

# FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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**SERMON:** *Shepherds and Sheep*

**SERIES:**

**SCRIPTURES:** *Psalm 23*

**SPEAKER:** *Shaun Kipe*

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*\*Credit to...Dallas Willard (Life Without Lack); Scott Scruggs; W. Phillip Keller;*

Well good morning, it so great to worship with you. Want to say welcome to all of you in this room and also to those of you on-line, at home, tuning in to the live stream.

A number of years ago, Jenny and I participated in a missions trip to Honduras (**PIC OF JENNY AND SHAUN**). We lived there for 6 months. Aside from the usual nerves about living a different culture, one of the realities of going to Honduras is landing at their airport in Tegucigalpa. In prep for this flight, I discovered that Tegucigalpa is rated as the third most dangerous airport to land in, in the world. It's because the city sits right down in the middle of a mountain range, so the plane has to do some circling and maneuvering to land. (**IMAGE OF TEGUC AIRPORT**) And the runway is very short. Plane must slam on it's breaks and try to get slowed very quickly.

Dangerous enough that there is actually tradition, that when a plane lands successfully at Tegucigalpa everyone on board cheers. I've flown many times, and I know the reality is, planes almost never crash. But when I heard this about landing in Tegucigalpa it sounded more like, *"This plane will probably go down in flames but we're hoping it doesn't. Good luck."*

Anyway, we're on this flight into Tegucigalpa and we're preparing for the landing. And I could tell the person sitting beside me was pretty nervous. So I tried to reassure them, *"I've done this kind of thing before and this is a completely safe way to travel. This Pilot probably lands a plane here every day."* And the funny thing is

while the plane was just cruising across the sky, I really believed that. And trusted that the pilot would not fly into a situation that was not safe. The pilot then came on the intercom as we started to make our descent said, *“I’m really excited to be landing in Tegucigalpa with you all today, just yesterday on my third try I passed my pilots safety exam and so this my first ever flight into Teguc!”* I’m just kidding he didn’t say that.

Even though I believed or trusted that the pilot knew what he was doing. I was pretty nervous. My body tensed up. I closed my eyes. I was holding to the hand rests with a grip that was certain to make a lasting imprint. I must have really looked in bad shape because the person sitting beside me soon started to rub my arm and caress my hand. I was so grateful it was my wife Jenny. Cause otherwise it would have been really awkward.

I came to realize that day of my **certainty in the belief of gravity**. In fact whether we realize it not, our belief in gravity drives our behavior all of the time. Keep us from walking off a ledge or dropping objects we are carrying. If you just look at my behavior you will know for certain that me belief in gravity is rock solid.

Landing in Tegucigalpa reminds me I know I believe in gravity and live everyday as if it is true. This belief in gravity is part of what teacher Scott Scruggs calls my **paradigm** about life.

And all of us have a paradigm...a set of beliefs or assumptions about how the world works and it influences how we live our lives. **It isn’t just what you say you believe, it is what you believe regardless of what you say.** (Scruggs)

Examples of Paradigms in our world.

**“Money will bring you happiness.”**

**“If it feels right...do it.”**

**“This life is all there is.”**

**“Being the most powerful nation in the world will bring you security.”**

You have a paradigm about life...something that is driving/motivating your behavior. We may not realize it about ourselves, we may even deny it...but if someone were to look at our actions, they would know this is what we believe! In how we handle our money, our relationships, difficulties, enemies etc...

And this brings us face to face with our Christian faith and certain central passages of Scripture that should inform our life paradigm. Passages that kind of stand out as significant in expressing aspects, concepts, theology that should influence our behavior in the same way that gravity does. A certainty that this is the way the world actually works.

Can you think of any passages like that in Scripture? All good examples. I want to include another one...that you should all be familiar with. **Psalm 23 (Series Title Graphic).**

This is one of those paradigm passages or should be. But I realized that just as my trust in the pilot was somewhat shaky as we began our descent into Teguc., that this passage is in danger of becoming one of those that is easy to quote, but there are very few of us who live our lives in the reality that this passage expresses.

Dallas Willard writing about Psalm 23 says, **“One of our greatest needs today is for people to really see and really believe the things they already profess to see and believe...The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is not merely a pretty poem with charming sentiments but an accurate description of the kind of life that is available to anyone who will allow God to be their Shepherd.”** (Willard)

And so for the next four weeks, we want to lean into this well-known passage of Scripture...and walk our way through. What would our lives look like if we lived as if

this passage were as true as gravity? So if you have a Bible go ahead and open to Psalm 23.

A poem written by David who would become one of Israel's most well-known and powerful kings. But who grew up a Shepherd boy, tending flocks of sheep in the Middle-Eastern desert. And there is much imagery associated with that life...meaning a lot we probably miss. How many shepherds in the room today?

As we make our way through this series, I want to encourage you to take some time each day and meditate on the words of this Psalm. Don't just rush through it because you can quote it. But think about each phrase, what it means if it's really true. If you haven't already, consider memorizing the words. Soak in this passage for the next month. Let me read the Psalm for us...by the way, many of us probably memorized these words using the KJV. In most of our sermon teaching here at FF we use the NIV. I encourage you to use and compare and contrast different versions as you study the Bible.

**<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup>he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley,<sup>[a]</sup> I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

Pause for a moment. Do you believe this is true? Is this passage as true as gravity in your life? What if it could be?

This morning to get us started we want to take a look at just the first 8 words of this Psalm 23, verse 1.

**“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing...”**

**“One of the single, great, paradigm shifting, counter-cultural, assumption-challenging statements in all of the Bible.”** (Scott Scruggs)

So we need to begin with understanding...

## **A. The Shepherd**

A couple of things to understand here. The word David uses here for **The LORD** is the Hebrew word often transliterated as Yahweh or Jehovah.

### **1. Yahweh**

“Yahweh is my shepherd...” And we’ve talked a little bit about this word before. This was kind of like the personal name of the Hebrew God. Not the generic name for “one of the god’s.”

One of the core ideas associated with this name is **the self-existent one or the self-sustaining one.**

There is a story in the book of Exodus. The Hebrews are slaves in Egypt and have been for 400 years. And God wants to rescue them out of slavery. So he tracks down Moses and has a conversation with him in the form of a burning bush. *“Moses, I want you to go and tell Pharaoh to let my people God.”*

It’s somewhat amusing because Pharaoh is one of the most powerful kings in the world and Moses at this time is a no name shepherd. Moses says, “why should Pharaoh listen to me? Why should Pharaoh listen to anyone?” Who is strong

enough, powerful enough, awe-inspiring enough to cause Pharaoh to allow his slave labor to just go free? Moses says, “who should I tell Pharaoh sent me?”

God answers with this kind of mysterious, sometimes hard to understand answer... “Tell Pharaoh... ‘I am’ has sent you.”

I am meaning...the self-existent, self-sustaining, self-sufficing, all-powerful one. “My being sustains my being.” The one who created, gives and sustains all of existence. Yahweh...I am...means God never runs out of anything. Food, breathe, power, intelligence, joy, patience, faithfulness, energy, resources, life...God never runs out.

This is one of those concepts that can mess with your mind. When did God come into existence? He didn’t he’s always been there. God didn’t come into existence he created existence.

God tells Moses, you tell Pharaoh the one who created all of existence, sent you.

In Psalm 23 David is saying...Yahweh can be your Shepherd. You never have to fear about running out of anything ever again. **“I lack nothing...”**

Yahweh is my Shepherd. He never runs out.

Second, another important concept in this opening phrase...the word...

## **2. My**

Great theologian, Charles Spurgeon, once said that the most important word in the entire 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm is the word my. Sometimes when we try to think about or talk about God’s eternal nature, his self-existence, it leaves us feeling distant or disconnected from God. That’s why this little word “my” is so important.

David says the Lord (the eternal self-existent one) is MY shepherd! He becomes personal.

The Lord is not just a Shepherd. He's not just the Shepherd. But David says, "He's MY shepherd.

Not in the sense of I own him and control him, but rather in the sense of "we share a personal and intimate relationship." He knows me. He understands my pain.

Have you seen a newborn baby...looking around? They often look oblivious and quizzical towards unfamiliar objects and faces as their minds process everything. But what happens when mommy's face or daddy's face comes into view? A huge smile breaks upon the child's face. Why? Because that's my mommy. Not just a mommy. Not just the mommy. But somehow the child knows that's my mommy.

The baby does not own mommy. The baby does not control mommy. Though some mommy's may argue that. But the baby knows, this is the one who takes care of all my needs. This is the one looking out for me. Feeding me when I'm hungry, wrapping me in a blanket and snuggling me when I'm cold, holding me close and whispering to me when I cry.

You pause for a moment and you think about your life and what's taking place and does anyone really know, does anyone really care. David says, my Shepherd the great self-existent one he knows all about me and he cares.

This is a phenomenal thought. It should change how you live!

Matthew 10 Jesus told his disciples the following...

**<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care.<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>30</sup> And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.**

What Jesus is saying is, this world so often gets out of control and there may be times where you begin to wonder does anyone know or care about me and my pain? And when you begin to wonder, Jesus says remember there is One who does care.

He cares about the birds and the hair on your head (even if you don't have any hair on your head.) You are so much more valuable than they are.

My good friend Bobby Crowe, who passed away a few weeks ago...we were in a prayer group together and every spring, end of May, he would remind me to go for a ride up through the mountains. There are these bushes (**PIC OF MOUNTAIN LAUREL**) all over the mountain plastered with gorgeous white flowers...called mountain laurel. When Bobby would pray, sometimes he would say, "Thank you God for showing me your flowers." Those flowers are kind of like God's reminder...I'm watching out for things. Those are my flowers.

When David says the Lord is my shepherd he is talking about this kind of personal and caring presence in your life.

Imagine if you were to walk through the rest of your day today as if you believed that were true. The God who keeps track of the sparrows and the mountain laurel...the God who never runs out of wisdom, or patience, or joy, even life itself is walking with you.

**"There is a God who is enormously good and infinitely loving and he wants to be the committed and consistent caregiver of your life."** (Scruggs)

This is the picture of God you must begin with. Self-existent and sustaining, and at the same time personal and intimate. If this is hard for you, I would encourage you this week to spend some time admiring and thinking about God in nature. Noticing the beauty, grandeur and constant care of his creation. Not worshipping creation,

recognizing God in creation! This is a great time of year to do it...as the flowers begin to bud.

The Lord is my Shepherd. Great words!

Now this is the part you may not like. To say that the Lord is my shepherd, what does that make you and me? Sheep. So let's talk for moment about...

### **B. The reality about Sheep**

One of the core characteristics of sheep is that they are dependent animals.

Sheep in David's world were reliant on the Shepherd to lead them to food sources. To protect them and fend off wild animals.

David recalls his own accounts of fending of a lion and a bear that attacked his flock. Jesus tells a story about sheep...a sheep that wanders off, get's lost or falls in hole.

Sheep are not known for their strength or power. Sheep are not intimidating. Sheep are not the smartest animals in the barnyard. You don't tremble in awe in their presence.

Sheep instead need guidance, direction. They are reliant on their Shepherd to provide for them. They cannot take care of themselves. Sheep who wonder off, sheep left to themselves die...they do not survive.

Concept of cast sheep, pg. 70.

BBC News reported a story about a flock of sheep in Turkey that all went over a cliff. 1500 hundred sheep and 400 of them died in fall. Do you know how it started? One.

One sheep and then another and another. Each one blindly following the one that went before it. They aren't sharpest animals in the world.

And you and I we are a lot like the sheep. We humans are dependent creatures. We are not self-sustaining.

We were created to be dependent. **“From dust you were made and to dust you shall return.”**

Part of what causes anxiety and insecurity in our lives is an awareness that we could, at any moment run out of something. We run out of groceries. We run out of gasoline in the car. But we also run out of energy. We run out of wisdom. We run out of courage. We run out of patience. We run out of control over our lives, circumstances and relationships.

I lack the financial resources to do and to have all of the things I want.

I lack peace in my spirit about the stability of the world in which we live.

I lack often lack the wisdom to be the teacher of Scripture that I want to be.

I lack the integrity in my life to be the witness to Jesus that I want to be.

I lack the skill in my role as a husband and a father to always get it right for my family.

In the end we run out of physical life itself, no matter how hard you try, one day life will leave your body.

Do you feel this insufficiency in your own life? It can often leave us feeling, defeated, discouraged, in despair. Where do you turn? Where do you find assurance, security, peace in a world that often seems so far out of our control?

Part of living in the reality of Psalm 23 is recognizing and accepting your dependence on God. This may challenge some of the paradigm that many of us have been living under. That we were created to be independent, self-sustaining.

Babies need their moms and dad's. Children need their families. Individuals need communities. How do the roads get cleared when it snows? Who is educating your children? Who picks up your garbage? Who x-rays your thumb when you break it playing soccer? Who do you call when the plumbing gets backed up?

Folks even on a larger scale...Nations actually need other nations. No nation, including the US was intended to be completely self-sufficient and independent. When we try to shut ourselves off from the rest of the world, we suffer and the world suffers.

When we try to be, we are in danger of idolizing ourselves...trying to take on a character trait that only God was intended to have.

We are dependent. And whether we admit it or not we all know this is true. The world knows this is true. Everyone is following some Shepherd. Seeking something to make life complete, content, fulfilled. It's wealth, beauty, health, vacations, possessions, success, relationships...none of these Shepherds ever fully satisfy. Most people just move from one Shepherd to the next. (Keller pg. 31)

Which is why the most important question you face in life is: **who is your shepherd?** (Scruggs) Is it your income? Retirement Plan? A relationship?

We are dependent. This means that the welfare of a sheep is not based on it's own intelligence or attractiveness or strength or resources...instead **the welfare of a sheep is based on the quality of it's shepherd!** (Keller pg. 32/pg. 33)

Being content, having joy, experiencing abundance in your life is not about how smart, how successful, how wealthy you are...it's about the quality of your Shepherd.

And that brings us to Jesus.

### **C. The Good Shepherd**

Jesus knew the welfare of the sheep is based on the quality of the Shepherd. And it's why he offered this most profound invitation to anyone willing to listen...

**John 10:11 - <sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd."**

First, notice Jesus says, "I am". In fact in John's Gospel there are a whole series of these "I am statements." Jesus says, "I am the bread of life." "I am the light of the world." "I am the vine." "I am the way, the truth and the life." Now do you sense the overtones? Who was Moses to tell Pharaoh sent him. I am. Who does Jesus claim to be over and over again...I am... John knows what he's doing every time he writes this phrase.

Jesus associated his life with God. Jesus is the great I am...Yahweh. Jesus is the all-sufficient and eternal one. You may know that seven is kind like a number of completeness in the Bible. 7 days for creation to be completed for example. Guess how many "I am" statements in John...7. Jesus is the complete I AM.

**Colossians 2:9 -<sup>9</sup> For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form...  
<sup>10</sup>He is the head over every power and authority.**

And yet, in his incarnation, he becomes personal and intimate. God takes the form of a human. He is the Shepherd who enters your world to experience your life, even your pain.

**The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.**

**<sup>14</sup> “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—**

W. Phillip Keller was born in East Africa and spent 8 years as a Shepherd. And he’s written a fantastic little book about Psalm 23 called “A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23”...in which he speaks about the nature of the relationship between a Shepherd and his sheep. Here’s one of the things he writes...

*“I recall quite quickly how in my first venture with sheep, the question of paying a price for my ewes was so terribly important. They belonged to me only by virtue of the fact that I paid hard cash for them. It was money earned by the blood and sweat and tears drawn from my own body during the desperate and grinding years of the depression. And when I finally bought that first small flock I was buying them literally with my own body which had been laid down with this in mind. Because of this I felt in a special way that they were very much in truth a part of me and I a part of them. But the day I bought them I also realized that this was but the first stage in a long lasting endeavor in which from then on, I would, as their owner, have to continually lay down my life for them if they were to flourish and prosper.”*

Jesus is the shepherd who lays down his life for his Sheep.

A shepherd who is better than any other Shepherd. Who came down from heaven, who gave up his life, paid for you on a cross, through his blood, sweat and tears he bought you. So that you also can say, no matter how much turbulence you face...  
“The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing...”

Think about that. The one who created all of life is the one who wants to personally and intimately walk through life by your side. Psalm 23 says that can be the paradigm in which you live.

Jesus came to replace all of the false and misguided shepherds we so often follow. I am the one you want to trust. I am the one you want to follow.

Wow, to live in the reality of that Shepherd. That's a paradigm I want to live by. In a world of turbulence and uncertainty and confusion I want the Good Shepherd.

This week I want you to look around your world, your life...are you living in the fullness of this statement? What are the Shepherds that you have been relying on that just aren't good enough? Would you be willing to lay them aside? To invite Jesus into your life and into each moment of every day of your life? And if you want to do that today. You can. You come and talk to me after the service. We'll talk about how start allowing Jesus to be your shepherd.

This week when you find yourself saying I'm not enough, I'm running low. My patience is running out. My joy is running out. My wisdom is running out. Would you commit this week, you'll pause every time that happens and you'll soak in Psalm 23:1... "The Lord is my Shepherd, I lack nothing..." I will trust in his strength and his wisdom and his patience and his energy in my life.