

Gleaning In The Fields Of Light

By Ken Woodley

Virtually every day I'm reminded that without my Good Shepherd I would have gotten lost in life's brambles and briars, or some pasture that seemed to have greener grass—greener grass that turned out to be poison ivy.

One of my favorite "Good Shepherd" stories is the parable Jesus tells about the shepherd who had 100 sheep and lost just one of them. We don't know how the sheep came to be lost. Jesus doesn't say. There are many possible explanations.

Despite having 99 sheep all flocked around him, the shepherd is not content, however.

Most people would be.

Ninety-nine percent? That's nearly perfect. Just a single percentage point below 100 percent. One percent would be an easily acceptable loss on Wall Street, or Main Street.

But Jesus doesn't view the world through a corporate lens. He has the eyes and heart of a shepherd.

"Which one of you," Jesus asks, "having a 100 sheep and losing one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices..."

"Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance," Jesus tells the group, which includes grumbling Pharisees and scribes who are upset that Jesus welcomes people they describe as "sinners."

The parable would have gotten their attention. They are no better than any other sheep, Jesus is telling them. And no worse. They are not better sheep than the one sheep—or, the one human soul—who was lost.

And, again, we are not told how the sheep came to be lost. Perhaps it was afraid of wolves, had anxiety about when the next green pasture might be seen over the horizon.

Maybe this sheep was too busy enjoying a cooling stream on a hot day to notice that the shepherd believed it was time to move on to the next pasture.

So many things can get between us and God. Everyday concerns, fixations, habits, thoughts, the absence of thoughts—you name it.

Anything that, when we feel our Good Shepherd calling us, keeps us rooted to the spot, absorbed in whatever it might be that distracts us.

There are times when I obsess about this or that and so keep myself from feeling the full measure of God's love and grace. And there are other times when I ignore that little voice of the Holy Spirit inside me urging me to stop doing one thing and start doing another. Oftentimes, I don't even realize that I've wandered off the path because I don't feel "lost."

It's only when I turn around my thoughts and wonder, "How in the world did I get so deep into this anxiety?" that I realize how much I've separated myself from the loving presence of God.

The wonderfully beautiful joyful truth is that our Good Shepherd is out there, looking for us, coming toward us, and can't wait to lay us across His shoulders and bring us home to the still waters and green pastures our soul so needs.

And when we look up—mentally or physically—from where we are "lost" and see our Good Shepherd approaching, a loving smile on His face, heaven's rejoicing has company because our own happiness becomes complete.