

Woolly Warriors



A Deep Dive
Into Sheep



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By Disciples of Jesus

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When you think you know what you're talking about, look again for His ways are higher than ours and we miss it a lot. But we serve a MERCIFUL Father who seeks to teach us all things.

- Isaiah 55:8-13 & John 14:25-27



Why Dive?

Sheep are stupid. Everyone knows that. It's why the Lord calls us sheep, right? Because we tend to be stupid. Going our own way. Getting lost. Being defenceless and crying out for help. Everyone knows it. You can find quite a few blogs, articles, and even books featuring the symbology. That's not mentioning all the cartoons and entertainment that have it. We all take it as granted. Why? Well, the Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Malachi 3:6 and Hebrews 13:8) so it makes sense that He has always seen us that way and always will, so there you go.

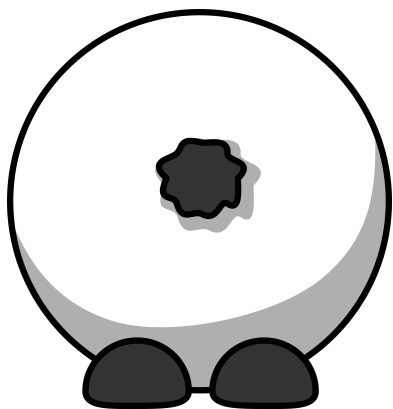
Except it wasn't His idea.

That's right. It wasn't His idea. Jacob on his deathbed told his sons that the Lord had always shepherded him (Genesis 48:15). It was David who first called us sheep (2 Samuel

24:17 & 1 Chronicles 21:17). He did it in prayer calling out for mercy for the people of Israel who were under his rule. It was humanity that called themselves sheep. God went with it though, so I guess He agreed we were pretty stupid and simple. I certainly agreed.

God didn't. The Lord told me I was doing sheep a disservice. He told me to look into it. To take a deep dive and find out what sheep are really like. He didn't say why. He just told me to do some research. So I did. And there are a lot of reasons to call humanity sheep - male AND female - but none of them are because of stupidity or being simpletons.

Hopefully, at the end of this you'll agree too.



Roses and Rectangles

Ashy, longing, usually amorous glance - usually used in plural. That's the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition of sheepish. First used in 1529, you still find it used today. Usually though, it references the dopey and wide-eyed appearance of a sheep. It also gets used in reference to embarrassment, looking sheepish. But the eyes of a sheep are remarkable.

Sheep have rectangular pupils. They have a 270 to 320 degree field of vision with excellent depth perception. Humans have about 135 degrees horizontally and 180 degrees vertically in each eye. When they combine into our binocular vision we have about 114 degrees horizontally in total, but the combination is needed for us to have depth perception.

A sheep though, can see almost everything around them. Their only blindspot is directly behind them when their head is up -- when grazing, they see all around themselves. Thing is, they get that amazing sightline without turning their heads. That's why their eyes are on the sides of their heads, not at the front.

They are not colourblind, but they only have two-colour receptors which means they cannot see red. They see yellowish green and bluish purple hues best. They adapt well to sunlight and moonlight. They blink, but they blink sideways which can take a little getting used to. They have pockets of fat around their eyes in the sockets. It's to protect them.

The sheep is aware of their entire surroundings. Their senses are geared to react to any change they detect. Their sense of smell is amazing. They communicate with each other with their scent as well as verbally. They have scent glands in front of their eyes and between the digits of their hooves.

They know what the other sheep smell like. They know when ewes are in heat. They know their offspring. They know the smell of their predators - even differentiating between different ones of the same type. They can locate water by smell. They can tell the difference between pastures and between types of feed. The bulb in their brain that manages their olfactory sense is between two and three times the size of the human olfactory bulb.

They're hard to fool. They're hard to sneak up on. They're not quite like we present them, are they? These traits are not only great for the sheep, they are things for us to strive for. Jesus taught us to be like sheep for a reason.

Let them stand behind you.

David sang, *"I will set no vile things before my eyes. I hate the deeds of faithless men. They will not cling to me. A perverse heart will be far from me. I will have nothing to do with evil"* (Psalm 101:3-4). David learned about that. If he had been out with the army when he was supposed to be, he would not have been home to see Bathsheba bathing (2 Samuel 11:1-5).

The Lord knows that the flesh craves fleshy things (Galatians 5:16-17). The feelings and sensations that this world provides in spades. He doesn't forget what we are made of (Psalm 103:14). Instead of focusing on that, He empowers us to use His eyes. *My son, attend to my words. Turn your ear to my sayings. Let them not depart from your eyes. Keep them in the centre of your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and health to their whole body* (Proverbs 4:20-22).

Whenever you see in the bible people told to keep the Word of the Lord in front of their eyes, you will almost immediately see two things. They either do it and succeed or they choose to squander their time and they fail. Part of the consecration of Aaron and his sons in Leviticus 8 was for them to stay at the door of the Tent of Meeting day and night for seven days (Leviticus 8:35). The last half of the verse says *and keep the LORD's command, that you don't die*.

What were they to do for that time? It doesn't say beyond keeping the Lord's command and they had already been told to seek His Word - as written down by Moses (at Mount Sinai, Exodus 19:25). But a short time later, two of Aaron's sons used *strange fire* offering the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong place and paid the price for unrighteous behaviour (Leviticus 10:1-2). If they had kept the words of

the Lord before them, would they have made the same choices? Speculation, I know. But every time I read the story I wonder. Keeping the Word before you helps you focus on all that we should, and ignore all we shouldn't as if it didn't even exist. It's what Jesus practiced.

"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men."

Peter had just acknowledged Jesus as the true firstborn Son of the living God - the Anointed One. This was the truth upon which Jesus was going to build His church (Matthew 16:15-18). Jesus was beginning to open the door a crack and let them glimpse the deeper things of His mission to earth (Matthew 16:21). The real reason He came. Peter, perhaps puffed up on the blessings of Jesus and the pat on the back he got, immediately got offended.

Remember, changing their thinking was no easier for them than it is for us. Messiah was destined to establish a kingdom on earth. None of them imagined the WAY Jesus was going to do it. Messiah was to be a power in the world and give back to Israel all that God had promised them. Peter and the others were VERY resistant to Jesus' mission of being a sacrificial lamb. Even the mere mention of it here caused Peter to try and show Jesus another way - perhaps suggesting that Jesus had missed it this time.

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This will never be done to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of men" (Matthew

16:22-23). Harsh? Maybe, but Jesus didn't compromise. He refused to listen to the doctrine that Satan was peddling. He refused the easy road. It wasn't the first time.

*The devil, leading him up on a high mountain, showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. The devil said to him, "I will give you all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I want. If you therefore will worship before me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "**Get behind me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve him only.'**" (from Deuteronomy 6:13}" (Luke 4:5-8). Jesus is very serious about what is before His eyes and extremely firm about what He puts in the place He refuses to look. He calls us to do the same and the Father empowers us to succeed at it.*

God sees everything that we do here on earth. All the deeds of man (Job 34:21). All the inhabitants of the world and all that they do - humankind or beast (Hebrews 4:13). He looks not at the surface, but right to the hidden places in our hearts where our true self sits with all we value (1 Samuel 16:7).

But God doesn't keep what He sees from us. He lets us in on the secret (Amos 3:7). Jesus did it in the Old Testament (Genesis 18:17). Jesus did it in the New Testament (Acts 9:16 and 1 Corinthians 11:23). Jesus doesn't change (Hebrews 13:8), so He is still telling us things today. That's why He sent His Holy Spirit to us to guide us, teach us, correct us, and show us revelation (1 John 2:27).

The Lord cares about the state of our spiritual eyesight. He cares whether or not we are blind or free to see. He cares about the quality of that which is behind our eyes (Matthew 6:22). If there is not His Truth informing us, we won't have light but ignorant darkness. One of Jesus' main

mission tenets was to recover the sight of the blind (Luke 4:18). This was not just a physical healing. That was the manifestation we could see and understand - both then and today - of the principle He deeply cared about. It is so much a part of the gospel that it forms the centrepiece of one of the most powerful prayers for the church that has ever been recorded.

For this cause I also, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which is among you and the love which you have toward all the saints, don't cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, authority, power, dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:15-21).

This prayer was a beautiful incense wafting from the earth to the Throne (Revelation 8:4). God liked it so much it became part of the New Testament. Smell doesn't factor a lot in worship, but it should never be far from our minds. Smell and purity are linked in the Word a lot (John 11:39). God breathed the breath of lives into us (Genesis 2:7) and as long as that breath is within us, we have life (Job 27:3).

It was with worshipful thanksgiving that the two women anointed Jesus' feet on separate occasions (Matthew 26:6-13 and Luke 7:36-50). When we are striving for purity by abiding in Jesus, we are always getting our hearts right with

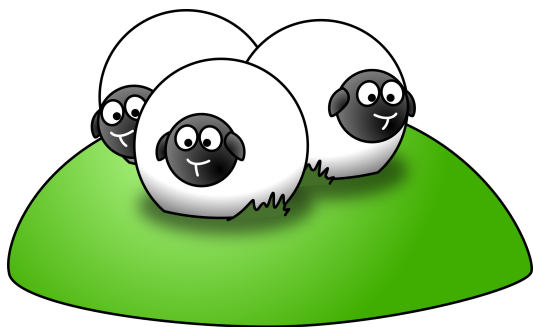
Him. When we are doing that, our prayers are aligned with the Word. The Father hears the prayers of the consistently righteous (Proverbs 15:29).

The Spirit was given to us to enable us to walk in Jesus. When we walk in Jesus, we are able to approach the Father. The Spirit was also given to us to enhance our sight. To keep us mindful of the purity of our heart. To make it so that we are not only keeping the Word before us all the time, but we are spiritually aware of our entire surroundings.

When sheep graze they have no blind spot. When we graze, feeding on the Word, we renew our minds to the things of the Lord and it feeds our spirit. If we're feeding properly (instead of simply reading) with the Word, prayer, and meditation on what we're hearing, we put the things of the enemy behind us. When they're behind us, when we lift our heads they won't be distracting us or taking our eyes off the things of God which we have surrounded ourselves with.

Sheep cannot "see" red. Sin should be the "colour" we cannot see. Our spiritual eyes should be kept so attuned to the Lord that the shade of sin doesn't exist for us. Temptation will cease to be a thing in our lives and go back to being an enticement. It will stop being a boardwalk of neon signs constantly grabbing our attention. It will go back to what it is: something we put down. An external thing, knocking at our door seeking to come in (Genesis 4:7), not a roommate or bedfellow we struggle to evict.

Sin and all that it entails should be behind us. Out of sight. Out of attention. As we focus all we have on the Lord God Almighty (Deuteronomy 6:4-9), ever vigilant against that which would take our eyes off Him and our walk together.



Together Toward

Fuzzy lemmings. That's our standard picture of the flock of sheep grazing on the hillside. Waiting for the wolf in winter jammies to come and snag a few here, swipe a few there, and - if discovered - chase them over hill and dale until they fall into ditches, canyons, or over a cliff. Woolly dominoes falling over at the drop of a hat, wandering off alone into unknown peril and a cooking pot. Basically, singular and not smart creatures we put up with to get things from. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Sheep are emotionally complex. It's true. They have the full range of feelings that we do. They feel bored. They feel happy. They feel anger. They feel sad. They have individuality. That's a big one. Within a flock of one hundred sheep, there are one hundred individual sheep. One hundred personalities. One hundred minds expressing

one hundred feelings - and not always the same ones. Yes, they do at times move as one. They do that as a survival technique, not because they are docile and easily swayed. I dare you to try and sway a sheep that doesn't know you. You'll need help. They care about their own individual lives. They also care about how the sheep around them are treated. They're capable of forming friendships and then coming to the aid or rescue of those friends.

They are capable of interpreting different emotional expressions - in humans as well as in fellow sheep - and then use that information as they form and monitor their interactions with those around them. When the expressions of those around them change, their behaviour changes as well. They can experience stress and isolation. When they're depressed they hang their heads and avoid things that are positive. They exhibit fear when around strangers. When they cannot see their flock - their friends and their family - their heartbeats rise.

They're social animals. They're playful. They nurse their young for at least six months and form strong, exclusive bonds between mother and child that never go away. In fact, they are so good at bonds and emotional expressions that they can tell the difference between a calm and anxious sheep IN PHOTOGRAPHS. They can be optimistic and pessimistic. They form expectations and have strong feelings when those expectations are not met.

They have empathy and can pick up on the state of the flock around them. Like us, when one yawns those around them tend to yawn as well. They play together as well as alone, expressing positivity with their interactions with their environment and each other. Sheep are almost as complex as we ourselves are.

Don't forget to remember.

Jesus said the second greatest thing you could do to be His disciple was to love your neighbour like yourself (Luke 10:27-37). That's more than just thinking about being nice to them, but truly loving them like yourself. To love to help others (Isaiah 1:17). How much more should we love as ourselves those who are in Christ with us? Those with whom we share a body? *For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all given to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many* (1 Corinthians 12:12-14).

When Paul, Barnabas, and Titus went to Jerusalem (Galatians 2), they met with the elders of the early church - including some of the Twelve, like Peter. Paul was nervous because of their mission to the Gentiles not being received happily by all of the Jewish followers of Jesus. But they were overjoyed that they were fully accepted and that the church laid on them only that they remembered the poor (vs 10), which Paul was passionate about doing anyway.

The early church had the attitude of helping each other. Pooling resources (Acts 2:44-45). Sending offerings of money to assist in times of need (Acts 20:1-5) - even from Gentiles to Jews, which was a huge social step in that day. Sharing meals (Acts 2:42 & 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). Getting together, encouraging one another, and imaginatively stirring up acts of goodness and love (Hebrews 10:24-25).

"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

They were a community. A group of individuals who chose not to solely promote their own interests, but working toward a multi-faceted mindfulness that included everyone. This was how they wanted to go forward. With honesty, compassion, and understanding. They were the perfect model for how we should be operating toward each other. Helping should never be done in order to get a reward, but the Lord does reward us when we help one another (Hebrews 6:10). The best way we have to do that is by using compassion. Not human compassion, but spiritual compassion: loving kindness (Galatians 5:22-26).

As human beings, we have a tendency to hold things against people. No matter how big, or little our own failings are, we hold other people's against them. Selfish, fleshly nature: strife, jealousy, hatred, anger, division, rivalry, and other such things (Galatians 5:19-21). This is what the world does. Look around. Everything is either mired in those behaviours or tools to help you navigate them. We as believers can lay them aside because in Christ we have been given new natures. We are new creatures IN JESUS (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We are to look to the Word and the actions, words, and example of Jesus as found in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. Since we are in Him and made in His mould, we should be acting and talking like Him - and working on renewing our mind in the Word so that we're thinking like Him too. We are to treat each other like He treated everyone He came into contact with: *Brothers, even if a man is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, looking to yourself so that you also aren't tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if a man thinks himself to*

be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself (Galatians 6:1-3).

We are meant to help one another along (Romans 15:1). We are called to love one another regardless of who they are, where they came from, or what culture they were born into (Romans 1:16-17). In Jesus, we are in the culture of faith. In Jesus, we are the nationality of Righteousness. Since we are the same, we can love one another as God loved us. We will encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11). We will bind ourselves together, picking up anyone who falls as we are picked up in our turn (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

We are of the flock of faith and faith is what makes us all brothers and sisters in Jesus. Fellow children of the Most High God. *But if anyone doesn't provide for his own, and especially his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever* (1 Timothy 5:8). We ARE all of the same household and we are called to take care of each other. Because that is what the family of faith does. We are known by the love we have for one another (John 13:35). It is the BEST witness we have, since the world does NOT run on anything even close to it.

"We are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his care."

God is love. We love because He loved. We can love fiercely in protection. We can love generously in our blessing. We can love instructively in our usefulness. We can love each other, work together, build each other up, and become what it is that we have been called to be: a healthy, connected, supporting flock guided by a loving, merciful, and powerful shepherd (Ephesians 4:11-16,

Leviticus 25:35, and 1 Peter 5:1-11). Jesus said He was the GOOD shepherd and the provider of all our pasture. We have no reason to be selfish and try and do anything but encourage everyone to pasture in Jesus too (John 10:1-11). It's the goal we are all supposed to be heading toward: deeper into Jesus, yoked in obedience, kneeling before the throne.

Oh come, let's worship and bow down. Let's kneel before Yahweh, our Maker, for he is our God. We are the people of his pasture, and the sheep in his care. Today, oh that you would hear his voice! (Psalm 95:6-7). We are His sheep. All of us. Don't neglect the getting together of the saints. We have a myriad of means in this modern world. We can get together. We can visit together. We can connect online together. We can zoom across the world together. Let's come together to encourage each other. Healthy, connected, and flocked under His guidance. Together.



High-Level Headiness

That guy. The one with the hat. He ordered the latte with soy milk. And bought a muffin. You know. Two years ago in that other store. He had on a cute shirt. Something about alien babies and the behaviour of cats. You remember, right? Maybe not, but conversations like this happen all over the world every day. We have the assumption that we will always remember faces and the individuals that they are connected to.

When it comes to faces, we can store a lot more than we realize (1,000 to 10,000 according to current research with the average being 5,000) but we might not have a name or many details to go with them. When it comes to relationships, we can maintain about 150 (Dunbar's number) which is the size of a village or small town - although recent research is pointing out the shakiness of how that number was arrived at. We can hold two people

comfortably and a slight number more of close friendships, but after that it depends on your research and scoring methods which can push that number up to five hundred. What about sheep?

Sheep are not considered intelligent by the masses. We portray them as uninformed, stupid, docile, unimaginatively following the herd. People mock them. When people want to mock people they think are stupid or 'blindly following' be it a group, a crowd, or the government, you often see them shouting "Baa! Baa!" to shame them. Do not be deceived. Under their fluffy white coats and elongated oval faces there is a lot of higher-level cognitive processes successfully firing.

Sheep can comfortably keep 50 faces of fellow sheep and humans in their minds for around two years. It doesn't matter if they are looking at a picture or a living individual. They'll recognize you and interact with you as a friend. That's pretty impressive for an animal that we see as fairly dopey and really stupid. They prefer faces they know to faces they don't. They can discriminate and determine the breed and sex of other sheep. Their face recognition abilities are on par with humans and primates - not the stereotype, is it?

Their brain power doesn't stop there.

Sheep can determine both shape and colour, not getting confused when those elements shift or are reversed. They frequently score as highly as humans and macaque monkeys when tested. They have excellent spatial memory and lambs have shown they can learn basic tasks in as few as two trials. They can learn a complex maze. They can remember that maze for at least 22 weeks. They can choose between two cups (one of which is baited and covered) and

master the choice of avoiding baited cups on the same level as primates.

Sheep can be taught, taught well, and remember what they have learned. They recognize their handlers and their friends and prefer them to the company of those they don't know as well. The flock can - in an instant - notice and avoid a stranger or interloper.

We don't have a face. We do have a voice.

How are we supposed to know Jesus? God says He will never leave or forsake us, but He is hardly there for us to see, is He? We're to know Him by His voice. *"I am the good shepherd (Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:11-12,15,22-23). The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand, and not a shepherd, who doesn't own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and flees. The wolf snatches the sheep and scatters them. The hired hand flees because he is a hired hand and doesn't care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and I'm known by my own; even as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep which are not of this fold [Isaiah 56:8]. I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice. They will become one flock with one shepherd. (John 10:11-16).*

Knowing Jesus is about more than listening, guidance, or obedience. Knowing Jesus is serious stuff. *This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and him whom you sent, Jesus Christ (John 17:3). This is how we know that we know him: if we keep his commandments. One who says, "I know him," and doesn't keep his commandments, is a liar, and the truth isn't in him (1 John 2:3-4). Yes most certainly, and I count all things to be a loss for the excellency of the knowledge*

of Christ Jesus, my Lord, for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and count them nothing but refuse, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on, that I may take hold of that for which also I was taken hold of by Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:8-12).

Since hearing the Lord's voice is so important, we can be assured that the Lord won't leave us struggling to figure it out for ourselves. Faith is developed and strengthened by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). He's eager to reveal the mysteries of Himself to us, expositing about the Word that we were given to know Him by (Jeremiah 33:3). He wants to fellowship with us (Revelation 3:20). The voice of God is one of the leading lights that shows us where to go and how to grab hold of His peace (Psalm 85:8). How can we be confident we're hearing Him?

We can ask Him for wisdom, which He gives to us liberally (James 1:5). Wisdom helps us discern His voice from all the other voices coming our way. He's given us the authority to tell our ears to perk up and work properly (Matthew 28:18, Luke 10:19-20). We MUST submit ourselves to Him (James 4:7). To crucify our flesh and unrighteous desires (Galatians 5:16-26). And to take each thought captive, taking it to Jesus, and examining it in the light of Him to see if it's worth thinking (2 Corinthians 10:5). When you do all that and meditate on the things of the Lord, you'll find that the noise of the world, your mind, and the enemy passes and leaves a stillness in which we hear

clearly the voice that God has been speaking to us with (1 Kings 19:11-13). Doing all that builds up affinity and familiarity with the Lord. Why is that important beyond the value to our personal walk? It is the mechanism by which we know each other as fellow brothers and sisters in the Lord (Matthew 12:48-50).

"But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another..."

What about each other? How are we supposed to know each other? By love. Love toward each other and love toward Jesus. *If a man says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn't love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should also love his brother* (1 John 4:20-21). *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34-35). When we love one another, we'll recognize one another because the reality of things is only the supernatural love of Yahweh can enable us to always be in love toward one another. It just isn't in the flesh to love unconditionally. That's a gift of the Merciful Lord Most High.

This is a big focus of the behaviour we as the church (the body of Christ) should have. We are not only to love one another (Mark 12:31), but to CONTINUE to love one another (Hebrews 13:1). Not as a sham. Not being two-faced, saying one thing in church and another at home (Romans 12:9). It takes Jesus to do it. It takes repeated fellowship to do it. *Not*

neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Hebrews 10:25). Encouragement is a key part of fellowship. We're not to judge, we're to support. That doesn't mean we're not to have standards and to excuse all behaviour (1 Corinthians 5:11). It means we're to help each other as Jesus helped us. That takes Jesus, because we're dealing with the flesh as well as with faith.

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son, cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Abiding in Jesus builds links of fellowship between us. Abiding in Jesus is what cleanses us of sin and gives us the tools to put down the flesh (Romans 8:13). When we put down the flesh as we abide in Jesus, there is nothing in the way of true fellowship. It all starts with love.

and hope doesn't disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit in us helps us recognize each other. This is important because, as you look at the context of that verse (Romans 5:1-8), we see that we all suffer. We were all sinners when we were saved. We only have our access to love and peace through Jesus Christ. We are all in the same boat. Now if we're in the same boat, why would we do anything but help each other? Why wouldn't we encourage one another? Why wouldn't we help each other achieve what God says we can: fellowship.

The best part? We may be able to only handle a certain number of faces, but we have the Holy Spirit indwelling in us. And He is omniscient. He can handle all the faces that are, were, and ever will be. If HE can remember all our faces and identify each and every one of us, He can and WILL tell us about each other as we meet up. Sometimes

you come across someone and there is just something about them. Something familiar. Then you find out that they are a fellow believer. A brother or a sister. Part of the family. A fellow flocker.

Sometimes, it's hard to know what to say. Sometimes, we know exactly what we want to say and we shouldn't. We aren't in a "Best Believer" contest but in a "Be Like-minded" marathon (Philippians 2:1-11). It isn't a race to win individually, but to win as a body. And it isn't one we can win without Jesus. But that's a reason we have been given His Righteous Spirit. When we are on trial for Jesus' sake, the Holy Spirit is there to give us the right words to say (Luke 12:11-12, Mark 13:11, Matthew 10:19). It applies to more than just that.

We have been given the Holy Spirit to instruct us, help feed us, and make sure the Water of Life is flowing (Nehemiah 9:20). He is here to instruct us in ALL THINGS (John 14:26), not just in what to say before our tormentors. *As for you, the anointing which you received from him remains in you, and you don't need for anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, you will remain in him* (1 John 2:27).

The Holy Spirit and the righteousness we have in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:21) is how we know we are in the same flock. We all abide in Jesus and remain in Him. When we do we'll act like it. We'll act like it and recognize it in each other (1 John 2:29). Fellow flockers, fellowship fellows, and fearless, faithful followers of Jesus, the Anointed One. Bound together, helping each other, and remembering that the Holy Spirit helps us in all situations as we become overcomers in Jesus who is THE Overcomer of everything (John 16:25-33). He supplies all we lack (2 Corinthians 9:8)

and has a plan for every situation that comes up (Luke 12:7). If we walk in Jesus, the Lord will be there to keep us from being caught in traps, stumbling around, or fearing of what is happening in the world (Proverbs 3:1-26). Help each other remember that. We're all part of His flock following His voice. We're siblings and friends, not thorns.



Self-Medicative

I'm not a doctor, but... Oh, how we love that attitude. Taking the "expertise" of us knowing ourselves and our bodies and turning that into some kind of permission to partner with a website doctor to gain diagnosis and prescription options. Thankfully, we aren't at the point where we are able to write our own prescriptions. We just don't have what it takes to make those kinds of decisions without training. Sheep, however, have it from birth as instinct. How cool is that?

The sense of smell in a sheep is more developed than that of humanity, though not as good as a dogs. They move into wind so that they can use their sense of smell. They use their lips and mouths for touch - because they are mostly covered with coarse hair. Added to this is the third leg of their self-medicative tripod: taste. Sheep have the ability to differentiate between foodstuffs.

There has always been reports of sheep and other wild animals eating foods known to benefit them. Until recently, however, this wasn't tested under controlled circumstances. But in 2005 there was a paper published by Juan J. Villalba, Frederick D. Provenza, and Ryan Shaw that studied the likelihood that sheep could self-medicate when challenged with illness-inducing foods. They found that "sheep learned to associate three illness-inducing substances in foods with three compounds known to cause recovery from those illnesses, and sheep showed greater preference for the medicinal compound that specifically attenuated the effect of each illness-inducing substance" (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.anbehav.2005.09.012>).

Sheep have been known to eat plants that hold no nutritional value in order to prevent or treat sickness. They also have been observed teaching their young to do the same. Not only that, but sheep who are under the weather will avoid areas that are detrimental to them - such as a pasture known to have ticks, since with a weakened immune system they might not be able to fight off the ticks effect on their system.

They show a remarkable tendency to graze in healthy pasture with a variety of easy to eat plant matter. The less chewing they have to do, the more energy they conserve. The more they conserve, the more energy they get out of their food. Sheep are discriminating eaters and know how to leverage that discrimination for maximum effectiveness.

Know what ails you.

We need spiritual food as much or more than we do physical food. Forgetting that, or ignoring it, leads to a withering of spirit followed by death of spirit. That's how

things started way back in the Garden of Eden. Humanity was being spiritually fed as well as physically. When Adam rebelled and disobeyed the Lord, the spiritual food was cut off (Genesis 2:17). His spirit died and that dead spirit was passed on to all his offspring - humanity. In Jesus, we are given His righteous spirit (Romans 8:10-11), restoring us to where we started. However, if we don't feed our spirit it is going to wither away as it starves. A starved spirit is no good to us or anyone we come into contact with.

He said to all, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me (Luke 9:23). Simple, but not easy. It is the struggle we all have. Flesh vs faith (Romans 7:15-25). What we need is an anchor. A point that we can focus on. Something that can show us when we stray and help us back back to that point. The first thing we have, of course, is the Holy Spirit. He is with us always and never, EVER ceases to speak to us. All we need to do is listen. He is the best barometer because He is always in accordance with Jesus, the Father, and the Word.

We have another tool. It is the simple (there's that word again) idea that we can judge our thoughts and choose what we will focus on. *Finally, brothers, whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report: if there is any virtue and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things* (Philippians 4:8). Remember that only good things come from God (James 1:17) and that all good things are from Him. Our spirits pick up on that even when we consciously might not (Psalm 139:14).

We can determine what is good or not good by looking through the lens of Jesus Himself (Hebrews 12:1-2). It is at Jesus that we are meant to point our eyes (Colossians 3:2).

Anything else, anything at all, and we're not going to see clearly. It does no good to weigh the goodness of something unless we are using true and holy goodness as the measure. If we put worthless things before us, we are going to step wrong. If we put holy things before us, we will clearly see where we are going (Psalm 101:3).

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light."

We're told not to trust ourselves, but the Lord (Proverbs 3:5). Not with one day a week or only during our devotional time, but all the time. With all we have. We need to keep our eyes on the Lord if we hope to see what He is saying to us (Psalm 141:8). *"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"* (Matthew 6:22-23). What we put before our eyes is what is going to filter into our hearts. What is in our hearts is what is going to determine what we choose to do (Proverbs 4:23).

The very things that tell us that we are stepping wrong - the Holy Spirit and the Word - are exactly what we need to step right again. It is through prayer and worship - taught by the Word and the Spirit - that we come to a knowledge of wrong and a desire for repentance. Without repentance we're sorry we got caught. Repentance is the total and complete turning around from one action and embracing its opposite - without a desire to escape consequences.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). No matter what we do, it is a single step. A single thought, and we can be back where we belong: kneeling broken and humble before the throne submitting to His Righteousness. Today is ALWAYS the acceptable time and the day of our salvation from our choice to sin (2 Corinthians 6:2). Whenever we hear the still small voice asking us what we're doing outside of the protection of the Lord's wings (1 Kings 19:12, Psalm 91:4), we need to listen.

The Lord loves us so much and doesn't seek to smite us (John 3:17-18). He wants to fellowship with us (Revelation 3:20). But we MUST submit to the Lord and what He says (Romans 8:7, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:6). When we do, the Lord moves and moves mightily. Don't fear that you're too far out of His Grace. His Grace knows no bounds (Luke 4:40-41, Mark 5:6-13). We can NEVER be away from His Love (Romans 8:38-39).

When in doubt, get into the Word. Seek for wisdom. Listen to what you find and submit to it. The Word never fails. Jesus is the cure for EVERYTHING that ails us.



Many, But One

Over 1,000 different breeds of sheep worldwide. Seriously. Cameroon, Texel, Scottish Blackface, Ouessant, Hari, Racka, Awassi, Dorper, Merino, Priangan, etc. The list goes on. For about another 990 names. Now there is a general genus *Ovis* that can apply to other species, but the term 'sheep' is almost exclusively a referent to the domesticated, ruminant mammal. They are members of the order Artiodactyla, the even-toed ungulates. Scientific name: *Ovis aries*. Domain: Eukaryota. Family: Bovidae. Pretty fancy stuff, huh?

At a population of over a billion, sheep are almost as numerous as we are, all things considered. In that billion, they share a lot of the same characteristics. They are raised domestically for their meat, milk, and wool. They're fairly stocky. Their horns are divergent. They have scent glands in their faces and their hind feet. In wild sheep, the outer

coat takes the form of hair with an undercoat of short, fine wool. Domesticated sheep have a robust fleece on the outside that never stops growing - causing serious health issues if it is unshorn. In fact, if a domesticated sheep falls over (referred to as casting), they cannot get up do to the weight of their wool. If unaided, they could die.

All sheep are herbivores. They tend to graze in flocks and do not have many - if any - natural defenses from predators apart from flocking behaviours. They mature at about one year of age and breed when they reach the age of about one and a half. Their births tend to be single, but twins are not unheard of. The lambs are weaned at about four or five months of age and switch to grazing like their parents.

Among domesticated sheep there are a few differences. Humans breed some for wool production alone. Others have been bred to reflect the conditions of the environment in which they are kept. There are even some crossbreeds out there so that their communities can benefit from both meat and wool.

Despite the many breeds out in the world, fewer than two hundred of them are of any interest outside the communities in which they are found. In the wild sheep there is a lot less diversity of colour, quality and quantity of wool, size, milk production, and conformation to the standards of the individual breeds.

Overall, it can fairly be said that there are few species on the planet who have been more changed by the needs, desires, and interference of humanity (Except maybe dogs. You can look up dog breed appearance over the last hundred years and get shocked).

Differences in our sameness.

Humanity was created by the Lord God. We were made in His image. We were made to reign and rule over this earth. We were made male and female. You can debate until you're blue in the face, but if you believe the Word of God is true, then you have to accept those facts as true as well. There is no getting around it. *God said, "Let's make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* God created man in his own image. In God's image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them. God said to them, *"Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth"* (Genesis 1:26-28).

The world is currently trying to hold up a different narrative, but funnily enough, science is on the side of scripture. Of all the arguments that can be brought to bear, I want to focus on two basic and unalterable facts. The first is the pelvis. The second is the brain.

The pelvis is the only bone in the body that is different between males and females. It is a visible, measurable difference between the sexes. Generally, the female pelvis is thinner and less dense. It is wide and shallow. Importantly, the pelvic inlet (the superior pelvic aperture) is wide, oval and rounded. This is so that babies can pass through it. The pubic arch in a female is about $>80^\circ$. If you look laterally at the female pelvis you can see the relationship between the urogenital and reproductive organs.

In males, the pelvis is thick and dense to support a heavier body build. It is heart shaped and narrow. The male pelvis has a v-shaped pubic arch that is about $<70^\circ$. The coccyx in the male pelvis is projected inwards and immovable, where the female has a flexible and straighter coccyx. These are clear differences between the sexes.

Moving onto the brain, there are also clear differences here as well though what underlies the differences is not always well known. We aren't going to focus on the measurable differences in mental states or conditions, but on the physical or anatomical ones.

Females have greater volume of brain mass in the prefrontal cortex, orbitofrontal cortex, superior temporal cortex, lateral parietal cortex, and insula. Males have greater volume in the ventral temporal and occipital regions. These regions all process different types of information. Also, the regions of the brain that have a relatively high expression of sex-chromosome genes tend to have greater cortical volume in males. Due to these differences, when brains are studied there is a marked and measurable difference in the brain activation of these regions between males and females -- but marked and measurable similarities within the sexes.

Historically, the neuroscience community have considered differences in cognition and behaviour between the sexes to have been cultural variations. That is changing fast as technology increases. This doesn't mean one sex is better than the other. It simply means that there are actual and honest differences between males and females. This is why God partnered us up. We need each other.

For example, men can juggle more items in working memory. They have superior visuospatial skills. Men tend to use dead reckoning when they travel instead of

landmarks. The female hippocampus (the learning and memorization section) is larger than the males, and works differently. Activity in the amygdala (deep seated emotional section) is also different. The right side exclusively lights up in males viewing emotional material. The left side exclusively lights up in females. The two hemispheres of a female's brain talk to each other more than in males.

These are marked differences, but you can see how together they make a whole. *Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother, and will join with his wife, and they will be one flesh* (Genesis 2:24). Males and females were made to be together because we are less when we are alone (Genesis 2:18). It is not a dominant relationship. One is not better than the other. But there is a spiritually authoritative relationship (Genesis 3:16). This is nothing untoward. We accept these authority issues in our societies all the time (presidents and vice presidents, CEOs and the board of directors, managers and employees, etc). Why we get so bent out of shape about it when it comes to males and females I have never understood.

When it comes to the body of Christ, the same principles exist. There is a spiritual chain of command - just like in the Godhead (Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 8:6). There are similarities - we all have the spirit of Christ and have the same faith (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:9, 12:3). And there are differences - one body, but many parts making it up (1 Corinthians 12:14-27).

"When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. When one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."

We're not islands, individuals, or lone wolves. The world is obsessed with position and placement. We as believers shouldn't be. *Those parts of the body which we think to be less honourable, on those we bestow more abundant honor; and our unpresentable parts have more abundant modesty, while our presentable parts have no such need. But God composed the body together, giving more abundant honor to the inferior part, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. When one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. When one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it* (1 Corinthians 12:23-26).

We all have different roles (Ephesians 4:11-12). We're not the same. We're not meant to be. *For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members don't have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another, having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us: if prophecy, let's prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or service, let's give ourselves to service; or he who teaches, to his teaching; or he who exhorts, to his exhorting; he who gives, let him do it with generosity; he who rules, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness* (Romans 12:4-8).

What we are meant to be is supportive. Loving. It is the second most important command that we have been given by the Lord (John 13:34-35). We do that by being affectionate to one another in deed as well as in words (Romans 12:9-13). Supporting one another in all the ways that we need - without judging (James 4:11-12). We're meant to work together, build each other up, instruct each other, correct each other by the leading of the Holy Spirit, and lift one another up (Ephesians 4:11-16). We should do it more

and more as time goes on (Hebrews 10:24-25), not looking for a particular level of blessing or generosity or teaching to stop at. It is an ongoing labour of love in love.

For God didn't appoint us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Therefore exhort one another, and build each other up, even as you also do. But we beg you, brothers, to know those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to respect and honor them in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves. We exhort you, brothers: Admonish the disorderly; encourage the faint-hearted; support the weak; be patient toward all. See that no one returns evil for evil to anyone, but always follow after that which is good for one another and for all (1 Thessalonians 5:9-15).

It's not a chore. It's not a burden. It's a sacred calling. It's also common sense. Who would let a part of their body atrophy away on purpose? We all want all the parts of ourselves to work as they were designed. Our spiritual body in Christ Jesus should be even more. We are all in Him, so we should all work together. Celebrating our differences and bonding over our sameness. One flock. Full of individuals of purpose. Known as the ones who love.



Selective Grazers

Only three. That's how many types of teeth sheep have. Humans have five, but sheep do just fine on three. They have incisors for cutting and biting, premolars, and then molars - both of which are for chewing and grinding their food. There is a large gap between the incisors and the premolars because they have no canines. Instead, they have a flat plate (a kind of toothless dental pad) on top of their bottom incisors that helps them to grab and chew grass.

In fact, they can be quite precise in their grazing selections. Because of their mouth shape and tooth gap they can graze very close to the ground. They can select what they want to bite off, and can get nutrients out of thicker feed. They spend about seven hours a day grazing. That time is broken up between grazing and resting (or digesting). They only sleep about four hours a day.

Sheep are ruminants and have four digestive organs (the rumen, reticulum, omasum, and abomasum). The rumen is the first digestive organ and where the name comes from. It is the largest of their reservoirs and is on the left part of their abdomen. It is about 75% of their total digestive tract and holds about 60% of its volume. Like all ruminants, they eat then regurgitate, chew some more, and swallow again. This happens several times and is called ruminating or chewing the cud. The microbes in the rumen and the chewing/re-chewing process enables the sheep's system to break down food to get out more nutrients than it would otherwise be able to. It makes normally un-nutritious food, nutritious.

Sheep eat about ten pounds of food a day (0.03 lbs for every pound they weigh). They eat grass, leaves, legumes, and flowering plants. The more variety, the happier they tend to be. However, they CAN survive solely on pasture grass (especially ryegrass) which makes them self-sufficient in the warm months. They do prefer to eat food they can consume quickly. They avoid woody plants and favour softer ones that don't require as much chewing and digesting.

Because of how and what they eat, sheep will often find their own food within a pasture, eating at their own pace. They do not need a lot of monitoring beyond making sure there is the proper ratio of sheep to available space and having nutritious foliage on that ground. In winter, when things can get dicey in the grass department, shepherds need to be more watchful. Sheep eat hay, grains, squash, pumpkins, silage (a type of fermented forage), and sheep feed. Naturally, a lot of that needs to be provided for them. In the wild, sheep can resort to eating bark, twigs, buds, lichens, and mosses. Those in higher mountainous

elevations have adapted to go long periods without food or water.

Lambs feed exclusively on their mother's milk for the first few weeks. Then they add in small amounts of grass or grain. By the time they're six weeks old they only take milk for half their feed. By fourteen weeks they will be fully weaned. After that point they are full flockers and follow their mother, grazing where she grazes and learning the ropes of how and what to eat.

Sheep are versatile, adaptable, and get a LOT of nutrition out of each and every bite. They eat and re-eat, rest and digest, sleep a bit, and start all over again. We can learn a lot from sheep.

Meditate day and night.

The Lord doesn't want us to starve. Not as physical people and not as spiritual people. He also doesn't want us to indulge gluttony. Spiritually, He wants us right where He had us in the garden. To be models of sheep, we need to be grazing when done with our food, and digesting it when we're not. In order to graze, we need a lot of feed. We need to revisit it a lot. And we need to put even the smallest amount to the most use. Sounds messy, but it isn't. It's all about relationship and being particular.

Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand on the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in Yahweh's law. On his law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that produces its fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither. Whatever he does shall prosper. The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment,

nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish (Psalm 1).

When we are spending time in the Word, we get fed. That's what the Lord wants. He wants us fed. It gets into our hearts, which leads us to know Him better (Jeremiah 24:7). We need to meditate on it. Just like a sheep chews, swallows, regurgitates, re-chews, and swallows in a repeated pattern, we too need to repeatedly bring up the Word. Read it. Study what we might not get. Think about it. Ask Holy Spirit for wisdom and guidance. Read it again, maybe in more than one translation. Look at the notes. Think about it. Pray about it. Listen about it. Take our time with it.

The Word is deep and rich. We will never plumb its depths. The Word is multifaceted. There is little if anything in the Word that means just one thing. There's context, there's echoes throughout, there's symbology, there's prophesy, and more than I have room to get into. There's a lot. It's a living thing. A physical manifestation of the Word Himself who in turn also manifested physically (John 1:1-5, 14). If we ask the Lord, He'll reveal more of it to us. Deeper understanding (John 14:26). But we have to get it in us before it can change us - just like food in our physical bodies.

We need to make new patterns. To throw off the thinking of the old us, the pre-saved us, and put on the Lord Jesus (Romans 13:11-14). Once we are in Him, we need to follow His lead. It's a mindful decision to look for the good things of God and fill our mental lives with them (Philippians 4:8). That will automatically start to bring the rest of our lives into line with His thinking (as clearly outlined in the Word).

We need to graze more than we sleep. Actively ruminating (or meditating) on the things of the Lord (Joshua 1:8).

"Test all things, and hold firmly that which is good."

God has given us His righteous spirit by which we can measure everything that comes at us. He doesn't want us to graze on any and everything. He wants us to be discerning. Just because it looks or sounds good, doesn't make it beneficial (1 Corinthians 10:23). Just because someone is a believer, doesn't mean that they have it right every time. We all miss it. God wants us testing everything we come across.

Always rejoice. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus toward you. Don't quench the Spirit. Don't despise prophecies. Test all things, and hold firmly that which is good. Abstain from every form of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22). God wants us particular. And firm. If it is not of Him, turn away. This isn't about cutting quality from your life. It is about making sure what is in your life - in EVERY area - is HIS quality. Let's face it. His quality is far better than ours any day (Ephesians 1:3-6).

Sometimes we need to really think on something. Really examine a portion of scripture to see not just what it means but how to make it part of our lives. Prayer and fasting is a great way to do this. To avoid something (food, drink, social media, etc) in order to spend the time we would be focusing on that focusing on the Lord. Remember, if you have medical issues or don't have experience with food/drink fasting you should consult your doctor. Also, the Holy

Spirit won't lead you wrong so check in with Him before anyone.

We need to grab what our spirit needs because what our spirit needs the rest of us needs too. God blesses our bread and water when we serve Him (Exodus 23:25). The Lord's Supper (Communion) is also a blessing of bread and fluid symbolizing a spiritual meal (Luke 22:19-20). Jesus is our living bread of life (John 6:35-40, 43-51). Jesus is our living water of life (John 6:53-58, 4:13-14, 7:37-38). We need to eat and drink Jesus on every level that we can. We need to do it daily. And we need to ruminate on it like we had four stomachs - mind, heart, body, spirit for instance - to squeeze every ounce of meaning, life, blessing, instruction, and correction out of each and every verse of the Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It's the healthy, sheepish thing to do.



Sheep For Service

We've been given all the tools we need to succeed. There is nothing that the Lord hasn't planned for (Ephesians 1:11, Isaiah 46:10). He made us carefully, male and female, with no mistakes (Psalm 139:13-14). When we went wrong, the Father sent the Son (John 3:16-18), the Son hunted us down until He found us (Luke 15:4-7), Jesus returned us to the flock (Psalm 50:5), paid the price for sin (Ephesians 1:7, 1 Peter 2:24), sealed us with His blood in a new covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:11-15), and the Father sent to us the Holy Spirit to be our constant companion, helper, guide, and teacher (Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:18, Matthew 10:19-20, John 16:13). We are equipped with all the values of the Lord IN JESUS (Galatians 5:22-23).

On our own, we are nothing. This cannot be denied.

Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch can't bear fruit by

itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (John 15:4-5). We should always stay humble because of that. We are nothing on our own. But God loved us too much to leave us that way. We are no longer sinners. We are no longer losers. We are no longer nothing. As new creations IN JESUS we are everything because it is IN Jesus, BY Jesus, THROUGH Jesus, and FOR Jesus that we accomplish the purposes the Father has called us to.

5 lies about why believers are called sheep.

Don't let religious thinking keep you out of your legal right of inheritance (Isaiah 54:17). Don't take YOU'RE NOT for an answer. With the Lord, all things are possible. IN JESUS we are overcomers. *Be careful that you don't let anyone rob you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the elemental spirits of the world, and not after Christ. For in him all the fullness of the Deity dwells bodily, and in him you are made full, who is the head of all principality and power. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the sins of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead* (Colossians 2:8-12). Listen to what the LORD says about you, not what ANYONE else does.

1) We are defenseless. It's true a sheep is pretty defenseless. No offensive weapons. They're pretty placid and don't really use what capabilities they do have. They

CAN kick. They CAN bite. Not much good against a bear or a lion. There's a tendency toward docility, but it isn't from weakness. Domestic animals have a tendency toward docility because we have bred them and conditioned them not to defend themselves and have all their needs met. Sheep in the wild have more vibrant personalities in the defense department, but they still flee from predators (rapid flight is the key). But they bond into a flock and move as a group. That flocking behaviour protects them from predators. The males often have long, curved horns that they're not shy in using.

Why is this defenselessness a lie? Because we are strong in the might of the Lord, not ourselves and not meant to be (Ephesians 6:10-11). The Lord gave us HIS armour and empowered us to utilize it to keep ourselves safe from attack (Ephesians 6:13-18). In fact, we have so many tools available to us as we abide in Jesus that we have to DECIDE to sin. That's how redeemed and protected we are. We don't sin by nature anymore. It is ALWAYS a choice. We are so armoured against sin that if we submit to God and stand on the Word we won't HAVE to defend ourselves. The devil will flee from US (James 4:6-8).

We're to rule and reign in this life, not be dominated and reigned over (Genesis 4:7). We're equipped to fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12), not live in the defeat of fear (2 Timothy 1:7). At the same time we're instructed to flee immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18-20, 2 Timothy 2:22). To flee rapidly, without thinking about it. We're to keep ourselves from dwelling on evil (Psalm 5:4-7, 2 Corinthians 5:9-10, Galatians 5:19-21). We're to bind up our unhelpful, unhealthy spiritual tendencies and permit the Lord to do what HE wills in our lives (Matthew 18:18-20).

We're called to flock together and leverage that sheepish behaviour to our advantage. To not forsake gathering together (Hebrews 10:25, Matthew 18:20). To lift each other up in every way possible (Colossians 3:14-16, Ephesians 5:15-21). Those who faith together should flock together, for there Jesus will be also. And what sheep doesn't want to be with a Good Shepherd?

2) We follow without thinking. Sheep aren't lemmings. Even lemmings aren't lemmings (Yes, that nature film lied to you. Look it up). They flock together for safety in numbers and to utilize their desire to defend each other. One sheep isn't a threat, but a dozen could trample you to death if they were motivated. They follow leaders and shepherds, but from trust. Not blind obedience. They make bonds and rely on those bonds. We're called to the same behaviour.

The Lord tells us to test ALL things (1 Thessalonians 5:21). That isn't blindness. That isn't believe everything you hear. That's test it out, track it down, research it, and go to God with it. Even when dealing with the Lord Himself He doesn't say follow blindly. *"Come now, and let's reason together," says Yahweh: "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured with the sword; for Yahweh's mouth has spoken it* (Isaiah 1:18-20). The Lord is looking for obedient free thinkers, not mindless automatons - that's what the world wants.

We're to examine not only what is coming at us, but we are to also examine ourselves. Consistently. Deeply. Leaving no motivation or word unturned (2 Corinthians 13:5). We

are to be ever-watchful that we don't start listening to anything but Him (1 Peter 5:8-11). God doesn't want drones or clones. He values diversity within the Body of Christ. He wants us to freely choose obedience so that He can fill us with the knowledge of Himself (Colossians 1:9-14). He wants to expand our horizons, not shrink them. Working from light and knowledge, not darkness and ignorance - or complacency.

3) We'll settle for whatever we have. Sheep who are thirsty have been known to drink from any collection of fluid that presents itself. BUT, remember that their sense of smell is far superior to ours - they consistently avoid things that are detrimental to their health. And that their systems are conditioned to handle bacterium we have conditioned ourselves not to. Since domesticated sheep are dependent on human shepherds, they have learned to get what they can when they can because we are not always dependable. But their own nature and senses help protect them from doing self-harm.

Do we have to settle? By no means. Not unless we're disobedient and rebellious children. The Lord wants to bless us no matter which direction we're walking: in or out (Deuteronomy 28:1-14). In all things He wants to see us blessed. We have to be obedient. We have to seek Him first (Matthew 6:33). We need to maintain the Lord before our eyes and our spiritual lives healthy (3 John 1:2).

Our spiritual senses should be connected to Jesus (John 15:5). This enables us to prevent spiritual self harm by focusing on God and keeping the guiding light of the Word before our feet (Psalm 119:105). When we see evil, we will be able to kick it from our path because we are in Him and He is in us (Romans 12:21, 1 John 4:4). We never need to

"settle" because the riches of the Kingdom have been laid before the Father's Beloved and obedient children already (Deuteronomy 30:19-20, 1 Peter 4:14, Ephesians 1:3-6).

"Yahweh of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge."

4) We cannot care for ourselves. Domesticated sheep have been bred over the centuries (since about 5,000 BC) for total dependence on their shepherds. We wanted docile animals who did exactly what we wanted and gave us exactly what we wanted. We've done so well, they'll suffer and die without us to take care of them (Domestic sheep MUST be sheered. Wild sheep moult). Total control. God doesn't want that.

Yahweh God Almighty wants partnership and fellowship with humanity. Yes, He requires obedience. Not from our inability to function or His desire to control. Obedience because we recognize His total Righteousness, completeness, and Godhood (1 Chronicles 16:25, Psalm 145:17, Zechariah 8:8, John 1:1-5, Ephesians 4:6). The fact is that He deserves our obedience and worship by His very nature. He IS (Exodus 3:14, John 6:20; 8:48-58). All we need to do is to be still in our spirit and we will know that. In our obedience and worship He wants us functional, and He calls us to that (Colossians 3:23-24).

"Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth." Yahweh of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge (Psalm 46:10-11). Knowing He is God and He is Above All, we are called to four simple actions of self-care: We are to repent when we miss it (1 John 1:5-9); we are to prepare ourselves for action

as He calls us (1 Peter 1:13-16); we are to hide from danger that we can easily avoid, guarding our souls (Proverbs 22:3-5); and we are to press on toward our goal not drifting to the left or the right (Proverbs 4:23-27, Philippians 3:14).

5) Cannot get up without help. Sheep cannot get up when they fall over on their backs, but it is not because of any failing of the sheep itself. It is because we have bred them to grow such a weight of wool that it makes them both unbalanced and unable to rise with ease. Wild sheep (and certain types of "hair" breeds like the Katahdin - farmsanctuary.org) will naturally moult their coarse winter coats as the weather warms up. Then they scratch their bodies against trees and rub away their extra fluff. The enemy wants us to believe our burdens are too heavy for us. So heavy NO ONE can lift us.

We are instructed to cast our cares on Jesus (1 Peter 5:7). We're circled by the Armies of Heaven (2 Kings 6:17-20). *I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from Yahweh, who made heaven and earth* (Psalm 121:1-2). We're to store the Word up in our hearts (Psalm 119:11) because whatever is in our heart is where we are going to go. We're told not to be anxious, not to be troubled, and not to fear (over 365 times we're told not to fear or to have peace - check out our social media channels for more). We have been given HIS peace (John 14:26-27).

Instead, by Grace through Faith we have available to us all the Fruits of the Spirit with which we are able to navigate all the situations we encounter with life (Galatians 5:22-26). We have indwelling in us the Holy Spirit to give us the words, correction, and guidance we need to use that

fruit effectively. We are empowered to be the help we need
IN JESUS (Philippians 4:13).



Equipped To Strive

On our own we are nothing. But we have been equipped. We're not what we started as. We're not who we were. We are new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17). We may be sheep, but we're sheep who are soldiers. We first called the Lord our shepherd. He smiled and lovingly called us His sheep. Not the negative, altered, and docile version humanity has created. But the capable, clever, bonding, emotional, intelligent creatures that He first created (Genesis 1:24-25). We are caretakers of the precious gift of freewill and faith He has gifted us with. Together, one body and one flock in Jesus our Lord, we can strive to where He is calling us.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good. In love of the brothers be tenderly affectionate to one another; in honor prefer one another, not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,

rejoicing in hope, enduring in troubles, continuing steadfastly in prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, and given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless, and don't curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Don't set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Don't be wise in your own conceits. Repay no one evil for evil. Respect what is honorable in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at peace with all men. Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved, but give place to God's wrath. For it is written, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord." Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head." Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:9-21).

Paul's prayers for his flock are my prayers for you. I speak them over you now hoping you'll take them up as daily prayers - offered honestly with all desire and eager expectation of their fulfilment. May you be blessed as you graze and continue as a cherished member of the flock of the Good Shepherd, the Great I AM (John 6:20; 10:11,14).

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all

rule, authority, power, dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come (Ephesians 1:17-21). I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that you may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strengthened to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, and to know Christ's love which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be the glory in the assembly and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:14b-21).



My Cup Runs Over (Psalm 23)

Yahweh is my shepherd; I shall lack nothing
(Matthew 6:33)

He makes me lie down in green pastures (John 6:10)

He leads me beside still waters (John 4:13-14)

He restores my soul. (Isaiah 40:31)

He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me. (Proverbs 3:25-26)

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. (Isaiah 25:6, Job 36:16)

You anoint my head with oil. (2 Corinthians 1:21, 1 John 2:20)

My cup runs over. (Luke 6:38)

Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, (Psalm 103:8, Psalm 91:14-16)

And I will dwell in Yahweh's house forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

About the Author



No Fear

John 6:20

Disciples of Jesus is a multimedia ministry run by a husband and wife team. They're located on social media under the Fear No Fear banner, which came about from the idea of 366 verses that command, instruct, and direct us away from fear into God's peace. A year of not fearing - even if it's leap year! Other projects are underway and will be posted through our social media addresses:

Recordings: audio.com/fear-no-fear

Facebook: [@FearNoFearAtAll](https://facebook.com/FearNoFearAtAll)

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