

Praying the Psalms



June 20, 2023

Praying the Psalm against Fear – Psalm 23

Thankfully David spent time as a shepherd; he knew what it meant to be a good shepherd. He knew how dumb sheep were; how they could not survive without a shepherd. And thankfully he wrote this amazing psalm about shepherds and sheep which still speaks to us today. Psalm 23 was not the only time he wrote about God as Shepherd.

Psalm 28:9: Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever.

Psalm 80:1: Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock. You who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth. . .

Our purpose is to glean from David's Psalm how we today in our culture, in our lives, can learn to stand strong against fear.

Psalm 23:

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

What did David mean when he wrote "I lack nothing"?

2 Peter 1:3: His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

James 1:4: Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

David was harangued and hounded most of his life. He did not have an easy life—yet he said, "I lack nothing."

Jesus expanded even more on the role of a good shepherd and how he cares for his sheep:

John 10:1 – 9, 14 – 15, 27 – 30

"Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ²The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵But they will never follow a stranger;

in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

What does this passage teach you about Jesus as your Shepherd?

When you pray against fear, begin here:

Lord Jesus Christ, because you are my Good Shepherd, I lack nothing that I need. I choose to trust my Good Shepherd that he will meet this need, this fear I face.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³he refreshes my soul.

In his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller writes, "It is almost impossible for sheep to lie down unless certain requirements are met."

1. They must be free of all fear.
2. They must be free from friction with others.
3. They must be free from pests like flies or parasites.
4. They will not lie down until they are free from hunger.

David says that our Good Shepherd *makes* us lie down in green pastures.

Sheep are so easily panicked and when one startled sheep runs in fright, a dozen others will bolt with it in blind fear. It is the uncertain, the unknown, the unexpected that produces the greatest panic.

How often are you fearful of the unknown? How much time do you spend worrying in fear of what may happen? Are you often made fearful because someone else is fearful? And how helpless do you feel in the face of all your fears?

2 Timothy 1:7: For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Sheep require water and it is up to the shepherd to find water places for them. Often Jesus used water and thirst as analogies for our relationship with him:

Matthew 5:6: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

John 4:13 – 14: Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

John 7:37: On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink."

Like sheep, we need soul-restoration. That's step two in your prayer against fear:

Lord, I am the sheep of your pasture, and you know that I am worried and fearful about this situation. Please make me to lie down—please make me “be still and know that you are God.” Please restore my soul. I am thirsty, tired, and fearful. I come to you because I hunger and thirst for you.

With sheep there is the “butting order,” the order of dominance or status established within the group. It is generally an old domineering ewe that will be the boss. She maintains her position by butting and driving other ewes or lambs away from the favorite bedgrounds.



In Old and New Testament times, the nature of sheep was understood clearly.

Ezekiel 34:15 – 16: I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Ezekiel 34:20 – 22: “Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, ²²I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another.

There is continuous conflict and jealousy within the flock which causes tension, discontentment and restlessness. But whenever the Shepherd comes into view and they sense his presence, the sheep quickly forget their foolish rivalries and stop their fighting.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Isaiah 53:6: We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Jesus, your Good Shepherd, wants to show you the path to take and he will guide you on that path, but you must choose to follow and not get stuck in the ruts of your life—those worn-out paths you've been on too long. Remember what Jesus said about paths:

Matthew 7:13 – 14: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

So, as you pray Psalm 23, you don't pray for guidance—rather, *you claim the guidance* that has been promised you. When you're on the right path, God will protect you from all that is fearful. When you go your own way, you invite trouble.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Notice how David changes the form of the psalm in verse 4. In the first three verses, David refers to God as “he.”

- He makes me lie down...
- He leads me. . .
- He restores my soul. . .
- He guides me

Then in verses 4 and 5, David refers to God as “You”:

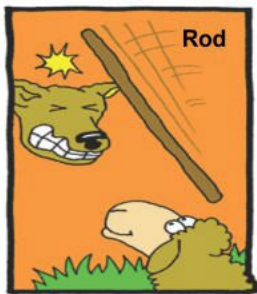
- I fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me
- You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies
- You anointed my head with oil. . .

There is a personal relationship here. When anyone asks you what is your religion, you might respond that you don't have a religion but you have a relationship with the Good Shepherd.

The green pastures are temporary. David says we walk *through* those dark valleys.

There are dark valleys to walk through but they are not “dead-end streets”!

If you are walking through some dark valley right now, are you walking in fear or are you learning to trust God in new ways?



The “Rod” is God’s Word in our lives. It protects us from our enemies and disciplines us when needed.

The “Staff” is God’s Spirit, guiding and rescuing us. Even when we are dealing with crises of our own doing, God’s staff still rescues us from all our troubles.

Psalm 32:7: You are my hiding place; *you will protect me* from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

Colossians 1:13: *For he has rescued us* from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

2 Timothy 4:18: *The Lord will rescue me* from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Your Good Shepherd goes ahead of you; he knows what you will face; he has prepared a table for you that is safe and is praying that you will not be tempted to go astray.

Luke 22:32: But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

Are you aware that Jesus is praying for you?

Romans 8:34: Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

What do you think Jesus is praying for you?

Jeremiah 6:16: This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”

As you pray Psalm 23, ask for the ancient path, the good way, and then walk in it. Your Shepherd has gone before you, he knows where the enemies lurk, and he is totally capable of protecting you. Claim his protection.

Psalms 91:3: Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence.

Song of Songs 2:15: Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.

Any “flies in your ointment” today? Any small, petty annoyances that tend to ruin your day, your attitude, and steal your joy? This is when you pray for an anointing of God’s oil, his Holy Spirit, to deal with those aggravating pests.

“Lord, you know I’m having trouble dealing with these little things—little things that are robbing me of joy, little foxes that hang around. Please apply the oil of your Spirit to my mind.”

And with the oil of the Spirit anointing you, you will overflow—with joy and peace.

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Romans 8:38 – 39: For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. In a world that has no idea what truth is, you have this truth, this promise: you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever, never separated from him and his love. Never!

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