

Psalm 23

Lesson 7

Even Though I Walk Through the Valley of the
Shadow of Death

Leader Guide

A Bible Study to Accompany
“A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23”
by Phillip Keller

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Lesson 7, Psalm 23, A Psalm of David

Even Though I Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. *Isaiah 41:10*

Prayers

Luther's Morning Prayer

Thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Psalm 23, The LORD Is My Shepherd

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ 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.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Discussion

In the Shepherd's View of Psalm 23, the valley is described as full of peril: predators, natural disasters, rocks, and storms, but the shepherd guides his sheep through the valley, watchful of the perils, because the valley is the best path to the green alpine pastures on top of the mountain.

Christians experience all manner of perils in life; no one is exempt. But believers are never alone. In our church, Stephen Ministers encourage and walk alongside people passing through the "valley of the shadow" who are experiencing suffering or grieving. "Walking the Mourner's Path" is a ministry helping people grieving the death of a loved one. Christ accompanies all believers during their perils through the presence of his Holy Spirit.

Why doesn't God remove the perils in our life? Some suffering and loss are unfathomable. But some perils strengthen and deepen our faith, give us confidence and assurance of the presence of the Spirit of Christ, and equip us to comfort and encourage others.

1. Reflect on times of crisis in your life. How did you experience God's presence and faithfulness?

2. Why would a shepherd move his sheep through the valley full of peril?

a. Moving toward what's ahead-

The shepherd moves his flock to green pastures and fresh water.

b. Moving away from what's behind-

The shepherd is moving his flock away from over-grazed land and water that is potentially polluted and carries disease and parasites.

3. In this parable, what is different about the shepherd's presence back at the sheep pens on the ranch versus going through the wilds in the valley?

The sheep are safe in their pens on the ranch, so the shepherd has some time off, but the shepherd remains constantly vigilant for danger while going through the valley and is constantly with his flock.

4. David refers to God as "He" in prior verses and as "you" in verse 4 and the following verses. How might this be significant and related to passing through the valley, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me"?

The language change is more familiar and personal in verse 4 and in the following verses. The more personal language may suggest David's relationship was made closer by the suffering and trials in the valley.

5. David knew danger and faced death. He fought lions and bears as a shepherd, faced Goliath with a sling and a few stones, and fought Philistine's armies. He fled from Saul and his son Absalom to live in the wilderness and among his enemies, the Philistines.

a. What is significant about David's phrase, he ***walked*** through the valley of the shadow of death.

We do not linger in the valley, but pass through it with God as our guide and shepherd. Sometimes the journey is slow, and suffering is great, and sometimes the journey is short, but it is always temporary.

b. What are the properties of a shadow?

Two things are needed to produce a shadow: light and an object that blocks some of the light. Add light in all directions, and the shadow disappears!

Christ is the light in our lives, but sometimes fear or sin can block his light from fully shining in our lives. The remedy – is more of Christ's light!

c. How is death like a shadow to a believer? See 1 Corinthians 15:54-58.

^{1Co 15:54} When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." ^{1Co 15:55} "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

^{1Co 15:56} The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

^{1Co 15:57} But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

^{1Co 15:58} Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

6. In the same way, David wrote that he would fear no evil in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, Jesus told his disciples on dozens of occasions not to fear. Why did the disciples need to be told so often they did not need to fear?

^{Mt 10:22} All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

^{Mt 10:23} When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

^{Mt 10:24} "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

^{Mt 10:25} It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household!

^{Mt 10:26} "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

^{Jn 20:19} On the evening of that first day of the week [the day of Jesus' resurrection], when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!"

^{Mt 28:9} Suddenly Jesus met them [the women at the tomb].^z "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him.

^{Mt 28:10} Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The disciples faced many dangers: hatred, persecution, and floggings. Eventually, all would be martyred. They feared the death of their Lord. They even feared Jesus' power and glory, just as Adam feared to be in the presence of God after his sin was revealed. They would face many dangers, and their fears were not unfounded.

7. We will all face the time when the valley of the shadow of death becomes the valley of death. As Jesus faced his death on the night before his arrest and crucifixion, he needed to comfort and console his disciples, who were overwhelmed by confusion, grief, and sorrow. As we read Jesus' words of assurance and consolation to his disciples in John 14-16, identify the promises and discuss their meaning.

Read John 14:1-4

Jn 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

Jn 14:2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

Jn 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Jn 14:4 You know the way to the place where I am going."

- 1) John 14:1-2, Promise 1 **Jesus will prepare a place for us in heaven**

- 2) John 14:3-4, Promise 2 **Jesus will return and take us to be with him - resurrection.**

Read John 14:10-14

Jn 14:10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

Jn 14:11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.

Jn 14:12 I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.

Jn 14:13 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.

Jn 14:14 You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

- 3) John 14:12-14, Promise 3 **Answered prayer to do good works**

Read John 14:15-19

Jn 14:15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

Jn 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—

Jn 14:17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

Jn 14:18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Jn 14:19 Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.

- 4) John 14:16, Promise 4 **the gift of the Holy Spirit**
- 5) John 14:18, Promise 5 **the promise of Jesus' return**
- 6) John 14:19, Promise 6 **the promise of Jesus' abiding presence**

Read John 14: 25-28

Jn 14:25 "All this I have spoken while still with you.

Jn 14:26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

Jn 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Jn 14:28 "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

Jn 14:29 I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.

- 7) John 14:26, Promise 7 **the Holy Spirit will teach and remind the disciples of Jesus teaching**
- 8) John 14:27, Promise 8 **the promise of peace**

Read John 15:26-16:4

Jn 15:26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me.

Jn 15:27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

Jn 16:1 "All this I have told you so that you will not go astray.

Jn 16:2 They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God.

Jn 16:3 They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me.

Jn 16:4 I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you. I did not tell you this at first because I was with you.

- 9) John 15:27-16:1, Promise 9 **to be Christ's witnesses, promise of mission.**
- 10) John 16:2-4, Promise 10 **there will be persecution**

Read John 16:12-16

Jn 16:12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.

Jn 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Jn 16:14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you.

Jn 16:15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

Jn 16:16 "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me."

11) John 16:13-14, Promise 11 **the spirit will guide us in truth**

12) John 16:16, Promise 12 **our walk through the shadow is short – "a little while"**

Read John 16:20-27

Jn 16:20 I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.

Jn 16:21 A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.

Jn 16:22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

Jn 16:23 In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Jn 16:24 Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

Jn 16:25 "Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father.

Jn 16:26 In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf.

Jn 16:27 No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

Jn 16:28 I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

13) John 16:20-22, Promise 13 **that grief will turn to joy**

14) John 16:23-24, Promise 14 **of answered prayer**

15) John 16:27, Promise 15 **God's love for you.**

8. Jesus gave his disciples 15 promises in a few short verses. Some assured them as they faced danger in life; others assured them of God's presence as they faced death.

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| a. A place is prepared in heaven | 9) Witness and mission |
| b. Resurrection and eternal life | 10) Persecution |
| c. Answered prayer for good works | 11) Spirit's guidance in truth |
| d. The gift of the Holy Spirit | 12) Suffering is only a little while |
| e. The promise of Jesus' return and resurrection | 13) Grief will turn to joy |
| f. Jesus' abiding presence | 14) Answered prayers |
| g. Holy Spirit will teach | 15) Assurance of God's love |
| h. Peace | |

Which of these do you find most meaningful in life?

Answered prayer for good works

The gift of the Holy Spirit

Jesus' abiding presence

Holy Spirit will teach

Peace

Witness and mission

Spirit's guidance in truth

Answered prayers

Assurance of God's love

Which of these would you find most meaningful as you face death?

A place is prepared in heaven

Resurrection and eternal life

The promise of Jesus' return and resurrection

Suffering is only a little while

Grief will turn to joy

Assurance of God's love

9. Some people face death with peace and assurance; others are filled with anger, guilt and regret about the broken relationships in their lives. Can you identify relationships in your life that need healing and restoration?

10. What is the main thing you want your family to know about your life?

Closing, The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.