

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE



SILVERDALE BAPTIST CHURCH
THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM
GOD GUARDS YOUR LIFE
PSALM 23:4
11/26/2017

MAIN POINT

As the Great Shepherd, God protects you.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce our topic of discussion.

Describe a time in your life when you were walking through a “dark valley.” What was it like? How did you feel?

As you were going through that time, what ultimately got you through? Are you still going through it?

The imagery of a shepherd and his sheep drives Psalm 23. David himself was a shepherd (1 Samuel 16:11) and was intimately familiar with the constant provision, guidance, and protection required of a faithful shepherd. In the ancient world, the shepherd stood by his sheep 24/7, attending to their every need. In our study today, we will focus specifically on how God, the Great Shepherd is faithful to protect His sheep even when walking through the darkest valleys.

DISCUSSION

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about our topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ PSALM 23:4.

What is it that allowed David, while walking through what he called “the darkest valley,” to have no fear?

Have you ever had an experience in life where you “should” have been afraid, but God’s presence with you and in the situation brought great peace? What did that look like? Share with the group about your experience.

David described the “rod” and “staff” of the Shepherd bringing comfort to him. These symbols paint a vivid picture of the Great Shepherd’s presence and protection of His sheep. What does it mean to be comforted by the Great Shepherd?

“Comfort” here does not mean “to sympathize,” but more “to encourage.” The comfort the shepherd provides for the sheep is not merely sympathy for their needs, but real, tangible assistance and action on their behalf.

HAVE A FEW VOLUNTEERS READ DEUTERONOMY 31:6, JOSHUA 1:9, PSALM 27:1, ISAIAH 35:4, AND ISAIAH 41:10.

What is the common thread to these verses of Scripture?

How does the Lord's presence transform the way you can view the "dark valleys" of life?

When have you felt this "peace of God, which surpasses every thought" (Phil. 4:7)?

Phillip Keller notes: "As Christians we will sooner or later discover that it is in the valleys of our lives that we find refreshment from God Himself. It is not until we have walked with Him through some very deep troubles that we discover He can lead us to find our refreshment in Him right there in the midst of our difficulty. We are thrilled beyond words when there comes restoration to our souls and spirits from His own gracious Spirit." (Keller, Phillip. "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23," p. 86.)

HAVE TWO VOLUNTEERS READ 1 JOHN 4:4 AND ROMANS 8:31,38-39.

What promise of God in these verses gives us courage to face any circumstance, trial, enemy, or even the devil himself with confidence?

APPLICATION

Identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to our lives.

How have you seen God, the Great Shepherd, protect you from a specific trouble? When has He guided you in the midst of the dark valleys of life?

What is a "dark valley" or maybe simply a point of struggle in your Christian life that you are facing right now? Are you struggling with your job, with school, in your family, in your marriage, with finances, or with health? How does today's discussion give you comfort?

How can we as a group and church together find encouragement in Christ, our Great Shepherd? What can we do in our group to establish rhythms of rest in His presence in the face of this life's trials and difficulties?

PRAYER

Praise God for His faithful protection of His sheep. Thank Him for the times you have discussed today where you have seen God protect you, even in the darkest valleys. Cry out to Him for protection, encouragement and comfort as you face the current trials of your life. Give Him praise and thanks that He "that is in you is greater than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

COMMENTARY

PSALM 23:4

Some argue that the Hebrew term tsalmaweth is related to an Akkadian word (tselem) that means "deep darkness." Others say it comes from two Hebrew words, tsal and moth, and means "shadow of death." It occurs approximately 20

times in the OT. It is clear that it implies intense darkness that represents extreme danger (Job 10:21; 28:3; Jer 2:6). “Darkest” fits this specific context, since it is in the darkest valley where the greatest danger (such as a predator) lurks for sheep.

DEUTERONOMY 31:6

The narrative of Moses’ imminent death and the succession of Joshua to leadership is reminiscent of an earlier part of Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 3:21-28). It also anticipates the formal call and commissioning of Joshua following Moses’ departure (Jos 1:1-9). Human leaders are only God’s surrogates and therefore are to be followed only if they are obedient to Him.

JOSHUA 1:9

Two more references to the instruction affirm the key importance of God’s revelation. Study and learning of it are to form so much a part of one’s life that the words are fully obeyed as in Deuteronomy 6:6-9. The “frame” of God’s promised presence in Joshua 1:5,9 indicates that Joshua’s success will come because God is with him, enabling him to read and observe God’s word (Eph. 2:8-10).

PSALM 27:1

Light is parallel to salvation, which in this context refers to rescue from danger. Darkness represents danger (23:4), but light dispels darkness, eliminating the immediate danger (18:28). With God’s protection, there is no need to be afraid regardless of the danger (v. 3; Rm 8:31).

ISAIAH 35:4

God will save His people from the godless nations that oppress them. God’s retribution refers to the punishment due the wicked and the reward due the righteous. For this reason, the latter can be strong and not fearful.

ISAIAH 41:10

God’s statement I am with you is a concise way of describing the covenant relationship between Him and His people. God’s right hand is often associated with His military might, thus His ability to protect His people.

1 JOHN 4:4

The one who is in the world probably refers to the Devil, whether in person or as represented by his spiritual and human servants.

ROMANS 8:31, 38-39

8:31 If God is for us expresses not a hypothetical scenario, but a sure reality: God really is for us. OT believers had the same assurance: “I fear no danger, for You are with me” (Ps 23:4; cp. Ps 27:1). “This I know: God is for me” (Ps 56:9). Who is against us? The opposition seems like a lot sometimes—the world, the flesh, Satan, secularists, false religions, our enemies—but God loves us and is sovereign. Yahweh is our Shepherd, Maker of heaven and earth!

8:38-39 Paul’s “grand persuasion” (Gk *pepeismai*) is in the perfect tense, which indicates a past action that has ongoing impact. Having been persuaded (by God), he stood firm in the belief that nothing could separate him from the love of God. Jesus conquered death and Satan on the cross, ensuring that nothing can change God’s love or purpose for us. We “are being protected by God’s power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1Pe 1:5).