

“He Restores My Soul”

- 👁️ When I am “cast down”
- 👁️ He knows what He is doing.

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

Remember a few weeks ago when I told you about those two young police officers in Australia or New Zealand? They see something over next to a highway. Can’t tell what it is until they’re closer. It’s a sheep on its back kicking its legs. Fun? Seems like it. They lift her on her feet again. As she walks off, they’re fist pumping like they really accomplished something. Actually they did. A “cast” sheep is in mortal danger. Imagine you’re shepherd Philip Keller scanning the morning sky to see if black winged buzzards are circling over your pastures. If so, you run to find out if one of his sheep is “cast down.” Cougars, coyotes and wild dogs might beat the buzzards to an easy meal. How desperately we need Jesus our Good Shepherd scanning our lives. What a relief to know that “**He Restores My Soul**” ...

👁️ When I am “cast down”

Where does this idea come from that Christianity means prosperity and pasted on smiles that never dry out in sadness or wash away on a rainy day? The sweet Psalmist King David asks in Psalm 42, “**Why are you cast down, O my soul?**” David knew the sorrow of sin and the frustration of falling into temptation. We know it when impatient with our children, disobedient to our parents, unkind to our co-workers and spouse. Life can drop us into a depression of worry, anxiety and death. Don’t you love it when a doctor or healthcare professional gives that sage advice: “You need to avoid stress in your life”?

In the life of a sheep, to be “cast down” is to be near death. It’s an old English shepherd’s term for a sheep in a pathetic position. Maybe the heavy, fat or long fleeced sheep just wants to lie down in a comfortable depression in the ground. As it rolls on its side to stretch and relax, its center of gravity shifts and suddenly all four feet are frantically pawing the air. Unless the shepherd comes quickly, gases will build up inside, cutting off circulation. If the air is cool, it can struggle for days until it dies. But if the sun is beating down, vultures may be feasting in a matter of hours competing with the coyotes. Lambs will either die inside their mother, or become orphans. Losing one sheep often means losing several. So a caring shepherd must keep counting his sheep. If one is missing, he must go rescue it right away!

Remember what “pastor” means? “Shepherd,” right? See why your pastor is so concerned if you miss church? The largest, fattest, strongest sheep can become a “cast down” casualty in no time. Pastor Paul warned his flock in Corinth: “**So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!**” So kindly our Lord assures us: “**No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.**” (1 Corinthians 10:12f NIV84)

That “soft spot,” the “good life,” no demands on our time, no need for self-discipline, hide away in our little “cocoon” – danger comes from too much wool as our soul gets heavily matted with the mud, manure of this life, weighing us down with worldly ideas, pride and possessions. Too fat with blessings?

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. Fifth in Summer Sermon Series by Pastor Mark A. Cordes.

Something must be done **When I am “cast down,”** to restore my soul. It’s for my own good, and also for the sake of my Shepherd’s reputation. When people hear the name “Jesus Christ,” God wants them to think of the Good Shepherd who truly cares for His sheep. He wants us to be confident that...

👁 **He knows what He is doing.**

For a shepherd to restore a cast sheep requires tenderness and knowledge. Time and patience if circulation makes it hard for her to walk. He’ll need to straddle the cast sheep, rubbing her legs and, like shepherd Keller, gently chide: “When are you going to learn to stand on your own feet? I’m so glad I found you in time, you rascal!” She may fall, so he’ll have to do it again until she can walk. We accept such kindly scolding from Jesus because He gave the ultimate sacrifice of His own life to save us from our self-imposed death. **He knows what He is doing** when getting rid of the sin within and around us.

If you succeed in removing all stress from your life, you may actually be in the greatest spiritual danger. The fattest sheep, Keller says, were the most likely to be “cast.” The comfortable, easy spot where they love to lie, means the quickest rollover time. If I am “cast down,” or in danger of getting “cast,” my Good Shepherd leads me out of my cozy corner to a less comfortable, safer spot. He teaches us self discipline like the rich young man. (Matthew 19) It wasn’t pleasant to be told to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, but it was exactly what he needed for the Good Shepherd to restore his soul. **“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”** (Hebrews 12:11 NIV84)

When the wool of my old sinful nature is matted heavy with my own aspirations, plans and desires, when my wants become more important than what He wants, my Good Shepherd refuses to stand idly by while the world drags me down. My loving, gentle Shepherd will get out the sharp razor of His holy Word and shear off all that filthy wool of my self pride. Like any sheep I may go down kicking and bleating as my shepherd sweats and labors over me. But when He sets me on my feet again in His full, free forgiveness, what a relief to be free of myself! Wisely, lovingly **“He Restores My Soul”!**

When I am overweight from His many blessings, my Good Shepherd knows how to take long-range steps toward more rigorous rations to make his sheep strong, sturdy and energetic. It’s too easy for all of us to think we’ve reached some level of success and then fall over spiritually. As the Lord told the angel (pastor) of the church in Laodicea, **“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”** (Revelation 3:17) His strict “diet” may not be pleasant, but it sure helps us not fall for the lie of material success.

But what about those times when **I am “cast down”** through no fault of my own? Faithfully reading my Bible, saying my prayers, humbling myself before my God in worship and meditation – yet my earthly friends forsake me. The bottom drops out of my finances. My boss couldn’t care less about my extra efforts for the company. Maybe my spouse refuses to even be polite, much less love me. What about those times when everything seems piled up and me cast down? Friends, especially in distress **“He Restores My Soul.” He knows what He is doing** as He reassures us through Isaiah (50:4): **“The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary.”**

You see, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, shows us God’s feelings toward us whenever we are “cast down.” No matter why or when or where – not in anger or disgust, but in compassion and yearning to set us upright – He comes looking for His lost sheep, hurrying to get there in time. Keller hired his son to look after one expectant ewe to keep setting her upright until her twins were born. God sent His Son who sends the Holy Spirit constantly to set us up again. He’s in the field with us, heart and soul determined to keep us on our feet – happy when we are relieved. How wonderful: **“The LORD is my shepherd.”** How wonderfully: **“He Restores My Soul.”** Amen.