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Safely Home

Above Politics and Parliaments, Part 6

1 Peter 2:25

Discussion Guide

Main Idea:

In order to face this world and all of the uncertainty that comes with it, we need to entrust ourselves fully to the Good Shepherd to guide and guard every aspect of our lives.

Discussion Points:

- What does it feel like to be lost?
- Have you ever felt like no matter what you try, you can't do the right thing?
- Do non-Christians have any hope of finding their way and living a life that is pleasing to God?

1 Peter 2:25 appeals to the great disparity there is between the lives of the unbeliever and the believer.

- Do you remember what life was like before you trusted Christ as your Savior?
- How has your life changed?
 - Has your mindset or mood changed?
 - How do you deal with pressures and stresses differently?
 - Do you spend your time differently?
 - If you don't recognize a difference, do you think everything is okay?

Jesus often referred to himself as the Good Shepherd.

- How does he act like a shepherd to Christians?
- Why is it important to know Jesus as your shepherd?
- How would your life be different without His guidance?

Discussion Guide cont.

For Jesus to be our shepherd, we must listen to His voice.

- How are you seeking guidance from the Shepherd in your life?
- In what specific ways can you submit to the Shepherd?
- How can you point others to the Shepherd and encourage them to follow His guidance?

Gospel Connection:

If we live for ourselves, we will always wander and be lost. Only through faith in Christ and obedience to His Word can we find our guidance to navigate throughout our lives.

Think: Contemplate what it looks like to have Jesus as your shepherd. Do you trust him and truly believe that His guidance is better than your own?

Pray: Thank God for how he genuinely cares for you. Ask him to continue to guide and protect you through life's struggles and temptations.

Respond: Who do you know that is wandering aimlessly through life? Look for opportunities to share with the joy you have now that you are protected by the Good Shepherd.

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1 Peter 2:25

I came across this article recently – entitled, How to stay safe in the world today:

It offered the following guidelines:

- Avoid riding in automobiles, planes, boats or trains because they are responsible for 36 percent of all fatal accidents – in other words, don't use a plane, train, boat or car to go anywhere;
- But don't walk either because 14 percent of all fatal accidents occur to pedestrians.
- You say, well I just won't go anywhere – no, don't stay home either because 17 percent of all fatal accidents occur in the home;
- So where can you go – well, don't go to the hospital – 32 percent of all deaths occur in there;
- All of that adds up to 99 percent. And that remaining 1 percent – research shows that only one half of one percent of fatalities occur on Sunday in church . . . so the safest place to be is in church.

I'm not sure about this research . . . it sounds like a pastor probably did this.

But the truth is still obvious, life is filled with hazards and risks and injuries – and a big part of the problem is that we depend on so many other people and a host of unseen conditions for so many things in life.

I took about 2 minutes in my study and jotted down a few:

- your education is tied to the diligence of your teachers and the accuracy of your textbooks;
- your income is tied to the decisions of a few people in leadership;

- your business is tied to numerous factors, including other businesses in the marketplace;
- the good investment you hope you're making on products is dependent on the precision of the manufacturer;
- the water you drink and the food you eat is tied to the integrity of that processing plant and the employees overseeing distribution – all the way to the honesty of that grocery store or that chef in the restaurant;
- your health is tied to the skill of that surgeon or the carefulness of that pharmacist;
- your safety is tied to the alertness of that bus driver who takes you to school, and the alertness of all the other drivers coming in your direction.

Life itself is one calculated risk after another. The question isn't whether or not you should get on an airplane; the question is whether or not you should get out of bed.

So much of life is entrusting your life into the hands of mortal, fallible, distracted, dishonest creatures. And then . . . with all that in play . . . you became a Christian – and the list suddenly got longer:

- temptation and sin are now dangerous concerns, where before, sin never bothered you;
- now there's a culture that mocks your values and adds pressure at school or work;
- now, the possibility of suffering some sort of set-back because of your testimony is a reality;

- now, being overlooked, ridiculed, ignored, demoted at work or failed by a teacher at school – all of that adds all the more reason to stay in bed and hide under the covers.

But remember, it's not perfectly safe there either.

So how in the world do you face the world?! And how do you live with confidence and assurance and joy and purpose?

That would have been the question of the first century Christian as well – unjust suffering, the loss of financial security, mistreatment, demotion, ridicule – and on top of that, a government and a culture at large that was growing more and more hostile to the concepts of objective truth and justice and ethical principles and moral boundaries.

I mean, how do you respond – how do you live – where do you ultimately look for guidance?

All of this was racing through the hearts and minds of the early Christians when the Apostle Peter was moved by the Holy Spirit to write a letter to these scattered believers throughout the Roman Empire.

And Peter has been informing us that you've got to look way past earth; you've got to look beyond all the politics and parliaments and machinations and counsel of this world – you have to see beyond it all . . . if you want to face your world with confidence and assurance and joy and purpose.

We're coming to the conclusion of his thoughts on the matter – so turn back with me to **chapter 2 of 1st Peter**.

It's no surprise that Peter wraps up his thoughts on the response of believers to government and culture and unfair masters and uncontrollable conditions – it's no surprise to me that Peter ends this topic with **chapter 2 and verse 25 – For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.**

Now, before Peter reminds us of who God *is*, he reminds us of who we *were* – notice again his

description – *we were continually straying like sheep*.

Again, Peter quotes from *Isaiah 53* where the prophet writes in *verse 6*, *all of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way*.

Throughout the Bible, Christians are most often identified as sheep . . . and for good reason.

They aren't the brightest creatures on the planet – they need the constant attention of shepherds; and, what Peter highlights here, it is the nature of sheep to stray. And even though they aren't the smartest animal on the planet, they seem to be intent on wandering away.

One news article I came across reported on this issue; it read, for centuries now shepherds have tried to keep sheep from straying – everything from additional staff to trained dogs. In more recent times, shepherds have turned to more sophisticated methods. One method is a metal grid – 8 feet wide – built into the ground around the edge of a pasture. The sheep can't walk across it without their hoofs slipping through the grid; but in one county, one of the sheep figured out that it could lie down and roll over the grid – which it did; and all the other sheep in the flock watched and then they rolled over the grid too and they all scampered away.ⁱ

Now part of the bigger problem is that sheep, unlike a normal dog or even a normal cat – and I say that with great hesitation – but to my point – most dogs and cats can find their way home – but sheep cannot.ⁱⁱ

So, for a sheep to wander or stray is the same thing as saying that a sheep has become, and will remain, lost.

Peter draws that kind of analogy as he describes our lives before conversion. Notice again what that was like – *for you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned*.

Now at first glance, it sounds like the sheep actually did come back.

This verb translated *returned* is a word that refers to someone's salvation – or conversion.

You could render it, “you have turned about, or, you have turned around”.ⁱⁱⁱ

This doesn’t mean the sheep were once walking with Christ and then they wandered away, but now they’ve come back to Him.

That can happen too, by the way, but that isn’t Peter’s analogy here. Peter isn’t describing the life of a disobedient believer, he’s describing the life of an unbeliever.

And what’s their life like? Like sheep who are continually straying – which is tantamount to saying, they are continually wandering through life without purpose or meaning.

That’s a description of the world you face tomorrow.

When Jesus saw a huge crowd of people coming after him, Mark recorded in his Gospel Jesus’ perspective and he wrote that Jesus was *moved with compassion – why? – because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34)*.

In other words, as unconverted unbelievers they were like wandering sheep without a shepherd.

So in Peter’s mind, the idea of *returning*, here in this aorist tense, is a reference to a past decisive moment in life.^{iv}

In fact, Peter uses the same verb in *Acts 3:19* where he preaches, “*Therefore repent and return (there’s that same verb) – therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away.*”

The same verb appears again in *Acts 9:35* where people saw the healing of the paralyzed man by the Apostles - we read that *all those who saw him . . . turned* (there it is) *to the Lord*.

Paul used the same verb to describe the conversion of the Thessalonian believers – he writes, *how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God (1 Thessalonians 1:9)*

This is who you were as unbelievers – let me remind you, Peter says – you were wandering like sheep that went astray.

But now that you’ve turned around and become a follower of Jesus – and Peter now

writes – I don’t just want to remind you of who *you* were . . . let me remind you of who *He* is.

Notice again, *but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls*.

He’s our Shepherd . . . and do we ever need one! There’s a good reason the believer isn’t referred to as a lion or a stallion . . . but a sheep.

Even though we’re converted by faith in Christ alone, we’re still, by nature, like sheep.

- Sheep are anatomically weak and unable to bear burdens – which is why the Shepherd bears their burdens;
- Sheep are too timid to drink from rushing water, which is why David said that the Lord leads him to still water;
- Sheep can’t grow their own food or even chase it down – which is why David praised his Shepherd for preparing a pasture and spreads the table for him;
- Without a shepherd, sheep are in deep trouble!

David began that classic poem called *Psalms 23, The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want*.

David is saying, “Everybody, look at who my Shepherd is – it’s the Lord – and because the Lord is my Shepherd, I am satisfied in life.”

Listen, it makes all the difference in the world who’s leading you.

David writes, “the Lord – as if to remind us that the Lord is the only one who can pull off all the things in Psalm 23 that lead us through life and finally home.

The Lord is – present tense – not, the Lord was; the Lord used to be; the Lord might be one day – but, the Lord is!

The Lord is my Shepherd – personally possessive – He’s mine; not, the Lord is my mother or my father’s shepherd; the Lord is my grandfather’s shepherds; the Lord is my good friend’s shepherd – but, the Lord is my Shepherd.

From the first century to the 21st century, the problem with the world can be summarized in one sentence – they’re following the wrong shepherd.

And as a result, our world is continually wandering and in desperate need of redirection.

Just survey the top news stories of the past 12 months:

- Russian aggression;
- North Korean threats;
- failed peace talks in the Middle East;
- nuclear ambitions in rogue countries;
- economic crises in several countries;
- trillion dollar deficits here at home;
- failing educational systems;
- drug cartels and human trafficking and on and on.

And that's just in the last 12 months.

The world is also wandering morally, staggering around in more and more confusion . . . if you look for moral and ethical consistency in the highest levels of leadership in our own country; you discover the pedestals are almost completely empty.

Frankly, our country is in desperate need of the right Shepherd.

Jesus Christ's invitation is issued to your world through us – who happen to represent satisfied, well fed, well led sheep;

Philipp Keller wrote about his experiences as a former shepherd in east Africa; he wrote about the land adjacent to his land which had been rented out to a tenant shepherd who really didn't take very good care of his sheep; his land was over grazed, eaten down to the ground; his sheep were thin, diseased by parasites and often attacked by wild animals. Keller writes that he can remember how his neighbor's sheep would line up at the fence and blankly stare in the direction of his green pasture and his healthy, well fed sheep, almost as if they were longing to be delivered from their abusive shepherd. They seemed to be longing to leave their field and belong to him.^v

For the believer, especially those who were saved later in life – you understand the hunger from trying to feed at that over grazed, barren pasture; you know the disease of a guilty conscience and the parasites of sin that weighed you down; you know the longing in your heart for a new life and a clean heart – and you heard of that Shepherd who said, "***I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father,***

except through me (John 14:6) – that happens to be shepherding terminology – He's the one who knows how to navigate you through life – and He's the one who knows the path to Heaven . . . which is why *He* is truly, the Good Shepherd.

And I commend to you this ***Good Shepherd, who gives His life for His sheep (John 10:11)*** – follow Him! Follow Him.

Peter writes next in ***verse 25*** the truth that the Lord isn't just a Shepherd, He's – notice – ***the Guardian of your souls.***

The word is *episkopos* – which is also used for the elders of the church. The verb form of this title means to oversee, to look after, to care for^{vi}

Again, the analogy to the believer is perfect. Sheep have no recourse in danger except to run; they have no built in battle weapons with which to fight; they are helpless without a Shepherd.

Timothy Laniak, a man who spent several years living among Middle Eastern shepherds, wrote in his journal how trouble prone sheep were – and how desperately they needed an attentive shepherd. He writes, even the hardy mountain breed are susceptible to braxy, pulpy kidney, staggers, pneumonia, pasturella, hypothermia in the winter, scab and scrapie. They push their heads through fences and get cut or stuck; they climb trees to pick at foliage and get hung up by their legs; they fall down banks, get bitten by snakes and stung by wasps. They tumble into ponds and can't get out; they gorge themselves on fallen ash leaves, then roll on their backs and swell up like balloons; they poison themselves on ragwort; they starve, freeze and fall ill – but every affliction they face can be countered by a good shepherd.^{vii}

Listen, beloved, Peter is effectively reminding the believer that they have been rescued from a world that is staggering, wandering, tumbling, drowning, thirsty, hungry and deeply afraid.

In that classic poem of praise, David also writes in Psalm 23 – and ***verse 5*** – ***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.***

Don't miss what David just implied – *in the presence of my enemies* – in other words, sheep following the Lord can end up being surrounded by enemies.

Following the Lord doesn't guarantee the absence of danger and difficulty and suffering – but it does guarantee the presence of the Savior.

Timothy Laniak again writes in his journal, while shepherds watch their flocks at night, so do the wolves. It's a nightly match of watching, waiting and outwitting. He wrote, "I've seen Middle eastern shepherds spend all night shouting, whistling, throwing stones into the darkness in all directions with their slings."^{viii} They know the wolves are out there.

Peter writes to these believers who have nowhere to run and nowhere to hide – *He is the Shepherd and Guardian of your soul.*

And would you notice Peter's mention of the *soul*? That's the inner you . . . the real you.

Peter is implying to these 1st century believers and to this day all around the world in this 21st century, believers may be ruled by tyrants – believers may be suffering mistreatment and abuse – Peter reminds them that their inner being – that immaterial part of them which is immortal and redeemed and on its way to heaven – their real selves is being sustained and guarded by the Lord.

No one can take a believer away from Him; no one can snatch you out of His hand or away from His flock . . . you are eternally secure no matter what may come.

This is how you enter your world, surrounded by risks and hazards and dangers and accidents and trouble – this is how you enter it with joy and confidence and assurance – because you see beyond earth.

You see past all this stuff around you – the politics and parliaments of this world – you see beyond all of that as you fix your eyes on Jesus – your Good Shepherd and the Faithful Guardian of your souls – the One who leads you through life – and will eventually bring you safely home.

Listen beloved, there are a lot more people out there who want "The Lord is my Shepherd" written on their tombstone than would ever want it written on their lives.^{ix}

Peter is commending us to write Him boldly into our lives – to say to the people in your world – "Listen, you know what the real problem is? You need a Shepherd – let me introduce you to mine – He is the Living Lord Jesus."

And live with this kind of perspective . . . and attitude! Don't get beaten down because you didn't get a fair shake.

Listen, the world might be looking *at* you . . . but Your Guardian is looking *out* for you. Just keep following Him.

The world might be *watching* you; but your Shepherd is watching *over* you.^x

And none of you will fail to arrive safely home – and in the meantime, by Shepherded through life according to His plan and divine purpose.

His eye isn't just on the sparrow, it happens to be on you - His sheep.^{xi}

This text and context reminded me of the lyrics to a song by Don Wyrzten, written a number of years ago.

When alarmed by the fury of the restless sea,
Towering waves before you roll,
At the end of doubt and peril is eternity,
Though fear and conflict seize your soul.
Just think of stepping on shore, and finding it
heaven;

Of touching a hand, and finding it God's,
Of breathing new air, and finding it celestial,
Of waking up in Glory, and finding it "Home."
Look there . . . can you see just ahead? There according to His perfect timing, this faithful Shepherd and the Guardian of your soul will land you, without accident – without sliding off the runway . . . without error – perfectly, safely home.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/14/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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- ii John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of Peter* (Kregel, 2005), p. 128
- iii D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (BMH, 1984), p. 190
- iv Daniel G. Powers, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude* (Beacon Hill Press, 2010), p. 103
- v Philip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm Twenty-Three*
- vi Hiebert, p. 190
- vii Timothy Laniak, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks* (ShepherdLeader Publications, 2007), p. 65
- viii Tim Laniak, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks* (ShepherdLeader Publications, 2007)
- ix Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*: www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/february/4020408.html
- xx Warren W. Wiersbe, *1 Peter: Be Hopeful* (David C Cook, 1982), p. 76
- xi R. C. Sproul, *1-2 Peter* (Crossway, 2011), p. 87