

GOING GOD'S WAY
FROM ECHOES OF EDEN
BY ALICE EBY HALL

Sigh! Gayleen is running away again! I stand in the doorway and debate whether I should chase her once more, or if I should let her go and suffer the consequences. I don't have time or energy to chase her this morning. A new baby kid demands my attention.

I shake my head as I understand God's impatience with humans, with me. I appreciate why in Noah's day God said he was sorry he had ever made man. He really must have been irate. No matter how annoyed I become, I have never said I was sorry I bought my first goats.

Gayleen is one of my champion Nubian does, and I am the "goat lady." There are many reasons why I keep goats, but what they teach me about my relationship with God is an important motive.

Most of the time, Gayleen behaves as well as I expect of her, just as I, most of the time, behave as God wishes me to, but every so often, Gayleen and I both decide to push the limits. She knows that when I open the barn door morning and evening, she should come in with all the other milkers and take her place on the stanchion. When the does are confined on the stanchion, they eat their delicious dessert—molasses coated rolled grain, and I take their milk.

If Gayleen decides to run the other direction to tease me, she misses her dessert and she suffers with an extended udder all day. By evening she is limping with udder stress.

I know I am supposed to live by those ten rules God gave me, too, but there are times when a harmless little lie doesn't look so bad. It's so easy to fudge a little when I repeat a story to friends to make it more interesting. Maybe it doesn't seem so bad, but it must be as irritating to God as Gayleen's scamper is to me.

I wonder why Gayleen has these bouts of disobedience, but then I look at my own life, and I don't understand my own wanderings either. I have days when I run away from God. I hear his quiet whisper in my heart and soul, and I ignore it. It seems inconvenient to do what I hear I should do, so I do what I want instead.

After Gayleen spends a day of discomfort and deprivation, she becomes a model producer for several weeks. I grin. How many times I have behaved the same way and suffered uncomfortable consequences. How many times I have run from God in selfish search of a delectable reward or avoidance of an inconvenience.

I remember a day I did obey God's voice. It's difficult for me to visit with people, and I avoid visiting if possible. But that day I stopped to see a veterinarian God clearly told me to see. I didn't want to take the time for that visit, but I did obey God's urging.

The vet was struggling with the new-to-him concept of miracle healing, and I was prepared with answers from my youth group meeting the previous evening. He shared with me how his science education in an Eastern European Communist nation convinced him that creation was entirely too orderly for evolutionary chance. He thanked me profusely for my contribution to his fledgling faith.

It was the most rewarding witnessing experience of my life. I left God's appointment on wings of joy. I may never know what blessings from God I have missed other times by going my own comfortable way instead of

His seemingly inconvenient way.

Now I decide to let Gayleen go her own way and suffer the consequences even though I know she wants me to chase her. Of course, I know that the consequences are not life-threatening!

I turn to the barn and milk the other does, who munch contentedly on their dessert as they release their milk for me. Gayleen stands across the field gazing in distress and bawling her loneliness. She joins the herd when I release them to pasture.

I sweep the barn and dash to the kidding pen to check the new baby.

He's an hour old and standing on wobbly, spindly legs. He searches for milk. He is his mother's first kid, and she is neurotic about his care. She licks and nuzzles him so diligently that he sprawls on the ground. Then her concern for his fall compels her to paw him to his feet again. She seems to be constantly in motion in her attempts to care for her first newborn.

I see that if I don't restrain her, the baby will have a difficult time finding his first meal. I carry the kid and lead his mother to the stanchion. With her head restrained and sweet rolled grain in front of her, she stands quietly.

I direct the baby's head toward the udder. He twists away, searching for something elusive while the real goal hangs obvious, right in front of him. I rotate him so that his head points right at the udder. He turns the other way. For some reason, he cannot recognize that the smooth object caressing his nose is what he needs to grasp. He nuzzles his mother's flank. He suckles hair. Time and again I redirect him only to have him reject the palpable reward.

I shake my head. How like Gayleen and me he is being. She ran from what she knew was good, I ignore God's nudging, and the baby turns away from what he needs. I allowed Gayleen to dictate her behavior and suffer the consequences. I can't permit the new kid to have his own way. His time is running out. If he doesn't suck colostrum in the next few minutes, he will not benefit fully from its protective powers.

His mother has eaten all her grain and wiggles restlessly. She turns her head in an attempt to see and lick her kid. Now I have to hold her and the kid, too.

Again I sympathize with the frustration God must have felt when He murmured that He wished He had never made mankind. I am reaching that point. But a final surge of compassion overwhelms me, the kind of compassion I realize God must feel for his feeble creations. With my head planted in the mother's flank to prevent kicking, I firmly grasp the kid's head, pry open his mouth, and squirt milk into it.

Finally he understands. He suckles. His mother stands still and gazes in adoration. I release her head so she can snuggle and nuzzle him while he sucks. Such caresses increase the kid's ability to use the first milk.

I bed the new family in the kidding pen. My job is done for the morning. I faced two recalcitrant creatures. One I left to deal with the discomforts of her decision. The other I dealt with severely until he learned his lesson. I feel satisfied that I did what was right in both situations.

As I stroll back to the house, I feel God grinning with me regarding the lessons I have learned from my goats about how He deals with me. Sometimes He lets me miss blessings and suffer consequences, and sometimes He forces me to partake in the fullness of life as He forced Lot and his family to leave Sodom.

Just as I handled Gayleen and the baby differently, so God has different plans and directions for his

children. I can't compare me with anyone else for that reason. Nor can I compare myself in one situation with me in another circumstance.

In any condition, God does what is right, and when I obey His guidance, so do I.