

## Following the Judas Goat

Shepherds and ranchers say that sheep are virtually defenseless against predators, not very resourceful, inclined to follow one another into danger, and absolutely dependent on their human masters for safety.

Thus, when the prophet Isaiah wrote, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray,” he was referring to our tendency to move as an unthinking herd away from the watchful care of the Shepherd.

A documentary on television was filmed in a packinghouse where sheep were being slaughtered for the meat market.

Huddled in pens outside were hundreds of nervous animals that seemed to sense danger. A gate opened that led up a ramp and through a door to the right.

To get the sheep to walk up that ramp, the handlers used a Judas goat. That is a trained animal used in general animal herding. The Judas goat is trained to associate with sheep or cattle, leading them to a specific destination. In stockyards, a Judas goat will lead sheep to slaughter, while its own life is spared.

In this television documentary, the Judas goat did his job very efficiently. He walked to the bottom of the ramp and looked back. Then he took a few more steps and stopped again. The sheep looked at each other skittishly and then began moving toward the ramp. Eventually, they followed the goat to the top, where he went through a little gate to the left, while they were forced to turn to the right and to their deaths.



It was a dramatic illustration of unthinking herd behavior and the deadly consequences it often brings.

In our present day – particularly aided by social media – we are seeing more and more demonstrations of the herd mentality. A flash mob, for example, is a group of people who assemble suddenly in a public place and perform an unusual and seemingly pointless act for a brief time before quickly dispersing. They are often used for the purposes of entertainment, satire or artistic expression.

“Flash rob” or “flash mob robberies” is a reference to the way flash mobs assemble to engage in robberies and assaults perpetrated suddenly by groups of teenage youth.

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Instead of following the Judas goat, engaging in the herd mentality, we should: (1) use some common sense, (2) follow the wise counsel of mentors or trusted associates, and (3) heed the wisdom of scripture gained through Bible study and attendance in worship services.

*Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals" (I Corinthians 15:33 ESV).*

– Beecher Hunter