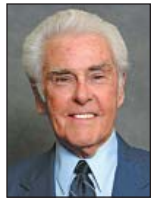


# Our need for protection

The title of our lesson might create in our minds the kind of protection that many of us need when we



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contemplate the many ways that life can become dangerous in our times.

In recent weeks a gunman joined a prayer group and then killed several of them with his firearm. More recently in Hesston, Kan., a local Mennonite community, a gunman killed three residents and then was killed by the local chief of police to protect others from being killed. Many Christians can need protection from persons who are programmed to kill.

In our biblical material, such protection is included as a need but major emphasis is on spiritual protection for life and beyond. I will augment our assigned text with three other relevant biblical sources that feature protection.

The shepherd imagery focuses on Jesus as the door to abundant life (John 10: 7-10). When the sheep are gathered together with other flocks, the shepherds maintain an opening through which the sheep may enter the secure place of protection for the night. Jesus portrays himself as the shepherd guarding the open door who can give the sheep protection from thieves, robbers and predatory animals.

Perhaps Psalm 23 is the Old Testament picture of the shepherd protecting his flock. "The Lord is my shepherd," declares the psalmist. He later says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me."

The staff was used to guide the sheep on the right pathway, and the rod was used to fend off attacking animals. Thieves come only to steal and to kill, but the shepherd protects

the door to the sheep's enclosure. Through the door, we and the sheep find abundant life.

Jesus is the good shepherd who gives his life for the sheep (John 10:11-13). Still following the shepherd imagery, Jesus said to the crowd, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." The shepherd who does not care for the sheep runs away from the flock when danger threatens. The analogy is that Jesus as the good shepherd is willing to die to protect their lives.

In John 12:27 and 36, Jesus cried out, "Now my soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour... I have come as light into the world, that everyone who believes in Me may not remain in darkness.'" The light gives guidance and protection to those who believe in the good shepherd.

Jesus is the good shepherd who knows us and keeps us secure (John 10:14-15, 27-30). Jesus said, "I know my own and my own know me." When the morning dawns, each shepherd takes a turn standing at the door to the enclosure and calls his sheep out to follow him to their place of grazing. Only his particular sheep obey his voice and follow him.

On one occasion, a guest decided to test whether or not the sheep knew only their master's voice. He learned what a given shepherd called out to the sheep and borrowed the shepherd's clothing. He looked like the shepherd and knew the language, but when he stood at the door to call out his sheep, they paid no attention. They did not know the voice, so they did not respond.

John 17:1-19 is the high priestly prayer of Jesus for his followers and the people whom He wants to win. In one part of his prayer, Jesus prays for the Father to protect those who

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have accepted Christ as Savior. "I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one" (17:15).

While the disciples (sheep) are in the world, Jesus said, "I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given me and I guarded them." Linda Lee Johnson encourages our dependence on the protection of Jesus in our Christian life:

*Be strong in the Lord,  
and be of good courage;  
Your mighty Defender  
is always the same.  
Mount up with wings,  
as the eagles ascending;  
Victory is sure  
when you call on His name.  
Be strong in the Lord,  
and be of good courage;  
Your mighty Commander  
will vanquish the foe.  
Fear not the battle,  
for the victory is always His;  
He will protect you wherever you go.*

Because of the protection given by the Father through faith in Jesus Christ, we can trust God's care for us and we are given assurance that we "shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:28).

This confidence is celebrated in the Baptist Faith and Message, where a portion of it declares that "All real [true] believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end."

Believers are not perfect and will have times of failing to fulfill our commitment but we are always open to God's redeeming grace when we come in repentance and renewal.

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