

Call to Worship

Go into a quiet place. Welcome the Holy Spirit with the ancient prayer, “Come Holy Spirit”. Give yourself 3 or 4 minutes to sit silently before God the Father – just absorbing his presence, just enjoying the relationship you have with him. In this intimate time don’t speak. Just listen.

Prayer

Finish with this prayer.

Heavenly Father, thank you. Thank you that Jesus made this time possible. Thank you that I can simply rest in you. Thank you that your Holy Spirit ministers to me. Forgive me when through busyness, through prioritising my needs and wants, through pursuing my particular idolatry, I have drifted away from you. The Lord is my Shepherd. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He refreshes my soul. My cup overflows. Amen

Song: “Just Let Me Say” by Geoff Bullock

1. Just let me say how much I love You, let me speak of Your mercy and grace.
Just let me live in the shadow of Your beauty, let me see You face to face.
And the earth will shake as Your Word goes forth, and the heavens will tremble and fall
But let me say how much I love You, oh my Saviour, my Lord and friend
2. Just let me hear Your finest whispers as You gently call my name,
And let me see Your power and Your glory, let me see Your Spirit’s flame.
Let me find You in the desert ‘til this sand is holy ground,
And I am found completely surrendered to You my Lord and friend.
3. So let me say how much I love You, with all my heart I long for You,
For I am caught in this passion of knowing this endless love I have found in You.
And the depths of grace, the forgiveness found, to be called a child of God,
Just makes me say how much I love You, O my Saviour, my Lord and friend.

© 1993 Geoff Bullock Music (Admin. by CopyCare Pacific Pty. Ltd.) Used by permission CCLI 509237

Prayer of Intercession

A few years ago, I came across the testimony of a pastor in northern Nigeria who had gone for a short walk and wasn’t with his family and his church family when a militant Islamic group attacked and burned down his church with his people locked inside. His testimony said that when he returned and walked over the ashes and bones in his destroyed church, God filled him with an overwhelming love for those perpetrators of this disaster.

Lord, fill me with that sort of love as I pray for the disasters of today.

- I pray in the face of violence in so many marriages, and the lasting damage to children and those abused. Lord, give me the love that I am unable to conjure up on my own for the victims and the perpetrators.

Sheep

- I pray in the face of the damage caused in young people through the misuse of technology. I pray for those who are preyed upon and the predators. Lord, fill me with your love for them because my love can't cope.
- I pray for children who face abuse from their parents and then make it generational when they perpetuate this with their own children. Lord thank you for those Christians in the front line of this disaster who carry the gospel into the hearts and minds of all those who suffer. Give them and me the love for all those who are damaged and in turn damage others.
- I pray for Jewish people in our country who suffer under the attacks of those aligned to radical Islam who act with unbridled hate. Help them to remember that vengeance is yours. And when I entertain thoughts of vengeance on those who don't deserve your love, fill me and my actions with your love, the love that Jesus showed to me who did nothing to deserve it either.

In his name I pray. Amen

Bible Reading:

- **Isaiah 53:4-9**
Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was like a lamb led to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Song: "How shall I Call You" *by Robin Mann*

1. How shall I call you? Maker of heaven, poet of sunset and painter of sky;
Father almighty who's running to find us, giving his Son who must suffer and die.
Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, let's sing it again and again.
Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.
2. How shall I call you? Lover of children, shepherd and teacher and brother and friend
Healer of blind man and healer of leper, you are beginning and middle and end.
3. How shall I call you? Spirit of comfort, cloud in the daytime and fire in the night;
Guide as we wander, protector in danger, listener and helper and giver of sight.
4. How shall I call you? Master and servant, Lord of the seasons and Lord of the years;
Faithful and constant in loving and mercy, giver of laughter and taker of tears.

© 1977 Robin Mann, Used by permission CCLI 509237

Message: "Sheep"

A few weeks ago, in my conversational English class at church, I was sharing some things about Australian rural culture, particularly about shearing, wool and sheep. Using Tom Roberts's painting, "The Shearing of the Rams", we collected the vocabulary about the shearing shed and the process of blade shearing and the more modern handpieces. And of course, we had some fun singing "Click go the Shears"! I told them how the shearer holds the sheep and moves it around to different positions to complete the shearing. This generated an interesting question, "Why don't the sheep struggle while all this is happening?"

My first answer was that it depended a lot on the skill of the shearer, but it was a wonderful God given opportunity to share another answer. For thousands of years, it has been the nature of sheep to submit to the shearer, and we learn this from the Bible in its description of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53. **He was oppressed and afflicted yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent so he did not open his mouth.** This reference of course perfectly predicts Jesus' trial and crucifixion where, in obedience to his Father's will, right up to his death on the cross, he said nothing to defend himself in an unfair trial before the chief priests, Pilate, or King Herod. Who would have thought exploring the Australian idioms around this topic would lead to explaining how and why Jesus died for us? It sent me back for another look at Isaiah 53, and I marvelled again at the accuracy of this prophecy in relation to Jesus, but the thing that stood out the most was obedience to the will of the Father, and that we are also likened to sheep, both in Isaiah 53 and in the New Testament, particularly the gospels.

We can compare our behaviour quite closely to that of sheep. They can go astray quite readily - just try leaving the gate open! As born-again Christian people we can also wander, stray or drift from the righteousness which Jesus enabled in us. It may not perhaps be deliberate (although, it might just be me, but I reckon you can see a sort of perverse glee in a mob of sheep who see an open gate!) but maybe it's just small steps away from the narrow path required of us, to the wide path which is easier and requires nothing of us. Crossbreed sheep on the other hand have a reputation for finding the small holes in the fence and deliberately straying!

Whichever our straying looks like, God does not metaphorically shrug his shoulders and say, "Oh well". God loves us so deeply that our drifting into sin, or deliberately flaunting his will, greatly grieves him. Jesus told two parables to show how the Father regards the lost. The parable of the lost sheep shows the shepherd leaving the 99 and bringing back the one who was lost. And there was great rejoicing! That's how much God wants us to repent and come back to him. The parable of the lost son depicts the father *running* to meet his son and throwing a party on his return. That's how much God wants us to repent and come back to him.

Another thing about sheep is that they are followers. Watch one sheep make a break for the gate and they all want to go. Watch one sheep jump when it's going through a gate and they will all do it. We have a sheep-like tendency to do the same. If one bloke buys a Ford Ranger ute, we want one too. If one TikTok influencer wears a

Sheep

particular style of clothes, we want them as well. The Israelites' history is littered with examples of going astray. They were continually straying away from obedience to God's laws, and time and time again they turned to idols instead of worshipping the one, true, living God. I don't suppose it all happened at once. One bloke marries a foreigner outside the faith (expressly forbidden), who brings idols into the house. Then another one does it, and then another, until idol worship is rampant in Israel. The book of Ezra, chapter 10, actually makes a long list of the *priests* who married foreign women which led to "detestable practices", and hence God's anger and displeasure with Israel.

Straying into idolatry doesn't look exactly like that for most of us. For us it may be the Ford Ranger utes, or designer clothes, money or status, sex or pornography, things or thoughts, but if it is something we worship instead of, or even alongside, our worship of our living God, it is idolatry of which we need to repent and return to the loving arms of the Father.

All we like sheep have gone astray, but there is a positive aspect of this nature of sheep - they follow. And Jesus encourages us to follow him as the Good Shepherd. He uses sheep to teach us about following him. He declares that he has laid down his life for the sheep (us), John 10:15, that he calls his sheep (us), John 10:5, that his sheep (we) follow him because they know his voice, John 10:4, and that finally at the end of the age, his sheep (we – not the goats) will be sitting at his right hand, Matthew 25:33, because we understand what is required to follow him. This all speaks of a deep, close, intimate loving relationship between us and our Saviour, the sheep and the Good Shepherd.

So how do we, the sheep, make this work so that we don't stray, don't wander away from the righteousness we have that Jesus won for us on the cross, that we don't slip into our own choice of idolatry. I was recently introduced to what is essentially a kids' song (20 years old but new to me) by Colin Buchanan called, "Practise being Godly". The verses speak (or sing!) of sporting activities and the practice that is required to be good at them. The chorus says,

Never give up, make it your aim, practise being Godly.
If you've been forgiven in Jesus' name, practise being Godly.
He paid the price for all our sin, his Holy Spirit dwells within,
So centre all you do on him, practise being Godly.

This gives us a strategy to avoid falling into temptation. Some may think this is a rules-based faith - law and not grace. But God has always given us the freedom of choice - obedience or straying. It's not the fault of the temptation that we fall into it. If it's not a direct choice to stray into it, it is a choice not to be Godly. A quote from Dr Paul White, (who wrote the Jungle Doctor books which many of us devoured when we were kids) says, "You can't stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can stop them nesting in your hair". God has given us all the tools - the voice of the Good Shepherd, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a thankfulness for the saving grace of Jesus, and a deep desire to be like him. And Satan hates it! He plays with our mind, questions the wisdom of God, tells us it's easy and OK to stray, and that it's too hard to obey. We must defend ourselves against this, put on the armour of God, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of readiness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and take up the sword of

Sheep

the Spirit, the word of God, as your offensive weapon. Get into the habit of doing this every day.

And practise being Godly. You won't have to ask for the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace etc. They will be there! Fruit appears naturally if we tend to the tree. Practise being Godly.

Song: “Trust and Obey” (by John Henry Sammis)

1. When we walk with the lord in the light of His Word
What a glory it sheds on our way!
While we do His good will He abides with us still
And with all who will trust and obey.
*Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*
2. Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt nor a tear, not a sigh nor a fear
Can abide while we trust and obey.
3. But we never can prove the delights of His love
Until all on the alter we lay;
For the favour He shows and the joy He bestows
Are for them who will trust and obey.
4. Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do, where He sends we will go -
Never fear, only trust and obey.

Benediction

Lord, as I practice being Godly this week, may I do it through the power of the Holy Spirit, by the grace of the Lord Jesus, and in the love of the Father. Amen

This service was prepared by Ron Tiller, HopeNet SA