

# Dear Good Shepherd, I'm Feeling Sheepish



■ by Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT

*“All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.*

*We have left God’s paths to follow our own.” -Isaiah 53:6a*

**A new year calls for change. We evaluate our hearts and minds.**

Pride demands perfection. God requires complete holiness. Christians desire God’s approval, but our human nature cannot be flawless. We fall short and condemn ourselves. When I see my failures, I feel sheepish. “Sheepish” means feeling “embarrassed or bashful, as by having done something wrong or foolish”, or being “like sheep, as in meekness, docility, etc.” ([www.dictionary.com/browse/sheepish](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/sheepish)). We lose self-condemnation when we trust the Good Shepherd to rescue, guide, and protect us.

## **Sheep Need a Shepherd**

I need God. One insight moment occurred October 13, 1984. My parents, husband, and I decided to enjoy the fall splendor of the Rocky Mountains. We set off for Devil’s Head, an active fire-watch tower with 360 degrees of amazing views. Our determination knew no bounds — we even moved a small, fallen sapling that blocked the road. We made amazing discoveries over the next 24 hours:

- Unexpected blizzards occur in Colorado in mid-October.
- Mountain roads become very slick in snow.
- Saplings can keep cars from sliding down the mountainside.
- Rangers leave the mountaintop after fire season ends.
- Emergency CB broadcast “skips” occur, making extremely isolated emergencies discoverable.
- A good-hearted ranger will spend a night in his Jeep to give comfort and safety directions while arranging for rescue attempts.
- Although snowplows and snowmobiles work poorly in two feet of mountainous snow (with three-foot drifts), Sno-Cats work well.

The ranger supplied some necessary information. We discovered the moved tree was really a ranger-placed roadblock. I professed relief regarding bears’ hibernation — however, I then learned they were not hibernating. I realized my sheep-likeness, and my embarrassment soared.

Sheep are foolish. They wander away, paying no heed to the shepherd’s direction. Lone sheep may go hungry or thirsty. They easily find danger, yet they continue straying. Sheep return only when shepherds bring them home again. According to the Apostle John,

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Photo courtesy of Debi Mitchell

Jesus called himself “the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14). King David knew it, too (Psalm 23:1). David said, “I have wandered away like a lost sheep; come and find me, for I have not forgotten your commands” (Psalm 119:176).

## The Good Shepherd Rescues Us

Our embarrassment causes resistance. Yet our Shepherd knew our sins, failures, and faults before he volunteered to rescue us. He loves us (Romans 5:8). Jesus will leave 99 sheep safely home to rescue the wandering one (Matthew 18:12-14; Luke 15:4-7).

Jesus rescued us through his death and resurrection (John 3:16; John 14:6; 1 Peter 2:24). Jesus rescued us from self-condemnation (Romans 8:1; 1 John 3:20). He rescued us from our enemies, sin and death (Romans 6:4, 6). He brought us home as his children and heirs (Romans 8:15-17). So, we're rescued. How do we avoid more sheepishness? Our mountaintop rescue resulted in deep appreciation. The Good Shepherd's rescue resulted in trust.

## Trusting the Good Shepherd

Depending on a stranger brought anxiety. Our anxiety eased as the ranger maintained frequent contact. We learned we could trust him. King Solomon said, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take” (Proverbs 3:5-6). Consider this. Can sheep follow someone if they don't know what he looks like? Sounds like? No more than we can follow a car if we don't know which car we're supposed to follow. Trusting the Shepherd requires knowing him. This means we must ask for and seek out God. He leads us to good paths.



Photo courtesy of Debi Mitchell

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find... For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds...” (Matthew 7:7a, 8a). I changed my pre-devotion prayers by starting with, “God, please show me who you are.” Then I opened my Bible and began reading. I rarely read more than a chapter, and I frequently read much less before God opens my eyes to see him more clearly. I love music, and good Christian music opens my heart and soul to him. My trust grows. Step by step, he brings me closer. Trust the Good Shepherd. Know you fail, but hear his love. Find his acceptance. Please don't condemn yourself. Trust him and be rescued. Come and rejoice with the rest of the herd. We can rest safe in our Shepherd's care.

P.S., I remain foolish, but I rejoice in this: **“But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...” (1 Corinthians 1:27a).** ■

*Debi Mitchell, MS, LMFT, is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and sees clients in our Schererville, IN, location.*



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