

The guide replied, "*I am* the path."

It's a jungle out there, and we need a guide who knows where he's going and what he's doing. God is that guide, because He is the great I Am.

"...Is..."

David didn't say, "The Lord *was* my shepherd." He didn't say, "The Lord *will be* my shepherd." He said, "The Lord *is* my shepherd." Right now. In this very moment. It's a present-tense relationship, which it must be, since God's name is I Am, and that name also reveals His *eternal* nature.

When God says, "I Am That I Am," He's saying, "I am always in the present tense." Everything for God is *now*. God has never experienced a yesterday. Nor does He have a tomorrow, so God never has to use the words *I hope...*

Why is it important to know this about God? Because when I have a need, my need is in the *now*. When I have a struggle, my struggle is in the *now*. When I have a hurt, my hurt is in the *now*. And God tells us, "I am the Eternal Now. I can meet you in your present experience."

Then there are those of us that are worried and upset and even popping pills because we're thinking about *tomorrow*. But God shepherds us one day at a time—He makes sure we have enough grace to cover the troubles of today.

God says, "Don't worry. When you get to tomorrow, I'll be there. Just deal with today. Just let Me be your Shepherd, and I will take care of you. Receive My grace for this moment. And if you take time to thank Me for the present, you won't have time to worry about tomorrow."

God meets today's needs today. He'll meet tomorrow's needs tomorrow.

When the people of Israel journeyed through the wilderness, God rained down a certain food for them every morning from on high, like cornflakes from the sky, and the people gathered it up from the ground for that day's sustenance. He gave them each morning only a day's supply of these flakes, except on the sixth day of the week, when He gave them twice as much so they could rest on the Sabbath and not have to gather their food.

It was always enough, but *only* enough, to supply each day's need.

God wanted His people to recognize Him as their *daily* provider. He wanted them to *constantly* look to Him for their provision.

That's why God isn't satisfied with our go-to-church-on-Sunday-and-I'm-good-for-the-week approach to the Christian life. Once you hit Monday, Sunday's over. It's "was," not "is." God wants a moment-by-moment, day-by-day relationship with each of us, not a once-a-week "refresher."



"...MY..."

"The Lord is *my* shepherd." This is an individual situation, a personal relationship. It wasn't enough for David that the Lord is *a* shepherd or even *the* Shepherd. He knew he had to be able to say that the great I Am is *my* Shepherd, to say that the Lord is the one I'm depending on for *my* needs and *my* salvation.

Sometimes at a crowded restaurant, when you're waiting for a table and your name is on the waiting list, the hostess will give you a pager to hold. When it's time for you and your party to be seated, the pager will vibrate. The restaurant staff has your name, and they're preparing a table just for you. And once it's ready, if you're still patiently waiting and holding on to that pager, it will let you know.

Now some people wonder why their spirituality is so lifeless and nothing's vibrating. It's because they're not holding on to God's pager and patiently seeking and awaiting their Shepherd's personal instructions just for them. So they miss the table He's prepared for them.

I have shirts that are monogrammed with the letters *T. E.* They're not just off-the-rack shirts; they're personalized. A lot of Christians want an off-the-rack God, but what God wants with us is a monogrammed relationship. He has your initials inscribed on His heart—and He wants His Son's initials inscribed on yours.

God gave you a unique personality, a unique orientation, a unique purpose, a unique calling. And He has to be your personal Shepherd in order for you to know His unique will for you. He wants a relationship with you that's unlike what He has with anybody else.

You may think I'm going too far by saying that, but if you read in Revelation, in Christ's messages to the seven churches, you will find this promise regarding the believer who's committed to Him:

"And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

REVELATION 2:17

The Lord is saying, "I will give you a private name that only the two of us know." God is going to monogram you, to mark the most intimately personal relationship possible. And He's nurturing that relationship with you even now.

Some things, of course, apply equally to each and every Christian. The promises and commands and standards of Scripture are for us all. But just like your fingerprints are unique and different, so also is God's interaction with you unique and different, because *you* are unique and different. And that's why you need to learn to hear God's voice to know when He's speaking specifically to you, and how He's



particularly leading you in the application (or the *illumination*—that's the theological word) of the Scriptures to your life.

“...SHEPHERD.”

“The Lord is my *shepherd*.” A shepherd's job is to look after the comprehensive well-being of the sheep. And for that job, there's certainly nothing better than someone who can actually meet those comprehensive needs.

In Jeremiah 23:4, God describes the role of a shepherd as one who feeds his flock in such a way that “they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking.” In Ezekiel 34:2–4, God lists all that He expects a shepherd to do: feed the flock, strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring back the strays, seek the lost.

That's what being a shepherd means to God.

And there's more: “The good shepherd *gives His life* for the sheep” (John 10:11). The superior shepherd is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice—he puts it all on the line for the sheep.

And so when selecting a shepherd for your own life, the proof of a good one is whether that shepherd has given his life for you. And you have that proof. *This is exactly what*

*Jesus has done for you.* You know He loves you as no one else possibly can.

But in order for Him to be your Shepherd, you must first recognize yourself as a sheep. Shepherds don't tend wolves or dogs; shepherds shepherd sheep. And if you don't think of yourself as a sheep, you're not qualified to receive Him as your Shepherd.

That's why many of us aren't seeing God meet our needs. We haven't decided yet that we are sheep. We resist what that implies. We resist it because fully recognizing yourself as a sheep will mean humbling yourself and identifying with a sheep in at least three ways.

*Do you think of  
yourself as  
a sheep?*

First of all, sheep are *dumb*. Have you ever been to the circus and seen sheep performing to the commands of a sheep trainer? Have you ever seen a farmer teach his sheep to do tricks? No, because sheep are too dumb. And to ask the Lord to be your Shepherd means realizing and admitting how limited your intelligence really is.

We've all said to ourselves, *How could I be so stupid?* Because sheep are dumb, they regularly wander and stray. Stupid as they are, they regularly think they know best what



to do and where to go. Isaiah 53:6 says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (NIV). What does that say about us? That we're dumb.

Second, sheep are *defenseless*. They have no fangs, no stingers, no claws, and they don't gallop or fly or swim. That's why we don't have professional sports teams named after them—no such thing as the Dallas Sheep, the Chicago Sheep, the San Francisco Sheep. That's also why we don't use sheep for protection; we don't have guard sheep. You never hear anyone shout, "Sic 'em, sheep!" Sheep need protection themselves, or else they get eaten up by an animal that is armed with fangs. To want the Lord as your Shepherd means realizing how vulnerable you are.

Finally, sheep are also *dirty*. Cats and birds and most other animals will clean themselves, but sheep will stay dirty forever unless the shepherd gives them a bath. And to have the Lord as your Shepherd means being willing to admit you need Him to wash you and make you clean.

Unless you understand that you have these limitations and undesirable traits, you'll never recognize your comprehensive and constant need for a Shepherd. You'll want a Shepherd for emergencies only.

But if you accept the truth as David did, then you can call the Lord Himself your Shepherd. For even though we're dumb, defenseless, dirty sheep, God still takes care of

us because we're *His* sheep. And the beauty of a Good Shepherd is, he's so knowledgeable about our foolishness and our frailty and our filthiness that He knows exactly how to address all of it, even when we hardly begin to recognize what's wrong with us.

## GOD'S FULL SERVICE

There are two ways to get gasoline for your car.

In the first method, you pull up to the self-service pump. You get out of your car, open the tiny door that covers the gas tank, and unscrew the gas cap. You turn to the pump and slip your credit card in the slot and punch the appropriate buttons. You take the nozzle from the pump and insert it into your tank.

You stand there until the nozzle clicks, and then you click some more to squeeze in all the gasoline you can. You put the nozzle away, screw on your gas cap, and close the tiny door. Then you open your car door, get in, and drive off.

Now if the weather is cold, you get cold while doing all this. If the weather's hot, you get hot. If it's raining, you get wet. But at least you're able to say, "I did it myself."

But there's another way to get gasoline. You drive up to the full-service pumps, and you remain comfortably seated.



Someone comes out to you, takes your credit card, and runs it through the slot for you. He opens the little door back there, unscrews the gas cap, and inserts the nozzle for you. And while it's filling up, he washes your front windows and your side windows. If you ask, he'll even check the air in your tires. He'll lift the hood and check your oil. And when the gas nozzle clicks, he'll take it out, screw the cap back on, and close the little door for you. And after all of that, he'll thank *you* for using their services.

*Why do we insist  
on living self-  
service lives?*

Meanwhile, the wind hasn't messed up your hair, and you don't have the smell of gasoline on your hands. It may be cold outside, but you're still warm in your car. If it's raining, you're still dry. If it's hot outside, you're still cool. All because there was somebody at the station whose job it was to provide you full service.

The reason so many of us cannot sincerely pray, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," is that we're still living self-service lives. We're saying, "I'm going to pull it off. I'm going to make it happen. I'm going to cut the deal. I'm going to reverse this situation." And we get out and try it, and we wind up all sweaty and sore and dirty and frustrated.

But God is running a full-service station. And if you'll just pull up and rest, He'll come out and not only do what you came for, but He'll take care of some stuff you never asked for—clean your dirty windows, check for low oil. He's going to take care of *all* of your needs.

It all comes down to this: If the Lord is your Shepherd, if you will be His sheep, He'll take care of everything—your spiritual needs, your directional needs, your emotional needs, your physical needs, your eternal needs. He'll satisfy them all.

And all His sheep say, "Amen."