

The little girl was curious. She opened the big family Bible. On the first pages were the names of her great-grandparents and their birth dates and dates of death, followed by the names and birth dates of her grandparents, her aunts and uncles, her parents, and her own name and those of her sisters and brother. As she continued turning through the yellowed pages, something fell out of the book of Genesis. The little girl picked it up to have a closer look, and then read the passage from Genesis. What fell from the book was a large leaf that had been carefully pressed between the pages. The little girl hollered to her Mother, “Mama, Mama, look what I found!” Whatever in the world have you got there?” the Mother asked. With astonishment in the little girl’s voice, she answered, “I think I just found Adam’s underwear!”

That just goes to prove, you never know what you’ll find, if you dare to open your Bibles. You might even find the peace you need to quell your worries and fears. You might find the comfort you’re looking for in the face of pain and suffering and loss. You might find the courage you need to resolve your financial difficulties or confront the spouse who has become an alcoholic or the child you suspect of substance abuse. These are just some of the things you might find, if you dare to open your Bibles.

Today’s Scripture speaks to the worriers among us. Are there any worry-warts out there? Please, don’t raise your hands. I know your name is Legion! Most of us are filled with all kinds of worries and fears.

The truth is we all have reasons to worry. I mean you have to stay out of the sun because it can cause skin cancer. Air vents in public places can cause lung clotting molds to form in your body. Potato chips have too many carbs; bacon and all red meats contain carcinogens, and too many vitamins can be toxic. Why do they have to call an airport a terminal? Then there are those who are stoking our fears about Isis, extreme weather, financial meltdowns, Donald Trump, Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, and Bernie Sanders. Why isn't anyone fearful of or worried about John Kasich?

The question is what are we going to do with all our worries and fears? You can either try to handle them yourself or you can let someone else handle them for you. Now, if you're anything like me, you're not handling your worries and fears too well for yourself.

That's why it might be a good idea to take a closer look at our Scriptures today. In the book of Revelations, we read: "The one who sits on the throne will shelter them. They will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike them. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Then, the same author of Revelations, the Apostle John, has Jesus saying, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Now to appreciate how these Scriptures might be applied to the concerns of our lives, we have to understand the difference between a shepherd and a cowboy. A shepherd leads his sheep. If he doesn't lead them, they wander all over creation. A cowboy, on the other hand, drives his cattle. He leads, if you will, from behind. Cattle generally, they tell me, are more comfortable in a herd, where sheep have no sense of direction or necessarily belonging together, so they'll even wander off a cliff or into a ravine. It seems cattle are a little bit smarter than sheep. Maybe that's why the Bible often compares God's people to sheep and God speaks of Himself shepherding his flock.

Think about it. Most people live their lives like sheep. They don't know where they are and they don't know how to get to where they are going. Husbands and wives wander away from their marriages. Children stray from their parents' home and values, and wander aimlessly in a world that seems to reject them. People will walk off cliffs of drugs, alcohol, or materialism. Like sheep need guidance and leadership. So, too, do people.

Sheep without a shepherd are pathetic. They are totally helpless. They have no sense of direction and without leadership they wander aimlessly, straying away from the flock. They lose their way and eventually they will die.

Contrast that, with what Jesus promises us today, "My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

That's one of the things I find so awesome about Jesus—how he looks at people. When Jesus looks at people, he didn't see nameless faces, bland personalities, a bunch of hang-ups, or mess-ups. He saw people as sheep. You have to understand, when Jesus walked the earth, shepherding was a very intimate occupation. The shepherd knew each one of his sheep by name and he had one job—to provide for the sheep and to protect the sheep. The very existence of the sheep depended on the care and the leadership of the shepherd. Listen to how Matthew, in Chapter 9 of his Gospel, describes Jesus' reaction to the people following him: "At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity. They were lying prostrate from exhaustion, like sheep without a shepherd." There is great tenderness in the heart of the shepherd for his sheep.

I once read where a shepherd who led his sheep on a long journey was considered successful if he arrived with more than 50% of his flock. The reasons for this are many—sickness, disease, poisoned grasses or water, and predatory animals. That's why Jesus is like no other shepherd. That's why we refer to him and he referred to himself as The Good Shepherd. "Good" here doesn't just mean nice or effective, it means "one of a kind, in a class all by itself." Jesus, the Good Shepherd, The significance of this is that the Good Shepherd lives by this creed—No Sheep left behind. Once you're in his flock, you are always in his flock—"they shall never perish. No one can take them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one can take them out of the Father's hand.

Though they are helpless, defenseless animals, one of the most admirable thing about sheep is that they never worry. You'll never see a worried sheep. You'll never see a sheep nervously rubbing its hoofs together. You'll never see a sheep sweat. You'll never see a sheep pacing back and forth. Sheep never worry as long as the shepherd is around. They never worry about their security or their well-being or anything else going on around them because as long as they have the presence and the protection of the shepherd they know he can handle anything that is thrown at them.

The only question yet to be considered is how do you become part of the Good Shepherd's flock? Is it enough to come to church to get your ticket punched each weekend? Is it okay to wear a bib rather than an apron? Is it good enough just being a pew potato?

Apparently not, if you consider what John says today in Revelations: "These are the ones who have survived the time of great distress; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The symbolism, that they had washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, indicates that they had suffered greatly, but now they were part of a victorious multitude that surrounds the throne of God because of their faith and because of the sacrifices they had made.

Sacrifice is an important part of what it means to be a Christian. If the Son of God can cry tears of pain and agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the Cross of Calvary, then who is exempt? The promises of Christ are for those who have helped to carry his Cross. In Revelations, God's promises are to a very special group of people—those who have committed themselves totally to Christ's service. Following Jesus is about committing yourself to a life of service, often at great cost.

There is a little-known book by H.G. wells called *The Croquet Player*. Significantly, it came out in 1938, while the Western nations were passively watching Hitler expand his power. Toward the end of the novel a psychiatrist is explaining a case of strange behavior to a young man who is one of the central characters. Refusing to face a world as grim as it really is, the psychiatrist says, “Some sensitive people try to run away from reality. But the facts must be faced, and one of these is that people are essentially the same fearing, snarling, fighting cavemen they were hundreds of thousands of years ago.” The young man asks what must be done. The psychiatrist’s answer is that those who care for civilization must become giants who will make an enormous effort to build a harder, stronger, more disciplined society. While he is explaining, the young man is pulling away. He is nervous and frightened by this apocalyptic talk. Finally he cries that he realizes the world is going to pieces but what can a fellow like himself do about it? Become giant-minded and build a new civilization—him? He says he’s sorry but he has other engagements. He is due to play croquet with his aunt at 12:30.

I hope I don’t sound too judgmental when I say that many of us are playing croquet when God has called us to play the part of moral and spiritual giants in this age of uncertainty and doubt.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best: “When you go out of here to help the sick; when you go out of here to deal with the brokenhearted; when you go out of here to help the poor, it isn’t easy. It means suffering and sacrifice. But God wants the church today that will bear the cross. Too many Christians are wearing the cross, and not enough are bearing the cross. The cross is something you die on. It may mean the death of your prestige; it may mean the death of your popularity; it may mean the death of your budget. But there are too many churches more concerned about a cushion than a cross; more concerned about making the gospel something easy, retranslating the gospel to read, “Go ye into all the world and keep your blood pressure down, and lo, I will make you a well-adjusted personality.” That isn’t God’s Church! Don’t forget that Bethlehem was just 18 miles from Calvary. You’ve got to go to Calvary!”

Christ promise is to the sheep who hear his voice: “Whatever you have done for the least of my brethren, that you have done unto me.” And “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.” Or “If you love only those who love you, what credit is there in that.”

And God’s promise “to wipe every tear from their eyes” is made to those who have picked up their Cross and followed Jesus, sacrificing themselves for the good of others.

The truth is if you are helping Christ to carry His Cross in this world today, you're too busy helping others, serving the needs of others greater than your own, you simply don't have time to fret and worry, to moan and complain, to be troubled by fears. All these are the concerns of the Good Shepherd, who has promised you that you will never perish. "The one who sits on the throne will shelter you. You will not hunger or thirst anymore, nor will the sun or any heat strike you. For the Lamb who is in the center of the throne will shepherd you and lead you to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe away every tear from your eyes."

It's all here! Right here, in the Book! Dare to open it! Dare to live it!