

Natalie Ford Cowling  
 April 25, 2010

***The Good Shepherd***  
***John 10:1-18***

***Sacrifice.***

What do you think of when you hear the word?

Since we are in a sanctuary, maybe your mind conjures of sacrifices from the Old Testament. But I'm talking about something we're all familiar with....when you give up something for someone else.

***Sacrifice*** is at the heart of what it means to be a good shepherd.

We've all heard the images of Jesus as our shepherd so many times, it's easy to lose sight of what it really means to have Him as our shepherd.

The good shepherd is one who makes sacrifices—for us.

A good shepherd is someone who ***cares*** for the sheep, day in and out, good weather and bad, over the hills and through the valleys, never stopping too long in one place. A good shepherd leads the stubborn animals to new, safe grazing land and clean water, day after day after day, no breaks for vacation or shopping or his own rest. His needs come second, because he cares first for his flock.

***Psalm 23*** says it so well....

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...I don't need anything else.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters,

He restores my soul...

A little girl put the 23rd Psalm this way, and it's really the right way to look at it:

"The Lord is my shepherd; that's all I want."

Because the good shepherd cares for us,  
 more than we could ever care for ourselves.

A good shepherd is also someone who ***guides*** the stubborn animals with the sound of his ***voice***.

So often the shepherd is leading the flock, not out in front,  
 calling them to please follow...

but from behind, gently encouraging them to keep on moving, bringing up the rear,  
 pulling in the wandering sheep, and grabbing those who get lost.

Sometimes they can't see the shepherd, but they can hear his voice....

Ever think of *your life* that way?  
 That Jesus is your guide, leading you with His voice?  
 The voice you hear in prayer, in the quiet, in the Word of God?  
 Sometimes you look ahead and can't seem Him,  
 but that's because he's behind you encouraging you,  
 making sure you don't wander, bringing you back when you get lost...

The good shepherd is also the **Gate** for the sheep. At night when the sheep are corralled in the pen, or up against the rock, the good shepherd literally lays down across the opening at the gate, to keep any predators away from his beloved flock.

Jesus says, ***I am the gate**; whoever enters by me will be saved...the thief comes to steal and kill and steal and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand runs away because he does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.*

Do you know in your soul, that Jesus ***laid down his life*** for You?  
 That YOU may have life, and have it abundantly?  
 Jesus didn't die that we might just live—but that we live joyful lives.

Unlike anyone else, who may run away at the sight of trouble,  
 Jesus ***cares*** for us more than anyone else,  
 knows us better than anyone else,  
 and loves us so much that he laid down his life for us,  
 and then took his life back up again, raised from death—all for us.

This means Jesus really ***knows you and me***.  
 He knows which of us have a tendency to do things that ***are harmful*** to our minds, and our bodies, and need some help to get out of those habits.  
 He knows which of us feel ***unloved***, unforgiven, unable to be accepted, even though He has loved us from before we were born.  
 He knows which of us turn anthills of ***worry*** into mountains of anxiety,  
 And need His peace.

He knows us, he cares for us, he guides us and protects us.  
 He is our good shepherd, who has made the ultimate sacrifice for us.

And he asks us to learn from him, and his shepherding ways.

In John 13, Jesus tells his disciples, *I give you a new commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you should love one another.*

Could we be born with an *inclination to love*?....

Just last November, Nicolas Wade reported in the New York Times that researchers from Germany to Harvard have discovered young children displaying an innate desire to help others, something not seen while testing young chimpanzees. While many people agree that children are also naturally selfish, new research suggests that children are also prone to help those who have lost something, whose hands are full and cannot open a door or pick something up, or someone who has dropped an object. New research suggests that this may be a defining difference between humans, and the animals that so closely resemble our own DNA. (Nov 30, 2009, NYTimes)

*Leo Tolstoy* said it, and God's Word certainly supports it, "The only certain happiness in life is to live for others."

Many people think that teens only have an inward focus...but

While waiting at a traffic light with her parents in Atlanta, Georgia, Kevin and Joan Salwen's 14-year-old daughter, *Hannah*, saw a black Mercedes coupe on one side and a homeless man begging for food on the other. Hannah turned to her father and said, "Dad, if that man had a less nice car, that man there could have a meal."

Hannah wanted to do something about the inequity. "What do you want to do?" her mother asked. "*Sell our house*," Hannah replied.

Eventually, that's what the Salwen's did.

They sold their luxurious home, donated half the proceeds to charity, and bought a modest replacement home.

The sacrifice was great, but the benefits have been greater still.

"We essentially traded stuff for togetherness and connectedness," Kevin says. "I can't figure out why everybody wouldn't want that deal."

The entire project is chronicled in an upcoming book by Kevin and his daughter, entitled *The Power of Half*. The aim of the book isn't to get people to sell their houses, but simply to encourage them to step off the "treadmill of accumulation"—to define themselves by what they give, and not just by what they possess. Hannah says, "For us, the house was just something we could live without. It was too big

for us. Everyone has too much of something, whether it's time, talent, or treasure. Everyone does have their own half; you just have to find it."

Nicholas Kristof, "What Could You Live Without?" nytimes.com (1-24-10)

Consider the sacrifice of *parenting*.

Children come into the world totally dependent.

They cannot become independent

unless their parents give up much of their own freedom for years.

If you don't allow your children to hinder your freedom in work and play at all, and if you only get to your children when it doesn't inconvenience you, your children will grow up physically, but remain emotionally needy, troubled, and overdependent. You can either sacrifice your freedom or theirs.

To love your child well, you must decrease that they may increase.

Tim Keller, *The Reason for God*, 2008, pg. 201, pastor Redeemer Presbyterian Church, NY.

It may not be a child that we make sacrifices for.

It can be anyone that we love.

I'm sure all of you have seen the famous drawing called *The Praying Hands* by German artist Albrecht Durer.

There is a legend behind the praying hands that tells of two struggling artists, brothers in a very large family. One is a musician whose goal in life was to play and compose music to the glory of God.

The other brother Albrecht, was a painter and engraver.

It was such a struggle for the family to survive, that the two drew lots and promised that one would go to school to study art while the other worked in the mines to support him, then they would trade places.

The musician began to work to help support the work of Albrecht.

By the time Albrecht gained enough fame to be self-supportive, and returned to uphold his promise to his brother, his brother's hands had become too damaged to pursue his own career in music.

His brother's hands became the model for the famous praying hands.

Laying down one's life is not always a matter of life or death.

Sometimes it is the sacrifice, of a parent, a sibling, a friend, postponing or canceling dreams so that another might fulfill their dreams.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu described sacrifice this way,

"Nothing is *too much trouble* for love."

Consider all these who have made the *ultimate sacrifice* for their faith.  
Stephen being stoned to death,  
Paul being chained and executed by the Romans,  
Peter hanging on a cross upside down,  
countless martyrs killed throughout the ages.

And did you know that more died for the Christian faith  
in the 20th century than any other?                      May 10 2002, Zenit News Agency, Rome, Italy).

Jesus is our *good shepherd*, the one who cares for us, knows us,  
And loves us more than anyone else.

He never leaves us, he *leads* us everywhere we need to go,  
His *voice* guides us, even when we cannot see him,  
He lays down his *own life* for us, to save us, and give us new life.

And he asks us to love one another, just as he loves us.  
Whether we do it for our kids,  
For our family, or our friends,  
We make sacrifices because He made the ultimate sacrifice for each one of us.

It's the way we gained new life,  
And it's the way we find real life, meaningful life, joyful life.

May we listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd, follow where he leads,  
And love as He loves us, Amen.