

## THE WALK OF PEACE – Psalm 23 (Shalom)

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I saw a plaque once that read “**Peace is not the absence of trouble. Peace is the presence of God.**”

THE WORD FOR PEACE IN SCRIPTURE IS SHALOM.... IT MEANS ABUNDANCE, FULLNESS, CONTENTMENT, WHOLENESS

HOW DO WE EXPERIENCE THIS SHALOM IN A DIVIDED WORLD FULL OF RANCOR AND DISSENT?

I think Psalm 23 has some help for us on this one.

Psalm 23 is one of the best loved psalms, and I want to walk you through it today, highlighting for you principles of peace.

We have so many people right now who are sick or dying right now in our congregation, or who have died. I can't tell you how many times I have said this psalm in the last week. Every time I say it, though, whatever the circumstance, a certain peace seems to settle over the room that I am in.

A lot of times there are tears afterward – people thank me – all I've done is recite this psalm

Maybe its just because people know it – its familiar  
But I also think its because these pastoral words usher in SHALOM – usher in peace where there is fear...usher in the presence of God  
If you haven't memorized this psalm...do it

Because...

IT IS A PSALM THAT, IF FOLLOWED, WILL HELP US TO WALK IN SHALOM...

MOST OF US DON'T WORK WITH SHEEP TOO MUCH HERE IN SILICON VALLEY AND SHEPHERDS ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN;

BUT IN JESUS DAY, SHEEP WERE ALL OVER THE PLACE....SHEPHERDING WAS A COMMON OCCUPATION...Computer Programmers, or Engineers are here in Silicon Valley

JESUS SAID A LOT OF TIMES IN DIFFERENT WAYS COMPARED PEOPLE TO SHEEP...*AND I DON'T THINK IT WAS A COMPLIMENT*

ONE REASON JESUS CALLED US SHEEP....  
IS THAT SHEEP HAVE NO FORM OF DEFENSE, DO THEY?

NO SHARP TEETH...NO CAT LIKE CLAWS...THERE IS NO VENOM IN THEIR BITE

SHEEP ARE UTTERLY HELPLESS ON THEIR OWN

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SHEEP NEED A SHEPHERD, A CARE TAKER,  
JESUS SAID **“I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD. THE GOOD SHEPHERD GIVES HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP”**

WHAT A RELIEF! WE AREN'T JUST OUT , IN THE WORLD WALKING TARGETS FOR THE ENEMY RATHER...  
WE BELONG TO A SHEPHERD WHO IS OUR SALVATION...  
SO THE FIRST PRINCIPLE TO WALKING IN PEACE FROM PSALM 23 IS

### 1. **KNOWING THAT I BELONG TO GOD**

LETS READ TOGETHER  
**“The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want” (best translated...The Lord is my shepherd, what more could I ask for?)**

JUST SO YOU KNOW SHEEP ARE VERY DIFFICULT LIVESTOCK TO TAKE CARE OF  
THEY ARE NOT THE KIND OF ANIMALS THAT YOU CAN JUST LEAVE ALONE AND EXPECT THEM TO DO WELL IF YOU GIVE THEM WATER/FOOD – (HERMIT CRABS ARE THE BEST PETS...THAT'S WHAT THEY DO) But sheep are NOT hermit crabs – not self sufficient

THEY ALWAYS SEEM TO HAVE A PROBLEM IF THEY AREN'T CAREFULLY MONITORED

SHEEP REQUIRE METICULOUS CARE, AND CONSTANT OVERSITE

AND I GUESS THAT'S HOW GOD SEES US AS WELL  
THAT WE NEED CONSTANT OVERSIGHT...WE JUST CANT GO IT ALONE...WE'LL GET INTO TROUBLE SOMEHOW

(One of my three kids was like that. If there was a mess that child would get into it. If there was a toxic substance in the room that child would find it. If there was a cliff that child would run toward it like a lemur. Anyone ever parent a child like that, bent on dying?)

THAT'S LIKE SHEEP. ALWAYS GETTING INTO TROUBLE. HIGH MAINTENANCE

SO...JUST REFLECT A MOMENT...  
YOU belong to and are known by THE GOD OF ALL CREATION WHO CREATED THE UNIVERSE, PLANETS, SUN, MOON, GALAXIES....

THAT SAME GOD  
WATCHES YOU WITH THE METICULOUS CARE  
AND THE INTIMATE CONCERN OF A SHEPHERD –

EVERY DETAIL OF YOUR LIFE, THE HAIRS ON YOUR HEAD – ARE KNOWN BY GOD...

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GOD HAS CHOSEN – DON'T ASK ME WHY - TO CARE FOR DIFFICULT HIGH NEED PEOPLE....

AND THIS AMAZING TRUTH IS WHY DAVID WRITES THIS SONG OF PRAISE....

SO IF THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF LIVING A LIFE OF SHALOM/PEACE IS SECURITY in KNOWING THAT I BELONG TO GOD....

THE SECOND PRINCIPLE FOR WALKING IN PEACE/SHALOM IS LEARNING....

### 2. TRUST & REST IN THE SHEPHERD

READ TOGETHER

**He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters...**

NOTICE, PLEASE FIRST OF ALL THAT IT IS ALL ABOUT *THE SHEPHERD* NOT ABOUT US AS SHEEP....**IT IS THE SHEPHERD**...THE GOOD SHEPHERD WHO **MAKES ME** LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES

**IT IS THE SHEPHERD**...WHO LEADS ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS

ANOTHER THING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SHEEP IS THIS

THEY ARE A SKITTISH LOT  
RUNNING HERE, RUNNING THERE

(AGAIN, COMPARING US TO SHEEP ALL THE TIME AS JESUS DID IS NOT VERY COMPLIMENTARY OF THE HUMAN RACE)

SO NOT ONLY ARE THEY DEFENSELESS...AND NEEDY...AND HIGH MAINTENANCE....THEY ARE SKITTISH  
SHEEP RARELY LIE DOWN...ALWAYS LOOKING...WORRYING....NERVOUS UNLESS...UNLESS  
THEY ARE FREE FROM FOUR THINGS (kellar's book a shepherd looks at the 23 psalm))

**THEY MUST BE FREE FROM FEAR....**

**THEY MUST BE FREE FROM TENSION/RIVALRY WITHIN THE HERD**

**THEY MUST BE FREE FROM PARASITES**

**THEY MUST BE FREE FROM HUNGER**

WE LIVE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD WHICH CREATES FEAR  
WE LIVE WITH RIVALRY AND COMPETITION WHICH CREATES ENVY & STRIFE  
EVERY DAY WE DEAL WITH INCONVENIENCES AND STRESSORS (THAT ANNOY US LIKE PARASITES)

AND WE ARE PART OF A HUNGRY WORLD...LOOKING FOR MEANING AND PURPOSE

AND YET...

THE WORDS OF THIS PSALM TELL US... *LIE DOWN...BE STILL TRUST ME...*

STILL WATERS....BRINGS A PEACEFUL IMAGE, DOESNT IT?

## THE WALK OF PEACE – Psalm 23 (Shalom)

STILL WAS ALSO AN IMAGE THAT FOR ANY SHEPHERD IN THE BIBLE MEANT SAFETY FOR THE SHEEP

IF YOU LET A SHEEP DRINK FROM A ROARING RIVER, THE SHEEP COULD EASILY SLIP IN AND ONCE THE WATER GOT INTO ITS HEAVY WOOL IT QUICKLY WENT UNDER

SO THIS IS AN IMAGE OF SAFETY, OF TRUST AND OF REST...THE WALK OF SHALOM FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN

THE THIRD PRINCIPLE FOR WALKING THE WALK OF SHALOM/PEACE, AS SHOWN TO US IN PSALM 23 IS ...

### **3. ALLOWING MYSELF TO BE LED – SURRENDER**

READ TOGETHER

**“He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name sake.”**

AGAIN, LET’S TALK ABOUT SHEEP FOR A MINUTE  
SHEEP ARE NOT THAT BRIGHT...REAL LOW IQ...SHEEP DON’T GET IT  
SHEEP DON’T HAVE A CLUE WHAT PATHS TO GO ON

IF LEFT TO THEMSELVES, THEY GO ON THE SAME RUTTED PATHS OVER AND OVER AGAIN  
AND THEY KEEP GOING ON THEM, EVEN WHEN THEY’VE EATEN UP THE PASTURELAND AND THE GROUND IS DRY AND DESERT-LIKE

THEY DON’T HAVE AN INTERNAL GPS TO TELL THEM WHERE TO GO TO SURVIVE...THEY’D DIE SAYING THAT FAMOUS PHRASE “WELL, WE’VE ALWAYS DONE IT THIS WAY”

WE ALL KNOW INSANITY IS DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AND EXPECTING A DIFFERENT RESULT...

THAT’S THE WAY SHEEP ARE

IN FOLLOWING JESUS, WE HAVE TO SURRENDER OUR PATHS – OUR WAY OF DOING THINGS

THE PATHS OF THE SHEPHERD MIGHT BE NEW, YES, AND SOMETIMES SCARY BECAUSE OF THAT UNFAMILIARITY...

BUT THE PATH OF SURRENDER IS A PATH THAT WILL LEAD US TO SHALOM – GREEN PASTURES, STILL WATERS. GETTING THERE ON OUR OWN WON’T HAPPEN

THE FOURTH PRINCIPLE FOR WALKING THE WALK OF PEACE/SHALOM IS IN

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### 4. LEARNING TO WALK IN THE DARK

(READ TOGETHER)

**“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...”**

ANOTHER LESS THAN COMPLIMENTARY THING ABOUT SHEEP IS THAT THEY ARE THIN-SKINNED CREATURES

WE AREN'T THAT TOUGH AGAINST LIFES UNPREDICTABILITIES

EVERY SHEPHERD KNEW, IN BIBLICAL TIMES, THAT VALLEYS IN ADDITION TO HARBORING PREDATORS...

WERE ALSO SUBJECT TO SUDDEN STORMS, AND FLASH FLOODS THAT SENT WALLS OF WATER RAMPAGING DOWN THE SLOPES...

IF SHEEP BECAME SOAKED AND CHILLED WITH A FREEZING RAIN THE EXPOSURE COULD KILL THEM IN A VERY SHORT TIME...

AND YET VALLEYS WERE THE VERY BEST WAY TO THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN EVERY SHEPHERD KNEW IT – THE SIDES OF THE MOUNTAINS WERE RUTTED AND STEEP...YOU COULDN'T GET UP TO THE HIGHER PLACES THAT WAY...

SHEPHERDS WERE WILLING TO RISK THE DARKNESS OF THE VALLEY TO GET THEIR SHEEP TO A BETTER PLACE

FOR THE JOY OF THE MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCE THAT AWAITED THEM

SUFFERING, YOU'VE HEARD ME SAY IS OFTEN THE PLACE OF TRANSFORMATION...WE LEARN TO DEPEND IN THE VALLEY...WE LEARN COURAGE AND TRUST...AND WE LEARN ABOUT HOLDING GODS HAND IN THE DARK

ONE OF THE FUN EXERCISES I DID WITH YOUTH, WHEN I DID YOUTH MINISTRY WAS ONE WHERE YOU BLINDFOLD SOMEONE, AND THEY HAVE TO ALLOW ANOTHER PERSON TO LEAD THEM AROUND A SERIES OF OBSTACLES....IT WAS ACTUALLY A RACE....

THE PERSON WHO COULDN'T SEE ANYTHING ABSOLUTELY HAD TO SURRENDER, AND TRUST THEIR LEADER IF THEY WERE AFRAID THEY DIDN'T MOVE, THEY BECAME IMMOBILIZED....AND THEY LOST THE RACE...

NOTICE ONE WORD HERE...THE WORD IS “THROUGH”

IT DOESN'T SAY “EVEN THOUGH I AM STUCK IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW”...NO...

THERE IS A PROMISE HERE THAT WHEN WE DARE TO BE LED BY JESUS IN TOUGH TIMES

WE WILL BE LED OUT OF THE DARKNESS

YES...BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

NO...LIFE IS NOT FAIR

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YES...GOD IS FAITHFUL IN THE DARK AND WILL LEAD US OUT

THEN IT SAYS, "I WILL NOT FEAR....WHY?... FOR YOU ARE WITH ME"

DARK TIMES ARE SO MUCH MORE TOLERABLE WHEN WE KNOW THAT WE ARE NOT ALONE IN THEM

THAT IS WHY THE MOST FREQUENT PROMISE OF JESUS TO US IN SCRIPTURE IS "I AM WITH YOU, I AM WITH YOU, I AM WITH YOU.

A PSYCHOLOGIST DID A STUDY OF HOW LONG PEOPLE COULD KEEP THEIR FOOT SUBMERGED IN FREEZING ICE WATER;

HE DISCOVERED THAT WHEN THERE WAS SOMEONE ELSE IN THE ROOM WITH THEM WHILE THEY DID IT, THEY COULD KEEP THEIR FOOT IN A WHOLE LOT LONGER....

I CAN GO THROUGH ANYTHING, SOMEONE TOLD ME ONCE, AS LONG AS I KNOW I AM NOT ALONE...

FINALLY, THE ROD AND THE STAFF ARE COMFORTING BECAUSE OF THIS THE ROD WAS USED TO GENTLY TOUCH THE BACK OF THE SHEEP TO KEEP THEM ON THE PATH IF THEY STARTED TO WANDER OFF...also used to separate the sheep's wool and make sure there were no wounds or parasites

AND THE STAFF HAD THE CROOK IN IT AT THE TOP THAT WAS USED TO REACH DOWN INTO A RAVINE, HOOK A SHEEP, AND LIFT HIM UP....

BACK THEN THE ROD AND STAFF WERE THE EMERGENCY RESCUE TEAM The staff was also used for the shepherds to draw sheep close to each other, and to himself

THE COMFORT IS THIS...THAT EVEN WHEN I FEEL LOST, ALONE, OR WHEN I START TO GET OFF TRACK...I KNOW THAT YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF WILL BE THERE TO KEEP ME CLOSE TO YOU

MAYBE YOU'VE RECEIVED SOME BAD NEWS RECENTLY OR YOU ARE MISSING A LOVED ONE TODAY OR WORRIED ABOUT A LOVED ONE MAYBE A RELATIONSHIP YOU'VE HAD HAS GONE SOUR

PERHAPS FINANCIAL STRESSORS ARE AT A HIGH...I KNOW SEVERAL OF YOU HAVE HIGH STRESS IN YOUR JOBS RIGHT NOW

MAYBE YOU ARE AT A TIME IN YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU NEED TO HOLD GODS HAND IN THE DARK, AND TRUST THAT HE WILL LEAD YOU THROUGH THE VALLEY AS HE PULLS YOU CLOSE TO HIMSELF...

The fifth principle FOR THE WALK OF PEACE/SHALOM IS THIS

### **5. REGULARLY CELEBRATING GODS GOODNESS**

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**“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows.”**

SHEPHERDS WOULD ALWAYS GO UP TO THE TABLELANDS - THE FLAT AREAS ON TOP OF THE MTN. and prepare the SUMMER ground for their sheep ahead of time...

IN THE SPRING...THEY WOULD pull out poisonous weeds, open up rocks that hid water sources, fill up dangerous holes...prepare the ground so that the sheep could feast and be satisfied....it took hours to do this...hard labor...

BUT...WHEN THE SHEEP ARRIVED  
THEY WERE ABLE TO FEAST AND DRINK FREELY  
EVERYTHING HAS BEEN PREPARED AHEAD OF TIME  
AND IN THE PRESENCE OF WILD ANIMALS  
THE SHEEP COULD SAFELY GRAZE  
BECAUSE THE SHEPHERD WAS PRESENT TO PROTECT THEM  
HE HAD PREPARED IT ALL FOR THEM  
AND IT WAS TIME TO FEAST  
CELEBRATING GODS GOODNESS DOESN'T MEAN CIRCUMSTANCES ARE ALL THAT GREAT  
IT MEANS GOD IS GOOD, AND WE CELEBRATE THAT

SOMETIMES CHRISTIANS AREN'T VERY GOOD AT CELEBRATING  
BUT ITS PART OF THE WALK OF SHALOM  
GRATITUDE! FEASTING! THANKFULNESS! ENJOYING LIFE!!

Finally this magnificent psalm ends with a promise  
Let's say it together:

**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

What's the ironic twist here?

All along we've been following the Shepherd.

*Now, goodness and mercy follow me...*because when I follow the shepherd...blessings naturally come from that

When I am going God's way...even though there are valleys...the result is SHALOM...fullness, wholeness, goodness, mercy

That follows me...as I follow Jesus.

Who is ultimately leading us home...walking us home...through this life...to his home which is our home – just as his peace is our peace. Shalom!