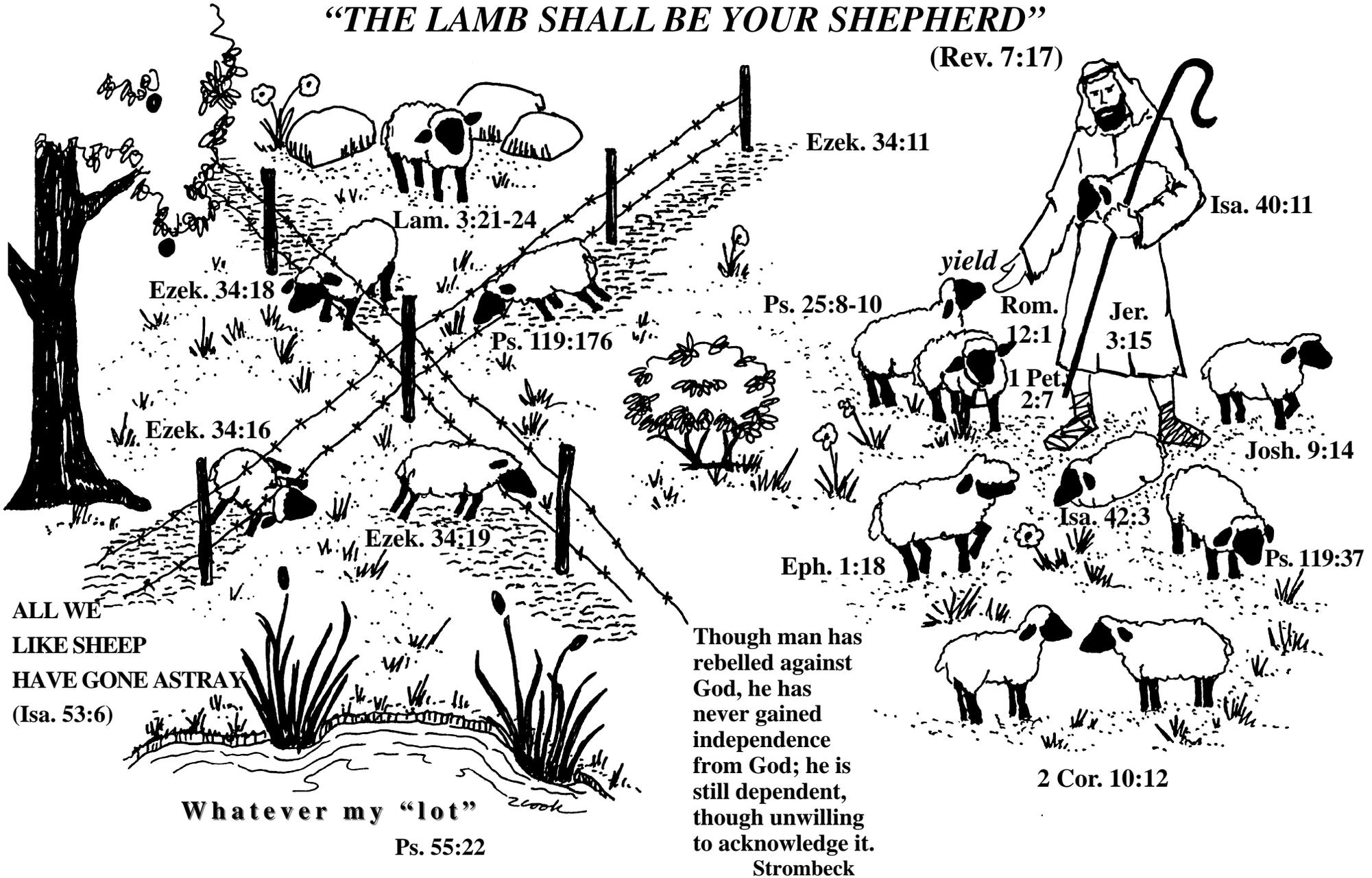


"THE LAMB SHALL BE YOUR SHEPHERD"

(Rev. 7:17)



AND YOU MY FLOCK, THE FLOCK OF MY PASTURE, ARE MEN, AND I AM YOUR GOD

(Ezek. 34:31)

GREENER PASTURES

And I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding (Jer. 3:15).

For the Lord God says: I will search and find My sheep...I will seek My lost ones, those who strayed away and bring them safely home again (Ezek. 34:11, TLB).

The Lord is good and glad to teach the proper path to all who go astray; He will teach the ways that are right and best to those who humbly turn to Him...All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful (Ps. 25:8-10, TLB).

I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak... (Ezek. 34:16, NIV).

Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? (Ezek. 34:18, 19, NIV).

Remember my affliction and my wandering...Surely my soul remembers and is bowed down within me. This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease. For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning: Great is Thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion (lot)...Therefore I have hope in Him (Lam. 3:21-24).

...They did not bother to ask the Lord, but went ahead (Josh. 9:14, TLB).

He will encourage the fainthearted (Isa. 42:3a, TLB).

Turn me away from wanting any other plan than Yours (Ps. 119:37, TLB).

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye (yield) your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God...(Rom. 12:1).

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling... (Eph. 1:18).

For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise (2 Cor. 10:12).

He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young (Isa. 40:11).

GRACE for the Rest of Your Life

GREENER PASTURES

RETURNING GRACE: Lot in Life; Comparison vs. Contentment; Intimacy with the Shepherd; Faithful and Precious!

The shepherd theme (in the metaphor of the shepherd and sheep) is threaded throughout the Scriptures. From the beginning of time, we read of the *“Lamb who was slain before the foundation of the world”* (1 Pet. 1:19). The verse at the top of the card is *“The Lamb shall be your shepherd”* (Rev. 7:17). In order to be a shepherd, one must know all about sheep. Jesus was a Lamb first. He created sheep, so He knows how sheep are designed.

God created sheep **dependent**. Was Jesus dependent? Yes!—on His Father for everything (Jn. 14:10). Sheep are **defenseless**. Did Jesus defend Himself? No! *“As a lamb before His shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth”* (Isa. 53:7). This is what Jesus is showing us by His life—how we should live our lives. Only He can live that life through us.

Let’s look at Ezekiel 34:11 (TLB): *“I will seek my lost ones, those who strayed away.”* In the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15, the prodigal father was always waiting for the son to return. That is a picture of our Shepherd—always waiting for us—and He will go to great lengths to woo us to return to Him.

“The Lord is good and glad to teach the proper path to all who go astray. He will teach the ways that are right and best to those who humbly turn to Him. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful” (Ps. 25:8-10, TLB).

Lot in Life

Shepherds in New Zealand divide their pasturelands into four sections or quadrants in order to rotate their flocks. They know when it is time to move their sheep from one quadrant to another. If they leave their sheep in one pasture for too long of a period of time, the sheep will destroy the land by eating all the grass down to the roots. Often the sheep will try to go to the rest of the quadrants because the new grass looks more appealing. Sheep are dependent on the watchful care of the shepherd. It is the wisdom of the shepherd to know when to rotate them from one pasture to another. He knows what is best for His sheep!

Look at the left side of the drawing. For illustrative purposes, the pasture has been divided into separate lots (in life) for the sheep. The sheep are often not satisfied with the lot they have been given. The “greener pasture” on the other side of the fence always looks more appealing. One sheep is dissatisfied with his lot and longs for the shade tree in the neighboring lot; one is dissatisfied with his shade tree and longs for the marshy land in the adjoining lot; one is tired of the marshy land and wants to lie under the shade bush; and another sheep is tired of the shade bush and heads for the cool rocks. Each is dissatisfied in their quadrant—their lot in life. They are reaching for the “greener pasture.”

Notice the mud that each is creating as they move toward the middle in their search. Ezekiel 34:18-19 (NIV) reads, *“Must you trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet?”* This is the syndrome. Each one is looking at the other’s greener pasture. But what eventually happens? They ruin more good pasture than what they gain. As they move

toward the center, what will they have? One big mud puddle—nothing will be there for anybody! That is usually how it ends up! But, even then, if we take the example of the prodigal son, the shepherd is waiting and ready to take him back and restore him to the fold. Note the sheep that is caught in the barbed wire. The shepherd goes forth to look for his sheep, so he is not only waiting for them to return, but he also goes out and searches for them. The shepherd knows what is best for His sheep!

Try this experiment. We have seen these sheep dissatisfied or disillusioned with their lot in life as they search for greener pasture. Let's imagine that our life—our entire life—is packed into a suitcase. There are private places and hurtful memories. Now, take your imaginary suitcase and pack your life into it, so if anyone opened it up they would see that it was yours. Include all your valuables and all those hard things especially from your past. You can tuck them in secret compartments. Now let's imagine ourselves at an airport waiting around a circular baggage claim area. All of our suitcases are on the conveyor belt and we watch as each person's suitcase passes by.

Now is your chance. You can take anyone else's suitcase that you want. But you cannot pick and choose just parts of it. You have to take the whole thing—even the things in the hidden compartments. Remember what you have been complaining about—what you wish you had. This is your chance! But remember, not only do you have to take the whole suitcase, but you will be leaving yours for someone else to take! Does anyone want to volunteer whose she would like to take? Whose would you take? Who will end up with yours? It is interesting how many would take their own! Even after all the complaining every day about your lot in life—if and when you had the opportunity, you walked off with your own suitcase anyway! At least you know what is in there, right?

The following is a quote from F. B. Meyer, a missionary to India, "God chose your lot in life out of myriads that were open to Him, otherwise God would have made you different than what you are. He chose your lot with its irritations, its trials, its difficulties, all the agony that eats out your soul. He chose it just as it is, because in it, if you will let Him, He can realize for you the fairest life within your reach." Dr. Chafer, founder of Dallas Seminary, said, "That which gives us our priceless distinctiveness is our own personality, and we cannot please Him more than by being what He has designed us to be."

David in the Psalms wrote, "*Lord, You have assigned me my portion and my cup; You have made my lot secure*" (Ps. 16:5). Psalm 55:22 says, "*Cast your lot on the Lord and He shall sustain you.*" Your LOT is usually your burden—your whole lot in life, what has come to you, your portion. It is as if God had a large pie and gave out portions—He gave you yours and someone else theirs. In each portion we are to glorify God, whatever our situation is. "*You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living*" (Ps. 142:5). "*The Lord is my portion, therefore I have hope in Him*" (Lam. 3:24).

A familiar song was penned after a tragedy at sea. A ship had gone down with Horatio G. Spafford's wife and four children on board. The four children were not rescued; only his wife survived. When she arrived on the distant shore she sent a telegram to her husband with the words, "SAVED ALONE." The children were gone! The grief-stricken husband boarded another ship to attend to his wife. At a certain place on the voyage, the captain of the ship showed him the exact place where his four children drowned. This is the song that he penned at that very spot:

**When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll.
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well; it is well, with my soul.**

Darlene Rose Deibler, in her book *Evidence Not Seen* shares about how she was captured while serving as a missionary in New Guinea during World War II. She found out later that her husband had died at the hands of his captors. One of the songs that was the greatest encouragement to her during that entire time was:

**Fear not, little flock,
Whatever your lot.
He enters all rooms,
The doors being shut.

He never forsakes,
He never is gone.
So count on His presence,
From darkness till dawn.**

**Chorus:
Only believe,
Only believe,
All things are possible,
Only believe!**

Paul Rader

Let's go back to our picture of looking for greener pasture instead of being content with the lot that the Lord has apportioned to us. He knows how to move us from lot to lot and how to care for His sheep.

Psalm 119:37 (TLB) *"I have gone astray like a lost sheep, seek thy servant."* The plea here is for the acknowledgment that maybe we have gone astray, or our loved ones may have gone astray. It is like sheep to go astray; they are **directionless**. When sheep do get lost, they go in circles. Do you know what happens when humans get lost in a jungle? They go in circles. It is amazing how God designed sheep and humans with some of the same propensities—to keep teaching us lessons.

"Though man has rebelled against God, he has never gained independence from God; he is still dependent, though unwilling to acknowledge it." (*W. H. Strombeck*)

Nothing has really changed. We have been dependent since the day we were born. The change comes when we are willing to acknowledge our dependence. Many times we run amuck, or get caught, until we are finally ready to admit, **"I am helpless, I am dependent; I want to come back to you."**

Comparison vs. Contentment

These two sheep on the lower right are comparing themselves with each other. *"They measuring themselves among themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise"* (2 Cor. 10:12). Paul observed this in the Corinthian Church. First Timothy 6:6 says *"Godliness with contentment is great gain."* *"Having food and raiment, therewith be content"* (1 Tim. 6:8). This is a call to contentment, not to dissatisfaction—no matter what our lot is. Philippians 4:11-12 says, *"I have learned to be content in whatever state (or circumstances) I am."* Contentment is not the fulfillment of what we want, but the realization of what we have.

We have a shepherd who is ready to provide, protect and comfort in every situation. He never changes. He is always there waiting for us. That is His shepherding nature.

Let's look at the sheep on the top right. One sheep is striking out on his own. *"He did not bother to ask the Lord, but went ahead"* (Josh. 9:14). As busy people, we are go-getters, movers and shakers! We need to learn to wait on Him and go forth in His timing.

Notice the sheep on the right, *"Turn me away from wanting any other plan than Yours"* (Ps. 119:37, TLB). This sheep was going off on his own again—forgetting the provision, protection and comfort that the Lord gives. Do you see the sheep on his left with wool over his eyes? When a shepherd is not carefully watching the sheep, the wool will grow over the eyes, hindering its sight. How sad, and a sheep cannot do anything about it. The shepherd has to come and cut the wool from around the eyes, restoring its sight.

A woman shared her story, *"I know exactly what you mean about wool growing over the eyes. We had a sheep that my two brothers had raised for 4-H. They won the blue ribbon and after that they just let the sheep go—they neglected it. One day when I came home from school early, I saw the sheep in the cornfield. I decided to go after it and return it to the barn to surprise my brothers. I was pushing at it, yelling at it, but having a terrible time. Two hours! Pushing from one side to another, I was exhausted! It would not budge!*

Just then my dad drove by and asked me what the problem was. 'Oh, nothing,' and then followed a torrent of tears 'I can't get this sheep to go back to the barn!' My dad said, 'Hold on, Amy,' reached for his pocketknife, and proceeded to cut away the wool from the old sheep's eyes. Then he simply walked in front of the sheep and led her back to the barn. I just stood there dumbfounded! He made it so easy! He was the shepherd; He knew what to do. I was motivated, but I had the wrong method!"

We can relate to this also—trying to get someone to do something when they are really blinded. We need to pray that *"the Lord will open the eyes of their understanding so they will be enlightened"* (Eph. 1:18). It is also a good verse to pray for others who are also really blinded. They do not even know that they do not know! Psalm 119:18 (TLB) reads, *"Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from thy Law."* We need to pray that the Lord will open our eyes because maybe we have allowed wool to cover our eyes and do not even realize it

Look next at the sheep near the feet of the shepherd—the fainthearted—the one whose legs are tucked beneath him and are not visible. *"He will encourage the fainthearted"* (Isa. 42:3a, TLB).

Intimacy with the Shepherd

Now locate the sheep by the word 'yield.' Romans 12:1, *"I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice."* That word 'present' is the same as 'yield.' In the East when the shepherd does lead his sheep into different pastures, he always carries some oats or grain in his deep pockets prepared to give to his flock. Let's say he has twelve sheep. In the morning number eleven sheep works its way through the flock and **comes by the hand of** the shepherd. **Yield means "come by the hand of."** The shepherd digs into his pocket, hands the sheep some oats, pats him on the nose, and the contented sheep returns back to the fold. Then, the next sheep, say number eight, moves up to the shepherd. This goes on all day long. Each of the sheep has its special time with the shepherd as it yields and **comes by the hand of** the shepherd. "Thou openest thine hand and suppliest the desire of every living thing" (Ps. 145:16). That is just one of the interesting things God has put into "sheepology" to teach us about our relationship with Him. The shepherd enjoys our relationship with Him.

Isaiah 40:11 reads, *“He shall feed His flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”* He carries His lambs in His bosom; they just rest in His arms. The Shepherd is good at holding us safely and securely. These are some of the many insights the Lord wants to teach us through the sheep/shepherd metaphor.

Faithful and Precious!

First Peter 2:7 refers to the Bell Sheep story. Find the sheep next to the shepherd with the bell around his neck. Sometimes a sheep does go astray and is detrimental in leading others astray. That is when the shepherd intervenes and breaks its leg to keep it from misleading others again. However, the shepherd does not abandon the sheep, he comes and nourishes it until the leg is healed. Then he gently places it next to him, ties a bell around its neck and deems him the lead sheep. When the bell on his neck tinkles, the other sheep will follow the sound of the bell which will always be next to the shepherd. In our teaching and in our ministering, remember to focus others on the Lord. The bell sheep remains next to the shepherd. He uses us as His instruments, but the focus is not on us; the focus is on the Lord.

The verse again from 1 Peter 2:7: *“Unto you who believe, He is precious.”* Let’s add another part to that concept—*“Unto you who don’t believe, He is faithful”* (see 2 Tim. 2:13). So let’s put the two concepts together. *“Unto you who believe, He is precious; unto you who don’t believe, He is faithful.”* To those who are close to Him, He is precious; but He is still faithful to everyone else, no matter what. We know that in our own lives. The Lord has remained faithful to us, no matter what. We can all testify to that. But we hope that through this study we move from seeing not only His faithfulness, but beginning to enjoy His preciousness. He is faithful-- that is the kind of God He is. He is a faithful, tender, loving shepherd—no matter where we find ourselves in this drawing. *“His mercies are new every morning”* (Lam. 3:22-23).

As we find Him more and more precious every day, His desire then is to make us shepherds/shepherdesses in our sphere of influence. Jeremiah 3:15, *“And I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.”* This relationship is not just for our own selves, or for our devotions or our secret time with the Lord; He wants us reaching out as bell sheep in others’ lives. He wants to raise up shepherds and shepherdesses to tenderly care for His flock.

The closing verse at the bottom reads, *“And you My flock, the flock of My pasture, are men, and I am your God”* (Ezek. 34:31). The Lord commonly compares men with sheep throughout Scripture, but Matthew 12:12 states that we are of much more value than sheep. He knows our value; He designed us; He went to the cross for us; He laid down His life for us (John 10:11, 15). His redemptive and restoration process is ongoing because of who He is and His ongoing desire for an intimate relationship with His flock.

Review and reinforce this lesson by incorporating the following notes and quotes pages and by reading the Scriptures on the back of the card.

I WILL LEAD ON SOFTLY

Genesis 33:14

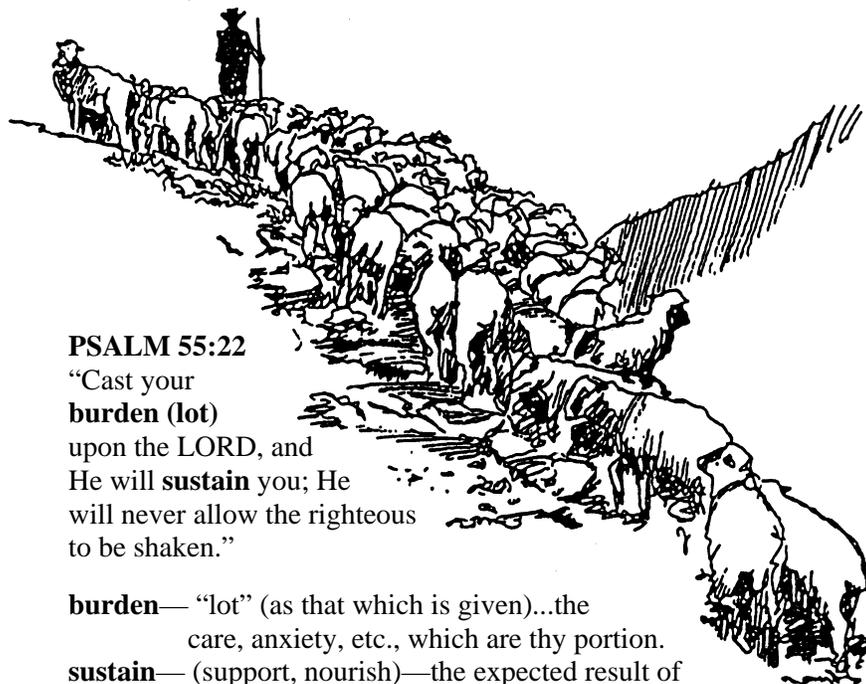
I will lead my children softly,
Hear the loving master say,
Lest the lambs grow overweary
On the hard and toilsome way.
I have trod the path before them,
And I know the road is steep.
Lest they faint upon the wayside,
I will softly lead my sheep.

I will lead my children softly,
For the noonday sun is high,
And the path is parched and rugged,
With no welcome shelter nigh.
Lest their hearts become discouraged,
I will bid them rest and wait;
I will lead my children softly,
Lest the journey be too great.

I will lead my children softly;
There are steeps ahead to scale,
There are deep and rushing rivers,
Many a dark and dismal vale.
Often sad and often weary,
I once trod this way alone,
But my lambs I must lead softly,
For to them 'tis all unknown.

Precious, loving, gentle Saviour,
With Thy guiding hand to hold,
Safely shall we make the journey
To yon glorious heavenly fold.
Step by step we'll trust Thy leading,
Day by day we'll follow on.
Thou wilt ever lead us softly,
Till at last the journey's done.

Avis Christensen



PSALM 55:22

“Cast your
burden (lot)
upon the LORD, and
He will sustain you; He
will never allow the righteous
to be shaken.”

burden— “lot” (as that which is given)...the
care, anxiety, etc., which are thy portion.
sustain— (support, nourish)—the expected result of
casting our **lot** on the Lord is that He will
indeed take it and **sustain** us.

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“God chose for you your *lot* in life out of
myriads that were open to Him...otherwise God
would have made you different from what you
are. He chose your *lot* with its irritations, its
trials, its difficulties—all the agony that eats out
your soul. He chose it just as it is, because in it,
if you will let Him, He can realize for you the
fairest life within your reach.” (See Ecc. 3:22.)

— *F.B. Meyer*

IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’

Horatio G. Spafford

=====

*Envy not your neighbor,
No matter what his lot;
You'll find you fare much better
Being content with what you've got.*

—*Roworth*



“GREENER PASTURES”

In “green pastures”? Not always; sometimes He
 Who knoweth best, in kindness leadeth me
 In weary ways, where heavy shadows be,
 Out of the sunshine, warm and soft and bright,
 Out of the sunshine into darkest night.
 I oft would faint with sorrows and affright,
 Only for this: I know He holds my hand;
 So, whether led in green or desert land,
 I trust, although I may not understand.

Beside “still waters”? No, not always so;
 Ofttimes the heavy tempests ‘round me blow,
 And o’er my soul the waves and billows go.
 But when the storms beat loudest, and I cry
 Aloud for help, the Master standeth by,
 And whispers to my soul, “Lo, it is I.”
 Above the tempest wild I hear Him say:
 “Beyond this darkness lies the perfect day;
 In every path of thine I lead the way.”

So whether on the Hill-tops high and fair
 I dwell, or in the sunless valleys where
 The shadows lie, what matter? He is there.
 And more than this; where’er the pathway lead,
 He gives to me no helpless, broken reed,
 But His own hand, sufficient for my need.

“He Leadeth Me” by Henry H. Barry

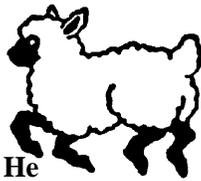
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*Shepherd of love, You knew I had lost my way;
 Shepherd of love, You cared that I’d gone astray.
 You sought and found me, placed around me
 Strong arms that carried me home;
 No foe can harm me or alarm me—
 Never again will I roam!*

*Shepherd of love, Savior and Lord and Guide,
 Shepherd of love, Forever I’ll stay by Your side.*

*Shepherd of love, Contentment at last is mine;
 Deep in my heart There’s peace and a joy divine.
 The future’s brighter, burden’s lighter,
 My cup runs over each day;
 Your grace supplied me now provides me
 All that I need for the way.*

John W. Peterson



“CHOOSE THOU FOR ME”

Thy way, not mine, O Lord,
 However dark it be!
 Lead me by Thine own hand;
 Choose out the path for me.
 Smooth let it be or rough,
 It will be still the best;
 Winding or straight, it leads
 Right onward to Thy rest.

I dare not choose my lot;
 I would not, if I might;
 Choose Thou for me, my God,
 So shall I walk aright.
 Take Thou my cup, and it
 With joy or sorrow fill,
 As best to Thee may seem;
 Choose Thou my good and ill.

Choose Thou for me my friends;
 My sickness, or my health.
 Choose Thou my cares for me,
 My poverty or wealth,
 Not mine, not mine the choice
 In things both great and small;
 Be Thou my Guide, my Strength,
 My Wisdom, and my All.

Horatius Bonar, 1857



“REFLECTIONS”

*I thank God for the bitter things;
 They’ve been a ‘friend to grace.’
 They’ve driven me from paths of ease
 To storm the secret place.*

*I thank Him for the friends who failed
 To fill my heart’s deep need;
 They’ve driven me to the Savior’s feet,
 Upon His love to feed.*

*I’m grateful, too, through all life’s way
 No one could satisfy,
 And so I’ve found in God alone—
 My rich, my full supply!*

Florence White Willet

When we allow God our shepherd to guide us, we have contentment. When we choose to sin, however, we go our own way and cannot blame God for the environment we create for ourselves. Our shepherd knows the “green pastures” and “quiet waters” that will restore us. Rebelling against the shepherd’s leading is actually rebelling against our own best interests!

Life Application Bible