

The Good Shepherd For Downcast Sheep

Psalms 23:3 “He restores my soul.”

As I started this article I got an email from a dear friend telling me that her mother had died only a few hours before. She is possibly experiencing many strong feelings. She may feel temporarily downcast, saddened, exhausted, immobilized, disheartened, powerless, and generally miserable. She has a positive attitude but these feelings can momentarily depress a strong person.

This is what the psalmist meant when he said “The Lord restores my soul.” When in the midst of life’s ordinariness we face situations that drain our energy, we may feel overwhelmed, helpless and lost. Our soul needs to be recharged with energy.

Our soul describes the essence of who we are. It is the essential energy at the core of our being; it is our life energy. It is not a disembodied part of us but is the sum total of who we are as a person. “He restores my soul” literally means, “He renews my life.”

God renews us when we are physically, emotionally and spiritually out of energy. We become stalled like an excellent car that is simply out of gas or the battery is down.

Every normal human being, including Christians, get slammed when we feel that we don’t fit; we feel isolated and lonely; we get bogged down with worry or anxiety; we feel inadequate and vulnerable. When this happens our creativity dries up, our imagination is stifled, and our soul fades.

Even David, the writer of this psalm had times when he was downcast. Psalms 42:11 reveals this when he asks: “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God...”

The term “cast” is a very informative shepherd’s term. It is the term used for a sheep that has gotten itself turned on its back and cannot get on its feet by itself. A cast sheep is helpless and pathetic. Lying on its back, its feet in the air, it flays away frantically struggling to stand up, without success. Unless the shepherd arrives quickly to lift the animal upright, the animal will die and become easy pray for predators.

The sheep most likely to become cast have long fleece, are heavy and round with fat. They will lie down in a low place or hollow spot. When they stretch out, their weight may cause them to roll over onto their back and they can’t get on their feet. They become cast.

Shepherds continually count their sheep to prevent one from becoming cast. When the shepherd finds a sheep that is down, he will immediately leave the flock to rescue the cast sheep.

There is a false belief that if a Christian strays off and becomes downcast, that God will put them on a shelf of uselessness, ignore them, or throw them out and forsake them.

The hymn, “The Ninety and Nine,” by Ira Sankey and Elizabeth Clephane, truly portrays the Good Shepherd.

“There were ninety and nine that safely lay in the shelter of the fold. But one was out on the hills away, far off from the gates of gold. Away on the mountains wild and bare, away from the tender Shepherd’s care. Away from the tender Shepherd’s care.

“But all thro’ the mountains, thunder riven, and up from the rocky steep, there arose a glad cry to the gates of heaven, “Rejoice! I have found my sheep!” And the angels echoed around the throne, “Rejoice for the Lord brings back His own! Rejoice, for the Lord brings back his own!”

If you are downcast, look up! The Lord is looking for you.