

SERIES: **GOD IS GOOD- God's goodness to me in Psalm 23**

TEXT: **Psalm 23:4**

**HOOK-** Picture driving down a two-lane road on a sunny day with the sun to your left.

On the other lane coming towards you is an 18-wheeler truck. It gets closer and closer.

}} HOLD THAT MENTAL PICTURE {{{

This morning we'll be talking about Suffering/ painful circumstances/ dark valleys.

### **DARK VALLEYS**

*Read Psalm 23:1-4*

(pray)

Different translations: Darkest valley/ valley of shadow of death- *Lit= valley of deepest shadow*  
death is the last valley, but there are plenty more before we reach that one

The disclaimer we keep making every week is: God has given all the promises of this Psalm to Christians only.  
But God desires that if you are not already one, you would be.

Let's go back to that mental picture of the truck-

Suffering death (or any of life's valleys) apart from Christ, is like being hit directly by the truck;  
but with Christ, the same situations, though painful, are like being hit by the shadow of the truck.

*Which would you prefer?* It's almost a silly question; here's why it's important:

### **WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT- Not suffering is Not an option.**

The bible ASSUMES we WILL all suffer at some point.

We tend to approach life trying to figure out ways to **avoid suffering-**

you can't go through life always trying to avoid pain, because then your eyes are not on the shepherd.

But you can go through life with your eyes on Christ, then even if you find yourself in a painful situation,  
you have no reason to fear and every reason to have comfort, because He is right there with you.

**2 Corinthians 4:8-9** We are pressured in every way but not crushed; we are perplexed but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> we are persecuted but not abandoned; we are struck down but not destroyed.

***Anyone feel pressured, perplexed, persecuted, or struck down lately?***

David, the author, knew dark valleys- chased around by the King Saul who wanted to kill him,  
then by his own son Absalom; after one of his greatest moral failures, he lost his newborn baby;  
one of his daughters was raped by her brother, his son;  
many innocent people died as a result of some of his leadership decisions (census against God's will)

You may be going through relationship trouble; facing loneliness; terminal or chronic disease; financial despair; mental breakdown; exhaustion, etc.

It is easy to drift towards the feeling, thoughts, or attitude that **"because of what is happening to me, God doesn't care for me"**- but that thinking is near sighted- it cannot see what God sees!

Someone needs to hear this today, you already know it, but you need to be reminded:

**God didn't leave you in the valley, He is leading you through it.**

During a storm or after a nightmare my daughters will call out for me. I go get them & we'll walk down the dark hallway to our room, together- it doesn't stop the storm or take back the nightmare, but it comforts them to be in my arms because they know this one thing:

I'm not leading them to the hallway, but through it.

Here's what is even more comforting about our Shepherd:

He knows how to comfort us well because He Himself has endured that dark valley.

Jesus on the cross, the sky goes dark, and He yells out "My God My God why have you forsaken me!"

No one knew the Father's love like the Son of God. **Yet He experienced what it was like to FEEL like if God's not there.** But He was; He was indeed present, reconciling the world to Himself.

**John 16:32** Look: An hour is coming, and has come, when each of you will be scattered to his own home, and you will leave Me alone. (ABANDONED + BETRAYED!) Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.

Jesus himself lived out this verse- as truly man, He learned obedience through suffering

**Hebrews 5:7-8 NLT** While Jesus was here on earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could rescue him from death. And God heard his prayers because of his deep reverence for God. <sup>8</sup>Even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered.

YOUR SHEPHERD KNOWS THE WAY THROUGH THE VALLEY!

**Being in a dark valley doesn't necessarily mean I'm off track.**

**Why is the sheep in the valley?** The shepherd led them there. (V3)

It may feel as if some of the sufferings we face are punishment; like God's angry and He wants us to know it.

But this may be exactly where God intended for us to be (I know that hard to comprehend).

God in His infinite wisdom knows that as harsh as this pain or confusion may be- it is ultimately for our good.

Look at JOB's life

**John 16:33** I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.

**James 1:2-4 NLT** <sup>2</sup>Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. <sup>3</sup>For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup>So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

**God isn't idle to my suffering; God is invested in my sanctification.**

The promise of our faith is not that we will be spared from suffering, but that God will be by our side.

And He's not merely a spectator. He is at work, though it may feel like He is asleep.

*“There is another reason also why the soul has traveled safely in this obscurity; it has suffered: for the way of suffering is safer, and also more profitable, than that of rejoicing and of action. In suffering God gives strength, but in action and in joy the soul does but show its own weakness and imperfections. And in suffering, the soul practices and acquires virtue, and becomes pure, wiser, and more cautious.”*— Saint John of the Cross, Dark Night of the Soul

Think about this: haven't most of your dumb decisions, sinful setbacks, bad behavior come in the good times?

So God in His all-knowing grace purges us through the dark nights, so that when morning comes once more, we are less like our weakness and more like His strength.

Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for You are with me;  
Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.

Rod- like a club/ the weapon by which our Shepherd strikes down our adversaries.

Staff- walking stick often bent or hooked at one end. With it the shepherd restrains the sheep from wandering or hooks them out of holes into which they may fall or grabs them before they fall over the edge;

by it also he corrects them when they are disobedient.

**Romans 5:3-5 NLT** <sup>3</sup>We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. <sup>4</sup>And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. <sup>5</sup>And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

**Dark Valleys expose everything that cannot comfort my suffering and reveal the only One who can.**

*Why isn't the sheep afraid?* The presence of the shepherd

*What gives the sheep comfort?* The shepherd's rod & staff

Our safety/hope is not in the removal of our problem/ circumstance, but in the presence of God with us

WHEREVER we may be in life-

there are plenty sheep in the green pastures who live afraid-

and there are sheep in the valley who walk courageously

Suffering hurts- we can be in pain, but we should not be afraid, for He comforts us

-Your relationship is falling apart, that hurts no denying it- but trust God IN your pain AND for your outcome!

-Singleness is lonely when what you crave is a relationship, that hurts no denying it- but trust God IN your pain AND for your outcome!

-Physical ailments/ pains/ chronic conditions are painful no denying it- but trust God IN your pain AND for your outcome!

-Financial problems, debt, collections, the results of unwise younger years or of situations beyond your control that hurts no denying it- but trust God IN your pain AND for your outcome!

V1-3 He is talking about God, but something interesting happens in V4- the personal pronoun changes from the third person to the second person – it is here where David truly experienced God's comforting touch

V1 The Lord; V2 He/ His; V4 You/ Your

*“While suffering is never enjoyable, one of its benefits is that it shows us when we are following false shepherds. (Like those of health and wealth.) When we place our confidence in our bank accounts, what happens when we come up short one month on our mortgage? Or can’t afford groceries? When we place our confidence in our health, what happens when we get sick? Or find ourselves on the other end of a freak car accident? These are false shepherds and cannot provide for us the way Jesus can.”*- Matt Chandler

Dark nights of the soul drive us to whatever we think will save us.

Pills, drinking, getting high, sexual relief, gambling, anger, etc.

**Not suffering is Not an option.**

**MAIN TAKEAWAY- Those who dwell in the shadow of the Almighty need not fear the shadow of the valley of death.**

“I shall fear no danger”- All of us have failed in this- fearing no evil requires more than simply our own human strength.  
**Isaiah 26:3** You will keep the mind that is dependent on You in perfect peace, for it is trusting in You.

**Psalm 91:1-6 NLT** Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

<sup>2</sup>This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.

<sup>3</sup>For he will rescue you from every trap and protect you from deadly disease.

<sup>4</sup>He will cover you with his feathers. He will shelter you with his wings. His faithful promises are your armor and protection.

<sup>5</sup>Do not be afraid of the terrors of the night, nor the arrow that flies in the day.

<sup>6</sup>Do not dread the disease that stalks in darkness, nor the disaster that strikes at midday.

**CALL TO ACTION- If you’re in the valley- seek God’s guidance more than you’re seeking a way out.  
If you are not in the valley- seek someone who is, who needs encouragement.**

## BULLPEN-

Does this piece of literature more than 3,000 years old really have anything for me???

**Romans 5:6 NLT** When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners.

**Isaiah 43:2** I will be with you when you pass through the waters, and when you pass through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you. You will not be scorched when you walk through the fire, and the flame will not burn you.

No suffering/ hardship, no matter how great can push God away from us- He is stronger, He's not going anywhere

The Shepherd's rod symbolizes His authority and defending power, and His staff symbolizes His comfort and care.

**Psalms 37:25** I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous abandoned or his children begging for bread.

*"If we haven't already walked through dark valleys, it's a matter of time before we do. That's not pessimistic or fatalistic. It's just a realistic understanding of life in a fallen world. And in His kindness, God has equipped us to face tough times. He has given us the truth of His Word and His unfaltering presence. There's nothing to fear, because He walks with us, step by step, defending us and delivering us."* -Brad Bonhomme

**2 Corinthians 4:17-18** <sup>17</sup> For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. <sup>18</sup> So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

**Deuteronomy 31:6** (Hebrews 13:5) Be strong and courageous; don't be terrified or afraid of them. For it is the Lord your God who goes with you; He will not leave you or forsake you.

### **Whether we find ourselves in the light or in the darkness, God is right there with us**

**Exodus 20:20-21** Moses responded to the people, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that you will fear Him and will not sin." <sup>21</sup> And the people remained standing at a distance as Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

**1 Kings 8:12** Then Solomon said: The Lord said that He would dwell in thick darkness.

**1 Timothy 6:15b-16** ... the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> the only One who has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; no one has seen or can see Him, to Him be honor and eternal might. Amen.

**Psalms 139:7-12** Where can I go to escape Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?

Not trying to escape, he's making a point

<sup>8</sup> If I go up to heaven, You are there; no heaven without God

if I make my bed in Sheol, You are there. The place of the dead in OT- death won't separate me

<sup>9</sup> If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits,

*Lit I take up the wings of the dawn; I dwell at the end of the sea*

<sup>10</sup> even there Your hand will lead me; Your right hand will hold on to me.

IOW, nowhere on the globe, sky, earth or sea, that you're not there

<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light around me will be night"—

<sup>12</sup> even the darkness is not dark to You. The night shines like the day; darkness and light are alike to You.

It's important to properly enjoy the good times because they fuel our hope in the bad times. (V2)

Dark Valleys show us God's care for us in a way green pastures cannot.

*"God leads into the dark night those whom He desires to purify from all these imperfections so that He may bring them farther onward."* St John of the Cross- Dark night of the Soul

*"The bumps are what you climb on"*- Warren Wiersbe

the dark valleys are what you go through, not to

The most frightening of the valleys is death, and the worst thing death can do to us is the best thing that can happen to us