

***He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*** The term “*He Maketh*” does not imply the Good Shepherd forced his sheep to lie down but rather it means he made the conditions such that they wanted to lie down. The make-up of sheep makes it almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met.

1. Because of their shy and timid nature, they refuse to lie down unless they are free of all fear.
2. Sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind.
3. They will not lie down if tormented by flies or other pest.
4. Sheep will not lie down as long as they hunger.

It is significant that only the shepherd can provide this calm atmosphere. As we consider these four factors, we want to notice the PART THE SHEPHERD PLAYS that makes it possible for them to lie down and to be content. A flock that is restless, discontented, never does well. And the same is true of people.

**NO.1.** It’s been said that sheep are so timid and easily panicked that even a stray jackrabbit suddenly bounding from behind a bush can stampede a whole flock. When one startled sheep runs in fright, a dozen others will bolt with it in blind fear, not waiting to see what frightened them. They all stick together and run for safety together.

Ewes about to kid often slip their unborn lambs and lose them in abortions when chased by dogs or other predators. This is a significant loss for the shepherd. Often shepherds will stay the night with the herd to protect them and it’s been said that nothing calms and reassures the sheep as the shepherd in the field. The presence of their master and protector put them at ease as nothing else could.

In the Christian's life there is no substitute for the keen awareness that my Shepherd is nearby. There is nothing like Christ's presence to dispel the fear, the panic, and the terror of the unknown. We live a most uncertain life. Any hour can bring disaster, danger and distress from unknown quarters. Life is full of hazards. No one can tell what a day will produce in new trouble. We live either in a sense of anxiety and fear or in a sense of quiet rest; which of the two depends on your relationship with the Good Shepherd.

Generally it is the "unknown," the "unexpected," that produces the greatest panic. These difficult times invade our peace and like sheep often our first impulse is simply to get up and run. Then in the midst of our anxieties comes the awareness that He, the Christ, the Good Shepherd is there and that makes all the difference. Suddenly with His presence in the picture, things are not half so black or nearly so terrifying. The outlook changes from despair to hope. I find myself delivered from fear, rest returns and I can relax because of the knowledge that my Owner has things under control. Paul wrote (*2 Tim 1:7 KJV*) ***For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*** The idea of a sound mind is a mind at ease and at peace.

**NO. 2.** The second source of fear from which the shepherd delivers his sheep is that of tension within the flock itself. In every animal society there is established an order of dominance or status within the group. Often in sheep, it is an arrogant, cunning and domineering old ewe that is the boss. She maintains her position and drives others away from the best grazing or favorite bed grounds. Succeeding her, the other sheep all establish and maintain their exact position in the flock by using the same tactics of butting, pushing and thrusting. Because of this rivalry, tension, and competition for status, friction can exist in a flock. With this kind of tension, the sheep cannot lie down and rest in contentment. They must stand up and defend their rights and contest the challenge of the intruder. An interested thing though is that whenever the shepherd comes into view, the sheep quickly forgot their foolish rivalries and stopped their fighting. The shepherd's presence makes all the difference in their behavior.

This is a graphic picture of the struggle for status in our human society. There is the eternal competition "to keep up with the Jones's" or, as it is now — "to keep up with the Jones's' kids." In any organization, be it large or small, the struggle for position and recognition goes on. Many fight to be "top sheep." We butt, quarrel and compete to "get ahead" and in the process people are hurt.

It is here that much jealousy arises and petty peevishness grows into horrible hate. It is where ill-will and contempt come into being. It is here that discontent gradually grows into a covetous way of life. In contrast to this, the picture in the Psalm shows us God's people lying down in quiet contentment. One of the outstanding marks of a Christian should be a serene sense of gentle contentment. (*1 Tim 6:6 KJV*) ***But godliness with contentment is great gain.***

Paul put it this way, (*Phil 4:11 KJV*) *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.* The endless unrest generated in the individual who is always trying to "get ahead" of the crowd, who is attempting always to be top man/woman on the totem pole, is so devastating. In His own unique way, Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd, pointed out that the last would be first and the first last. A shepherd has great compassion for the poor, weak sheep that get butted about by the more domineering ones. The Shepherd's presence puts an end to all rivalry.

**NO. 3.** As is the case with freedom from fear of predators or friction within the flock, the freedom of **fear from the torment** of parasites and insects is essential to the contentment of sheep. Sheep, especially in the summer, can be driven to absolute distraction by flies, fleas, ticks, etc. When tormented by these pests it is literally impossible for them to lie down and rest. Instead they are up and on their feet, stamping their legs, shaking their heads, ready to rush off into the bush for relief from the pests. Only the diligent care of the owner who keeps a constant lookout for these insects will prevent them from annoying his flock. A good shepherd will apply various types of insect repellents to his sheep. He will see that they are dipped to clear their fleeces of pests and he will see that there are shelterbelts of trees and bush available where they can find relief from their tormentors.

This all entails considerable time and labor and sometimes expensive chemicals to do the job thoroughly. It means, too, that the shepherd must be among his flock daily, keeping a close watch on their behavior. As soon as there is the least evidence that they are being disturbed he must take steps to provide them with relief. Always uppermost in his mind is the aim of keeping his flock quiet, contented and at peace.

Similarly in the Christian life there are bound to be many small irritations. There are the annoyances, frustrations, and maybe even disagreeable experiences. Sometimes we refer to these upsetting circumstances as "being bugged" like sheep with flies. Is there an antidote for them? Can one come to the place of quiet contentment despite them? Of course there is and the answer is for one to be in Christ's care. We learn that when we get into the inspired word of God that it brings quietness, serenity, strength, and calmness in the face of frustrations and futility.

When we read such passages as (*1 Pet 5:7*) *Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you*, then there immediately comes into my consciousness the awareness of His dealing with the difficulty in a way I had not anticipated. And because of the assurance that He has become active on my behalf, there steals over me a sense of quiet contentment. I am then able to lie down in peace and rest.

**NO. 4.** Finally, to produce the conditions necessary for a sheep to lie down there must be freedom from the fear of hunger. This of course is clearly implied in the statement, "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*" Many of the great sheep countries of the world are dry, semi-arid areas. Most breeds of sheep flourish best in this sort of terrain. They are fewer hazards of health or parasites where the climate is dry. But in those same regions it is neither natural nor common to find green pastures. I've read that the region near Bethlehem where David wrote this Psalm and kept his father's flocks is a dry, brown, sunburned wasteland.

Green pastures did not just happen by chance. Green pastures were the product of tremendous labor, time, and skill in land use. Green pastures were the result of clearing rough, rocky land; of tearing out brush and roots and stumps; of deep plowing and careful soil preparation; of seeding and planting special grains and legumes; of irrigating with water and husbanding with care the crops of forage that would feed the flocks. All of this represented tremendous toil, skill and time for the careful shepherd. If his sheep were to enjoy green pastures amid the brown, barren hills, it meant he had a tremendous job to do.

But green pastures are essential to success with sheep. When lambs are maturing and the ewes need high protein feed for a heavy milk flow, there is no substitute for good pasturage. No sight so satisfies the sheep owner as to see his flock well and quietly fed on rich green forage.

One of the primary objectives of a goat or sheep operation is the developing of rich, lush pastures where the flock could fill up quickly, then lie down quietly to rest and ruminate. A hungry, ill-fed sheep is ever on its feet, on the move, searching for another scanty mouthful of forage to try and satisfy its gnawing hunger. Such sheep are not contented and they do not thrive.

In the Scriptures, the picture portrayed of the Promised Land was that of a "land flowing with milk and honey." By this we mean a land of rich, green, luxuriant pastures. And when God spoke of such a land for Israel He also foresaw such an abundant life of joy and victory and contentment for His people.

For the child of God, the Old Testament account of Israel moving from Egypt into the Promised Land is a picture of us moving from sin into the life of overcoming victory. We are promised such a life. It has been provided for us and is made possible by the unrelenting effort of Christ on our behalf. But the Good Shepherd has supplied green pastures for those who care to move in onto them and there find peace and plenty.

Invitation