

## *Women & More*

### *All We Like Sheep*

Lesson 20: **March 26, 2015**—*grace*

Sheep cannot do anything for themselves: they must be guided and tended and prodded and protected and fed. The only defense against enemies that they possess is ‘retreat’. They can bleat, but when they do they draw their enemies to them. Sheep—intelligence level is just below pigs—will wander away from a perfectly good fold and become tangled in brambles, stuck in muck or meander alone out on a rocky crag. Sheep can’t rest if they are fearful or frustrated: ripe for torment from flies and other pests, they can be bitten by the poisonous adder when poking around on the ground for food. Sheep need to be carried and cared for and constantly cured; rescued and restored over and over again.

Sheep are mentioned 204 times in Scripture in 35 of the 66 books from Genesis to Revelation, with many mentions referring to the animal itself and the sacrifice of it. Whether we speak of 1 sheep or 100 sheep, they are all sheep. Job 30:1 refers to sheep dogs, and the sheepcote or sheepfold is the place where the sheep are herded for special care in injury, illness, when ewes are ready to deliver, inoculations, anointing with oil to protect from pests and injury from the fighting rams’ horns, shearing and a place to sleep peacefully at night.

These animals are an awful lot of work! And God likens His people to them: Israel (Ezekiel 34) and Christians. Why would God bother so much with us? Because He is the Good Shepherd and Scripture says He lays down His life for the sheep. One of the earliest mentions of Israel’s being like sheep is in Numbers 27:16-17—the LORD’s answer to Moses’ request was Joshua—“*May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community 17to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the LORD’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.*” And Deuteronomy 18:4 commands: “*You are to give them (shepherds of Israel—the levitical priests) the firstfruits of your grain, new wine and oil, and the first wool from the shearing of your sheep.*”

We must graze on God’s grace, on God’s every word, and He will develop in us and through us His many graces! What does it mean for God to be daily at work developing graces in us? There is, of course, **enduring grace** afforded by trial and tribulation; **confessing grace** of the child to his Father; **communing grace**; **forgiving grace** and **loving grace** to name only five.

†But we will begin with **stand-alone Saving grace**! Nehemiah 3:1 and 32 talks about the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem’s wall: this was the designated entrance into the city for sheep. Entrance into God’s salvation is through His Son, Jesus Christ in John 14:6—He is our gate to God the Father.

Ephesians 2:4-5 says, “*But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—**it is by grace you have been saved.***” Psalm 28:9 “*Save your people and bless your inheritance; **be their shepherd and carry them forever.***” Possibly the most endearing passage in the Old Testament is Isaiah 53:6-7—lesson title—because it speaks of us, like sheep, going astray; and of Jesus, like a sacrificial ‘lamb’ giving His life for the sheep. “*We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him (Jesus) the iniquity of us all. **He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.***” Jesus died for us like a ‘sheep’!

John 1:16 says, “*From the fullness of His **grace** we have all received one blessing after another.*” Mary Magdalene was a trophy of God’s saving grace! Charles Spurgeon summed her transformation so well: “What a blessed deliverance! What a happy change! From delirium to delight, from despair to peace, from hell to heaven! ... Grace found her a maniac and made her a ministry.”

**1. Enduring grace:** From the website, *Sheep 101*, we learn that sheep are quadrupedal (four-footed), ruminant (cud-chewing) mammals; they are livestock and they are prey for predators—their life expectancy is 10-12 years. They have an amazing tolerance for pain: they do not show pain, because their predators look for the weak or injured. So their only natural protection is to stay together in a group—to ‘flock’ together. Spurgeon said, “He is well provided for, for the LORD is his Shepherd; he is well endowed for heaven is his inheritance.”

**2. Confessing grace:** When David had sinfully numbered the fighting men of Israel and God sent His angel to avenge, 2 Samuel 24:17 (also 1 Chronicles 21:17) says, “*When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, **I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done?** Let your hand fall upon me and my family.*”

Psalm 19:12-13 “***Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.***” And Psalm 119:176 says, “***I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.***” There is now no condemnation to the Christian, but certainly there is the daily confession to our loving Father. Spurgeon instructs, “There is a wide distinction between confessing sin as a culprit and confessing sin as a child. We have been cleansed once for all, but our feet still need to be washed from the defilement of our daily walk as children of God.”

**3. Communing grace:** The mention of sheep in the Old Testament is increased considerably in the Psalms, because the author of 73 of them, David, was a shepherd of sheep before God made him a shepherd of His people, Israel. Psalm 37:3 “Trust in the LORD and do good;  *dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.*” And when God had paid back Israel’s enemies, David said in Psalm 79:13—“Then we your people,  *the sheep of your pasture,* will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.” And he began Psalm 80 with adoration: “Hear us, O  *Shepherd of Israel,* you who lead Joseph like a flock; you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth....”

James 4:8a says, “Come near to God and he will come near to you....” In Exodus 20 the people were terrified to come near God—the good Shepherd gave us access! Psalm 100:3-4 “Know that the LORD is God. It is  *he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.*

<sup>4</sup>“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.” Spurgeon again, “We should all know more, live nearer to God, and grow in grace, if we were more alone. Meditation chews the cud and extracts the real nutriment from the mental food gathered elsewhere. When Jesus is the theme, meditation is sweet indeed.”

**4. Forgiving grace:** Matthew 10:16—“I am sending you out like sheep, among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” Again, from the *Sheep 101* site, we learn that a ‘cast’ sheep is one who has rolled over on its back—it often will require assistance to get upright. And they can die of distress in that position. Sheep tracks are never straight: winding trails allow them to see their backside with first one eye and then the other so that they can watch for predators: they can see a coyote, dog, fox or wolf 1,200 to 1,500 feet away.

Reviewing a survey on forgiveness given to believers, and noticing the very low percentages of the Scriptural view, it seems that few born-again Christians possess a biblical view, but seem to share the world’s view. In these, **only**:

- 25% believed you can forgive even if no remorse is shown (1 of 4 adults);
- 23% believed you can forgive but hold the offender responsible for consequences;
- 13% believed strongly that you can forgive but it’s not necessary to rebuild the relationship;
- 22% believed strongly you can forgive even though you are unable to forget (forgiveness does not necessitate forgetting—only God forgets), and
- 34% believed strongly that there are no unforgivable offenses.

**The idea of forgiving yourself is still debated among the expert forgivers!**

Two little girls had ended their playtime one day in a noisy squabble. But the next morning Kitty took her favorite book and headed for Jeannie's again. Kitty's mother was surprised and teasingly asked her daughter, "I thought you said you'd never play with her again after what happened yesterday?" The little girl looked a little worried and hugged her book tight to her chest as if she didn't know what to say. Then a very toothy smile lit up her face and she said, "Oh, Jeannie and me are good forgetters."

Paul in Colossians 3:13 wrote: "*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*" Can we even imagine how this went over with this mostly Greek congregation? To the New Testament Greek a non-retaliatory spirit was a sign of weakness. They thought you were a strong man if you would not let anybody get by with anything. Their mantra: vengeance is a virtue; before the sun goes down, get even! Aristotle, the Greek writer, taught that the great Greek virtue was refusal to tolerate insult or injury and to strike back and retaliate for the slightest offense. What...overlook an offense and forgive? Their first thought would be "*We don't think so!*"

**5. Loving grace:** Leviticus 25:35 "*If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you.*" God provides for the poor through His people: Psalm 68:10 "*Your people settled in it, and from your bounty, O God, you provided for the poor.*" Henry van Dyke "love is not getting but giving...."

Jesus reinstated Peter, and He had a vital question for him—the same question three times. John 21:15b "*Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these (fish)?*" Jesus asked him the same question again in verses 16a and 17a, and each time Peter answered: "*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*" Every time Jesus asked the question and Peter answered affirmatively, Jesus gave a command: "***Feed my lambs***" (15c); "***Take care of my sheep***" (16c), and "***Feed my sheep***" (17d).

**Now for some 'sheep' meat:** Prepare to 'chew the cud' on the Shepherd and His flock! John wrote the most about sheep in the New Testament, even mentioning Jerusalem's Sheep Gate in 5:2. But John 10 is where we want to camp. In verses 1-6—Jesus spoke through John—"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way is a thief and a robber. <sup>2</sup>The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. <sup>3</sup>The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. <sup>4</sup>When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. <sup>5</sup>But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will **run away from him** because they do not recognize a stranger's voice. <sup>6</sup>Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them."

Before we berate them for their lack of ‘brains’, remember that we have the benefit of God’s written word with all of Israel’s history; of God likening His people to His sheep in the Old and New Testaments. But Jesus’ listeners had the benefit of looking into the face of the divine Speaker and hearing His voice. And many of them lived among sheep and knew exactly how they were. Yet Scripture says “*they did not understand what he was telling them*”, so He patiently explained. Don’t miss this in John 10:7-10—“*Therefore Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. <sup>8</sup>All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. <sup>9</sup>I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup>The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.’*”

There’s more in John 10:11-13 “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup>The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.’*”

When Jesus finished His teaching on this in John 10:14-18, Scripture says that “*at these words the Jews were again divided*”. Jesus foretold His death and resurrection and, notice, too, that He will bring His sheep Christian together with His sheep Israel—He will put the two flocks together: “*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—<sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.’*”

Luke 15:4-7 records the *Parable of the Lost Sheep* as Jesus told it to the tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees and teachers of the law in audience. “*Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup>and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup>I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

An appropriate doxology for we ‘sheep’ from His Grace, is in Hebrews 13:20-21—“*May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, <sup>21</sup>equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”*