

PSALM 23

Even Though I Walk

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Psalm 23.4 | July 19, 2020

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our summer series in Psalm 23, engaging the phrase, “Even though I walk through the darkest valley” or “the valley of the shadow of death.”

II. Connecting with One Another

What comes to your mind when you think about that phrase? Does it remind you of a particular image you’ve seen? A season of life you’ve experienced? A story of someone you know?

III. Study the Text

- a. As we’ve seen before, Psalm 23 starts with a declaration: “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.” These words set the stage for all that follows. Before each remaining line we can insert the word *because*.

This allows us to ask the question, “How can I know that the Lord is my shepherd, in whom I lack nothing?” Because He makes us lie down..., He leads us..., He restores us..., He guides us to righteousness...

Which of these lines is currently the most meaningful for you to reflect on?

- b. Look up **Psalm 23.4** in as many translations as you can.

Which of them most “speaks to your soul”?

- c. In Hebrew, the phrase *shadow of death* is one word, translated literally as “deep darkness.” It is used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, describing such things as darkness before creation (**Amos 5.8**), the gloom of a mine shaft (**Job 28.3**), and the realm of the dead (**Job 10.21, 38.17**). It recalls a sense of anxiety and dread.

Have you experienced seasons of “deep darkness”?

Did God make Himself known to you somehow during that time? If so, how?

- d. In **Acts 14.22**, Paul and Barnabas declare, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.” Alexander Solzhenitsyn agreed, saying, “Suffering ripens our souls.” Richard Foster put it this way: “God becomes a reality when he becomes a necessity.”

Have you seen this to be true in your own life? Or in the life of another?



- e. Here, in verse 4, the grammar of this ancient poem shifts. Instead of speaking about God in the third person, David begins addressing him in the second person – from “he” to “you.”

Do you think that is significant? Why or why not?

When did you “shift your grammar” from speaking about God to talking with God?

- f. Throughout the Scriptures, God repeatedly declares, “I am with you” (see, for instance, **Genesis 28.15**, **Exodus 33.14**, **Joshua 1.5**, **Isaiah 41.10**, **43.2**, **Matthew 28.20**, and **Hebrews 13.5-6**).

How can knowing that change our perspective within valleys of deep darkness?

- g. Some conclude that David is here reflecting on a particular valley known as the Wadi Kelt, which is the same route Jesus would have taken when he departed Galilee – and the site of his story about the Good Samaritan. In Jesus’ day, it was called “the way of blood” because of the danger of bandits and wild animals.

Read **Luke 10.25-37**. In telling this story, how is Jesus calling us to be more like our Good Shepherd?

- h. In David’s day, such valleys were necessary to lead sheep through so they could reach high country in the springtime. Not only were these valleys the most direct route to the top of the mountain, they were the most well-watered with rich pasture.

Our experience in life’s valleys may not be quite the same. But note the preposition in this verse: *through*. The valley is not our permanent destination – we walk *through* it, on our way *somewhere else*.

How can having a larger, eternal perspective shift our current experience in the valley?

- i. Like many passages of Scripture, Psalm 23 is written in chiasmic structure. This means that the primary meaning is found not at the end, but in the middle. That middle is the simple phrase we’ve looked at in this study.

How does that transform your understanding of this psalm?

How does it inform your perspective on this difficult season in our world?

IV. Pray

- a. Pray for those you know experiencing valleys of deep darkness, that the rays of God’s light and love would shine forth the path ahead and that they would know of their Shepherd’s presence.
- b. Lift up the ongoing threat of COVID-19, that God’s wisdom would be sought and relied upon.

