

March 10: Live Like You're Dying Series
You Will Walk through the Valley: Be Comforted

King James Version of Psalm 23 on Screens

Intro: The Lord is my shepherd reminds me of Jacob's word, "the God who has been my Shepherd all my life to this day" (Genesis 48:15). King David, who kept the sheep as a boy, writes this beautiful description of his relationship with God. Let's recite this psalm together (KJV on screen).

My brother, Tom, and I hiked the bottom of the Grand Canyon (SLIDE) several years ago and spent the night. The Canyon is huge, and the bottom is 5,000 feet below the rim. Night comes early, and the shadows creep across your path before you know it.

The shadows start earlier and deepen faster in the valleys than they do on the mountains.

We do not walk through many valleys these days. We drive through them. But in the time of David they walked everywhere they went. They experienced the rugged terrain of their homeland in a very intimate way. And they knew about the shadows in the valleys. David is from the Jerusalem/Bethlehem area, and he is often associated with the Kidron Valley shown here (SLIDE).

The valleys have slopes or cliffs where predators or thieves can hide. That is the problem with road from Jericho to Jerusalem. It passes through the valleys that make good venues for robbery.

I. Keep Your Gait: "Yeah, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4).

A. This valley is on your life plan.

1. This valley is one that everyone travels
2. I can predict with certainty that you will go through this valley if you have not already.
3. This is a reference to dying. The word "walk" indicates that David knows the dying process may take some time as it often does. That means that family members and friends are going to be experiencing with the person who is dying this valley that all walk through.
4. Your personal death may be sudden or extended. In these days of medical technology and amazing life support you may find yourself taking a few more steps in this valley than your fathers.

B. You may find this valley unfamiliar. This valley is extremely deep. Sometimes it is very long.

1. Expect new experiences in this valley.
2. Expect your knowledge and faith to be challenged here.

C. Prepare for this valley as best you are able. Preparation does not mean that you will have no surprises. You will be surprised by events and experiences and feelings in this valley.

D. Maintain your steady gait as you walk through this valley. We do not freeze in our tracks as if we are afraid. Nor do we run as if we are afraid. We walk through this valley as we have walked through all the valleys and along all the ridges of life.

We do not saunter through this valley, as if we had no care in the world. That would be false of us for this is a difficult valley.

We do not stutter-step as if we are uncertain.

1. We have walked along the high ridges of life and its broad thoroughfares.
2. The very same faith that sustained us in the challenges and opportunities of life will sustain us here.

II. Keep Your Faith: "I will fear no evil" (Psalm 23:4)

A. Shadow. Don't let the poetry lull you to sleep. The shepherd boy is not writing here about beautiful sunrises or light on the water. Here we are visiting the place of shadows.

1. This seems a dark and difficult picture, and so it is. The shadow of death is there because death is there, and there is no denying that.
2. The shadow is cooler—a little chilly. You know how it feels when you are walking downtown and a shadow falls across the sidewalk. It sometimes brings a chill to you, and you want to get back out into the direct light of the sun.
3. Wherever there is a shadow, there is some light from somewhere. And that light is Christ.

B. Death. They say that no novel is successful unless it records a few deaths. Like all good movies and television shows, death is a part of art. And the poet, King David, often touches upon it.

C. Fear. **Hebrews 2:14-15: *Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*** (SLIDE of this).

1. Sometimes I hear people say, and I think myself, that I do not fear death so much as dying. I believe that King David is talking both about death and dying here. We are not to fear either the front porch of Heaven or the journey to it.

2. You know that place where you are in the morning between waking and sleeping, where you are not really conscious but your mind is active? Perhaps that is the place where we pass through in the dying process.

D. The Black and White effect happens in the valley of shadows. Instead of seeing the colors you see the extremes. You see the glory of God in the face of death, and you see the awful debilitation and decay as well. We vacillate between faith and doubt, between confidence and fear. This is a valley of extremes, and we make our journey through it internally—mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

III. Keep Your Friend: "...thou art with me; Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

A. This valley will leave its mark on you mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. You will remember the things you see and hear, and the things you learn. You will see in this valley what you do not and cannot see elsewhere.

B. YOU are with me. Here is a reference back to "MY SHEPHERD." He uses the personal "my."

***The songwriter said, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear."

C. This valley will require the ROD and the STAFF of the shepherd.

1. David remembers the rod with which he protected and corrected the sheep when he was a boy.

2. This is a reference to the CORRECTION and the PROTECTION of God in the Valley of Shadows. You must receive both of these in faith. You will find direction for your life in this valley, and you will find correction for your life as well.

D. The Shepherd will be ACTIVE not passive in this valley. He will be with you here more so than any other place in your life.

1. You only thought he was with you on the mountain when the world was yours.

2. Here in this valley you will cry out for his presence as if you are alone, and you will feel his arms around you as if you are being carried.

3. You will cry out for answers and explanations in this valley, but you will receive his presence rather than formulas or philosophy or specifics about your loved one or yourself.

4. Here you discover that God is all you need to walk through this valley.

E. Allow him to comfort you.

1. This word translated "comfort" is also used in describing what Joseph did for his brothers after the death of their father (Genesis 50:20-21). The brothers were afraid that Joseph would take vengeance on them for their behavior toward him. But Joseph gave them that amazing perspective: ***"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured (comforted) them and spoke kindly to them. (SLIDE of this)***

F. Walk through. This valley is not eternal. It does not last forever. You get through it. You keep your gait. You keep your faith. We are not stopping here in this valley of the shadow. We are walking through. Death is not the house to which we are going. It is only the front porch. The house itself is that mansion that Jesus has prepared for us.

Conclusion: The psalms in the Psalter are arranged deliberately into five books of songs. The psalms in each of the books are placed in order. And the order of Psalm 23 is instructive following as it does the poem which foreshadows the suffering of Our Lord.

Our Lord Jesus walked through the valleys. In fact, he walked through the Kidron Valley on the night he was betrayed. The Garden of Gethsemane was likely in this valley. It was for him the valley of the shadow of death that night. His journey is recorded prophetically in Psalm 22, the Psalm of the Cross. Here are the words that Jesus quoted on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1).

Knowing what our Good Shepherd did for us on the old rugged cross we can say with the psalmist, "The Lord is my shepherd." Now the richness and amazing grace of that statement is known in light of Calvary.