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The Privilege of Being a Sheep

I was recently walking with my husband, and we came across a sheep on its back. I, unhelpfully, went into panic mode; my husband calmly scaled the fence and got the sheep back on its feet. In this moment, I was struck by the extreme vulnerability of sheep. That a sheep cannot roll itself back over seems a huge drawback! But that a sheep could die from being stuck on its back – it almost seems like a design flaw.

This got me thinking how completely dependent sheep are on the farmer, their shepherd. A sheep survives because of the guidance of the shepherd, otherwise they wander off. A sheep survives because of the protection of the shepherd – it cannot protect itself or its young easily against predators. It can't even roll over by itself.

I wonder if it has ever occurred to you the irony of King David of Israel, originally a shepherd, likening himself in Psalm 23 not to a shepherd, but to a sheep? David, who slayed Goliath the giant. David who becomes King of Israel, defeating multiple enemies in battle. David who is used to ruling over Israel. Yet he has the humility and the insight to know that at the end of the day he would be nowhere without God as his shepherd. He knows the ways of being a shepherd and the ways of sheep. And in this psalm, he declares that he is the sheep in need of the Shepherd. David has experienced the guidance, protection and goodness from God, and he knows that he, even the King of Israel, is intrinsically dependent on God for his deepest needs.

Many might consider this to be a flaw in the design of humans, that we would be dependent on a god to meet our needs. But from the Christian point of view, it is the most beautiful aspect of God's design. It tells us that first and foremost we were designed to have a relationship with God, as our Father, Saviour, and friend. We are offered the greatest gift: a relationship with God, where He promises to lead us beside quiet waters and green pastures; to look after us and comfort us; to be with us always, even in the darkest of times; and ultimately to give us a home with him in heaven.

Psalm 23 shows us that David experienced this first-hand, and my prayer is that each of us know that we too can know the love and care of the Shepherd.