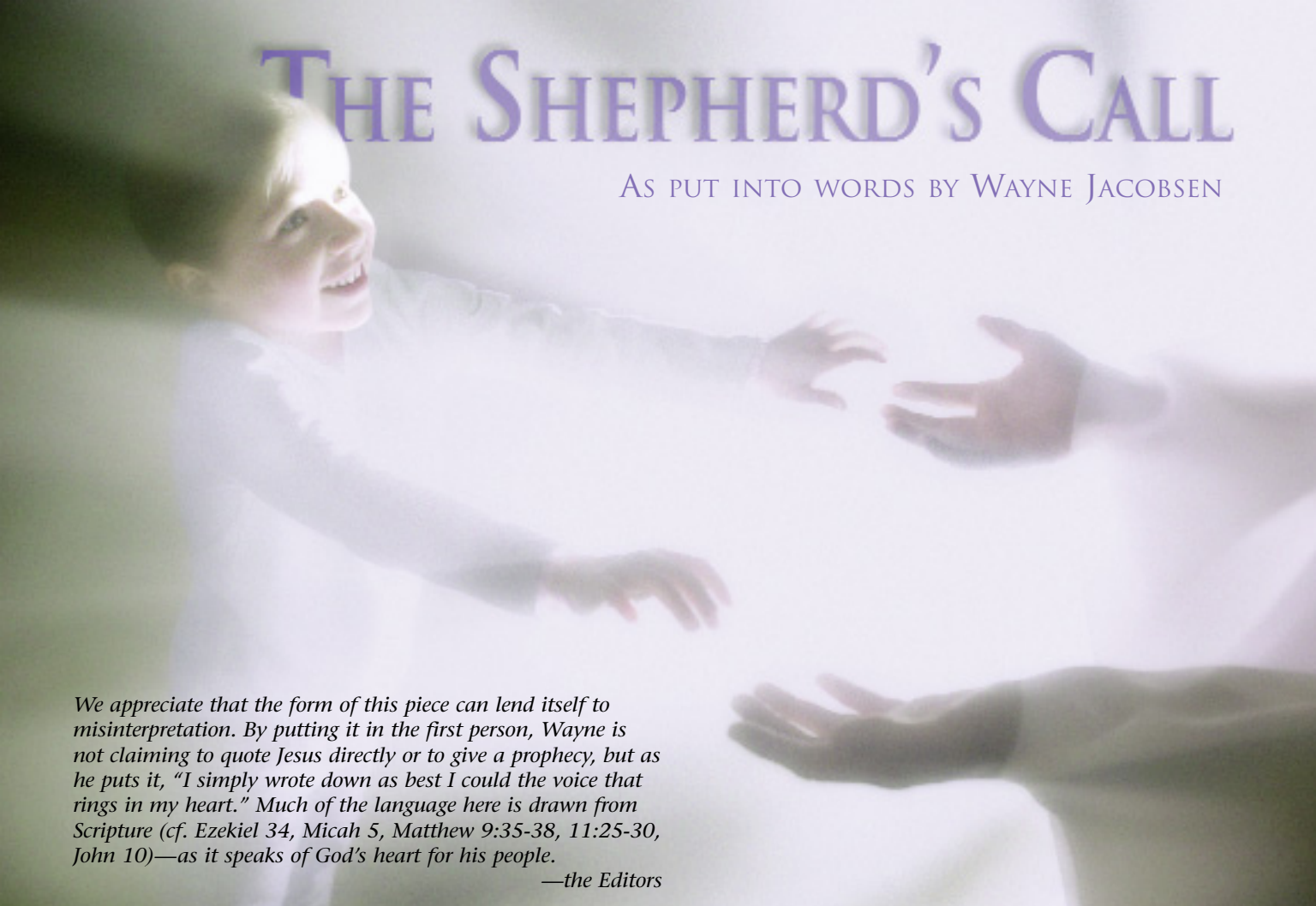


THE SHEPHERD'S CALL

AS PUT INTO WORDS BY WAYNE JACOBSEN

A young child with blonde hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, is reaching out with both arms towards several hands that are reaching out towards them. The hands are of various skin tones and are positioned at different heights, creating a sense of reaching and connection. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

We appreciate that the form of this piece can lend itself to misinterpretation. By putting it in the first person, Wayne is not claiming to quote Jesus directly or to give a prophecy, but as he puts it, "I simply wrote down as best I could the voice that rings in my heart." Much of the language here is drawn from Scripture (cf. Ezekiel 34, Micah 5, Matthew 9:35-38, 11:25-30, John 10)—as it speaks of God's heart for his people.

—the Editors

Do you remember the first day you knew that I loved you? Do you remember how clean you felt and how light your heart was? The air seemed clearer, the colors of my creation brighter. You felt as if you had stumbled out of a dark, dirty cave and plunged headlong into a clean, cool stream. You drank in the reality of my presence and splashed with delight in my goodness.

In that moment nothing else mattered. You knew at the very core of your being that I was real, that I had great affection for you. Even in the face of dire circumstances, you were convinced that there was nothing we couldn't walk through together. My love not only overwhelmed you, it also overflowed you with grace for others, even those who had wronged you. You woke up every morning in eager anticipation of what I'd

show you that day. You delighted yourself in me as I delighted myself in you and each day became an adventure together.

Wouldn't you like to come back to that place? Me too. That's not just where I wanted you to start. It was where I wanted you to live every day.

Harassed and Helpless

I know things got complicated. I didn't fix everything you wanted me to fix, and I know that shook your confidence in me. Others told you that you weren't working hard enough so you concluded that the success of our relationship was hinged on your effort and wisdom. When anything went wrong you either blamed me for not loving you or yourself for not trying hard enough. Both were dead ends, and the life we shared eventually faded into confusion and guilt.

But I never gave up on you. I knew your best efforts would not

be enough, which is why I already satisfied in myself all my Father would ever require of you. Your righteousness is in me and guilt never has a place in our relationship. And I know I disappointed your expectations, but that was only because I had better things in mind for you. I work through times of pain as well as times of joy.

I know you thought I had lost sight of you, but I never had. It was you who lost sight of me. I know right where you are and every place you have wandered because I followed you there. I have continued to call your name and invite you into the life that really is life. But so many other things drowned out my voice, activities you thought would bring me closer to you and the busy-ness you got caught up in hoping to hide your emptiness. Even when I tried to scoop you up in my arms, you recoiled, not recognizing my hand, and I held back, letting you have



I CAN KEEP FOLLOWING YOU AND RESCUING YOU OUT OF ALL THE PLACES YOU GET STUCK, OR YOU CAN TURN AROUND AND FOLLOW ME, AND I WILL LEAD YOU TO THE HEIGHTS OF MY GLORY.

the distance you thought you needed.

I'm still here ready for you to fall into my arms. I want you to see through the illusion of your own efforts to produce my work in your life, or in the lives of others. I will teach you how to trust my purpose in you so that even times of trouble will not destroy our friendship. Come, my Beloved, let me wash over you again like a cool fountain, cleansing all that has hurt and confused you. Let us start anew, and I will show you just how much I love you and that all I ever wanted from you was *you!*

A Shepherd Like No Other

Did I not tell you that I would take care of you—that I would lead you into safe pastures and refresh you with living water? Did I not tell you that I had rejected the shepherds who wanted to use my flock for their own purpose, battering and plundering them for their own gain?

You need no other shepherd but me. I will lead you into rich pas-

tures and watch over you so that you will never need to be afraid again. I am not going to exploit you, for I am the shepherd who gives his life for the sheep. I did not run in the face of my own death, but embraced the shame because I wanted to open the way for us to be together.

No one on this planet ever has or ever will love you like I do. The great lie is that I cannot be trusted with your life. Oh, but I can! I will take care of you and teach you to follow me so that you can know the fullness of my life. I will hold you close to my heart as we walk through the days ahead. Even in the face of pain and death, I will ensure that nothing will take you out of my hand. I will draw you to myself, wipe every tear from your eyes and, through it all, transform you into the person I created you to be.

I know you haven't always seen that, nor yielded to me so that I could do it. You wandered in places where you got hurt and sought out easy answers that could not work. I have not been the source of your pain, but the one who has offered you healing.

All the while I wanted to teach you how I work. I do not put band-aids over your life so it will look better, but I seek to heal you in the deepest places. It is not something that you can do, but it is some-

WHEN ANYTHING WENT WRONG YOU EITHER BLAMED ME FOR NOT LOVING YOU OR YOURSELF FOR NOT TRYING HARD ENOUGH. BOTH WERE DEAD ENDS AND THE LIFE WE SHARED EVENTUALLY FADED INTO CONFUSION AND GUILT.

thing that you can thwart if you won't let me teach you how to yield to my wisdom and power. You have nothing to fear. Your entire life is in my hands, and my hands are sure.

To the Heights

I can keep following you and rescuing you out of all the places you get stuck, or you can turn around and follow me, and I will lead you to the heights of my glory. I am the way to Father's fullness and I

want nothing more than to take you there.

Let me scoop you up in my arms and carry you along as I show you the wonders of my Father's kingdom. Tune your ears to my voice and look to me in everything you do. There is no situation that I can't lead you through and no promise that I cannot fulfill in you. Trust my voice more than your own and yield to my hand as I shape you into the person I created you to be.

There is nothing you can do to earn this. It is beyond your ability, but it is not beyond mine. I am able to make you stand and establish you in my gospel. I am able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times you will have all that you need. I am able to guard all that you have entrusted to me and able to help you at your weakest moment. And I am able to keep you from falling and present you before God's glorious presence, without fault and with great joy! (Romans 14:4, 16:25-26, 2 Corinthians 9:8, 2 Timothy 1:12, Hebrews 5:2, Jude 24-25).

I am calling my flock back to me from all the places it has been scattered. I will take you to the heights of my glory, where you can delight in the greenest of pastures and drink the purest water. You will never need to be afraid again for you will know how much I love you and how safe you are in my

hand. There is no God beside me, and no life apart from mine.

Come, my Beloved, your time is now. Draw near to me. Take my hand and I will show you all that I hold in my heart for you, and you will discover the unmitigated joy of living in my rest. □

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