

What Kind of Sheep Are We?

Did you know there are over 101 breeds of sheep in the world? There are over 40 right here in the United States. Each one has distinct characteristics. Some are bred for their wool, some are bred for their meat, and others actually have hair instead of wool. There are some traits that are common to all sheep no matter what they look like. All sheep instinctively run away from danger. After they get away from danger all sheep instinctively herd back together. All sheep have excellent vision, and can spot trouble up to 1500 yards away. The Sheep never walks in a straight line but is constantly checking its back to avoid being surprised by a predator. Sheep have a very high tolerance for pain. This keeps them from attracting the attention of predators who are always looking for the sick or weak.

Given these traits I wonder why Jesus said we are his sheep in the gospel message today. Because if we are like sheep, we are very bad sheep. Can you imagine what it would be like trying to be a shepherd of sheep that acted like humans? First of all, if there was danger nearby, we wouldn't run away from it, we would move closer to it to see how close we could get before it attacked. We humans have terrible herding instincts. We don't really like following the crowd, and often look up to people we believe have gone their own way—fought against the system—or are their own man. Our ability to spot danger in advance is not great and even when we spot it we don't react well to protect ourselves. Look at how many people stayed in New Orleans even when they had known for 5 days that Hurricane Katrina was going to hit there. We don't like to meander as sheep do. We move in a straight line as fast as we can and so trouble can easily sneak up on us from

behind. Our tolerance for pain is not very sheep like. If someone hurts us we let everyone know. And we hire attorneys to make sure they get hurt too. If we are sheep we must be the worst sheep in the world. Why would any shepherd worth his salt want sheep like us? Jesus does!

The good news is there is a shepherd who wants us. Jesus Christ calls himself the good Shepherd because that's exactly what he is. A good shepherd is aware of the traits of his sheep and makes allowances for them. A good shepherd knows each one of his sheep and provides for them. A good shepherd is willing to die protecting his sheep, even more importantly; a good shepherd tries to keep his sheep away from danger so that he doesn't have to lose his life defending the sheep.

There is one big difference between sheep and us—sheep live by instinct and so cannot consciously change their characteristics—human beings are able to change their minds. **WE CAN ADAPT AND CHANGE OUR BEHAVIOR!** We can repent. So Jesus is truly the best shepherd because he is willing to give us time to learn to be better sheep. He was willing to even become a sheep like us so that he could better communicate with us and lead us by example.

Just as sheep come to rely on a shepherd to lead them to the safety and security of the best pasture, we need to rely on Jesus. Jesus will never fail us. Jesus will never leave us. Jesus will watch for us and protect us. Jesus will eventually lead us to our eternal pasture.