

The Shepherd's Voice — a Modern Day Parable



Annie awoke early and felt ready to tackle this day. Over the last few months, she had begun to feel defeated. For years, she had worked extremely hard and wanted to succeed. She worked and sacrificed to get ahead. She always tried to do the right thing and walk the straight and narrow path, but nothing good seemed to come out of it.

Annie felt like a failure.

She had finally had enough, and decided to try a shortcut. She turned her gaze away from her true calling, the real goal of her life, and she climbed over elsewhere. "If they won't give me the promotion I deserve, I'll just have to take it," she decided.

Life had beat Annie down so much that she forgot what she had learned as a child. The childhood image of Jesus as Shepherd and her as His beloved sheep was long gone from Annie's store of memories. She no longer saw the door that led her to God. She no longer heard the voice of the Good Shepherd calling her by name. There were too many other doors and too many other voices interfering, telling her the way she should go and the kind of person she should be. Get ahead! Do whatever needs to be done to succeed, even if it means knocking a few people off the ladder on your way up!

This morning, Annie was on her way to crash a meeting with the board and a new client. She needed to stand out, so her plan was to give the presentation on her own, without her other team members. That would show how smart and hard-working she is, and surely they would make her team leader on the account.

As Annie rushed down the sidewalk, people were brushing up against her, bumping into her shoulders. Everyone seemed to be in such a hurry, and they all looked confident in where they were going. They were walking in and out of doors as she passed by. She had no idea what was behind those doors! How did they know the right one to walk through? Her confidence began to wane.

This race up the corporate ladder was beginning to overwhelm Annie. The street looked and smelled like a sheep pasture. She began to feel lightheaded and dizzy. Suddenly amidst all the chattering and blowing horns and roaring engines, Annie heard someone call her name. The gentle voice said, "Annie, come this way. I will show you the way."

Annie looked around. She didn't recognize any of the faces surrounding her. No one was even looking at her. But, the voice calmly called her again by name. "Annie, I am the way." She somehow knew the voice was speaking only to her, yet she wasn't afraid. The voice felt familiar and safe. She was drawn to it and felt connected to it.

Spying an alleyway, Annie turned away from the busy street and decided to take the back roads to work, though she wasn't exactly sure why. Doing so, put her at risk for being late and blowing the whole deal. It would take longer and this path was a bit more difficult to navigate, but she went anyway. There were only a few people on this street. Annie slowed her pace and felt like she could finally breathe. It was much more quiet here. So quiet she could hear herself think.

Annie noticed the sun shining down on her, its rays could reach over these smaller buildings. After walking only a few blocks, the scenery changed dramatically. Office buildings were replaced by cottages, quaint little homes with neatly trimmed lawns. She had never even known this neighborhood was back here.

Each home had a window box with pretty flowers of all colors that seemed to be reaching up toward the sun and gesturing a peaceful hello to all who passed by. For the first time in a long time, Annie felt calm. Her heart rate slowed as she noticed little details that made each house into a home. Her face bent into a smile when she saw a child's toy lamb on the front steps of one home.

The image of Jesus holding a lamb came to Annie's mind. She suddenly knew the voice that had called her name was His. She heard His voice because she is His beloved. She was filled with renewed Hope and Joy because the Good Shepherd had called her by name and led her out. Annie remembered what Jesus had told the Pharisees, "Amen, Amen, I say to you, I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved."

Without even realizing it, Annie had gone astray. She was looking in the wrong places and listening to the wrong voices. This turn brought her back to listening for the One who has the plan. He will show her the way to have life and have it more abundantly.