



NIBBLING OURSELVES LOST

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Being basically a city person, I haven't had a lot of experience with farming or sheep. The Gospels, however, keep referring to sheep, the Good Shepherd, the sheepfold, etc. so I decided to try and get a better understanding of these pastoral images.

Regarding sheep – if you've ever watched one out in pasture, you would probably see a calm, gentle animal nibbling grass. The sheep gradually moves along from one patch of grass to another, head down, not usually paying much attention to the direction the grass is leading it in. As the sheep nibbles, there may be a point where there's a break in the fence and if there's an enticing sprig of grass in that direction, the sheep ambles toward it. Eventually, just by following the meanderings of its nose, the sheep may end up nibbling itself lost. Our sheep's been busy, doing what sheep are supposed to do, without even realizing how far it has wandered from home.

I think sometimes our lives follow the pattern of the sheep. It's not that we're dumb or intend to go astray, but we get very busy and engrossed in what we're doing. One thing leads to another, one project to another, one purchase to another, one deadline to another. Before we realize it, step by step, we may have nibbled ourselves lost – forgotten the dreams, goals, or beliefs we once thought were so important.

I imagine this happens to all of us in different ways. For me, it often takes the form of household projects. First, I decide to paint a wall, then caulk a window, then build a bookcase, then clean out the basement. As any homeowner knows, the list is endless. In the process, I sometimes lose sight of what's really important in my life – my husband, children, time for prayer, a perspective on life. I've nibbled myself lost. Not by any grand design or decision, but rather just by following all those little bits of grass and not taking time out to look up and see where I'm going. It's not that any of the projects are bad in themselves. In fact, often they are necessary and for good purposes. As any parent of a toddler knows, one can spend a whole day seeming to do nothing more than prepare food, eat, and clean up. Again, I ask myself, am I nibbling myself lost?

We can nibble ourselves lost from our spouse or our children. We can nibble ourselves so deeply into a job that we forget the original vision of our work. And we can nibble ourselves lost in our faith and forget why we're going to church, synagogue, or mosque or what God is calling us to.

The solution? I suppose it's the same as for sheep – to raise our head up occasionally, take time out to look around, get our bearings, and remember what's really important in our life. For me, this takes the form of making space for reflective prayer and I remind myself: If I'm too busy to pray, I'm too busy! Do you ever nibble yourself lost?