they are, figuratively speaking, changed to sheep. This occurs when one is “born again” in Christ. We also see that Christ’s flock only consists of “sheep”. God says through His prophet Ezekiel in chapter 34, verse 31: “You are My flock, the flock of My pasture; you are men, and I am your God.”

The sheep will find good pasture: “I will feed them in

good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God” (Ezekiel 34:14–15).

This flock is the Lord’s flock and the Lord Himself is the Chief Shepherd. When Jesus left this earth, He provided overseers for His flock. Peter says: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly” (1 Peter 5:2). Paul also admonishes the elders in Ephesus: “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

This counsel was faithfully followed in the time of the apostles as well as for several years afterwards. Gradually, however, some shepherds began to feed only themselves and not the sheep, and they lost sight of the true Doorkeeper, Jesus Christ, replacing Him with human doorkeepers. They admitted “goats” into the sheepfold. Apostasy increased and with time the Chief Shepherd was replaced altogether with the Pope in Rome. He fed God’s flock as one might imagine a wolf would feed a flock of sheep. It is no wonder that the sheep scattered. Various fledgling sheepfolds were established, some of which provided a temporary home for God’s true sheep.

“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? [...] So they were scattered [...] My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and on every high hill; yes, My flock was scattered over the whole face of the earth, and no one

was seeking or searching for them. [...] As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day” (Ezekiel 34:2–12).

One could hardly recognize the true flock during this dark and cloudy time. There were so many different sheepfolds that the prevailing opinion became that each sheep could simply choose the sheepfold that best suited his own tastes and preferences. Instead of gathering the sheep into the one true flock of God, shepherds concerned themselves with establishing appealing distinctions and winning the most sheep. But the prophet Ezekiel writes: “For thus says the Lord God: Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. [...] I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek what was lost and bring back what

was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment” (Ezekiel 34:11–16).

It is God’s plan that His flock becomes as it was at the time of the apostles, so that the Lord Jesus’ words are fulfilled: “There will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16b). Praise the Lord! Dear reader, if you are truly God’s sheep and still find yourself in a human sheepfold, let me tell you that God is gathering His sheep into one flock and they are feeding on rich, green pastures. Have you heard the Shepherd’s call and are you willing to follow Him alone?

R.L. Berry

Through the Valley

“Yea, 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 comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

David was well familiar with these dark, narrow, valley paths. He knew what it was to despair in overwhelming circumstances, to fear what the future might hold, to worry about friends and loved ones, to suffer physical illness, and to be in deep anguish of soul. The Bible tells of people throughout human history who had to endure deep valleys. However, the child of God knows that the Good Shepherd is never closer at hand than in a crisis situation. Under the protection of His wings, he feels safe and secure (Psalm 46:5, 7; 91:4). Awareness of God’s presence brings him comfort and courage.

Our Good Shepherd does not abandon us. Even when Satan mounts an all-out attack, when trusted strongholds crumble, when the worst imaginable situation threatens to worsen yet more, it is then that we must know we have a faithful Shepherd. He sees our weakness and covers us with His hands. Maybe physical illness has made you over-sensitive; perhaps your spirit is shrouded by a sense of gloom or even depression and you see no light at all. Please know that your Good Shepherd does not abandon His sheep. Even if you’re so

beaten down that you can hardly utter a prayer, He who created you and loves you knows the deep longing you have for Him. He knows that you know you cannot live without Him.

Because our omnipotent God remains ever near us, He can change an utterly hopeless predicament into a period of soothing calm. He who “prepares a table” for us in the presence of our affliction, settles and strengthens the soul (Zechariah 12:8). Remember that it is our impotence that makes way for God’s omnipotence. Remember also that “children are born in Zion” even amidst the greatest struggles and afflictions (Isaiah 66:8). God has promised to bless in abundance: “My cup runs over.”

It can never be the wit or strength of the sheep that brings it through the valley. It can only be by the power and might of the Good Shepherd. You must therefore look to Him and take hold of His promises. Your faith must be unshakable in Him who cannot lie. He will surely demonstrate His power in your life in due time. Wait upon Him; soon enough the dark valley will give way to a glorious mountaintop.

Hermann Vogt
Gifhorn, Germany

Hearing with the Heart

Our hearing is crucial for receiving information. We share our thoughts and ideas as one person speaks and the other listens. God has created us not only to hear but also to understand Him. When you hear God's voice, do you also understand it?

A telephone must be properly connected if it will be of any value to us. If the connection is broken, or the receiver out of order, it will be useless for us to talk into the transmitter; the person at the other end will hear none of our words. We may speak just the same as though he was hearing, but nothing will be accomplished. There must be a proper connection; there must be a responsive vibration at the other end of the wire.

It is the same with spiritual matters. One of the most important things is to have our ears properly connected to our hearts. We have often heard the expression, "It just went in one ear and out the other." By this is meant that the one who heard gave no heed. How often this occurs in regard to the things of God!

When it comes to gossip, idle talk, foolish conversation and things of that sort, we should let those go "in one ear and out the other;" we should be very careful that they find no lodging-place in our hearts. That is the only safe way for our souls. But too often these words are given a place in the heart and mind; there is too good a connection, and many times there is only too ready a response in the heart for such things. That is why some people never make spiritual progress and are always lagging behind others. Those who have a good connection and responsiveness in their hearts on these lines usually have very poor connection between their ears and their hearts when it comes to the teachings of the Word of God. They can hear the Word preached on almost any subject and not seem to think it means them. They go along in their lives just as they had been doing before. They feel no particular responsibility to obey. They can go on just as if they had never heard, still professing, still shouting the occasional "Amen!"

There were times when Israel had its connection broken. God said to the prophet of old, "They hear your words, but they will not do them." So many times people exclaim, "Wasn't that a good sermon today?" Why, yes, how they enjoyed it! But they go their way and give no further heed to what was said. However, in the popular pulpits of today, the preachers too often hold this attitude: "This is my opinion. You may take it or let it, just as you please; you have a right to your own opinions about it." And there are a great many people who act upon this idea. They feel that they can take a thing or let it alone, just as they please - even when the words preached are the judgments of God. Many hold that attitude not only toward preaching but toward the Bible also. They read, or hear read, what it says about worldliness, foolish actions, and conversation. They read about being patient and holy and blameless, about not returning evil for evil, and about speaking evil of no man; yet they go right on doing the things forbidden, just as though the Book said nothing. They do not take it to heart. The trouble is, the connections between their ears and their hearts are broken as far as the things of God are concerned.

The Bible warns us to take heed how we hear. If we do not treat the preaching of God's Word reverently, and listen with hearing hearts to His messages, it is because we do not fear Him. In our hearts we are lifted up against Him. That attitude of "I will take or leave it, just as I please," is one of the worst attitudes that can be held. Not only is it dishonoring to God; it is exceedingly dangerous.

Sometimes such an attitude of heart is the result, partly at least, of the way the preacher preaches. If a man has a message from God, he has authority to preach that message as the Word of God, and he should so preach





it. Every true gospel preacher should be imbued with the feeling: "I am preaching the truth of God. It is your duty to hear it; I expect you to hear it; and hear it you must." Let him hold this attitude in his heart and mind, and then let him enforce upon his congregation by proper disciplinary methods the truth that he preaches. If the preacher feels his authority as God's spokesman as he ought to feel it, the people will be impressed - they cannot help it. It is true that they may rebel, grow stubborn, or disobey. They may shut his words out from their hearts, but nevertheless he is clear, and his listeners are responsible before God for what they heard. Paul believed that preaching and teaching should be with "all authority." This does not imply mere human rule but divine authority - God speaking through man.

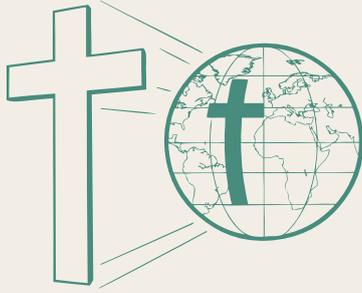
When the heart does not hear and feel, there is always a reason. One reason is self-will. People do not like to be told what to do. They like to be masters of themselves. God's government demands complete surrender of self-will. If we will be His servants, it is not for us to choose what our lives shall be, what we shall say, or what we shall do. It is His right to command; it is our part to hear and to obey. To hear and then to heed just as we please is setting up our authority above His. The two ideas of service and self-will are opposed to one another. Self-will always means rebellion against God's will. Therefore, if a person chooses what he will do and leaves undone what he finds distasteful, he, and not God, is the master. This self-willed disposition is very noticeable among nominal professors of faith. They profess to be God's servants and yet they set their wills not to do certain things that they ought to do, or else to do certain things that they ought not to do. They have

their minds and hearts set in the matter. When they hear the Word of God preached on matters predetermined by them, it falls on unhearing ears. There is no response of the heart.

Another symptom showing that the heart does not hear is unbelief. One reason why the Jews did not believe Christ was because their hearts were so hard, and that is one reason why people do not hear the gospel in these days. This is not confined to non-professing sinners; it is a very common thing among church-members.

How is it with you? Are you one of those who have the connection broken between the ears and the heart? Or do you have listening ears and a feeling heart? When you hear the Word of God preached on certain subjects, do you slight it? Or does it sink deep into your conscience and take hold there and produce fruit in your life? Are you ready to live by every Word of God? Or do you want to take only that which suits your views? If the latter is true in your case, you are in a dangerous condition. God has the Word preached not simply to entertain people, but that they may obey it. The soul who delights in God's will does not have to be compelled to listen, and he does not have to be compelled to obey; he is ready both to hear and to obey. If there is something wrong with the connection between your ears and your heart, you had better go to God and have the connection fixed. Allow your heart to be taught to feel as it should feel, and respond as it should. Be not a hearer only; be a doer of God's Word.

C.W. Naylor



Radio Broadcast Message of Salvation

Friedrich Krebs
Kitchener, Ontario

Blessed Encounters with Jesus

"Then, the same day at evening...Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you.' When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:19-20).

Jesus knew that His disciples needed the risen Savior to reveal Himself to them. It would have been difficult for the disciples to believe in Jesus' resurrection without having seen Him face to face. But are such encounters with Jesus possible today? Many people dismiss this idea, as skepticism is so dominant in our society. This unbelief leads to much insecurity and despair in our world. Some may agree with Thomas: "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." This attitude prompted Jesus to say to him later, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). This statement is equally important for us to remember.

Unbelief has never helped anyone and has never led anyone to Jesus. There were many people who saw Jesus and His deeds during His time on earth and yet remained unbelieving. Being aware of their unbelief, Jesus admonished them, "You believe in God, believe also in Me." After Jesus had returned to His Father in heaven, His disciples also needed faith to experience His presence. The words of Jesus and the experience of the disciples underscore for us the importance of faith in our lives.

Let us take a closer look at the encounters people had with Jesus following His resurrection. In examining several of these experiences, we will notice that Jesus

continues to reveal Himself in a similar way even in our time.

He revealed himself to a weeping Mary at His empty tomb. She only recognized Him when He directly called her by name. She was familiar with the manner and tone of voice that Jesus used when speaking her name. This was sufficient evidence to give her the assurance to confidently declare: "I have seen the Lord." Referring to Jesus, the apostle John wrote, "He calls His own sheep by name and leads them out." Our names are not unknown to Him. God's faithful servant Moses was called by name at the burning bush, as was the prophet Elijah in the cave at Mount Horeb. However, Jesus also knows the names of His enemies and persecutors. Just outside of Damascus, Saul was surprised to hear a voice call out to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" He never forgot that moment and spoke of it openly to the Jewish leaders and to the people.

To the disciples of Emmaus, Jesus revealed Himself on the road and again in their home (Luke 24). They were so moved by this encounter that they said to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" How often has this experience been repeated in fields, in forests, in homes, in barns, in prisons, in hospitals, and in churches?



To the lowly peasant shepherd, whose soul thirsted for God (as we read of David in Psalm 42), Jesus revealed Himself on the pasture. Should the Lord not regard those who call on Him? And do these examples not demonstrate that Jesus lives "to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79)? Does the Lord not look out for those who are wise and seek God?

John reports in our text that the resurrected Jesus appeared to His disciples when they were assembled behind barred doors on the evening of Easter. They were hiding in fear of their persecutors when suddenly "Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you' " (John 20:26). What a stark contrast this greeting represented when compared with their present circumstances! Jesus met them with comfort and peace and they "were glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:28).

My father, two brothers, and I were fleeing from Poland to Germany in the late autumn of 1946. During the nights we crossed many unfamiliar pathways and fields. One morning, in the very early hours, we climbed on top of a large haystack and hid ourselves in the hay to avoid being seen. Here, we too felt as if we were behind barred doors." The Lord revealed Himself to us with a comforting pres-

ence as Guardian and Protector and in the following night led us to the path that—despite fear and danger—would eventually lead us to safety. To this day we thankfully look back on our Lord's wonderful leading.

We read in John 21 how Jesus revealed Himself to His disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. He would not rest until they were all convinced that He was indeed alive. However, the adversary and his activity against Christ and His church did not cease. Fritz Rienecker, the Bible commentator, writes: "Though conquered and judged at Calvary, the devil is like an imprisoned convict. Indeed, he goes about like a roaring lion seeking to devour the elect of God. And the nearer we come to the end of time, the more greater his power and ferocity becomes. He is and remains the avowed opponent of God and his works manifest themselves in hostility, hatred, unbelief, vice, and destruction."

As children of God, we benefit greatly from these comforting encounters with Jesus. Everyone who is convinced of Jesus' resurrection and eternal life can join in the prayer of Moses: "Please, show me Your glory." You too can experience a blessed encounter with Jesus. May this faith never die in us or in the church of our God.

Friedrich Krebs
Kitchener, Ontario



Reconciliation

Why do we need reconciliation with God?

“For when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:10-11).

Christ is the foundation of Christianity. It is not merely a religion based on morality. Unlike Judaism, which emphasizes the commands and laws of God, Christianity is about a person. This person is Jesus Christ. It is He and His work of salvation that stand in the foreground, not the Law and our obedience to it.

In the previous lesson we saw the hopelessness of sinful man's condition before a holy and righteous God. As mentioned above in Romans 5, we were enemies of God. His wrath burned against us. He could not ignore His righteous laws. He could not simply forgive our sins and “turn a blind eye” as we sometimes do. That would be inconsistent with His righteousness. Without a paid ransom, He could not pardon a guilty world. There was no sacrifice on earth sufficient to reconcile the wrath of God. His infinite righteousness required an infinite sacrifice. Only God's Son was capable of paying the debt of all humanity. He took our sins upon Himself on the Cross of Calvary (1 Peter 2:24).

In the next few lessons we will examine the concepts of justification, salvation, and the new birth. These concepts need to be explained and connected to one another in order to better understand the plan of salvation. We have started with reconciliation because it is the root. If God had not been reconciled, then there would be no justification or salvation. The entire plan of salvation is based on this. Reconciliation means this: Christ's sacrificial death on the cross changed the relationship between the holy God and sinful humanity. God, who had been

angered by sin, was now reconciled.

Reconciliation pertains to God and not to man. The price of reconciliation was greater than all of earth's gold, silver, other precious metals and gemstones. It was the precious blood of Christ. His blood was sufficient to cover the sins of all people. In this way, reconciliation affects all humanity. It is infinite and has no boundaries. In contrast, salvation, which pertains to people, is not infinite. For example, the number of people who will receive salvation is limited to those who will accept it.

Christ accomplished reconciliation freely and without conditions. It is finished and efficacious. Reconciliation was completed once and for all, not in parts but in the whole. For hundreds of years it has been a finished work. Whether we believe it or not, the fact remains that God has been reconciled with humanity. That is why Christ called out on the cross, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He brought the sacrifice for sin that is valid forever (Hebrews 10:12).

Friend, let us look once more to Christ. He left the splendor of heaven. He was obedient to the point of death on the cross. He was the Hero who bridged the gap that sin had brought between man and God. He is the Savior, who accomplished reconciliation for you and me by His own precious blood.

Robert Witt
Gifhorn, Germany

Lesson 23: The Plan of Salvation

Lesson 24: Reconciliation

Lesson 25: Justification

The Soul Cries - God Replies

Lord, be my helper!
Psalm 30:10

Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am in trouble!
Psalm 31:9

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me
from my sin.
Psalm 51:2

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth.
Psalm 141:3

God, be merciful to me a sinner!
Luke 8:13

What must I do to be saved?
Acts 16:30

Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!
Job 23:3

Create in me a clean heart, O God!
Psalm 51:10

Do not leave nor forsake me, O God of my salvation.
Psalm 27:9

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God!
Psalm 42:2

My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch
for the morning.
Psalm 130:6

The terrors of death have fallen upon me.
Psalm 55:5

Fear not, I will help you!
Isaiah 41:13

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you.
Psalm 50:15

I am willing; be cleansed.
Matthew 8:3

I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.
Exodus 4:12

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
1 Timothy 1:15

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved!
Acts 16:31

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for
Me with all your heart.
Jeremiah 29:13

I will give you a new heart.
Ezekiel 36:26

I will never leave you nor forsake you.
Hebrews 13:5

Your eyes will see the King in His beauty.
Isaiah 33:17

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.
Isaiah 40:31

He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.
John 11:25

A SINFUL WOMAN

"Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman?' "(Luke 7:36–50). Simon had not noticed the woman, the one whom the Bible simply calls "a woman who was a sinner". The manner in which she is described to us and the way the Pharisees thought of her in their hearts tell us that she was no ordinary sinner. "Do you see this woman?" Simon would have never invited this woman into his house, and the woman would have never, under normal circumstances, entered Simon's house. These were not normal circumstances, however. Simon had invited Jesus into his home. When the woman heard that Jesus was in Simon's house, she came without invitation from him. And that is how it came to be that this Pharisee encountered this sinful woman.

"Do you see this woman?" A moment later and the opportunity would have passed and Simon would have never truly seen her. He did not look at her face, he did not look into her eyes, he did not see the person within; Simon simply saw that she was a sinner. His concern was why the Prophet did not recognize her for who she was. He could not imagine that Jesus would know who and what she was and still let Himself be touched by such a woman.

When Jesus asked him about the two debtors, Simon still did not realize that he himself was being discussed. And then he heard the question, "Do you see this woman?" The Master then began to compare the two of them, raising her, who in Simon's eyes was far beneath him, to a level far above him. Simon thought she was a great sinner. Jesus showed him she once was a great sinner. Her many sins were forgiven and resulted in her great love. "But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."

In my youth I often asked myself the following question: "Have I been forgiven little or much?" For those of us who grew up in the church, have we been forgiven little or much? Would it have been better if we had used drugs and robbed banks? Would we then be able to love God more? Maybe we think that those who have used drugs and robbed banks somehow have

a greater love for God when they repent. Are we then disadvantaged because we lived a sheltered childhood and therefore sinned less? Must we as a result now love our Lord less?

Jesus is not talking about quantity of sins when He says "much". Nor is He referring to a hierarchy of sins – that one is somehow worse than the other. The question that Jesus asks is, "How wicked are your sins in your own eyes?" Have you been forgiven much, not so much, or very much? A weeping little boy once responded to the altar call. "I am a great sinner", he said to the pastor. "What is it you've done?" asked the man of God. "I was disobedient to my mother!" It was a big sin to the little boy. And what do you consider it? Perhaps you chuckle over the little boy's "great" sin? Be careful! This sin would have brought this little boy to hell had it not been forgiven. It would bring you to hell too. Can we even speak of "little" sins when the consequence of every sin is eternal death? And if you think you have not sinned all that much, let me ask you this: How many times have you sinned? Have you sinned more or less than 100 times? More or less than 1000 times? Can you even count your sins?

We all have been forgiven many sins. We all have reason to love Jesus with a great love. What truly matters is that we recognize this great love – that we treasure it. It is not necessary for us to have descended to the lowest level of sin to gain the privilege of being forgiven many sins. Do not let the enemy persuade you that you have not been forgiven much. When you kneel down to pray, thank God that He forgave your many sins. Do not allow this prayer of thanksgiving to become a repetitive phrase, to become words that lose their meaning over time. Thank Him every time, deliberately and earnestly, and the fire of a great love will burn brightly in your soul.

Robert Witt
Gifhorn, Germany

QUESTIONS

Why were Peter and John sent to Samaria to lay their hands on the believers so that they would receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:12-17) if Philip was there with them?

Why were hands laid on believers to receive the Holy Spirit in former times but not today (Acts 8:19-20)?

Peter describes the receiving of the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands as a gift. Does every brother who prays with souls to receive the Holy Spirit have this gift?

ANSWER

The Bible mentions the laying on of hands in various places in both the Old and New Testaments. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the sacrificial animal (Leviticus 8:14-18, 22) at their official ordination, thus becoming "one" with the animal sacrifice. When God commanded that Joshua should replace Moses as the leader of Israel, Moses laid his hands on him, thus conveying the office of leadership to him (Numbers 27:23).

In the New Testament we read that Jesus blessed (Mark 10:16) and healed (Luke 4:40) by the laying on of hands. We find it interesting that Jesus was asked to physically lay His hands on the sick, even though He, as Creator God, was able to convey healing without physical touch (Matthew 9:18, 25; Mark 7:32-35). Paul had the gift of healing by the laying on of hands (Acts 28:8) while Peter and John conveyed healing without it (Acts 3:1-10). Thus, we realize that when God works He is not bound by a fixed pattern; His intervention varies with each situation. Though the reason for this might not always be obvious to us, we can be assured it is always the best.

The Holy Spirit is also a gift that can be conveyed in different ways. In Acts 2:1-4 we see how the Holy Spirit descended very dramatically upon the disciples and all who were present. It is not known if the Holy Spirit was ever conveyed a second time in this way. Then Luke tells us in Acts 8:12-17 that the Holy Spirit came to the believing Samaritans through prayer and the laying on of hands by Peter and John. In Acts 10:44 we read that the Holy Spirit fell on the listeners during a sermon delivered by the apostle Peter. Even though the conveyance was experienced in different ways, in each instance the believers were filled with the same Holy Spirit.

It is important to know that receiving the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands is not one of the gifts referenced in 1 Corinthians 12:28-31. If that were the case, then Paul would certainly have called attention

to it. The original Greek word for "gift" used in Acts 8:20 is "dorea" which refers simply to a free gift. God is willing to gift us with the Holy Spirit if we meet His qualifications. It is clear that those who pray with believers seeking the Holy Spirit do not need a special gift. However, they must themselves be filled with the Holy Spirit and be led by Him. Even today we hear of men of God who occasionally lay their hands on those seeking the filling of the Holy Spirit. This can bring a special blessing and strengthening of faith.

Knowing this background information, we may rightly wonder why Peter and John were sent to Samaria to pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Surely Philip would have been able to do this, for he was also filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:3-5). However, God wanted to send a greater message through this event.

The people of Samaria were hostile to the inhabitants of Judea, and vice versa. Now, a revival had come through Philip's preaching in Samaria. God always desires unity among His people. The Spirit who worked through Philip in Samaria was the same Spirit that had worked through the apostles in Judea and elsewhere. It is assumed (as various Bible commentaries tell us) that if God had sent the Holy Spirit through Philip, the hostility between the ethnic groups would have remained, or at least would have become more difficult to overcome. Two separate churches would have developed, each denying their need for the other. The fact that Peter and John came from Jerusalem to pray for their brethren in Samaria showed that God was removing all hostility between His children. All those who were saved could live in unity. God, through His powerful Word, was able to bring the peace and harmony that people were unable to achieve for many years. By this we see that God's way of conveying His blessings really is best for those who receive them.

Niko Ernst
Herford, Germany

Experiences with God

"Our God is the God of salvation; And to God the Lord belong escapes from death" (Psalm 68:20).

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank my Lord and Savior with all my heart that I can be His child. I want Him to have all the glory for the things He has done for me. On July 31, 1969, when I was 15 years old, He saved me from my sins. Praise the Lord!

We have often seen the wonders of God's grace. He has answered our prayers and exceeded our expectations. It was the 16th of August in 2012. As it was a hot summer day, I wanted to get some gardening done when I got home from work. I reached for a large plate, lifting it up. Suddenly, everything went black. I lost my balance and fell from a height of 1.9 m down onto concrete. I was unconscious and to this day do not remember what happened next. My wife and a neighbor rushed to my aid. My neighbor had already called the ambulance. At the hospital, they brought me directly to the Intensive Care Unit.

The doctors took X-rays of my head. I had a cranial fracture on the right side of my skull, and shoulder and back injuries. Throughout all this I remained unconscious. The next day I slowly came to, amid intense pain. I was in ICU for four days and five nights. The severe pain was especially hard to endure at night. For nine nights I was unable to move to the left or right. My wife and children, as well as brothers and sisters from the Church of God, visited me. They shared the news that many were praying for me.

The first Bible verse that came to my mind was, "Our God is the God of salvation; and to God the Lord belong escapes from death" (Psalm 68:20).

I began to pray earnestly. I discovered how difficult it is to pray when you're in pain. At the beginning of verse

19 in Psalm 68 David writes, "Blessed be the Lord who daily loads us..." God sometimes lays a burden on us, but He also helps us carry it. That's how it was for me. After ten days the situation improved and every day was better. "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

I also want to thank everyone who petitioned God on my behalf. After nearly three weeks at the hospital I was moved to a rehabilitation center for another three weeks. There I was able to learn and appreciate how gracious and merciful the Lord is to me. On November 5th I was able to resume my duties at work without complications. The Lord healed me completely and I thank Him for it. Blessed be the name of Jesus. He keeps His word. He is always faithful!

God's promise in Psalm 50:15 became new and important to me, "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." As the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:15, "See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise." May God help all of us to live wisely on the earth, so that we may glorify Him.

Paul Mayer
Pforzheim, Germany

The Good Shepherd and His Sheep

You probably know at least a part of Psalm 23. It begins with the words: "The Lord is my shepherd" and it goes on to describe how wonderful it is to be a sheep with a good shepherd. The Bible also tells us a story about a shepherd who once lost one of his sheep. He still had ninety-nine other sheep, but he cared so much about the one that was lost, that he looked for it until he found it. He was so happy when that lost sheep was finally safely back with the flock that he ran to tell his friends and neighbors about it. He needed to share his joy with them.

Jesus told that story. He calls Himself a Good Shepherd who knows and loves His sheep. Sheep come up in the Bible a lot, actually. That's because sheep and shepherds have a very special relationship. Jesus used that relationship to draw us a picture of what it is like when we belong to God. Let me tell you a little bit about sheep so you know what I mean.

Sheep live in big flocks with other sheep, and they have one shepherd who watches over all of them. We are like sheep because when we belong to Jesus He watches over us, too.

A shepherd provides the things that his sheep need. He takes them to meadows so they can find grass to eat, and if they are going to be in one meadow for a long time, he builds a fence around it to keep them safe.

Even with such good care from a shepherd, sometimes the sheep scatter, and that frightens them into wandering about aimlessly. Sometimes a wild animal frightens them and scatters them. Without their shepherd nearby, the

sheep are helpless and would get tired easily.

A good shepherd would risk his life to gather his sheep safely into a flock again.

You can see that a shepherd has got to like sheep. He has to love his sheep, in fact, and want to be surrounded by them every day.

Because a good shepherd is with his sheep all the time, he gets to know them very well. We think all sheep look alike, but a shepherd can tell his sheep apart, and he knows right away when one of his beloved sheep is not feeling well. It matters to him. He cares about every little lamb.

Jesus is like that. He loves us, and He cares about every little thing that happens to us. He wants us to be safely within His care, and we are even more important to Him than a lamb is to his shepherd. He loves every one of us. He is our Good Shepherd.

Think about all the good things that you have. All of those good things are yours because God cares for you as a shepherd cares for his sheep. God even builds a fence around us to keep us safe - His commandments are a fence to keep us safe. His commandments are good. If we obey them, we will be protected from evil. And just like the shepherd who risks his life to help his sheep, Jesus gave His life so that we could become His children.

We need Jesus, our Shepherd. Without Him, our life would be sad and empty. Without Him, we would be lost.

Jesus loves us as a shepherd loves his sheep. Let us follow Him the way the sheep follow their shepherd.



Praising God in Hard Times

There will be no pain, no sorrow, and no tears in heaven above. However, to live on earth below means to experience joy and pain, health and sickness, life and death. All of us go through such things at one time or another. How good it is to know that when our suffering seems the greatest, we are held firm by the unfailing hand of God.

"Our Duty to Praise God." I had preached these words only this morning and now, only a few short hours later, I sit behind the steering wheel of a car that is racing anxiously towards the hospital.

A Hopeless Situation?

Ambivalent Sunday drivers threaten my reserves of patience. Our seven-year-old son Bernhard lies in the backseat of our little car, pale as a ghost. He is the third of our five children. My wife is hovering over him, weeping anxiously. I try to keep calm, although the situation seems hopeless, and I know that this day could very well be our son's last.

Then I recall the words my mother spoke at my father's graveside five years ago. They are from the Book of Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21b). How difficult that is to say now. As the boy in my wife's arms asks, "Mama, why are you crying?" I tell her she must get her emotions under control. He needs calmness now, not panic. A severe illness has turned the blood in his veins to water. Now, with insufficient red blood cells in his body, his very life is at stake. He is showing a precocious awareness of death. His calm resignation and maturity would be the envy of many adults in a similar situation.

"Life-threatening"

Our fears are confirmed at the hospital. His condition is determined to be critical. From the adjoining doctor's room, I peer into the brightly-lit examination room. Bernhard looks back at me from the examination table, his eyes wide in his sallow face. I have to fight back my tears.

"Our duty is to praise God." The words of my own sermon admonish me. Somewhat calmed, I call my brother who is watching our other children.

I return to the parsonage late at night. My brother brings the children home. My wife will stay at the hospital with our son. The children anxiously inquire about Bernhard. I tell them the truth and they cry for their brother.

Little four-year-old Sarah turns to her thirteen-year-old sister: "Esther, why are you crying? Has another bird died?" We have had bad luck lately with our birds. "No Sarah. Bernhard is very sick."

Comforting Others...

Remembering the verse from Job, I try to calm the children: "We want to thank God that He gave us Bernhard. We want to ask Him to make him healthy again. If he should die though, God will be here to comfort us and give us strength." I pray with every child at their bedside in the same way. Committing Bernhard to God, the eternal Father and Lord over life and death, is something we will all have to learn. It is difficult though, excruciatingly difficult.

"...What you can rely on"

Our eighteen-year-old son Michael battles with a mix of anger and helplessness. "Forget all the religious teachers and their theological babble. When you're in real trouble, they cannot help you. You have to know what you can rely on!" With these words he vents his frustration. We speak awhile about holding firm to our faith, about death and resurrection, about the meaning of life. God will carry us through the times of despair and through the dark valleys of life. We will cling to that truth.

The Exact Moment

I'm in the hospital again and it is after midnight. There is subdued activity in the children's unit. The

head doctor is still here. More questions. More speculations. My wife tells me once more the events of the previous day. She had slept poorly the night before and had dreamed of our son suffering with a life-threatening disease. The unease of the dream followed her into the next day and was the reason why she knew the exact moment he needed help. Dreams can be more than just dreams. The promptly-administered blood transfusion has brought him back from the brink of death.

Two months have passed. Our son had to have an operation. We are confident that even if another disaster strikes, "Our duty is to praise God in joy, in suffering, in fear, and in need."

Burghard Affeld

Note: Shortly before Easter 2010, Christa and Burghard Affeld lost their son Bernhard due to a serious accident.

Never Abandoned

The following incident took place a long time ago, but its message can still encourage us today:

"Andrew, we want to look to God alone for help!" These bold words came from the trusting wife of a farmer who was lying in bed with an illness of the feet. It was harvest time. The sun's rays flooded the ripe grain fields. The bullwhips cracked and the wagons rolled onto the harvest fields, returning home heavily laden with ripe sheaves. Everything bustled with the activity of bringing in the harvest. Only Andrew had to lie idly in bed – suffering and waiting.

The good advice of his wife made sense to him. She knelt at the side of the bed with both of their children and earnestly asked God to restore her husband's health. And God answered the pleas of the little "house church". The man got well and after only a few days was strong enough to go back to work. It was very apparent to those around him that the Lord had done this. It is true - with God nothing is impossible! The Lord's arm has not become weaker. Blessed are those who trust in Him!

In these modern times, we are consumed by our many duties and obligations. We are pressured to remain strong, to stand our ground. There is no time for exhaustion or illness. And yet, unforeseen troubles can suddenly take command of our lives. Dark clouds can obscure the view before us and human resources often come up short. Blessed is the man, whose help is the God of Jacob; who trusts God with all his heart. He will certainly experience the faithfulness of God's promises. God stays true to His word and allows His love, His comfort, and His goodness to become our personal experience.

Hermann Vogt
Gifhorn, Germany

Faithful Families

A mother once told her son, "Charles, your father and I have raised you with integrity. We taught you God's Word and demonstrated a godly lifestyle for you. If you choose not to live a godly life, know that your father and I will testify against you on Judgement Day." – The son, Charles H. Spurgeon, became a preacher of the gospel.

A mother was once asked by her neighbor, "Do you write literary works?" "Yes," she answered, "I'm writing two books. They are called John and Maria, my children. My goal is to write unforgettable lessons in their hearts and minds."

Andrew Murray and his wife had eleven children and lived in South Africa. Five of their sons became pastors and four of their daughters married pastors. In the following generation, ten of their grandchildren went into the ministry and thirteen became missionaries.

Their secret was providing a Christian home, one which God especially blessed. Neither Andrew Murray nor his wife left any room in their lives for sin. They were prayer warriors filled with faith and reverence.

REPORT

Baptism Services in Germany

Baptism is always a special event in the life and ministry of a local congregation. It is, above all, a testimony that God is still adding souls to His church.

Baptism itself is not efficacious for the forgiveness of sin. It is merely an outward symbol of the inward finished work of salvation through Jesus Christ. The inward experience has already taken place and baptism is now an outward demonstration of that salvation experience.

Thus, we are very glad to be able to report that baptism services were held in various local churches in Germany.

On September 23, 2013 the Hagenschieß congregation of Pforzheim celebrated baptism. Special

evangelistic services were held on Saturday, and visitors from various local congregations were present. God spoke to souls through the gospel preaching, and a number of them found peace with God. One of the young men who was saved on Saturday asked to be baptized on Sunday. A total of 14 people followed the Lord into the waters of baptism. Bro. Hermann Vogt from Gifhorn, Germany conducted the baptism.

The church in Hamm celebrated baptism on November 11, 2012. The sermon during the morning worship service was taken from Matthew 28:19-20. The afternoon worship service had the theme of “Blessed is the man who endures temptation” (James 1:12). The church and especially the people being baptized were encouraged to overcome, to have victory in Jesus, and to prove themselves in the battle of faith in order to one



Bro. Kowalski and the baptism candidates in Hamm, Germany



Bro. Jeske and the baptism candidates in Herford, Germany

day receive the crown promised to us by God. Eleven people were baptized, including two who were not from the congregation in Hamm. Especially moving was the moment when the group being baptized sang a hymn together before entering the water. The church was encouraged by their resolve to follow Jesus wherever He might lead them. Bro. H. Kowalski conducted the baptism.

The church in Herford celebrated their baptism service on January 27, 2013. Since the majority of those requesting baptism were young people, a topical study of "Baptism" was conducted during two consecutive youth meetings. The three areas of study were: 1. The Meaning of Baptism 2. The Blessing of Baptism 3. The Commitment of Baptism. On Baptism Sunday, two special worship services were held together with visitors

from sister churches. During the first service, Bro. H. Brose preached the message "Buried and Raised with Christ Jesus". During the afternoon service, Bro. C. Reiß spoke to the congregation about "A Celebration of Joy over the Salvation of the Soul and New Life in Christ". Eighteen converts were then baptized by Bro. Jeske. Each delivered a short testimony to the congregation before they were baptized.

We are deeply grateful to God that we were able to experience these special blessings from Him. We would like to encourage the church family to now lift up these precious souls on hands of prayer so that they, by God's grace, may remain steadfast in the faith.

Dieter Jeske
Herford, Germany



Bro. Vogt and the baptism candidates in Gifhorn, Germany

Experiences with God

I want to thank God for His help and for the privilege of being His child. He is near to me in times of joy and sorrow, and has answered many of my prayers.

Since I was 16, I've had back problems. At that time, I paid little attention to them. I lived and worked like the people around me did, but as the years went by, my discomfort increased.

In 1991 I went to an orthopedist to be examined. The radio-graphs and his exam showed that my back was crooked and that my right leg was shorter than my left. He said he could do nothing for me; I simply had to live with this condition. To ease the pain, he suggested a number of therapies which I tried. They helped for a short time, but the pain returned. I suffered for a long time, and in the last years the pain increased greatly. My work became a burden and my sleep was often disturbed. I regularly woke up in pain.

However, I decided to rest in God's will and see where He would lead me.

On August 11, 2012, I started having increased pain in my lower back. I assumed it was lumbago, which I've had a number of times before. On Sunday, November 11, 2012, our church had a baptism service. I was especially looking forward to the service since my daughter was being baptized. I hoped that my pain would not get worse. Again and again I prayed that the pain would not increase. The Lord answered my prayer, and I thank Him for it! On Tuesday the return of my pain took me by surprise. The pain seemed more than I could handle. I prayed earnestly to God and asked for help. It seemed to me that God did not hear my prayers. I turned to Him with fasting and prayers, and continued to hope for His help.

Then I remembered song #353 from the German hymnal *Zions Wahrheitslieder*. God blessed me as I sang this song. The first verse reads:

*I have yielded myself to Thy service,
And Thy presence my bosom doth fill;
O my Savior, I haste to obey Thee,
And my heart says Amen to Thy will.*

I knew that I was supposed to follow Him, even in my pain.

The next day I went to the doctor because my right leg felt stretched right down to my toes and it ached. After his exam he said my sciatic nerve was infected. He prescribed some injections but the pain did not subside. On the third day he recommended I be admitted to the hospital. There they discovered a herniated disc. The doctors wanted to operate as soon as possible, since the paralysis was already severe.

Fear and worry filled my thoughts. I prayed to God, asking Him whether or not I should have the operation. Inside I repeatedly heard a voice saying, "My heart says Amen to Thy will." Suddenly I was at peace and the worries and fears were gone.

After that I knew all would be well. The operation was scheduled for the next morning, November 23, 2012. That morning a Christian sister visited to encourage me. I shook her hand when she left and said, "May God bless the hands of the doctors as they operate." She looked at me in amazement and simply answered, "Yes."

The operation was successful. The pain was gone, though the paralysis persisted for a time. I was worried the paralysis would stay. Again I cried out to God and He comforted me with the word, "Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5). Every day I feel better and the paralysis continues to lessen.

With these words I want to thank the great Creator from the bottom of my heart for His goodness and grace. To Him be thanks and adoration. Amen.

Your sister in Christ,
Valentina Siwert
Hamm, Germany

“I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad” (Psalms 34:1-2).

In 1975 God called us out of error and darkness. We were living in spiritual ignorance and uncertainty. Then the Lord opened our eyes and revealed to us His holiness. We were able to see ourselves in His pure light and realize that we could not stand before Him. He made us aware of our sin and lost condition. We were overcome with guilt, and God gave grace for repentance.

This is a great gift, for Jesus says: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). How my husband and I thanked God that He had forgiven our sins and given us the testimony that we are God’s children! What a privilege it is to know that we are Jesus’ own. It is written: “We know that we have passed from death to life” (1 John 3:14).

How precious it is to know that God loves us personally! At first it was too difficult for me to grasp this and believe it. I felt unworthy, but God’s Word does not expect certain feelings from us. No, we obtain righteousness through faith.

Then I went through a period of depression. It was awful and oppressive. I spent a lot of time on my knees in prayer, crying out to God, pleading for help. And God in His infinite love and patience led me through!

During a service in Hoffnungsfeld, Mexico, I remained behind for prayer. The Spirit of God and His precious Word worked on my heart and, in faith, I was able to truly understand and grasp God’s love. I repented for doubting God. From that moment on, I gained new courage to live and now could joyfully trust. Yes, God be praised that through His Son Jesus we can have victory. He gave me peace like never before, and consequently, I surrendered my whole life to the Lord.

But soon a new trial came. God laid a cross on me. In 1981 I was diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis. I suffered immense pain; at night it took extreme effort to just roll over. All my joints were afflicted, even my jaw; often I could barely eat. The doctors gave me little hope for improvement. My joints stiffened so that I constantly

needed help. But through all this, I experienced God’s presence and nearness. Many times during those sleepless nights, I was so blessed. I was able to bring all my needs to the Lord as to a best friend, and He gave me comfort. Many brothers and sisters in the Lord prayed for me, including Pastor and Sister Brix who served our congregation at the time and were an unfailing help. And God once again intervened. I did not become a cripple like the doctors had predicted.

In 1983 I had to undergo a major surgery. I lost so much blood that I received a blood transfusion. Due to carelessness, I was given medicine that was much too strong for me – I was hanging onto life by a silk thread. A few times I neared the gates of eternity. The doctors were puzzled. One nurse told me: “we’ve done all that we can do.” But during this time I once again clung to the Physician who is above all physicians.

That year we had spring revival services here in Aylmer with Pastor Semenjuk, and Pastor Berndt was also traveling through. We asked the brothers to anoint me according to James, Chapter 5. God answered those prayers and that Wednesday, after an extended time of absence, I was able to attend prayer service again. God had performed a miracle!

I have admittedly suffered a lot in my life. The Lord has tested and chastened me; but it says in Hebrews 12:7-8: “If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons”

We want to faithfully serve our great God and be a help to others to the best of our abilities. Wherever He leads us – we want to trust our Lord, for He purchased our salvation through His suffering, death and resurrection. There are certainly other dear brothers and sisters who have to go through sickness, trials and hardships. Remain firm in the Lord in all suffering, for the Bible says: “The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who trust in Him” (Nahum 1:7).

Let us remain united in the love of Jesus!

Aganetha Friesen
Neustädt, Mexico

Transgression Brings Punishment *But Wounds Bring Healing*

We find these words in Isaiah 53:5, the chapter that prophesies Christ's suffering: "But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed."

The first part of the verse directs our attention to the reason Christ had to suffer. How quickly people look elsewhere for answers to His suffering. Some claim He was simply a martyr for His own ideology. But there is no logical explanation for this, because the inescapable truth that must be dealt with is that Jesus was sent to earth for the express intent to deal with sin. God had no need to simply start a new religion; the world the Christ child encountered was already filled with many religions. God was intent on dealing with sin. This is a topic that makes people uncomfortable, even today. They would rather speak of character flaws and other temperament issues. But the Cross of Calvary is a stark reminder of how God truly views sin. Jesus later speaks of what the Holy Spirit would do: "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8).

God shows us how weighty sin is by giving us the consequence of it in the next part of the verse: punishment. Oh, anything but accountability and punishment! We typically do not want to think about how our actions and sins have consequences. When confronted with our fleshly weaknesses, we try to justify them. But disobedience cannot be so easily swept away. It started in the Garden of Eden and its consequences are far-reaching. Only a few short years after their first sin, Adam and Eve stood at the graveside of their son, murdered by his own brother. Sin had planted itself deeply in the heart of man. The punishment for sin is so great that man cannot bear it alone. God gives us the result of sin in a verse in Ezekiel: "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20a). Yet God found a way to give us a substitute. Who would take all our punishment upon Himself? Who can truly grasp all that Jesus did for us so long ago?

Sin must be followed by punishment. There is no way around this. The punishment left behind an indelible

mark: the wounds on the body of the holy Son of God. His nail-pierced hands prove what our punishment did to Him. It is interesting that these marks of the cross were still visible after His resurrection. Does the Lord want us to be continually reminded of all He has done for us? Does He want us to never forget that our transgressions were the reason for the punishment, and that His wounds were because of our iniquities? "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

If we look at the sacrifice and suffering of the Son of God, His love and mercy only increases before our eyes. The Lord wanted us, a deeply-fallen race, to be healed! No one can cure the disease of sin. The wounds and scars are too deep to ever be healed. Jesus carried the punishment and we receive the benefits; that is, the healing of our diseased souls. This is how the Lord views the unsaved soul: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints" (Isaiah 1:5).

The only way for a person to be healed is through the wounds of Christ. Every other method will fail. What great need we live in today! How sore are hearts around us! What grief is suffered by many because of sin! How dark and fearful are the futures of many precious souls! But there is a cure. There is a salvation that brings lasting peace. It is found in the blood and in the wounds of Christ. It is time to give up everything else and experience the healing grace at the Cross of Calvary. Jesus carried our sins and punishment, and now our sick and weary hearts can be healed.

Peter Ens
Neustädt, Mexico

Experiences with God

Looking back, I see it so clearly – the Lord’s faithful hand leading me. I remember how blessed a morning it was. Our pastor preached a wonderful sermon from God’s Word. We talked with friends at our church and had an invitation for lunch.

But our life was about to change dramatically. At lunch, I began to feel a strange pain and it was not long until I could not even stand up straight. The pain was so intense I ended up in the hospital. The doctor suggested they do exploratory surgery, and for a person who likes to be in control, that was a big step. As I prayed, I was reminded that we can totally trust our Heavenly Father at all times – even when we face uncertainty in our lives.

We prayed for the surgeon and thanked God for His promise that He would never leave nor forsake us. I did not know what was coming my way, but God is faithful and gave me peace.

The doctor said surgery had gone well. The first few hours were very hard, but I kept praying for God’s help and He did just that. He gave me a kind and compassionate nurse, a husband that stood by my side, friends and family that prayed for me, and children who cheered me up.

I have had many health complications this last year. But my faith remains strong because I have seen how God works in our lives to help us grow closer to Him. Jesus has been by my side each step of the way and for that I can only praise Him.

Anne Thiessen
Seminole, Texas

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Special Services in 2013

Canada

Fest Services in Winnipeg: May 18 - 20, 2013

Fest Services in Aylmer: June 29 - 30, 2013

Fest Services in Edmonton: October 12 - 14, 2013

Germany

Pentecost Conference in Herford: May 18 - 20, 2013

Youth Bible Conference in Tuningen: July 28 - August 2, 2013

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The Lord Is My Shepherd

*The Lord is my Shepherd, what wonderful bliss!
Of what I need daily, no good thing I miss.
I drink of his pleasure, on green fields I feed.
I taste of His goodness, He knows what I need.*

*The heavenly manna, what foretaste divine
Gives strength for the battle, the vict'ry is mine.
Refreshing my soul, on the right path He leads
I follow my Shepherd, Who knows all my needs.*

*When dark times of sorrow and woe cause distress
In life's stormy trials, I trust nonetheless.
The tempest may rage, and the storm may not yield,
But I fear no evil, for He is my shield.*

*And when my adversaries taunt me and tease,
He cares for me still and the blessings won't cease.
My cup, it runs over; whatever I face,
He lifts up my spirit and fills me with grace.*

*O Praise to the Savior for all of His love!
His goodness and mercy, His help from above
Will follow me always as long as I live.
My life and my all to this Shepherd I give.*