

“He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness for His Name’s Sake”

- 👁 **From ruts to righteousness**
- 👁 **The Shepherd’s reputation**

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

Many people think sheep can get along without a shepherd. Can’t you just buy a bunch and leave them to themselves? The previous renter of Philip Keller’s first sheep ranch nearly ruined the land and wasted all his sheep. But there shepherd Keller gained insights into how much we need God. **“The LORD is my Shepherd...He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness for His Name’s Sake.”** We need His skill...

👁 **From ruts to righteousness**

More than any other class of livestock sheep must have constant care from a wise and faithful shepherd. As creatures of habit, sheep will follow each other down the same paths until their bodies and the land are infected with parasites. Worms, nematodes and scabs have a life cycle that can ruin the owner and waste away his sheep if they stay in one spot. The land itself can be “sheeped to death” like places in Africa where shepherd Phillip Keller saw grass roots pawed out of the soil leaving nothing but barrenness behind.

God calls us sheep. Isn’t that embarrassing? Our Creator knows how human nature has devolved since the Fall into sin. **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”** (Isaiah 53:6 NIV84). Though God has warned us many times about personal pride and self-assertion, we still shuffle along the same old familiar trails, wearing in the ruts that finally erode into gigantic gullies. One flash flood of trouble and we’re another casualty. What happens to sheep without a shepherd? Read the blogs and articles about broken homes, broken hearts, derelict lives and twisted personalities. Aren’t all of us sheep who love to wander? We naturally do not want the Shepherd, especially when He says, **“Follow me.”**

To safeguard his sheep the wise shepherd makes a plan to systematically move his flock. He can save the land from ruts, and his sheep from parasites if they just keep moving. He checks his pastures every day for balance between growth and grazing pressure. Intelligent, wise management means almost every week opening a new gate. You can watch the staid old ewes kicking up their heels in sheer delight.

Isn’t that how we feel as our Good Shepherd leads us **From ruts to righteousness**? Listen to Wisdom in Proverbs: **“I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice, bestowing wealth on those who love me, and making their treasuries full.”** Again: **“He who pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honor.”** (8:20f; 21:21) When husbands and wives fall into the rut of quarrelling, when our lives erode with anxiety, when we habitually turn to old sinful ways, we need the LORD. We pray: **“The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth. Yes, LORD, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you; your name and renown are the desire of our hearts. My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you.”** (Isaiah 26:7-9 NIV84)

So what’s so important about sheep with their shepherd? Whether they flourish or fail, whether the land is a delight or a desert, whether the flock is thriving or ruined – this reflects directly on...

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

👁️ The Shepherd's reputation

We don't meditate on this nearly enough: **"He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness for His Name's Sake."** The LORD is love, joy, peace, beauty, kindness – everything good wrapped up in One Almighty being of three Persons. So if you were the greatest of all architects, the most beautiful of artists, if your creative skill formed every single human being, wouldn't you want them to know? So does the LORD, the Father. If you had made the ultimate sacrifice of your life to save all people, wouldn't you appreciate a victory parade for heroes at least once a week? So does the LORD, the Son. If you found a way to heal countless broken lives and restore marriage relationships, you wouldn't want such wonders to go unnoticed, would you? Neither does the LORD, the Holy Spirit. **The Shepherd's reputation** means blessings and joy.

This is so uplifting when we see what wayward sheep we are, how we grieve our Good Shepherd's heart. Calling on Him in prayer may be very difficult after we've done something shameful or if we slide back into the ruts of sinful habits and addictions. Yet the Good Shepherd's kindness puts His **reputation** on the line: **"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me."** (Psalm 50:15)

God's Name-**reputation** guarantees He hears our prayers for other sinful people too. When Israel worshiped the golden calf and committed sexual sin, the LORD was ready to destroy them. Moses appealed to **The Shepherd's reputation**. He basically asked, "What will the Egyptians think?" **"Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people."** (Exodus 32:12) The LORD did relent. He is **"the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin."** (Exodus 34:6f).

A century before the sinful city of Jerusalem was to be destroyed, the LORD said through Isaiah: **"For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to cut you off."** (48:9) 100 years later Jeremiah again appealed to **The Shepherd's reputation**: **"For the sake of your name do not despise us; do not dishonor your glorious throne. Remember your covenant with us and do not break it."** (14:21) The people broke the Old Covenant. So the LORD made a New Covenant of pure grace and forgetful forgiveness. He saved a remnant of His flock **for His Name's Sake**.

Can you see our amazing "leverage of love" on **The Shepherd's reputation**? No one wants to look bad. Neither does God Almighty. Speak to the LORD of His dear Name and you have a lever on His love. Thinking about His **reputation** and His tender love will lever away your fear. If we pull away from His **reputation**, love's leverage is a firm hand to lead sheep back though we did not want to be led.

Our faithful Shepherd laid down His life for us! **The Shepherd's reputation** turns me away from my self into **"Paths of Righteousness."** I stop loving myself most, and eagerly love Christ and others instead. I waive my rights and place my personal affairs into my Master's capable hands. Gratitude sustains me in the wide open pastures of His Word as He guides and guards me. **"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee."** (Isaiah 26:3 KJV) His quietness and peace make me strong.

Don't be that sheep that refuses to be led. **"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."** (Proverbs 14:12) **"It is God who is working in you, both to will and to work, for his good pleasure."** (Philippians 2:13 EHV) **"Paths of Righteousness"** lead to life and joy eternal.

*Whether my pathway leads to hilltops fair and high or through the sunless valleys where the shadows lie, it matters little, for I know that you are with me. Your paths of righteousness are life and health and peace. Where you lead, I gladly go. Guide me faithfully on life's uncertain way here to my heavenly homeland there. In Jesus' precious Name. Amen.*²

² Adapted from *My Prayer Book*. (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), p. 10.