

*11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."*

I remember running down a hill, I was very small, behind me, chasing me was a lamb nearly as tall as I. The hill was steep, my legs were trying to keep up with my speed, the lamb was easily running faster. He lowered his head and knocked me to the ground. I laughed in joy.

Skippy was my pet lamb. We didn't raise sheep in those days, a neighbor must have had a lamb that was rejected by the mother sheep - we raised Fuzzy on a bottle. Whenever he saw me he came running. My lamb, though I think my sister Kay thought Skippy was her lamb too.

*I am the good shepherd*, says Jesus. I like to think that every one of you is a lamb that Jesus found orphaned. Jesus adopted you, fed you, frolics with you - a friend.

*I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.* Jesus knows you, has joy in you the way a little boy had joy in a pet lamb. The way the almighty Father has joy in his Son. *I know my own and my own know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.*

All of this is nothing like the sheep I raised later on.

When I was in junior high my father decided that my brother and I needed more responsibility. He bought sheep for us to raise.

I never named these sheep. They were just the sheep to me. I never fed them one by one. When I walked out in the pasture they did not run toward me, they ran the other way. I was responsible for their care. I fed them in the harsh days of winter. On a cold windy February afternoon I brought a ewe and lamb into shelter when a lamb was born out on that same hillside down which Skippy had chased me. I set my alarm for 3 am so that I could go out to the barn and make sure the newborn lambs were being fed by their mothers, and when they were not, I held the ewe with my knee and forced the nipple into the lamb's mouth and usually had success. Yet even though everything I was doing was for their good, they opposed

me in everything. Maybe deep down inside they sensed that the last thing I would do with them would be to send them to the slaughter.

I think of Jesus as my shepherd. How many times as he seeks to guide me in ways that are for my good, I resist. His word says, "Believe!" and I doubt. He invites: "Pray without ceasing!" and I worry. He nudges me toward forgiveness and I hold grudges.

I remember one day trying to get the sheep into the barn where there was food, shelter from the coming cold weather. The more I pushed them toward the barn door, the more they tried to escape. Just like those afraid to enter this place of shelter and feeding.

One more memory I would like to share with you. Actually it is a memory I do not remember. At the end of the summer, my father must have sent my pet lamb to the slaughter. I don't remember any discussion, no scenes, no tears, but looking back I know that the lamb I loved was killed, and I was powerless to stop it.

"I am the good shepherd," says Jesus, "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Jesus, your shepherd, was taken to the slaughter for you. The Father sent God's own Son to the slaughter instead of the lamb. *The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away - and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because the hired hand does not care for the sheep.*

There was all the difference between the lamb I loved and the lambs I was just raising. Yet I could not keep even the lamb I loved from the slaughter.

There is all the difference in the world between everyone who wants your life and your days to belong to them because of what you can do for them, and Jesus.

Will you let your life be ruled by the promise of wealth? Will you sacrifice time with family, and health, and concern for your neighbor all so that you can find security in accumulated wealth?

Will you let your life be ruled by entertainment, enslaved to soap opera and ballgame and boat? Will enjoyment be the shepherd of your life, your guide, your Lord?

Will family become your reason for living, serving children, seeking love, or putting all your eggs in the basket of your marriage?

Only Jesus can save you from the slaughter - he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

Trust in the Good Shepherd, Jesus. Listen to his voice; trust in him for he leads you not to the slaughter, but to green pastures and still waters and to life now and forever with him.