

**Ps 23 (ESV)** The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>(2)</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. <sup>(3)</sup> He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>(4)</sup> 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. <sup>(5)</sup> 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 goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

**Ps 23:4 (ESV)** 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.

## 1. David is speaking from experience of being a shepherd

- A. Saw last week for sheep to stay healthy they have to be moved regularly to new pastures
- B. Also the time of year dictated the movement of the flock
  - 1). In the winter the sheep were kept in lower elevations where it was warmer
  - 2). But as it got hotter in the summer months the grass in the lower elevations would dry up  
So they'd move to higher elevations where it was cooler and the grass still lush
  - 3). When winter was approaching - it started to get colder they would head back down again
- C. Moving these sheep to higher grounds could be very dangerous
  - 1). In the mountains in Israel this would mean traveling through dark and gloomy valleys
    - a). Along the side of the paths would be caverns and caves with predators  
That could dart out and grab a sheep very quickly
    - b). Plus at points there would be steep drop offs a sheep could tumble down to its death
  - 2). Therefore the shepherd had to be constantly aware – constantly present to assure success

**Thought:** The shepherd would never choose these paths unless there was great benefit in doing so

- A. These paths lead to pastures where the sheep would thrive

## 2. What is the “valley of the shadow of death” for the believer?

### **The Passage From this Life to the Next**

- A. Because of Christ the believer is *comforted* in the valley of death – as that time draws near
  - 1). We realize that death is not the end of anything – it is where life really takes off
  - 2). Because of Christ when we close our eyes here for the last time we open them in glory
    - a). How do I know that? Scripture tells me that Christ has defeated the death and the grave  
That there is therefore no condemnation for me because I'm in Him
    - b). My shepherd has done all that is necessary to protect me from this last enemy - death
- B. The grave is not going to take me into hell – it is going to take me to Christ – my Shepherd

**Now watch what Christ is going to do: Jud 24 (ESV)** Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to *present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,*

- 1). He's going to present me to the Father – blameless – clothed in His righteousness  
And there is going to be great joy – Jesus, the Father and I = great joy! Amen!
- 2). Because of that truth the author to Hebrews says that Christ has removed the fear of death

**Transition:** So this would certainly include that time of physical death

- A. We fear no evil because Satan – death – the grave and hell have been conquered by our shepherd
  - 1). He has protected us from these predators
- B. But this is more than just the last stage of life
  - 1). This valley will also be a regular part of the believer's life on their journey to glory
  - 2). Our walk seems to have a rhythm to it – peaks then valleys then peaks and valleys again

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### **The Believer's Walk Will Regularly Lead into Valleys**

- A. Just as the sheep could expect to be lead into these valleys at least twice a year

- 1). In summer going up to higher ground – as winter approached coming back down
- B. It is the same for us isn't it? We can expect to be regularly lead into the valley by our good shepherd

**Question:** What does it mean by valley?

- A. It would be times of trial. Pain. Suffering. Struggle. Loss.

- 1). Those times we would be tempted to be frightened – to panic in

**Question:** But why would a good shepherd lead us into valleys like that (quick reminder)

- A. You should know the answer by now – it is necessary for our growth

- 1). Without these valleys we will live our life out in the lowlands - a shallow, mediocre life

- 2). None of us want to be stuck there – grazing on dried up spiritual grass – barely sustained

- a). Not when God wants to lead us higher – to lush pastures – closer to Him

- B. This verse tells us that path of spiritual elevation must go through valleys

“But God can't you just helicopter me up? Is there one of those trams? A ski lift?”

- 1). There isn't. The only path up at times seems like it is going down

- a). Things happen in the valleys that don't happen anywhere else and we grow

**Transition:** There are at least 4 things that happen in the valley for the believer – let's look at those

## II. THE BELIEVER IN THE VALLEY

### 1. The valley is the only way up to higher ground (already saw this)

- A. Those disappointments, frustrations, discouragements, those dark and difficult days

- 1). This is what teaches us to depend upon God

Here is where we see how faithful He is – Here is where our confidence in Him grows

- a). Confidence grows when we are forced to trust Him

And we see Him coming through again and again

- b). This happens in the valleys – when things are difficult

### 2. We find refreshment in the valley

- A. These valleys leading to higher ground usually had a river running in them

- 1). Cool, refreshing water from the snow melting on higher ground

- B. Haven't you discovered in the valley can be wonderful times of refreshment

- 1). As the trouble pushes you to Him – and causes you to pour your heart out to Him

He comes to comfort us – whisper His promises – that intimacy deepens

- C. Those treks up the mountain were intimate times between the shepherd and the sheep

- 1). The sheep were separated from the other flocks – they were alone with their shepherd

He would be constantly with them – sleeping with them – eating – walking with them

- 2). The valley enhanced the intimacy between shepherd and sheep

**Point:** It can be the same with us – trials drive us to our shepherd and can become times of special intimacy

- A. We'll see more on this intimacy as we move on

### 3. The valley equips us to comfort others

- A. Those who have been through dark valleys have been equipped to help others in their valley times

- 1). It is so easy to give trite answers to others – kind of by rote

But somebody who has suffered in the same way doesn't do that – they empathize

- a). They come alongside – they listen and enter into the others pain

- B. Just as cool, refreshing waters ran in the channel of those valleys

- 1). In the same way the refreshing life of God runs through us out to others

- In those channels that have been cut into our lives through our times in the valley
- 2). This is the way it has always worked and it seems the more He's going to use a person  
The more time they must spend in the valleys

#### 4. The growth in the valleys helps to inspire others

- A. When those lessons in the valley increase our faith – our maturity – our Christlikeness  
Our lives will begin to affect others – our lives will begin to have an eternal impact
- B. The younger Christian will be comforted as they see how you have persevered in trial
  - 1). To a younger Christian – every trial seems like the ONE doesn't it – I'm through!
  - 2). But when they see your peace, joy, triumph in your valley they are given hope
    - a). Nothing like the calm assurance of a veteran of the war to calm new recruits
    - b). They see our confidence in God's care and provision when life gets rough  
And they learn by example how to walk by faith

**Thought:** I love this thought of how discipling works in a church – naturally is happening all the time

- A. I think one of the most powerful things a pastor can do is just walk with Christ – fall in love with Him
  - 1). Have faith in Him – confidence in Him – be excited about Him
  - 2). That will spread – trickle down theology
- B. It is the same with all of us - Those young in the faith look to those who are older in the faith  
And they learn how to walk with the Lord – how to trust Him – How to have joy in tough times
  - 1). I think those who have been walking with the Lord for a while need to understand this dynamic  
You are being watched – take advantage of that

**Transition:** So that is the sheep in the valley

- A. Now David goes on to talk about why we should have courage  
and how our shepherd gives us confidence in those valley times

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**Ps 23:4 (ESV)** 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.*

#### 1. So the shepherd takes the sheep up the mountain in summer Brings them back down to the lowlands when winter begins

- A. These treks were very treacherous and very dangerous but absolutely essential for their health
- B. The shepherd would pack very lightly – taking only what is necessary for this trip
  - 1). He'd usually carry only a little knapsack with some necessities  
And he would ALWAYS have his rod and staff

**Transition:** David points out how important this was

- A. The sheep fear no evil because the Shepherd is with them = His presence  
And he carried this rod and staff and the way he used these gave the sheep comfort
- B. Early on we looked at how the presence of the shepherd calmed the sheep
  - 1). How they are afraid of everything – panic – rush off in a stampede  
But if they can just see him they will remain calm
- C. So rather than re-tracing all that – download the message – let's go to the Rod and staff

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## II. THE SHEPHERD'S ROD

### 1. The Rod described:

- A. It was a shorter piece of wood that was actually a club – one end shaped to fit the hand
- B. The shepherd used this for many purposes in caring for the sheep

- 1). To comfort and correct – to examine and defend

**Question:** Since this is speaking of human sheep – what would this rod be in context to us?

## 2. The rod is the word of God

- A. How do I get that? David said the “Rod of the Shepherd” comforted the sheep in the valley

He says the same thing about the Word of God for spiritual sheep

**Ps 119:49–50 (ESV)** Remember your word to your servant, in which you have made me hope. <sup>(50)</sup> *This is my comfort in my affliction*, that your promise gives me life.

- 1). Your word is my comfort when I’m in the valley

**Transition:** So let’s look at what the Word does for us – already hinted at the first one

### The Word Comforts us

- A. How comforting to have His Word when life can be so uncertain – all those promises!

- 1). Want to hear a bad Monday – Colonoscopy (find something biopsy for cancer)  
Then come home – check email – landlord is moving back in – be out by August 1
- 2). These situations give us an opportunity to see if we’re growing
  - a). I remember when this would have floored me – entering into a valley like this
  - b). It did hit me hard – for a moment – but immediately the Word started to comfort – promises
    - 1a). I think that is how we grow – bad news still startles us – momentarily shakes us  
But we recover more quickly – what took days becomes hours – becomes minutes
- 3). What comforted me? The Word of God – the promises – the truth  
“I have a shepherd who is responsible to take care of me”  
**Psa 24:1 (NIV)** The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;
  - a). So Lord every house, every condo, every apartment is yours!  
He is my Father/Shepherd He already has one of His residency’s waiting for us  
**Ex 23:20 (ESV)** “Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. (**Thanks Lord. Can’t wait to see where it is**)
- 4). What a blessing to live our life with this book guiding us and comforting us
  - a). I thought it was interesting – just taught on being willing to move to different pastures  
Didn’t think we would have to apply it so quickly!
    - 1a). Pray for us – if you know anybody renting something let us know

- C. Everything we experience is Father filtered – all orchestrated for my good in the end!

The Word comforts us

### The Word Corrects Us

- A. The Shepherd uses the rod to correct a sheep who was wandering away from the flock into danger
  - 1). They were experts with the rod – spent hours practicing to throw it accurately
  - 2). They would let it fly – smack the sheep – it would scurry back to the flock
- B. What did David say  
**Ps 119:11 (ESV)** I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.
  - 1). Just as the shepherd would throw that rod and correct the wandering sheep
  - 2). The Spirit takes the Word and skillfully applies it when we start to wander
    - a). We’re contemplating sin and a scripture comes to mind to stop us
  - 3). We start moving towards something dangerous – a path that looks good but is not
    - a). A scripture comes to mind that causes us to step back – pray more – we are corrected

**Thought:** How comforting to know this powerful book is in the skillful hands of our shepherd

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- A. That He will use this in our lives to keep us from sin and protect us from danger
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### The Word Examines Us

- A. The shepherd would use the rod to examine the sheep – referred to as “passing under the rod”
- B. Regularly as the sheep would come out of the pen – and pass through the gate
- 1). The shepherd would stop them and examine them individually and carefully
  - 2). He would use the rod to part the fleece  
Looking for any signs of infection – disease under the wool
- C. The examination was comforting because it caught things early before they became big problems

**Thought:** David certainly knew the benefit of this

**Ps 139:23–24 (ESV)** Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! <sup>(24)</sup> And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

- A. David was placing Himself under the Shepherd’s rod
- 1). Lord search me carefully – find the beginning of sin before it sinks those roots deep into my heart
- B. How important it is to expose our hearts to the Word to be examined
- 1). We saw this before but – you want to see those sins at early beginnings when easy to remove
    - a). Allow sin to sink roots and those roots can spread into the whole of your life
    - b). Then dealing with that sin becomes a major pain – you’re taking care of it at so many levels
      - 1a). Trying to pull those roots out of so many areas of your life it has affected
- C. Some Christians are afraid of this process – but hasn’t God proved His love for you?
- 1). Don’t you have a history with Him that proves that you can trust Him?
  - 2). If you ever doubt His love for you just look at the cross
  - 3). I think a lot of times we’re afraid because we really don’t want to go His way
    - a). That is something that all of us need to deal with
    - b). Pray for grace to surrender – you’ll need His help in this
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So the Word Comforts us – Corrects us – Examines us

### The Word Defends Us

- A. The skilled shepherd used the rod like a club to drive off predators
- 1). Remember when David told Saul how he used the shepherd’s rod to drive off lions from the flock
- B. Scripture tells us the Word does the same thing
- 1). We have a roaring lion seeking to devour us  
**1 Pe 5:8 (ESV)** Be sober-minded; be watchful. *Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*  
a). You are being stalked! By a powerful, clever, subtle enemy that wants to destroy you

**Transition:** Turn to Ephesians 6:12 to see how Paul puts this

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**Eph 6:12 (ESV)** For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

- A. Peter calls Satan a roaring lion who is seeking to devour us
- 1). Warns us to take this seriously – be sober-minded – watchful – don’t let your guard down
- B. Paul says we wrestle against these demonic forces who are out to destroy us
- Next verse: Eph 6:13 (ESV)** Therefore (since that is true) take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.
- 1). This is serious – if that is true you MUST take up the whole armor of God  
Why? So you can stand on that evil day – that day that is darker than most – we all go through

- a). Doesn't say IF you go through an evil day – we all do
- C. Then Paul goes on to list 7 pieces of spiritual armor God has provided to enable us to stand

**Twice in that list is the Word of God**

**Eph 6:14 (ESV)** Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth...

- 1). Listed first because all of this armor is built from the truth of the Word
  - a). If that belt isn't in place in your life you will have no armor to defend you
- 2). This belt of truth would be a well-rounded knowledge of the Word of God
  - a). That enables us to put on the rest of the pieces

**The Word again: Eph 6:17 (ESV)** ... and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

- 1). This is Scripture used accurately – out of the well-rounded knowledge “Belt of truth”
  - a). We are able to take out that specific scripture to use in that specific situation
  - b). You will be defended against the attacks – the temptations the devil throws at us
    - 1a). You will be enabled to stand

**Transition:** So the Word of God comforts – corrects – examines - defends

- A. The Christian who has a Bible that is falling apart usually has a life that is not

## IV. THE SHEPHERD'S STAFF

1. **The staff: A long slender stick with a crook or hook on the end**
2. **What the staff symbolizes**

- A. While the rod symbolized power and authority – defense and protection
- B. The staff symbolizes compassion and intimacy – guidance - patient and long-suffering

### **The Staff Speaks of Intimacy**

#### 1. **Intimacy with the Shepherd**

- A. The shepherd will use the staff to reach out and catch the sheep and draw them to himself
- B. One of my favorite images – Shepherd will rest the staff on the side of the sheep
  - 1). That will cause the sheep to walk next to Him – as if they were hand-in-hand
  - 2). ***The sheep will revel in this special attention provided by the shepherd***

**Thought:** I'm an artist and I see things visually – this is one of my favorite pictures

- A. The Spirit desires to draw me near to my shepherd
  - 1). That staff today might be circumstances that draw me near and keep me near
  - 2). But I love that picture of just walking with Him day after day no matter where I am
- B. “Hudson Taylor's spiritual secret” – very simple yet so profound
  - 1). The secret - Let everything in life push you to the Savior
  - 2). Then everything becomes a servant to our joy because it takes us to our source of joy
    - a). Everything becomes that staff leaned against our side to draw us near to Him
    - b). Walking through this world just snuggled up close – I love being a sheep

The staff was used to promote intimacy

#### 3. **The staff was used to guide the sheep**

- A. Onto a new path – through a gate – through a narrow and dangerous passageway
- B. The sheep is not beaten – the staff is gently laid on their side and they respond
  - 1). Isn't this how God wants to guide us – easy – simply – intimately

**Psa 32:8-9 (NLT)** The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. (9) Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."

- a). What a promise – ***I will guide you along the best pathway for your life!***
- b). Therefore - Listen for the whisper – let Him guide you easily  
Don't force Him to always be yanking you through circumstances
- c). How many Christians are like that – one difficulty after another  
Surrender to His love – you can't really enjoy life while you're fighting Him
  - 1a). You're going to lose and it's going to be constantly painful

**Thought:** Yield then He can use you – then it really gets exciting

- A. I've bought a lot of guitars – the one's I use are those who just seem to yield to my touch
  - 1). I've played expensive guitars that I'd never own – seemed to resist my touch  
Then pick up one a fraction of the cost – it is a joy to play – it just yields to your touch
    - a). That is the one you'll end up using
- B. Same with us – a lot of extremely gifted people – high talent people - that never seem to get used
  - 1). Then there is that person with no where near the talent – God is using them all the time  
Why? The one with all the talent doesn't yield to God's touch – the other does
    - a). So God takes them and pours His abilities through them
- C. I think Christianity is fairly simple – Trust our Shepherd – Hear His voice in His Word and Follow
  - 1). We way overcomplicate it when we don't trust Him enough just to yeild

**Question:** What does the Spirit use to guide us – usually the Word

- A. Jesus said He would send Him to guide us into all truth (John 16:13)
  - 1). He takes the Word and gives us understanding so we can apply it
  - 2). He gently and persistently uses it to show us the way to go
- B. All the time He is using it to lead us closer and closer to Christ
  - 1). So that we will be that sheep reveling in that close walk with our shepherd

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## CONCLUSION

### 1. I think the application is pretty consistent week after week

- A. We have a shepherd who is responsible to protect us – provide for us – guide us – care for us
- B. Our responsibility is to draw near – trust and follow
  - 1). As you do that you are moving towards those green pastures of rest and contentment  
Though the path that takes us there may go through the dark valleys – same path
    - a). Trust Him there! He knows how to get you to where you really want to be