



CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD SHEPHERD

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1. Loves his sheep and develops a close, intimate relationship with them so that they know his voice and trust him
2. Understands the needs of the sheep better than they do
3. Understands what threatens sheep and what makes them sick
4. Works tirelessly to provide protection and security
5. Leads them to fresh pastures and fresh water
6. Searches out sheep when they stray
7. Defends sheep against all their enemies
8. Provides protection while they sleep
9. Shears them and examines each one for injury or disease
10. Goes ahead of sheep and prepares the path
11. Disciplines and corrects them
12. Comforts sheep when they are hurt or fearful
13. Keeps sheep "on the move" so they don't get into a rut
14. Liberally anoints them with oil to prevent disease or to heal an injury
15. Keeps sheep from fighting and from hurting each other
16. Cares for, loves sheep, and sacrifices his life for them
17. Rejoices in the health, well-being, and prosperity of his flock
18. Will leave the flock to search for lost sheep
19. Experiences great joy in finding lost sheep
20. Carries the lambs close to his heart
21. Gently leads those with young
22. Gets deepest satisfaction from seeing that sheep are contented, well-fed, and safe

12 CHARACTERISTICS OF SHEEP

By DAVID MURRAY of Head Heart Hand

Throughout Scripture, sinners in general, and God's people in particular, are described as sheep. Here are some characteristics of sheep and I think you will agree that it is very applicable to us!

1. Sheep are foolish I don't know what sheep would score in an animal IQ, but I think they would be close to the bottom of the scale. They seem to only know how to do one thing well – eat grass (and produce more grass-eating sheep).

It's possible to know little, yet not be foolish; but not if you are a sheep. They are so irrational. You watch them as they pause in front of a stream. They know they can't jump it or swim it. So what do they do? They jump in anyway!

2. Sheep are slow to learn. Every shepherd will tell you countless stories about how sheep can be taught a very painful lesson, and yet fail to learn the painful lesson. A sheep may get caught in barbed wire trying to break through a fence. And the next day it will try it again, and again,...

3. Sheep are unattractive Some animals may not be very bright, but make up for it with grace and elegance in their movement and actions. But sheep are so awkward, so lacking in agility and dignity. Although some shepherds may tell you differently, to most outside observers sheep are dirty, smelly, and ugly.

4. Sheep are demanding Ever watch a lamb suckle its mother? Almost as soon as it is born, it is violently sucking its mother's udders. And that insatiable demand never leaves them. They demand grass, grass, and more grass; day after day, and night after night. (Do they ever sleep?) And when snow is on the ground, they aggressively demand food from the shepherd. Just listen to them bleat if their troughs are empty even for a short time. And watch the life-or-death stampede when the shepherd appears.

5. Sheep are stubborn Have you ever tried to move a sheep? It's like trying to move an elephant. Ever watched a shepherd try to maneuver a sheep into a fold or a dip-tank. It's like trying to wrestle with a devil. Half a dozen sheep invaded my garden once. I thought it would be easy to hustle them out the wide gate again. But it was as if an electric shield (visible only to sheep) stretched across the gap. I could get them to go anywhere and everywhere, but through that gate.

6. Sheep are strong I've watched the most macho of men beaten by sheep. You look at their skinny "arms" and "legs" and think "easy." Next thing you are flat on your back or face down in the dirt. I've been flattened by running sheep. It was like getting run over by a tank.

7. Sheep are straying Perhaps the main reason Scripture chooses sheep to characterize us, more than any other animal, is because of its well-deserved reputation for straying (Isa. 53:6) and getting lost (Lk. 15:3ff). So many times I was out in the middle of nowhere when I would come across a sheep – miles from anyone and anything – and totally unconcerned. I would look up on a cliff and there was a sheep out on a lethal ledge. Other times, when fishing miles from anywhere, I would come across ditches and bogs with the decaying remains of a wandering sheep, and I'd think, "How did that get out here?"

8. Sheep are unpredictable If you travel along the roads of the Scottish Highlands you will soon learn to expect the unexpected. You look ahead on a quiet piece of long straight road with no cars. You spy sheep in the distance on the side of the road. They watch you driving along towards them. Hundreds of yards pass. You are almost level. Well, they aren't going to cross the road now, are they? Screeeeeech! Well, what do you know!

9. Sheep are copycats OK, bit of a mix of metaphors here, but I think you get my point. When one sheep decides to start running, they all decide to start running. If you were able to ask one, "Why did you start running?" it would say, "Well, because he started running." The next would say the same. And the next one. And when you got to the last sheep he would just say, "I dunno."

10. Sheep are restless It always puzzled me how little sheep slept. I would be in my study at midnight, look out, and there they were still eating grass. And no matter what time I arose in the morning – 3am or 5am – they would still be eating grass. Other times, there would be a beautiful summer evening when everything was still and quiet and you would come across a field full of sprinting sheep (usually due to the Scottish midges – look it up on Google). I once heard that for sheep to lie down they need freedom from fear, freedom from friction with others, freedom from hunger, and freedom from pests and parasites. From what I've seen, that combination is very rare.

11. Sheep are dependent Some animals can cope and thrive without any close supervision. Not sheep. They are very dependent on their shepherd. They cannot live without him (or her).

12. Sheep are the same everywhere I've been in a number of different countries in my life and enjoyed the many cultural differences. But sheep are the one constant – in character if not in looks. The American sheep is the same as the African sheep (see 1-11 above), which is the same as the Asian sheep, which is the same as...