

The Shulamite's Experience of Shepherding

Part 1 - *Where Do You Feed Your Flock?*

*Tell me, O you whom I love,
Where you feed your flock*

In the last series on shepherding, we looked at how Paul cared for the Thessalonians. We learned that he was personal with them and invested in their lives. We traced the word *faith* in 1 Thessalonians 3, seeing that he *sent to know their faith, heard of their faith, and was comforted by their faith*. Perhaps you noticed, but there was one more phrase regarding *faith* that we never talked about. Paul also desired *to see their face and perfect what is lacking in their faith* (3:10). This phrase has a lot wrapped up in it. There are endless ways to perfect what is lacking in someone's faith, depending on who they are and where their faith is at. It's hard to know what Paul had in mind for perfecting the Thessalonians' faith. One way to look into this phrase could be to study the rest of Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians and see what he wrote to them (he may have gotten to visit them in person again, but the Bible doesn't give any definitive details). Another way to investigate this concept is to look at what else the Lord has currently been speaking to me about shepherding. This is a more experiential option, but it's also based in the Bible. The Lord has recently brought up a little section of verses in Song of Songs where the Shulamite experiences shepherding within the context of her relationship with King Solomon. I hope that by looking at the Shulamite's experience of shepherding, we can go further into what shepherding looks like (or *where* it happens).

This is the section in Song of Songs:

Tell me, O you whom I love,
Where you feed your flock,
Where you make it rest at noon.
For why should I be as one who veils herself
By the flocks of your companions?

If you do not know, O fairest among women,
Follow in the footsteps of the flock,
And feed your little goats
Beside the shepherds' tents.

Song of Songs 1:7-8

In the first stanza, The Shulamite is speaking to King Solomon, who is the one *whom she loves* (line 1). Then in the second stanza, King Solomon replies. The relationship between King Solomon and the Shulamite is often seen as a picture of the relationship between us and the Lord. So, we can also take the first stanza to be our words to the Lord and the second stanza to be His response to us. In the next article, I will share on Solomon's response in the second stanza (which involves more of what the Lord has been showing me recently), but I wanted to spend some time on the very request that prompted his response.

O You Whom I Love

The Shulamite firstly wanted to be with the one she loved. Perhaps she noticed that he went away with his flock every day and didn't come back until the evening. She wasn't satisfied with just knowing Solomon in the mornings and evenings at his palace, or whenever they were able to spend time together. She also wanted to be around Him while he tended to the sheep, while he did his day's work. Shepherding isn't a very kingly activity, but she didn't care. She didn't think it right that she only knew where Solomon's friends pastured their sheep. She wanted to be right where *he* was.

Where You Feed Your Flock, Where You Make it Rest at Noon

The Shulamite also realized that if she wanted to be with her Beloved more, she needed to find out where he cared for his flock. She didn't just ask, "Where are *you* at noontime?" She recognized that where his sheep were, there he would be. What kind of place was Solomon at? He would have to be somewhere with lush grass, somewhere with clean, flowing water, and somewhere with shade from the sun. Solomon couldn't go just anywhere to feed his flock. He needed to be where the food was, where the restful areas were. Once the Shulamite found out where Solomon was, she would be coming to a very special place. She wanted to go there, to the place Solomon had chosen, to the place he deemed worthy for caring for his sheep.

The Shulamite's request reveals what kind of attitude she had toward Solomon and his flock. Regarding Solomon, she was so in love. Regarding his flock, it's like she was saying, "I'm starting to notice what you do during the day. I'm starting to take interest in your life's work. And I want to be where you are doing it." This is a sweet picture of a Christian who, out of love for their Lord, wants to put themselves in the place where He is working. Even if they don't quite know what He is doing, they are curious to find out, like the Shulamite, "What kind of food does He have them eat? From which brook does He have them drink? Under what trees does he have them lie down?" By spending time where the Lord is working, that Christian could learn so much about the way He cares for His sheep--what kinds of experiences He puts in their lives, how He moves them with His word, how He uses other people around them. They could watch, day by day, the little sheep grow. This would take patience and endurance, to be out with the sheep every day and observe the slow progress of nurturing a lamb to maturity. But it seems that

the Shulamite would not be bothered. She would feel so privileged that she would just get to be where her love was working.

What did Solomon call the Shulamite after she made her request? He called her the “fairest among women” (v. 8). Perhaps he was thinking, “You really are the most beautiful among women. No one has ever asked me about my flock. Everyone likes to enjoy my palace, look at my riches, and eat food with me, but you want to come with me to the dirty, hot, unpredictable outdoors.” The Shulamite’s longing to be with him as he worked was so attractive to him. Perhaps King Solomon started to feel excited for her to come out to the pasture the next day and see how he tended his sheep. Perhaps he started daydreaming of no longer working alone but having his companion to help him and to simply spend time with him.

Could we generate this excitement in the Lord? Do you realize just how much the Lord appreciates us taking interest in His work? This interest can be the genesis of our shepherding. Our love for Him blossoms into a curiosity--“Lord, what are you caring for right now? *Where* are you taking care of it? I don’t mind if it’s not as glorious as a palace, or if it’s too hot outside or too cold. You have a work that you’re about, and I’d like to know what that is. Because it’s what you’re doing, I want to be there.”

In our care for people, may we be reminded of this picture. “*O you whom I love*, I delight to know Your business. And I want You to be delighted by my interest in where you feed your flock.”