Thriving in the Valley

Psalm 23:3-4 / Job

10/9/22

The shepherd David penned one of the most famous lines in all of Scripture:

*“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.”* (Ps. 23:6)

In the Palestine winter months back in David’s day, shepherds would take the sheep down to the lowlands where there was more grass, and it was warmer. But once summer arrived and the temperature rose, it was in the sheep’s best interest to move to higher ground. The only way to get the sheep from the low ground up to the high ground was to go through the valleys and gorges that are common in Palestine.

In this psalm, the better translation for this valley is “dark valley” or “valley of deep darkness.” The valley of deep darkness is not just about death; it’s about all those trials in life when, for a season, the shadows overtake the light.

Now contrary to popular belief, Valleys are impartial, inevitable, and purposeful. Everyone will go through the valley, and often more than once. Even the most obedient sheep still have to go through the valley.

Just before David talked about the valley in vs 3, he wrote, “He refreshes my soul, He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.” He then went on to say that sometimes that means going into dark valleys in vs. 4. Here’s a truth, we may not want to hear...Even righteous paths can still have valleys and shadows, but the truth for the Christian in these “Valleys” is it’s for His name’s sake...His Glory!

* An artist knows you can’t have a great picture if you don’t have shadows. Even more, The Divine Artist knows the same thing is true for us and knows that valleys, with shadows, and dark tones will make us so much more!

**Valleys are impartial and inevitable.**

Notice the Bible does not say, “Count it all joy **IF** you encounter trials” but “Count it all joy **WHEN** you encounter trials…” James 1:2

Whether they come as a result of this sin-sick broken life, or as a wilderness experience preparing us for battle, or as divine discipline when the perfect Father loving corrects us, we need to see valleys as if we were on the anvil watching everything about ourselves become melted down, hammered out, and chiseled so that we better reflect His image. So, the truth this morning I want you to take home is valleys are purposeful and there really is a reason for “your valley”

Just as the shepherds back in David’s day would move the sheep to a better place, our shepherd is leading us to a place of refined faith and promoted usefulness, where we again as we’ve been learning to do all year, become less of ourselves and more of Him!

**Faith is not immune to trials...It is fueled by trials.**

* 1 Pet. 1:6-7 - *6 So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. 7 These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.*
* (Homework - James 1:2-12 & Heb. 11)

This doesn’t mean the valley is easy, but it does mean our pain, our trial, and our journey will not be wasted. If your path is currently through the valley or you see one in your future, there are five things I want us to see that will make the difference in your ability to not just survive, but “thrive in your valley”.

**“WHEN YOU GO THROUGH THE VALLEY:”**

**1- Draw Close to the Shepherd**

The shepherd is not a long-distance guide. He enters the shadows with us and can use those shadow moments to draw us closer to Him.

* Isa. 43:2-3 - *“When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.”*

The enemy loves to whisper in our ears, “You are alone. God’s left you to fend for yourself. A good shepherd wouldn’t bring you here.” Resist those lies by drawing close!!!

* James 4:7-8a *- 7 So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come close to God, and God will come close to you*

1. Don’t resist the shepherd, resist the lies, resist the depression, resist, the distractions!
2. Don’t blame God! Remember we don’t have His perspective, but we do have His promises.

The journey will be much more bearable, beneficial, and thriving if we walk beside the shepherd instead of pouting ten steps behind. So, draw close. And when you draw close …

**2- Talk to the Shepherd**

When David got in the valley, he stopped talking ABOUT God and he started talking TO God.

Have you ever noticed how the pronouns change from the first three verses to the last three in Psalm 23? The psalm opens with, “He leads, He guides, He restores,” but David adjusts his language to “… for YOU are with me; YOUR rod and staff comfort me.” It’s no coincidence this shift happens in the valley.

* Martin Luther said, “The thing that separates Christianity from all other religions is its personal pronouns.”

David knew the value of crying out to God. Over and over throughout the psalms, he recorded this phrase, **“Hear my cry, O God.”** The same shepherd-psalmist who didn’t hesitate to talk to the shepherd-Savior is the one who testified, “*The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”* Ps. 34:18

In the valley, do what Jesus did in his darkest hour in Gethsemane. He prayed “Abba, Father,” and invites us to do the same.

* Gal. 4:6 - *And because weare his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.”*

Don’t equate darkness with distance. Draw close to the shepherd and talk to the shepherd.

And while you’re there…

**3- Hunt for Treasure**

God is able to redeem anything believers go through. This is the essence of what Paul told us in these well-known words in Romans 8:28:

* *“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*

But we need to notice, He doesn’t say all things are good; He said there is NOTHING we go through that cannot be redeemed by God so that something good can come from it. Any valley we go through – God can and will enter it with us – to bless us and change us so that we look more like Jesus. That’s Treasure!

* You know how a pearl is formed? A grain of sand makes its way inside an oyster’s shell through a crack. In response to the irritation, the secretions and coatings produce a pearl. All oysters don’t produce pearls — only the ones who recover from the irritation and the wound. A pearl is basically a healed wound.

No wound. No treasure.

* 1 Pet. 1:7 - *“These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.”*

The benefit of this fire of testing is immediately for the Christian. When a believer comes through a trial still trusting the Lord, he is assured that his faith is genuine. That’s Treasure!

God through His Spirit will reveal to us where He is turning wounds into treasure. We may not ever fully understand, but in His grace, we get a glimpse of how far He’s brought us.

In fact, one day we just might look back and thank God for the journey. Not that we’d ever want to go through it again or wish it on anyone else, but we’ll look back and realize we’re in a better place because we went through the valley and the things we learned, how it’s changed us, and how God was with us the entire time! That’s the treasure...learning, changing, and knowing you were never alone!

**4- Keep Walking**

The keyword is **through** — We go through the valley. The place of shadows is not a permanent home.

When the darkness closes in and you don’t know what else to do, just take the next step. Do the next thing. Hold on for a little longer. Keep walking, even if it is with a limp. Keep walking by faith, not by sight. You can’t afford to stop and analyze why you had to enter. Faith chooses to survive when it cannot explain, and it’s in that time your faith can grow from surviving to thriving as you continue to walk, trust, and be led by the Shepherd.

God never did explain the valley to Job. The phrase “valley of deep darkness” is used nine times in the book of Job. Job was on the right path, but he never did understand why God sent him through the valley of deep darkness.

* God allowed the Valley
* God was with Him in the Valley
* God restored him after getting THROUGH the valley

Thriving faith declares, “It is enough to know that I know the shepherd and He is guiding me for His name sake. God wouldn’t lead me anywhere if it couldn’t bring Him glory and me good.”

So, keep walking. You on to a better place, a better you, a stronger relationship in Him! The Shepherd has promised to get us there.

Finally..

**5-Praise Him Through the Valley**

Matt Redman was interviewed about his song, “Blessed Be Your Name,” written in the weeks following 9/11: “It’s really a song born out of the whole of life — a realization that we will all face seasons of pain or unease. And in these seasons, we will need to find our voice before God.”

Many of us have in the past or are even currently have traveled into totally unexpected valleys; They’ve caught you off guard in every way imaginable. Initially, you handled it with firm resolve and faith. But as the issues dragged on and the complications may have mounted, you’ve became weary and maybe even lost your way. Maybe even taking your eyes off the Savior and only seeing the storm. Maybe, you’ve lost your “voice.” Maybe this morning, God is trying to get your attention, by calling you to praise Him in the middle of your storm your valley.

Casting Crowns has a song, “Praise You in This Storm”. Praising God in the darkness of your valley, in your storm will return your eyes to the Savior and slowly your voice will return fully.

**Closing:**

The shepherd’s presence changes everything. Before any of us ever go through a valley, we say we believe and trust in God. But it is in the limping beside Him through the darkness that we learn whether or not we truly believe and trust Him or it’s just something we say. There is a difference.

I am so thankful that in every valley I’ve ever been in or will ever have to go through, the shepherd never left me in the darkness, sometimes pulled me back from the edge, and was leading me ever so gently all the time.

If you are in a valley this morning, I pray these few words the Lord has brought will lead you back to the side of the shepherd. Once you’re in a valley, the only way out is THROUGH it and the best place to be is BESIDE your shepherd-Savior...Jesus Christ!

Psalm 23 doesn’t promise the absence of shadows, but it promises the continuing presence of the shepherd in the midst of them; and that changes everything!

Remember whether you’re in the valley this morning or heading into one, the valleys & trials of our life are inevitable and purposeful...Remember that faith is not immune to trials, but is fueled by trials, and it’s in these “valleys” allowing the Shepherd to lead you, change you, and get you THROUGH, you will grow to be what God has divinely purposed you to be when He created you!

**So rather than struggling, complaining, and surviving the valley, start Thriving in the Valley today!**