

## ***VOICE OF THE SHEPHERD***

We knew her well, yet we were always vaguely surprised by the way one of our friends responded to our voices. She was a German shepherd and she was both a guard for our home and a companion for our children. She felt the need to roam not only our property, but most of the surrounding area. Neither our neighbors nor we had too much of a problem with that. At night though, before our day came to an end, we would call out into the darkness. She came to us then from wherever she was. Out of the woods. Out of the fields. Out of the darkness. She came, not because she was finished with whatever had drawn her away from home. She came because she trusted us. She did not know what we did about the danger of being alone when the coyote were hunting in packs. She was not well versed on the problems of lying down to rest in a cold world. She merely came because she was ours and she knew it. She knew our voices.

We are trying to learn to trust the voice of the shepherd in that same fashion. John 5:28-29 tells us that the sheep listen to His voice. He calls His own sheep by name and calls them out. What a promise. What an incredibly concise set of instructions for living for the master.

A great number of voices call to us. They bombard us every day. They tell us we deserve luxuries we have not earned. We will only have to pay later. Opportunity beckons in the mistakes of the boss, possessions left unattended, the wink of an eye, or the smile on a stranger's lips. Fame glitters and stardom glistens. Give our life to the pursuit of it and we might gain power and pleasure. Five numbers and the nerve to take a risk is all we need to succeed. The family, the job, the bank, the stores, all want a piece of us and our time. "Leo the Lop", depicted in the book by Serendipity Press, is sadly outdated. Normal is no longer like us. Normal is an image developed by marketing geniuses that is updated regularly to include what we do not have and will need to purchase in order to not be different from everyone else who is normal. In the middle of all of this clamor, out of Matt 11:28, comes a still small voice of a shepherd, saying, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Hearing the voice is a matter of listening for familiarity. In a crowded store filled with many children, a mother will instantly know the cry of her own. Likewise, the child will hear the call of the parent. There exists a connection that goes past the ears to the heart. It is a bond born of shed tears and comfort, needing and being needed, and living together in communion till the thoughts and desires of one are mirrored in the other. Words of the shepherd are spoken and received in love, for they travel through the same bond.

We sometimes wonder how God keeps track of the names of all of His sheep. We have a problem remembering the names of people we have just met. On the one hand, if He knows the very hairs on our heads, then maybe names are a form of relaxation. On the other, maybe He just gives them all a new name. His name. Perhaps that is why we are admonished to take on His name in baptism. It clears up the confusion about whom He is telling to come home.

Before we come home, we must come out. "Come out from among them and be ye separate," is one way it is stated. If we are heavy laden, we are invited to a place of rest. If we are tired of wandering blind in a dark world, we can come out. If we are unloved, unnoticed, and insignificant in the crowd, we can come out. When we lose our way and are trapped by circumstances, or the cares of life are closing in and we are suffocating. When we can't even hold our head up above water, much less swim, the shepherd calls out with a simple solution. Come out!

When we hear His voice, we should be grateful. As in 1 Timothy 3:16, whether spoken for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, or for instruction in righteousness, we should be thankful. Whether we agree with the master that it is time to leave off from our own pursuits or not, we should get on home. It is not annoying to have the chance to respond to that voice. It is an affirmation of our eternal worth. The Shepherd only calls to His own. If we hear the voice, we have been bought with a price and He values us.

What He values, He acts to keep and preserve. What we perceive dimly, He sees quite clearly. He knows all about the dangers of walking in the dark where snares and traps abound. That is why in Psalms 119:105, He gave us a light for our path and a lamp for our feet. He is also well versed on what can happen when we confront roaring lions in their territory. He practiced animal control with Daniel. Better than anyone else, He feels the pain of being left abandoned in a cold world. So He calls, not to the stranger, but to those whom He calls His own. To those who are listening, He offers a place of safety and rest and refreshing. He is calling, "It's time to come home!"

### ***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Trust is an integral part of the relationship between the sheep and the shepherd. How easy is it for you to trust God, when you do not understand the reasons behind his commands or directions?
2. Does it bother you to think that an advertising agency has the power to make you so unhappy over what you do not have that you would spend money that you do not have to spare for something you have no need of?
3. How does God's definition of success differ from that of our culture? What does Joshua 1:8 have to say about success?
4. Have you found that the more often you listen to the shepherd's voice, the easier it is to hear it in times of trouble or temptation?
5. How many names does He call you by?
6. Did you know that if you can even hear the voice of the shepherd, it means that He considers you His own? It is to His own that he calls.
7. Is dealing with the troubles we have created really as easy as just coming out from them and leaving them behind us and going to Jesus?
8. One reason He feels compelled to instruct and direct us is that He can see more of the path ahead of us than we can. Why do you suppose that is? Does a higher viewpoint help? If you hired someone knowledgeable with the area to guide you through dangerous terrain, would you argue with their instructions or ignore them?
9. At the end of your days, are you looking forward to hearing Him say, "Come home?"