

Women & More

Beyond the Shepherd's Eye

Lesson 1: **September 4, 2014**—*assurance*

We will never be where God is not; we can never be out of the range of His eye. There is nowhere we have been or can go that will take us out of our Shepherd's scope of vision—**His 'eye' is on us!** David asked his Shepherd and ours in Psalm 139:7-10 *“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I go up to the heavens, **you are there**; if I make my bed in the depths, **you are there**. ⁹If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰**even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.**”* He lists out all the places he could go—the heavens, the depths, the dawn, the sea, and in darkness—but that God would be there still!

The prophet Jonah tried to get out of range of God's telescopic eye and was watched by Jehovah every moment of his dramatic run and fish-belly landing! During severe trial or tragedy, we may feel that our Shepherd's eye is not on us—like the young man in Scripture, envied by his brothers, who was sold to a band of Ishmaelites and reported to his father to have been torn to pieces by a wild animal. Be sure that God's eye was 'on' him; and Joseph was **sure** of it!

God's presence was with Joseph every single step of the way. Genesis 37 records Joseph's dreams at age 17, and his brothers' angry responses. Later when he was sent to check on his brothers, verse 19 says: *“Here comes that dreamer, they said to each other”* and they plotted to do away with him. Have we ever ended up somewhere that we never expected to be—far away from home, in a strange culture, without family perhaps? Do sheep of the great Shepherd just have to make the 'best' of things? No, no, and no! God takes us to places we would never choose to go so that we can know Him and serve Him better!

Joseph was sold to Potiphar one of Pharaoh's officials—captain of the guard. Genesis 39:2-5 *“**The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered**, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. ³When his master saw that **the LORD was with him** and that **the LORD gave him success in everything he did**, ⁴Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household and **he entrusted to his care everything he owned**. ⁵From the time he put him in charge of his household and all that he owned, **the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph.**”*

Things looked good for Joseph, other than missing his father's house he was prospering under God's eye. The plans God had for him had been unfolding! Scripture says in 39:6 that *“Joseph was well-built and handsome”*, so after repeated flirtatious invites to her bed, and his steadfast refusal, Potiphar's wife cried 'rape'. Now Joseph has a new home in prison—**the Shepherd's School!**

Genesis 39:20b-23—“*But while Joseph was there in the prison, 21the LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. 22So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. 23The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.”*

Joseph refused to sin against God! “*How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?*” (39:9c) When Joseph was brought out of prison to interpret Pharaoh's dream, he was placed second in command over all of Egypt. And we know the end of the story, and we are privy to God's plan to save Israel through Joseph! And the dying blessing of Jacob on his son Joseph was absolutely amazing in Genesis 49:22-26.

“Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall.

23“With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. (betrayal)

24“But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, 25because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb.

26“Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers.”

Joseph had made the decision to be **assured** that God was watching him and not to sin against Him! But it was because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, his father's God and the Almighty that he was helped and so blessed. **God will always do more for us than we will ever do for Him!** We need to know and be sure that God is working out every detail of His plans for us, plans He made so much prior to our birth—**His eye is on us!** We may be missing out on God's ‘best’ for us, because we're not sure! Hebrews 10:10 says to draw near in full assurance of faith. J. I. Packer said, “To those who are Christ's, the holy God is a loving Father; they belong to His family; they may approach Him without fear, and **always be sure of His fatherly concern and care.** This is the heart of the New Testament message.”

In *Peace Above the Storm*, Ellen G. White wrote about Robert Robinson's conversion to Christ. “Robert Robinson, a poor orphan, wandered from place to place, never calling anywhere home until one night the **Holy Spirit led** him into a tent meeting. The preacher, the great evangelist George Whitefield, preached on the subject of Jesus' love for sinners.” Robinson received Christ as his Savior, went to college and graduated with a ministerial degree. And in 1758, when he was just 23, he wrote a poem that became the words to the hymn, *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*, and it was published.

As years passed, Robinson **drifted away** from his call as a minister and eventually from God. Remember that the last few lines from his poem read: *Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love; Here's my heart—O, take and seal it; Seal it for Thy courts above.* Under God's providential and watchful eye, Robinson found himself traveling with a very talkative Christian woman who insisted on talking about God, and wanted to read to him a poem that had particularly blessed her. Guess what it was? It was his poem; words he had written when he walked with the Lord, and he confessed that to her, adding, "I would give a thousand worlds if I could enjoy the feelings I felt then." White shared that on that very day Robinson recommitted himself to His Lord and served Him until he died in 1790.

"Pleasant it is to the believer to know that God's eye is thus tenderly observant of that work of grace which He has begun," said Charles Spurgeon. "He never loses sight of the treasure which He has placed in our earthen vessels." Philippians 1:5-6 *"...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

Scripture warns in Hebrews 2:1 *"We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard so that we do not drift away."* We must pay attention by heeding and obeying God's word: the teaching and preaching we've heard, our reading of it, and what we've heard God speak to us. If we are not careful, we will drift away. Is God's eye still on us when we drift? Absolutely!

Do we understand that God pursued us in the first place? We don't just decide one day to come to Him—**the Father through His Holy Spirit will draw us or we will not come!** John 6:44 says, *"No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day."* That's why when we sense the Spirit's tug on our heart we must respond—today! We have no guarantee that we will live to see another day or recognize that spiritual 'draw' again. We must not presume upon God's discriminating pursuit! He will be the One to decide when and if His pursuit will end. We are to stay close!

Sarah Young in *Jesus Calling* said, "You don't have to choose between staying close to Me and staying on course. Since I am the Way, staying close to Me is staying on course." Of the writer of the books of Ezra and Nehemiah it was said of Ezra—in 7:6b, 9b-10—*"The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the LORD his God was on him. 9b...for the gracious hand of his God was on him. (Why?) 10For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel."* We must stay glued to God's every Word!

A final rejection of the Spirit of God's call to salvation is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, and it is the unpardonable sin. That individual has thwarted the Spirit's last call to confession of sin, repentance (turning), and receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and LORD. **Matthew 12:31** "And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." Do not be unmoved by the prompting of God's Holy Spirit for salvation! John 3:36b "...but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

September 15-19, 2010, we hosted *Team Impact* at our church, and I was able to pray with several to receive Christ. One teenage young man went to school and made fun of the church and his decision to be saved to one of his teachers, and another teacher (B.J.) related this to me the following Wednesday night. I believed it to be one of the teens I prayed with because the description and circumstances fit (C. Arnold). I was, of course, saddened, but realize that not everyone who comes forward and professes is a true believer. I only pray that this young man will come to Christ before it is too late for him.

The true story of Chuck Templeton bears repeating: he came to know Christ, and became the pastor of one of Toronto's leading churches, holding crusades where he preached the gospel to thousands, seeing people come to faith in Christ all over North America. And then, seemingly out of the blue, he left his church and turned his back on God. As told by interviewer and author, Lee Strobel, "He renounced his faith because God who claimed to be love allowed suffering around the world to go unchecked." He even wrote a book titled *Farewell to God: My Reasons for Rejecting the Christian Faith*.

How long did God pursue him? Did Templeton ever return? All we know is what was reported: It was said that "...at 83 and in declining health, the former preacher vigorously defended his agnostic rejection of God", and when asked how he felt about Jesus—he wept. Did I mention that Templeton was a personal friend of Billy Graham and that together they had helped to found *Youth for Christ* in Canada? Was he ever, truly, a believer in the first place? We can be **sure** that God knew and that His 'eye' was on him to the end!

Henry van Dyke asked, "But if there were Someone above the moon and stars who did know and care, Someone who could see the places and the people that you and I would give so much to see, Someone who could do for them all of the kindness that you and I fain would do, Someone able to keep our beloved in perfect peace and watch over the little children sleeping in their beds beyond the sea—what then?" Psalm 11:4 "The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD is on his heavenly throne. **He observes the sons of men; his eyes examine them.**"

It's not about 'feeling' like God sees us, but it is all about knowing—being absolutely assured—that He does no matter what. We must be sure that God is with us and for us. Max Lucado in *Next Door Savior* said of Jesus, "There is no person he won't touch. No place he won't go to find you. For even though he is in heaven, he never left the neighborhood." Often it is our sin that causes us to 'feel' distance between us and God, and certainly sin will shadow our assurance. Someone has said that if we sense distance between ourselves and God, we must check to see who moved because it wasn't God!

The sin nature is within us from birth and even conception, and it separates us from God. Romans 7:5—"For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death." Toplady, the poet of Christian assurance according to Packer, warned: "We are not aware enough of SIN; and we are not aware enough of PARDON."

◆God's eye is stayed on His people; He cares about everything that concerns us, and He can see beyond our every situation. God's eye on us means that His providence, His protection and His presence are with us every minute.

-God's eye went with the infant Moses through the reeds of the Nile;

-into the fiery furnace with the three Hebrew children, and

-into the lion's den with Daniel.

-His eye stayed on Paul through shipwreck, prison and beatings to death.

-It was fixed on Stephen and James as they gave up their lives for Christ.

-And it followed Peter deep into a prison cell, delivering him to a prayer meeting. Adrian Rogers said, "It was easier for Peter to get out of prison than to get into the prayer meeting."

-God's eye was on His Son from the manger to Nazareth, Galilee to Jerusalem, the garden to the cross, and the upper room all the way Home!

My testimony these past several years has been Psalm 66:16—"Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me."

A favorite, and my nephew Justin's epitaph, is this Psalm of Asaph in 73:23-24 "Yet **I am always with you;**

you hold me by my right hand.

**²⁴You guide me with your counsel, and afterward
you will take me into glory.**"

◆What about God's eye on the wicked; does He see them? Proverbs 15:3 says, "***The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.***" And then verse 11—"Death and Destruction lie open before the LORD—how much more the hearts of men." Packer again: "God has us in his hands, but we never have him in ours! Just like us, He is personal, but unlike us, he is GREAT!"