

For the Shepherd to bring them home

Like most people, you know what it's like to have suffered the consequences of mistakes you've made. You've also experienced God as a Shepherd, who not only paid the penalty for your wrongdoing, He has brought healing to your sin-broken life and restored your soul so that you enjoy walking with God. Because you understand how we all go astray, and how God brings people back home, you are a perfect candidate to pray for someone who hasn't yet known God's shepherdly love. You might find yourself becoming something like a shepherd yourself. Keep praying with vigilant compassion until you see God bring them home.

1 Peter 2:24

And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

1. Christ's sacrifice brings freedom and healing to live rightly (vs 24)

Express thanks for Christ's amazing sacrifice for the one you are praying for. Consider the purpose of Christ's death for them: to break the cycle of sin so that they could live a life restored to the beauty and rightness God always intended. Pray that Christ's suffering on the cross would bring about God's desire that they would be healed. Pray for every dimension of their life to be restored to wholeness:

- **Emotional healing** covers so many matters of well-being. Pray for restoration of mind and hope.
- **Physical healing** can include illnesses, or the debilitating affects of harmful lifestyles.
- **Relational healing** can include family, friends, or even societal relationships.
- **Spiritual healing** for areas afflicted by evil and/or the withering affect of estrangement from God.

1 Peter 2:25

For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

2. Christ's power brings them into a new life (vs 25)

No one, except for Jesus Himself, has ever managed to follow their own intentions. We veer from our best ambitions. If we are powerless to live up to our own ideals and hopes, how much more have we wandered from what God has desired for us? And no one has ever been able to find their way back home to God. If anyone returns to God, it's because Christ ushers them along, prodding, providing and protecting them. Pray creatively, imagining Jesus as a shepherd in the life of the one you are praying for.

- **Christ the Shepherd:** Pray that Christ would move in their lives in every way you know that shepherds care for sheep (you can use words like feed, herd, heal, gather as a flock, lead, guide, protect, give rest, and many more). Ask particularly for Christ to nudge them closer and closer to a full relationship with God and others who are part of His flock.
- **Christ the Guardian:** Pray that Christ holds their hearts near. Pray for Christ to break the power of addictions and habits. Ask Jesus to liberate them from evil forces by the immense power of His resurrection. Ask God to intervene in relationships which may turn them back to old ways and lifestyles. Ask the Spirit of Christ to nurture them in a walk of steadfast faithfulness to God.

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Continuing the previous issue

As you may recognize, this session continues the prayers from 1 Peter 2 found in the last issue of FreshPrayer (Volume 3, Issue 5). Use them together or separately.

Learning to pray fresher and better

This prayer session can be used as a way of learning how to pray creatively and persistently in three ways:

1. Praying with biblical cross-references in order to pray with rich, biblical substance.
2. Learn how to pray with persistent vigilance by praying for people with their life-story in view, instead of merely making requests about their most immediate needs.
3. Learn how to form lively, lasting prayers around the imagery of Christ as Shepherd.

Forming prayers supported by mountains of biblical bedrock

Both confidence and creativity in praying comes from praying according to the revealed will of God. Before we pray and while we pray, it's important to be attentive to God so that we can apprehend whatever He might wish to convey to us about His will. The best source, of course, for understanding His will, ways and purposes, is the scriptures. The passage before us in this session is doubly attested. Peter had obviously spent time meditating on Isaiah 53. He quotes words or phrases from Isaiah 53 at least five different times in four verses. You can spend some fascinating, faith-stretching minutes examining 1 Peter 2:22-25 in light of Isaiah 53:4-9. If time permits, ask those praying with you to find the words or ideas in verses 22-25 which come from Isaiah. Here's what we found:

1 Peter 2	contains words from	Isaiah 53
vs 22		vs 9
vs 23		vs 7
vs 24		vss 4 and 5
vs 25		vs 6

What you'll discover is that Isaiah and Peter see that Christ suffered as a sacrificial sheep, and yet accomplished redemption, like a Shepherd, for people who had wandered as sheep. Christ is both the Lamb that was slain, laying down His life for people; and a magnificent Shepherd, leading His people in new life.

"I am my neighbor's shepherd"

FreshPrayer helps Christians pray for people who have yet to follow Christ. We are learning to pray with articulate persistence. Something more than simply, "Lord save John." And then, "Lord, may John be saved." The best way to keep praying with responsible, life-giving concern is to pray with their entire life story in view. In this light, you are not praying for one particular thing to happen. You are praying that all of God's purposes would be fulfilled. It's long-haul prayer, as if you were a shepherd, which encompasses all that God desires to do in their life.

You can get a discussion going that will encourage this kind of praying by asking participants to discuss how it is that people wander and drift through their days like lost sheep. Try to "map" their wanderings. Where or when did they go astray? What habits or circumstances have moved them even farther from God? A little discussion helps dispel the degrading idea that going astray is something reserved for stupid or morally bankrupt people. Everyone is sheep-like and lost. How has God been intervening and shepherding them already, though they may not have recognized Him? In this light it can become a creative joy to pray for their healing and return to God.

Christ as Shepherd

Our best prayers focus vision upon God acting to bring about change, rather than focusing vision on the changes themselves. In other words, be sure to ask God to do something instead of merely asking for things to happen. In order to do this well, we usually need a metaphor or set of images to conceptualize God at work in our lives. The image of Jesus as Shepherd, guiding people home to God is powerful and inexhaustible.