

Psalm 23: The Good Shepherd

by Keith Price

Keith Price's sermon on Psalm 23 explores the profound relationship between God as the Good Shepherd and His followers, emphasizing His guidance, provision, and comfort in life's challenges.

Duration: 59:58

Topics: "Gods Providence", "Shepherd Leadership"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the interpretation of Psalm 23, focusing on the first four verses. They mention that some people divide the psalm into different motifs, with the first four verses being about the shepherd and the sheep. The speaker highlights the various blessings and provisions that the shepherd provides for the sheep, such as leading them to green pastures, restoring their souls, and guiding them in righteousness. They also emphasize the comforting presence of the shepherd, even in the valley of the shadow of death. The speaker concludes by mentioning that these blessings are all for the glory of God.

Transcript

words, I appreciate your kindness. All I can think of as I look back over the six months is all the things that I'd intended to do and didn't do. So I'm glad you didn't know what I intended to do.

But as I look back on life, too, there are a lot of things I'd intended to do. As I look back in my study at home, there are a lot of piles of paper I'd intended to go through. One of these days, maybe I won't and somebody else will have to.

I don't know. But anyway, there are a lot of things that we try to do in life and we're not able to. But thank you.

You've been so wonderful and so encouraging and you've been so grateful for any little thing. It's just amazing. I appreciate so much being with you all.

I had a sweater on tonight. It was a little colder coming and here I am. I'm too hot to keep it on.

So, no, just leave it there. So I hope you're not going to be too warm. If you are, just drop off to sleep.

Don't worry about it. Probably this is my last night here. At least I will be coming back probably a couple of weeks from now when Doug is preaching and just for one Sunday just to be around.

But then it'll be the end of October. So if you drop off, don't worry. I'm not going to tell you off on the last night.

But we've got a wonderful, wonderful psalm to look at tonight and it's the last of our evenings, Summer in the Psalms. And you know, I'm amazed to see one, two, three, four, five, six, seven in the front row there. I very much doubt whether your Bible falls open to the Psalms, you know, because mine didn't at that age.

And maybe you've read a few, I don't know, but it's mainly the kind of passage of Scripture that you get used to in life as you go through life and you come to feel the knocks and the hits of life and you realize that this is what life is about, what's in the Psalms. So I hope what I'm going to do today, and I'm so glad you're right there in the front row, and I realize if I don't keep your attention, oh, I thought it was a skateboard, sorry. That's just great indeed.

I thought you were going to get out there quickly like that. I'm glad you're there because I hope that you will come to see, just like all of us will, something tremendous in these Psalms. We've done a number of them, I can't remember the different ones, I know it's included Psalm 19 and the Word of God, Psalm 131 and Contentment, Psalm 42 and 43, we did at least four sessions on Psalm 139, and tonight we're going to come to this final one in Psalm 23.

Now if you don't have a Bible with you, I am using the New International Version, but you'll find that, apart I think you may have the British one on your sheet there, a couple little expressions that are different on the sheet you've got, but you'll understand as we get to it. So would you like to look at it? All I'm going to do tonight, if I had decided what I was going to say on this Psalm, I would have wanted to include everything and we'd never got away from here. So what I've done is I've just saturated myself with the Psalm and the author of the Psalm and the one who inspired it, the Lord himself by his Spirit.

And I'm saying, Lord, I don't know where I'm going to go in this Psalm tonight, but you decide what it is you want me to share from this Psalm. Because we're just going to go through it, that's all I'm going to do, give you the sense of it. And as we do it, maybe you've got a special need, which I wouldn't have planned, but God will allow that to come to my mind tonight.

So if you haven't got a Bible then, by all means turn to the Psalm on the back of your worship folder tonight, would you? And I'm going to read Psalm 23. Let me read it two ways, and I'm sure you'll understand why. We've just been singing a lovely song, My Lord and I, or what is it, The Lord and I, or God and I, it says on the top, but The Lord and I. This Psalm is all about the Lord, capital L-O-R-D, and me.

It's all about how we're thrown together. Let me read it the first way, listen to this. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in need of anything I want.

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

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

It's all about him. But let me read it the other way now. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

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

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Isn't that marvelous? That's what this psalm is all about. It's about a beautiful relationship, a relationship between my God and myself. And everything that happens in this psalm is dependent entirely upon that relationship.

Nothing you can concoct yourself, no clever ways I can think up that I could get through all these problems. No, it's all dependent on a relationship that he is the shepherd and I am the sheep. And we've been thinking about that now for a couple of weeks, and I don't think we're going to go on to it after tonight, but it's wonderful to think about this lovely psalm in this great way indeed.

You know, there actually is a valley of the shadow of death. I've been thinking about it. I don't know whether you know that, but there is one.

And in fact it goes from, it's about four and a half miles long, and it's south, just south of the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, Jerusalem to the Dead Sea. And if you've been down that road, you know the one we read about in Luke's Gospel about the man that was robbed in the Good Samaritan and so on, it's just south of that road. And this is a terribly dangerous valley.

It's the most dangerous valley that many, many people, that many shepherds have ever seen. In fact, most shepherds, they say this is the most dangerous valley they'd seen. And about every five or six years, Reader's Digest reproduces an article that came out, I think, during the Second World War, first of all, and it reproduces telling you all about this valley of the shadow of death.

Every shepherd from Spain to Dalmatia knows all about this for hundreds of miles around. And it's so dangerous and so narrow, in fact at some points the walls are 1,500 feet high. And the distance across at the very bottom may be no more than ten or twelve feet sometimes.

And there are gullies even with that. So you can imagine that the sun really, even at midday, never gets down there. And it's dangerous and it's filled with all kinds of animal enemies and all kinds of problems.

And in fact two flocks of sheep can't pass one another in some of those places. So as a result, there's an unwritten law. The unwritten law is that the sheep, the shepherd will take his sheep up the valley in the morning and down the valley in the evening so that two flocks won't have to pass one another.

And sometimes those gullies are six, eight, ten feet deep, you know. Sometimes there's a drop across a gully, particularly one part where you have to cross over from one side to the other. And as you cross over, you have to drop down about eighteen inches and there's about a seven or eight feet wide gully.

And the sheep stand on there and they've got to get across. I'm not sure how he does it, but he does it in a marvelous way and he just steers them across. But it's a terribly dangerous place.

And in fact, if one owner of a Christian bookstore told me some four or five years ago that this psalm is so well known that if somebody comes into the bookstore and wants to buy a Bible, and they certainly don't know much about Bibles, they say, oh, I'd like to buy a Bible. Well, which version would you want, man? Oh, are there different versions? I didn't know that. Well, show me one and I'll sort it out.

All right, so he says, now this is a very good version. And they look around for a little while and they say, where is Psalm 23? And so they find Psalm 23 and they look at it and they read through it until they come to that place that says, 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 they comfort me. If that says the valley of the shadow of death, they say, that's fine, I'll have that Bible.

Why? Because that's probably along with John 3.16, the verse that is known best by people who know maybe only very little of the Bible. But somehow or other, even though that thought is there, and it's an important thought, this expression, as we'll see when we get to verse 4, includes far more than the valley of the shadow of death. It includes all of the valleys of life.

In fact, the literal translation of it, according to most scholars, although some will say you can just see that word death in there, is, as you see in the footnote there, if you've got an NIV, it says in the bottom, underneath verse 4, if you look down in the footnote, or, yea, though I walk through the darkest valley, the expression is, the deepest darkness, the darkest, the valley of deepest darkness, and the valley of the greatest crisis in life is death, and it's the deepest and darkest perhaps in some cases, although it's the one of the briefest. There are other valleys that are much longer than that, the valley of bereavement, the valley of doubt and questioning, the valley of loneliness that comes about after the valley of the shadow of death, but frankly, that's the one they want to use, they want to use that verse and say that Bible must be okay, so of course no translators would put anything else other than that, because they wouldn't sell their Bibles, but it includes more than that, but listen, it includes that, and it's absolutely there, and it speaks about it, something that we can face, as Christians we can face death. You don't want to think about it when you're your age, but frankly you do as you get through life, you come to realize this is life's greatest crisis, so what I'm going to do is just go through it as quickly as we can, and just give a few brief thoughts on each one.

We'll just go through the verses, we'll just milk the text, all right? You milk it, and then you go back tomorrow morning again, there'll be more there, more milk again, ready to be milked. But I want you to notice the kind of way in which it's laid out. Look at the expression in the first line, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

It doesn't mean you say I shall not want, well, I won't want anything. Of course you want things, you want all kinds of things. God isn't interested in what you want, he's interested in what you need, and he knows that he's only going to supply what you need, because much of what we want, like a motorbike at eight years of age, isn't good for us.

So as a result of that, he says, no, I know what you need, so I hold back some of the things you want, but I'm going to give you the absolute essentials of life, so I won't be in want of anything I need. That's the idea, not the old English, I won't want anything. Now, what will we not be in want of? And the rest of the psalm tells us that.

Look, verse 2, I'll not be in want, verse 2a, I'll not be in want of rest. He makes me lie down in green pastures. Verse 2b, he leads me beside quiet waters, I'll not be in want of refreshment.

Verse 3a, he restores my soul, I'll not be in want of restoration when I need that. 3b, he guides me in the paths of righteousness, I'll not be in want of guidance. Verse 4a, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'll fear no evil for you are with me, I'll not be in want of companionship.

Your Lord and your staff, they comfort me, I'll not be in want of comfort. Then verse 5, I'll, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, I'll not be in want of sustenance or provision. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows, I'll not be in want of joy.

In fact, I'll not be in want of anything, because if my cup overflows, there's more there than I really need. Not only that, but surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. I'll not be in need in this life, I'll not want anything, I'll not be in want in this life.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, even though that means all the days of this life is a parallel thing, yet looking at it from a New Testament, I'll not be in want eternally. So right through this psalm you can see that in want side, and he just takes care. It's only because Jesus is the companion, because he is with me, because he's the shepherd, because I'm the sheep that's waiting upon him in every respect, that I can say, I know I will not have need of any of these things, because they'll be there, because he's there.

Now having said that, there are many fine scholars that look at this psalm, that look at it in equally valid ways, and they say, well it's not all about the shepherd and the sheep. They say, the first two verses are all about the shepherd and the sheep. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not be in want, he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.

And they say that's all there is about the shepherd and the sheep. Then they say, because we need different analogues, different analogies, in order to bring out all the wonderful things about the relationship between my Lord and I, he moves on to a different motif then. He starts talking about the traveler and the guide.

Now he says, this isn't a sheep now, this is a traveler and guide. He guides me, still the same Lord, but he guides me now as a traveler, they say. He guides me in the paths of righteousness, all for his name's sake.

And even when I'm traveling, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'll fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. And they say in actual fact that there's the traveler and the guide. Then they say that the last two verses, five and six, is in actual fact a different motif again.

It's now to do with the host and the guest. Now you've arrived at your destination, or you've come to a place where you're a stranger and somebody's received you in like a good Jew will. And you prepare a table before me.

In the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy, or goodness and love, will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Now, I wouldn't quarrel with people that want to break it up like that.

I still like to see it all as the sheep, but that's fine. I understand that too. But I'm only going to cover, if I can tonight, the first four verses, because we won't possibly get through the rest of it.

And we know that most of the people, most people who do divide it up, still say the first four verses are to do with the shepherd and the sheep. When you get the rod and staff, it's pretty hard perhaps to think of it as traveler and guide, but anyway, that's the way they are. So let's have a look at this just one by one.

The Lord is my shepherd. There's the two thrown together. Sometimes, you know, when we're in deep, deep trouble, in the valleys of life, we need to know victory in those valleys.

The thought is, if you can't think of anything else, just think of the Lord on one side, the shepherd on the other, and then say, this Lord is capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D. This is the covenant God of Israel. This is the name that God showed himself as to his people. This was that beautiful relationship with that deep, wonderful love of God, that beautiful, beautiful chesed love of God, which is the prime quality of this God to his people.

And now this God is the one up there, the creator of heaven and earth, the Lord. He's my shepherd. And you throw those two things together, or you say, he leadeth me, or he guides me.

Always put those together and smile. But the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be in want.

All right, let's have a look at what we won't be in want of. Firstly, we'll not be in want of rest. Now, sheep need rest.

They often get up in Israel about 3.30 or 4 in the morning. They're eager to get going, as I indicated this morning. If they're going to get some good pasture, then they need to start early, but also to get a lot of moisture in even the rougher pasture early in the morning, because the dew is still on it.

And you know, it's not very generally known, but a sheep can actually go a month or more, two months maybe, without actually drinking. Did you know that? It can actually go a month or two without drinking. But only if they get up early in the morning and they make sure that, of course, they get all that good grass with all the dew in it.

And of course, the two of them are combined there. He makes me lie down in green pastures, although he leads me beside quiet waters as the actual drinking. But let's look at the green pastures.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. You must know shepherds. We have a very famous one that died not too long ago, as you know, in British Columbia, lived in Victoria over there with us, just on the coast, and his name was Philip Keller.

And you know, Philip Keller wrote those two wonderful little books, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, and then another one, A Shepherd Looks at The Good Shepherd in John 10. Two wonderful books. You should get those.

Another excellent book to buy, by the way, is F.B. Meyer's book, The Shepherd Psalm, a little booklet just about as big as that Paths to Power that you got from Dr. Tozer's book some weeks ago, and which will be available again with my own book next Sunday, I believe. So a little book like that is The Shepherd Psalm by F.B. Meyer and Philip Keller's book. But Philip Keller says this, now he's pastured, he looked after sheep, and pasturing sheep and shepherding sheep, as we saw this morning, it's the same word.

You're out to pasture, you're a pastor, you're a shepherd. It's all the same word. That's what a pastor does, he shepherds.

But he says, if I'm going to get my sheep to lie down in any kind of field or anywhere when we're out, there've got to be several things that must obtain, things that must be in place or they won't lie down. And he says the first thing that must be in place for a sheep to lie down is there must be, must be free from fear. Fear particularly of other animals, or fear of something that may be in the field, or fear that the shepherd isn't around.

In fact, he says, if only the shepherd walks into the field when the sheep are fearful, you can sense this calming effect come over the sheep. But if there's fear there, if they know they're in a place where they've previously seen some animals, or if they're lying down there, and suddenly they hear a jackrabbit just move a twitch of muscle or something, and in the undergrowth there, or the loose leaves perhaps, suddenly one sheep will start off, and the whole flock will start to go across the field. Because if they are fearful, they cannot lie down.

They will not lie down. They must be completely free from fear. You and I, as we're Christians, as we are sheep in the hands of our shepherd, we completely trust him.

We know when he's in the field that all is well. We don't need to be fearful, because he will have checked it out first to make sure there's none of those wild animals around. He'll walk around to make sure there's none of the poisonous plants there on the field that I'm going to eat.

I know I can feel safe. There's no fear of eating the wrong thing, and there's no fear of having someone attack us. And if he's in the field, and if they do come and attack us, he's got his club, and wow, he'll take care of them all right.

As Christians, we know that we can't rest when there's fear. When we rest, it's because there's perfect love, and perfect love casts out fear. And so when we know our Lord, when the shepherd becomes special to us, when in our times of communion we get to know him, and read the word, and draw from all the things he has to give us, that love deepens and deepens.

It becomes so enriching, and enlivening, and enriching in our lives, that in actual fact, enriching in our lives, that we will just not have any fear, because that perfect love casts out fear. A sheep will not lie down, not only when it's fearful, it must be free from fear, but also secondly, it must be free from tension. If there's tension in the flock, the sheep won't lie down.

If they're sort of, you know, what do you call it, I guess you call a pecking order, right? With chickens, we call it a pecking order. With cattle, I guess you call it a horning order. With sheep, you call it a butting order.

And they know exactly where they are. Once they determine that butting order, in the beginning of the day, they know they better stick to it. But sometimes, that old domineering old ewe that's been around there for a long time, and thinks she's got the run of the whole place there, you know, she just, people don't like her very much, those other sheep don't.

And they start to get fussy, and they don't like this, and they start to compete. They say, it's about time she gave up. She's three years old now, you know, it's about time she packed up.

And as a result, there's sometimes tension, and there's competing, and they're vying for position in the flock. And when there's this kind of tension, a competitive spirit, then the sheep won't lie down. In the church of the living God, the church of Jesus Christ, when there's a competitive spirit, there's no way the

sheep will lie down.

There's no way there's rest in our hearts. We sense one person vying against another, itching to get into that top place, or itching to be recognized for this or that. Those who are the shepherds ought to recognize all the sheep, because all of them have unusual gifts.

Not one person exactly the same gifts as the others, but the combination of their personality traits, their natural talents, and their spiritual gifts are unique as a mosaic, and there's nobody else like them. That's why the shepherd loves to have that time with each one of those sheep each day, and that sheep feels there's something special. We haven't been doing it the last few months, but very frequently we would have one of our grandchildren all the time over to breakfast, run them off to school after, they don't live too far away, and it's always nice to have one of them there, just one.

Sit them in the place of the guest of honor there, lay the table properly for breakfast, and lay it all out there just like it's a dinner with candles at breakfast time. But you know what I mean, they sort of look at this and they say, oh can't I just stuff this in my mouth and run to school? No, this is proper breakfast. And you get them over there, they feel different.

And you know, one at a time it's nice to do that, well that's what the shepherd does, and in order to break that tension oftentimes he just calms that sheep down. Now if that isn't calmed down, if there's still this tension and competitive spirit, then the sheep won't lie down. The Lord Jesus enables us to avoid that, because as I said this morning, he shows us that he came not to be served, but to serve.

And as I've said a dozen times in these six months, there isn't any competition at the bottom. That means that if we are servants, have a servant spirit, there won't be this competitive, vying for position, this butting order, and the sheep will lie down. A third reason, excuse me, a third reason why sheep will not lie down is not only when there's fear, to lie down they've got to be free from fear, to lie down they've got to be free from tension in the flock, but thirdly they've got to be free from aggravation, from annoyance, from the things that annoy them, particularly those parasites, and they get in the field, particularly in the hot months, you know, and all those little flies, particularly all those different flies, they're completely, some of them just lay eggs in the sheep's mucous membrane here, and they get up through the whole system, and the sheep can't get rid of them.

Sometimes sheep are so utterly devastated and annoyed at all these insects, that they'll shake themselves, and they'll go and rub against a tree, sometimes they throw themselves against a tree. Sheep have been known to kill themselves by virtue of the fact they've been annoyed with insects or parasites. When there's annoyance by one member of the body on the part of another, you can't stand them, you see them come in here, you go and sit over there, or when you see that person and you can't stand them because, you know, I don't know how people can stand me because I'm always talking, you know, and I understand that.

Some people are so nice and quiet, and boy, when they talk, I lift up my ears, and I came to the conclusion some years ago, as I thought about how can I be quiet, I thought about there's no one more obnoxious than someone that's got an opinion on every subject, and I thought, Lord, am I like that? If I've got an opinion on every subject, but you know, there are all kinds of ways we can annoy one another, but you know, the gracious thing is that the Spirit of God pours in grace to put up with even the most annoying characters, and when the shepherd is there with you, then his life is ministered to you by that Holy Spirit who pours in that grace so we can put up with one another, and then you can lie down and you can be at

rest, even though that person's sitting right next to you and even rubbing shoulder to shoulder. There's a fourth reason, though, why sheep won't lie down, it's the main reason. Not only must they be free from fear, free from tension, free from annoyance, but they must be free from hunger.

That's why he makes me lie down in green pastures. Probably, this is the middle of the day now, a sheep will perhaps start off in the early hours of the morning before most of us are awake, and they'll go out then to pastures. They start with the rougher ones, and then they gradually make their way towards a nice pasture, but about 10 o'clock, maybe 10.30 in the morning, in Israel in particular, the sheep need a rest.

So the shepherd says, okay, it's time now, I'll just check out this field, everything's fine, I'll make sure I got my sling there ready to throw, I got my club here, and I want to make sure that everything's safe, so they can lie down, as long as they're free from fear, free from tension, free from annoyance, but now they have to be free from hunger, and if they're still hungry, they're only now getting to the richest pastures. Now they're only getting to the green pastures. There aren't many green places in Israel, as you know, but if they're in the green pastures, they know they've got the finest pasture they can get, and as they feed on that, and as they eat that, then they're contented, oh my, so contented, and then they lie down.

If they're free from those four things, they can lie down. Now the Lord Jesus has made it so that we won't be, we all be hungry for him, there's a sense in which we never cease to hunger, we never cease to thirst. I've told you a number of times over these months, in fact, it's the essence of my book, *Thirsting After God*, that frankly, that the more we drink from the fountainhead, the more thirsty we will become.

I don't mean in that sense, I mean if the sheep have had enough just for the time being, they lie down, and with us, of course, when God feeds us, and when he gives us to drink, then what happens is we are absolutely satisfied only momentarily, and then just like that, with that he gives us an increased capacity, so we still keep on hungering and thirsting. So the ones that are most hungry and most thirsty are the ones that keep on eating and drinking. However, with the sheep, they must have enough right there and then, and if they've had enough to eat, then they'll lie down.

Now God has made his wonderful word available to us, and the more you take of that, the more hungry you will become. The more you read it, the more you'll want to read it. Some people say, oh, I don't understand this, you know, oh, I read it in the morning, and I'm going through my Bible, I'm going through the one-year Bible here, and I read my Old Testament chapter, and I read my New Testament chapter, and I read my psalm, and my proverb, and well, you know, it's okay, but all these people killing one another off, and all these Levitical offerings, I haven't got a clue what it means that the fat on this part of the animal goes there and there.

It doesn't mean, you know, the more you read in the scriptures, the more hungry you'll become, and as you become hungry, you'll just long more to go beyond the scriptures and come to the Lord himself. But in this situation, when we're hungry, he feeds us from his word, and his spirit enables us to understand that increasingly, and the more you read it, the more you'll understand it, and the more satisfied you'll become, temporarily, until he gives you a bigger appetite again, right? So those are the four reasons why. Not only does he make me lie down in green pastures, but also, I shall not be in want of refreshment, for he leads me beside quiet waters.

I don't have to tell you that sheep won't drink from rushing streams, they don't like fast-flowing streams at all, and sometimes they would build a dam, perhaps, in the river, so that there'd be a not such a fast-flowing part in the stream. Or sometimes, at the side, in the little backwater there, the shepherd may

just dig a kind of a deep hole there, if he can, with his hands, with the stuff underneath, if it's soft enough, and somehow it's a little bit quieter. But the sheep doesn't like rough, fast-flowing water.

He has to have still waters, quiet waters, or, as the literal translation is, he leads me beside waters of rest. For the rest comes not only from the green pastures, when they're lying down, but they have rest, because these waters don't trouble them. The Spirit of God is the water that flowed from the rock of Christ, as we've seen in the last few weeks.

He was the rock smitten, the Spirit of God came, and he just satisfies our thirst, only to the point where, in the end, we have this increased capacity and keep on crying out for more. But he leads me beside the quiet waters, the places I love to drink from, all to put the Spirit and the word together, the green pastures and the quiet waters, if you like, although, again, I wouldn't argue over what that means. I think sometimes we go too far in insisting that every little analogue has to have some spiritual meaning.

It doesn't always have one, you know, but I guess you can read it into it, as long as it's in the rest of Scripture, I won't argue, but if it's against Scripture, be very careful. But he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters. Isn't that marvelous? He leads me.

He is over there, in all his greatness and wonderful, wonderful person. I am over here, he, me. But in between, is it equal? No.

He leads me. All I've got to do is to follow. I don't have to worry about anything, just like a little child, they don't have too many worries about money, or how they're going to get the mortgage put together, or where the next job's going to come from.

No! Just follow the parents, whatever they say. He leads me. Isn't that a marvelous thing? Get that into our minds and say, Lord, when I maybe can't think too deeply, when maybe I'm on my deathbed, Lord, I may not be able to think too deeply, and maybe Alzheimer's is gradually getting a hold of me, Lord.

My mother had Alzheimer's very badly for the last three years of her life. She didn't know who my father was, and yet she would remember some of those scriptural expressions. Isn't it a wonderful thing? Although there was one thing we couldn't understand, because when my father said, isn't it wonderful that Jesus died for us? She suddenly said, Jesus isn't dead.

What she meant was, she knew he was alive, and she couldn't realize, of course, that he had died. That part had just gone from her. But how wonderful that these expressions remain.

He leads me. Isn't that a marvelous thing? To join those together. He leads me beside quiet waters.

Well, look at the next thing that we shall not be in want of restoration. For verse three says, he restores my soul. He renews my soul.

He gives me a new beginning, which is the theme that Pastor Doug's going to start next week. He gives me that new beginning. He restores it.

It's just like I'm going back to square one on snakes and ladders and starting all over again. I'm going to throw the right number this time. No, snakes and ladders, never heard of that, did you? No, sorry, that was a hundred years ago.

Whatever the modern equivalent is. Anyway, you know, sometimes you slip down this, this snake, and you go all the way down the bottom. But here it is, starting, he restores my soul.

When do we need restoration? Let me suggest three specific scenarios when we need restoration. Number one, when we have failed to take advantage of having a time of devotion, a quiet time with the Lord, and we've got dry, and his voice seems distant and far away, and we don't recognize it too easily anymore, because we've gone weeks, maybe months, who knows, could be years, without hearing his voice, without going to the word and saying, Lord, I want to hear your voice in it today. Lord, my soul is all dry and shriveled up.

And the Lord says, doesn't matter, you've been away a long time, but that's fine. I'm glad to see you've come back. And what I'm going to do now, you just have to meet the conditions, and you just have to get back into that word and talk with me again in communion in that time, and I will restore, I'll bring restoration and renewal to your soul.

Second time, a second kind of scenario is when perhaps there's some lack of confession in our lives. There's a specific sin or a need for us to confess things in our lives which we've not gone to the Lord with and told him about, and that breaks that communion. It may not change your status if you really know the Lord Jesus, you're still a sheep, but it's broken the communion.

You don't want to come up to him and let him cuddle you each day, you know, and you don't want to talk to him, because he doesn't want to talk unless you come up and say, hey, shepherd, you know, I blew it today. He wants to hear you say that. He wants that confession from us, particularly if we're living in some habitual sinful state, and we know that thing is sinful, but we keep on doing it, and the only way we can keep on doing that is to rationalize that what is wrong is actually okay.

And as long as we do that, we can rationalize, we can keep living that way. But God says, no, you need your soul restored, and when you come back and are prepared now to confess that, agree with me that it's sin, that's what confess means, then it is I can restore your soul. Or as a third scenario, too, and that is when our spirit has been too much involved with and too much just taken over by a worldly spirit.

Maybe our priorities are wrong. Maybe our business has got a hold of us to the point where we know and we rationalize, well, I've got to leave my family enough money, you know, but there's never enough, is there? You always know that. And you've got to keep on getting involved with it to the point where, not that you're asking God each morning to be your partner in business, but you now haven't got too much time to ask God to do anything, you've just got to get off because you've got so many customers and you're making so much money.

And what's happened is gradually it sort of fizzles out, and you haven't had any time with it. Your priorities are wrong. There's a worldly spirit taken over, not only in that area, but in many other areas of life.

The way we look, perhaps, or the things we're known for, or the knowledge we want to seek after, all kinds of other things, or get lost and hooked on the internet to the point where first thing I do when I get up in the morning is switch on that silly machine and I boot it up before I put my socks on. And I just seem to just get into that thing and all the time, here I am just absorbed with that. Now, when we get absorbed with anything that is not the priority, we need to have our souls restored.

I wonder tonight, how wonderful to see this room packed again tonight, but I wonder if something has taken the place of the one who is your shepherd. You may be involving Christian work, you may be leading a group this fall, you may be starting a new ministry, you may be taking leadership in some way in the church, but still nobody else knows that your soul is in need of restoration. Could I urge you tonight, before you go to bed, just kneel down by your bed and say, Lord, I want to confess.

I was willing to do all these other things and I can, but I'll be doing them my own strength unless you restore my soul. Lord, I come to you now in confession to put my priorities right and I ask you to keep me in your word and by your spirit fill my life with your life. He restores my soul, but he guides me in paths of righteousness, so I shall not be in want of rest, of refreshment, of restoration.

Now I shall not be in want of guidance. He guides me in the paths of righteousness. Guidance.

Who will he guide? He will guide those who want to be guided. You must want to be guided and you won't want to be guided if the previous line is true, that you need restoration and you're not coming to put it right. You won't want to be guided at all.

You're enjoying doing all the things you're doing. It won't last for long, mind, but frankly, the Lord says, I want to guide you and I'll guide the one who wants to be guided. The way to pray is not perhaps you can't tell God a lie.

Lord, I want to be guided when you don't. Say, Lord, I want to want to be guided. And Lord, if I want to want to be guided, I know what I've got to do and I'm just not doing it.

Would you now give me the courage and the strength to change my ways so I'll do the things that I know you will then guide me in. So who? The ones that want to be guided. But how does he guide us in the paths of righteousness? How does he guide us? Well, there are many ways.

He guides us primarily from this book as we read it. It's amazing all the guidance you get. It keeps on coming.

I've been reading it for nearly 50 years, for 50 years now, and frankly, I just find there's constantly more and more guidance all the time that I'd never seen before, even though I read the passage many times maybe. And he will guide us not only through his word, but by his spirit. Be careful of his spirit on your own, on his own, because it may be something you had in your pizza last night.

But frankly, put the word and the spirit together and you'll find that his spirit never guides you contrary to the word, but will often give you a little extra detail on what he wants you to do. He may guide you through something you heard in church, through the person sitting next to you right now when the session is over tonight. They'll say something to you and you say, you know, that's exactly what I needed right now.

I didn't know that was true. That's the way God wants to guide me. He'll guide you through a book you may be reading.

He may guide you and give you an ability to contemplate his blessed person as you're watching a western sunset there. Whatever it is, he can guide you in many ways, but still the main way is in this book. Not only who does he guide and how does he guide, but where does he guide? Look, he guides me in the paths of righteousness.

Now, of course, I guess for a sheep, not quite so much the moral accountability perhaps as we have, but for a sheep it means he guides me in the right paths. That's the paths of righteousness, the right paths. He knows exactly where to go, how to avoid the problems here, and he knows how to take me to avoid that valley and all these poisonous grasses.

He knows exactly where to take me, so he guides me in the right paths. But for us as his human sheep, he's the shepherd. He guides me not only in the right paths, for he will do that in our lives.

There are principles that are true for all of us in scripture, but then individually according to your own makeup and what God wants you to do with your life, he'll guide you in the right paths for you. But when it comes to the paths of righteousness, they're the same for all of us, for the moral standards of scripture apply to every one of us, whatever culture, language, or color of our skin. So, therefore, he guides me, and every time he guides me, it will be always in the righteousness paths.

It will make me more like Christ. It will always agree with what's in scripture, in the paths of righteousness. I wonder when we last really asked God for guidance.

Roland, you've been asking the Lord for guidance a lot lately. Can I ask you just to come in a minute? I just saw your face. I hadn't planned anything here, so I don't know what to ask you, but what are you asking the Lord for guidance for right now? Well, I thought I was meant to go back to the Philippines in January, and I was with Team Mission.

You're a missionary there then? I was for a short term, and I found out from the doctor that they couldn't send me because I had a medical condition that they felt was too risky. So, I began to feel as I prayed that I wasn't losing my sense of guidance to return. So, I didn't know what to do with that, and I thought it needs audacity to go out on a limb, and if God lets me fall, so be it.

There's something to learn in that, and I'll perhaps learn that God makes parachutes or something, but whatever it is. So, I began to ask God to give me a group of people that would help me get back, and if there were risks to make those risks minimized or use awkward situations, I might get in for His glory. And right at this moment, actually this weekend, there's one person in Manila who's got the key to this.

The board is 90% saying, come on back. The board of the mission, isn't it? The board of the church, the church that had called me as a pastor. I'm a fellowship pastor, actually, but no one would know that because I've never done anything here, but they've asked me to come as a pastor to help on their church planting team, and I'm trusting God to have me ready, and I presume He's making it so precarious because I know He wants to refine my life.

When do you think you'll be going back, if you go back? The end of the month. The end of September, and it's only awaiting this medical decision? Yes, that's right. Well, actually, it's one of the board members.

We all know there are risks, but this board member who's very influential in the church there is not sure that she wants to take this risk, so everybody else is talking to her, and they've got the answers she needs, and we're just waiting now for the final decision. Well, let's pray for her, Roland. Thank you.

Lord Jesus, you've just told us in your word, which is as up-to-date as tomorrow's newspaper, that you guide us in paths of righteousness. Lord Roland wants your righteousness in his life. He wants Christ to take over more and more, and Lord, we know that as long as our hearts are in that place where we're willing to accept your ruling, that you will be able to rule and send us in paths of righteousness.

So I pray now for the decision that must be made in Manila, for the decision that must be made ultimately by this board, and if Roland is to be there, Lord, pastoring that church in the Philippines, I pray that that will come through positive, and he'll be able to leave, and you'll supply his need as that is needed too. And then, Lord, if the answer is no, I pray that he may have spent so much time with you that he'll know that's the best decision of the shepherd because there was something in the field that he couldn't see. We leave it in your hands, and thank you that we can claim this beautiful line of Psalm 23 in the name of Jesus.

Amen. So let's have a look at the next passage. Yes, it is getting on.

All right. Well, let's quickly just look at the fourth verse, the last one. When I become a wonderful person because he's guided me, I say, wow, look what I did.

No. It's for his namesake. It's for his glory.

It's so that his character may be known more by people, that they may say, this must be a wonderful God. I think I told you before that some years ago, I was down at Campus Crusade in San Bernardino, California, and I was with Bill Bright in the morning, and it was an early morning, about 10 to eight, and he was coming in at my appointment. It was eight o'clock with him, and I was standing looking at these 100 board members, not board members, 100 staff members, the first 100 staff members of Campus Crusade a long time ago, and there they were down there, and I was looking at them, and you know, they're kind of ordinary people to me, and I thought, well, this organization seems certainly he's got good vision, and I looked, and then lo and behold, I found a hand on my shoulder.

There was Bill Bright, and he said, what are you looking at? Looking at those people? He said, they look quite ordinary, don't they? And I didn't like to say, how can you read my mind? He said, you know, I love taking ordinary people, even subordinary people, because when something happens in their lives, people say, hey, that can't have been them, that's got to have been God. They couldn't have done it on their own, it had to be God. So it's all for his namesake, and it's for his glory, and that's why I think God is in a wonderful way enriched and blessed Campus Crusade.

Amen, Ed Becker? Amen, I thought you'd say that. Okay, well, let's have a look at verse four, and we'll be through with this, all right? Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Just look at some of these marvelous words.

The King James actually has, yay, though I walk. How many of you got a King James in front of you tonight? You refuse to look at my sheep, don't you? All right, that's fine, but you can be useful still, you know. You can say, yes, it starts off with yay.

And as I remember, I said some months ago when I took a verse from Romans 8, I said, you know, yay and nay mean the same thing, because in Romans 8, 37, nay and all these things we are more than conquerors means the same as yay. Yay, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'll fear no evil. They both say, hey, get a load of this, fellas, it's true, it really is true.

But the NIV doesn't like the yays, they put even, that's fine. Even though, yay, yay, though I walk. Think of that marvelous word.

Though is a marvelous word, you know, if you read the most dreadful scenarios around and things that can happen. And if it didn't have the word though on the front and it said, I fell among a band of robbers. If it starts off with, though I fall among a band of robbers, it makes all the difference, doesn't it? Because you

just don't bother to read that part, you know that the part it ends with is the most important part, though.

I remember when I was a little boy, we used to wear, when we were about, oh, I guess seven or eight years of age, I always used to wear short pants then, you know, you couldn't wear long pants until you were fourteen. Isn't that right? I think it was about fourteen, that's right. So short pants, you know.

And I remember climbing over the shed in the back of our garden at the back and we had an old field at the back. People used to tip rubbish there, they didn't have things like, they never heard of the word environment in those days. And they tucked things there, but it was never cut.

They couldn't cut the grass and all cans and bottles and all that were there. And so we used to run through after we'd stolen apples from my father's orchard, you know, and we'd have them tucked up in our sweaters here and they'd jump, they'd fall down on the roof, the tin roof and roll down and we'd climb down the other side and run through the field. I couldn't stand it because it was full of stinging nettles and I would just go gently and all my friends would run on and I couldn't stand these stinging nettles, you know.

You need all this, all these blisters come, the stinging nettles around your ankles. So one day one of my friends said to me, what are you worried about? He said, notice that in England, in Britain, wherever you see stinging nettles, within two feet you'll find a dock leaf. And the dock leaf is a leaf like that and all you've got to do is to take the dock leaf and down the middle, I've got a feeling I told you this about two weeks ago, but anyway, here it is again.

I got, right down, he said, you just bend the dock leaf, just, no I didn't, I think I told them this in Peterborough two weeks ago, that's what it was. You bend the dock leaf and what happens is when you bend the dock leaf, break the stem, squeeze it and sap comes out and just like that wonderful two and a half percent hydrocortisone cream, you just rub it in that little blister and bingo, within about half a minute there's no more itching. It's anti-puritic and anti-inflammatory and it's marvellous stuff.

So now I would run into that field, I said, I couldn't care less about these stinging nettles because though I walk into a bunch of stinging nettles, there are plenty of dock leaves around. That's the idea that's here, but it's in much more serious form. For though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, and you don't worry about that because you're waiting to see what the end of the sentence is, for you are with me, you are with me, even though I walk, walk, walk through a valley like that, there's all kinds of danger around.

I used to walk home from Brynmill School in Swansea, up through Brynmill Park and Singleton Park when I was about eight or nine again. I remember Singleton, it was a long way from where I lived to my school, it was three miles, although now I notice when I do it in the car, it's only half a mile now, but it used to be three miles when I was in school and it was a long walk, you know, and I would go there and what was I saying before you? Oh yes, school, and I used to come up through this park, well Singleton Park was a dark, it used to have what we thought were weird, I mean, it's like Stonehenge, all those old stones, you know, they have in Britain, some of these places, the circle of the Druids and so on. Anyway, I walked through the woods, it was a long woods, again, it probably was no more than a few hundred yards, but again, it seemed like half a mile, and I used to come in these woods and particularly as the sun was dropping in the western sky there in the wintertime and I put my satchel, my school bag right up on my back and pull hold of these straps here so it wouldn't bob up and down, you know, like it used to, and I would start tearing off, I would tear through these woods and suddenly I'd trip over a root, I'd come flat on my face, oh, I think now he's going to get me, whoever he is, and I'd wait there and I'd listen, then I'd hear

a noise over there, a bird stepped on a twig, I'd know it was the bogeyman, you know, and I'd say, oh no, and I must get up again and run and run and run until I'd get out into the sunshine on the other side into the meadow that was wonderful, but this doesn't say even though I run in terror through the valley of the shadow of death, this doesn't say even though I turn back discouraged through the valley of the shadow of death, it doesn't say even though I stand still petrified in the valley of the shadow of death, it says, yea, even though I walk, walk, how can you walk through Singleton Park, walk, for thou art with me, you're holding my hand, you've beaten all this enemy, you beat him on the cross, he's completely stripped of his power to do any damage to you, and so he's with you right now, and that's what it says, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, but it says even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, when thou passest under the water, says the old King James in beautiful up-to-date language, when thou passest under the waters, I will be with thee, is that what it says? No.

When thou passest, or when you pass through the waters, I will be with you, for this valley is a wonderful valley, it's a difficult valley, it's a dark valley, but frankly this valley is a brief valley, it's just a parenthesis, you're not going to pitch a tent in this valley, you're going to walk through it, you're not going to settle there, it's not a place that you build a house on, you're just passing through it, and the valley of the shadow of death is like that, you pass through that, and how wonderful it is, I remember my father, he was a carpenter and builder, and I remember he used to lock up his workshop, sometime I'd be over in the workshop with him, and he had about a mile to go home there, and I remember he'd lock up the workshop, turn the lights out, all the tools would be on

the bench, he'd sort it all out, and he'd leave it and lock it up, I think he's left his place, but he's only got a short way to go home, and he arrives at his real home, and here I thought, this was his real place, it's just like a man who's a tradesman, and he's just locking up the place where he's been working in order to take a short trip and get home, or it's just like this valley of the shadow of death, like maybe a baby again in the womb that you were seeing, was it last week or two weeks ago, I don't know what it's like, I can't remember myself, although some people claim they can, but here is a baby in the womb, and thinking this is so comfortable here, this is so wonderful here, and can you believe, I get a sense that this is coming to an end, I can feel all these funny

movements inside here, and all these things that seem to be getting more frequent, I've got a feeling that this is going to come to an end, I'm not going to surely be put out of my home, but the baby has only got to pass through a narrow valley, mind you, only, it's all right for a man to say only, I mean that's pretty difficult isn't it, those days, those hours of labor, maybe minutes, sometimes a day or so, and it passed through that, when they pass through that, then what they realize, oh what I thought was a wonderful place, home, look at the brightness out here, look at the light out here, look at all the wonder, and the color, and the beauty, and everything else, I didn't get that in there, and I thought that was home, that's the same isn't it, as we go through the valley of the

shadow of death, we don't want to leave this place, but oh if only we would know, if only we could know, what he's got beyond us, far better, far better, this is only a little training ground for it, so you pass through, you pass through, but even though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me, incidentally, the other valleys in life may be some that you're going through tonight, the valley of the shadow of death is indeed a deep valley, a dark valley, but it's not as long as some of the others, as I said just now, maybe the valley you're going through right now, of not knowing what God's mind is on something Roland, or not knowing just what's going to happen with one of your children, that seems to be in trouble in their marriage, or

something that's happened in business, and you can see a reversal around the corner, something, maybe you don't know those things, you're going through a deep valley right now, the truths that are here, for the valley of the shadow of death, are true in every darkest deep valley, for that's what it means, and God wants us just to put these wonderful truths, because when I pass through the valley, wants us to put them into practice, I will fear no evil, what a marvellous declaration, oh sometimes I can say that, you know, and sometimes I'm, I almost whisper it, you know, we get these ups and downs sometimes in our lives, and if you think preachers don't go through that, then you ask Pastor Doug, you ask Roland, you ask, yeah that's right, because we do sometimes feel like that, and all

kinds of things get us down, they don't, usually it's because we've not been keeping close enough to the shepherd, or we haven't been hearing his voice today as much, because that perfect love casts out fear, but I will fear no evil, it doesn't exist, yes it does exist, don't stick your head in the sand and say it isn't there, but you can take all of the fog, so I remember hearing Earl Nightingale say about 40 years ago on the radio Southern Manitoba, and I was driving through there, he said you can take all the, all of the fog on 10 square city blocks, and you know you can contain all the moisture in that fog in one glass, one glass, in other words it looks much worse than it is, no, when he is with me, I need fear no evil, don't say it doesn't exist, we recognize it, we face the foe,

but we say I won't fear any evil, for thou art with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me, the main thing Lord, your rod and your staff wouldn't do much unless you were there, you are the one that wields those, but Lord you are with me and when you're there holding my hand I can assure you this Lord, I will not fear any evil because you can cope with any emergency that comes up, your rod and your staff, we were asking some folk at lunch today at meal, midday meal, some people think that the rod is one thing and the staff's the other, others take it the other way around, I notice even shepherds tell you when they write about the scriptures, Philip Keller looks at it one way and the Basque Shepherd, I told you readers digest, he's the other, some of them say that the rod is the tall

one like the shepherd's crook and the staff is the thing he's got around here, the club that he just makes sure that the enemy is taken care of, other people say no and I tend to go for this that this indeed is the rod and this is the one, the rod that is the defensive weapon and then of course the shepherd's crook is the staff you see that he would lean on and so on, but whatever it is they're both in actual fact instruments of discipline and it's strange to find that with instruments of discipline I'm going to get comforted, yet that's the way God does it but you see he takes one of them which is the defensive weapon and he takes the other one which is the guiding weapon and Keller says now you know there's nothing wrong in this again don't build a doctrine on it but frankly it's

possible that this is the way God as he takes his word on the one hand by which he defended himself and God's name against the evil one that came in the day of temptation in Matthew 4 and he takes the rod the staff on the other hand the shepherd's crook by which he guides us and he says this is like the word of God that we defend with and this one to guide us is like the spirit of God so whatever it is whether they mean that or not and probably they don't specifically mean anything just those are the things that he uses but how wonderful to let them remind us at least that God has his word and God has his spirit and by his word and his spirit he can guide us through those places and defend us well there's so much in these I haven't I'm not going to go into any more other than to say

you'll have to do the last two verses yourself because I won't force the sheep into that even though they may be sitting at my table tomorrow I won't force them into that even though as you know it can be a table

you prepare a table that can be looking after a field making sure there's no poisonous plants and so on in the presence of my enemies can be the wolf or the bear or whatever the lion again you anoint my head with oil can certainly be when the sheep comes back he's got some bruising on and you put ointment on his head just like he goes underneath the staff at night my cup overflows it can certainly be that he gives me plenty of everything in life I want and then goodness and love I'm not too sure those are the two sheepdogs but if you will insist on it I'll let you have it

goodness and and indeed as pastor Doug says he'd rather see the word mercy there your goodness and your loving kindness is the best isn't it will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the lord let me ask you I've only just overflowed a little bit from this psalm but there's so much more in it oh do you love it do you love this psalm do you know it by heart if you do whichever version you know close your eyes right now and even though we say different versions let's say it together close your eyes one two three let's go the lord is my shepherd I shall not want he makes me lie down in green pastures he leads me beside the quiet waters he restores my soul he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake 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 they comfort me you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies you anoint my head with oil my cup runs 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 learn it off in whatever version you've got you may have forgotten it maybe just came back now and as you do remember this shepherd wants to do the seven things we saw this morning he wants to lead you he wants to feed you he wants to protect you he wants to correct you allow him to he wants to search for you when you go astray he wants to heal you when you've been bruised and he wants to love you and commune with you this is our shepherd this is our great god and I don't know

about you but I couldn't do without him amen amen

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