

## Sheep Dogs

For those of us who are Christians, we often use the metaphor that we are sheep. Well, the other day I was thinking about that metaphor and I would like to extend it a bit. In this extended metaphor most of the people in our society are sheep. However, there are also some wolves in the community who prey on the sheep. They look for a sheep who is isolated or who is weak and then they attack. However, in addition to the sheep and the wolves, there are sheep dogs. These protectors of the flock help to keep the sheep together and ward off the wolves when they get to close.

Now the question for us is which role best describes how we interact with our family? As a father, we quickly jump to the position that we are the sheep dog. But are we really?

### Know Your Sheep

First, do you know your sheep? How much time do you spend with your children or grandchildren? Do you know if their character is healthy and strong or if it is weak? Are you there every day to provide protection when predators come prowling?

As fathers, we should be among those who know our children best. Our children should both respect us and trust us with everything in their lives. The sheep are not afraid of the sheep dog. They know the dog well. The sheep dog is there caring for them, guiding them, and protecting them. The close interaction between the sheep and the sheep dog is developed over time – both quality time and quantity time. To develop a close relationship with our children will require both quality and quantity time on our part. If you do not already have planned into your day and week dedicated time with your children, you need to change your priorities.

### Recognize Wolves

Well, if we know our sheep and our sheep know us, the next question is whether we are able to recognize a wolf – even if it disguised in sheep's clothing. To do this we must be both aware of the people and influences who are affecting our children. What TV shows do they watch? What music do they listen to? What websites do they visit on a regular basis? Who are their friends and what activities are they involved in? We won't recognize a wolf if we don't even see it. As you spend time with your children, ask them what they have been doing, what are the topics they are discussing, and what are the frustrations and problems they face. But be careful. Don't ask with the attitude that you already have the answer. Stop and really listen to what your children are overtly saying and what your children are saying through body language and verbal signals. Keep tabs on the influencers in their life.

The next aspect of wolf recognition is to know what a wolf looks like. I don't mean recognizing the physical appearance of a wolf. I mean recognizing the individuals and influences that are seeking to undermine your child's morals, challenge your child's religious beliefs, or allow your child to

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directly or vicariously participate in evil. You need to watch the TV with your children, read the books they are reading, and listen to the music they listen to. Then assess whether these influences are edifying, enlightening, or a healthy diversion. If not, that influence is a wolf and it must be run off.

Keep in mind, sheep are naturally followers. They will follow a leader wherever they lead. Even if they don't know the leader, sheep will follow the flock in whatever direction it is going. You cannot trust your children to have the discernment to know whether the influences in their life are positive or negative.

### Defend Your Flock

This brings us to our last point. Once a sheep dog recognizes a wolf, the sheep dog stands between the flock and the wolf and they defend the flock. They block the wolf's access to the flock. And if the wolf attacks they actively defend the flock. So what does this mean for us as fathers? When we recognize a wolf, we need to prevent that wolf from gaining access to our children. So, yes, we may put censor controls on our child's computer. We may ban certain books, movies, or TV shows. We may even remove our children from activities where wolf predators abound. One caution--whenever you decide to remove a wolf from your child's life, you should be certain to provide a positive replacement. Don't leave a void or your child may begin to miss that wolf, put it on a pedestal, and rebelliously seek out the wolf.

If you have ever watched a sheep dog working a flock, you will find that they are always busy. The sheep dog does not sit back and wait for the flock to call a problem to his attention. The sheep dog is out patrolling and protecting. As fathers, we can't be passive in this role. We must be active. The number and types of wolves are proliferating in our society. Vigilance is needed and needed more than ever.