

Invisible Fences

By Andy Smith

“Then Jesus told them this parable, ‘Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?’”

Luke 15: 3-4 (NIV)

Throughout the Scriptures, the shepherd is described as one who knows his sheep by name. He loves them, provides for them and protects them from dangers that lurk in the wild. Sheep learn to listen, love and obey their shepherd’s guiding voice. His gentle voice creates invisible fences that keep them safe.

Jesus tells a story about a man who has one hundred sheep and has lost one of them (Luke 15:1-7). Ninety-nine sheep are content in the secure presence of the shepherd.

One sheep, however, begins to dream of greener grass with fewer fences. He feels the shepherd’s voice can be restricting. Limits are set that at times seem too extreme for him. Dreams swirl in his head of a life without fences, of freedom, of listening to no other voice than his own. Proudful voices of his own abilities and potential get in the way of the clear voice of his shepherd. When a sheep begins to wander in dreams of discontentment, his feet will often follow.

The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine behind and goes after the one who has wandered away. This is his highest priority. When he finds the one lost

sheep, he lays it on his shoulders and takes it home rejoicing. This is one of the greatest promises in the entire Scriptures – that if you were the only one lost the shepherd would come after you to bring you home.

Why would one careless sheep wander away from the shepherd? Did he dream of a greener pasture? Was he tired of having to follow the shepherd's voice? Did he simply wonder what life would be like on his own? Could his own pride get in the way of the Shepherd's voice?

The author of Proverbs warns, "*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*" (Proverbs 16:18) Pride destroys the invisible fences of the Shepherd. Danger lurks in a life without fences.

So, why do we wander away from the safety and security of the God who loves us? What are the enticements and distractions that can lead us away from the one who loves and protects us? Just as Jesus used a parable of sheep and the shepherd to illustrate God's loving and relentless pursuit of us, let's see if this modern-day parable – ***Steve the Sheep*** -- can shine any light on that penetrating question, "Why do we wander away from the God who loves us?"

Questions for Thought:

1. What can we learn about ourselves from Steve?
2. What are the voices in your life that seem to lead you away from the Shepherd?
3. What did the fox mean when he said, "it's your pride that does the rest"?
4. Can you think of a time when the shepherd pursued and rescued you?