

ARE YOU DRIVEN, OR ARE YOU LED?

A young missionary traveling in the desert regions of Africa spotted a nomadic shepherd driving his sheep. Thinking it somewhat odd, she commented to her guide, "Look at that shepherd. I've never seen one driving the sheep so angrily before. Is that common in this country?"

Her guide responded, "No, Mam, for that is not a shepherd. A shepherd leads the sheep. That, Mam, is the butcher. The butcher buys the herd and then drives the sheep to their slaughter."

This true illustration leaves me with a lump in my throat. It makes me wonder how many times I have thought my shepherd was leading me, when it was really the butcher driving me every step of the way.

We get so easily driven in a world like ours. It seems like every moment of our time is clamored after and apportioned out. How do we know the difference between led and driven?

First we have to know the difference between a shepherd and a butcher. I think it is safe to see the shepherd (our source) as He who goes before us. If we find ourselves frantically moving forward with our source behind us, then we had better take another look!

A shepherd is a leader, provider and protector. A butcher is a destroyer whose finished work is slaughter.

Phillip Keller, in his book called *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, tells us of the wondrous benefits of a relationship between sheep and their shepherd:

We get the idea of an ever-present Shepherd on the scene, and also the concept that the sheep wants to be in full view of his owner at all times.

It is the alertness, the awareness, the diligence of a never-tiring master which alone assures the sheep of excellent care. And from the sheep's standpoint it is knowing that the shepherd is there; it is the constant awareness of his presence nearby that automatically eliminates most of the difficulties and dangers while at the same time providing a sense of security and serenity.

His presence guarantees there will be no lack of any sort; that there will be abundant green pastures; that there will be still, clean waters; that there will be new paths into fields; that there will be safe summers on the high tablelands; that there will be freedom from fear; that there will be antidotes for disease and parasites; that there will be quietness and contentment.

In contrast, the butcher is a man of blood who angrily drives his sheep. He is not interested in the welfare of the sheep. He is only interested in getting them to a place of slaughter and destruction. He wants his last pound of flesh and in place of the sheep's lifeblood, he wants personal gain.

There is no rest, for the butcher illicitly fear and frenzy in place of peace and contentment. The only guarantee is death. No quiet meadow awaits his sheep, only a desperate journey filled with peril and rage that leads to nothing but annihilation.

What a beautiful vivid picture of different moments and periods in our lives as believers. We are the sheep of our Lord's pastures, the lambs of His flock. When we walk with Him and listen obediently to His voice, we are gathered in His loving arms and carried in His bosom. He gently leads us and grants us the grace to follow.

When we lose sight of the Good Shepherd, and slip away to go our own way, we forget that we are under a caretaker. Suddenly, we sense the peace is gone, things don't seem quite right. Now we are running and there isn't enough time or energy to get it all done. Soon we begin to hear the strains of a harsh voice behind us.

"What's the matter? Can't you do anything right? Move faster. Try harder. Do more. Your Shepherd won't love you if you don't perform! Where is He now? Don't you know, silly lamb, that He gave up on you when you made that bad turn? He won't come for you now. Give up on Him, and get moving."

The enraged voice of the lying butcher is a far cry from that of the gentle loving Shepherd, who is always willing to leave the ninety-nine to find just one that is lost. Which voice do you hear at this moment in your life?

How I wish we always heard only the voice of our Jesus. But, sadly, there are times or circumstances when another voice breaks through. My prayer for those who are frantically running before the butcher is a prayer for release and return.

Ask the Lord to show you when you lost the wonderful peace that comes from following Him closely. Ask Him when the quiet meadows disappeared, and the driving tyranny began. Confess those things that took your eyes and heart off of Jesus and ask for ears that respond only to Him.

What will He do? He will gather you in His arms and lift you to His heart. He will lead you gently back to what you thought you had lost. With tears of delight (like the father of the prodigal son) he will restore you to that place of quiet rest near to the very heart of God.

The first step cannot come until you honestly respond to the question, "Are you led, or are you driven?" It is His question to you. Will you let Him search your heart for the answer? He waits to comfort you with arms outstretched...

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