

THE HEALING TOUCH
FROM ECHOES OF EDEN
BY ALICE EBY HALL

LEARNING FROM SICK GOATS

I opened the barn door and counted the goats as they raced each other for their favorite slots on the milking stanchion: seventeen, eighteen, nineteen.... I was missing a goat. I closed the stanchion on the necks of the does so no one would escape and returned to the barn. Saucy huddled miserably in the darkest corner, her head down, her red and white hair frizzed, her eyes closed. Fluids dripped from her nose, and tears matted the hair on her classic Roman nose.

“Saucy, Sweetheart, what’s wrong?” I asked. I didn’t expect an answer, of course, but she didn’t even open her eyes. I slipped my thumb gently into the side of her mouth where there were no teeth. My thumb all but sizzled.

“Oh, Saucy,” I crooned as I hugged her neck, “I’m sorry you’re sick. Give me a few minutes, and I’ll take care of you.” I milked the other does as they ate their grain. When they were contentedly grazing and browsing outside, I returned to treat Saucy.

I gave her Gatorade to rehydrate her. I injected her with Penicillin/Streptomycin to fight the infection causing her elevated temperature. I put Vicks VapoRub on her nose to help fight her congestion, and I gave her eight aspirins to fight her fever. With four stomachs, oral medications require a much higher dosage in goats than in humans. I put Penicillin/Cortisone drops in her matted eyes. I moved her to a small, clean, dark shed bedded softly with unsoiled, fresh straw. I gave her choice alfalfa hay in case her appetite returned, and I made sure she had a clean bucket of clear, fresh water with molasses in it to entice her to drink.

They call me the goat lady. I am a capriculturalist. I raise goats. Being a herdsman has taught me about the “Good Shepherd” who is Lord of my life. Loving and caring for a herd of goats has shown me what kinds of things God does for me.

Because I want my goats to be productive, to give me a lot of kids, to produce enough milk to feed those kids plus a little for us, I make sure that my goats have plenty of good alfalfa hay to eat. Then, in case alfalfa isn’t enough (so much needs to be learned about goat nutrition), I turn them loose on huge pastures and browse areas on our 82 acres in the San Bernardino National Forest so they can find and eat anything they feel they need. I make sure my goats always have clean, fresh drinking water running in clean containers. Their salt box is kept replenished with trace-mineralized salt sometimes

mixed with organic iodine, when I can find it, to help fight disease.

They have a barn in which they can keep warm and dry. They have shade trees under which they can keep cool and comfortable. They have rocks to climb for their favorite games, and their hooves are trimmed so they can walk comfortably.

I enjoy doing these things to keep my goats' lives pleasant and productive because I love them.

In the same way, my Shepherd cares for me. He has blessed me with an adequate home, plenty of food, loving companionship, rewarding work, a sufficient income, and creative things to amuse me.

Just as I enjoy keeping my herd comfortable, I know God enjoys blessing me because He loves me. Other people would maybe not be satisfied in my environment as I would not be in theirs. But I know that even if I'm not satisfied, God is with me, teaching me to adjust.

Because I manage my herd the best way I know how, my goats produce twins and triplets every year so that I have plenty of kids to sell and replace older animals. They also produce enough milk to feed those kids and keep our family in milk, kefir, cheese, butter, and all kinds of delicious custard desserts and ice cream. They win prizes in shows and fairs. To me, it's a fair trade. I give them comfort, and they enrich my life.

It gives me pause to think, to wonder, whether I am being as productive as I should be to please God and to enrich His life. Do I spend enough time in prayer to satisfy Him the way it satisfies me when one of my goats comes to nuzzle me, paw me, or lick my hand? Do I spend enough time in Bible study so that I know Him? Do I share my Jesus often enough with others so that I can be a blessing to Him? Am I active enough in my spiritual life, producing the kinds of fruit He intended for me to produce?

Sometimes, in spite of my best efforts at management, a goat has a kid born dead. Or she does not produce enough milk to feed her live kids. Or she ceases production long before her ten months of lactation should be over. Sometimes the milk she gives doesn't taste as delicious as I've come to expect from "my girls." Sometimes she looks scrawny or non-productive on show day. When any of these things happen, I don't love the goat less. I worry about her. I work to find out what is troubling her. I make every effort to correct what is wrong because years of experience have taught me that the only time my management efforts and their production efforts are unequal is when they have been invaded by a pathogenic organism—disease-producing bacteria or virus. I shed tears over my sick goats. I search for causes and corrective measures.

God certainly must cry and worry over me, too, when I cease to be as productive as I should be in the delightful setting He designed for me. When I become lax in my Bible study, when I start to gossip instead of witness, when I hurry through my prayers so I can read a novel or watch TV, God must know

that I've been invaded by a pathogen—sin, just as surely as I know a goat has been invaded when she stops being productive. God knows my productivity won't return until the sin has been conquered. It comforts me to know He loves me still and works with me to try to restore my productivity.

When I work with an unproductive goat, I touch her. I look into her eyes and study the color of her eyelids for anemia or jaundice. I run my hands over her body to check for swellings and soreness. I take her temperature, check her pulse and respiration, and I try to tempt her appetite with delicious tidbits. The goats enjoy these ministrations.

And I appreciate God's efforts in my behalf when I am unproductive. I enjoy feeling His gentle hands on my brow or enfolding me in a big hug. I may feel discomfited to know that He is looking into my soul through my eyes, but I'm glad He cares. The delectable morsels, like church friends, satisfying fellowship, and worship that He uses to tempt me back into his fold are usually irresistible. I enjoy His ministrations.

But sometimes awareness of all these things is not enough to restore my right relationship with God, just as sometimes the touching, temperature-taking routine doesn't tell me what is wrong with goats like Saucy. When Saucy didn't respond and get well in a day or two, I took blood samples from her jugular vein to the nearby State veterinary lab for evaluation. Their report told me specifically what organism had invaded Saucy, so I gave her a specific high-powered antibiotic injection every day for ten days.

I administered electrolytes IP (interperitoneal) into the abdominal cavity when the Gatorade didn't do the rehydration job. When she recovered, I vaccinated her and the entire herd against a recurrence of the disease.

The goats don't like to have needles poked into them. Whether it's a large needle in the jugular vein or peritoneal cavity, or a small needle in the muscle or under the skin, or a blunt plastic needle in the teat to infuse antibiotics right into the udder, the goats scream with pain or they fight the needles. They jump and kick and pull away. In the worst cases, their antics cause problems like hitting a nerve with the needle, or losing the vein, or causing bleeding.

God has to be rough with me sometimes, too. When I'm leading a selfish, rebellious, unproductive life, God has to make me aware of the cause. He has to prick me with my conscience. He has to inject sense into my nonsense by having brothers in Christ speak to me. He has to infuse my being with His Spirit for healing.

And, like the goats, I squirm. It's uncomfortable, and I pull away. I jerk, and the pricking hits a nerve. I stop, and the infusions and injections find their marks.

I'm being treated by the "great physician" whether I want to be or not. If I move incorrectly and lose a little blood in the process, the healing becomes dearer to me and to my God.

I sing in thanksgiving when my ministrations to my unproductive goats have positive results. When Saucy started producing milk again, when she was well enough to go to a fair and win again, when she gave me live kids, I praised God. I sing my joy just as I am sure God and his angelic host sing in praise and joy when I respond to the spiritual ministrations and am healed back to productivity for the Kingdom.

Saucy regained her health, but sometimes I can't find the cause of a goat's nonproductivity.

Sometimes none of the injections, vaccinations, medications, or lab-work produces results.

Sometimes disease has such a tight hold on a doe's body, that it is impossible for her to bear or feed healthy kids, or to produce healthful, delicious milk. Her body becomes so ravaged, that even if she has been a sure winner in the show ring, she starts to look worn and ugly. She walks and moves in pain. Sometimes, there is nothing else I can do. I cry. I ache.

I sorrow for the loss. I take her away from the herd. I euthanize her. Her life no longer exists, but I do it in love. I don't kill a goat because I hate her. I do it because I love her, but I can no longer help her to feel well, happy, and productive. I cry.

I think God sees His herd the same way. His eternal, wonderful love is evident even when a soul is so warped by sin that it can't respond to Him any longer. Such a person may have to be taken away from the herd. He may have to be taken from this earth, but he is not taken in anger or hatred. He is taken in love and sorrow.

LEARNING FROM WELL GOATS

Ah, but I learn from the well goats, too. I have learned about Jesus from the healthy, productive, winning goats in my herd. They are contented with their lot, and I am pleased with them. They respond to the routine, and they respond to me.

They come into the stanchion twice a day to get their grain ration, their dessert, while I milk them. They know the sound of my voice, and they come home from pasture when I call them for an extra treat of fresh vegetables or brush cuttings, cookies or crackers. These times are the most enjoyable for me and for them. They love the extra goodies I give them, and I love the way they respond to me. But sometimes they do act contrary!

Once in a while, a recalcitrant doe enjoys teasing me by going the opposite direction from the stanchion at milking time. If I have time and energy for the game, I chase her until she wants to be caught. These does love that game, even if it frustrates me. I appreciate the times when God will make

the effort to chase me down when I rebel against His routine, even as I sorrow that I frustrate Him. But work with teasing does have taught me that the patience of a shepherd is not infinite. There are those days when I can't chase as much as they'd like. Then they miss their morning grain ration and milking. They suffer on two counts all day—udders became too full and uncomfortable, and they don't get their dessert.

How like me! Sometimes I am so certain that what I want and what I need are in some different direction from where God has called me, that I go dashing off and miss some of the most joyous blessings He has planned for me.

How grateful I am that such foolhardy rebellion does not result in being dismissed from the herd, but only in missing those golden blessings. Like my does, when I realize what I've missed, I come back and behave myself beautifully for a while. But, it seems such lessons are not learned permanently by those of us who are stubborn.

LEARNING FROM HERD REBELLION

Then there are those times when the entire herd rebels! I call them in from pasture, and they will not come! How angry I become. Screaming and yelling don't help a bit, even though goats are so sensitive they dislike that kind of racket. Threats don't matter. They don't understand. They just will not come when they are summoned. Those younger ones, who act as if they'd like to respond, are called back to the herd by the older does who are leading the rebellion.

But, I'm not without resources. I want my herd with me, so I send out my Border Collie. She's been trained to bring my herd to me when they disobey. They don't like me to send the dog. Sometimes they get their heels nipped. Sometimes they will come when I call the dog, even if the dog is not there to respond!

I'm glad God wants His herd with Him, too. It's not unusual to see a whole segment of His church wandering off in some dangerous direction. It is not atypical to see that large segment going its way in spite of His call to return. Some younger, more trusting souls may wish to obey, but they are held to the group by peer or authoritarian pressure. God has His herding dogs, too. Whether He uses the Holy Spirit directly, or whether he sends prophets, angels, or evangelists, the wandering herd has its heels nipped so that it turns and heads for home.

Strong leaders in the herd must be dealt with, too—especially headstrong, rebellious leaders. Old Granny-goat was such a herd boss. She knew how to open the feed-room door to let the entire herd in for between-meal snacks. I'm not a selfish herdsman. I don't mind sharing snacks with "my girls," but it can be dangerous if I'm not there to supervise. Those gluttons in the herd can eat too much and go

into enterotoxemia, an almost always deadly digestive disease.

Granny was also quite willing to lead the herd astray at milking time. I could almost see her grin as she did it.

Granny's wings had to be clipped for the good of the herd. She was too valuable an asset to remove her, so she had to be restrained. She was shut in a small pen, alone with her own kids, so she couldn't be such a bad influence on the herd. Granny couldn't stand that!

She was gregarious. She loved everyone's kids, not just her own. And she missed her position of leadership. She screamed and complained until she was hoarse. She went on a hunger strike, hoping to convince me to turn her loose with the herd again. She looked and sounded pretty pathetic before we came to an understanding. Eventually, I did turn her loose with the herd, but her spirit was more compliant and the herd much better behaved.

God may have to treat us that way, too, especially if what we propose doing is a hindrance to other Christians. We have to be restrained. There are lots of ways to restrain a headstrong Christian—hospitals, rest homes, casts, or just bed rest are a few. When the physical body is not in good condition, we tend to concentrate on repairing it, and we let mischief go. A solid bout of pneumonia made a believer out of me concerning God's ability to turn us around when we're being rebellious.

Yes, being a goat herdsman has taught me many things about my Father. I have learned firsthand how He punishes, forgives, directs, blesses, heals, delivers, and always, in and through it all, how He loves. The love overrides it all—the anger, the disappointment, the frustration, the sorrow. The love is always there.

And because the love is there, in herdsman for herd, in Father for children, all the giving in love is made worthwhile when even one in the herd responds with excellent production, beautiful kids, a championship, friendliness, or anything else that would make men say "I want a goat from that herd," or "I wish my Father were like your Father," or "I want to be part of your family."

When others praise the name of our Lord, we have repaid His love.