

Ps 23 (ESV) 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.

Ps 23:3b (ESV) He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

I. THE NECESSITY OF MOVEMENT

1. Sheep are creatures of habit

- A. Because of this – without intervention – they will continue to do things that destroy them
 - 1). They will follow the same trail until it becomes a rut
 - 2). They will graze on the same area until they destroy it
 - 3). They will so pollute the ground that it becomes filled with parasites and disease
- B. The Shepherd knowing this MUST plan meticulously in how to disrupt these natural habits
 - 1). Because if he doesn't – the sheep will destroy the pastures
And create an environment that will eventually lead to sickness

2. The solution: Keep the sheep on the move

- A. To avoid overgrazing that destroys the land he constantly moves them to new pastures
- B. This also stops the sheep from getting sick from the parasites that are left in their waste
 - 1). The sheep are moved before the parasites hatch – by the time they come back they have died

Point: So every couple of days they are moved to a new pasture

- A. The shepherd is very intentional in his planning – he knows exactly where the next pasture is
 - 1). He has already been there – examined it to make sure it will provide all the sheep's needs

3. When the sheep arrive in these new pastures they get all excited

- A. Even the older ewes will kick up their heels with delight
The flock loves being lead onto fresh ground

Transition: But this is about human sheep – how does it relate to us

II. HUMAN SHEEP AND SHEEP SHEEP ARE VERY MUCH ALIKE

1. Like the sheep we are creatures of habit aren't we

- A. We have this dangerous tendency to follow our own ways even when deep down we know those ways are destructive
 - 1). From habits necessary for physical health – to habits necessary for spiritual health
 - a). We are able to convince ourselves that we can neglect these with no serious repercussions
And that the ways we have chosen are actually fine

Pr 14:12 (ESV) There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

Point: We cling to our ways – we cling to our self-made comfort zones

Neglecting those necessary disciplines that will move us ahead spiritually

- A. What happens to us is similar to what happens to those sheep who stay too long in a pasture
 - 1). We start to stagnate as believers - we start to get sick spiritually
- B. Our shepherd must do all He can to move us – to get us going again

Thought: Let's look at some of the attitudes that are necessary for us to be able to be moved

- A. Some here may have stagnated spiritually – you haven't really grown in awhile
 - 1). That is a very dangerous state spiritually – to not be moving forward is to be going backwards

Like I've said many times – you can only coast downhill

- B. Sheep who are not moving are grazing spiritually on overgrazed land - barren
 - 1). They are not allowing themselves to be challenged
 - 2). All the time the shepherd wants to move you to those lush pastures of satisfaction

Transition: So let's look at some attitudes that will help us to be moved

- A. We know the Shepherd is always wanting to move us forward – *stagnation is deadly*
 - 1). So what is our part – the proper attitude

II. NECESSARY ATTITUDE TO BE A SHEEP ON THE MOVE

1. Be willing to be moved into a life with more service in it

Be like Christ: Phil 2:3-7 (NIV) Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. (4) Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (5) **(Here's the command)** *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:* (6) Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, (7) but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...

- A. See what He is like – then the Bible says to emulate that in your own life
- B. As He put the Father first – we put Him first – as He put others ahead of Him we do the same
 - 1). This will guard your heart from that self-centered life that is so shriveled up and joyless

Thomas Merton: “To consider persons and events and situations only in the light of their effect upon myself is to live on the doorstep of hell”

 - a). That is the lifestyle of the devil – ME FIRST
 - b). Jesus came and set the example – I will care about others – I came as a servant
 - 1a). That is the lifestyle of heaven and the lifestyle of spiritual health
- C. What happens when a body of water only has an inlet – no outlet – it stagnates – rancid - useless
 - 1). That's what happens when a person only comes and hears a message never applying it

They become spiritually sick

Point: The solution – create an outlet of service - so that the water is moving – stays fresh

- A. You have this constant flow – receiving spiritually – giving out in serving the church and others
 - 1). That will move you out of that old polluted pasture of self
- B. It brings us into a pasture where joy is discovered

JOY. J = Jesus O = Others Y = You

 - 1). Get those right priorities and you'll find God filling you with joy
 - 2). Keep yourself in the middle of everything – Number 1 = God won't bless that

Again. Here is the life God blesses: Phil 2:5-7 (NIV) *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:* (6) Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, (7) but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...
 - 3). The result of this life of obedience

Phil 2:9 (NIV) Therefore God exalted him...
- C. Didn't Jesus say it is the same way for us

Mk 10:42–45 (ESV) And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁽⁴³⁾ But it shall not be so among you. *But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁽⁴⁴⁾ and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁽⁴⁵⁾ For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”

 - 1). Those who God lifts up are those who stoop down in service
 - a). They reject that hellish lifestyle characterized by selfishness
 - b). They desire to live like Christ and God blesses that

- 2). Therefore they don't stagnate – they don't get sick – they have an inlet of God's Word etc.
 - a). They have an outlet through service – putting into practice what they are learning
 - b). Their Christian life stays fresh – alive – vibrant - blessed

Summary: Move out of those polluted pastures of self – into those lush pastures of service

A. Serve where? Start in the church you attend

Eph 4:11-16 (NIV) It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (12) to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (13) until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (14) Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. (15) Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. (16) From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, *as each part does its work.*

- 1). Every member who can – I know there are extenuating circumstances – health etc.
But every member is called to do their part in the local church
- 2). Church is not to be a spectator sport
 - a). Like an NFL game – 22 people on the field in desperate need of rest
80,000 people in the stands in desperate need of exercise
 - b). Church can be like that – a few carrying the load rather than all involved

B. I have found that serving in church is always such a great source of joy – every Sunday morning
“Thank you Lord that I get to do this. Set up your church with my brothers and sisters”

- 1). Something that simple brings joy now – great rewards later for those who faithfully do it

Thought: Let's talk about serving in evangelism quickly

A. This is putting Jesus first – evangelism honors Him by declaring what He has done

This is putting others second – we evangelize because we love them – care about them

B. I have discovered that this leads to great joy

- 1). God does something in the heart of those who evangelize – it becomes a bit addictive
You sense His touch upon your life – it increases your prayer life and hunger for the Word
- 2). It is another opportunity to put the flesh in its place – so important to take advantage of that
 - a). I have to put my flesh to death every Friday night – as it dies the Spirit soars

Objection: But I don't think I'm called to street witnessing – FINE! But you are called to evangelize

A. The great commission to make disciples in all nations is a command to all of us

- 1). You can start by leaving tracts – gas stations – gym etc.
By praying for those who are going out
 - a). E.E. each team going out has a team back in camp praying for them
- 2). You may want to go out and pray with the group – don't have to say anything

B. Just get those wheels turning – kick it into gear somehow – time is short – this is urgent = leads to joy

Transition: So your shepherd wants to move you out of the pasture of “self” where spiritual sickness thrives

A. Be willing to allow Him to move you – “What would you have me do?”

- 1). He won't give you more than you can bear – He will give you what will bring life

2. We must be willing to stand alone if we want to be free from stagnation

A. God will call us to do things others won't agree with

- 1). Especially if it is risky – the “comfort zoners” will shout out “No!”

B. I think of Gideon – called by God to lead Israel's armies against the Midianites

- 1). Gideon is called – that call has been confirmed – so he is ready to go

- 2). Midian has an army of 135,000 – so Gideon puts out the call to Israel
 “God has called me to fight against Midian – so we can be free – come join me”
 - a). The most he can muster is 32,000 men to go up against their 135,000
 - 3). Watch how God leads this man – in ways he must stand alone – nobody would agree with this
Jdg 7:1–3 (ESV) Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. ⁽²⁾ The LORD said to Gideon, “The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, ‘My own hand has saved me.’ ⁽³⁾ Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, ‘Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.’ ” Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained.
 - a). When God moves – He moves us out of the way – He does it in a way we can’t boast!
 - b). Think of Gideon. “Really Lord! Too many! We’re already outnumber almost 5-to-1!”
 - c). But he does what no advisor would agree with – something ALL would think is foolish
 - 1a). He gives his men the opportunity to go home
 10,000 say “Right on! Pack up their bags and go home.”
 - d). Can you imagine the men who are left – what they are thinking
 “Hey Gideon. Great job of leading. Now it’s 10,000 against 135,000. Well done!”
 - 4). But God is not done yet – from man’s perspective it gets worse
Judg 7:4-6 (NIV) But the LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, 'This one shall go with you,' he shall go; but if I say, 'This one shall not go with you,' he shall not go." ⁽⁵⁾ So Gideon took the men down to the water. There the LORD told him, "Separate those who lap the water with their tongues like a dog from those who kneel down to drink." ⁽⁶⁾ Three hundred men lapped with their hands to their mouths. All the rest got down on their knees to drink.
 - a). Again – this is standing alone isn’t it
 “Lord did you hear what they said about that last reduction. I’m not sure they can take me doing this again to them. But I will follow you.”
 - b). It’s not always easy is it? But God knows what He is doing
Armin Gesswein: When God is about to do something great, he starts with a difficulty.
When he is about to do something truly magnificent, he starts with an impossibility
 - 1a). Why? Because that is where He gets the glory!
 - 5). The result.
 - a). God gives Midian into the hands of Gideon and his 300 men – a complete route
- Thought:** Here’s what I want you to see – what all this did for Gideon – who was willing to listen
- A. God moved him out of the rut – that stagnant pasture he was dwelling in – spiritual sickness
 - 1). When God called Gideon in Judges 6 he was thrashing wheat in a wine press
 Hiding from the Midianites in terror
 - B. When the angel says to Him “God is with you mighty warrior” – He wasn’t excited at all
 His reply. “God! Where is God! If God was with me why am I threshing wheat in a wine press? Why am I living in terror? Where is the God my father’s spoke of?”
 - 1). He hadn’t known the touch of God in years – God wasn’t alive in his life at all
 - a). He was depressed, discouraged, overwhelmed – spiritually sick – in a spiritual rut
 - 2). So the good shepherd must move him out of that pasture of stagnation
 - a). He calls him to do something risky – even if nobody else agreed with it
 - C. In Judges 7 we find him a completely changed man – spiritually alive – worshipping God
 - 1). He experienced spiritual revival in his own life – God used him to affect others spiritually

Point: Talk about being moved out of the comfort zone

- A. Talk about taking a risk
- B. Talk about being worth it – from terrified little man to mighty warrior
 - 1). From spiritual deadness “Where is God!” To spiritual life – worshipping Him
 - 2). From spiritual uselessness – to leading a nation to revival!

Transition: But that brings us to the next point – why we might not to take risks

- A. We don’t want to take risks because we’re so afraid of failing
 - 1). Idol of success – and idol of reputation - What will others think about me if I fail?

3. To be free from stagnation you can’t be afraid of failure

- A. The comfort zone is just trying to maintain ground – hunker down – take no chances – no risks
 - 1). The devil REALLY wants us to live like that – every time I’ve attempted anything new for God I hear that hiss. “But what if it fails? What will people think”
 - a). What if you go out and play basketball with these young guys and embarrass yourself!
 - 1a). He wants to shut that evangelistic opportunity down – pray for me
 - b). Fear of man - Something we must overcome to accomplish anything spiritually

Proper thinking: **If it fails – so what!** You re-group and try again.

- A. Is failure really the big thing – NO!
 - 1). The thing to be frightened of is to never try anything significant – that’s what’s scary
 - a). To choose the comfort zone when there is so much left to do spiritually
 - b). To focus only on the temporal when God wants us to have an impact on the eternal
 - 1a). To live in indifference and apathy when God has commanded us
To be zealous about good works in His kingdom
- B. To coast while time is running out
 - 1). To be silent when we are surrounded by those going to hell
 - 2). To choose the comfort zone where passion dies and apathy is birthed
Rather than stepping onto the front line and finishing well – **that is scary!**
 - 3). To coast into heaven when God says “Agonize, strive towards the finish line” = scary
- C. To mess about with the trivial and neglect the important surrounding us – scares me
Leonard Ravenhill: “Many of us are hunting mice - while lions devour the land.”

Point: To make an impact for God you cannot worry about failure

- A. We must see what heaven considers success to be
 - 1). It is simply obeying God! Doing what He tells you to and leaving the results up to Him
 - 2). Jeremiah ministered for years never saw one convert – was he a failure – No!
 - a). He did what God told him to do – entered heaven a success
Rewarded greatly for his faithfulness
- B. Who’s more successful the Pastor of a big church or a small church – all depends
 - 1). You can build a big church off of worldly techniques
 - a). Taking off the pure garments of Christ’s bride and clothing her with worldly
Just to use her as bait to attract the flesh
 - 1a). You may fill up a church that way – it will be interesting what God says about it
 - 2). The MAIN thing – are you obedient to Christ? Following Him?
- C. AND Many times what He calls you to looks like failure at first
 - 1). Why? To make you depend upon Him – to drive out all independence
 - a). 32,000 men must be reduced to 300 or you’ll think you’re doing it
300 against 135,000 – God says those odds are just about right!

- 2). We love those things that are sure – “Can’t fail – no brainers”
 - a). God loves things that look like they can’t succeed – that force us to trust Him
Again: Armin Gesswein: When God is about to do something great, he starts with a difficulty. *When he is about to do something truly magnificent, he starts with an impossibility.*
 - b). He likes to lead us up to situations like the Children of Israel coming out of Egypt
 - 1a). Red sea in front of them – mountains to left and right – Pharaoh behind
 - 2a). Man – impossible! God – perfect! I have them where they must depend upon me
Now watch – believe and see my glory

D. Interesting study: Go through the Scriptures and watch men step out into certain failure
Except for one thing – God stepped out with them!

- 1). What they accomplished changed them and the world around them
 - a). Because they did things that depended upon God – things they couldn’t boast in

Transition: That brings us to the last point in what to think about so you’re easily moved
So you don’t stagnate

4. Learn to view everything through a Biblical lens

- A. It’s so easy to find fault with everything life throws at us – constantly stealing our joy
 - 1). I hear so many Christians complaining about getting older – why?
 - a). You’re also closer to glory AND
If you’re doing this thing correctly – you’re actually getting stronger where it really counts
2 Co 4:16 (ESV) So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, *our inner self is being renewed day by day.*
 - 1a). Ps 84:7 “They go from strength to strength”
 - b). I met a guy playing basketball – Kaiser doctor – “Oh yeah, I have Kaiser”
“What plan? Senior Advantage?”
 - 1a). I thought “Ouch” then immediately – that’s fine! The finish line is coming!
I can’t jump as high – run as fast – but I’m going from strength to strength
 - 2a). This world’s not my home I’m just passing through – just a pilgrim
My citizenship – my roots are sunk down somewhere else that is much nicer
Somewhere so glorious it makes the best this world has to offer look like a ghetto
 - 3a). I am getting older – the finish line is getting closer – coming into clearer view!

Thought: What that does is keeps my head up – keeps me pressing towards Him – not stagnating

- 1). That is what is important – don’t worry so much about the rest – *“Finish well Bill”*
- B. That helps me take the risks – not worrying about failure
 - 1). Remember what Biblical success is – simply following God – just do what He says
 - 2). So many Pastors are always so depressed – not as big as the other guy
 - a). But are you doing what God has told you to do? That’s the question
John MacArthur “You take care of the depth of your ministry – let God worry about the breadth.”
 - 1a). The breadth is up to Him – you take care of living for Him personally = success

Transition: Brothers and sisters - we really want to be moved onto these paths of righteousness

- A. Resting in what our shepherd has planned for us – whatever that is
 - 1). Some will own a home – some won’t
Some will be married – some won’t
Some will be healthy all their life – some will struggle

Some will have huge ministries – some won't

- a). My paths aren't the same as yours – but as long as they come from Him – fine
I must learn to trust where the shepherd leads – if I don't I'll never rest

B. Brings us to the last thought

III. PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAMES SAKE

Ps 23:3 (ESV) He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness *for his name's sake*.

1. We need to come to a place where we see what paths lead to blessing

A. They are the same exact paths that lead to His glory

- 1). His glory – our blessings = same path

B. So the more you take seriously the command

1 Co 10:31 (ESV) So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

- 1). The more joy you'll have

2. These paths lead to greater and greater righteousness – NEVER towards sin

Pr 4:18 (ESV) But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.

A. Anything that justifies something that is contrary to God's clear word is a wrong path

CONCLUSION

1. Stagnation is deadly for spiritual health

A. Our great shepherd wants to keep us moving – growing – experiencing Him

- 1). But we must allow Him to do what is necessary for us to move

We must trust His will above our own – care more about what He thinks than man

2. Where do we start? Start by going to Him and saying we want to start

A. Ask Him by His grace to move your heart like this – tell Him you want – that you desire this

Depend upon Him to help you depend upon Him to begin to guide you

- 1). Onto paths that bring Him glory and bring a renewed spiritual life to you

B. Have the courage to just ask “What would you have me do?”

- 1). Don't be afraid of that! Your shepherd has plotted out your journey

a). It leads to Him – it leads to blessing – Leads to success in God's eyes – eternal rewards

- 2). Paths of your own choosing lead to frustrations – dead ends – spiritual barrenness

a). Be afraid of those paths