

“He Makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures”

👁️ Free from fear...friction...pests...hunger

In the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, dear sheep:

More than any other class of livestock sheep require constant care and attention. In fact, shepherd Philip Keller tells us that four requirements must be met before they can be made to lie down: Sheep must be **Free from fear...friction...pests and Free from hunger.**

👁️ Free from fear

Only a shepherd can truly understand the timid helplessness of his sheep. A stray jackrabbit can startle an entire flock. Imagine Keller's dismay when a friend brought along a tiny Pekingese pup. It jumped out of the car and started yapping. Nearly destroyed his flock. Real danger? In a single night two stray dogs were known to have killed 292 sheep. A pregnant ewe can get so agitated she slips her lamb; both die from the abortion. One sad morning Keller found nine of his choice ewes all killed by a cougar. After that he slept with his .303 rifle, a flashlight, and his trusted collie ready to dash out into the darkness at the slightest sound. Watching over his flocks by night paid off with rustlers too. They left the area because they heard Keller was out there making sure his sheep could lie down **Free from fear.**

See why the LORD calls us sheep? Fear of the unknown is our worst enemy. Morning may dawn calm and quiet, but then startle us with disappointment. We just want to jump up and run away. But like Keller's sheep, nothing calms us like the sight and sound of our Good Shepherd in the field. His presence soothes away our guilty fear through Word and sacrament. The Holy Spirit reminds us, **“God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”** (2 Timothy 1:7 NIV84). A father with scared children can calm them with the powerful tranquility of the Good Shepherd. As David said, **“I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”** (Psalm 4:8 NIV84).

👁️ Free from friction

Chickens have a “pecking order,” cattle “horning order,” sheep “butting order.” All animals suffer from tension, rivalry and cruel competition. But because of their social makeup, friction among sheep can be devastating. Keller found it was usually an arrogant, cunning and domineering old ewe that would walk up to a younger one, stiffen her legs and charge with lowered head. The rest of the flock would do the same, right down the “butting order” as each tried to defend its own rights and territory.

Keller notes the scientific accuracy of the Bible in Ezekiel 34:20f: **“This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep....You shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away.’”** Many folks have left churches because of bad “butting order” experiences on councils or ladies groups. **Friction** makes sheep edgy, tense, discontented and irritable. They lose healthy weight and good condition. Shepherd Keller had to severely trounce any belligerent ewe in order for his sheep to flourish. **Free from friction** they must be. Whether caused by ram or ewe, the welfare of the entire flock is at stake.

¹ Keller, Philip. *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Zondervan Publ. House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970. Available from NPH, 1-800-662-6022. Also at Amazon / Audible Books. Third in Summer Sermon Series by Pastor Mark A. Cordes.

Again, nothing does more to help the flock lie down **Free from friction** than the presence of the Good Shepherd. The sound of His voice distracts us from our foolish rivalries. It's hard to look at others with jealousy or be nervous about what they think when your eyes are fastened on Jesus. And isn't it the sheep who are always aware of the Master's presence that are most peaceful and unafraid? Anxiety runs away when you trust that the Shepherd is in the field of your life with you. Experiencing His love and care makes it good enough to be the "bottom sheep," just to be near Jesus, **Free from friction**.

👁 **Free from pests**

More will be said later in this sermon series about the need for sheep to be **Free from pests**. In fact, it's one of my favorite illustrations from Keller how he freed his sheep **from pests**. For now just remember this third requirement for sheep to actually "*lie down in green pastures*." They're constantly "bugged" by nasal flies, bot flies, warble flies and ticks requiring more diligent care from the shepherd. Expensive chemical repellents and hard work making shelter belts of trees and brush are the only way for the shepherd to keep his sheep from being driven to distraction.

Does anyone here not know what it means to be "bugged"? Life's irritations, frustrations and annoyances can keep life rushing crazy so we cannot lie down. There is only one antidote: We need the Shepherd's gracious presence. Maybe this is why the Holy Spirit in the Bible is so often symbolized by oil. Like the oil repellents of a shepherd, the Holy Spirit keeps the flies of frustration out of our eyes. He teaches us to come to our Good Shepherd and expose the problem to Him with an honest admission, "Lord, I can't handle this." "I see," He says. "Let me." Then He shows His skill with our problems in ways we sheep cannot ask or imagine. Suddenly, they're gone. Or we're just at peace because He's got this. "*The LORD is my Shepherd*," and I'm free **Free from pests**, lying down again.

👁 **Free from hunger**

Have you seen pictures of Palestine and the barren brown fields around Bethlehem? Dry, arid land is healthy for sheep because it's no good for parasites. But it's also tough on "green pastures." It takes tremendous hard work and scientific skill to clear the rocks, tear out the brush and stumps, plow deep and prepare the soil for seeding with special grains and legumes. Then comes the watering. Shepherd Keller put himself out this way for his sheep on two separate ranches with overgrazed, impoverished fields. By his careful management and sweat he soon had pastures knee-deep in succulent grass that increased the milk flow of his ewes, so their lambs grew to 100 pounds in 100 days. Their shepherd provided verdant pastures so they could fill up quickly, lie down to rest...ruminant...and gain.

The flock of God's people Israel while they were slaves in Egypt languished without vitality and vigor. They had no shepherd to care for them. But when the LORD gave them Moses and led them through the desert to the Promised Land, they at last could thrive in pastures "*flowing with milk and honey*." The land was so rich and lush for flocks and herds. But also fathers and mothers could nourish their little lambs on the milk of God's Word which truly is "*sweeter than honey*." (Psalm 19:10)

And so our Good Shepherd continues to move His flock from the slavery of sin to the lush new life of faith. With unrelenting effort He clears the rocks of our stony unbelief, tears out the brush of bitterness, and plows deep the sun-dried clay of our proud hearts. He sows the seeds of His Word and waters His pastures, so that we can rest and meditate. How blessed we are with His gracious presence always so near, and even better when our faith can treasure Him in His Word and sacraments. Let us not fail to enjoy His care because of personal perverseness as if we're better off on the barren ground of the world around us. Our Good Shepherd laid down His life for us. With the preaching and teaching of His Word the LORD my Shepherd frees me to "**Lie Down in Green Pastures**." Bless His Name! Amen.