

# THE GOOD SHEPHERD

*“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” —ACTS 26:14*

What did Jesus mean when He said to Saul, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads?” Goads are sharply pointed sticks or rods that were a common tool used in primitive societies for prodding and directing oxen. When Jesus said this, Saul was on his way to Damascus to round up and imprison believers in Christ. This new faith had drastically demeaned his expectations of the Messiah, and was not only highly offensive to centuries of Jewish faith, but to God, Himself. Saul fully believed he was on a mission that would please God.

Goads, of course, are painful to the oxen, but they’re used to prod them in the right direction. Jesus had brought Saul to the painful point of kicking against the goads. He had closed him in, causing something like scales to form on his eyes and for three days, Saul walked in darkness, but he walked in the right direction. When he arrived in Damascus, it was with Christ’s agenda, not his own. This marked the beginning of a life that would experience God. A fiercely driven arch enemy of the church, Saul became the great Apostle Paul; a crusader for Christ who would blaze a trail throughout the Mediterranean world, bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles.

God has not promised us a life floating six inches off the ground. Sometimes we need a little goading and prodding, usually when we’ve strayed from God’s will. He’ll allow us to head into the deserts, storms and battle grounds, because it’s in them we acknowledge our failures and weaknesses, which God will then use to drive us back to dependence

on Him. Any notion that we can get rid of them if we just believe God for that puts us in danger of forgetting who Jesus Christ really is, and what His work really is. We can turn Him into a super psychologist, physician or pain reliever, but then our lives tend to be all about us, and not about Him. Jesus is our Saviour first, but essential ingredients of the Christian life; love, trust, obedience and dependence are so often stimulated and maintained through trouble, not ease.

Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 12:11, “The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings are like firmly embedded nails - given by one Shepherd.” It’s the tough and trying times that will ultimately enrich us, as we experience more and more of God, Himself. The hard times, as well as the good, are the agents of the Good Shepherd, who is goading and nailing us into something we would never be if we just lived on the easy plain.

***PRAYER: Dear Lord, I pray that I remain in your will, but if I slide off track, use whatever goading is required to bring me back to You. Thank You, Lord.***

***TO REFLECT UPON: What difficult times have I experienced that has realigned me with God in a deeper way?***