

Daily Devotional Guide

Monday – This week we will focus on verse four of the 23rd Psalm. There is a major shift in verse four. David moves from talking about the shepherd to talking with the shepherd. For the rest of the psalm David is having an intimate conversation using “I” and “you.” What we read is a vulnerable account of David’s faith in the shepherd. We all need to make that shift on a regular basis. We need to turn to the shepherd through intimate prayer. There is an old saying, “If you can’t sleep, don’t count sheep; talk to the shepherd.”

Tuesday – Notice that verse four says, “walk *through* the valley...” Indeed, the shepherd helps us get through our valleys. We don’t stop in the valley or die in the valley; we walk through it. This is important for us to remember. Often when we are in a valley we believe that we will never get out of it. This is not true. The psalm reminds us that the shepherd will walk us through it. Today, ask the shepherd to take your hand and walk you through the valley.

Wednesday – A good shepherd knows that the best way to the top of a mountain is through the valley. There are three reasons for this. First, the valley contains the best terrain for sheep to walk and climb. Second, the valley contains the best source of water. And third, the best grass for grazing is in the valley. Sometimes, the best way to get to God is through the valley. It is in the valley that we find ourselves closest to God and his refreshment. We come through the valley stronger and more connected to God.

Thursday – David mentions that the shepherd’s rod and staff comfort him. The rod is a fascinating biblical image. We remember that Moses held a rod as a symbol of his authority when freeing the people of God from bondage. As he held it, he said, “Thus saith the Lord.” A rod is a symbol of God’s word. This makes sense giving the fact that a shepherd uses a rod to protect his sheep from predators and keep them from wandering off. The Bible does the same for us. Indeed, the power of God’s Word protects us and disciplines us.

Friday – The staff is the most common symbol for a shepherd. Whereas the rod is a symbol of God’s Word, the staff is the symbol of God’s abiding spirit which guides our lives. A shepherd uses the crook of the staff to pull sheep closer together and to get sheep out of “stuck” places. A shepherd will also use the pointy end of the staff to gently guide the sheep through rough terrain or tricky paths. Isn’t that a great image for the way the Holy Spirit guides our lives? If we let him, the shepherd will guide us through the rough terrain of our lives.



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~ The Good Shepherd ~

The Shepherd Frees Us From Fear

Sunday, June 19, 2011

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 23

In one of my favorite “Peanuts” cartoons, Lucy is in her psychiatrist booth counseling Charlie Brown. He has just lost another baseball game and feels depressed and defeated. Lucy looks at Charlie and says, “Look, Chuck, you are going to have face facts - life is a series of ups and downs.” Charlie gets up and screams, “I hate downs, all I want is ups!”

I think we can all relate to Charlie Brown. All of us would prefer life to be all ups and no downs, all peaks and no valleys. But we know better. All of us will face valleys in life. The key is our attitude when we are in the valley, or to put it another way, how we see the valley. The key is how we respond to the valley.

Verse four helps us develop the right attitude in the valley. It is the one verse most people have memorized, “Even though I walk through the valley, I will fear no evil.” In this verse David is sharing with us why he does not fear the valley. He is also encouraging us to not fear the valley!

I don’t know what the valley is in your life today. Perhaps it is a troubled relationship, a bad report from doctor, an obstacle at home or work, or family problems. I don’t know what challenge you may be facing today, but I do know this - you don’t have to fear the valley – you don’t have to be a victim in the valley – you don’t have to stay in the valley. All you have to do is learn what David learned about the valley.

The most important word in this verse is “through.” “I walk through the valley.” David

knew he wouldn’t die in valley, stop in valley, or stay in valley. David knew he would walk THROUGH the valley - he would come out of it. Why? The shepherd was with him, helping him. He says, “For you are with me.”

So often we get stuck in valleys because we get stuck in bad thinking. We come to a valley and the challenge or difficulty is so great that we think that we will never get out of it. We believe it will be our lot in life forever.

What we tend to forget is we are not alone. We have help. We have the shepherd, and because we have the shepherd we won’t stay in the valley forever. So, it does not matter what valley you are in today. With the help of the shepherd you will walk through the valley. Count on it.

A wise man was once asked how he overcame difficulties. He replied, “First, I try to go around it. If I can’t go around it, then I try to get under it. If I can’t get under it, I try to go over it. And if I can’t get over it, I just plow right through it...God and I plow right through it” (“The Power of Positive Thinking” by Norman Vincent Peale, condensed edition, p. 28).

I like that! You and God are a majority. Together you can conquer anything. Use the great shepherd. Rely on his wisdom and power. There is a great old saying, “If you don’t bother God, everything else will bother you!” Don’t fear the valley, for the shepherd is with you.

There is another reason why we should never fear the valley. Often times the best way to

the mountain top is through the valley. All shepherds know this. If they want to lead sheep to the best places on top of a mountain, they will most always go through the valley. Any why? The valley has the best terrain to climb on, the best source of water, and the best source of grass and food.

It is the same way in our lives. God often uses the valley for great purposes. God uses the valley to make us stronger and wiser. The valley is often the best way to the promises of God.

Many choose to ignore this truth about the valley and their lives become stuck in the mire of mediocrity. All because they choose to avoid the valley and take the path of least resistance.

If you visit the city of Boston, chances are you will get lost. For you will discover their road systems are a mess. They just wind and turn with no rhyme or reason. The reason for this is simple. Their roads were constructed along cow paths. And cows, like sheep, always take the path of least resistance. If they come to a hill or obstacle, they will not think about the best way around it. They will just take what they think is the easiest way, up a rock or along a steep grade. When they return to the same area, the grass has been worn down and they take the same path again. The original engineers of Boston decided to build their roads along those same meandering paths (“The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success” by David Cooper, p. 57).

There is a moral to this lesson. The moral is don’t always take the paths that others take. For most people’s paths have no direction or meaning because they are often the paths of least resistance. But if you want to be the person God wants you to be sometimes you must go through the valley! So, don’t cheat yourself and God. Sometimes what you really need and desire is just on other side of the valley.

I’m sure Noah was afraid of facing the valley of the flood and having to build an ark. But Noah obeyed God, saved his family and found a new tomorrow for the world.

I am sure Abraham was afraid of the valley of taking his son to Mount Moriah. But Abraham obeyed God and discovered God would always provide.

I am sure Moses was afraid of the valley of confronting Pharaoh, but Moses obeyed God and led the people of God out of Egypt into promises of God.

I am sure David was afraid of facing the valley that was Goliath. But David took a sling shot and five smooth stones and said, “I come to you in the name of the Lord!”

I’m sure Mary was afraid of the valley that would come to her when being chosen for the virgin birth. Yet, she said, “I am Lord’s servant. Let it be as you have said...”

And we know Jesus was afraid of facing the valley of the cross. Yet, he endured the cross and redeemed the world!

I’m sure Paul was afraid of the valley of persecution while preaching the gospel. But Paul obeyed and changed millions of lives with his legacy.

Don’t fear the valley. Don’t avoid the valley. Allow God to give you the courage to face it because sometimes our destiny is on the other side of a valley.

Bonnie Ware has worked with the dying for years. She has been at their bed sides and heard many confessions and regrets. She decided to publish the top five regrets that many dying people have. You want to know the number one regret she listed? It was “I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.”

This regret does not surprise me. As I read it, it reminded me of a visit I had with a dying man. He poured his heart out to me. One of the last things he said to me was “Pastor Charley, I wish I’d had the courage to be what God wanted me to be. I was just always too afraid of doing what was necessary.”

It is not too late for us. We can live the lives we were destined for. We can gain the courage to do what is necessary and take the trip through the valley.

So, how do we find the courage to face the valleys in our lives without fear? We do it by using what gave David comfort and strength! He would say, “Thy rod and staff, they comfort me.” Good shepherds are adept at using a rod. If a sheep tries to wander off, a shepherd will throw a rod

next to the sheep to startle it and bring it back in line. The rod is also used to protect sheep from predators and to examine their wool for diseases.

It is easy to see that for David the rod is a symbol of God’s Word. When we meditate on God’s Word night and day we find the faith, strength and courage to face the valleys and be the people God wants us to be! So, find your favorite encouraging passage of scripture and repeat it ever day.

Don’t fear the valley! You know what I heard? “Fear once knocked on the door, faith answered, and there was no one there!”

Fear will always ask negative questions like “What if you fail?” And faith answers, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

David Cooper likes to tell the story of the first Sunday in his very first church. He and his wife had started this church. They only had 12 people and a small building, but they had faith that God would help them realize their dream of reaching thousands for Christ.

Their first Sunday was tough. Cooper’s wife had planned a great lesson for the kids and got the classroom all ready. But no children came. She looked up at David and said, “I have no kids to teach today.” She was discouraged. Well, Cooper did a wise thing. He put ten empty chairs in a circle and said, “Honey, I want us to hold hands and pray that God will fill these empty seats with children.” And that’s what they did. They prayed and visualized God filling those empty seats with children. And you know what? Within a few years, they did not fill those ten chairs; they filled thousands of them!

When you are in the valley, give God something to bless and watch him work. Repeat as often as you can, “If God be for me, who can be against me?”

“The victim says, ‘I can’t.’ The victor says, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthen me.’

The victim says, ‘It is not my fault.’ The victor says, ‘I’m responsible.’

The victim says, ‘We never did it that way before.’ The victor says, ‘Nothing ventured, nothing gained.’

The victim lives in fear and the victor walks by faith.

The victim sees problems and the victor sees opportunities.

The victim gives up and the victor presses on.

The victim explains why it can’t be done. The victor believes it can be done.

The victim gives excuse. The victor sets an example.

The victim is reactive. The victor is proactive.

The victim says, ‘This is impossible.’ The victor says ‘With God all things are possible.’

The victim says, ‘The odds are against us.’ The victor says, ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’” (Cooper, p. 47 and 48).

He was a young man from Kansas City who liked to draw pictures. He believed God had given him a gift. He went from newspaper to newspaper trying to sell his cartoons. Each editor told him he had no talent and advised him to forget his dream. He was in the valley, but he didn’t fear the valley, for he knew God gave him this dream and he would not let go of it. So, he prayed for God to help him.

A pastor hired him to draw pictures for church events, but they could not pay him very much. He had no place to live and no studio to draw his pictures. The church did have a dingy, mouse infested garage and they told him he was welcome to stay there. And so he did. He sat in that garage and wondered if things could get any worse. A mouse scurried along the floor and looked up at him. He decided to draw a picture of that mouse.

The mouse became kind of famous. And so did the young artist. The mouse’s name? Mickey Mouse. The artist? Walt Disney. Maybe you have heard of him? (Peale, “You Can If You Think You Can”).

Now, just imagine if he had not been in the valley and seen that mouse?

Don’t fear the valley! God is with you. God will use the valley for good. You will walk through the valley taller and stronger, and blessed by the best. Amen.