

## Creative Nonfiction



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### Knowing the Good Shepherd 'The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing'

Valentyna Hamova<sup>1</sup>.

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*"In the darkest times, the light that dwells becomes the brightest."* This axiom has become something of a creed for me in the last 14 months. It has been widespread across Ukraine, touching every heart and appearing in almost every public speech. Of course, most times, it concerns the noble acts, support, and sacrifice of Ukrainians. It speaks of unity and selflessness among the people. But I believe that, especially for the children of God, this phrase becomes real and powerful when it reveals our Good Shepherd's hand at work. We've seen hundreds of miracles, felt the Spirit guiding us, watched the Lord providing and caring, leading and protecting, giving joy amid trials, and creating something beautiful from the ashes.

When full-scale war hit Ukraine, many churches were left without their usual pastors and leaders. Mine was one of these communities. Many of our ministry leaders and families evacuated to Germany. I stayed in Ukraine and continue to serve our local church alongside one of my good friends. Together, we have provided shelter for so many. Overnight, I switched from "youth pastor" to "co-pastor," a transition that was extremely overwhelming. It took half a year to get used to what was going on, and I'm still processing. I am certain this experience of truly reflecting the Good Shepherd's heart will dwell with me for the rest of my life, no matter where I go or what God calls me to do.

In the most difficult moments, I remember this passage from Psalm 23; somehow, it always appears in my mind. In my dreams, during times of prayer, and in sermons, I continuously hear, "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." This promise is haunting. It protects me in moments of temptation, through hard choices or loss, and in seasons of doubt. More recently, it has become increasingly practical, real, and clear.

Long before the war, the decision to stay in Ukraine had been placed in my spirit. Since I was 16, God had given me dreams about the war, along with dozens of details that meant different things in various situations. As God had already revealed such pictures to me, I had my answer when the time came to decide amid stress, pressure, and the absence of peace. In my heart, there is a certain resolve, even though it hasn't been easy. I know what I need to do. My Good Shepherd is leading me step by step and welcoming me into His arms, granting me peace every day.

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He is there during lunchtime when people laugh and share food under the sound of sirens; He is there in the new pair of sneakers brought to you exactly when you needed them; He is there when your favorite food appears in a box sent to you from abroad; He is there when the exact sum of money appears in your bank account the morning after you told your friends about a need you wanted to cover; He is there when the person you met at just the right time gives you the encouragement you needed.

One of the most amazing things for me is that the first year of the war collided with my seventh year of being in ministry. The seventh year described in the Bible—the year of rest and restoration—always had a place in my heart. Gradually, during my dialogue with God, I received a picture of how He sees this year for me. It seemed impossible and even absurd, but God does not live according to human events. God’s schedule has become a vivid example of His care, timing, and faithfulness.

When the storm is raging and the wind is strong, Jesus still ‘*sleeps in the boat*’ if He decides to. This is the time I’ve learned to separate people’s opinions from God’s voice and see the fullness of His promises, no matter what. I’ve learned to love myself as God sees me and in that, I can truly love my neighbour. In a time of harvest, I have tasted and seen the faithfulness of God. I’ve experienced the fruit of submitting my finances to the Lord for years. I’ve learned it is not about the number of people you have; it’s about quality, faithfulness, and the smallest acts of love and care. In this time, I’ve realized that even in seasons of great need, desperation, and panic, God’s wisdom still prevails and teaches us not to be blinded by need, fear, or hate, but leads us by the Spirit each and every day.

I am at a loss for words when I reflect on the stories, moments, and times when I’ve seen God’s goodness during one of the hardest and most stressful times of my life. But the weird part is, at the same time, it has shaped my heart and faith in a certain way that I would never trade for temporal peace and slow development. This is so clear to me. I am certain I am not even close to the ‘final point’ of knowing my Heavenly Father’s heart, freedom, boldness, and peace. And I’m okay with that, because discovering all these things, and *growing* in the knowledge and wisdom of the Lord is life-sustaining, and I pray this process never stops. There is no limit. I have tasted and seen the goodness of God, and for that, I am forever grateful.