

Life With the Good Shepherd
“Walking Through the Dark Valleys of Life”
Psalm 23:4

Introduction:

1. Fear is a terrible emotion. It can literally paralyze you. **1 John 4:18** declares, *"Fear hath torment."*
2. People have all kinds of fears. Some have financial fears, some health fears, some have fears regarding relationships, some fear death, some fear living, some fear losing their job, and on and on we could go.
3. The reality is this - Christians are not exempt from any of these things. Christians have health problems, lose their jobs, have relationship problems, have financial problems, etc.
4. But here is the difference - a person who knows the good shepherd, Jesus Christ, does not have to be overcome with fear when going through any of these valleys of life.
5. Here in Psalm 23 David pictures himself as a sheep who has the Lord as his shepherd. In verses 1-3, David boasts of all the benefits of his position, but in verse 4, he begins to personally address the Lord, his shepherd. Let's read verse 4.
6. In the Bible, the phrase *"shadow of death"* speaks of darkness and oppression. David is speaking of a deep, dark valley where there seems to be no ray of light and you feel like you are not going to make it. Have you ever been in a valley like this?
7. But then the psalmist declares, *"I will fear no evil."* Why? *"For thou art with me."* Notice in this psalm, the sheep doesn't die in the valley. The good shepherd leads and navigates the sheep **through** this dark valley.
8. Christian, the valleys of life need not be dead-end streets. You need not fear the dark valleys of life. The disappointments, frustrations, discouragements, and dilemmas of life, though they be shadowed valleys, need not be disasters. They can actually be the road to higher ground in our walk with God.
9. If you belong to the good shepherd, you can walk victoriously through the deepest, darkest valleys of life. Why? Because God is with you in two very real ways, which we see depicted in **Psalm 23:4**.

First, you possess the rod of God's Word.

1. The rod was a vital part of the shepherd's equipment. Shepherd boys would carefully select their rod and then practice for hours learning how to throw it with amazing speed and accuracy. It was his main weapon of defense for himself and his sheep.
2. Do you remember what Moses was before he became the great leader of the nation of Israel? He was a shepherd. When Moses went to Israel and to Pharaoh to convince them of his divine commission and authority, what did he use? His rod.
3. The rod symbolized and demonstrated the spoken Word and revealed will of God. It carried the impact of *"Thus saith the Lord."* It was called the rod of God.
4. Today, the Scriptures are God's rod. They are the extension of God's mind and will to mortal man. Just like Moses' rod, God's Words are powerful, potent, and convicting.

- The Word of God is likened to a sharp sword (**Hebrews 4:12**), a hammer (**Jeremiah 23:29**), a lamp (**Psalms 119:105**), a complete diet of food, etc.
5. This world can get confusing and chaotic. As you go through the ups and downs of this life, you'd better have something sure, steadfast, and reliable - a place where you can go and get absolute truth on which to base your decisions and attitudes.
 6. What a comfort to know I have an authoritative, clear-cut, powerful instrument by which to conduct myself through the valleys. I have the rod of God's Word.
Psalms 119:49-50, 54, 92
 7. When Jesus went through a 40-day wilderness time period, Satan tried to exploit Christ during a time of physical weakness. Do you know what Christ used to counter Satan's attacks? The rod of God's Word. **Matthew 4:1-11**
 8. When going through the valleys of life, and darkness seems to be surrounding you, what a comfort to know that I have the light of God's Word, and in it is divine power.
 9. When going through dark valleys in this life, I will fear no evil. Why? God is with me through His written Word. I possess the mind, wisdom, and power of God.

Second, you possess the staff of God's Spirit.

1. The staff is an instrument used uniquely for the care and management of sheep. It is shaped and designed for the needs of sheep. It is used for their benefit.
2. One shepherd said that no other single word can better describe its function on behalf of the flock than that it is for their **comfort**.
 - Picture a staff – a long, slender stick often with a hook on the end. The shepherd used the staff to comfort and guide the sheep.
3. Who in the Bible is identified as the Comforter? The Holy Spirit. **John 14:26**
4. Christ said that the Holy Spirit would come and guide us into all truth.
John 16:13-14
5. The moment that a person trusts Christ, Paul taught us that God's Holy Spirit immediately comes and takes up residence inside our spirit. **Ephesians 1:13**
 - In fact, in **Romans 8:9** calls Him the Spirit of Christ.
6. The staff of God's Spirit takes the rod of God's Word and makes it real to our hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual understanding and makes the life of Christ (our shepherd) real, personal, and intimate.
7. No matter what trial I face or valley I go through, God's Spirit is there, bringing to mind the fact that I belong to Christ and nothing can separate me from His love.
2 Corinthians 1:21-22
8. As I yield myself to God's indwelling Spirit and read God's Word, the Holy Spirit makes it alive and vibrant in my heart, and brings comfort and assurance. As I walk through the dark valleys He calms me down and brings peace. **2 Corinthians 1:3-5**
9. Sometimes a sheep would find itself caught in the brambles of a bush where it had pushed to find a mouthful of grass. The thorns hook its wool and it can't possibly get loose. It is entangled. The shepherd uses the staff to free it from its entanglement.
10. Many times, when we are going through a dark valley, we will make decisions and do things that are contrary to God's Word and are not good for us. We can get entangled with the affairs of this life. This is when God's Holy Spirit comes and

takes God's Word and brings conviction to our heart and says, "No, child, this is the way."

In Conclusion:

1. The shepherd many times has to take the sheep through valleys in order to get to the high ground where the richest fields are.
2. As the Lord's sheep, we are not exempt from the valleys of life. Sometimes they are dark and the shadow of death seems to hover around us.
3. What a wonderful thing to be able to say, "The Lord is my shepherd." As our shepherd, He has made provision for our every need when walking through the valleys of life.
4. God has given us the rod of His Word and the staff of His Holy Spirit. As we walk through the valley we can boldly say, *"I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."*
5. Even when a believer has to walk through the valley of death (not just the shadow), it is nothing to be feared because Christ has taken the sting out of it. Death isn't a period at the end of the sentence; it is simply the comma that leads us to eternal life.
6. Jesus said, "He that believeth on me shall never die." We walk right through the valley of death and when we come out on the other side, heaven is our eternal home!