

The Fourteen Blessings

by Gary Wilkerson

Gary Wilkerson explores the profound blessings found in Psalm 23, emphasizing God's intimate care and guidance in our lives.

Duration: 40:00

Scripture: Psalm 23:1

Topics: "Blessing", "Intimacy With God", "God's Blessings"

Description

Gary Wilkerson delivers a powerful sermon on the 'Fourteen Blessings' found in Psalm 23, emphasizing the intimate relationship between the believer and the Lord as their shepherd. He highlights the blessings of guidance, restoration, and comfort that God provides, even in the midst of life's valleys and challenges. Wilkerson reassures the congregation that these blessings are not earned but are gifts of God's mercy and goodness, available to all who trust in Him. He encourages believers to focus on their relationship with God, reminding them that true fulfillment comes from being shepherded by the Lord rather than seeking fulfillment in worldly desires. Ultimately, he emphasizes that God's goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives, leading us to dwell in His presence forever.

Transcript

I hope you have your Bible with you or a Bible on your app, an app on your phone, whatever device you might use. We're going to be looking at Psalm chapter 23. Here tonight, Psalm chapter 23.

I like to give titles to my message, and this one's called 14 Blessings. 14 Blessings. How many of you would like a blessing? Just raise your hand if you'd like a blessing.

How many of you wouldn't mind two blessings? They call that a double portion. How about four or eight or 12? We're going to talk about 14 blessings that the Lord has spoken to you and promised to you and blessed the blessings he wants to give to you in Psalm chapter 23. Father, I pray you bless the word.

Let it speak life. Give me words from heaven, divine words. Give me an unction, an anointing, an authority to preach the blessed word of God.

We give thanks for this in Jesus' name. Everybody said together, amen. If you don't mind, please, I know you just found yourself a comfortable seat.

Do you mind standing with me and opening up your word of Psalm chapter 23 as I read that Psalm chapter 23, a Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd. It's one of the most beloved passages of scripture, whether you're a Christian or not even.

A lot of people rely on this when they're in trouble. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me besides still waters. He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemy. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen and amen. Praise God.

You may be seated. Thank you so much. As I said, this is one of the most beloved passages of scripture, chapters of scripture that that is known to man.

And it is a beautiful text, but it's also one that speaks of conflict, one that speaks of trouble. And I want to take some time tonight, just not a lot of time, but just some time to walk with you through this passage. It starts in verse one by saying, the Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. And from the first words of everything we read tonight to the last words of everything we've read tonight, there's something that shows David, King David, who's the writer of this Psalm, shows his intimacy with Jesus or his intimacy with the Father, his intimacy with the Trinity. There's a closeness in this passage.

There's a sense of knowing one another. There's a sense of communion, of walking together. And when we read a Psalm like that, that is exactly what the Holy Spirit would love for us to discover, the blessing of communion with the Holy Spirit, of communion with the Father, of communion with Jesus Christ.

And it says in here, 10 different times, David is saying, you and me. I know we only read just six verses and we read them so fast. You probably didn't stop to really think about them.

I have them underlined in my Bible. The Lord, speaking of the Lord, that's you are my shepherd, you and me, you're my shepherd. You, it says, he makes me, he, the Lord, makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me besides still waters. He restores my soul. Do you see the combination here? You see how David is thinking, this is me and you in this thing together, Lord.

I'm going to walk through a valley of the shadow of death, but the good news is it's me and you in this thing together. We have the presence of the Lord together. He leads me for his name's sake.

I will, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, you will be with me. Your rod comforts me. Your staff comforts me.

It goes on, your presence goes before me. You anoint my head with oil and I have come into your house where I will dwell all the rest of my days. Me, me and you, Lord.

I love this passage. It just, it speaks of the thing that we most desire after being born again is this close-knit walk with God. What can keep us walking through the valley of the shadow of death? It's nothing but that sense of connection to the Lord, of being one with him.

10 times it says you and me, and that should reflect our life. If your life, if you could write six verses of your life, I would encourage you to put 10 times in there, me and you, Jesus, me and you, Father, me and you, Holy Spirit, we're in this thing together. And look what the Lord is doing for David, for the king, and for you and I. He is shepherding us.

He is fulfilling our wants, our desires, our hopes. He's causing us to lie down in green pastures. He's leading us.

It says leads twice here in this passage. He leads us in green pastures and by still waters. He restores our soul.

He leads us in the path of righteousness. He gives us power when we're walking through the valleys, through the shadows, through death, through fear, and through evil. And he gives us comfort.

That comfort speaks of discipline and direction, the rod and the staff. He sets a table in the presence of our enemy. He anoints our head with oil.

He lets our cup overflow. Goodness follows us. Mercy follows us.

And to top it all off, we have all these things, these 14 blessings that I just mentioned. On top of all that, it says you're going to have these a few days of your life. Doesn't say that, does it? How many days of your life you're going to have it? All.

Say that one more time. All. Remember that no matter what you're going through, no matter how hard things get, no matter what people say about you, no matter what your economic situation, no matter what your health, all the days of your life, the Lord's presence will be with you.

He will guide you. He will lead you. He will separate you.

He will watch over you. He will not leave you or forsake you. These 14 blessings aren't just blessings that you get occasionally, nor are they blessings you get as rewards for your righteousness.

There are blessings that are out of the goodness and the mercy of the heart of God. Some of us say, well, I'm not going to have those 14 blessings in my life. Well, why not? Well, it's because I haven't been living up to the Holy standard.

I haven't been reading my Bible enough. I haven't been praying enough. An interesting thing about this is where does David suggest we get these 14 blessings? What did he do to get them? What does that passage of scripture require of us in order to receive these 14 blessings? You want me to tell you what it is? Absolutely nothing.

It doesn't. David doesn't say I prayed and I got the blessings. I read my Bible a lot and I got the blessings.

I gave to the poor and I got my blessing. He got the blessings because God is good. He's got you.

Every blessing that he's poured out on you wasn't deserved, wasn't earned, wasn't merited. It was the mercy of God. You didn't deserve it.

I didn't deserve it. But he gave me the blessings from heaven. And it's not just all the days of my life, but it's the end of my life when it's all said and done.

I get to dwell with him in this house forever and ever. It's not just all my days, whether they be 60, 70, 80, or 90 or more here on earth. It's beyond that.

Some of us are aging in this room. Can you say amen, brothers and sisters? Amen. Don't point to the person next to you when you're saying that.

Amen. No, it's not only this earth, but it's forever. Hallelujah.

It's forever. It's forever. When we've been there 10,000 years, it's just the beginning of the blessings, the multiple blessings that the Lord is going to be pouring upon us.

You might be saying, wait a minute, but I have problems. I have anxieties. I have stress.

We're talking about blessings and promises and all these things God's pouring out, but I don't seem to have that. I have days where I'm depressed. I have days where I'm living in anxiety.

I have days where fear overwhelms me. I have days where I have doubt and discouragement. I'm kind of feeling guilty by reading these things because I'm really not receiving these blessings.

I'm not walking in that sense of abundance of the Lord. Can I say this to you? David only wrote one Psalm 23. It was on one of his good days, but he also wrote Psalm 22.

Have you ever read Psalm 22? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? They tear my bones apart. They rend my garments. They pierce my hands and my feet.

David in 22 is saying, but the world seems to be falling apart. And I want to encourage you in the Psalm 23 is a go-to Psalm. Read it.

Meditate upon it. Let that be that place of intimacy, the you and me with the Lord. But if you're down, if you're troubled, if you're weary, if you're overwhelmed, don't get discouraged by being discouraged.

Trust that the Lord is with you, that the Psalm 23 is always there, whether you feel it or not. It's there for you. And you have that promises.

We all want to live in Psalm 23, but oftentimes our experiences in some of the other Psalms where David says, why so downcast? Oh, my soul. It's not a sin to feel downcast. But when you are downcast, you can go back to Psalm 23 and say, even though I'm walking through this downcast time, the Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not want. He's with me. His rod and his staff, they comfort me.

The goodness and mercy are following after me. The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. This first sentence has two parts to it.

The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. They require a link together. You can't have one with the other.

If you don't have a shepherd, you're going to end up wanting. If you're living a life of a thousand different lustful wants, you're always on edge because you want more and you're striving and you're exhausted in your pursuit and ambitions. It's because you're not leaning on the shepherd.

These two things are mutually linked together. We must have them both. If there is no shepherd, you're going to find yourself in want.

If you're finding yourself in want, it means there's no shepherd in your life or your self shepherding. You're leading by your own worries or anxieties. You're having sleepless nights.

You're having troubled thoughts, a restless mind, a confused understanding of life situation. Leaning on the shepherd brings you back. Coming back to Psalm 23 will bring you back to that place of peace that we need in your life.

It says here that the Lord is my shepherd. You should not let anything else shepherd you. Don't let your emotions shepherd you.

Don't let your spouse shepherd you, even though they might be a good spouse. I have one of the best in the world, but she can't be my shepherd. Psalm 23 doesn't say Kelly is my shepherd.

I shall not want. It says the Lord is my shepherd. You have an amazing pastor and pastoral staff here, but they're not your primary shepherds.

They are under shepherds. If you're having a problem, it's not your church. It's not your pastors.

It's who are you allowing shepherds to you. The Lord is your shepherd. My father and my mother are not my shepherds.

My children are not my shepherds. The boss where you work, whether it's a good boss or a bad boss, is not your shepherd. Don't allow them to dictate your emotions.

Don't allow your life to be cluttered by problems because of the way your boss or your environment at work is treating you. They aren't your shepherd. When you're walking through all these things of life, just turn and go, I have a shepherd.

I have a shepherd, and he knows my name, and he sees my pain, and he is with me wherever I go. No other shepherd. If you have another shepherd, you're going to end up in want.

If Pastor Tim's your primary shepherd, he is your under shepherd. If he's your primary shepherd, you'll want. If the elders are your primary shepherds, you're going to want.

If your spouse is your primary shepherd, you're going to want other things. But the outcome of having, it's not, these aren't mutually exclusive. If you have the Lord as your shepherd, it's going to say you shall not want.

It's a result of having the first thing. It's not like you're focusing on saying, I don't want, I don't want, I don't want, I don't want. That's called Buddhism, to get rid of all desire.

That's not what this is. This is to accelerate desire. This is to move out into more desire than you've ever had before, but it brings a direction to the desire.

My desire is in cars. My desire is in money. My desire is in success.

My desire is in fame. My desire is in a comfortable life. My desire isn't getting everything I want.

My desire is placed on the Lord Jesus Christ, and he's my shepherd. And therefore, since I have him, I don't want all these other things. It's not trying to kill desire.

It's placing a stronger desire, like a laser beam focus on the first thing. And then he says to us, out of his mercy and goodness, that things that will follow us, New Testament words basically say the same thing, saying, seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these other things shall be added unto you. The reverse of that would go wrong.

If you seek the things that you want added unto you, you're not going to find the fullness of that shepherd leading and guiding you in your life. I shall not want is a, in the Hebrew language, the word shall there is future tense. Interesting, isn't it? It's future tense.

It's not saying I didn't want things, and it's not saying I kind of don't want things right now. You know what it's saying? A time is coming where I'm going to allow the Lord to shepherd me so powerfully, so intimately, so dearly, so laser beam focus. I'm going to allow him to shepherd me that way that I shall not want.

It's a growth process. So again, it doesn't weigh with condemnation and shame and guilt. If you say, well, I kind of want my children to stop acting up.

I kind of want my husband to stop being a knucklehead. You know, it's not wrong to want things, but what it's saying here is you're going to get to a place where you're satisfied in Christ. You'll have that, and you won't want other things in this future tense.

Mary had this. If you remember the story in the New Testament of Mary and Martha, and Jesus came to speak at them, and Mary was busy about many things, but Martha was sitting down at Jesus' feet, the laser beam focus on the good shepherd, hearing the words that Jesus said, my sheep know my words, and so she was wanting to know these words of Jesus, wanting to hear. That's why I'm so thrilled when you come to services like this on Tuesday night, and you open up your word.

You're hungry and thirsting after the word of God because you're sitting at the feet of Jesus, not me, but of Jesus. He's speaking to you through the power of the Holy Spirit tonight, and you're becoming a Mary. You're saying, I want to be shepherded by the Lord, and I want to have this Mary heart.

Martha, Jesus said, you're busy about many things, but Mary has chosen the better part. What was the better part? Trusting the shepherd of her soul, coming and resting. The dishes will take care of themselves.

There's a good time and place to do that, usually before you go to bed at night so they don't get full of bugs, but anyway, that's beside the point. At least that's what my wife tells me, but those things will take care of themselves. The world has enough trouble.

The day has enough trouble for itself. That's what Jesus said, but he said, choose the better part. When you choose the better part, the good news about choosing the better part is once you choose the better part, you get all the other parts.

You don't have to worry about the other parts. Choose the other parts. You don't get the better part, and you're going to be worried about not having all the parts you want.

Did that make any sense to you? Choose the single focus part, and your life won't be anxious for all these other things. It doesn't say you won't walk through the valley of the shadow of death. It doesn't change where you are, but it changes who you are, and that change is radical.

It's a difference. If your deepest affection is for a new car or a bigger house or a better income, you're going to find yourself wanting. But if your deepest affection is that merry heart to come and be at the feet of Jesus, to get to know him, to study his words that we might have revealed, to pray, not just praying for people or things, but praying for your own heart.

Lord, I want to know you in the power of your resurrection. There's another type of want. It's the want of, I have something, and I don't want to lose it.

Anybody have that fear? All right. I'm not wanting something new, but I've got something I want. My kids are finally working out the right way, and my marriage is finally working together, but I'm afraid I'm going to lose it.

It's too good to be true. I'm going to do something wrong. I'm going to mess this thing up, and we're living under a fear.

We think it's not wanting more, but it actually is. It's a fear of insecurities. The Lord really is not going to shepherd me, or he shepherded me into this good place, but I'm not sure he's faithful to keep me in that good place.

And it's important we understand that he is the shepherd. And it's the Lord is my shepherd, not my own desires, not my own ambition, not my own lust, not my own carnal desires, not my own sinful nature, not satanic temptations. None of those things can shepherd us.

We have to have this one and single shepherd. Now, that was only verse one, and I'm going through six, and you might be thinking, well, we're going to be here for another hour. The latter verses go faster than the former verses.

Verse two, he makes me lie down in green pastures. Strange word in the middle of that sentence. Can anybody pick it out as you see it on the screen? He what? Makes.

He doesn't ask, does he? If he asked, we wouldn't do it. If he suggested it, or if he said it would really be good for you to take a little time and just breathe and rest and trust, spend a few moments with me. It's not a suggestion, is it? Unfortunately, he has to make us do this.

All right, I'm going to make you. The shepherd sometimes gets the crook, the shepherd's hook, and he just takes it and puts it around the neck and pulls that sheep down. Quit running around.

Quit being scattered in multiple places. Quit having ambitions for a million different things. Just have this one thing focused.

Just settle down. And so he makes us lie down. This is hard for some of us, right? You ever heard of a New York minute? I live in Colorado.

A New York minute is like 40 times faster than a Colorado minute. It's it just flies by. A Colorado minute is like, dude.

And a New York minute is like, dude. And so not to be rude to New Yorkers, but you guys are just faster than the rest of us. So it's harder, I think, here in this culture.

When do you do that? Just if you walk here, if you get off the train and come here, you're walking by noise. And I mean, this guy was on a bicycle. I mean, walking here just from a few blocks, he was on a bicycle.

And the music was so loud, my ears hurt. And there was all kinds of stuff going on. And so sometimes he just grabs us by the scruff of the neck and says, I'm just going to sit you down for a little while.

I'm going to let you rest for a moment. I'm going to make you lie down. And it's precious because he's not going to make you lie down in a desert.

He's not going to make you lie down in thorns. He's not going to make you lie down in fire. He's going to make you lie down.

But once you get there, you're going to be like, wow, this is green pastures. It'd be like him saying, I'm going to make you lie down in Hawaii. You're not going to have much conflict with that.

But sometimes we're just moving so fast. We don't do that. He leads me besides quiet or still waters.

Sheep don't like roaring rivers. They don't like to be led up by the rapids of a fast moving river. They like still waters, a little pond, a little stream, because the other ones, the noise and the activity frightened.

But you know what I found in many Christians lives? They like the roaring rivers. They like the stress. They like the anxiety.

They like to move. They like the stirring. They like conflict.

Or even if you want to Christianize that, they like to go to roaring river revivals. They like to go to powerful Pentecostal deliverance moments. They like to fall over when somebody waves their hands at them.

They like to scream and shout. They want to have a roaring river church. They want to have just, come on, this is getting too quiet.

Somebody scream or I'm going to get uncomfortable in this place. Extravagant moves of God, revival tent meetings, go to this city or that city to get the roaring rivers. But I have found in my Christian life, most of my growth comes through still waters.

Comes through that quiet time. Comes through that intimate. Comes when he said, it comes when he says, just lie down.

Don't make me make you. Just start to learn to do that in that place, that quiet place where you can grow. Verse three, he restores my soul.

In the context now, verse one and two, it sounds like restoring of the soul, but your soul's troubled, your soul's discouraged, your soul's upset. So now I'm going to restore it. But the Hebrew word there is the same word in Greek that Jesus used when he was restoring Peter.

Do you remember what happened? I believe it's in Luke 23 when Peter had denied the Lord three times and Jesus says, I'm praying for you. And when you are restored, I believe in the context here, he's talking about righteousness and unrighteousness. He's talking about falling away from the Lord.

He's talking about backsliding. He's talking about being lukewarm. How many of you, don't raise your hand, but you've experienced that? Or maybe you're experiencing it right now.

I get comments from somebody in this church here on my Instagram account and we write back and forth. And this person is almost constantly, and by the way, if you think it's you, it's not you. They're not here tonight.

Okay. But they're constantly saying, I think I failed the Lord. I think he's upset with me.

Or I'm not even sure I'm still in the faith anymore. And I'm just going, you wouldn't be writing me. If you weren't in the faith, you would have forgotten about your faith.

And so the fact that you're worried about it shows that you have it. But the thing that's lacking is to realize Jesus has prayed for you. And then the next thing that Jesus says, and when you return, and I love that passage because he doesn't say, I'm praying for you.

If you return, what do you say? I'm praying for you. And when you return, you'll be restored. I'm restoring you, Peter, not only restoring you to where you were, but now you're going to feed my sheep.

Interesting. Jesus uses the same word, Psalms 23 does, that he's going to shepherd over people. Peter's going to get to do that through the power of Jesus Christ.

By the way, that's Luke 22. I think I said 23, Luke 22. How comforting is it to us church tonight that we have the confidence that God himself is the source of your restoration.

It's not picking yourself back up. It's not striving to do a bunch of better stuff. It's not trying harder in your faith.

It's not trying to squeeze your mind into saying, I believe, I believe, I believe, I believe. That's humanism. This is a grace.

Goodness will follow you. And the Lord's goodness is that he's going to restore you. Your soul will be restored.

He leads me in paths of righteousness. To me, this is one of the most powerful parts of this scripture. Some people talk about the valley or the green pastures or the quiet waters.

To me, this is really what it's all about. This is the centerpiece of what David is after. This is the centerpiece of what God is after.

What he's saying there is we hear about in these six verses, all the glorious gifts of God, the shepherd's heart, the green pastures, the still waters, the rod and the staff, the table, the overflowing cup, the

anointing of my head, the goodness and the mercy. All of these things have one purpose, though. How many of you know God's eternal purpose is not to make you comfortable? If it was, he's not doing a very good job.

Am I right? Comfort is not his primary things. It's part of the, he knows when you need comfort and he knows when you need challenge. But his goal, out of all these things we read in Psalm 23, is this one thing.

He leads me to a place of righteousness. He's making me righteousness. Now, I know you're not shouting hallelujah, but that's the most important thing I'll say tonight.

He is after your righteousness. Righteousness is living holy just before God. The problem with righteousness is we don't know how to do it.

From the law, it's proven us we couldn't do it. The prophets prove us, prove we couldn't do it. The New Testament church proved we couldn't do it.

So he had to come and put a new covenant upon us, saying that the father's going to make a covenant with the son and they're going to promise our righteousness. And we'll be engrafted into the righteousness of God. So when you're measuring yourself in the light of this, he's leading me to walk in the path of righteousness.

Don't measure it by your performance. Don't measure it by your behavior. Measure it by how you are graciously engrafted into the things of God.

And you will soon find the patterns of sin, the habits of negativity, the worldliness, the backs of the nest. You'll find those things will fall away because he's imputing. And the word imputing means giving to you.

He's giving you his righteousness. How much righteousness is his righteousness? It's perfect righteousness. It's perfect keeping the law.

Jesus was the only one who perfectly kept the law. And now he's saying, I'm keeping it, I'm putting that into you. So when the father sees you, he's seeing a perfect son, a perfect daughter, one who is righteous in his eyes.

He gives you 14 blessings in order to produce this one thing in your life. I am the righteousness of God in Christ. He's made me in right standing with the father.

He makes me acceptable into the kingdom of God. And he gives me an eternal home now because of his righteousness. And the path that he has us on is righteousness.

It's for him. And this righteousness is for his namesake. It's not for you to say, hey, I finally obtained righteousness.

I'm waiting for the elders to obtain their righteousness. They're doing pretty good, but I've already obtained my righteousness. Right? No, no, no.

It is for his namesake. He's doing this for himself. He's not doing it for you, although we are recipients of it, and we are enjoying participating in it, but he's doing it for his own glory.

You glorify God when you worship in song, but you glorify him more when you live in that righteousness of Christ that he covers you, the cloak of righteousness that he puts upon you. Verse four, even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, it takes a wicked left turn here, green pastures and quiet waters. And now, wait a minute, let's go back to the green pastures and quiet waters.

Now he's saying, but even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. But that even though speaks to the second part of this text, even though I walk through the valley of shadow of death, but it connects with the first part. Even though I walk through the valley of shadow of death, I'm still drinking quiet waters.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I'm still lying down in green pastures. Even though I'm walking through the valley of the shadow of death, I'm still being shepherded by the great shepherd of my soul. The valley doesn't change the shepherding, the pastures, the quiet waters, the cup overflowing, the benefits, the 14 blessings of the Lord are not quelled by being in the valley.

The only thing that quells it is our emotions. I don't feel them quite as strongly. Why? Because the valley, the shadow of death creates tension and it creates stress and sometimes our mind begins to focus on those things.

We focus on the negative rather than remembering, remembering, remembering who our shepherd is. These are some serious things here he's talking about, a valley. Raise your hand if you've been through a valley.

You know what that means to go through a valley? A downtime, a discouragement time, a troubled time. A shadow. Shadow in Hebrew means deep darkness.

I'm not sure how in English got the word a shadow in that, but it's more than a shadow, it's a deep darkness. Some in this room are in a deep darkness even now. It goes even further, death, the valley of the shadow.

If it said the valley of the shadow of a new car, okay, I'm waiting for it to happen, but it's not, a valley in the shadow of a new job, but a new marriage, not a new marriage, but first marriage hopefully, whatever it might be. But it's the valley of the shadow of death. The ultimate fear that Jesus came and said, the last, the struggle is the fear of death, and he's come to destroy that.

There's fear of fear, right? We have the fear of fear, there's the fear of evil, there's a fear in verse five, it talks about enemies, in the presence of my enemies. You have green pastures and you have still waters, but you have a lot of trouble in life. Don't expect not to have these troubles in your life.

Even though I walk through them, it almost seems to be suggesting when I walk through them, or as I'm walking through them, or next time I walk through them, they're going to be present in your life, these enemies. But even though, here's where we can say praise God, even though I walk through them, even though my mother and father reject me, even though my spouse has left me, even though the doctor just said cancer, even though I've been looking for this work and I can't find it, even though I don't seem to have friends, even though my children seem to be prodigals, even though I walk through all those things, I will not fear one single thing that comes my way. Not one of them, not one.

I will not fear, even though I am these things, I will fear no evil, no shadow, no dying, no enemy, no darkness, nothing will cause me to fear, nothing will cause me to tremble. The last few things I have to say

to you is, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. The staff I can understand, it's the pulls you near, it's the crook of the shepherd's hook, you've ever seen that before? And it pulls you near, I love that, that comforts me.

I'd start to drift away from the Lord a little bit, he pulls me back in, that so comforts me. Now, I don't know why it says they comfort me, they is plural, the staff comforts me, not sure why it says the rod comforts me, because the rod beats you. It's the bad sheep, you know the bad sheep? Like I have four kids, one of them, it took a lot of rod.

And literally, I would tell him when he was a little boy, I'd say, I won't say his name, but I say, son, if you do that, I'm gonna spank you. He would say, how hard? He's negotiating, I say, pretty hard, he goes, how many swats? And I go, like, three, he goes, okay, I'll do it. And he would do it, and he'd get to spanking.

But that's what the rod is, it's the discipline, it's the one, but you know what the shepherd says? It comforts me, because not only is it gonna pull me into intimacy, but it's gonna keep me from wandering, it's gonna keep me from backsliding. That should be a comfort to us, when we fear we're losing our faith, or fear like we're getting backslidden, or whatever it might be that causes us fear, he's going to use that rod to bring us back into the things you prepare. Now, all of a sudden, it changes gears here, in the last five minutes I have with you.

Let me talk about the change of gears, because what the gear changes is from shepherd to king, or from shepherd to host. He's shepherding us out in the valley of the shadow of death, and he's bringing his rod, and his staff, and he's like King David, who fought against the lion, and the bear, and he's out there in the fields with us, but now he changes gears, and he says something different. You prepare, and as we read this one more time, look at this through the lens of a New Testament supper with Jesus.

Do you remember he said, I came into your house, and you didn't wash my hands, you didn't anoint my head, come and recline at the table with me? These are interior things that a host does. So you have to picture this, the chapter 23, as two different scenarios taking place. One out in the field where there's danger, trouble, strife, problem.

Now all of a sudden he's saying, but things are gonna change. You're not always, here's the good news, you're not always gonna be walking through the valley of the shadow of death. Don't you think, there's one word in there that gives me hope, through.

I'm walking through it. I'm not staying in it. I lie down in green pastures.

I don't lie down in the shadow of the valley of death. And so he's causing us to walk through that. And what we're walking, we're not just walking through that, we're walking to something else.

We're walking through the valley of the shadow of death to get to what? That I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. This is a better place to be, I think, don't you? It says, here's what happens when the host Jesus comes and says, I'm gonna prepare a table for you in the presence of my enemies. To me, when I oftentimes read that, it sounded like a strange scenario.

All my enemies are over here, arrows are flying, people are kicking each other, swords are cutting off heads, and all of a sudden, Jesus, man, are you hungry? Not right now, no. I'm a little bit more concerned about my environment. Well, here's some potatoes and a steak.

Like, I can't eat a thing. It's just like, I'm ducking arrows. I always pictured this like a table in the presence of my enemies, out in the shadow of the valley of shadow of death.

But you see here, and almost every scholar and commentary says this. Now, this is a different scenario. This is a different setting.

He's bringing you into his house. And even though the house is surrounded by enemies, picture a castle, if you would, and the king invites you in and says, hey, you've been out there, you've been through it, haven't you? You've been suffering, haven't you? You've had arrows flung at you. You've had hardship day and night.

Come into my house for just a moment. I got a table for you to sit at. The enemies still rage, the enemies still fight, but you're inside a house now, a protected house with all kinds of soldiers up on the wall with arrows to fight back on your behalf.

You prepare a table for me. The president's my enemy, but now they're on the outside. You anoint, see, I came in, you anoint my head with oil now.

Oh, it's refreshing. I'm not sweating anymore. I got the cool oil of the household.

You anoint my head with oil. My cup, here it is. Are you thirsty from the battle? Here's a cup, and it overflows.

Oh, look how much there is to drink here. This is beautiful that my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

Goodness, the good things of God. The mercy, the mercy is when we don't do things that we should and we deserve wrath, but we get mercy instead, and that comes our way. The Bible says it follows me.

The word in the Hebrew there for follows is pursues or chases. It chases after you. I get the picture of he's asked us to lie down in green pastures, or he invited us to sit at the table, and we're running around trying to make our own life happen, and he's having to chase us with goodness and mercy.

I want to give this to you. It's not like God is like trying hard to withhold his gifts, and if you perform well enough, I'll give you my gifts. He's chasing you.

He's pursuing you with goodness. He's pursuing you with mercy. He's giving you all these precious things from heaven, and as I said earlier, these aren't just on good days.

It's not just on mountain days, not just on valley days. It's all days, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. That's the end place.

That's the final culmination. He's shepherding us from the place of trial, tribulation, trouble, but there's a goal there. A word, teleos, a direction.

It's telescoping something. It's bringing us into the house of the Lord. The very thing that David longed for, one thing I ask, one thing I desire, that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

The one thing he desired, the shepherd says, that's what I'm giving to you. You're walking through the valley of the shadow of death, but I'm giving you something. Now stand with me if you would, please.

I want to pray for you. Worship team, you're welcome to come back, or however you guys do it here. I want to pray for you.

I don't think I'd be wrong to say, all of us feel like we're in the house to some degree, but how many of you, I kind of feel like I'm in the doorway. You know, I got one foot with arrows still flinging at me, and swords coming my way, but I see the house too. It's like I'm not totally in the valley of the shadow of death, but I'm not totally in the house where I'm dwelling with the cup overflowing and the beautiful table set before me.

You're in that place of struggle because you know your faith is strong, but I would say that a lot of you would feel that way. How many of you, just by lifting of hand, just say, that's how I feel. I feel kind of the battles raging, and I'm thankful for the Lord's protection and his love and his mercy, but I'm feeling this struggle.

I want to pray for you particularly, okay? I want to pray for you. Jesus, I pray right now that you would show my friends in this room today that these valleys of the shadow of death, the fear, the evil, the enemy, all these things, Lord, are in our life, they're realities, and the enemy would have those things kill, steal, and destroy us, but your purpose is, take those very same things and use them for your intentions to cause us to walk in righteousness, to say, I shall not be, I shall not be moved. Like a tree planted by the waters, I will not be moved.

Lord, that's the righteousness that you implant into our hearts. It's like a seed that goes down and digs deep roots. So I pray, and God, I just want to have a touch, maybe if I could, from heaven of a signal, so to speak, of your goodness and mercy, and speak over these people with their hands raised, and Lord, put faith in their hearts to saying, it's chasing you, it's catching up with you.

You may feel like it's a little bit behind you. It's the event that's happened, and the goodness and mercy doesn't seem to be there yet, but it's coming, it follows you. Everywhere you go, it follows you, and so I pray over you right now that mercy, goodness would chase you down until it captures you, grabs you by both arms and shoulders, and pulls you into that house, and say, now sit down at this table, and eat, and drink, and fellowship with me.

Come close to me, know me well. Father, I pray. I know these problems that the people are facing are very serious, are very real, are very heart-wrenching, but God, I thank you that you're shepherding them through that valley in order to bring them to a new place, a higher place, a better place.

We give thanks for that in Jesus' precious name. Amen and amen. Put your hands together and thank the Lord.

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