

### Chapter 3 - Green Pastures For Refreshing Sleep

My Shepherd makes me lie down in green pastures beside still water. Psalms 23:2.

This pastoral scene invites most sheep, and elderly humans, to accept the invitation for a nap. However, many sheep, and humans, regardless of age, find it almost impossible to sleep.

Max Lucado writes in his book, *Traveling Light*, that insomnia is a major health problem for millions of people. In spite of memory foam mattresses, sculptured pillows, and relaxing music, some people cannot get a good night's sleep. He says, "Since 70 million Americans aren't sleeping enough, that means one-third of our country is dozing off at work, napping through class, or sleeping at the wheel of a vehicle. Thirty tons of aspirins, sleeping pills and tranquilizers are consumed every day! The energy gauge on the dashboard of our forehead says empty."

Philip Keller tells us in, *A Shepherd Looks At Psalms 23*, that sheep have a similar problem. He lists four requirements that sheep must have in order for them to lie down and sleep. It is obvious that humans share these same symptoms.

"Owing to their timidity sheep refuse to lie down unless they are free of fear.

"Because of the social behavior within the flock, sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind.

"If tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. Only when free of these pests can they relax.

"Lastly, sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free from hunger."

Among sheep, the flock that is restless, discontented, always agitated and disturbed never does well. It also applies to churches.

I was pastor of local churches for 30 years and notice a strong similarity between church members and sheep. I recall an interesting conversation with a church member who complained that our attendance was dropping off. It is significant that he had recently resigned as an unsuccessful pastor of a church that was about to close its doors. He began sharing his concerns with these words: "Pastor, since my wife and I joined this church several months ago, we have noticed that the attendance has steadily declined. I feel that God wants me to make you aware that there is a growing discontent with your ministry here in this congregation."

It was later revealed that he and his wife had been backstabbing me, and that may have caused the drop in attendance. He is now in secular work.

Today pastors, priests and rabbis are God's under-shepherds. They are highly responsible, but not totally responsible, for the well being of parishioners. Shepherds in Bible days were totally responsible for the care of their sheep. They often had to clear the land, plow it, plant the seed, and water it in order to provide green pastures. He provided everything they needed.

As a retired clinical chaplain I visit many churches in this area. I often see and hear agitation, tension, rivalry and bickering in various congregations. I am convinced that parishioners, who cannot find rest, have taken their eyes off of the Great Shepherd.

Keller says, "I came to realize that nothing so quieted, and reassured the sheep, as to see me in the field. The presence of the master, the owner, the protector put them at ease as nothing else could. And this applied night or day."

There is no substitute for the knowledge that Christ, our Shepherd, is present among us. Christians, like sheep will rest better when we are free of fear, pests, friction, and hunger.

"You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You." Isa. 26:3