



## Sermon Title: Psalm 23 (Part 4) 'He is With Me'

### **IN Opportunities to connect and pray as a group**

1. What was your 'craziest' childhood fear?
2. Tell of a time when either you helped someone, or they helped you, in a time of trouble. What was the situation? How were you (or they) 'with them'?  
(Psalm 23:4)
3. Pastor Henry spoke about the surveys that show how people's fears have changed over the years. Public speaking used to be the #1 fear; now it is the fear of corrupt government officials. Fear of death used to be #4; now it is #48. Do these changes surprise you? Why / why not?  
What fears do your friends / family members talk about?

### **UP Time that is devoted to the Word of God**

1. Pastor Henry has encouraged everyone to memorize Psalm 23!  
See how far your group can say it out loud. (no peeking!)
2. How does a shepherd use the 'rod' and 'staff' to care for the sheep?  
How are these symbols a description of God's power, faithfulness, goodness and guidance for us?
3. Scenario: Your colleague at work has had a tragic death in her family. She is desperate to try to make sense of the crisis in her life. Knowing that you attend Centre Street Church, she talks to you about what has happened.

Using Psalm 23:4; John 16:33 and Romans 8:28, and applying Pastor Henry's sermon outline, what could you say to her about your perspective on her family crisis? (Reminder: do not be like one of Job's friends)

### **OUT Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community**

1. What 'fear' are you currently facing?  
What fear is someone you know currently facing?  
What reminder from this message has most encouraged you?
2. How can the Group pray for you?

***UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).***

(This week's writers: Edi Dygert, Sandi Somers, Thomas Attrell, Georgia Harrison.)

### **THE WORD (NIV)**

#### **Psalm 23**

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> 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.

#### **John 16:33**

<sup>33</sup> "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

#### **Romans 8:28**

<sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

#### **I Corinthians 13:12**

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.



In this passage of Psalm 23, David talks about dark valleys and our fear of walking through those valleys. Millions of people in our society are haunted by fear; and what we fear has changed greatly over the past years. Many of us remember a time long ago when we did not lock our doors and keys were left in the car ignition; when talking to a stranger was friendly courtesy and children played in neighbourhood parks for hours on end without parents checking on them. We believed the community was safe. Surveys at that time indicated public speaking was the majority's #1 fear – fear of death was #4 on the list. Other Top Ten fears included fear of flying and of heights, of bugs and the dark, of failure & intimacy, of rejection and commitment. But based on a recent survey fear of death has dropped to #48, and the #1 fear is “corrupt government officials.” Fears on the list are #8 global warming & climate change, #14 identity theft; including among others fear of pollution of air & water, terrorism, pandemics, collapse of the electrical grid and nuclear war. These fears are the topics of a multitude of news media headlines, relentlessly pushed at us on a daily, even minute-to-minute basis.

What is your greatest fear, what keeps you up at night? All of us struggle with fear – of relationships, health, finances, employment, or rejection, failure or inadequacy – an almost endless list. David, author of Psalm 23, was also well acquainted with fear. On two occasions he feared for his life, fleeing to the wilderness to escape and hide. And in those times David found an eternal friend, totally trustworthy, who loved him unconditionally and walked with him through the best and worst times of his life. In Psalm 23 he introduces us to this friend: the Lord, His Shepherd – all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present; a shepherd who rests, refreshes and restores and guides us along right paths for His Name's sake.

In v.4, David talks about the sense of security and safety that he receives from His Shepherd. David was a shepherd in his youth, often with his flocks 24/7 for weeks or months on end. Late Fall and Winter the shepherd kept the flock close to home, but by Spring the sheep had to be moved to new forage found at the higher elevations of the Judean wilderness. The shepherd led them up through the narrow and dark valleys. Not only was the footing uncertain, but predators were waiting to attack: bears, wolves or cougars. Sudden storms or flash floods also left the sheep vulnerable to injury or death by rock and mudslides. We also have dark valleys to walk through: of failure or slander, of rejection or broken relationships, financial loss or unemployment, of sickness and disease. We fear these valleys. We do not want to walk through these are valleys. In Psalm 23, David gives us three truths to help us - giving us God's perspective – as we walk through our valleys. The **first truth** is this: **valleys are a part of life**. David has walked through dark valleys; they are unavoidable. As mountaintop experiences are a part of life, so are dark valleys of hardship and disappointment. In John 16:33, Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble.” In this broken world, trouble is a certainty, not a possibility.

The **second truth** is this: **We can walk through the valley with or without God**. Some sheep just seem set on doing their thing at their peril, so too are people who reject God to take their lives into their own hands. Now their life does depend on them. They do not realize that rejecting God does not remove the dark valleys. It only means they will be on their own or, at best, with other finite humans. And in the darkest valley - death itself- they will be all alone. Only God can walk with us through that valley. They may make up a god that they want, assembled with attributes selected by them; made in their image: not the true God in whose image they are made. But reality always sets in. In the dark valley you realize the self-made god is able to protect, guide and encourage you as much as a toy teddy bear can. God does not force our will; He gives us the freedom to choose. Our other option is to go through the dark valleys with the Lord, Our Shepherd, where “I will fear no evil, for YOU (God) are with me”. The key to having the peace of God is trusting in God. The secret to trusting God is knowing Him. How did David come to know God so intimately? It was when God was walking through the valley with David. Here David experienced first-hand the power and faithfulness symbolized by ‘Your rod and Your staff’. The rod, a two-foot club of oak with a rounded head studded with metal bits, was used primarily to defend the flocks at close range from predators or danger. It could also be thrown near a sheep to stop it heading in a dangerous direction, urging it to safety. A thrown rod was deadly accurate, as was a slingshot. In his valley, David learned that His Shepherd, His Lord is more powerful than any evil, totally faithful and trustworthy: keeping His promises, fully aware of all that occurs, letting nothing touch him that He does not allow. By the shepherd's staff, David experienced the goodness and guidance of God. The staff, a slender pole with a crook at the end, was used primarily to guide the sheep with a gentle poke, or to help them up or out from where they were stuck. Just so is the staff symbolic of the Spirit of God who guides, helps, strengthens, and gently corrects us.

The **third truth** is that **God is with us in the valley**. Notice David writes that we walk **through** the valley – we don't stay there. Why then would a shepherd lead his sheep into a valley full of danger, even at risk to his own life? The only answer possible is: it is a path to take them to a better place. Like the shepherd for his sheep, so God is for us. God's perspective is that the valley is not the destination: a close friendship with Him is. Dark valleys make no sense to us, but we need to know that God's reasons for the dark valley are not meaningless, 1 Cor 13:12. His reasons are good and perfect. God has our best interests at heart. Out of great love, He is taking us to a better place in the high country; or in the spiritual realm, to a deeper and greater knowledge of, and friendship with, Him. The valley is not good - the Shepherd is good, He leads you through the valley. We need to know that not everything that happens is God's will. Not sin, not evil: we live in a broken world and bring many problems on ourselves. While God does not cause our problems, He will allow what was meant for evil to accomplish great good, Romans 8:28. David did not fear evil because he knew that, regardless of what happened in the valley, God was for him and His purposes were right and good.

God's promise is not happy endings in this world. He does promise us that He is with us in the valley; not to meet us on the other side. He's there to encourage, guide and lead, to be leaned on – He will do what we can't. David is comforted knowing that God is with him, and that God is in control. There is no peace greater than turning to the Lord and hearing His whispered Word: ‘I love you, I'm in control, I make no mistakes, My way is perfect, I am for you, you can trust Me never to leave you or forsake you.’

Here must something be re-emphasized from the first message in this series. There will be times when these words seem empty and hollow to us. The only thing that will keep you going is the “stubborn faith” that Job had. A stubborn faith that refuses to blame or run from God, chooses to lean into Him with your fears and needs, believes He is both a Sovereign God and a good God who is for us and can be trusted. Nothing else will work. This is the decision we must make: to go through the valley with Him, or to go through the valley without Him. There is nothing in between.