

# BodyLife Past Article Archive

## The Call of the Shepherd

As put into words by Wayne Jacobsen

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[I appreciate that the form of this piece can lend itself to misinterpretation. By putting it in the first person I am not claiming to quote Jesus directly or giving a prophecy. I simply wrote down as best I could the voice that rings in my heart. Much of the language here is drawn from Scripture (cf. Ezekiel 34, Micah 5, Matthew 9:35-38, 11:25-30, John 10) as it speaks of God's heart for his people.]

Do you remember the first day you knew that I loved you? Do you remember how clean you felt and how light your heart was? The air seemed clearer, the colors of my creation brighter. You felt as if you had stumbled out of a dark, dirty cave and plunged headlong into a clean, cool stream. You drank in the reality of my presence and splashed with delight in my goodness.

In that moment nothing else mattered. You knew at the very core of your being that I was real, that I had great affection for you. Even in the face of dire circumstances, you were convinced that there was nothing we couldn't walk through together. My love not only overwhelmed you, it also overflowed you with grace for others, even those who had wronged you. You woke up every morning in eager anticipation of what I'd show you that day. You delighted yourself in me as I delighted myself in you and each day became an adventure together.

Wouldn't you like to come back to that place? Me too. That's not just where I wanted you to start. It was where I wanted you to live every day.

## Harassed and Helpless

I know things got complicated. I didn't fix everything you wanted me to fix and I know that shook your confidence in me. Others told you that you weren't working hard enough so you concluded that the success of our relationship was hinged on your effort and wisdom. When anything went wrong you either blamed me for not loving you or yourself for not trying hard enough. Both were dead ends and the life we shared eventually faded into confusion and guilt.

But I never gave up on you. I knew your best efforts would not be enough, which is why I already satisfied in myself all my Father would ever require of you. Your righteousness is in me and guilt never has a place in our relationship. And I know I disappointed your expectations, but that was only because I had better things in mind for you. I work through times of pain as well as times of joy.

I know you thought I had lost sight of you, but I never had. It was you who lost sight of me. I know right

where you are and every place you have wandered because I followed you there. I have continued to call your name and invite you into the life that really is life. But so many other things drowned out my voice, activities you thought would bring me closer to you and the busyness you got caught in hoping to hide your emptiness. Even when I tried to scoop you up in my arms, you recoiled, not recognizing my hand and I held back, letting you have the distance you thought you needed.

I'm still here ready for you to fall into my arms. I want you to see through the illusion of your own efforts to produce my work in your life, or in the lives of others. I will teach you how to trust my purpose in you so that even times of trouble will not destroy our friendship. Come, my Beloved, let me wash over you again like a cool fountain, cleansing all that has hurt and confused you. Let us start anew and I will show you just how much I love you and that all I ever wanted from you was you!

### **A Shepherd Like No Other**

Did I not tell you that I would take care of you - that I would lead you into safe pastures and refresh you with living water? Did I not tell you that I had rejected the shepherds who wanted to use my flock for their own purpose battering and plundering them for their own gain?

You need no other shepherd but me. I will lead you into rich pastures and watch over you so that you will never need to be afraid again. I am not going to exploit you, for I am the shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. I did not run in the face of my own death, but embraced the shame because I wanted to open the way for us to be together.

No one on this planet ever has or ever will love you like I do. The great lie is that I cannot be trusted with your life. Oh, but I can! I will take care of you and teach you to follow me so that you can know the fullness of my life. I will hold you close to my heart as we walk through the days ahead. Even in the face of pain and death, I will ensure that nothing will take you out of my hand. I will draw you to myself, wipe every tear from your eyes and through it all transform you into the person I created you to be.

I know you haven't always seen that, nor yielded to me so that I could do it. You wandered in places where you got hurt and sought out easy answers that could not work. I have not been the source of your pain, but the one who has offered you healing. All the while I wanted to teach you how I work. I do not put band-aids over your life so it will look better but seek to heal you at the deepest places. It is not something that you can do, but it is something that you can thwart if you won't let me teach you how to yield to my wisdom and power. You have nothing to fear. Your entire life is in my hands and my hands are sure.

### **No More Strangers**

My sheep know my voice. I call you by name and point the way for you to go, but you have found the voice of strangers to be more certain than my own. Those who take turns pretending to be the shepherd have

destroyed your confidence in my ability to lead you. Wanting you to be dependent on them, they told you to follow them because they knew what would be best for you.

Many of them even meant well, but the end result was always the same. They could not lead you to life because life is only in me. They had no way of knowing where I wanted to lead you and they were blinded to my working by their own plans to do what they thought were great things for me.

And you followed them, only to be abused and exploited. It was their vision they served and not mine. Yes, I saw your pain when they turned on you for asking honest questions and cut you off when you sought to follow me instead of them. I know how deeply it hurts to be betrayed by those you thought loved you. I never wanted you to trust them more than me. I never asked you to follow any man or woman. They're the ones who asked you to do that.

I know many of you thought they were helping you, but in the end they only led you astray. They bullied you with their imagined authority and bloodied you with guilt and calls to loyalty. But you knew better, didn't you? Often I warned you and your heart was unsettled in the things they told you. You overrode my warnings because you didn't think yourself mature enough to question people like them. At such times you were looking to yourself and not to me. I am strong enough to lead you in my life, even beyond your doubts and insecurities.

Anyone who knows me will teach you to follow me. They will not use you to build their ministry or to line their pockets. They will give freely, always pointing you to the only shepherd that matters - me! They will encourage you to trust my love for you and will teach you to follow me even when you're uncertain. They know it is better for you to learn to follow me and make a mistake than think yourself secure in any program they could devise.

Are you tired of listening to the voice of strangers? I want to teach you how to know my voice again. I have others that will help you learn but listen only to those that point you to me, not the ones who would gather you to themselves. You can trust me to make clear to you everything that I want you to know and everything that I call you to do. If you don't hear my voice in what others say do not feel any obligation to follow their counsel or their instruction. You are only truly safe in me.

## **Listen**

Can you hear me calling you in the deepest chambers of your heart and mind? I am not loud and boisterous. I will not compete with the clamor of the world nor the busyness of your agenda. I gently call you by name, hold you close to my heart and invite you to follow me.

If my voice seems only to drift by for a moment and then fades into the harried pace of life, it is because your ears are better tuned to other things. I only seem more distant when you trust your own wisdom

instead of mine. Often I have shown you the way I want you to go but instead of simply following, you looked at the challenges that stood in your way and convinced yourself that it wasn't me at all. I do not take the path of least resistance, but neither do I send you where I will not go with you. One day you will know that your safety is not in pleasant circumstances, but in being with me.

If you have forgotten how to listen, just ask me and I will show you. It is not as hard as you think. I simply want you to draw near to me and once again let your heart be mine alone. The more you grow in knowing my love for you, the easier it will be to recognize my gentle prodding. I am greater than any doubt that troubles you or any voice that seeks to steer you another way. I will help you recognize my presence in all you do. I will show you how to live as a father or mother, child or student, employer or employee, neighbor or friend. Don't separate me to a separate spiritual part of your life, I want to make all of your life spiritual and all of it full in me.

## **You Won't Be Alone**

I know that the closer you follow me the lonelier it seems. You even think at times that I have abandoned you and you withdraw into your own fears. But even there I am with you, calling you outside yourself to come into the freedom of being my child and to join your hearts with others in my flock who live for no other.

You've been called arrogant, independent and unsubmitted, not by those who knew my heart, but by those who wanted you to conform to their way of doing things. They can't see the body beyond their own way of organizing. If you only knew how many people I have scattered all over the world, you would know that you're not alone.

Some of those live just down the block from you or work alongside you. I know that you don't know them yet but you do understand the passion that courses through their veins and their desire to connect with people who share it. I am the shepherd of all my sheep and I am not only inviting you to follow me as an individual, I am gathering my flock together from the ends of the earth - not in human systems devouring your time and energy, but in the joy of healthy friendships. No man will own it and no system will replicate what I am building between my people. Resist the temptation to follow models devised by men that will always fail.

I will knit you into relationships with people near you and even some far away so that you can enjoy the richness of my flock. Don't try to make it happen on your own. Just live with your eye on me everyday and soon you will find people around you who follow the same Shepherd you follow.

But first I want your heart to be completely mine. If you try to use others in the body to get what you do not find in me, it will only ruin the relationships. I want to teach you how to share my life together, each

one receiving from my hand and sharing freely with the others without demanding anything in return. As you love that way you will find that life among my people is not cumbersome, but of great joy. You will go away from encounters more aware of who I am and less focused on your needs and weaknesses.

## **Wherever I Lead**

What do I need from you? I need a willing heart that will simply follow me wherever I choose to take you. I don't need great talent, great wisdom or great abilities, just a yielded life willing to learn how to trust me beyond your wisdom and your fears.

I want you to abandon your agenda, for it will only distract you from what I want to do in you. Even the best of intentions can lead you to desire the wrong things and following the wrong path. If you only knew the plans I have for you with a future and a hope that far outweighs your own agenda, you would abandon yours in an instant.

Don't try to save yourself for you will only get in deeper trouble. Stop. Take a deep breath and yield to my arms. Pause before me and listen until you hear that voice that says, "This is the way I want you to go." Don't worry about whether or not it makes sense to you. I've been here before and you have not. I know the way through your doubts and pain to greater transformation and freedom.

Wake up each day and lay your agenda aside. Live in the moment looking for my hand and listening to my voice. Don't live in the past by copying what you've done before. Don't try to secure the future with programs and models that only offer false security.

Lay down even your dreams for ministry. You have confused your dreams with mine and trying to fulfill them in your own effort will only frustrate you. If they are only your dreams you won't want them and those that are mine I will bring to pass in a way that you cannot even imagine yet. Most of what you call ministry has more to do with human aspiration than it does the life of my kingdom. Your pursuit of ministry instead of me will be a barrier not a blessing. Let me teach you all over again, how much I love the broken-hearted, the wounded and the oppressed and how I set them free.

## **To the Heights**

I can keep following you and rescuing you out of all the places you get stuck, or you can turn around and follow me and I will lead you to the heights of my glory. I am the way to Father's fullness and I want nothing more than to take you there.

Let me scoop you up in my arms and carry you along as I show you the wonders of my Father's kingdom. Tune your ears to my voice and look to me in everything you do. There is no situation that I can't lead you through and no promise that I cannot fulfill in you. Trust my voice more than your own and yield to my

hand as I shape you into the person I created you to be.

There is nothing you can do to earn this. It is beyond your ability, but it is not beyond mine. I am able to make you stand and establish you in my gospel. I am able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times you will have all that you need. I am able to guard all that you have entrusted to me and able to help you at your weakest moment. And I am able to keep you from falling and present you before God's glorious presence, without fault and with great joy! (Rom. 14:4; 16:25-26, 2 Cor. 9:8, 2 Tim 1:12, Heb. 5:2; Jude 24-25)

I am calling my flock back to me from all the places it has been scattered. I will take you to the heights of my glory, where you can delight in the greenest of pastures and drink the purest water. You will never need to be afraid again for you will know how much I love you and how safe you are in my hand. There is no God beside me, and no life apart from mine.

Come, my Beloved, your time is now. Draw near to me. Take my hand and I will show you all that I hold in my heart for you and you will discover the unmitigated joy of living in my rest.

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