

## The Value of a Soul #16 The Lost Sheep and the Lost Soul

The parable of the lost sheep (Lk. 15:3-7) illustrates the value of the soul.

The analogy of the shepherd and the sheep is used many times in the Bible to represent God's relationship with His people. Psalm 23, perhaps the most beloved psalm of all, is based upon this figure.

There are several reasons why this is a common illustration. First, it was a familiar sight. People could readily visualize a shepherd watching his flock. Second, sheep, were a valuable commodity. Many times the Bible determines a person's wealth by the size of his flock. Caring for sheep was also time-consuming. They demanded much attention and nurturing. Third, shepherds really did care deeply about their sheep, often giving them individual names. They sometimes endured great sacrifice to ensure the safety of their flock. Fourth, there were real dangers for any sheep that strayed from the flock. If it didn't fall into a ravine, then the wolves, wild dogs, or hyenas could attack the lamb.

On the occasion of Luke 15, it was the straying sheep that Jesus focused on. When a sheep strayed, the shepherd did not just leave it to wander around in the wilderness until it was destroyed. Rather, because of his concern for the sheep, and because he wanted to save it from danger, he left the other sheep in their position of safety, and endured hardship and danger to seek out that lost sheep.

It was an occasion of great joy when the danger was past, the hardship was over, and the straggler was safely returned. "That's what it's like in heaven," said Jesus, "when a wayward sinner repents." God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but longs for them to repent, and live (Ezek. 18:32).

In John 10:11 Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." Because of His love, Jesus endured hardship and danger to save His sheep. Will we also expend ourselves to bring into the fold those souls for whom Jesus made that sacrifice?