

:: summary

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” These are probably familiar words which are commonly used in both real funerals and depictions of funerals for TV and movies, but what do they really mean? The closest most urban and suburban dwellers have been to sheep is the county fair. Sheep belong to a shepherd, who is devoted to feeding, protecting and caring for the flock. A hired hand will help a shepherd but abandon the sheep at the first sign of trouble. God is our shepherd, not the hired hand.

:: discussion

While shepherding is one of the oldest professions in the world and common among many heroes of the Bible, it is not very common in the developed world. The word “shepherd” is literally the words “sheep” and “herder” put together, and has an equally literal meaning. Maybe most of us have not tended sheep before, but if you have ever been in a position of caring for someone else and putting their welfare before yours, then you know something of what being a shepherd means.

Have you ever had to take on the role of a shepherd for someone else? What did that look like?

Read John 10:11-18

When we call God our shepherd it doesn't mean He's a cosmic sheep herder – it's an expression of His perfectly good character. Because God exceeds the limitations of human language and thought in every way, He often uses human imagery to help us understand what He is like, which means no human flaw applies to God and every good trait about a shepherd is infinitely truer of God. So when Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd, he is calling himself *Yahweh Ro'i*, which means “the Lord is my shepherd” and tells us that the ideal of all those shepherding traits applies to Him as God.

If you consider the traits listed in verses, which particularly resonate with you and why?

Read John 10:27-30

On another occasion Jesus explained his work as a shepherd. What Jesus said provided more than provide a job description – he has revealed to us the purpose of His work, which also reveals his nature or his essence.

When you consider what Jesus has revealed in these words, what has God revealed of Himself to us?

Read Psalm 23

These words of praise provide a beautiful picture of what Jesus meant when he said that he is the Good Shepherd. The phrase “I shall not want,” sometimes translated “I lack nothing,” describes the way that we as sheep will be taken care of by our shepherd. The “rod” and “staff” are tools of the trade for a shepherd, and are used for protecting, disciplining, guiding and gathering the sheep close to himself.

Where do you find images of provision, protection, discipline, guidance or gathering in this psalm?

God is *Yahweh Ro'i* - The Lord is your shepherd. You shall not want. No matter what happens in life, you are never outside of His reach or His care. Like a good and perfect shepherd, He knows you by name and He has already laid down His life for you in the crucifixion of Jesus so that by faith He can gather you to Himself eternally in heaven.

