



January 29, 2017

Psalm 23:3-4

"The Song of a Shepherd" Part 2

Pastor Gary Hamrick

In part two of our study through Psalm 23, Pastor Gary walks us through the verses about *"the paths of righteousness"* and *"the valley of the shadow of death."* If you've ever felt like you were on the wrong path or in a dark valley, this passage will encourage you about how much our Good Shepherd cares about each of us.

Part 1 - Review

1. Sheep are senseless, defenseless, and fearful, which creates a natural bond with their shepherd, because sheep are completely dependent upon the shepherd.
2. God wants to have this same kind of special bond and relationship with us, and he wants us to know how we are completely dependent upon him.
3. [Psalm 23:1-3a](#) - *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul..."* (NKJV)

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4. [Psalm 23:3b](#) - *"He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."*
5. Shepherds don't lead sheep individually, they lead sheep as a whole or as a flock, but David personalized the relationship between himself and his Shepherd.

6. Shepherds don't send sheep off in a random direction, they lead sheep in the right path, because sheep are senseless and have no way of understanding their surroundings regarding obstacles, debris, etc.
7. When we try to do life our way, like senseless, wandering sheep, we will oftentimes find ourselves on a harmful path because we have not followed the leading of the Good Shepherd.
8. Pastor Gary said: "God is going to lead us on the right path. It is a good path with God. It is a pleasant path with God. It is a straight path, in the sense that it is unencumbered by things that [would harm us]."
9. [Psalm 27:11](#) - *"Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path..."*
10. [Psalm 143:10](#) - *"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground."*
11. [Isaiah 26:7](#) - *"The path of the righteous is level; O upright One, you make the way of the righteous smooth."*
12. God is good to us, not because of our goodness, character, or reputation, but because of his goodness, his character, and his reputation!
13. Pastor Gary said: "We need to follow his lead. We need to get on God's path. Some of you are on the wrong path, and you know it and God knows it, and it's a miserable path that you're on. But if you'll turn to the Lord, and if you'll put your faith and trust in Jesus, and you follow his lead, and you start to live your life according to his direction, friends, it will go far better for you than when you try to navigate the murky waters of life on your own."
14. [John 10:27-28](#) - *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."*
15. The more you know the Lord the more you'll be inclined to listen to his voice!
16. [Psalm 23:4a](#) - *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil..."* (NKJV)
17. Sheep are fearful creatures, and one of the things that they are most afraid of is being cast.

- a. Being cast means that sheep have no way to get up when they are on their back.
 - b. “A heavy, fat, or long-fleeced sheep will lie down comfortably in some little hollow or depression in the ground. It may roll on its side slightly to stretch out or relax. Suddenly the center of gravity in the body shifts so that it turns on its back far enough that the feet no longer touch the ground. It may feel a sense of panic and start to paw frantically. Frequently this only makes things worse. It rolls over even further. Now it is quite impossible for it to regain its feet. As it lies there struggling, gases begin to build up in the rumen. As these expand they tend to retard and cut off blood circulation to extremities of the body, especially the legs. If the weather is very hot and sunny, a cast sheep can die in a few hours. If it is cool and cloudy and rainy, it may survive in this position for several days.”¹
18. When David wrote about the “*valley of the shadow of death*,” he was referring to a real and very dangerous place, which was the road from Jerusalem to Jericho.
- a. It is believed that Jesus referred to this specific place in his parable about the Good Samaritan, which is found in [Luke 10:25-37](#).
19. The point David was making was that no matter what kind of valley we are in (death, danger, grief, etc.), we have the assurance that the Lord is with us.
20. People, like sheep, have many different kinds of fears, which are evidenced by the fact that there are more than 500 clinically defined phobias!
21. Pastor Gary said: “The greatest comfort to fearful sheep was to be in the presence of their shepherd. The thing that will bring the greatest comfort to you and me, in our times of fear, is to always remember that God is with us. The Bible says that he will never leave us nor forsake us; that he is our abiding Good Shepherd. You know, God is omnipresent, so he can be at all places at all times. And, he can be with you as much as he is with me, as much as he is with somebody else... Because God is with each of us, and cares for each of us, and it is his presence that we need to be reminded of when we are going through those valleys. When you are going through a valley, whatever particular valley it might be: some worried place, some dark place, some discouraging place, some fearful place, always remember, God is with you.”
22. David knew the valley of the fear of death.

¹ W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 71-72.

- a. There was a period of about 10 years when David was on the run because of the death threats of King Saul.
23. David knew the valley of rejection.
- a. The Lord told the prophet Samuel go to David's father, Jesse, because one of Jesse's eight sons was to be the new king of Israel.
 - b. **Psalm 27:10** - *"Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me."*
 - c. In **1 Samuel 16:1-13**, we read that Jesse apparently thought so little of David that he didn't even call him in from the field to present himself before Samuel; Jesse only presented David's seven brothers.
24. David knew the valley of sin.
- a. One specific example would be the adulterous affair with Bathsheba, and the way David plotted to have her husband, Uriah, killed in battle.
 - b. **Psalm 51:1-2** - *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin."*
25. Pastor Gary said: "So, whatever valley you might be going through or have gone through or are presently going through, please never forget your Good Shepherd is with you, and he loves you. And, he will see you through. God doesn't promise us the mountaintop experiences for every day of our life, but what he does promise us is that when we are in the valleys he's with us... [Those] who have gone through some very painful valleys in [life oftentimes]... say, 'Though I don't want to go through it again, and though I don't wish it on anyone else, I'm thankful I went through it.' And why are they thankful they went through it? Because oftentimes in the valley is when that relationship with Christ becomes even more precious and even more real."
26. It's interesting to note that in **Psalm 23:4**, the pronoun for God changes from "He" to "You," which demonstrates the personal nature of the relationship we can have with God.
27. **Psalm 23:4b** - *"For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."* (NKJV)
28. Some believe the rod was for correcting and the staff was for comforting, however, Pastor Gary said he does not believe this is the case, because the Scripture clearly says the rod and the staff are used to bring comfort.
- a. A shepherd's rod was used to defend and protect the sheep from predators.

- b. A shepherd's staff was used to rescue sheep out of dangerous places with the crook of the staff, as well as being an instrument that was used to guide the sheep.

29. We should be thankful we have a Good Shepherd who rescues us!

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Psalm 23](#) to provide the foundation for this study.
3. What are some of the ways the Lord has led you in "*paths of righteousness*"?
4. Read and discuss [Psalm 27:11](#) and [Psalm 143:10](#).
5. How is the Lord teaching you his will and his ways?
6. Allow the people in your group to share examples of their experiences about learning to listen to the Lord's voice.
7. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the comforting assurance of the presence of the Good Shepherd. (See #21 above)
8. Spend time talking about the specific valleys David experienced. (See #22, #23, and #24 above)
9. Read and discuss Pastor Gary's comments about the ways the Lord takes us through difficult times. (See #25 above)
10. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).