

## His Flock Among the Lilies

By Lynn Warner

*“My beloved is mine, and I am his; He pastures his flock among the lilies.”*  
(Song of Solomon 2:16 NASB)

Relationship and identity reveal who we belong to and who we really are. If our relationship is built on Christ and we abide with Him then we *“...are already clean because of the word which I (Jesus) have spoken to you”* (John 15:3) and *“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love”* (John 15:10a). However, if our relationships are with darkness and lies, we will be fragmented and numb, and stumble along our way. If we follow Jesus he has said, *“...I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life”* (John 8:12). We will be more whole and “lifened” if we follow Jesus, for He is Eternal Life. In John 17:3, He defines Eternal Life: *“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*

Life in the Spirit is “knowing” – it is relational. To have a loving relationship, we have a sense of belonging – a connection, and we feel like we are “seen” (accepted and welcomed). We are in God’s household and eat at His table. Psalm 23 gives us a lovely picture of this: *“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake”* (Psalm 23:1-3). Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10, and what do the sheep do? They follow Him, because they know His voice: *“When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. A stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers”* (John 10:4-5).

A “stranger” represents great danger in this passage. In fact, by the ninth verse, we recognize the stranger which Jesus describes is a **thief**. *“I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The **thief** comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep”* (John 10:9-11).

Like Psalm 23, the Good Shepherd takes great care of His sheep, and nourishes and cherishes them with life-giving food and water (both physical and spiritual). He converts their souls and leads them in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. The sheep hear Him and heed Him; they know His voice and follow Him. Not only that, but they also flee from the voice of strangers who come to steal, kill, and destroy with darkness and lies.

The Good Shepherd protects His sheep and even lays down His life for them. Jesus emphatically states His protection in John 10:27-28: *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”* Jesus knows when we need help – He knows our true needs before we do and Jesus is with us providing life, truth and the way. Psalm 23:5 describes that God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. Jesus allows us to eat at His table in His household, and are invited into His presence.

Yet, we may shrink back in distrust, especially when we go through trials, suffering and start doubting. He is always asking us if we hear and believe in the Gospel. The Gospel is the Good News that shows us the way of “real life”. When we sin God leads us to repentance – then when we repent of our wandering and distrustful ways, we are met with welcoming love and

acceptance by our Shepherd. He gives us strength and power to trust Him through our many sufferings. Can we say like Job, *“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him”*? (Job 13:15). We can only trust God through our Belief in Jesus, as Jesus explained in John 6:29: *“... This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”* This statement does not simply mean our initial belief when we first come to Christ, but a continual belief that works throughout our lives.

God feeds us His grace, as we see in Hebrews, where we are warned: *“Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited”* (Hebrews 13:9). We who live by Faith in Jesus Christ do not find life in the law of commandments or penalties but in the Gospel of Grace, mercy, and Eternal life. He Himself works in us, as our Great Shepherd, to do his will: *“Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen”* (Hebrews 13:20-21). We are instructed to obey and work out our salvation as we see in Philippians 2:12: *“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”* In the very next verse (13), we see how to obey: *“for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”* We sheep are weak and don’t even know how to pray as we should as we see in Romans 8:26-27: *“In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”*

As our identity and relationship in Christ reveals who we belong to and who we truly are, our new nature is also revealed, not only to others, but to us also. We also see our fleshly nature and are scandalized by it. Our weaknesses offend us. The weaknesses and the fleshly natures of our Brethren in Christ may also offend us. But Jesus sees it all, all of our weak sheepish brokenness, foolishness, and wanderings. He will even leave the flock to fetch us back if we wander too far astray (Jesus told this parable in Luke 15:3-7). As God empowers us, we must remember to approach all things (in Him) like our Heavenly Shepherd.

I have pondered Hosea 14:4a for many years: *“I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely.”* Both the parable of the Lost Sheep and the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) seem to illustrate that our backsliding, apostasy, and wandering can only be healed by God’s freely given love. Penalties and punishments emphasize the problem of sin, but they do not heal us or keep us in the love of God. Only through the Gospel can we truly say, *“My beloved is mine, and I am His”* (Song of Solomon 2:16a) *“and His banner over me is love”* (Song of Solomon 2:4b). Jesus is our Good Shepherd who calls, leads, feeds, keeps, and protects us. *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 15:13).