

# Valley Experiences

by Charles Stanley

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*Valley experiences are a part of every believer's life, and there is no way to escape them, but we can learn to trust God and find comfort in Him during these times.*

**Duration:** 54:37

**Scripture:** Psalm 23:1-5, Matthew 6:33, John 14:26

**Topics:** "Valley"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of not leaving a church service without taking something meaningful with you. He acknowledges that everyone will face valley experiences in life, filled with pain, fear, and evil. However, he encourages listeners to trust in God and not be overcome by these hardships. The preacher also highlights the tendency for people to turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as alcohol, during difficult times, emphasizing the need for a reliance on God instead.

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## Transcript

Our text of this message is probably the most familiar passage in all the Bible. In fact, I didn't know when I was a school kid that everybody had to memorize this passage. And usually, you will hear this passage of Scripture read at almost every single funeral.

Oftentimes, it is read to the bedside of someone who is very, very ill. And I'm sure that many of us have read the stories of men in war who, in times of great fear, pulled out their little pocket New Testament, in the back of which was the psalm, and they began to read out of fear, desiring courage, and the presence of God to read, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. So when you turn to the 23rd psalm, and I want us to read this psalm, and there's one particular phrase and facet in here that I want us to deal with, and the title of this message is The Believer's Valley Experiences.

The Believer's Valley Experiences, and if we all read out of the same version, we'd just all stand up and read it together. But since we have many different ones, it probably wouldn't make a lot of sense. So, beginning in verse 1, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul.

He guides me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou

prepare the table before me in the presence of mine enemy.

Thou hast anointed my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Well, as we think about this particular psalm, I want us to look at, if you will, at the fourth verse, and notice what he says in this fourth verse.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Oftentimes in the Bible, valleys are indications or symbols of times of difficulty, hardship, trial, suffering and pain. And I want us to look at this passage in the light of that title, and that is the believer's valley experiences.

And I want to say three things primarily, and the first one is this, that valley experiences are inevitable in the life of every believer. Valley experiences are inevitable in the life of every believer. For example, if you have mountains, you're going to have valleys.

You can't have a mountain peak without a valley. Now, most of us would like for our Christian life to be from peak to peak, wouldn't we? We'd just like to go from peak to peak and somehow be able to board the valley. But you can't have a mountain peak without having a valley.

Topographically, as far as the land is concerned, where you've got beautiful mountains, you've got valleys. And the same thing is true in the life of the believer. There are going to be those valley experiences in our life.

And if you'll notice in this passage how he begins, he says, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. And then what we have is this beautiful description of the shepherd leading the sheep into the meadows on the hillsides. He says, he makes me lie down in green pastures, leads me beside quiet water, restores my soul, guides me in the paths of righteousness, and then notice verse 4 how he says it.

He says, Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, even though I do that, which is his way of saying it's not the norm. God does not intend for us to live in the valleys, or that's our normal way of life. But there will be those seasons in our life, those times in our life, those experiences that become valley experiences, times of difficulty, hardship, trial, pain, rejection, you name it, they're there.

And so what he's saying in this passage here, even though I walk through these, he says, I will fear no evil. Notice the four words he mentions in that fourth verse. He speaks of shadows, of death, of fear, and of evil.

All four of those indicate something to us about the nature of the walk in the valley. And so when he says, even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, he's talking about hardship and pain and suffering and trials and tribulations and heartaches and burdens that we go through in life, and oftentimes we feel hopeless, oftentimes we feel helpless, and no matter what anybody does, we feel absolutely, totally dependent upon God, or if that person is not a believer, they have to do something else to find out how to help themselves through the valley experiences. This is why the bars are filled in the afternoons about 5 o'clock.

They call that the happy hour. It certainly is not a happy hour. If you look around, you'll notice if you're in a restaurant, they don't look all that happy.

But what they're doing is trying to escape the valley experiences that they're going through. And think about a person who is not a believer, a person who doesn't have God to turn to, and then when the bottom drops out, then when they go through some valley experience in life, what do they do? They have to drink, they have to take pills, they have to do something, they have to have some kind of experiences or affairs of some sort in order to get their mind off of the pain, off of the hurt, off of the rejection, off of the loneliness, off of those indescribable feelings which they're trying to avoid. So what he's saying in this passage is simply this.

All of us are going through some of these experiences in our life. It may be because of finances, it may be because of family, it may be because of health, it may be because of vocation, or whatever it might be. There's no such thing as living in this life without valley experiences.

One of the reasons for that is because of the end result of those valley experiences, which we'll come to a little bit later. I live in a world of sin and of evil. There are two forces fighting each other, and that is the forces of righteousness and the forces of evil.

Likewise, there are situations and circumstances in life that thrust us oftentimes into those valley experiences. And so as I think about it, one of the things that I want to mention here and discuss is the fact that there are reasons and why is it we end up in valley experiences. Now, if you're wise this morning, you'll get your pencil and piece of paper out and you won't miss a lot of this.

Because I want to tell you, if you're sitting here today and you're thinking, I've never been through one of those, then my dear friend, get ready. Because there is no such thing as walking on a mountain peak without hitting a valley. There are valleys in our life and there are valleys there for several reasons.

So let's talk about, first of all, why we go through these difficult trying times that are so painful, so heart-wrenching and so unbelievably causing us to feel so helpless. Well, one of the reasons is this, and that is the sheep strays away from the shepherd. For example, if the sheep strays away from the shepherd, they're going to stray usually in the wrong places.

And so when we choose to be disobedient to God, we choose to transgress his law, to violate his principle, what happens is we end up in the valley. So one of the reasons we get there is we get there by our own decision. A second reason we may end up in a valley experience is because of the actions of some other people or someone else.

For example, a fellow said to me this week, he was telling me about his vocation and he was doing his job, he was faithful, he was well-respected in his particular vocation, doing a good job. Because of his conviction and because he felt like he had to make a statement of where he was, what he could and could not do, they fired him, just like that, with no warning. So suddenly he found himself in the valley, he had a family to take care of, no job and no income.

So oftentimes it's because of someone else's decisions or their actions. And then there's a third reason we get in the valley, and that's this, that's because the shepherd leads us into the valley. You see, the reason we get into these valley experiences are not always because of what we do or what someone else does.

Sometimes it is God's design for our life. As a result of that, what he does, he leads us into a place and leads us the way he desires to get us where he wants us to be. One way is the way most of us would like to go in life.

When we see a difficulty, what we'd like to do is we would like to walk around the pain and the hurt and the suffering and the trial and the tribulation and rejection and get there. That's one way, and you can get there that way sometimes. But sometimes when the good shepherd, the Bible calls him, is leading us, here's what he does.

He knows he can lead us around that way. That's no problem with him. He knows there's a path around that way.

But you see, what he has in mind is the purpose over here for our life. And because that purpose is so clear and that destination is so clear to him, he chooses, God in his grace and goodness and love, chooses not to lead us the easy path, but to lead us into the valley of difficulty, hardship, trial, pain, and intense suffering like we have never experienced before. We get to the same place.

But this is the most difficult way. Sometimes it is a deep, dark, treacherous valley. Notice what he said.

He said, valleys of shadow, death, fear, evil. These things indicate something about the difficulty of that valley. Sometimes we're in the valley because God in his wisdom chooses to lead us the most difficult way to arrive at the destination for which he wants us.

So when he says here that even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, even though we do it, and I want you to remember also what he says in this passage, and if you'll notice two things here. Sometimes what God says, what he doesn't say, is as powerful as what he does say. Look at that verse.

He does not say this. He doesn't say, even though I may walk through the valley. Even though I might do it.

No. Even though I walk, because friend, it is inevitable. Valley experiences are absolutely inevitable in the life of every single person.

Notice something else he doesn't say. He doesn't say, even though I run, rush and hurry through the valley. That's the way I like to get through them.

I want to run through them quickly. In fact, the truth is, I like to put on my blindfold and just run through it right quick and not hear anything, see anything, and feel anything. Just get through that guy.

Just get me through that guy. But you know what he said? Even though I, what? Walk through the valley. And I may not, not might, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

And so when he makes this statement, what he's simply saying is this. It's going to happen. And I remember meeting a lady one time, went to her home.

And her sister was there and her mother. And she was dying of some disease. I've forgotten exactly what it was.

I remember what she told me. She said, you know, all of my life, I thought everybody had it the way I had it. And she drove the finest automobile.

She had plenty of money. Everything in the world anybody could ever imagine. And here she was in her late 30s dying.

And she died about two weeks later. And she said, you know, I guess my life was such that I just thought everybody had it the way I had it. No, they don't.

And what I've discovered is in the last few weeks, there are more people hurting with more pain and more suffering and more hurt than I've ever discovered in my life. Because all of a sudden when somebody feels that somebody else is hurting, then they somehow feel the freedom and the liberty to say, you know, I'm hurting too and I want to tell you about my hurt. Well, these valley experiences are a part of every single believer's life.

And there is no way to escape them. Sometimes we try, but there's no way. And so when he says, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, thou art with me.

He is giving us the most important part of this whole passage of scripture. This is the most important part. Because if you think about it for a moment, he says, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

And he says he's going to take us to green pastures, quiet waters, restore our soul and guide us in the paths of righteousness. But you know what? Suppose you read that whole psalm and he talks about preparing a table before us and head being anointed with oil and cup running over. Suppose he left out this part, thou art with me.

If he left out that part, the heart and the core of this psalm would be missing. Because that's what this psalm is all about. It is a psalm of comfort and of assurance and of reminding of us that we're going to go through those experiences of life that are so difficult and painful and hard that the only thing we have is God.

And so I just want to say to you today that no matter what experience you're going through, whatever it might be, ask yourself the question, God, why am I here, number one. And secondly, Lord, what is your goal? And so I want to say this two or three times in this message. If you think you're going through a valley or you think you're just getting ready to head into it, and sometimes you don't walk into it, you drop into it.

You don't just sort of find your way from the meadows and the mountains down to the valley. Suddenly you're from the mountain peak all the way to the depths of the valley. And what you have to ask is, Father, what is your goal for this valley experience in my life? And, Father, how am I to respond to this valley experience in my life? Those are always the wise two questions to ask.

Number one, Father, what is your goal? And secondly, Lord, how am I to respond to this valley experience? So the first thing I want you to notice here, and that is that valley experiences are absolutely inevitable in the life of every person. It doesn't make any difference how old you are, one of these days you're coming through them. It makes no difference how rich you are, how poor, how educated or uneducated, where your status is in life.

Valley experiences, difficulty, hardships, trials, suffering, pain, it is always going to be times and seasons in our life. The second thing I want you to notice that's very evident here, and that is this. And that is that valley experiences are painful times in our life.

Painful times in our life. Look at this passage. Look at the words in this verse.

He says, the shadow of death, fear, evil, all of these indicate something is going on. Now, these four words indicate something of the nature of the valley. Notice he said, green pastures, quiet waters, guided paths, restored, refreshed souls.

And even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. You see, this isn't just some little pain you get with a toothache or a bad cold. We're talking about intense kind of pain that happens when a person goes through a valley.

Whatever the reason, it may be something of your own doings, it may be something that somebody else has caused, or it may be that God has chosen to lead us through that valley. Whatever it might be, the pain is still going to be there. And so when I look at that and think about the kind of pain we're talking about here, and what he says, when he speaks about valleys, that indicates something of a shadow, something of uncertainty.

When he talks about death, something of destruction, something that is threatening. When he talks about fear, anxiety and dread, and when he talks about evil, threatening, temptations, all that go along with that, and there are those periods and seasons of time, for some reason, God may allow it, or it is their own doing. Here's what we have to think about.

We're not talking about little pains or little hurts here and there. We're talking about the kind of intense pain that is indescribable. We're talking about the kind of hurt that you cannot describe to someone else.

We're talking about the kind of hopelessness and helplessness that words cannot express. Deep, dark valleys that he will oftentimes lead us through. So we're talking about a degree of distress that is more than just a little distress.

A deep degree of tension, and feeling it in your whole physical body as well as your emotions, and your spirit, everything that gets inside of you gets tested. That is, there seems to be some kind of awesome invasion of your innermost being, your innermost spirit, the deepest part of you, and when you weep, you don't weep from your eyes, you weep from your spirit deep down inside. There is a pain that is indescribable in some walks in the valley.

And so when he says, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we're not talking about some little testing of the faith that ends up today, and it's just a matter of time, maybe a few days, and it's all over. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. And the reason he put that word in there is because he wanted to emphasize the intensity of the pain and the alarming threat that we face when we walk through that valley.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Now, there are a couple of things about this valley I want us to look at. First of all, I want to mention the fact of the length of that valley.

Sometimes the valley is short, sometimes it's long. For example, here's a person who goes to the doctor and the doctor says, You have a terminal illness. And two weeks later or a month later, they find out it was a wrong diagnosis.

And so that was a short-lived valley, praise the Lord. Or sometimes a person like the one I mentioned a few moments ago, they lose their job and they have no prospects for a couple of weeks or three weeks, and it looks like it's going to be a long, drawn-out process, and out of the blue somebody calls and says, I'm looking for somebody who has your qualification, they're out of the valley. It would be great if all valleys

were that short, but they're not.

And sometimes the doctor says to a person, You have cancer, and the type that you have, there's no cure for it. One month, two months, six months. Nine months, one year.

Eighteen months, two years. The hurt, the pain, the suffering, all the anger that they go through, all the guilt, all the anger toward God, all the emotions that crop up in someone's life who goes through that kind of awful experience, two years, two and a half years, three years, their family watches them die a day at a time. That isn't a short valley.

That's no painless valley. That is a deep, dark, painful valley that only a person who has been there understands. And my friend, before you walk up to someone else and say to them, Well, I'm just praying for you and I understand.

Be sure you do understand where they are. Because you see, I'm not sure anybody understands where someone else is until they've been where they are. And even then, I want you to remember something.

That God does not work in any two people's lives the same way. No two valleys are the same for anyone. Their valleys are similar, but no two people's valleys are the same.

And so when you and I want to console someone, we have to be sure, when we say, I know what you're going through, I know how you feel, be sure you know how they feel and what they're going through because you've been there. There are some valleys that are very long, very painful, very dark, very treacherous, little hope. There are some valleys that are short.

We would all like for them to be short, but since we're not sovereign and God is, he's the one who determines how long and how short they are. And what is it that determines how long and how short they are? First of all, his purpose for allowing us to be in the valley, and secondly, our response to being in the valley. But there's a second thing about the valley, not on the length of time, but the second thing is the difference in the depth of that valley.

Some valleys are very, very deep. Listen to what he says. Even though I walk to the valley of the shadow of death, some valleys are very deep and very dark.

Now, I've had the wonderful privilege of traveling lots of places and not climbing to the top of, but climbing up to a comfortable place in enough mountains and to be able to see at distances from the peaks of some mountains. I love the mountains and I love the valleys. Some valleys are beautiful.

Some valleys are very deep and some are dark and treacherous. And when we talk about the depth of the valley, again it depends on what God is up to in our life. And when he talks about, Yea, though I walk to the valley of the shadow of death, that indicates that there are some valleys that are very, very threatening to us, that set off alarms in us.

Those valleys that we have to walk through very, very carefully, that we make every step the right step, that we have to have wisdom, the wisdom of the Good Shepherd, to guide us through it step by step. Because on different occasions, people in valleys, traveling, take the wrong step, fall, hurt themselves, and sometimes break a leg or break an arm or whatever it might be. There are some valleys that are very dark and very treacherous.

The same thing is true in the spiritual walk. There are some that are very dark and very treacherous. And we have to be extremely careful.

And I think all of us could probably think about some valleys that we've been through, difficult trying times, painful times in our life. And as I thought about this week in preparing this message, things in the past of my life that I thought were dark valleys and deep times of heartache and trouble and trial and pain, then I thought about something that I read some time ago, that someone had written about the fact that the older you get, that the older you become in life and the longer you live, the more difficult your trials become. I remember thinking about that.

Well, it looks like to me, the longer you live and the more faith that you have, the simpler they ought to be. And so, you know, there ought to be some time out there where they don't get quite as difficult. And then I thought about it.

About eight months ago, my mom passed away, and I watched her die a day at a time, and I thought that was the deepest, darkest valley that I'd probably ever go in in my life. Because I watched her day by day just sort of dwindle away until finally the Lord took her. That was a very painful valley for me, extremely painful.

I hurt, I wept, I cried, and I cried, and I cried. I hurt on the inside, I hurt on the outside. And no matter what anyone said to me, only God could comfort me, and at times that was very difficult.

And then, a few weeks ago, I stepped into another valley. And I want to tell you, my friend, there is no pain and no hurt. There is no pain and no hurt to equal this valley.

There is no intensity of pain that I could ever describe that can describe the pain when you are torn away from something that you love very, very dearly, someone that you love with all of your heart. There is no way to describe the intensity of that pain. And so, when somebody talks about, I understand how you feel, I'm not sure any of us can fully understand how anybody else feels in certain valley experiences, because they're all different.

And all of our circumstances are different. But he says, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, because there are some things in this life that are far worse than physical death. And that is emotional pain.

It wrenches you and tears at you and almost destroys everything inside of you. There is a pain more intense than I can describe. I thought I knew what pain was like, but I'm sure that I didn't.

And therefore, I would not say even now that I know what it's like, because there must be some pain even greater than that. I don't know what it is. May God spare me of it, at least for a while.

And I think about, he says, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Well, I have to ask myself the question, Lord, if you're my shepherd, why would you lead me through this valley? And yet I know that he's an omniscient shepherd all wise. And he always does the right thing.

What he said in Romans 8, 28 is always true. That our God is engineering our circumstances and directing our paths in such a way that it will bring honor and glory to his name upon two conditions, which I'll come to later. And so, one thing I know for sure about the valley, that because he said, Thou art with me, this much I know, there is always a limitation on the depth of that valley.

And this is why, I think what the old gentleman said when he said that our valleys oftentimes get deeper, he didn't put it in those words, that's what he meant, is because when you and I are 21, we can handle a sort of a shallow valley. When we're 41, we can go a little deeper. When we're 61, we can go a lot deeper.

And since I'm not 81 yet, I don't know how deep it can get in the 80s, but I can imagine it could get extremely deep. And dark, and treacherous, and lonely, and hard, and painful, and indescribable. But this much I know, there is a limit.

And the same Jesus who said, I am the good shepherd, and I love the sheep, and the sheep know me, and I know them, and they follow me. The same one who said, My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me, and I give them an eternal life, and they shall never perish. Neither shall anyone pluck them out of my hand.

The Father and I are one. This much I know, that in the valley, no matter how treacherous, and painful, and difficult, nobody can take your hand out of the hand of the good shepherd. Because you see, in the valley, you're not holding on to him for dear life.

The good shepherd has taken us by the hand. And it doesn't make any difference. It doesn't make any difference if I let go.

Thank God he never lets go. It doesn't make any difference how dark it is, how fearful it is, whatever alarms set off in your soul, how absolutely intense the pain, and how much the tears. He never lets go.

He says, Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff accompany me. What a wonderful phrase in that psalm. Without it, it wouldn't be anything.

With it, it's everything. So when we think about the depth of it, it doesn't make any difference how deep it is, as long as I walk through it, hand in hand, with the good shepherd, who is the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is that? Why do I not need to be afraid? For this reason.

If you'll turn to John 10, he said it better than I could. John 10 is the passage of scripture that is the good shepherd discourse about Christ. Listen to what he says in this 10th chapter.

And this is why when he says, Yea, though I walk through the valley, the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? Here's the reason. Because the good shepherd, who is walking with us, said this.

Verse 11, I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Verse 14, I am the good shepherd, and I know my own, and my own know me. And verse 27, as we quoted, My sheep hear my voice, I know them, and they follow me.

And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. The Father and I are one.

Do you know why you and I can walk through the valley without fear? Because this I know. If Jesus Christ loves me enough and loves you enough to lay down his life at the cross 2,000 years ago, that was the ultimate test of his love. And if he laid down his life 2,000 years ago, I don't have to worry about him holding my hand all the way through the valley.

So he says, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Now, the valley experience as he describes it here, one thing is so evident is that the good shepherd is watching over us and caring for us all the way through that walk. Sometimes that walk is probably very slow because it is treacherous.

Sometimes that walk may not be quite so slow. It depends on what his purpose is and what he's trying to achieve in our life. But he's the one who's overseeing it, and he's the one who has said the key statement, Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Because the sheep are seeing the rod to beat off the wild animals, the staff or the crook to reach out and pull the sheep back when he's getting too close to the edge. All that's symbolical of his caring. Now, the question comes, how do we oftentimes respond and what is our reaction when we get in the valley? And people respond in different ways.

And so you must not ever judge somebody else's response because, first of all, you don't know the intensity of their pain. Second, you don't know what God's purpose is in their life. And so oftentimes, we're quick to judge someone else's response to the valley and how they're going through that valley and what's happening to them.

And most everybody has advice for anybody who's hurting about anything. And everybody's got advice, well, I do this and I do that and you ought to do this and you ought to do that. And the thing you have to listen to is what God is saying and what does God want you to do.

And so here's what happens. Here's how people respond. Sometimes they respond in panic.

Oh, my God, what shall I do? Now, I want you to listen carefully to what I'm going to say because I'm going to say one of the most important parts of this message in a moment. Sometimes people respond in panic. Sometimes they're overwhelmed with fear and uncertainty and discouragement and despair.

And sometimes people come to the place of committing suicide. We get lots of letters from people who are about to commit suicide and they listen to the program and God speaks to their heart and changes their mind. One of the reasons I don't read very many of those is because of the impact that it has upon people.

Oftentimes they will say, Now, I want to be sure you did say that I can be forgiven. Well, you can be forgiven indeed, but my friend, you short-circuit your life, you lose your reward, and the tragedy of suicide, you do not want to experience the ultimate of that tragedy. And there are many people who come to Valley Experiences and when they get to some point in the valley and they look back and they don't see a way out, and they look ahead and they don't see any way out, and they don't have the wisdom to know if they're a believer that Jesus Christ is holding their hand all the way through that valley.

Think about the unbeliever who is in the Valley Experiences of life and no God, no shepherd. What in this world do you do in the deepest, darkest valley when there is divorce, when there is separation, when there is the loss of a child, when there is an accident and there is sudden death? What happens when you suddenly find yourself in the valley and you don't have a shepherd? No one to hold your hand, no one to look to, no one to listen to your prayers, no one to call upon, no one you can be certain about, no one that you know who genuinely and truly loves you enough to have laid down his life already. What do those people do? They run to every human thing possible trying to get something to quieten that inner turmoil, silence the shout and the alarm of their pain, something that will so fog their mind and cloud their thinking

that they don't have to think where they are and what they have to face.

That's what they do. Listen to what he says. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Listen, the same shepherd that leads us in the valleys, the same shepherd is the one who leads us in the mountainsides, whether it's still water in the creeks, in the streams, good grass, place to rest, refreshment time, he's the same one. But if you don't have him and you don't know him, what do you do? There's panic, there's turmoil, there's strife, there's the threat of suicide ending it all, despair, disillusionment, hopelessness, helplessness, and all kinds of responses, not a single one of which is the right one. Now, what I want to share with you at this point is very, very important.

You hear me say to you oftentimes if you're going to come to church and you're going to spend 35, 45, 50 minutes listening to a sermon, it is foolish to sit here and spend that much time listening to a sermon and walk away with nothing to carry with you. You're not going to come to this place and listen to 45 minutes of a message without something that will not enrich your soul, deepen your relationship to God, and challenge you, that much I know. But whether you carry it away with you or not is something else.

And this is why I say if a message is worth listening to, it's worth writing down those areas of the message that relate to your life or something that relates to someone else or something that you feel you may need. Let me give you an example. You know why people panic in the valley? Here's the reason.

The reason people panic in the valley and the reason they just lose it all is because they walk into these deep, dark, valley experiences of life with no basic biblical theology. All of their Christian experience is hype-hype, praising the Lord and it's all emotion. If I feel Him, He's there.

If I don't feel Him, He's not there. And it's praising the Lord for this and praising the Lord for that. I'm for praising God.

I believe in worshiping Him and praising Him. Indeed, I do. But my friends, if your Christian life is only a matter of emotion and you listen to sermons and you just walk away hoping you'll remember something, maybe, the messages only make you feel good.

They don't challenge you. They don't enrich your mind, challenge your mind and make you think and cause you to want to apply those truths to yourself. And you take the time to write them down and to be able to apply them to your life and look for those experiences in life that will help you apply those principles.

I can tell you, when the valley experience comes and you don't have a basic theology to live by, you're going to panic. You're going to look to the world to find something. Listen, here's what you're going to do.

More than likely, you're going to find unwise, ungodly counsel and what that's only going to do is deepen your valley and prolong your walk in that valley. And that's why it's so very important you jot down the principles. You write down those things that have meaning, that these experiences are inevitable in every person's life and why we get in the valleys and how we respond and how we should not respond because we're all going to be there.

And so when he says, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? Because the psalmist knew God. Now, you see, if I'm going to respond right in the valleys, I need to know him.

If I don't know God, I'm not going to respond right. If I know him, that means I understand something of his ways, how does God operate, something of his principles, here are the things that guide us in our Christian walk, something of his promises, and not just know them something as far as something being able to quote, but know them and experience. How is it that the truths of God become a part of our very being? Not listening to sermons.

That becomes a part of my mind. The truths and the principles and the ways of God become a part of my life. When do they become a part of my life? Here's when they become a part of my life.

When God allows me or thrusts me into the valley. Then I have to draw from what I know. Then I have to apply what I've heard.

Then I have to test what I believe. Then I have to put that blowtorch to the very basic things that have brought me thus far in my life. And what happens? When you have a basic theology, when you have an understanding of God, when you believe his scriptures, when you know the promises, when you understand the principles, then in that valley, I'm telling you friend, everything you believe is going to get tested one way or the other.

And if your beliefs have never been tested then more than likely you don't have much belief. If you don't have a basic belief system that can stand the test, and stand the pressure, and stand the pain, and stand the turmoil, and stand the criticism, and stand the persecution, then my friend, there's something missing in your spiritual walk. It is walking to the valley with a basic biblical theology.

What I believe based upon what the word of God teaches. What the word of God says. The principles, the promises that fill this book from one end to the other.

That's why a light, fluffy relationship to God won't work. It may work all right as long as everything is going your way, but when you get in the valley, and the intensity of the pain is such that you cannot handle it, and the hopelessness and the helplessness is so absolutely overwhelming, and the days are dark, and there seems to be absolutely nothing at the other end, and you can't go back, you'd better have a belief system that's tested and tried. That's why, it's what God does.

That's the reason he gives us shallow valleys when we know a little bit. And deeper valleys when he's taught us more. And deeper valleys when he's taught us more.

But listen to me carefully. If you've had the privilege, if you've had the privilege of knowing more back here, but you ignored it, and knowing more here, and you weren't interested, and having the truths that I know that you've had, and you've paid a little heed to it, my friend, the valleys are going to get deeper and deeper. Listen to me carefully.

They're going to get deeper and deeper, no matter whether you take the time to apply the principles, or you don't. The difference is that those who have a biblical theology are sustained, and those who don't are not. And that's why it's so very important that you and I understand this book, and we understand the word, because no matter what you and I face, there are people in the word of God who've been there.

And you can start off whether it's Abraham, or Joseph, or David, Moses, they've all had those long valley experiences. Moses, 40 years on the backside of the desert in the valley. But they understood who God was.

Now, Moses had to learn the hard way, and that's why God kept him 40 years, until he absolutely ripped everything out of him, said he had nothing, here he was, a smelly shepherd. And then God spoke to him again. But he had all those past failures in his life to go back to.

And God reminded him that he's God, and Moses, you're not. I don't know where you may be in the valley, but I can tell you this. My friends, the wisest thing you can do if you get into this book, read it, pray over it, listen to the messages of God's servants, as long as they're sticking with the book.

Listen to the messages of God's servants. Write down the truth. Apply them to your heart.

Look at how they're being applied in other people's lives. Look at the consequences of disobedience. Those are the things that establish you, so that when you get in the valley, the Lord Jesus Christ, who holds you, holds your hand every step of the way, will keep reminding you, because you remember what he says? He says he sent the Holy Spirit and all of that.

He may bring to our remembrance those things that he wants us to remember, that you and I can apply to our hearts those basic truths that anchor us and steady us, and keep us firm and solid and stable in the most difficult trying times of our Christian walk. Well, there's a third thing that I want you to notice here about these valley experiences. First of all, we said they're absolutely essential.

They're going to be a part of our life. They're inevitable. Secondly, they're painful.

And thirdly, they are profitable. Valley experiences are profitable in our life. Now, that doesn't mean that because they're profitable, there's not going to be any pain.

Yes, there will be pain. Even though they're profitable, the pain and the degree of pain may be the same. But they're profitable for a couple of reasons.

First of all, they're times of discovery for us. Discovery of what? We discover what God is like in the valley in a way that we will never discover on the mountain peak. There are things about God.

There are aspects of God. There are ways of God that you and I will discover in the deepest, darkest, treacherous, most painful valley experiences we will never even get a glimpse of on the mountain peak. That's just the way life is.

And God reveals himself in the valley in a way that he does not reveal himself on the mountain peak. So we're going to get a glimpse of God. We're going to see him in ways that we would not see him otherwise.

Also, as I think about what we discover about God, we discover an intimacy and a sense of quietness. He says that he will lead us into places of rest. Listen to me carefully.

In the deepest, darkest, blackest moment of your valley experience, there can be the most overwhelming, indescribable sense of peace and rest and quietness and confidence that only hand in hand with the Son of God could you ever experience. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want for peace and quietness and tranquility even when the darkest, the deepest, and the most painful walk is a part of your experience.

And so he says here, we're going to discover something. Notice he says, he says, Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, anointing my head with oil. He's talking here about providing our needs in the darkest, deepest, most painful part of the valley experience.

And speaking of oil, for example, the shepherd would take oil and rub it on those skinned places where the sheep injured themselves. And he's simply saying that he's going to be our comforter. He's going to be our healer.

And the healing process, listen carefully, when you get in the valley, when you and I begin to respond correctly, the healing process begins even in the most intense pain. The healing begins even then. God doesn't wait.

He doesn't wait to start the healing process when we're out on the mountain peaks somewhere. That's not the way God operates. And so he says, he anoints us with oil, our cup runs over, he is providing every single thing that we need.

We discover something about ourselves. Not only about God, and there's a million things about God you've not discovered, but we discover something about ourselves. Now listen, it's real easy to sit in church or sit at home and everything's going your way and say, I believe in God.

Yes, indeed I do. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine.

Hallelujah, amazing grace. I believe all those songs. I believe the Bible from cover to cover.

Well, fine. Now let me ask you this. When the pain hits and the hopelessness is overwhelming, then what do you believe? You see, we discover things about ourselves in the deepest, darkest, valid experiences.

We discover how much real courage we have. We discover the degree of our faith. We discover the level of our faith.

We discover if our self-image is based on him or on somebody else or what other people think. We discover the true nature of our character. We discover whether we can really endure or not.

We discover what the real character is really about. When we go through those things that cause us to be absolutely helpless and we can do nothing about and all we can do is depend upon God, we discover things about ourselves. And maybe some of those things we oftentimes boast about when the pain becomes intense enough, all of a sudden there is no boasting.

And what we discover, we discover what our real value system in life is all about. We discover what the real priorities in life are about. And what happens, listen carefully, this is so important.

You see, here's the reason we make such tremendous discoveries in the deepest, darkest valleys of pain. Here's the reason. Because God has a way of increasing the pain level to the point that it is so painful nothing else in life matters.

Nothing matters. Absolutely nothing matters. You see, God knows how to wrench from us everything we depend upon.

And that's really what he's up to in the valley of experience. And ultimately this is his purpose. His ultimate purpose is to do what? To wrench from us emotionally, or physically, or materially, every single solitary thing so that Jesus Christ has no competition as Lord in our life.

There are no challenges to his rule and to his reign and his Lordship in our life. And so what does he do? He just strips us of everything that we cling to, that we lean upon. And he has a very painful way of doing

that.

I know that. I'm not blaming all pain on God. I'm simply saying there are some things he allows and some things he initiates.

Whether he allows them or whether he initiates them, it doesn't make any difference. God's ultimate goal. I think about people who are so extremely wealthy and their whole life is wrapped up in money.

That's what they talk about. That is the subject of their conversation. They begin their conversations there.

It's the only thing that matters in life. I tell you, my friend, the valley experience will come because God is not going to allow his children to cling to, depend upon, rely upon, be wrapped up in, soaked up in, absolutely overwhelmed by, and allow things to become gods in their life. So what does he do? He throws us into the valley experience to wrench from us, tear from us, every single solitary thing that challenges his place of preeminence in our life.

And sometimes those are things that we wouldn't even think of as being a challenge to God. But you see, and this is difficult for us to understand, he wants us to lean on nothing but himself, no one but himself. We are sons and daughters of God walking through valley experiences, learning to rely upon him and him only.

And so what does he do? He removes every single solitary thing but himself. And while that is painful and difficult for us, it ends up being glorifying to God. Because it forces us to himself, and we learn things about ourselves, we will not learn any other way.

And he brings us to a sense of dependence upon him, and that's why when we come through that painful period, and we realize that he is it, and he is only it, and there is no other it but him, then what happens? Even in the valley, tranquility, calmness, quietness of spirit. So, there are discoveries, discoveries about God, about ourselves, and discoveries about God's purpose in that life. Some of us know what God's purpose in our life is, and some people do not.

And it's interesting to me how many young men who have come to our fellowship, students at Georgia Tech, they came to school, their parents played their way, they were going to be engineers, administrators, and you name it, all of these things, and then something happens in their life, bottom drops out, they get thrust into the valley, and what happens? It's in the valley when God begins to tear them loose from everything, whatever is going on in their life. It isn't always the valley. It isn't a valley, for example, that God necessarily institutes or initiates, but it is a valley.

Sometimes it's the divorce of their parents. Sometimes it is a financial collapse and their parents can't pay their way through anymore. Sometimes it's difficult and hardship that they are going through, whatever it may be.

And then they come to say, I don't know what God's doing in my life, and ultimately through this deep, dark, treacherous valley, you know what their conclusion is? God's been calling me to preach, and I resisted it because I wanted to go out there and make a lot of money and told God, give a lot of money to the missionaries. That is the devil's lie. How many people he's told that one to? I'll give a lot of money to the mission workers.

If you'll just help me make millions of dollars, I'll give it all to you. I'm here to tell you, if all the people who have ever said that and made their missions and gave it to God, we'd have money running over and trying to figure out what in the world to do with it, because that's not true, and God doesn't fall for that lie at all. But how many of those young men in the ministry today on the mission feel why? Because God sent them in the valley, and it was in the valley when he stripped everything and all hope away from everything that he got their attention.

And they could say, Oh, is that what you've been calling me to do, God? Yes, yes, I do see that. And sometimes in that valley experience, he simply affirms his purpose in your life, and what happens is that God just enriches you and deepens you and strengthens you and makes what you've been doing a reality. But let me say one other thing.

That it is not only a time of discovery, it is a time of preparation. Now, preparation isn't easy. Think about this.

He puts us in the valley, and remember this. God never, listen, he never allows us to go to the valley, or never initiates the valley experience unless he has a purpose in mind. On the other side of that valley, God has a work, has a purpose, has a plan.

That's why the valley is never a destination. Not in the valley, not walking around in it, but through the valley. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will feel no evil.

Not in it, but through it. He has a purpose in mind. Now, what is he doing in the valley? He's preparing us for the purpose, whatever it is.

So what does he do? He uses those tools we don't like. For example, sometimes it is humiliation, sometimes, as he says, it is refinement, cleansing, purifying, renewing. In the valley experience, all the pain and all the hurt we feel have an overwhelming, awesome, glorifying, divine purpose behind it all.

That's why, I'm going to come to the last point in just a moment, that's why the next point is so very, absolutely essential. Because whatever his purpose is and whatever he is allowing to go on, what makes my valley experience profitable, or a great time of painful loss, is how I respond. Now listen, there are two ways to respond.

Negatively, we either get thrust in the valley or we get in there because of our own circumstances. We are in the valley. How do I respond? Rebel against God.

God, why did you allow this in my life? Look for a way out. Try to find some little offshoot of the path up some creek in some little slight valley thinking there may be a way out of the valley. So we rebel.

We want to run away. We want to blame somebody else for being in the valley. Blaming others is always a sign of our spiritual immaturity.

It doesn't make any difference what happens, how we get there. Ultimately, God allows us to be in the valley. And so we complain, we have pity parties, we moan and we groan and we blame God, we blame other people, and my friend, as long as you are doing that, guess what's happening.

You know what it's like? It's like God just stops you at the end of the valley. He's still got you by the hand, but he just stops, or he slows down the pace. You know why? Because he's refining and purifying and

cleansing and building character and changing and altering and doing what? Preparing us for what he has in mind.

What's the proper response? I said it once before on purpose, and I'm going to say it at the end of this message. Here's the proper response. It doesn't make any difference what the nature of the valley is.

It doesn't make any difference how short or how long it is. It doesn't make any difference how painful and treacherous it is. It doesn't make any difference how dark and hopeless and helpless it may be.

Here's always the right response. Father, what is your goal for my life in this experience? Secondly, Father, how do you want me to respond in this experience? Father, all that I am, I lay down before you with no reservations, no restrictions. I am solely your property.

And fourthly, Father, all that I have is yours. I open my hands. You can take any and all of it.

It is all yours. And my friend, when you and I get in the valley, and that is our response, Almighty God, in all of his sovereign wisdom and love will guide us every step of the way through that valley. And secondly, Father, The pain may be almost unbearable, but the glory on the other side will make that pain disappear.

Now you say, well, and I saw this happen a week or so ago, sometimes people are going through pain and they think when somebody describes it, what do they know about it? But my friend, none of us know how anyone else hurts. That's not even the issue. The issue is what is the proper response.

What is your goal? How would you have me respond? Here am I, and here is all that I have. God will honor that every single time. And Father, we love you for this wonderful passage of Scripture, so simple, but so descriptive, so comforting and so reassuring.

And I ask you, Father, with all of my heart, for all the hurting people who are going to hear this message, I pray the Spirit of God would write etched indelibly upon their hearts that when you said you would be with us, you meant it every step of the way. And that you would work good out of all of our pain, all of our hurt, all of our suffering, that you would accomplish your purpose, your way, and your will. And so, Father, we just want to rest in that today and thank you that you are the author of this Savior, adequate for every experience we face in life.

And we thank you for it in Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to the teaching ministry of Dr. Charles Stanley, speaker on the In Touch television and radio broadcasts.

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