

Restored

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
 He makes me lie down in green pastures;
 He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul;
 He guides me in the paths of righteousness
 For His name's sake.

Sheep can wander off from the flock and sustain injury or become easy prey. Another frequent danger for sheep is becoming 'cast down.' A sheep is cast down, or 'cast,' when it lies down to rest and shifts its weight so that it rolls slightly and draws its feet off the ground. When a sheep realizes this predicament it will panic by working its legs and body in an effort to stand up. If help does not come in time, the sheep will die.

A shepherd is well aware of the dangers of cast sheep and wandering sheep and is constantly looking out for signs of trouble. He will look to the sky for signs of circling buzzards whose eyes are also looking for signs of trouble. The shepherd will frequently count his sheep to insure that none are missing. If there are signs of predators or a missing sheep, the shepherd will immediately go in search of the helpless sheep in order to restore it to the flock under his watchful eye.

There is a parallel in our lives to the sheep that is cast down. Curiously, a fitting term for this parallel human dilemma is that of being 'downcast.' An individual can be going along life's way only fall into desperate circumstances. Job loss, family troubles, financial stress, frustration with fellow Christians, problems at work, death of a loved one; these and other difficulties can bring about a loss of self worth, anxiety, a sense of lostness, a burden of guilt, or other negative feelings. It is easy to panic and in frustration lash out at friends and family. These feelings can lead a person into a pit of despair and self-pity. Some have even given themselves over to a 'sinning spree,' having lost all hope of finding a solution.

For many people, there is not a problem with difficult circumstances, but simply wandering. Like sheep that wander off while grazing, we can easily wander off spiritually. Nothing much happens; there is no real 'life drama.' We simply lose focus on the truly important things, or we become distracted by the world. The distraction is ever so slight and hardly noticeable, and then we veer off God's path, just a little . . . then a little more, and more, and more. When we stop and look up, we realize that we are lost.

We are sheep, prone to wander, and easily frightened by the worries of this life. But our God is the Great Shepherd who restores souls.

A store manager calls over the intercom for the mother of a crying child who has wandered off. Their reunion is a mixture of hugs and kisses along with a tender scolding: "You **MUST** stay close to mommy," (hug). "I was worried about you," (kiss). "Don't run off from mommy, I love you."

Love and rebuke in the same breath: Restored.

God warned Israel of the bold and harsh discipline that he would use if they turned away to other gods. Yet with every level of escalating discipline there was a tender encouragement promising that He would accept them when they returned to Him. (Read Leviticus 26.)

Jesus seemed harsh when he rebuked Peter: "Get behind me Satan." He seemed so 'matter-of-fact' when he foretold Peter's denial. Yet Jesus restored his soul as he commissioned Peter with the task of shepherding His sheep.

The father of the prodigal son is a picture of God. We must remember that the son was always a son. When he left home, when he was lost, when he returned, he was never less than a son. We are represented by the son.

Our God is the faithful and loving shepherd who watches over us, aware of all external dangers as well as our own personal problems and frustrations. He finds us; He puts us back on our feet. Even then, he throws our arm around His shoulder and he helps us as we first stumble, then walk, and finally regain our strength.

He restores my soul.