

That the Bones That Thou Hast Broken May Rejoice

Roy Gustafson on Shepherds Breaking Bones

David, once a shepherd, later king and psalmist, refers often to sheep and shepherding throughout his writings in Scripture. They provide great insight on how the Lord deals with us. In Psalm 51, verse 8, we have this statement in his Psalm of repentance after his affair with Bathsheba:

*"Make me to hear joy and gladness; that **the bones which thou hast broken** may rejoice."*

The best explanation I have heard for this startling statement describes a practice where a shepherd deliberately breaks the leg of a persistently wayward sheep and then nurses it back to both health and a reformed manner of practice. The sheep quickly forgets the source of the break but forever remembers the tender care of the shepherd, thereafter his close and faithful companion. This explanation apparently first appeared in a book by Robert Boyd Munger, published in 1955 and called, "What Jesus Said". The quote lifted from this resource is as follows:



"A Foreigner traveling in Syria who became acquainted with a shepherd. Each morning he noticed the shepherd taking food to a sheep that had a broken leg. As he looked at the animal, he asked the shepherd, "How did the sheep break its leg? Did it meet with an accident, fall into a hole, or did some animal break its leg?"

"No," said the shepherd, "I broke this sheep's leg myself."

"You broke it yourself?" queried the surprised traveler.

"Yes, you see, this is a wayward sheep; it would not stay with the flock, but would lead the sheep astray. Then it would not let me near it so I had to break the sheep's leg so that it would allow me, day by day to feed it. In doing this it will get to know me as its shepherd, trust me as its guide, and keep with the flock."

This illustration has been used by many preachers including John MacArthur (<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1232/true-confession>) and Chuck Swindoll (<https://www.insight.org/resources/daily-devotional/individual/the-shepherd-restores1>). I heard it repeatedly from Bill Gothard in his many seminars in the 1970s and 1980s. It focuses us on the "goodness and severity of God" (Romans 11:22), how He will at times severely crush us in a manner that feels like cruel torture. Yet it is in fact His loving correction, designed to teach us - stupid sheep - that straying is dangerous, and that we can and must trust the Shepherd that loves us.

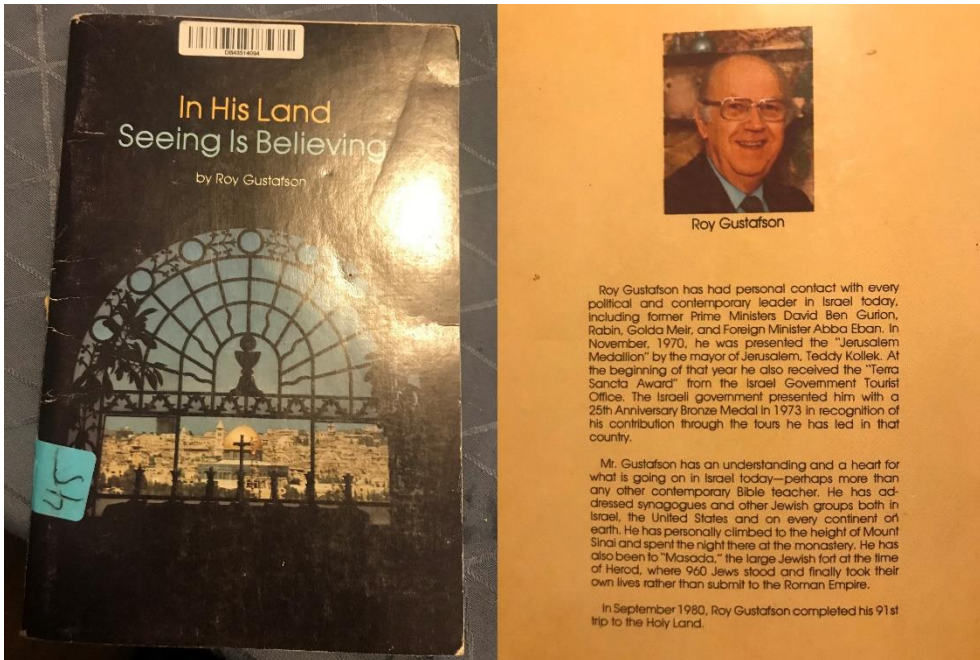
Such notions have, along with many other rejections of Scriptural teaching and our Christian heritage, come under persistent savage attack in recent years. God, like Santa Claus, is to be endlessly kind and loving toward us, always accepting and never mean. Many are now declaring that the God they worship would never cast a person into eternal hell, and that He would certainly never hit us hard enough "break our bones".

If you search the internet as I did for validation of this shepherding practice you will find an overwhelming cry against it: "myth", "apocryphal", "moronic". Folks claiming to know everything there is to know about sheep declare it to be false. How modern sheep farmers become experts on the practices of poor middle eastern Bedouin shepherds let alone

shepherds in Bible times is a mystery to me. Their confidence appears to derive from their inability to conceive of any situation that could ever call for such extreme measures. That is an opinion based on restricted knowledge, and

sometimes prejudice, yet their attestations have been bolstered by an apparent lack of a verified source in support. Until now.

Being greatly blessed by this illustration throughout my life I purposed recently to find some backing for it if it was at all possible. And, lo and behold, the crumbs left on the internet brought me to a very excellent modern account from a verified source. I had seen several references to Roy Gustafson, a man associated with Billy Graham, and his book allegedly called "In His Hand". Further sleuthing brought me to the actual



book which was in fact called, "In His Land Seeing is Believing". I had to order it from Amazon and it arrived this week.

Roy's credentials and accolades are given on the back cover:

"Roy Gustafson has had personal contact with every political and contemporary leader in Israel today, including former Prime Ministers David Ben Gurion, Rabin, Golda Meir, and Foreign Minister Abba Ewan. In November, 1970, he was presented the "Jerusalem Medallion" by the mayor of Jerusalem, Teddy Kollek. At the beginning of that year he also received the "Terra Sancta Award" from the Israel Government Tourist Office. The Israeli government presented him with a 25th Anniversary Bronze Medal in 1973 in recognition of his contribution through the tours he has led in that country.

Mr. Gustafson has an understanding and a heart for what is going on in Israel today - perhaps more than any other contemporary Bible teacher. He has addressed synagogues and other Jewish groups both in Israel, the United States and on every continent on earth. He has personally claimed to the height of Mount Sinai and spent the night there at the monastery. He has also been to "Masada," the large Jewish fort at the time of Herod, where 960 Jews stood and finally took their own lives rather than submit to the Roman Empire.

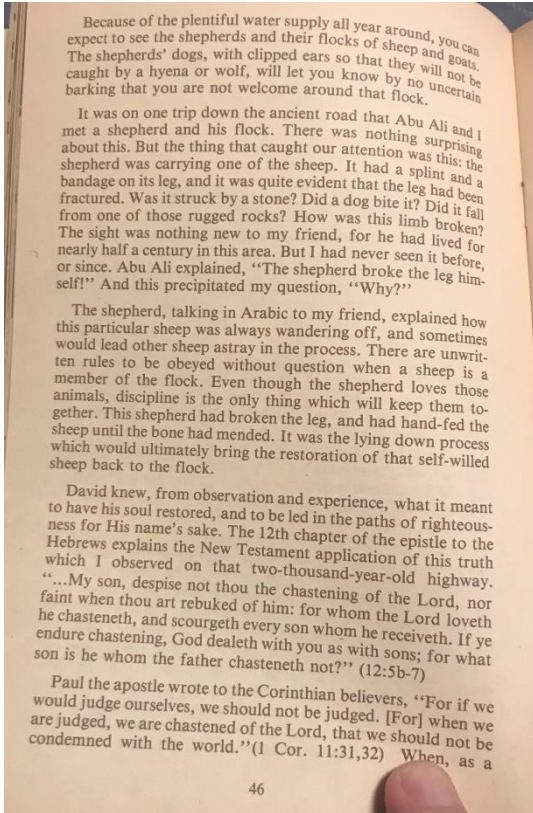
In September 1980, Roy Gustafson completed his 91st trip to the Holy Land."

Clearly, he was a very public man and highly regarded by important people in the Middle East. In this book, then, in chapter 7 called "He Restoreth" (pp.45-47) is this firsthand account:

"It was on one trip down the ancient road that Abu Ali and I met a shepherd and his flock. There was nothing surprising about this. But the thing that caught our attention was this: the shepherd was carrying one of the sheep. It had a splint and a bandage on its leg, and it was quite evident that the

leg had been fractured. Was it struck by a stone? How was this limb broken? The sight was nothing new to my friend, for he had lived for nearly half a century in this area. But I had never seen it before,

or since. Abu Ali explained, "The shepherd broke the leg himself!" And this precipitated my question, "Why?"



The shepherd, talking in Arabic to my friend, explained how this particular sheep was always wandering off, and sometimes would lead the other sheep astray in the process. There are unwritten rules to be obeyed without question when a sheep is a member of the flock. Even though the shepherd loves those animals, discipline is the only thing which will keep them together. This shepherd had broken the leg, and had hand-fed the sheep until the bone had mended. It was the lying down process which would ultimately bring the restoration of that self-willed sheep back to the flock."

He saw it for himself and heard the explanation from the shepherd, as translated by his friend. This is a verified observation consistent with many other unattributed accounts spanning the decades.

Sadly brother Gustafson has passed away

(<https://www.tampabay.com/archive/2002/04/15/roy-w-gustafson-holy-land-tour-guide-dies/>), but his obituary made it clear that he remained

highly regarded and decorated, his funeral conducted by no less than Franklin Graham himself.

I close with several additional verses which point out from Scripture that our loving God, being so concerned about the effects of sin on His children, will go to the extreme lengths to break our bones, if necessary, to get our attention and turn us around. Thank God that we have a loving, faithful shepherd that will not "suffer sin upon us" (Lev. 19:17-18) but will correct us with extreme pressure at times so we can be "partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10).

-Alfred Corduan, 01/29/2022 (ACorduan@gmail.com)

Spoken by Hezekiah when he was sick and to die and the Lord delivered him:

"I reckoned till morning, that, as a lion, so will he break all my bones: from day even to night wilt thou make an end of me." (Isaiah 38:13)

Jeremiah, reflecting on the severe discipline that Israel had just gone through, being ejected from their land and taken to Babylon:

"My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones ... He hath also broken my teeth with gravel stones, he hath covered me with ashes." (Lamentations 3:4, 16)



The words of Hannah, in the wake of the very unfair circumstances she had had to endure, childless and despised, followed by the blessing of God's gift of Samuel:

"The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up." (1 Samuel 2:6)

Eliphaz speaking of God's dealings with us all, but especially in the context of the broken, destitute, sick Job in front of him, described by God as one the most

righteous man that ever lived:

"For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole." (Job 5:18)