

You Are With Me Psalm 23

Introduction

Danger of Popular Poetry: “[This] psalm may be the most-beloved, most-sung, most-prayed, and most-studied poem in the Psalter” (e.g., read at funerals, memorized in our devotionals, there is a cottage industry for mugs and other religious, shepherd-themed trinkets).

- The danger of its popularity: (1) Too familiar to care: “The very familiarity of the psalm presents a challenge so that even, if not especially, those who know it well may not pass it by too quickly.” (2) Too dear, assuming you already know what it means: “Only a vandal, surely, would want to take to pieces the best-loved psalm in the book!”
- But we’ve never been those to avoid a passage: all of it is God’s Word and no amount of nostalgia or controversy is going to keep us away. And, I find these passages to be like a great book or movie, or a beautiful painting or landscape. I discover previously unseen gems each time I examine it.

Am I Alone?: The reason this Psalm connects so deeply, I think, is the powerfully illustrated promises of God’s presence. I’ve heard of numerous situations where people had to go to the hospital but because of COVID protocols or infections, they had to do it alone (e.g., Kathy broken ankle; Bryan and Megan baby). The bigger fear than the looming medical situation is often *having to do it alone*.

The Answer: **You are not alone.** And that might be enough. But I hope, as we study this familiar passage you’ll see exactly what it means for **God to be with you** and the seed of hope will blossom as you understand that this isn’t an empty platitude but a concrete reality at the very heart of the gospel.

A Psalm of David. ¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. ⁴ 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. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.¹²

^{1 1} Ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ. Κύριος ποιμαίνει με, καὶ οὐδέν με ὑστερήσει. ² εἰς τόπον χλόης, ἐκεῖ με κατεσκίνωσεν, ἐπὶ ὕδατος ἀναπαύσεως ἐξέθρεψέν με, ³ τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἐπέστρεψεν. ὠδήγησέν με ἐπὶ τρίβους δικαιοσύνης ἕνεκεν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ. ⁴ ἔὰν γὰρ καὶ πορευθῶ ἐν μέσῳ σκιᾶς θανάτου, οὐ φοβηθήσομαι κακὰ, ὅτι σὺ μετ’ ἐμοῦ εἶ, ἡ ράβδος σου καὶ ἡ βακτηρία σου, αὐταῖ με παρεκάλεσαν. ⁵ ἠτοίμασας ἐνώπιόν μου τράπεζαν ἐξ ἐναντίας τῶν θλιβόντων με, ἐλίπανας ἐν ἐλαίῳ τὴν κεφαλὴν μου, καὶ τὸ ποτήριόν σου μεθύσκον ὡς κράτιστον. ⁶ καὶ τὸ ἔλεός σου καταδιώξεταιί με πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ζωῆς μου, καὶ τὸ κατοικεῖν με ἐν οἴκῳ κυρίου εἰς μακρότητα ἡμερῶν.

^{1 2} מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד יְהוָה רֹעִי לֹא אֶחָדָר: ² בְּבָרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶרְבִּיצֵנִי עַל-מִי מְנוּחוֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי: ³ נַפְשִׁי יְשׁוּבָב יְנַהֲלֵנִי בְּמַעְגַּל־יְדָדֶק לְמַעַן מָשׁוּ: ⁴ אֲלֹהִים בְּגִיא צְלָמוֹת לֹא-אֶירָא רַע כִּי-אֶתָּה עִמָּדִי שְׂבִטְךָ וְרֹדְפֶךָ אֲמַשְׁעֶתְךָ הַמָּה יְנַחֲמֵנִי: ⁵ תַּעֲרֹךְ לִפְנֵי וַיִּשְׁלַח יְדָדֶק צַרְרִי דַשְׁנָת בְּשֵׁמֶן רֹאֲשִׁי כֹסֵי רַחֲמֶיךָ: ⁶ וְיִשְׁבְּתִי בֵּית יְהוָה וְיִשְׁבְּתִי

1. The Lord Is My Shepherd (vv. 1-3) A Psalm of David. ¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

David: A Psalm of David. The Superscription Matters™. It provides a layer of historical, literary, and theological context. Historically we know that David was a shepherd-king. He understood the relationship between the sheep and their shepherd. He understood the heart of the shepherd for the sheep. He understood the dangers that lurked in the wild for sheep.

- There's also a reason that God is described here and throughout as a shepherd. Who better to explain our heavenly shepherd than David, the shepherd-king?

Personal: ¹ The LORD is my shepherd; There is a personal touch to this opening line: YHWH is **my** shepherd. I belong to him. "If he be a Shepherd to no one else, he is a Shepherd to me; he cares for me, watches over me, and preserves me" (Spurgeon). I am not someone else's problem or concern, I'm his.

- The God of the universe also cares for and shepherds individual sheep. As we examine this, the question isn't: "Is God your parent's shepherd?" "Is God your grandma's shepherd?" "Is God your girlfriend's shepherd?" This is a **personal** question: Is he **your** shepherd? Is he **your** guide? Is he restoring **your** soul?

Bad and Good Shepherds: Interestingly, in the Bible, the idea of a "shepherd" is most frequently connected to the role of King in the Hebrew Bible. **Shepherd is a royal metaphor.** Kings were portrayed as shepherds and "God (YHWH) is the great Shepherd-King." And often the leaders of Israel are *condemned* for being poor shepherds.³ There's this running theme that the **people of God belong to him**, he is their shepherd (chief shepherd?) and he's given them these human shepherds (assistant to the regional shepherd; under shepherd?). Unfortunately, too often, these human shepherds who should be leading people to the great shepherd are abusing the sheep for their own gain.

- The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, 'Thus says the Lord God: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them'" (Ezekiel 34:1-6).

³ "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:1-4).

The Hope of a Perfect Shepherd: We've had this conversation about other metaphors in the Bible (e.g., Father) but there's this sense, we all *long* for a gracious and good shepherd to lead, protect, and feed us but too often we've been abused and exploited by leaders in our own lives..

- **Politicians** have made promises only to betray constituents and line pockets.
- **Pastors** have been given a solemn charge only to abuse the flock (in some sense, it's a miracle and testimony to the calling on my life that I'm a pastor because of how frustrated I've been by various pastors; **wouldn't vote for a particular candidate because he was a former pastor**).

These abuses can create cynicism and hopelessness, a sense of being beaten down and neglected. Some will turn in toward themselves and say, "I don't need any leadership in my life. I can do it on my own." But that would be no different than a sheep trying to survive in the wilderness, surrounded by wolves, bears, and other dangers, by itself. These *bad* shepherds, however, can remind us that there is a perfect shepherd-King in whom we trust. Our hope is not in the kings of this earth, the politicians of this country, or the pastors in our churches. **Our hope is in the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth. He is our true shepherd.**

- "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice. (Ezekiel 34:11-16).

The promise of the Gospel is that we have a *good shepherd* and a *good king* and no human can replace him. We should look to God for true and ultimate leadership.

A Different Kind of Leader: The picture of God as our shepherd is powerfully subversive in our culture because it emphasizes guidance, protection, and care. Contrary to so much that passes as leadership today (which focuses on power, obedience, and influence). Many in our day think that leadership is about bravado and authoritarianism, when the Biblical picture is a shepherd. A shepherd lives among his sheep, faces dangers that come against them, and compassionately tends to their needs.

- The Lord is my shepherd (i.e., pastor). "So I exhort the elders (συμπρεσβύτερος) among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd (ποιμαίνω) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the

unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'" (1 Peter 5:1-5).

And Jesus' is a particularly confusing shepherd to our world because he not only loves, cares, and protects the sheep: he lays his life down for them. That's crazy! How many shepherds will do that? Most will go only so far before they realize their life is more valuable than the sheep (they can always get more sheep). Not Jesus!

Provision: I shall not want. This word is a little confusing because we say "I want _____." Here the word means "lack" (lit. "I shall not lack"). This does not mean we *desire* nothing; it means we *lack* nothing we need. There is plenty that we still desire. What he means is that "God's sheep (and that is not everybody, but only those who trust him) *never lack anything that the shepherd thinks is good for them.*"

- "My God will supply every **need** of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). "No **good thing** does he withhold from those who walk uprightly (Psalm 84:11). He withholds lots of things from us **for our good** but never withholds what is good from us. He gives us what we *need* not what we *want*. He gives us "good things" not all things.

But we look around and compare our situation to others. We look to our desires and comforts and wonder why we don't have **what we want**. It's a dangerously narcissistic position, that what I want and what I desire is what I need now and is good for me.

- What if God's grace is saying "no" to something you want because it would hurt you, not help you?

Jesus asks: Does God not feed the raven? Does he not clothe the Lily? There are not birds at the grocery store or flowers at the outlet mall. God provides generously to his creation *and* if you'd stop worrying for a second, and trust God, you'll find that life is much better. Jesus speaks repeatedly about the sin of worry. Why?

- Worry blinds you to the goodness of God and prevents you from wholeheartedly trusting him. It robs you of perspective. We start to think we know best and God doesn't.

Jesus makes this point in the gospels, that God gives his children *only good things*. If God has promised to give us "good things" when we ask something of him, we must consider it possible that our understanding of good and God's understanding is different. If God gave us *everything* we ask, we would be God.

- God knows what is for your good and will give you that. "God will either give us what we ask for in prayer or give us what we would have asked for if we knew everything he knows" (Keller).

How do I know God will give me good things? The fact that he is my father is proof. "For what would he not now give to sons when they ask, when he has already granted this very thing, namely, that they might be sons?" (Augustine). The fact that he adopted us into his family is proof that he will do good to us (e.g., Why would I adopt Joshua and then fail to love, provide, care for him?).

- **Worry is also terribly ineffective.** It's like a sugar-filled candy bar that gives you a rush of frantic energy only to leave you lethargic when your blood sugar crashes.

He's Working for Me: ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. The active agency of the shepherd in seeking out an environment in which the sheep may thrive (i.e., green). He's working for us, so we can relax. Trust in God's provision gives you the rest your heart longs for. It gives you contentment (e.g., material possessions, biblical revelation, personality, talents).

- He enables us to rest. He's not telling you to find your way or discover rest; he wants to lead you.

The sheep can sleep because the shepherd is on guard. In Psalm 127, what's the sign that you are beloved by God? Not Bible knowledge. Not holiness. Not working hard for God. **Sleep.** Here's why: If I'm asleep, then who's watching? Who's working? Who's protecting? God is. When you sleep you're saying, God, I'm going to be vulnerable, I'm trusting you. At 3:30 a.m., God has not appointed you to worry about your finances, job, family, health, etc. He has appointed you to sleep. He intended sleep—and all rest—to be a time every day where you remind yourself of the gloriously freeing truth: **You are not God.**

- "When the soul grows sorrowful he revives it; when it is sinful he sanctifies it; when it is weak he strengthens it." "He" restores us (we do not restore ourselves).
- In moments of emptiness, despair, and exhaustion the solution is not to "find yourself" or "center yourself" or "work harder," it is to turn to God. Too many of us have other "escapes." We cope and self-medicate in all sorts of ways to distract and amuse us away from our fear, when all along God is telling us to **turn to Him.**
- He leads me in paths of righteousness. He leads the way; he goes before.

Soli Deo Gloria: for his name's sake. At the end of the day, if it is based on our names, it will fail. Our names are not strong enough to bear the weight of worship. Don't build your kingdom; live for the glory of God!

- Unfortunately, we so often make God into our image, and craft worship according to our preferences, and build ministry to accomplish our desires and, in so doing, worship ourselves. We must be careful not to build our churches, ministries, and lives around our names. We don't want personal or institutional fame. We want people to see and hear and know Jesus Christ.

Being a disciple of Jesus means pursuing the advancement of his kingdom rather than our own ("seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness"). A lot of our worry comes from seeking our little kingdoms first. The paradox is this, by seeking God first, all of those things we worry about are taken care of (e.g., trying to be cool, successful, important, secure, etc.).

2. The Lord is My Comfort (v. 4) ⁴ 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.

The Problem: ⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, There is this shadow, this valley that the sheep must pass through. It's a valley of "death's shadow." The light from the meadow is blocked by the cliffs of the mountain. In this valley, all sorts of predators lurk. The same phrase "shadow of death" is used in Isaiah 9 to describe our situation in life. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone."

- Trans.: “deep darkness” or “death shadow” (deep=death; darkness=shadow).⁴
- What is the darkness that penetrates deeper than any other darkness? What is the shadow that threatens all of us? What is the darkness we can’t escape? Death. There is no deeper darkness than death.
 - And we see it in big and small ways. COVID has heightened many an anxiety because the invisible spectre of death became unavoidable and insidious. It seems invisible, yet everywhere. 550,000 of our fellow citizens have died from this disease.⁵ Add to that, our city saw the most homicides in a year in three decades last year and we are ahead of that pace this year.
- We can try to ignore or avoid it but, sooner-or-later, you’re reminded of it. Death’s sting invades our holidays, when we see an empty seat at the table.

Remember Death: But there’s something the valley gives us. A shadow is only created by light being blocked. Darkness implies the existence of light (e.g., darkness is the absence of light).

- “When the reality of death is far from our minds, the promises of Jesus often seem detached from our lives... Once we’ve learned to see the shadow [of death], we’ll be able to apply the light of Christ... [S]o long as death remains someone else’s problem, Jesus will remain someone else’s Savior... If death is not a problem, Jesus won’t be much of a solution. The more deeply we feel death’s sting, the more consciously we will feel the gospel’s healing power. The more carefully we number our days, the more joyfully we’ll hear that death’s days are numbered too” (McCullough).

Jesus shines into the darkness; the shadow of death is all around, and that’s where God shows up. Jesus walks through death to bring us life. So now, all that remains is its shadow.

- Donald Grey Barnhouse, famous pastor at Tenth Presbyterian Church lost his wife Ruth to cancer in 1944 leaving him a single parent of four children under the age of 12. While driving to the funeral, he stopped at a traffic crossing. In front of them was a huge truck. The sun cast the truck’s shadow across the snow-covered field beside it. Dr. Barnhouse pointed to the shadow and spoke to his children: “Look at the shadow of that truck on the field. If you had to be run over, would you rather be run over by the truck or by its shadow?” The youngest child responded, “The shadow. It couldn’t hurt anybody.” “That’s right,” he said. “And remember, Jesus let the truck of death strike him, so that it could never destroy us. Your mom lives with Jesus now—only the **shadow** of death passed over her.”

The Shadow: “The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us... Let us not, therefore be afraid” (Spurgeon). For God to be present in the darkness is to show there is no darkness at all (or at least it has no power).

- For those outside of Christ, death not a shadow but a reality. For those in Christ, it is a shadow we pass through to the light of life.

⁴ τῆς σκιᾶ θανάτου

⁵ As of 3/26/21.

Presence: I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.⁶

- We all walk through the valley and many of us understand and are resigned to that; but the promise of God's presence is a powerful peace in the midst. He is with us:
 - "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).
 - He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).
- Whatever darkness you are going through, you can take heart that God is with you. The fuel for our courage is the constant presence of God.
 - God is never hiding or ignoring you. In every up and down, sorry and success, he is there.

The famous Baptist Missionary, William Carey, set sail for India in 1793 along with his pregnant wife, son and daughter, never to return to England. He would die in 1834 among the people he had given his life to. For nearly **seven** years he toiled in hard spiritual soil, spending his time translating the Bible into Bengali. During this time, his son Peter died of dysentery. The stress of Peter's death and other hardships caused his wife to suffer a breakdown from which she never recovered. In this season, he wrote in his journal, "This is indeed the valley of the shadow of death to me... but I rejoice that I am here notwithstanding; and **God is here.**" In December of 1800 after seven years of hard work and harder turmoil, Carey baptized his first convert, and two months later published the first edition of the Bengali New Testament. By the time he died, he had spent **41 years** in India without a furlough. He had seen more than **700 converts** to Christ. He had translated the entire Bible into all the major languages of India and he had spawned a global missionary movement. He is called the "Father of Modern Missions." Listen again to his words: "This is indeed the valley of the shadow of death to me... But I rejoice... [because] God is here."

- The point of the cross is that God is here, present in our suffering.

Center: Poetically and thematically, this is the center of the song. The "with-ness" of God is the point. There's a promise at the beginning and a reward at the end, but we're stuck in the middle: death has been defeated but it's shadow still haunts our lives.

- The switch in speech is telling. The Psalmist goes from third person ("the Lord is") to second person ("you are"). He doesn't say, "As I walk through the valley, *he* is with me" but "*you* are with me." In your valley is where the comfort of God goes from an *idea* to a *reality*. "It is good not to talk very long *about* God without talking *to* God" (Piper).
- Your theology and your prayer should be paired. E.g., say "God is generous" should result in a prayer of "Thank you God." To say "God is glorious" should result in a prayer of praise. To say "God is with me" should result in comfort.

The valley should push you to your heavenly Father (e.g., Abby nightmare cry out to parents). Where do you turn in the darkness? (e.g., raise your hands in worship not as a sign of spiritual maturity but as a desperate child reaching for the arms of the father).

3. The Lord is My Host (vv. 5-6)⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

⁶ The rod and staff remind us that our God is not merely empathetic but powerful enough to do something. He is compassionate enough to care and powerful enough to save.

Victory: ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows On the other side of the valley there is victory. All the enemies of God's anointed watch as the banquet table is prepared. The bounty is not just sufficient, it is "overflowing" (this is hinted by one of Jesus' first miracles where he turns water to wine).

Pursuing God: ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. I think maybe the English translation here leaves a falls a little short, not because there's something wrong with it but because of what the word "follow" connotes to us. When we hear "follow" we usually think of something **passive** and **subdued**. But the sense in this passage is that God's *faithful love* has pursues us. **You have been pursued by the goodness and mercy of God every day of your life.**

- It chased you down and sought you. You didn't stumble into his love, he found you (a surefire way to check someone's testimony is to see who the hero of the story is; are they or is God?).

Eternity: When you look back at your life, you will notice how God has relentlessly and lovingly pursued you. He has found you, he has protected you, he has loved you, he has guided you, he has held you. And because **he is responsible** for your past and present, you can trust that he can guarantee your future. You will make it to his table because **his strength will carry you.**

- If you place your faith and Christ, you will spend eternity in the house of the Lord. And it is not the house, in the end, that is our great reward, but the Lord of the house.

Conclusion

The Ultimate Shepherd King: But where is the encouragement really found here? Is it simply that God is holding your hand, lifting you up, and cheering you on (only one set of footprints in the sand). *Certainly* he is with you, but it's more profound than that.

- We've gone to great lengths the last few weeks to show you that the Psalms find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus. E.g., virtually all Psalms quoted in the NT (the most quoted OT book) are prophetically applied to Jesus. The Psalter is a prophetic book pointing to Christ.
- David was a shepherd-king who pointed to the perfect shepherd-king, Jesus. So Jesus, the "son of David" is the fulfillment of the prophecy and promise that God is making in Psalm 23.
- Psalm 23 is a prophecy!

Prophetic Purpose: Why does this matter? In Psalm 23, the psalmist prophesies of the anointed one, the messiah, who would walk through the valley of the shadow death, yet fear no evil. He would emerge victorious on the other side at the banquet table of God.

- "The story of this Psalm is the story Jesus came to complete. It is the story of our Shepherd-King ruling and reigning on earth as in heaven, he's sorting out the messes, injustices, and injuries of the world once and for all. His enemies prowl around, setting

traps and whispering lies, but he perseveres to win the freedom and rest of his people at the cost of his own life" (loosely inspired by N. T. Wright).

We have a Savior who has walked through the valley of the shadow of death before us, and not just before us, but in our place! The point of Scripture is not how to slay your giant or overcome your temptation or walk through your valley, though it surely has an answer for every giant, every temptation and every valley.

- *The point of Scripture is how Jesus has slayed the giant of death, overcome the temptation we could not overcome, and walked through the valley of death for us.*

So now, we can trust in what Jesus has done and we can accept his invitation to eternal life at the banquet table of the Lord.

Incarnation: This is the heart of the incarnation. That Jesus really is Immanuel ("God with us"). That God took on flesh to conquer our enemies. The "with-ness" of God is displayed in the person of Jesus. Through faith I am united to Christ; his spirit lives in me; he intercedes on my behalf.

- Because of faith in Christ, I am a son or daughter of God..
 - The witness of God is felt in the person of Jesus (Phil 2).

So, **you are not** truly not **alone** because Jesus came. The certainty of our hope is uniquely tied to the person and work of Jesus.

- "We dare assure ourselves that *eternal life*, of which [Jesus is] the heir, is ours; and the *the Kingdom of Heaven*, into which he has already entered, can no more be cut off from us than from him; and we cannot be condemned for our sins, from whose guilt he has absolved us, since he [took] them upon himself as if they were his own. This is the wonderful exchange he has made with us; that, becoming [a man] with us, he has made us sons of God with him; that, by his descent to earth, he has prepared an ascent to heaven for us; that, by taking on our mortality, he has [given] his immortality [to] us; that accepting our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; that, receiving our poverty, he has transferred his wealth to us; that, taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself, he has clothed us with his righteousness" (Calvin *adapted*).

How do I know there is life on the other side of the valley? Because Jesus has made the way. How do I know there is a seat at the banquet table of the Lord? because Jesus is making it ready for me.

- In your wandering, in your darkness, in your need, and in your doubt "it's not great faith you need; it is faith in a great God" who has come to rescue you (N. T. Wright).
- When the Lord is my shepherd, my needs are met, my soul is at rest, my fears are calmed, and my future is secure because all of his care, work, watchfulness, skill, concern, and self-sacrifice come from his love; and our shepherd loved us so much that he died for us, his sheep.

So What?

- You are loved. Do you believe that? What would change if you felt that deeply?
- You are cared for. Do you believe that? What would change if you felt that deeply?
- You have a loving guide. What would change if you followed his path rather than your own?