

“SHERPA OR SHEPHERD”
Ezekiel 34:11-16
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church
November 26, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

**If I were to ask you to describe God and gave you only two options:
Sherpa or shepherd,
which would you choose?**

**Before you answer that question,
let me give you a little more information about each.**

SHERPA:

First, the Sherpa.

**Most Sherpa people live in eastern regions of Nepal.
They are best known to us in the West
for their mountaineering skills.**

**Sherpas are highly regarded as elite mountaineers
and experts in their local area.**

**They were supremely valuable
to early explorers of the Himalayan region,
serving as guides at the extreme altitudes
of the peaks and passes in the region,**

**Particularly for expeditions to climb Mount Everest –
a service they render even today.**

**Sherpas are renowned in the international climbing community
for their hardiness, expertise, and experience
at very high altitudes.**

It has been speculated that a part of the Sherpas' climbing ability is the result of a genetic adaptation to living in high altitudes.

Some of these adaptations include unique hemoglobin-binding capacity and doubled nitric oxide production.

In the most simple of terms, Sherpas are human pack animals, hired to do the most dangerous work on Everest.

They are paid to do things such as prepare the route for foreign climbers to follow, fix ropes in place, and carry the necessary climbing kit up the mountain.

In other words, they serve. They are paid to serve and they are *expected* to serve.

Now, hold that thought.

**SHEPHERD:
Now let's take a look at the shepherd.**

A shepherd's primary responsibility is the safety and welfare of the flock under the shepherd's care.

To do this effectively, the shepherd will graze the animals, herding them to areas of good forage, and keeping a watchful eye out on the flock,

It is a solitary job, for the most part;

**with no companionship except for guard dogs
which help the shepherd move the sheep
and keep predators away from the flock.**

**The shepherd faced the ongoing challenge
of teaching the sheep and goats to obey his commands;
even giving them names to which they would respond.**

COMPARISON:

OK . . . it's time to make a choice.

Is God a *Sherpa*?

**A supreme being that *schleps* our burdens
up the mountains in our journey through life?**

Or, is God a *shepherd*?

**A loving protector who feeds and protects
those under God's care?**

**If you rely on the scripture for today,
then you would probably choose "shepherd."**

Our scripture points out:

**"I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out."
I will rescue them from . . . I will bring them out from the
peoples and gather them from the countries, and will
bring them into their own land; . . .and I will feed them
with good pasture, I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the
strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen
the weak . . ."**

You would not be wrong in choosing to think of God as a shepherd.

But . . . don't be so quick to dismiss God as a Sherpa.

There are some characteristics of a Sherpa that are god-like.

It is the job of a Sherpa to lead *others* to the top.

**Sherpa's are successful by helping those around them
reach their full potential.**

Like a good Sherpa, God has a detailed plan for our journey.

If your Sherpa just looked up the mountain

and said: "OK, Let's go"

you'd be wise to sprint in the opposite direction.

God knows each of us – and the journey we are on –

Therefore God anticipates and prepares for our setbacks.

Sherpa's routinely deal with unexpected weather,

animals, obscured paths,

and many other obstacles –

including arguments in the climbing party.

And this may surprise you,

Sherpas don't lead from afar;

they climb the mountain right alongside their people.

Finally, Sherpas are great listeners.

To reach the summit,

Sherpa's must carefully listen on many fronts.

They need to truly understand input from their team,

the basecamp crew, and other hikers.

They also need to hear rapidly changing weather reports,

advice from other Sherpa's,

as well as the latest advances in their field.

Want to change your mind and see God as a Sherpa?

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE GOD:

**Regardless of how we became what we are today –
whether by creation or evolution – that’s your choice -
we possess a finite mind.**

**The greatest mind among us –
the greatest collection of minds
simply cannot conceive of something which is infinite.**

**And the God who called us into being
Is not only infinite,
but God is the creator of the infinite itself.**

**What that means to us
is that when we try to talk about God – who is infinite –
we are reduced to using language that is finite.**

**So, we talk about God in anthropomorphic terms –
just a big word meaning we assign human terms to God.**

**That’s why we end up referring to God as “He” –
because tradition handed the image of God as a father to us.
In reality, God is spirit – neither male nor female –
or perhaps both!**

**And to better understand God,
The rabbis and teachers and prophets referred to God
As “shepherd.”**

**Had they known about Sherpas,
Maybe we would think of God as a sherpa.**

**I wonder, if the prophets were more modern,
Would they refer to God as President or Prime Minister?
They certainly referred to God as “king.”**

**In our scripture for today, the prophet Ezekiel speaks for God
and refers to God as a shepherd
and uses the illustration of God dealing with God's people
as a shepherd would tend a flock.**

**It worked well for as many years as the shepherd was understood.
but the illustration falls a little short
for people who are industrialized and urbanized.**

**If we thought of God as a great neuro-surgeon,
we would limit God to the medical profession.
That God could heal, but may not be caring enough.**

**If we thought of God as a great quantum physicist,
very few of us would understand that God.
That God could explain creation, but not actually create.**

**If we thought of God as a great philosopher,
we might understand that God,
but we would think we could debate that God.**

In reality, God is all that . . . and so much more!

**The "shepherd God" is one who would protect us,
keeps the predators at bay
and feed us.**

**Yet, we live in a world filled with predators –
unscrupulous criminals more than willing to take what is ours
either by cunning or by force.**

**There is poverty and starvation across this world.
How could a "shepherd God" allow that?**

The “Sherpa God” is one who would tote our burdens for us,
who would help us safely navigate a path through this life.

Yet, our burdens sometimes seem too great for us to bear
and we are constantly suffering
the consequences of bad decisions.

When we find we cannot “manage” God –
when we cannot bend God’s will to fit our own will
even though we try bribing, pleading and threatening,
do we just assume God either can’t or doesn’t care?

At some point, if we are not careful,
we begin to equate an *unmanageable* God
with a rebellious and uncaring God.
That is a *huge* spiritual mistake.

Have we so limited our thinking about God
That we begin to think maybe God has failed?

I can assure you that *nothing* could be further from the truth!
Our God is a *personal* God –
not in the sense that God *serves* us as an employee
but personal in the sense that God cares for *each* of us.

One has only to look upon the Cross of Jesus to see
Just how much God cares for *each* of us.

CHALLENGE:

I want to challenge you with a bit of spiritual homework.

I want to challenge you to make a list of all those things
which you believe God has directly blessed you with.
Write those down.

**Then make another list of all those things
which you believe God has withheld from you.
Write those down, too.**

**If your blessings outweigh the list of withheld blessings,
You have a lot for which to be thankful.**

**If the list of things withheld from you is the longer list,
give me a call.
We'll have coffee and talk about God.**

**You have my number.
You may call me anytime between the hours of 6:30am
And 11:00 in the evening.**

I promise not to scold or judge you.

**Instead, I'll introduce you to a God of forgiveness and love
Who has been waiting for your return for a very long time.**

And together – the three of us – will celebrate a new life!

PRAYER:

Lord God, too often we underestimate You. You revealed Your power to us when you raised Christ from the dead and seated him at your right hand. Grant that we may always give you thanks for your immeasurable love and show that gratitude in loving service to all our brothers and sisters through Jesus Christ. Amen.