

Jeff Johnson: Counting sheep & counting on good shepherds

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Last night, I could not sleep, so I started counting sheep. As I was counting, I could not get the troubling biblical injunction that calls for separating the sheep from the goats out of my mind. So, I started alternating between counting a sheep going to one pen and the goats to the other.

Jeff JohnsonThe problem was that my goats, with their wicked eyes and wily ways, would not stay in their pen. I suppose there is yet to be invented a fence that can contain a goat successfully—thus the word portrait that “they” are the spiritually lost.

But being identified as a sheep hardly is complimentary. The meek and mild nature of a “sheep-like” person rarely is admired in our society. And sheep are notoriously stupid. In a bit of showmanship, I suppose, when I visited the Holy Land, a local shepherd held up a stick in front of the lead sheep in a procession, and it nimbly leaped up and over the slight barrier. So far, so good.

Sheep need each other

Unfortunately for the reputation of “sheep-sense,” the remaining sheep also obediently leaped up to the level of the stick—even though the stick had been removed after that first sheep jumped it. All the other sheep leaped to avoid something that wasn’t there. (This is starting to sound like a Baptist church). The strength of their flock mentality forced them into the air. Yet, perhaps for that very reason, it is good that we as Christians are identified as “sheep.” Unlike the goats, sheep seem to need each other (notice I said need, not like). Our flock is our community and our identity.

Not only do we need each other, but as our imitative behavior indicates, we also need a leader, a shepherd we can depend on. In Baptist life, our local shepherd is our pastor. Funny, the goats in my dream didn't want anyone watching out for them; they were independent to the point of being headstrong. I can remember being butted by a goat. (No, it was not a deacon). The shepherd is the mainstay in the sheep's lives. Without his attention and care, they quickly find themselves in trouble.

Good shepherd connected with good sheep



Texas Baptists have a ministry of shepherd-sheep connection. Joe Loughlin's team (Robert Cuellar, Karl Fickling, Ira Antoine, Patti Adams and Alyssa Stiglets) leads our Pastor-Church Connection ministry. Whether providing direct resources for pastoral leadership development or acting as a connecting guide to other resources provided by the BGCT, this team tirelessly serves Texas Baptist pastors and congregations.

The Pastor/Church Connection ministry also offers expert guidance and extensive resources for churches in interim pastor situations. My prayer is this Texas Baptist ministry will help our sheep and our shepherds connect to each other through the Good Shepherd.

Oh, by the way, I counted so many sheep last night that after a while, they lost their unique character. They all looked alike. Rest assured, Dr. Loughlin and his team understand each local church has its own autonomous and unique character. They never lose sight of that.

You can contact our Pastor/Church Connection ministry [here](#). Tonight, I'm starting with "the sixth sheik's sixth sheep's sick" and see where that takes me.

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pastor of First Baptist Church in Commerce.