



From the Pastor's Heart

January 2010

Dear Friends,

On a trip to Israel, I witnessed one of the most incredible things I had ever seen. I will never forget it. The evening sun was setting and two shepherds approached a nearby well with their flocks. For approximately 20 minutes, the two men chatted while their sheep mingled and roamed about. The animals wandered everywhere. Soon, you could not tell one group from the other because they were so interspersed and scattered throughout the countryside.

But then something extraordinary happened. One of the shepherds turned around, quietly called out a command, and started walking away. Instantly those two flocks separated. The sheep recognized their master's voice, and as he made his way up the hillside, they streamed in from every direction to follow him. They knew exactly what to do.

This is the relationship the Bible tells us we're to have with the Lord Jesus. He said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me . . . My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:14, 27). In other words, if we believe in Jesus as our Savior, then we should have faith in Him and do as He says.

So as this new year begins, we should ask ourselves: *Do I recognize the Shepherd's voice? When the Master speaks to me, do I realize it's Him?* Listening to God is essential if we want to walk with Him. But what is even more crucial is that we truly believe the Good Shepherd's love for us is everlasting, unyielding, and unconditional. We must be confident that He always provides what is absolutely best for us (Jer. 31:3).

I hope you have discovered how awesome it is to have the all-sufficient, eternal, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, sovereign Lord of all creation to guide, protect, and provide for you in a personal way. As you seek an intimate relationship with Him and are obedient to His commands, you discover that He knows exactly what you need and precisely the right moment to supply it. King David realized this, which is why He affirms, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Ps. 23:1).

But maybe something in recent days has caused you to think, *I've been seeking God, but there are things I need and desires in my heart that He has not yet given me. Why doesn't He answer my prayers?*

(over, please)

I want to assure you that the Father always has your best interests at heart. So let's look at Psalm 23 as a reminder of how faithfully He leads you and why you never have a reason to fear when you are following the Good Shepherd.

The first thing you will see in this passage is how perfectly the Shepherd provides for you (Ps. 23:2). God not only supplies your physical needs, but also your emotional and spiritual needs. Nothing can satisfy your soul as He does—the Lord fills your desires for love, acceptance, companionship, and intimacy as no one else can. And He will never lead you to anything that could harm you (Matt. 7:9–11). If there is something God has not yet given you, then you can be sure it's for a very good reason.

Second, it's crucial for you to know and understand that the Shepherd is interested in restoring and sanctifying your soul (Ps. 23:3). The Father hates sin because it creates emptiness, guilt, anger, and loneliness within your heart and separates you from Him. So He heals you of your transgressions through the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ, and He gives you the Holy Spirit to teach you to walk in a manner worthy of His child (Acts 2:38).

Third, the Shepherd wants to lead you through the valleys of adversity to the mountaintops of victory (Ps. 23:4–5). Everyone experiences trials, conflicts, heartaches, and doubts at one time or another. But as believers, we're promised that no matter how hopeless our circumstances may appear, God will lead us through them. He will transform them into something positive in our lives. Because the Shepherd protects us, we know that our troubles will not leave lasting scars. Instead, every obstacle builds our character and brings us closer to Him than we've ever been before.

Finally, the Shepherd has prepared an awesome destination for you—one that is far beyond all of your greatest expectations and hopes (Ps. 23:5–6). You may not know what this year holds for you, but the Father does. God understands the path better than you ever could, and He has gone before you to map out the very best route possible to get you to where you need to be (Jer. 29:11–13).

Do you recognize the Shepherd's voice? When the Master speaks to you, do you realize Who is speaking and immediately obey? One of the reasons Christians fail to experience life at its best is that they are not actively listening for His voice. So I challenge you to make 2010 the year you follow the Good Shepherd more closely than you ever have before. May your cup overflow, and may His goodness and mercy bless you as you seek and serve Him all the days of your life.

Prayerfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles F. Stanley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "S".

Charles F. Stanley

P.S. Thank you for joining with In Touch as we follow the Good Shepherd. I am excited to see all the new doors of ministry that God will open in 2010 as we walk with Him in obedience. May the year ahead be our best and most fruitful yet for leading people worldwide into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Happy New Year!