

Psalm 23 Series (Session 5)

by Joseph Carroll

The key to finding rest in the Lord is to be free from fear, friction with others, hunger, and distractions, and to commit ourselves to His will and guidance.

Duration: 40:22

Scripture: Psalm 23:1, Psalm 42:11, Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 11:28-30, John 7:37, Romans 12:21, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Ephesians 6:12, Philippians 4:19, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Christian Life", "Trust in God", "Love as Defense"

Description

Joseph Carroll emphasizes the profound simplicity of Psalm 23, illustrating how the essence of faith is found in recognizing the Lord as our shepherd. He shares a touching story of a young girl who succinctly captures the essence of the Psalm, stating, 'The Lord is my shepherd, that's all I want.' Carroll elaborates on the four conditions necessary for sheep to lie down peacefully, drawing parallels to the Christian life, where freedom from fear, friction, distractions, and hunger is essential for spiritual rest. He stresses that love is the best defense against conflict and emotional turmoil, urging believers to trust in the shepherd's guidance and to find satisfaction in Christ alone. Ultimately, he encourages the congregation to accept God's paths for their lives, trusting that He is perfect in all His ways.

Transcript

We shall return again for a few moments to the 23rd Psalm. There was a little girl in a gathering in a church, and the pastor said to the gathering, is there anybody here who can come forward and quote the 23rd Psalm? Well, he thought some young teenager would come up, but this little girl, about four years old, came to the front, and he said, do you know the 23rd Psalm? Yes, I know the 23rd Psalm. Can you quote it? Yes.

And she very bravely and forthrightly stood up and said, the Lord is my shepherd, that's all I want. Sat down. Well, that is the 23rd Psalm, to a degree.

The Lord is my shepherd, that's all I want. Nothing more. Period.

And that's what it's all about. Concentration on a person, life reduced to fellowship with Christ, makes the complicated simple. This little book on A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, it's quite an excellent little book, tells you a great deal about sheep.

And in the third chapter, this man, who was a shepherd himself for many years, speaks about the sheep lying down. And he says something very important to us here. He says the strange thing about sheep is that because of their very makeup, it is impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met.

They're very interesting. The first is, owing to their timidity, they refuse to lie down unless they are free of all fear. There's no way they're going to lie down if they're fearful.

They must be free of all fear. Now this next one is a good one. Because of the social behavior within a flock, sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind.

In other words, the social behavior of the flock. How interesting. And they're not going to lie down unless they are free from friction with other sheep.

Thirdly, if tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. When I read that, I thought of the telephone. You know, those things that buzz around you.

The little things. Distracting pests. Lastly, sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food.

They must be free from hunger. So it is significant that to be at rest, there must be a definite sense of freedom from fear, tension, aggravations, and hunger. A flock that is restless, discontented, always agitated and disturbed, never does well.

And we could say there are the same four conditions which must be met as far as we're concerned. We must be free from fear. All fear.

Fear has no part in the life of a Christian. God hath not given us a spirit of fear. We are to fear God and that alone.

Freedom from fear. But I think the second one is the important one. Free from friction with others of their kind.

We have two great commandments in our messages on spiritual warfare. They are these. Don't become emotionally involved.

Don't wrestle with flesh and blood. If you become emotionally involved adopting an attitude toward any person less than 1 Corinthians 13, you're not going to lie down. You're going to be disturbed.

You're going to be distressed. The enemy is going to bring that person to you when you go to your quiet time and you're going to be upset about it. And you only need one.

You don't need a dozen. And you can't lie down. Why? Because there is friction.

No emotional involvement. Well, you might say, what is the antidote to that? Now, you listen carefully to this. If you live by this, it's going to enable you to, in an amazing degree, to walk in victory.

Remember this. When you are opposed, your best defense is love. Don't forget that.

Your best defense is love. Now, think on that. Think on it.

Your best defense is love. Why do you think our Lord says, love your enemies? It may not save your enemy, but it will save you. Yes, it will.

Because what does the natural man want to do as far as enemies are concerned? Retaliate. Retaliate. Or vindicate.

Leave it all quietly with the shepherd. Love is your best defense. You remember when Judas came to the Lord to betray him? He betrayed him with a kiss.

What a betrayal. The basest of all betrayals. The one I kiss, this is he.

And what did our Lord do? He said, friend. Friend. That's love.

Didn't save Judas. All the Lord had to do, as I said last night, just one word to heaven and he's gone. He doesn't have to go to the cross unless he chooses it.

So that the most despicable of enemies, you must love. It will save you. It may not save him.

When our Lord washed the disciples' feet, did he pass by Judas? No, he washed his feet. And very often the true test of discipleship is what you do with the Judas in your life. That's the test.

Very simple thing to love a John or a Peter. What about Judas? That's the test. It's always been the test for me.

God had a purpose in Judas being one of the twelve, obviously. And you'll find that the devil will bring the Judas along. He'll bring him along.

The Lord will permit it, of course, but he'll be there. You're going to love him. May not save him, but it will save you.

Love is your best defense. Our Lord on the cross is this mob shouting at him, reviling him. What does he do? Father, forgive them.

They know not what they do. Love. Love is his defense.

Please do not forget that. That's warfare. Love is your best defense.

That's the second statement you must memorize. If you want to return next year, if we are all here next year. Love is your best defense.

Don't forget it. It can save you. Because you're not going to lie down whilst there's friction with others in the body of Christ.

It's not going to take place. I believe this is the important one here. In those ten years we were out in the Orient, a great deal of that time was spent ministering to missionaries in their annual conferences.

And invariably, this was the problem. Friction. Friction.

Personal relationships. The devil works at it all the time. He'll start with a husband and a wife.

Or the parents and the children. Friction. Then he reaches out to other members of the body of Christ.

But that's what he's at all the time. I was speaking at an annual conference for a certain mission here in the United States just about three weeks ago. Same thing.

Same thing. Love is your best defense. Don't become emotionally involved.

And by that I mean, don't let the enemy cause you to have an attitude less than 1 Corinthians 13 toward any individual. Because if you do, you're going to wrestle with flesh and blood. And that's just what the devil wants.

And all you're wrestling with is a puppet. Because the devil's behind him just pulling the strings. There he is, dangling the puppet in front of you.

And you fall for it. And so what do you do? Grab hold of a puppet. And begin to wrestle with him.

And the devil's laughing at you. You're foolish. No.

Don't deal with the puppet. Deal with the one behind the puppet. That's what Ephesians 6 is all about.

Dealing with the powers of darkness that manipulate puppets. So don't become emotionally involved with a puppet. Just smile.

I know what's happening. And I know how to deal with it. I'll deal with the powers of darkness behind this puppet.

And then the puppet will stop his antics. He'll be still. And this is so.

So that we must guard against letting any of these four things hinder our rest. Because unless there is the lying down, there's not going to be the leading at all. But what about when I'm lying down in the green pastures having a grand time, and suddenly they dry up? You ever had that experience? They're drying up.

And for some reason, the shepherd lets them dry up. Well, there are many reasons, I believe, for that. One is, when that pasture begins to dry up, you're going to keep a lot closer to the shepherd.

But the second one is, that even at that point where we think that things are much for the worse, and there doesn't seem to be any water anywhere, he's trying to show us that there is water there. Himself. Himself.

He takes away, very often, those things that have been satisfying us, in order that we might find the living water. One of the men of God whose life has meant much to me is Andrew Bonner. The great Andrew Bonner.

Andrew Bonner had a very brief marriage, but he loved his wife dearly. They had one daughter, Marjorie Bonner. And then the Lord, after a few short years, took his wife.

He never really recovered from it. And for a long time, he wanted to know why, until the Lord said, don't speak to me anymore about this matter. The words that he spoke to Moses, he said, I don't want you to say another word about it.

But in his later years, he realized it was a right path. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness. It was a right path, because it brought Andrew Bonner to the Lord and kept him there in a way that nothing else could have done.

So if the Lord begins to dry up those passages, don't be afraid. He has a purpose in it. There's a woman in Australia, one of the most gifted, spiritual, and physically beautiful women I've ever seen.

Ever had the privilege of fellowship with. She bore nine children, two of whom died in childbirth. And I had the privilege of living in her home during a conference in the city where she lived.

It was an evangelistic campaign, actually. And I thought this woman is most unusual. She had these children, always in the home, always about her feet, but she was never disturbed, never distracted.

She was always calm, always serene, always had a word for everybody, always sweet. Never an exception. And yet she was very, very busy, and her husband was anything but a sympathetic husband.

So I thought, this woman's got something. And after being there for about five days, I woke early one morning, about 4.30, and I saw a light on. I could tell the light because the light was coming under my door.

So I opened the door to turn off what I thought was a light that had been left on during the night. But here I found this woman by her piano, praying. So I thought, well, the Lord has spoken to her during the meeting last night, and she's getting things right with the Lord.

So I quietly closed the door and went back to my bed. The next morning, same thing again. The next morning, same thing again.

So I said to her, what time do you rise to pray? She said, oh, I just leave that with the Lord. I tell him that when he wants me to pray, he must get me up. Sometimes he tests me, he'll waken me at two o'clock, just to test me.

And I'll get up, pray for about five minutes, and he says, go back to bed. So I go back to bed. He may disturb me at four o'clock, five o'clock, it's just up to him.

So I said, how long have you been doing this? She said, since he took my eldest son. Hmm. All right.

This large family of children, her eldest son was her idol. The only child that was really like his mother. He was 17 or 18 years old.

Handsome boy, beautiful boy. He ran a rusty nail into the sole of his foot. His mother took him to the doctor, and she asked for a tetanus shot.

He said he doesn't need a tetanus shot. In 36 hours he was dead. And when his mother was there at the hospital, stood beside the hospital bed, and the doctor said, there's no more hope, he's gone.

She bowed her head and she said, the Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. But that was the turning point for her life.

And she said to me when I got to know her a great deal better in following years, she said that was the only thing that could have brought me back to the Lord. She had strayed, she came from a very godly family. And she had strayed and she'd gone back into the world.

And one day she knelt down and she said to the Lord, I want to come back. And he took her son. He dried up her pasture.

And she found in him the living water. See, if the pasture begins to dry up, the shepherd has a purpose in there. He's perfect in all his ways.

I have a little book here. It's called *The Master of the Impossible*. And it has some writings and a biographical sketch of Lilius Trotter.

Lilius Trotter was one of the truly great missionaries to the Muslim world. She was a brilliant artist. She was a close friend of the great Ruskin who admired her paintings tremendously.

But she gave up what could have been a very promising, fascinating career and went out to Algiers. And she became very well known in Algiers and called Lilius Trotter of Algiers. And she has this to say concerning Desert Springs.

One of her chapters is Desert Springs. For the river of God is full of water, only waiting to break through human hearts that will let him have his way. The water is always there.

But it can only break through to the human heart that will let him have his way. And this is so. The shepherd is faithful and, let us say again, he simply waits to be wanted.

And if we don't respond, and if we don't obey, and if we don't walk in the spirit, then he's going to dry up that pasture to teach us his way. He restoreth my soul. Now, when does he restore your soul? When you let him do it.

Restoration is entirely your decision. He restores your soul when you let him do it. Now, in Psalm 42, verse 11, we read, *Why art thou cast down, and why art thou disquieted within me? Alright? Why art thou cast down?* And the same writer tells us that the old English shepherds have a word, cast down, concerning a condition which overtakes some sheep.

They call that sheep being cast down. And a cast down sheep is pathetic. And what happens is, a sheep will try to find a comfortable place for himself.

Perhaps a little hollow. But he's looking for a comfortable place, an easy place, a place where he can relax. And so, he or she goes along to this little hollow, and lies in the hollow, loses balance, tips over, feet up in the air.

Well, it may look funny, but they're in deadly danger. Because, number one, they're helpless. And predators are always looking for a helpless sheep.

So there they are, on their backs, feet in the air, struggling to gain their balance. And the shepherd tells us they build up gases in the rumen, there is expansion, and the cutting off of circulation to the extremities, especially the legs, and if it's very hot weather, in a few hours the sheep will die. And the only hope for the sheep is for the shepherd to come and deliver him, put him on his feet again, and massage his limbs and his body, bring the circulation back.

Now, what type of point do we learn from that? Don't seek the easy place. Don't seek the easy place. There's trouble there invariably.

Of course, don't accept the devil's cross, either. I've always threatened to preach a series of messages on the devil's cross. You must look out for the devil's cross.

He always says, this is not difficult enough and hard enough, therefore it can't be of the Lord, this is what you must do. And he'll drive you beyond your physical and mental and spiritual reserves. That's the devil's cross.

Because you must beware all the time that you're not being, what, pushed by the devil and led by the Lord. There's a trap there. And you must watch it.

The thing is, you must not seek the easy path. You must not seek anything. Just follow the shepherd.

But if you start looking out for yourself, saying, well, I'm going to take it easy, I'm going to get by. I'm going to let somebody else do it. And you lie down.

Look out, you're not cast down. And then the shepherd has to come, and he has to put you right side up, and he has to minister to you. Never seek the easy way.

And people who seek the easy way are usually those to whom Christ is not their satisfaction. He is not their satisfaction. I wonder if it is your satisfaction this morning.

Are you satisfied? You're not going to lie down until you're satisfied. And you're going to be a target for the devil until you're satisfied. Not until Jesus Christ, period, becomes your satisfaction.

Are you safe? Not until then are you safe. Because you'll always want something else. If Jesus Christ is your satisfaction, you will leave to him the meeting of your need.

Don't seek it, whatever you do. Because it's not going to satisfy you. Jesus Christ must become your satisfaction.

Do you see that? Leave it with him. In acceptance, said Amy, come, Michael, lieth peace. Accept the circumstances of his choice, said the great Rutherford, he purposeth a crop.

He's got an objective there. He's working something out. Expose yourself to the circumstances of his choice.

Don't be dissatisfied with your lot, with your circumstances. Don't try to change them. Unless he shows you they are to be changed, don't try to change them.

Rutherford said he purposeth a crop. In other words, he's going to get fruit out of this. He must become our satisfaction.

He must become our all. When he becomes that, I'm lying down and he can restore me and he doesn't have to use means that normally he would not use in order to bring his will to pass. So can we sum it up in one word? Yes, it's the word of last night from John 12.

I must place the sentence of death upon my life in this world. That means I'm no longer running it. I'm no longer determining my course of action and that comes right down to every department of my life.

I'm no longer in charge. I've placed the sentence of death upon Joe Carroll in this world in order that Christ might live through me. That's what it's all about.

That means all my desires are what? Subject to his will. I trust him to give me the desires of his heart and he will. He's the good shepherd.

But there must be that commitment to him. The commitment to him. For example, especially in the United States, there is this matter of marriage with young people.

Who said that it was the will of God for you to marry? I read a book that was given to me, highly recommended, and one of the chapters was on marriage and so this man is saying, now if you'll only commit yourself to the Lord, he will give you the partner of his choice and that one will be perfect. Well that's a lot of nonsense. He may not have any partner for you.

Who said that it's his will for you to marry? My sister has never married but she certainly has lived an abundant life. You're never married. Who said the Lord has marriage for you? He may have something better.

What could be better? The will of God. Lillius Trotter. Lillius Trotter never married.

Amy Carmichael. Amy Carmichael never married. These are some great ones.

So just leave that with the Lord. Leave it in his hands. If he wants you to marry, he's quite capable of arranging it.

He's quite capable. And it's very dangerous to start seeking yourself. The devil arranges marriages.

They're clever at that. When I was first converted, I realized that this was an area of my life that the Lord really had to take hold of. And so I made a covenant with the Lord.

I said, Lord, I will never date a girl until you tell me that girl is to be my wife and I didn't for 17 years. That was quite safe, wasn't it? Well, why not? Why waste time wondering and perhaps disturbing some young girl and leading her on to thinking that you're going to marry and then you change your mind? Poor girl, where is she now? You must never play with a girl's affection. They're very tender.

So it was quite safe. So for 17 years I lived a life of perfect satisfaction with the Lord and was quite surprised when he told me to marry. Well, that's all right.

If that's his will, I'll accept it. Why not? What's wrong with that? This question you must settle once for all. Otherwise the devil is going to disturb you with it.

And then you're going to do something about it. You take it out of his hands. Look out.

You're in deadly danger. Bertha Smith. Anybody that knows Bertha Smith knows Bertha Smith.

She's 91 or 92 now, I think. I'm serious. I could not maintain Bertha's schedule.

She's tripping somewhere, some other part of the world. She never seems to sleep. She's holding conferences all the time.

She's 91. Tremendous woman. And she's always... Those two things we saw in Psalm 133.

She's always fragrant and she's always fresh. And she's 91. When Bertha first went out to China, there was a young man came out, joined the mission.

And Bertha thought, ah, he's the one of the Lord's choice. So she went aside and she knelt down before the Lord just to get his approval. And he said, no.

Ah. Well. He said, oh well, he must be going to bring somebody else out here.

And sure enough, another young man came out to the field to China and Bertha said, ah, he's the one. I'm glad the Lord didn't permit anything to happen with the other because he couldn't have been the Lord's perfect choice. So she went joyously to a quiet place and knelt down and... No.

Hmm. So this disturbed her greatly. And then she told me she was crossing a plain in China.

And in those days they had these carts. And you had a little donkey and he pulled you and you traveled for about five miles in the cart and then you walk for five miles and then you travel for five miles. She was crossing this vast plain in China.

And in the distance was this large mountain. And Bertha was turning this thing over. She was troubled by it.

So she finally stopped the little donkey and she said, Lord, I'm going to make a covenant with you and I'm going to call that mountain to witness it. This is Bertha. Very definite.

I'm going to call that mountain to witness it. She said, if you don't want me to marry, you must never let any man cross my path who will ever disturb me emotionally again. And he didn't.

That was it. So what do we say concerning that it was the will of God for Bertha Smith to remain single. And the will of God is good, it's acceptable, and it is perfect.

So he makes me to lie down and he leads me in paths of righteousness. In other words, in right paths. They are right paths.

But I want you to notice, for his name's sake, not for my personal satisfaction, he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. You see that? In other words, those paths that he leads me into are for his glory. Not for my self-satisfaction.

And very often, it's only when you look back that you understand the path. There are times when you don't understand it. But you must trust him.

But later, very often, when years have passed, you can look back and you can say, it was a right path along which he led me. How could it be otherwise? Of course it is a right path, whether we understand it or not. But let us remember his objective.

His objective is the glorifying of his Son. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. So that, again, Amy Carmichael's great word, in acceptance lies peace.

I had a student come to me, one of our older students who graduated some years ago. He said, Mr. Carroll, I don't seem to be getting anywhere. I just seem to be calm spiritually.

Nothing much is happening. No doors are opening. I said, well, that's all right.

I've been through that many times. The Lord is simply testing you. Is he your satisfaction? And as soon as you pass the test, he'll open the doors.

He's just testing you. He's done that with me more than once. You settle down.

Everything's fine. And you've labored hard and you've established a beachhead. Now you have a ministry which gives you great satisfaction.

It's a tremendous challenge. That's what I had in the Orient. It took us ten years to form that beachhead.

Ten years to really dig foundations. Ten years to have the confidence of missionary bodies throughout the Orient. Then the Lord says, all right, pack your bags.

I love that work. That's it. It's finished.

Well, what are you going to do? You're going to say, but Lord, all these years of labor and we're just beginning now to really be in the place where we can reach out in a greater way. Just pack your bag. That's it.

You're leaving. What do you do? Well, you obey. You obey.

And he opens another door. What do you want, Lord? Don't get scared to ask him. Well, I want you to start a little school over there.

What? At my age? Impossible. All that responsibility? That's not my gift, Lord. I'm an itinerant Bible teacher.

That's not my gift. Well, he just lets you talk and talk. And he says... He just says, well, do it.

Fine. All right. But I tell you, this is the last ministry I would have chosen.

If you've put 100 ministries before me, this is the last one I would have chosen. And it's been the most satisfying. So he purposes a crop, you see.

You may seem to be getting nowhere. Oh, not at all. He's testing you.

Is he your satisfaction? That's the question. And that's the test here. Is he my satisfaction in this work? When, as I say, I work 14 hours a day for a month and I'm two months behind.

So my satisfaction cannot be in the work. It can be in seeing his grace in young lives. And that's very beautiful.

But it has to be in him. That's the only place when you're saved. Because the devil is always going to come along and he can give you reasons why you should be somewhere else, or doing something else, or experiencing something else.

And all the time the Lord is present to be your satisfaction. He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Hallelujah.

All right, shall we pray? Dear Father, we thank Thee that Thou art perfect in all Thy ways, so infinitely patient with us, so loving, so tender, and we give Thee thanks this morning. Again we would ask Thee to save us from our foolish ways, our foolish thoughts, our false concepts. How can any love compare with Thine? And if Thy love does not satisfy us, what love will? So Lord, will you not deal with everything that is preventing us from lying down? The irritations, the wrong attitudes toward others, the fears, the hunger.

Will you not deal with them, we pray? And teach us increasingly the truth that we know, that Christ is our life, a person. And give us grace to walk with Him, satisfied because we are with Him, and to accept the paths of His choosing, that He might be glorified through us. And this we pray in His precious name.

Amen.

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