

Shepherd's Field Guide
TCC
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Disclaimer:

The following is a preliminary guide for shepherds and, by extension, their sheep. This guide is not comprehensive. In fact, due to the astonishing nature of the gospel, more may be added (or amended) by either shepherd or sheep as s/he goes through life, observing, sharing and practicing the art of being said shepherd or sheep. The author relinquishes all responsibility for any sheep or shepherd's behavior or decisions. This is only a guide. It is requested that all who read (or hear) these guidelines give them prayerful consideration. This guide may not apply to all sheep or shepherds in all situations for all times. It is ultimately up to the hearer or the reader to decide for her/himself whether any or all guidelines apply to them personally.

*A sheep is willing to be led. That is, in human terms, willing to be wrong. She is willing to change directions, to go "another way." She does not consider this an affront to her intelligence or to her worth as a sheep. She trusts the Good Shepherd and will follow, even though it may not make her immediately happy. She knows it will ultimately make her happy, joyous, and free.

*A sheep has faith in the Way of the Shepherd even though the Way seems at times to be rocky and rough. He looks up, takes a deep breath and understands that life's difficulties and challenges are not personal. They are universal. He also knows that the less he complains and thinks of himself as "singled out" or alone, the more likely he is to attain wisdom. He is also more likely to enjoy the good things in life along the way.

Even though the sheep can be very smart, sometimes he gets stuck. This is where faith comes in. The sheep counts on the words of Psalm 27:14 and "waits upon the Lord." This is Way of transcendence, or "rising above it all," rather than having to figure everything out or be in charge of everything. That way can be very taxing on sheep and may cause many unpleasant stress symptoms.

*The sheep look out for one another. The Shepherd needs cooperation and partnership with his sheep. When one sees another blindly headed in the wrong direction (maybe even over a cliff), the sheep calls out. The sheep makes a racket. The sheep lets the Shepherd know, "Hey, over here, Shepherd."

Uniquely, those of our faith are both sheep and shepherds. Over time, we are likely to play both roles, interchangeably and even simultaneously. While a shepherd helps gently guide a wayward one back into the fold, s/he is also a sheep, one who follows the Good Shepherd. We are all following something or someone; best it be He who claims us as His own.

*Shepherds can become messy and smelly and quite weary. That's because they work so hard. This is where self-care comes in. The shepherd must be sure to take breaks, vacations, time for recreation, reflection and good conversation. They must withdraw for prayer, beauty, laughter and renewal. An exhausted, angry shepherd is not good for the sheep. When the shepherd notices that the body is tense, or in pain, when s/he is complaining more than giving thanks and seeing beauty, when no one or nothing can please him/her and there is little laughter, it is time to step back, recalibrate, and replenish at the fountain of joy that is provided only by resting in the heart of God.

*Shepherds need lots of eyes and ears to know what's happening with their sheep. Sheep tell the Shepherd when someone is hurting, lost or missing. All sheep, out of love and respect for the Good Shepherd, let others know when these things occur. Sheep must be mindful, however, to do this with love and confidence, not ever at the expense of anyone's privacy or dignity.

*Shepherds take risks for their sheep. They extend themselves beyond the norm. Everyone wants to look good, to come out "smelling like a rose." But that is seldom the case with shepherds. We come out smelling like anything but a rose, oftentimes. This is okay. We work for the Good Shepherd. We have a covenant, a vow, a promise, to care for the sheep. The shepherd knows, too, that not all sheep will do the right thing. Not all sheep will follow. Not all sheep will avoid the cliff. This is the heartbreaking part of shepherding. But the shepherd must continue; she must go on. He must fulfill his function as a Shepherd. Otherwise, so many other sheep will go by the wayside.

*Shepherds understand that integrity is the bedrock of their efficacy as shepherds. They do not embellish or tarnish the truth. They do not dramatize or over tell or exaggerate, except in fun or to make a point. Shepherds are soldiers for peace; they may not get to make every point they want to make; that's okay. Who they are speaks oftentimes louder than what they say.

*Shepherds know there are wolves in many disguises, pretty much everywhere. In war, in families, in situations where great stakes are involved, there are wolves we can and cannot see. Jesus showed us that The Good Shepherd gets beyond comfort, beyond feelings, beyond convenience. Jesus was called the Good Shepherd; he was also called the Lamb of God. This is a paradox of being innocent (pure in heart) but also wise. In Matthew 10:16 Jesus tells us: "Behold I send you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be you wise as serpents and harmless as doves." We train ourselves to be meek ("Blessed are the meek.") in situations (that is, to "not insist on our own way"-1st Corinthians: 13). But we need to be bold and courageous, in our lives and for the church, as shepherds and as sheep, for God's flock is in this room and outside this room.

*You and I have the privilege of being God's Shepherds and the sheep of God's pasture. We take care of each other. We take care of ourselves. We take care of creation. This is our mandate. This is our solemn and joyous purpose in life. May God bless us all on our Way.