

The Valley of the Shadow of Death

by Keith Malcomson

This sermon delves into the profound truths found in Psalms 23, focusing on the valley of the shadow of death. It emphasizes the victory, comfort, table, anointing, and overflowing cup that the Lord provides in the midst of the darkest valleys of life. The shepherd's presence, correction, provision, healing, and refreshment are highlighted as essential elements for believers to navigate through challenging times.

Scripture: Psalms 23:4, Psalms 23:5, Proverbs 22:15, 1 Chronicles 11:3, Ezekiel 20:37, Psalms 23:5, Psalms 23:5

Topics: "God's Comfort in Trials", "The Shepherd's Provision"

Description

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Transcript

In the Word of God this morning, we just started a new series on the Sundays last week, The God of the Valleys. And last week we preached our first message called The God of the Valleys. I began to open up onto what it means for God to be the God of the Valleys.

He's not only the God of the hills or the mountaintops or the ecstatic experience. He is known as the God of the Valleys. And yet most of the church don't think he can be the God of the Valleys.

They go, they're always trying to stay on the mountain or get back on the mountain because they go, God is God there. He reveals himself. He speaks.

He does miracles. It's ecstatic. You see everything on the mountaintop, but surely he's not the God of the Valley.

We've already seen, and I've laid in that foundation last week. He is the God of the Valleys. And we're going to deal with some of these valleys along the way.

I'll be away for two weeks, but I assure you, I'll come back and just carry on from where I left off. But here this morning, part two, and this is my message, The Valley of the Shadow of Death, reading from Psalm 23. Psalm 23, maybe one of the best known Psalms in the world.

Even sinners know this Psalm. I would dare say there's maybe no other portion outside of John 3, 16 that is memorized and known. In fact, I would dare say maybe, and I could be wrong, but I think I'm right.

Maybe Psalm 23 is the best known chapter in the Bible. And John 3, 16 is the best known verse. This Psalm is known.

It's known at funerals. It's known across our world. It's known by the old and by the young.

And I guarantee there's people who never darkened the door of a church and they could quote this to you almost word perfect. They've heard it so many times. They're so familiar with it.

And yet I actually believe that can be dangerous. Maybe you're more familiar with this Psalm than any other, but yet you can miss the truth of it, the substance of it, the reality. And so we're going to embark on looking at different valleys that the Bible speaks about.

And this is the first one specifically I want to deal with here this morning, The Valley of the Shadow of Death, Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.

He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. I wonder why.

For thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.

Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup overfloweth, sorry, runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Let's pray together. Father, we love you. We bless you.

We stand in awe of you that we can call you our shepherd here this morning. You're a good shepherd. You're a great shepherd.

You're the great shepherd that watches over our souls, that guides us, that leads us, that protects us, that provides for us. What a wonderful shepherd you are, and our eye wants to be single upon you this morning. We want to hear your voice and follow you.

We want to see you and follow you through the storms and even the dark valley of the shadow of death. Lord God, thank you that you're our shepherd in the valley of the shadow of death. Thank you that you don't ask us to walk through such a dreadful valley unless you're guiding us, leading us, walking ahead of us.

You're with us. You're comforting us. You're providing for us.

My God, I stand in awe, Lord God, that you're not a God who simply places us in the fire. You're actually there in the fire with us. You're there before us.

You'll be there after us, but my God, you never ask us to go to a den of lions and to count the cost unless you're there to shut the lion's mouth. We reverence you. We love you.

We bless you. We magnify you that your promises are so sweet in the dungeon, in the fire, in the valley of the shadow of death. And even this morning, I pray, open up the truths of this psalm.

Lord God, make them precious and special, that when we find ourselves in the valley of the shadow of death, we will see it isn't a place of barrenness and deadness and dryness, but actually the most dreadful place can be a place of greatest provision and the greatest manifestation of your care and your kindness and your love and your goodness. Lord God, we do pray, oh God, that even as we fellowship around the word of God, that you would be ministered unto as our hearts thank you and praise you and adore you and remember all of your goodness, that we could even in the preaching of the word minister unto you with thankful hearts. This preacher is so thankful that you are found, that you are walking with me in the valley of the shadow of death.

In Jesus' mighty name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. The verse I'm going to concentrate on is verse four. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.

Thy rod and thy staff comfort me. I'm going to point certain things out of this person who is actually walking through the valley of the shadow of death. I'm going to point five very remarkable things.

I'm not going to deal with everything in this psalm. This is not an exposition of Psalm 23. It's an explanation of the valley of the shadow of death.

And I'm going to show you five things that this man who finds himself going through, not sitting, not standing in the valley, passing through the valley, five things that he has in this valley. Because you know what? These are very real things and you could find yourself there, but do you know, do you understand what you have in this valley? You may not want to go there. You may be scared in entering into this valley, but you need to understand what is there.

If all you see is the shadow of the darkness of death, you'll be terrified of this valley, but you won't be if you see what this person has who finds themselves there. But let me just lay out a picture for you here concerning Psalm 23. And this person who is King David, I wonder if he composed this on the hillside before he was anointed king.

I wonder if this rolled within him when he was just a young boy looking after the sheep, protecting from the lamb and the bear. I wonder if he just sat there forgotten by his brothers, his older brothers, and his dad who almost forgot him as well. Oh, he's out on the hillside and he's there with these sheep that don't even belong to him, but he loves them and cares for them and will risk his life for them.

Here he is. He is the man of Psalm 23. I believe this, he knew something of the character and the nature of God in a very real way.

So I believe Psalm 23 is concerning a real, true, genuine believer. And first I want to take a step back and show you that verse 4, the valley of the shadow of death is only a small part of this Psalm. Don't be thinking this entire Psalm is about the valley of the shadow of death.

It actually isn't. It only mentions it incidentally. But I want you to see the person who walks into the valley.

The person of Psalm 23 does not live in the valley of the shadow of death. He is not there perpetually. This is something that can happen to him along life's journey.

Notice how this entire Psalm shows that he's a true believer. Look at verse 1, the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

Young David knew that the Lord was his shepherd. It's one thing to talk about God and the Lord and the creator, but to say this creator, this Lord of all things, this majestic God, this one who is sovereign in the nations, to say he is my shepherd or that this great God of the Bible acts as a shepherd to me. I know it.

I know him as my shepherd. David was able to say the Lord is my shepherd. That's very personal.

Can I ask you, is he your shepherd? Is he merely God or the God of others or is he your shepherd? If you're ever going to experience the valley of the shadow of death, you better make sure before you get there that he is your shepherd, that he's the watcher of your soul, that he's guiding you and leading you and caring for you. Verse 2, he maketh me to lie down in green pastures. You know what a shepherd does? He leads you everywhere, every situation.

He leads you into green pastures. You know, sheep will just eat and eat and eat if you leave them. Do you know sheep are colourblind? And remember your old picture, your sheep as Christians, they're colourblind.

They actually can't distinguish. They're not very wise in their eating habits. They have to be led into green pastures.

That's why a shepherd goes, if they stay here, they're going to eat this ground barren. They'll destroy the ground. So that's why a shepherd moves them around, goes, let's move you over here.

Oh, I want to stay with the truth of the love of God. Yes, you'll destroy that truth. I just have a revelation.

He is love. He is grace. He is mercy.

He is kind. I just read the Psalms. I just read the gospel of John.

You will destroy the gospel of John. I just keep reading John and keep reading the Psalms. Yes, you'll destroy those truths.

So the shepherd has to lead you into the book of Ruth, and then he needs to lead you into Leviticus, and then he needs to lead you into Daniel a bit. That's what a shepherd does. He actually leads you from pasture to pasture.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. Notice they lie down. A sheep only lies down when it's satisfied and it's well fed.

Starving sheep jump fences. They get into an awful lot of trouble. Remember a few years ago, I sent a picture to all of you.

We went on holiday, and we had all these sheep, and I told you about it. When a sheep falls on its back, it wiggles its leg. It's impossible for a sheep to get back on its feet.

It can't. It'll die. If it doesn't have a shepherd, that sheep is going to die there.

And I'll tell you what, if there's a hundred other sheep, those sheep can't turn the other sheep over on its four legs again. You need a shepherd. You need ministry.

And so as we were on holiday, and I said to Candice, stop the car, look. And we got out, and we took a photograph of this poor sheep with its four legs wagging in the air, and I sent to you all, and I said, see, I told you it's not a myth. It's not a theory.

This poor sheep. And so David knew he needed a shepherd. The sheep needed a shepherd.

He needed a shepherd. And you know what? A good shepherd leads you so that you're eating well, you're eating healthy. He leadeth me beside the still waters.

Sheep are scared of running water, moving water. Notice it's him. He leadeth me beside still waters.

He says, now I need to make sure that Larry has still waters. I don't want a whole ravaging stream, storm. I'm going to spook them.

And so I want to lead them. I want to guide them. Notice it's him guiding.

He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake. And look at the last verse of this.

It's beautiful here in Psalm 23. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. A sinner can't say that.

A rebel can't say that. An apostate can't say that. Someone who hates the things of God and hates holiness cannot say that.

You think that goodness and mercy is going to follow you all the days of your life right to the end? Only a believer who's following the shepherd can say that. I know that mercy is going to follow me all my days. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

There's a lot of people not in the house of God this morning. There's a lot of people who call themselves Christian. He's going to be my shepherd and provide, but they have no desire to be in the house of God.

What does David say? I will dwell. I will live. I will stay.

I will abide in the house of God. Oh, I am the church. No, you're not.

No, you're not. It's the gathering, the regular gathering of Christians together. If you claim to be a sheep and you have no desire to be constantly regularly in the house of God, I would dare say either you're not a sheep or you're a very sick sheep.

You're seriously ill. You're in danger of your very life. And so we see here in this psalm, it's a beautiful psalm, but it's a psalm for a believer.

When I talk about the valley of the shadow of death, I'm not talking to a sinner. I'm not talking of you coming into the valley of the shadow of death because of your sin or your disobedience or your rebellion or because you don't follow Christ. You actually end up there because you are following the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice as well, this isn't a physical valley in Israel. In the entire land of Israel, there was no physical valley within the land that was called the valley of the shadow of death. Even in David's time, he knew that it's not a literal valley.

It's not a physical place you can visit. This valley is symbolic. It is spiritual.

It is internal. And yet everybody knows it exists. I don't even think sinners would deny there's a valley of the shadow of death.

Maybe that's why they like Psalm 23. Everyone's aware there is such a valley. Nobody wants to go to that valley.

And yet we see it's not a literal place. It's internal. And you can't dictate when it comes.

Notice as well, it says the shadow of death. Let me emphasize this before I go into my points. The shadow of death, what does it actually mean? I am persuaded that the contemporary versions of the Bible don't understand this word.

And the commentators, the great Bible teachers, don't really understand it. Because when you read the new translations, how they translate this word, and when you read all the great Bible commentators, you know what they try to do? They try to smooth this term down, the valley of the shadow of death. They say, oh, don't worry, it's only a shadow.

Then why is he saying I will fear no evil? They try to blend it down. They try to lessen its severity. They try to say, oh, it doesn't mean death.

It just means darkness or gloominess or your worst trial. I disagree with that. I'm telling you what the greatest thinking on this verse is.

And I utterly disagree with them as I often do. You see the shadow of death. Some have said it's only a shadow.

The shadow of a dog can't bite you. The shadow of a sword can't pierce you. Neither can the shadow of death harm you.

That's a wrong understanding of this. I want to tell you this shadow is very serious and extremely dangerous. It is a dark, dark time that can come to a genuine believer.

It is a shadow. And notice death is very real. Death is a very real thing.

The death spoken of here actually casts a shadow to fall out over you, a darkness, a gloom. This word shadow of death, the Hebrew word is used 18 times in the Old Testament. The same word that's used in Psalm 23 and verse 24.

It can mean darkness. It can mean deep darkness, deep shadow, shadow of death, thick darkness. But I believe this term is the correct translation.

Shadow of death, the valley, a valley that you walk into that's filled with the shadow of death. It literally dominates it. Don't try to understand this term by looking at the Hebrew etymology or meaning of the word.

I learned how to be taught by the Holy Spirit. Some great Bible teachers who know their Greek and Hebrew don't know to do this. Do you know how you get the Holy Spirit to teach you? You actually go to that Hebrew word and you look at every single reference all 18 times.

And as you begin to read them and look at the context, you get the mind of the Holy Spirit. You don't get the etymology of the word and take it out and say, I know it doesn't mean death, it means just a dark shadow. Oh no, you need to go to all 18 verses.

And as you begin to read those 18 verses, you go, now I know what the shadow, the valley of the shadow of death in Psalm 23 actually is. I have a full understanding. Listen, out of 18 times this word is used, 10 times this term is used in the book of Job.

So you begin to understand what the valley of the shadow of death is. It's associated primarily with Job's trial. That gives you a bit of insight.

In Job 20, it is used of the darkness of the underworld or the place of death. It's talking about after you die, there is a darkness of the shadow of death. And so it's a real term for the place of death, especially those in the Old Testament.

When you die, that place you go to, the afterlife, when you die, when you depart this physical life, that was a place of the valley of the shadow of death. It was the shadow of death. But here we have in our Bible is there's a valley in the Christian life called the shadow of death.

What the underworld was called, the darkness of that underworld, the feeling of that underworld is actually crammed into a valley that a Christian, unless God very graciously doesn't allow you to go there, there is an entire valley experience that a real Christian can walk into. And you will walk through a darkness that was only experienced in the underworld. It is internal, it is emotional, it is mental, it is spiritual, it is deep, it is darkness.

Let me explain here from a few of these verses what it's like. Job 10 verse 1, my soul is weary of my life. I will leave my complaint upon myself.

I will speak in the of my soul. So notice in Job 10, he is tired of life. He wants to die.

His body is in pain. He's going through turmoil in his mind and heart. Then a few verses later, verse 21, before I go, whence I shall not return.

So he's going, death is hanging over me. He says, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death. That's the same term as in Psalm 23, a land of darkness as darkness itself and of the shadow of death without any order and where there is no light in darkness.

Lots of people have said, oh, to get a shadow, there has to be light. So in the valley of the shadow of death, praise God, there is light there. Yes, thank God there's light.

But the valley of the shadow of darkness, here, Job is saying, there's a place you go to where there is shadow and yet there is no light there. No light. There's confusion.

There's disorder. So you begin to understand what is this valley of shadow of death? There's confusion. There's disorder.

There is great darkness. There is no light in it that you can perceive naturally. Now you begin to understand, this is not a nice place at all.

A land of darkness as darkness itself. Then he says in Job 16, 16, my face is foul with weeping and on my eyelids is the shadow of death. The exact same term.

He says, I am weeping. I am crying. And on my actual eyelids, this same shadow of darkness, I can't even see anything.

My entire vision, spiritual vision is dominated by this dark shadow. Oh, what a dark trial Job went through. Job walked through this valley.

In fact, many people in the Bible walk through it. It also says in Isaiah chapter nine, verse two, the people that walked in darkness talking about sinners who haven't received the gospel yet. It's before the light comes, before the gospel comes, before relief comes.

People that walked in darkness have seen a great light. They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them the light shined. Notice that sinners are said to dwell there, not walk through it.

They dwell there. It's not a valley. It's a land.

They live in the entire land of darkness, of the shadow of darkness. Thank God we only visit there in a trial. Your worst agony as a Christian is far better than the agony of a sinner who's going to stay there unless the light of the gospel comes.

There is torment. There is confusion. But do you know what? God confines us to a valley and an experience for the real believer.

Again in Psalm 107, verse 10, such as sit in darkness, talking about believers, and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron. So you see spiritually, when you find yourself in the shadow of death, you feel like you're in affliction, that you're bound, that your hands and feet are held in irons. This is what the valley of the shadow of death is.

Later in Psalm 107, verse 14, it says, and he brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and they break their bands asunder. So there is a valley where you think you're trapped in. When this darkness falls upon you, it is terrible.

There are very horrible things in that darkness. And you know what? Only God can bring light to you in this valley. Only God can break your chains and your fetters.

Only God can deliver you from the affliction of this terrible valley. It says in Psalm 12, 22, he discovered deep things out of darkness. Notice the condition of a real believer in this valley.

He that is God discovereth or revealeth or opens up deep things out of darkness. See, when you find yourself in darkness, you need a look for what God wants to open up there. You're screaming, get me out of here.

Save me, deliver me. Why have you left me here? Don't you know there's things there for God to open up to you in that valley? It's not going to finish today or tomorrow. You know why? God has things for you.

You're cramped, get me out of here. Why not pray, Lord, show me, open up onto me deep things, hidden things. You know, the word of God says about the treasures of darkness, isn't that beautiful? You know, when you find yourself in dark times, there are treasures, but most people don't look for them.

You see, you're looking for the mountaintop. I want to be in the mountain. I want to get all the treasures of the mountaintop.

Don't you realise there's treasures in valleys? Don't you realise that there's actually treasures in the darkest times in your Christian life that you won't get in the light times or the good times or the blessing times? You have to be in the valley of the shadow of death. And there's things there that God himself actually begins to open up. And it says, and he bringeth light to the shadow of death.

It's God who does this. It's God who brings you out. Amos 5.8 also says that he, God, the creator, turneth the shadow of death into the morning.

So notice how God's hand is upon this, this valley of the shadow of death. It is a very dark, horrible place. No one wants to go there.

Do not pray for this, I assure you. But when you find yourself there, God is in control. Do you remember this entire, Sam, lead me.

What's David praying? Lead me by still waters. He's praying this. He's thankful for this.

Lead me in paths of righteousness. But suddenly he says, God is leading me through the shadow of death. So you can see someone who is walking or being led by quiet waters, being led into righteousness is also the same person being led by the same person into the valley of the shadow of death.

If you find yourself in the valley of the shadow of death and God is your shepherd and you are a sheep, do you realize you've been led there? I didn't put myself in the valleys I've walked through in my lifetime. It wasn't through sin or my foolishness or being reckless and saying, give me this valley. You see, I haven't heard people cry and say, give me this valley.

I want this valley. No, we're like Caleb saying, give me this mountain, give me Hebron. I can understand that.

I've yet to hear anyone in a prayer meeting pray, oh God, I want to possess the valley of the shadow of death. Lord, will you please lead me into the valley of the shadow of death. You see this verse four, what does it say? Ye, though I walk through.

He's not praying this. He's praying to be led by still waters, but he does not pray, lead me into darkness. He says, but along this journey as I walk with God and as he's leading me, ye, though.

In other words, if it happens, if God should see fit to lead me into this valley, then Lord, I will fear no evil. And so we see that this is an experience that God watches after. A dark path can still be a lead path.

When we get into the valley of the shadow of death, we go, God, where are you? Lord, I've lost you. Lord, why am I here? Lord, something has gone wrong. How do you know it's not perfectly, absolutely in the will of God? Don't you realize this entire Psalm is about the great shepherd leading you? That means he's in front.

Who first walked in this valley? How did you get there? Well, I was only following the shepherd. Then trust him. If you're walking with him, loving him, serving him, following him, obeying his teaching, and suddenly you walk into a dark valley that you do not like.

It's horrendous. It's turmoil. It's affliction.

Just keep walking. Keep your eyes on him. If he got you in there by following him, just keep following him through the valley of the shadow of death.

You cannot lead yourself. You certainly wouldn't want to put yourself there. It says in Jeremiah 2 and 6, the Lord that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, that led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought, and of the shadow of death, a land that no man pass through and where no man can dwell.

So we see in Jeremiah 2, he's talking about the 40-year wilderness. God led them. God led them through wildernesses, through the valley of the shadow of death.

Do you know that Israel in the Old Testament, God led the entire nation through something called the valley of the shadow of death? There were no enemies there, no armies there, but there was a valley of the shadow of death. Not a physical valley, but it was a very real spiritual experience they walked through. What is this shadow of the valley of death in our lives? It could be sickness.

You could be so sick, you're on the verge of death, and we've had to be familiar with that. It could be old age and going, now I don't know when I'm going to die. It could be serious danger.

It could be the loss of your wife. I am walking under the shadow of the valley of death this morning. You know why? Losing Candace, though she has gone, the shadow of that death actually hangs over me.

I'm having to walk through that darkness at this time. It could be some dark trial early in your Christian life, or as you get deeper, God says, let's go a bit deeper here. In Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan writes about Christian on his journey to the celestial city and talks about all the things he goes through.

First, he went through the valley of humiliation where he was greatly humbled. Then after that, he didn't get off scot-free. What happened? He got led straight into the valley of the shadow of death.

There were some people on the journey as well who began screaming at him, don't go into it. Don't go there. And he says, but if I keep following the Lord, I'm going to have to walk through this valley.

They're saying, you're crazy. Don't do it. Don't go in that direction.

But if following him puts me in a valley, then in a valley, I will go, I can assure you. You see, it's diverse what this can be. I don't know what it is for you.

I know what it is for me. I am now walking through a valley of the shadow of death that I've never experienced in 50 years, my entire life. I have never walked through anything like this.

It's unknown territory. You know, until three years ago, I thought I'd seen everything, been in every valley of the entire Canaan land. I thought I'd seen it all, possessed it all, walked it all, seen it all.

Candace thought that as well. And suddenly we walk into a dark valley and we go, this is unfamiliar territory. We've never been here before.

We've never seen this. I don't even know what the next step is. I can't see.

I can't hear. I can't feel. I don't know.

I've got no experience of this, but you know what? I'm there in the will of God. Just keep the shepherd in front of you. That is absolutely vital.

As you begin to read your Bible, you read about men like Job being there, David, Paul, Abraham, and many others. And so I lay out for you the valley of the shadow of death. Let me give you my five points here, because although I want you to see the valley of the shadow of death could bring you to place a condition, not for one night, not for one day, maybe not for three days, but for a period of time.

You don't know how long it is. You know, John Bunyan, he wrote, this valley was longer than all the others I'd ever seen. This is an unusual valley.

It's a long valley, and I think it'll never come to an end. This week as I was just praying and thinking, I thought, oh God, you brought me into a valley that has no end here. That's what I'm thinking.

I'm overwhelmed. And when every valley I've been through in my life, it's got a finality. It's got an end.

I come out of it. I go, she's not coming back. This particular valley has no end.

I'm just telling you what I felt and thought. I'm beginning to pray, and I go, this is an endless, until the day I breathe my last breath, I'll never see her again or hear her voice. This valley that I've been brought into, it has no limits, no depths.

It has no boundaries on its darkness. I've never seen anything like this. But do you know what? I'm wise enough in this valley not to trust my own reasoning.

I go, keep your eyes on this good shepherd. He is a good shepherd, a kind shepherd, a great shepherd, a wise shepherd. I'm staying on his heels.

Saints of God, I'm not going to follow men. I'm not going to follow myself. I'm following the great shepherd.

Here's my five points. Number one, his victory. This man that finds himself in the valley of the shadow of death, the first thing that you see about him is his victory.

There is victory in this valley. Not many people that I've heard of in my entire life have talked about the victory of walking through the valley of the shadow of death. We talk about the terror of it.

We talk about hating it, or we talk about the end of it. But what about the victory in the valley of the shadow of death? Look what it says in verse four. And though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, when you find yourself there, keep walking, keep walking.

Saints of God, I will fear no evil. David is saying this before he's in the valley. Look at the entire psalm.

He's not in the valley when he writes this psalm. But he must have known about the valley. He must have been there before.

And he's also going, I could end up back in this valley. He understands how terrible it is. It is the valley of the shadow of death.

He has been there. He has seen it. I'm sure at some point, he led his sheep into a very dark, dangerous valley.

And as he led the little lambs, and even the older sheep, you know what I think? I think those sheep, he watched their reaction, the darkness, maybe the unknown growls and snails from the darkness of the shadows. And these poor sheep are getting irritated, worried, scared. They're trembling, but they keep following the shepherd.

He keeps looking over. Come on, Larry, stay on my heels. Come on, Larry, don't get distracted.

Come on, Larry, don't you get scared. Just stay with me. I've always looked after you.

I delivered you from the lamb, delivered you from the bear. I've always led you by still waters. I've always made sure you had green grass.

Have I ever failed you? Haven't I looked after you, Larry, from a young lamb? I made sure you were cared for. I'm not going to leave you now. More so, the shepherd's going to be needed in the valley.

You see, when we get into this dark valley, we think, shepherd, where are you? Do you think he's going to be with you in the mountaintop, in the daylight, and not in the darkness? Don't you realise a shepherd's heart that he says, Larry needs me more now than ever he did in all of the other times of walking. Didn't I lead you in paths of righteousness? Didn't I lead you in the green grass? Do you think I'm not going to lead you through the valley of the shadow of death? And yet it's in this valley. You go, I can't hear his voice.

I can't see him. Is he still there? Is he remembering me? What's he doing to me? Why is he bringing me this way? This is scary. Is he leading me to the butcher's shop? I don't know.

Sometimes I'm not sure. Do you realise that there is a victory in this valley? Look what David says about this valley. He's saying, I've been there.

Maybe I'll go back there, but it's all going to be through following him. I will not fear. The entire psalm is an ecstatic psalm, a rejoicing psalm.

It is a high psalm. And yet it's got that note of sobriety that I could end up back in that valley, not too far down the road. But I'll tell you before I get there.

Oh, it's easy when you're not in the valley to have courage, isn't it? But also I want to tell you, I've told you before, no matter what happens in my Christian life, when I get to those dark places, even losing my wife, I will serve the Lord. He's more important than her. I want to tell you.

You know, I once told her and I'll tell anyone, you husbands ought to tell your wife, your wife ought to tell your husband. I said, you ever leave God, I'll just put you out the door. I'll just keep following the Lord.

You can do what you want. I'm not going to forsake God for you or anyone else. I love you more than any human on the face of the planet, but I don't love you more than God.

I'll never love you more than God. He is far more important than you. And if you ever think that you're more important than him, you're going to be in for a big surprise.

I love you with all of my heart. I can't love you anymore than I do, but you're not more important than him. He is everything.

He is my son. He is my righteousness. He is my life.

He is glorious. What does David say? I will fear no evil. I don't know what it's going to be like in that valley, but I'll tell you what, I'm not going to fear any evil.

That means in the valley of the shadow of death, there is evil. It is a place of evil. There is evil and darkness.

There are evil things that I do not like. What does he say? I will not fear evil. To fear is to be terrified or to dread.

I want to tell you, I am not terrified. Oh, I've had the experiences I want to tell you. From January last year, I went through, I was terrified for the first time in my entire Christian life.

I've never experienced being terrified. I'm not scared of anything. And yet I went through that valley of the shadow of death and the terror that engulfed me.

I can't even explain to you. It was the most terrible thing I've had to endure. Walking through that, that was January last year.

It was horrible. And you know what David says? I will fear no evil. You know what? When you walk into the valley, you may not have the victory.

You may go, I'm going to have to gain the victory. Do you know what? I'm working on it. Okay.

I'm still in the process. I am working on, I will fear no evil. What did I say? It's the victory of the man that finds himself in this valley.

You know what? I'm in a battle. I will stay here in this valley until I get the victory. I'm not here for no purpose.

I'm in this valley. I am going to get the victory over fear. I am going to get the victory over this trial.

I am going to keep walking after the shepherd. I can't trust any of my senses in this valley. And why does he say that? Why does he say, I will fear no evil? This is the reason.

For thou art with me. Do you realize that's the key to victory in the valley of the shadow of death? You're there saying, I need to endure this. No, you need to get the victory.

Oh, I'm here being dragged through. You need to get the victory. You need to triumph over fear.

What this tells me is that the valley of the shadow of death is marked by fear, terrifying, disturbing, soul disturbing, mind disturbing, fears. I don't know whether you've ever been engulfed by fear. It can be a terrible thing.

Read of David and Paul and Abraham and these men. You know Abraham, it says that he was engulfed by a darkness of thick, gross darkness. Do you ever know the dealings of God? Do you know the Bible says that God hides in darkness? Do you know he is actually dwelling in the midst of real darkness? I'm not talking about sin.

I'm talking about dark, hard trials. God clothes himself in darkness. He hides amidst the darkness.

You know why? Because saints are going to be there and he'll be there to meet with them. That's the first thing about the sheep walking through the valley of the shadow of death. It's his victory.

Psalms 23, 4, it shows that David had a victory. I will fear no evil. I am going to overcome.

I will persevere in the darkness. I had a call this week from a very good friend. He started explaining to me on the phone.

He said, there's another couple I've been ministering with and dealing with. Their situation is a parallel to yours. His wife died after some 45 years or so of ministry and of Christian walk.

He says their situation was such a parallel to you. And he started explaining it. I said, but here's the difference.

That man who'd been married all those years has just been caught out going into his neighbor to sleep with her. He lost his wife, had a good testimony. And here in that darkness, he's made shipwreck of his entire Christian walk.

And we were just talking about these. Don't tell me this isn't a dangerous valley. The valley of the shadow of death could be the ruin of you.

If you do not get the victory in that valley, you are going to have to overcome sin, temptations. Nothing makes sense in that valley. Number two, his comfort.

He not only got the victory in this valley, he had comfort in this valley. Remember what I said? There are things in this valley you won't get anywhere else. If you don't visit the valley of the shadow of death, there's some things you will never have some treasures, some insights to the character of God that you cannot get unless you go through a valley.

It's only in the valley you get them. And so the second point is comfort. It says again in verse four, I will fear no evil for the art with me.

Then notice what it says. Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Notice that God has tools or instruments.

Maybe you're so focused on God, the good shepherd, you don't see that he needs tools or uses tools or has instruments in his hand. When you know Jesus as your good shepherd, do you know what you see? If you look closely, don't be a scatterbrain, slow down and begin to look at him. Why is he a shepherd? Well, he's got a rod in one hand and a staff in the other.

And you know that rod and that staff, why does he have them in the valley of the shadow of death? It's for you to comfort you when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Notice the rod is different than the staff. They're not the same.

They're two very different things. If you do a word study on this word rod, it's very interesting. What is a shepherd's rod? What does it look like? What is it used for? The rod is also, the Hebrew word for rod used here is also translated a number of times for a king's scepter.

Do you know that scepter? He holds something in his hand. It's the symbol of a king. And when he holds it out, it carries authority.

He could hold it out and say, this man's going to die, or this man's forgiven. That king's scepter is the symbol of his royal rule. Well, you know what? A shepherd has a rod in his hand that's symbolic of being a shepherd.

It's not a king's scepter. It's a shepherd's scepter. But what is the purpose of that scepter? If the king can put out a scepter and you die, or you're forgiven, or you come close, or you've got to get out of his presence by that scepter, what does the rod in the hand of a shepherd do? Well, we're told very clearly what a rod is for.

When you go through all of these, you'll read in Psalm 89, 32, that this rod is an instrument of correction. In Proverbs 13, verse 12, we read that it is a means of correcting a child. A rod in a parent's hand is a means of correction.

You may say, I thought we're getting comfort here. Oh yes, this is comfort. You see, the Bible says that if God doesn't correct you, you're not his child.

I want to tell you, when I see a parent discipline their child, I go, that father, that mother loves their child. If you let your child off scot-free, if your eyes are blind and you don't see them doing anything wrong, you're actually not loving. You don't love that child.

If your love is such, well, love is blind. No, it's not. No, it absolutely isn't.

Love actually sees. You know, in this church, if I don't bring correction to you, you do wrong, and you go wrong, and I don't bring correction to you, I don't love you. If I ever sit you down and bring a rebuke, or a correction, or a warning, or plead with you, you know what it means? I love you.

I care. I'm a true shepherd. And you know what? I do have a rod in my hand.

This valley of the shadow of death, people die in this valley. People get destroyed in this valley. People go into heresy in this valley.

People fall into sin in this valley. And you know what? I've got a rod because I want to comfort the sheep. You know what a comfort is? You know when I say, he's going to correct me.

He's going to keep me. He's going to warn me. He's going to hedge me in.

This rod in his hand makes me feel secure. In Proverbs 22, 15. Proverbs 23, 13 to 14, all scriptures about a parent loving the child, using a rod to correct them.

That's anathema in today's homes, world, society, and church. We don't believe in correction anymore. Then you're a bad shepherd.

You're an apostate shepherd. You're a false shepherd, and you're a bad parent. You need to be wise in these days, very shrewd.

But I want to tell you the rod is a wonderful symbol. It also says use the rod for a fool's back. That's the only thing that a fool's going to listen to.

Fools don't listen to reasoning. Every fool I've met, they haven't listened to me when I reasoned to them. You need to use a rod, and I certainly don't believe in using rods, okay? Proverbs 29, 15.

The rod and reproof give wisdom. How's a sheep going to get wisdom in the valley of the shadow of death? They need to be reprov'd, corrected. The rod needs to be there.

Do you realize that's how wisdom comes is through the rod of correction? We also read in 1 Chronicles 11 and 3 how a man called Benaiah came with a rod in his hand and took the beam out of an Egyptian giant and defeated him with his rod. So the rod isn't only for discipline, it's to fight the enemy. And this is what you find with a rod.

When I'm a sheep following the shepherd and I see his rod, it's not only for my correction, it's for my defense. If a lion comes, if a bear comes, you know the instruments of a wise shepherd isn't only a slingshot, it's a rod. That rod can defeat an Egyptian giant, but also it can defeat any enemy in this valley of the shadow of death.

If I'm a sheep and I'm watching my shepherd, he's got a rod in his hand. I feel so secure. What a wonderful shepherd he is.

The word rod here is also translated into our English 140 times tribes. So in the Old Testament, when it talks about the tribe of Benjamin, it's the word rod. This is very, very strange indeed.

But listen, Sam, now listen, the rod in the hand is 34 times, but tribes 140 times. So there's a lesson here. Psalm 74 verse 2, remember thy congregation, which thou has purchased of old, the rod of thine inheritance, which thou has redeemed this Mount Zion wherein thou has dwelt.

Do you see that God's people is called his rod? The entire gathering of God's people is called his rod. God uses his people, his spiritual people, his gathered people as a rod. If you're a sheep in the house of God, do you realize the entire people of God are God's rod in his hand to comfort you, to help you as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death? I'm not making things up here.

It's in the text. It's in the teaching of scripture, but there's not only a rod, there is also a staff. You know, it talks in the Bible, the whole staff of bread was broken.

Isn't that an interesting term? That means the staff is a symbol of provision. The staff is a symbol of support. A shepherd uses a staff to lean on, to carry, to hold.

So he doesn't only have a rod to fight with or to correct with. It also says in Ezekiel 20, it says, you bring the sheep in under the rod to bring them into covenant. You know, that's how you identify real sheep is they come under the rod.

If you ever see a Christian and they don't like the rod, they kick against the rod and say, I will not come under the rod of correction. Do you know what that means? They're a goat. They're false.

They're a hybrid because the shepherd has the rod. It says, all of you pass. Remember in the Middle East, a sheep and a goat look the same.

So the shepherd gets them all to pass under the rod and goes, you go that way, you go that way. Come on, Larry, you're definitely a sheep. Some problems with you, but you're definitely a sheep.

Keep going that way. You're going that way. Hold on.

You're a goat. Because they're so identical, you've got to put them under the rod to separate them. But the staff is something very different.

You begin looking at this word staff in our Bible and you'll see the staff is the thing of provision. It is also a thing to rescue the sheep when they get in trouble. And so you see all these beautiful things.

Do you see when you get to the valley of the shadow of death, we not only get a victory, there is the victory of the man in this valley. He gains the victory in darkness, but also his comfort. What is his comfort? Thy rod, thy staff, the shepherd's rod and staff.

They are comforting me. You know why they keep me in the right path. They rescue me.

They protect me. They provide for me. They rescue me if I fall into some hedgerow.

You know sheep have a habit of getting in trouble. They get caught in things. They go places.

They get stuck. You ever seen one of those videos? I think we showed it here one day where there's one that's stuck in this trench. It's actually stuck there.

Look at YouTube. You'll see it. It's stuck in the trench.

This rather well-fed sheep and it's stuck and the shepherd comes and pulls it out, goes to all effort, gets it out, drags it out. And then the sheep goes bouncing and takes one jump and goes right back into the same. And the poor shepherd has to start all over again.

You go, what sort of an animal is this? You realize there is comfort. You need a rod and you need a staff to keep you in the valley of the shadow of death. Aren't you glad that he didn't say, live your Christian life more.

We'll see at the end of the journey, see if you make it through. That isn't this God, not at all. Look at point three here, his table, his victory, his comfort, his table.

Verse five, thou prepares the table before me in the presence of my enemies. Notice here, God prepares a table in this valley. If you ever find yourself in the valley of the shadow of death, there is a table spread by God.

Can you imagine being surrounded by enemies? And he says, come sit down. I want you to eat. Surrounded in the midst of your enemies.

They are all around you. Wild, ravenous animals. There's one verse that actually says that the valley of the shadow of death, dragons live there.

Dragons dwell there. I believe dragons are a real animal. The dinosaur was a real animal.

The Bible talks about it. That's what it's talking about. Leviathan and other animals are talked about in the book of Job.

This all blends. They lived at the same time as men. There's dinosaurs in this valley of the shadow of death.

There are enemies that want to kill you. But you know what? This man who finds himself in the valley of the shadow of death, listen to what he says, thou preparest a table before me. To prepare a table means to arrange it, to order it, to set it out, to put the right things there.

Who's putting the food on the table? God is. Your shepherd is. The Lord is.

He's preparing this. Can you imagine that someone would sit down? You'd think you'd be fighting your enemies. The valley of the shadow of death is not a time for you to fight your enemies.

You can't even see. John Bunyan again in Pilgrim's Progress. One of these days you're going to read it.

I'll just keep talking about it until one of these days or else you'll listen to it or watch it or do something. Do you know what he says? He takes these pictures and he brings doctrine and scriptures and New Testament all together in one story. It's beautiful.

It is filled with biblical truth. He says that Christian pilgrim, when he goes into the valley of the shadow of death, he's got his sword out and he advances into this valley with his sword. But he soon realizes this isn't a time for a sword.

He sheaths his sword. He puts it away and then he says, you know what I need? I need all prayer here. It's not a time to draw the sword against the enemy.

This is a time for me to pray. What a wise man John Bunyan was. And that's what we see here.

It's not his time to fight the enemy. He is going to sit at this table. Do you realize there's a table prepared of God that you'll only find in the valley of the shadow of death? I have never heard in any other place, no mountaintop.

You won't find it in Carmel. You won't find it there. You won't find it at Hebron.

You won't find it on the Mount of Olives. You won't find this table. You only find this table spoken about in the valley of the shadow of death.

Can you imagine being in that valley, seeing a table and saying, no, no, no, I need to get out of this valley. Sit down. No, no, no.

I need to keep going. Sit down. This is to give you strength to walk through this valley.

And so God prepares it and lays it out for you. Have you noticed in this Psalm yet? The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

He's talking about the shepherd. Verse two, he talks about the shepherd. He makes me to lie down.

Verse three, he restores my soul. Then it changes in verse four when he gets this valley. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me.

Verse five, thou prepares. Do you see how it suddenly changed? He's talking about the Lord when he gets this valley. He's talking to the Lord.

It's very, very personal. You know why? There is communion. There is fellowship.

There is relationship here. Can you imagine having the presence of the Lord? Thou art there with me. What a promise.

Oh yes, you'll have valleys, but I'll be there. Yes, it's going to get very dark, but I'm there. Don't fear.

Don't get scared. I'm going to feed you. I'm going to comfort you.

I'm going to lead you. I'm going to provide for you. Don't you realize the shepherd is more real in this valley than any other time? You see, I can feel the Lord these past five months.

Can you believe Candice has been gone five months? I can't believe that. It's mind blowing to me. For five months, I can't feel him.

I can't see him. I can't hear him. I can't touch him.

Yet this shepherd walks so close to me more than any other time. I know he is so close to me. I know he is so real.

He is here. That's why I don't get scared. I do get scared.

Then I turn my eyes on him and say, Lord, help me to overcome and walk with you. He is there. He promises to be there.

His table is there. His comfort is there. Point four, his anointing.

Look at him, his victory, his comfort, his table, his anointing. Verse five, thou anointest my head. You anoint my head in that valley.

You prepare the table in that valley. You comfort me in that valley. Thou anointest my head with oil.

The word anoint here means fatness, to satisfy or abundance. He's not merely dabbing the oil on. You know what he's doing? He's pouring the oil.

He is anointing the entire head. He is pouring the oil out on the head of his sheep, and that oil is literally pouring down over the head, the ears, the eyes, the nostrils, the cheeks of the sheep. He is anointing the head of the sheep.

Do you know sheep farmers actually do this, especially in the Middle East, especially in biblical days? The shepherd, one of his primary tasks is to anoint the head of the shepherd, the sheep, not for ministry, not for power. What is this anointing about? What is this bountiful anointing that has to happen in the valley of the shadow of death? It's because little insects bother sheep. Sheep can't flick it away with their hoof.

They can't do that. Their tail isn't long enough like the cow to flick the flies and the irritants away. They're really rather a awkward, victimized animal in many ways.

But insects target the sheep, laying eggs, termites, things that burrow into their skin, into their ears, into their head, into their wool. There's lots of things. I mean, there's so many termites that will target the head of a sheep.

And you know what they do? They burrow in and they drive that sheep mad. If they start laying the eggs, if those creatures start hatching, you know what they're trying to do? They're getting in. They'll eat their way into that brain.

They'll eat their way into the ears and drive that sheep, that purse sheep crazy. The sheep will go mad. It'll be distraught.

Even at a mild case, it'll be in agony, pain, not able to help itself. What does the shepherd do? He says, I love you. I care for you.

I'm going to make sure those termites don't nest in your head. I'm going to make sure that you're not being irritated. You're walking in the valley of the shadow of death, and he doesn't want you irritated with things.

You know what? He wants you to have a clear mind, a pure mind, an accurate mind. You know what he does as well as cut them? You know what sheep do? They butt heads. Have you ever seen sheep butt heads? Especially the older ones.

The older they are, the more they know, the more experienced, the more likely, boom. And then the young ones who think they're big and think they know everything, they go, I'm taking over, boom. Do you know sheep can get cuts? So the shepherd comes and goes, there's been a wee bit of conflict between Larry and Tomo over here.

I'll come in on the back of this, and I'll start anointing their heads. I'll start ministering to them. I'll start healing the wounds.

And you know what? I want to keep the whole sheepfold moving beautifully together. If there's something wrong, I want to be right there when that happens. I want to come right in and begin ministering the oil of the Holy Spirit to bring healing, refreshing, deliverance.

That's his anointing. His victory, his comfort, his table is anointing. Last of all, his cup.

There's many other things in this psalm, but you know what I'm showing you? How terrible the valley of the shadow of death is. But I want you to see what is in there for the real Christian. You know, most people only see the darkness, the terror, the dragons, the awfulness.

Don't you see the victory in this valley? There's a victory you can only get in this valley. It is found in this valley. There is comfort that you'll find in this valley.

There is a table in this valley. There is an anointing in this valley. But last of all, and I'm going to finish briefly with this, his cup, his cup.

Verse five, my cup runneth over. My cup runneth over. In the valley of the shadow of death, who would have thought that you can have a cup that floweth over? Not on the mountain top.

Oh, I thought my cup overflowed on the mountain top. I don't remember that verse. I can't remember reading it.

Maybe you can show me, but I can show you Psalm 23. You're walking through the valley of the shadow of darkness, of death, of gloominess, of terror, of feeling like you're chained in irons, of your soul is in affliction. Your eyes are crammed tears.

It feels like you're in hell, but your cup overflows. You know why? Because the shepherd is there and he's providing for you. He not only lays a table, but he is watching over your cup.

He doesn't just fill your cup in the valley. Do you see how he bountifully provides? He's pouring in. I mean, just look out.

You've got your cup there. More. He's just pouring.

Okay, you can stop now. I'm just pouring. You're in the valley.

You're in darkness. You're fighting against fear. And you know what? He just keeps pouring and pouring and pouring and pouring.

You know what a cup is for? Refreshment, to satisfy your thirst. You can walk through the darkest valley in your entire life and you will not be in a famine. You will be well fed.

You'll be well watered. You'll be satisfied. You're going to find a freshness there.

Since I am in the valley of the shadow of death, I am feasting like a king. I want to tell you. I tell you what, I'm feasting at a king's table.

He has prepared the table. He has laid it out. He is annoying to my head that I don't go crazy.

I could lose my mind. You know what? I'm amazed. I'm looking at these five months ago.

First of all, I'm amazed I didn't die physically. I thought I would. I thought I would.

Then I thought I'd lose my mind. I'm amazed I still have my mind. I go, Lord, why haven't I had a mental breakdown? Why haven't I collapsed? Why aren't I exhausted this morning? Now I'm saying, boy, this cup is overflowing.

I have to keep drinking. It'll go everywhere, all over. So I'm trying to keep up with him, and he's just pouring in the water, and I'm just trying to drink this.

He's forcing me to drink, and it's bountiful. It's full. Saints, are you in the valley? Do you need your soul refreshed? Come and drink at the master's cup.

He has a cup provided for you. He is a rod and a staff that's comforting you. He is anointing your head.

He is walking with you so you don't need to fear the evil. You may not have realized all this is in the valley, but you don't get it anywhere else. It's in the valley.

Maybe next time that you face the dark time, find yourself in the valley. You go, you know what? There's five things I've got to find before I get to the end. This may last a week, or a month, or a year.

I don't know, but there's five things I'm going to find. I'm going to find victory in this valley. I'm going to come to appreciate his comfort.

I'm going to sit at a table prepared for me. I'm going to have his hands on my head anointing, healing the wounds, and I'm going to drink from a cup that he keeps bountifully full, fresh, clean, beautiful, sweet water that is provided by the Good Shepherd. Please stand with me.

Thank you, Lord Jesus. We love you. We bless you.

Let's thank him here. Let's worship him. This is a psalm of praise.

This is a psalm of victory, of thanksgiving, of glory, of praise, of adoration. This is a psalm that gives him his rightful place. This is a psalm with a clear sight and vision of what the valley of the shadow of death is, since I will fear no evil because the Lord is with me.

He's walking with me, and all of this provision is there. If I was left alone in this valley, I would be a dead man. I would go crazy.

I would be starving. I would be dying of thirst, but I want to tell you there's a real shepherd leading you, guiding you, directing you, correcting you, steering you, preserving you, protecting you all the way through this valley until you walk out the other end. The Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. I shall not lack any anointing. I shall not lack being fed.

I shall not lack being refreshed by his water. I shall not lack direction or correction or protection. I shall not want anything.

Here's the darkest valley of your life, the deepest pit in your life, the hardest trial of your life, and yet in the midst of that, you will be able to say, there's nothing that I want in my spiritual life. There's nothing that I'm lacking because the Lord is here. Hallelujah.

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