

## THE SHEPHERD PSALM

by

William Evans

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### CHAPTER THREE

**"He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake"  
(Psalm 23:3).**

David, the shepherd Psalmist, is doubtless thinking of the refreshment that comes to the soul from browsing or meditating in the green pastures and by the still waters of the Word of GOD, and of the exhilaration and inspiration that comes from being alone with GOD with an open Bible and on bended knee. Every true child of GOD knows the strength and blessing that comes from such fellowship and communion. **"Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint"** (Isaiah 40:30-31).

But the Psalmist is referring more particularly, perhaps, to the restoration of the soul from a spiritual lapse or backsliding, resulting from failure to **"lie down."** We well know from what we have read regarding the Oriental shepherd life, that the shepherd must needs be a physician as well as a guide. A sheep is a most defenseless creature. A cat, horse, cow or a dog will defend itself -- a sheep cannot. Sheep have a genius for going wrong. A sheep is said to have less brains than any other animal of its size. If lost, it cannot find its way back unaided. A dog, a cat, a horse can, but not a sheep. **"All we, like sheep, have gone astray."** If the Good Shepherd had not gone after us we would not have been in the fold today.

Have you ever looked into a sheep's eyes? They look for all the world like glass eyes. A sheep can see practically nothing beyond ten or fifteen yards. It recognizes persons by sound and not by sight. JESUS said, **"My sheep hear my voice; a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers."**

### TRAPS FOR FALLING

Palestinian fields were covered with narrow criss-cross paths over which the shepherd would have to lead his flock in seeking new pasture. Some of these paths led to a precipice or deep ravine over which a stupid sheep might easily fall to its death. From such dangers the shepherd had to guard his flock. Some sheep, however, being wayward by nature would take one of these criss-cross paths leading to danger and fall headlong into thickets or down ravines, where they would lie wounded, bleeding and dying. What does a stupid sheep know of ravines, precipices or haunts of wild beasts? That hill or valley seems to offer fair prospects and good pasture -- but death lurks there. The sheep knows not. The shepherd would have to seek the lost, wounded sheep, and, finding it, bind up its wounds, reset broken limbs and restore its health.

It is said that if a sheep wandered into a stranger's pasture the finder could cut its throat and keep the carcass, providing the shepherd did not come in time to save the sheep. Many times the shepherd arrived just after the sheep had been mutilated, and by care saved its life and restored it to health again. The sheep was again his own -- it was "restored."

## THE WANDERING SHEEP

David is spiritually soliloquizing. He thinks of the tendency of human nature to err and stray like a sheep. "**All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.**" Man, too, has a genius for going wrong. "**There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.**" No man is clever enough to guide himself through the devious ways of life. He needs GOD as a guide.

David recalls how tenderly GOD had dealt with him after his backslidings and how graciously and completely He had restored him to fellowship.

How gently CHRIST deals with the backslider! When John the Baptist temporarily wavered in his conception of the mission of CHRIST, and sent his disciples to JESUS to ask, "**Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?**" how tenderly CHRIST dealt with His forerunner! The circumstances in the case might have led us to expect harsh treatment. John had seen the open heavens and heard the voice of GOD saying, "**This is my beloved Son.**" In a special and miraculous way it had been revealed to John that JESUS is the MESSIAH, "**the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world!**" The people had looked upon John as a prophet. All that he had said concerning CHRIST they had believed, and now from the forerunner of CHRIST comes this message of doubt repeated to JESUS within the hearing of the multitudes. But that child of the desert had been incarcerated for some time in a narrow prison cell. No wonder the eyes of the caged eagle began to film, and the faith of the stern prophet began to waver. Other great men have wavered in their faith before John. David himself said, even though GOD had definitely promised that he should succeed Saul as king, "**I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul.**" Elijah, after his great triumph over the four hundred prophets of Baal, sat down under a juniper tree, and full of fear because of Jezebel's threat asked disconsolately that he might die. No wonder then that, momentarily, the faith of John the Baptist was in the shadow. You and I have failed in faith amid circumstances less trying than those which surrounded John the Baptist in his dungeon.

## THE GENTLENESS OF THE SHEPHERD

How does JESUS answer John? Does He curse the doubter? No. That would not be like Him. He has never been known to do that. Not once, so far as we know, did He ever send a message of censure to a soul in the dungeon of darkness, doubt, and despair. We have seen Him blast, with the lightning of His eloquence, the false pride of scribe and Pharisee who stood before Him in haughtiness and scorn, but we never knew Him to say a harsh word to a creature that was sore stricken in soul. No, "**He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax.**" No, He will not send a curse; He will send a blessing. That will be more like Him. He will say, "**Go tell John again those things that ye do see and hear; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the dead are raised, the poor are evangelized, and blessed is**

**he that shall not be offended in me."** Not a curse, but a blessing will He send.

How much like His treatment of us! Do we not remember when we first came to Him as our Saviour, how He forgave, freely and gladly, all our sins, and sent us on our way rejoicing? Do we not recall how shortly after, when we had sinned and spotted the clean white sheet of paper He had given us, that when we brought it back to Him all spotted with sin He freely pardoned, gave us another clean sheet, and, without upbraiding, sent us away, saying, "Thy sins are forgiven; sin no more"? Yes, we recall it. We believe in the deity of CHRIST, not because of the metaphysical arguments that have been produced to prove it, no matter how elaborately stated or eloquently discussed; not because our library shelves are groaning beneath the weight of evidences of His deity; nor because theologians are said to have forced Him to that high eminence. We believe JESUS CHRIST to be GOD because when we sinned and came asking pardon He freely forgave, and gave us a clean sheet of acquittal, saying, "Thy sins are forgiven; go and sin no more"; and then when we did sin again and brought back the sheet of paper all blotted over with sin and said we were sorry and again asked pardon, He freely forgave, and without chiding sent us on our way rejoicing. That is what makes us believe in Him as the Son of GOD and love Him with a love surpassing expression.

Poor wandering soul, have you fallen by the wayside? Have you become a wayward sheep? Have you wandered from the fold? Are you tossed about, wounded, sick and sore? Do you desire to come back again to the Shepherd's care? Come now, right now, while the throb of passion is still beating high, while the deed of shame is recent; while the blot of sin is still wet; come now; say,

"With all the shame, with all the keen distress,  
Quick, "waiting not," I flee to Thee again;  
Close to the wound, beloved Lord, I press,  
That Thine own precious blood may overflow the stain.

"O precious blood, Lord, let it rest on me!  
I ask not only pardon from my King,  
But cleansing from my Priest, I come to Thee,  
Just as I came at first -- a sinful, helpless thing.

"Oh, cleanse me now, my Lord, I cannot stay  
For evening shadows and a silent hour:  
Now I have sinned, and now with no delay,  
I claim Thy promise and its total power.

"O Saviour, bid me go and sin no more,  
And keep me always 'neath the mighty flow  
Of Thy perpetual fountain, I implore  
That Thy perpetual cleansing I may fully know."

-- Frances Ridley Havergal

O wandering sheep, backslidden soul, may the Saviour find you today, put His strong arms

round about you, bring you back again into the fold, keep you from wandering, teach you all you need to know, until the gloaming, until after having washed the last sleep from your eyes in the river of life, you place your last climbing footstep on the threshold of our Father's house to go out no more.

Callest Thou, O Master, callest Thou thus to me?  
I am weary and heavy laden, and longing to come to Thee;  
And out in the distant darkness Thy dear voice sounds so sweet,  
But I am not worthy, not worthy, O Master, to kiss Thy feet.

"Child!" said the gracious Master, "why turnest thou thus away,  
When I came through the darkness seeking my sheep that have gone astray?  
I know thou art heavy laden, I know thou hast need of me  
And the feet of thy loving Master are weary with seeking thee."

Callest Thou thus, O Master, callest Thou thus to me?  
When my untrimmed lamp is dying and my heart is not meet for Thee;  
For Thou art so great and holy, and mine is so poor a home,  
And I am not worthy, not worthy, O Master, that Thou shouldst come.

"Child," said the tender Shepherd -- and His voice was very sweet --  
"I only ask for a welcome, and rest for my weary feet."  
Then over my lonely threshold, though weak and defiled by sin,  
Though I am not worthy, O Master, I pray Thee enter in.

-- Helen Marion Burnside

### **CHRIST THE RESTORER**

Do I not speak to a soul who once has known CHRIST as the Good Shepherd, but has now wandered away from the fold?

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,  
But yet in love He sought me,  
And on His shoulders gently laid,  
He home rejoicing brought me.

-- Sir Henry W. Baker

May I not remind you of the Master's own parable, "**What man of you, having one hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which has gone astray, until he find it?**" May I impress upon you the words "**until he find it**"? He will not cease the search until He has found the sheep. "**The LORD is my shepherd,**" and "I shall not be missing." "*O love that will not let go.*"

The shepherd stands at the door of the sheepfold and counts the sheep, his one hundred sheep. He counts to ninety-nine. One is missing. He cannot rest until that last one is found. The door of

the sheepfold is closed, and out into the darkness and cold and pain of the night the shepherd goes until he finds his lost sheep, and on his shoulders he carries it back to the fold, then calls upon his neighbors to rejoice with him. He has found his lost sheep.

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.

Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;  
Are they not enough for Thee?  
But the Shepherd made answer, "This of mine  
Has wandered away from me,  
And although the road be rough and steep,  
I go to the desert to find my sheep."

But none of the ransomed ever knew  
How deep were the waters crossed,  
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through  
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.  
Out in the desert He heard its cry --  
Sick and helpless, and ready to die.

Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way  
That mark out the mountain's track?  
They were shed for one who had gone astray  
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.  
Lord, whence are Thy hands so rent and torn?  
They are pierced tonight by many a thorn.

But all through 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 echoes around the throne,  
Rejoice, for the Lord brings back His own!

-- Elizabeth C. Clephane

### **"THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"**

**"He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."**

These words are strikingly significant, and show forth the tender aspect of GOD's guidance. Oftimes, after rain, the heavy wagon wheels would leave deep ruts in the road, which in cold

weather would become hardened and make it difficult for the sheep to walk. Not such roads did the true shepherd willingly choose for his sheep. If compelled, however, to take such roads, he would choose those that had been flattened down by wagon wheels until level. He chose those roads that had been worn smooth, that the tender feet of the sheep might not be bruised. **"He leadeth me in smooth roads." "Thou didst sustain them in the wilderness; their feet swelled not."**

He who follows the divine leading will always be led aright. His feet will travel in "right roads." No man will go wrong who follows CHRIST. He never leads the soul into questionable places, and no feet guided by Him will go into any place where He Himself does not go. **"Where I am, there shall my servant be." "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness." "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."** Sometimes the road He chooses may not be after our liking, but it will always be for our best interest, welfare and usefulness. This fact will eventually be made clear to us, and we will gladly go with Him all the way.

I said, "Let me walk in the field,"  
He said, "No, walk in the town,"  
I said, "There are no flowers there,"  
He said, "No flowers, but a crown."

I said, "But the skies are black;  
There is nothing but noise and din,"  
But He wept as He sent me back --  
"There is more," He said, "there is sin."

I said, "But the air is thick,  
And fogs are veiling the sun,"  
He answered, "Yet souls are sick,  
And souls in the dark, undone."

I said, "I shall miss the light,  
And friends will miss me, they say."  
He answered: "Choose tonight  
If I am to miss you or they."

I pleaded for time to be given.  
He said, "It is hard to decide?  
It will not seem hard in Heaven,  
To have followed the steps of your guide."

I cast one look at the fields,  
Then set my face to the town.  
He said, "My child, do you yield?  
Will you leave the flowers for the crown?"

Then into His hand went mine,

And into my heart came He;  
And I walk in a light divine,  
The paths I had feared to see.

-- George MacDonald

### "HIS NAME'S SAKE"

All this He does **"for His name's sake."** How beautiful those words are, **"for his name's sake."** CHRIST's own glory is involved in the security and care of His children.

- The physician cares for your child who is sick unto death, for your sake, it is true, but for "his own name's sake" as well. To lose your child would hurt his reputation and practice.
- The lawyer protects his client for his client's sake, it is true, but also, and perhaps more so, for his name's sake." To lose the case would be to hurt his standing in the legal profession.
- The pilot guides the ship safely into harbor for the passengers sake, it is true, but more particularly for "his own name's sake," for to lose the ship would be to lose his license.

We remember that JESUS said, **"Father, I will that they also, who thou has given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."** He also said, **"And of all that thou hast given me, I have lost none."** CHRIST Himself is the door. His broad figure and bulk fills it. Who shall strip Him of His power, or rob Him of His sheep? He is the secret of the security of the believer; yea, He is the security itself. We are hid in Him. It is rather the perseverance of the CHRIST than of the believer. Here, then, is the security of the believer, saved and kept for **"His own name's sake."**

How proud we are of someone who is named after us! We have more solicitude and care for the child that carries our name than for other children. For His name's sake, therefore, in an indication of the intense, intimate interest and care of the CHRIST for His people. Do we recall what Moses said to Jehovah when He said He thought to destroy the people of Israel? Did not Moses plead thus with GOD, **"If thou dost destroy them, what shall we say to the nations, and what wilt thou do for thine own name's sake?"**

Shall it not be that in that great day not one of CHRIST's sheep will be missing? **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."** **"The LORD is my Shepherd,"** so we might also say, "I shall not be missing."

CHRIST JESUS hath the power,  
The power to renew,  
The power to cleanse your heart from sin,  
And make you wholly true.  
CHRIST JESUS hath the power  
For evermore to keep;  
Oh, none can pluck you from His hand,  
Or rob Him of His sheep!

-- James M. Gray

## **GOD AS A GUIDE**

What a wonderful truth is asserted in this verse -- "**He leadeth me.**" Meditate just a moment on these words -- "He," GOD, the great and mighty One, the CREATOR of the heavens and the earth, the One who upholdeth all things by the word of His power, the unerring, unchangeable, all-seeing, all-knowing, all-powerful One -- "**He leadeth me**" -- me, poor, trembling, wayward, straying, sinning, fallible, erring son of Adam, unworthy, unfit, not entitled to the least of GOD's blessings; yet, incomprehensible as the truth may seem, GOD in Heaven leads "me" here, on earth. He leadeth me on a journey in which it is so easy of myself to go astray from the right path. Further, He leads, not drives, His sheep. "**He goeth before His own sheep and leadeth them.**" The Good Shepherd will not ask you to go anywhere where He Himself has not gone. He does not drive His children. He leads them.

He leadeth me! Oh! blessed thought,  
Oh, words with heav'nly comfort fraught!  
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,  
Still 'tis GOD's hand that leadeth me.

Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom,  
Sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,  
By waters calm, o'er troubled sea --  
Still 'tis His hand that leadeth me.

Lord, I would clasp Thy hand in mine,  
Nor ever murmur nor repine;  
Content, whatever lot I see,  
Since 'tis my GOD that leadeth me.  
And when my task on earth is done,  
When by Thy grace, the vict'ry's won,  
E'ev death's cold wave I will not flee,  
Since GOD through Jordan leadeth me.

He leadeth me! He leadeth me!  
By His own hand He leadeth me;  
His faithful foll'wer I would be,  
For by His hand He leadeth me.

-- Joseph H. Gilmore

## **KNOWING GOD'S WILL**

GOD's way of guidance varies with different individuals. There is probably no point on which we need more careful instruction than that which concerns the will of GOD for us. We may speak of two wills of GOD. The first concerns our character and may be known by all, for it is

distinctly declared in the Word of GOD in such passages, for example, as, "**This is the will of God, even your sanctification.**" There can be no doubt or hesitancy with regard to knowing what the general will of GOD regarding our character may be.

There is another will of GOD, however, which affects not our character but our career. This particular will of GOD is not as easy to discern as that which touches our character. Others may not know this for me. In the last analysis GOD and I alone must solve the problem of my career. It is true I may consult others and get all the light possible on the question at issue, but ultimately the solution of the matter is to be found in the quiet with the soul and GOD Himself.

### **THREE THINGS ABOUT GUIDANCE**

Three things may be said to indicate clearly the particular will of GOD which concerns my career.

The first comes from a constant and prayerful reading of the Word of GOD, through which GOD will in some way make known to me in particular His will regarding me. The Scripture which decides the matter for me may not have the same meaning to others, but I recognize it to be GOD's will for me. A minister received one day two calls to the pastorate of two churches. One offered a stipend of three thousand dollars a year and manse, and an establish church with nine hundred members, and located under the shadow of a great university. A flattering call indeed. The other invitation was from a struggling suburban church with a membership of seventy-five, and offering a salary of one thousand eight hundred dollars a year. What should the minister do? Which call should he accept? To say there was no struggle in the heart at the time would be to belie the fact. The man of GOD took the two invitations, laid them on the bed, knelt by its side, and put his open Bible in front of him between the two letters. After prayer for guidance and after reading the Word for some time his attention was riveted upon this verse: "**Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate**" (Romans 12:16). He had read that verse before, many times, but somehow he could not get beyond it at this time. To him at that particular time it was indicative of GOD's will. Obediently he chose the smaller church. After years proved the wisdom of the choice. So GOD will in some way indicate to you through the reading of His Word His will for you at that time.

The second element in discerning the will of GOD is what may be called the inward impression, by which we mean the constant, irrepressible, insistent, persistent conviction in the heart of the child of GOD that he ought to do thus and so in a given case. It often happens that a strong impulse comes to a child of GOD. In a day or two that impulse has passed away, and he looks back and sees that he has no assurance that such was the will of GOD for him; but to the obedient soul in communion with the heavenly Father, the constant, irrepressible, insistent and persistent conviction that a certain thing should or should not be done is one of the sure indications of GOD's voice in the soul.

The third feature in discerning the will of GOD is what may be called the favorable circumstance, or the open door. If GOD wants one to go to a certain place or do a certain thing, the opportunity to do it will present with the call to do it. If it is not, then one should wait until the door opens. If the pillar of cloud by day or the pillar of fire by night remains stationary, then Israel must remain in the camp. When these emblems of GOD's guidance lifted and moved, then

Israel knew that it was time for them to more.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still  
Will lead me on  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till  
The night is gone;  
And with the morn those angels faces smile  
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile.

-- John H. Newman

These three things, the Word of GOD, the inward impression, and the open door, should be present in every clear indication of the will of GOD. If any one of them is missing, it indicates that the will of GOD is not yet clear. We have a beautiful illustration of these three things in the call of Peter to admit Cornelius into the Church (Acts 10 and 11). First, Peter had the Word of GOD -- nothing should be regarded common or unclean; second, he had the inward impression -- he was meditating on what the vision he had seen should mean; and third, there was the open door -- three men were already waiting for him to convey him to Caesarea.

Wonderfully instructive is GOD's guidance of the children of Israel by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. In this connection we should recall the words of JESUS when in the Temple, at the time they were celebrating GOD's care for His people in the wilderness in providing them with the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. He said, "**I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.**" CHRIST is our GUIDE; the Word of GOD is our chart. Having them, we may rest assured that GOD who has guided His people in all the ages will guide us safely to the end.

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,  
Hold me with Thy powerful hand;  
Bread of Heaven, feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain  
Whence the healing steam doth flow;  
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through;  
Strong Deliv'rer, be Thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Big my anxious fears subside,  
Bear me through the swelling current,  
Land me safe on Canaan's side:  
Songs of praises I will ever give to Thee.

-- William Williams

~ end of chapter 3 ~