



HOUSTON VISITING CHRISTIAN SCIENCE NURSE SERVICE, INC.

Our mission is to heal through practical, operative Christian Science.

January 2024

The New Year

Millions the world over watch revelers in Times Square mark the turning of the old year into the new by counting down with the dropping ball—five, four, three, two, one: “Happy New Year!”

I confess that I rarely bother staying up for the midnight TV extravaganza. Perhaps my indifference stems from those boyhood farm days when Pop and Gram and I turned in early. So did all the other farmers we knew. Work began at first light. Sub-freezing temperatures, biting winds, blinding snowstorms—no matter the conditions outside, I had to be up and out the door at dawn to feed the sheep.

New Year’s Day was no exception. The January 1st that I’m vividly remembering now was when I was 14. It was a bitter cold morning. Figuring that the livestock water trough would be frozen, I trudged to the barn, through the swirling snow and howling wind, carrying two buckets of scalding water. As the first streaks of dawn etched the gray sky, the stillness of the darkened barn was broken by the hiss of hot water thawing the ice in the trough.



Photo by James Ahlberg on Unsplash

A couple of curious sheep ambled over to investigate and simultaneously sip. They looked at me and stood waiting. I could hear the bleating of the others from the security of their stall.

By the time I turned on the light in the feeding entry, every sheep—plus my horse Buck—was on all fours, peering at me intently. They watched attentively as I mixed molasses bran with oats and barley and poured the concoction into a five-gallon bucket. When I hustled to their feed trough, heavy bucket in hand, they nearly bowled me over in their single-minded zeal to chow down.

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Clanking the empty bucket across the entry floor, I returned it to its proper place. Then I climbed up the narrow stairs to the loft and threw a bale of hay down the steps. It tumbled end over end straight into the feeding entry.

Buck, in a separate stall on the other side of the entry, stood patiently waiting his turn. He watched my every move as I scooped out his special treat of molasses bran and two ears of field corn. While he was chomping contentedly, I pulled off a hefty section from the bale and dropped it into the hayrack directly above his head. Then I stood silently by his side and watched him eat. After his corn-and-bran breakfast disappeared, Buck yanked a bite of hay from the rack. As he chewed, his luminous eyes looked through me, and I felt good.

The sheep had long since devoured every morsel from their feed trough and were milling about in the cozy warmth of their stall.

I climbed the rickety stairway again—this time to wrangle two large round straw bales and drop them neatly through a 3' x 5' laundry-chute hole, from whence they thudded to the front of the sheep stall.

Once back downstairs, I seesawed one of the bales toward Buck, cut the binding twine, and kicked the bale's contents the length of his stall. It was like rolling out a red carpet of clean, toasty straw. Now he could lie down if he wanted. The sheep got the same straw-bedding treatment.

After completing my morning routine, I would often pause to enjoy the quiet companionship of my barnyard friends. Sitting with them that New Year's Day, I couldn't help hearing the harsh blasts of wind—typical of a Pennsylvania winter—shrieking outside, rattling the metal roof, and causing the wooden beams and timbers of our 150-year-old barn to creak. The building *sounded* like it was falling apart. I smiled, realizing *that* would never happen, for, as I'd learned from grandparents, Bible, and Sunday School teachers, God cares for all His creatures all the time.



Photo by Ninety Studio on Pexels

Buck, snug in his thick winter coat, and the woolly sheep, supremely content, paid no attention to the scary sounds. They, like me, must have instinctively sensed they were protected from harm. Perhaps they understood, as the prophet Nahum did, that "The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him" (1:7).

In their company, I, too, felt God's power—stronger, more solid and secure, than the great limestone walls upon which our wooden barn was built.

Surrounded by this family of sweet creatures, each of them so humble, so trusting, so serene, so content, I felt the same qualities present in me.

Lessons learned from such simple experiences stay with us, don't they? They are evidence of God in action—of Life richly sustaining, of Love tenderly embracing, of Truth steadfastly upholding Her entirely good, completely spiritual creation.

If in the course of our human affairs we are tempted to be frozen with fear, snowed by deceit, whipped by winds of selfishness, chilled by coldness from (and toward) our church brethren, we can turn from each temptation and be like humble sheep who take no offense, nor give any.

As sheep, we trustingly follow our Shepherd.

As sheep, we meekly imitate His Son—Christ Jesus, the Lamb of God.

Why do we need that perfect Lamb, Jesus the Christ, in our lives? Because he shows us the sole way to our Shepherd. Proves that our Shepherd is the exclusive provider of all good. Demonstrates that we derive all wisdom, receive all direction and protection, are healed of all ills, and are saved from all sin by our Shepherd.

When I sing hymn 245 in the *Christian Science Hymnal*, Frederic W. Root's description of God as our "tender, loving Shepherd" brings me back to my boyhood days in the barn.

O tender, loving Shepherd,
We long to follow thee,
To follow where thou leadest,
Though rough the path may be;
Though dark and heavy shadows
Enshroud the way with gloom,
We know that Love will guide us,
And safely lead us home.

We know, beloved Shepherd,
The path that thou hast trod
Leads ever out of darkness,
And on and up to God.

If from that path we wander,
And far astray we roam,
O, call us, faithful Shepherd,
And bring us safely home.

Throughout the way, dear Shepherd,
Thy strong hand doth uphold;
The weary ones, at nightfall,
Thou gently dost enfold.
And when to Truth's green pastures
With joy at length we come,
There shall we find, O Shepherd,
Our blest, eternal home.

May this hymn be a holy benediction for the new year ahead. On its first day—January 1, 2024—our *Journal*-listed Christian Science nurse Susie Petersen and our entire board of directors send you our love, straight from the Shepherd and His Lamb of Love.

Financial Assistance Available

Any Christian Scientist relying upon the services of a Christian Science practitioner and/or a *Journal*-listed Christian Science nurse may obtain financial support by applying to the [National Fund for Christian Science Nursing](#) (NFCSN). You may contact The Principle Foundation, which manages this fund, by emailing info@nfcsn.org or by calling (800) 873-2843.

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“Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee”
Christian Science Hymn 324