

RESOURCING WITH THE 23RD PSALM

Is “safer at home” getting long?

Souls get tired; a tired soul is nothing to feel ashamed about; it’s something to pay attention to.

Do you have people who are depending on you even more now?

- That, too, can wear on your soul.
- What do they say in the airplane safety instructions about the oxygen masks? *“Be sure to secure your own mask before assisting others.”*
- You can’t be there for others if you don’t also care for yourself.

In our recent sermons, we’ve been focusing on building skills for spiritually resourcing yourself at home. Worship, Prayer, Personal Bible Reading – these practices are the emergency oxygen mask your soul especially needs in these turbulent times.

In my last sermon, we talked about using each of several different Bible reading methods in order to get the most out of it. But I love continuous improvement. So, I’ve already done a little update on those Bible reading methods. I had used the image of “Core, Heart, and Mind.” But let’s change that to “Feet, Mind, Heart, and Hands.”

- **Feet** - You’ll never learn your Bible until you spend time walking through its pages.
- **Mind** - This is to study a passage closely. There are methods to learn for this too.
- **Heart** - This is memorizing a meaningful verse to capture in your heart.
- And finally, **Hands** - This is applying a biblical teaching to your life.

Let’s take a walk through the 23rd Psalm using our **feet, mind, heart, and hands**.

First, we **walk** through the passage as a whole, looking to see where it naturally divides into parts, and then mediate on individual words of each part. Whole, Parts, Individual Words.

Psalm 23 is a whole that begins with the main point and illustrates it in a series of scenes. The Main Point is that the Lord is **your good shepherd**.

- You belong to Jesus - maybe like a little lamb, maybe like a grumpy old goat - but he loves and cares for you either way. This is a personal relationship.
- **“The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not be left wanting.”** Even if you were to lose everything, your soul would lack nothing because Jesus has you.

The scenes that unfold from there in the Psalm are life’s journey, each scene vivid in its imagery:

- The green pasture and quiet waters.
- The paths of righteousness. (Envision a path winding up a mountain.)
- The valley of shadows. (Scary stuff here.)
- The banquet table in the presence of the enemies.
- Dwelling in the house of the Lord forever.

The Good Shepherd walks with you every step of the way, in every stage and circumstance.

The Bible often teaches in images and analogies so the supply of faith lessons and applications can never be exhausted.

- Compare that to this lesson. “Two plus two = 4.” True and very important, yes. But once you’ve learned it, you’ve pretty much got it.
- Not so with the endless faith lessons possible in the images of Psalm 23.
- And when you find one that speaks deeply to your soul, that’s one to **Apply to your life.**

The green pastures and quiet waters are images of spiritual restoration. Bible reading and prayer are the rest and restoration, the food and drink your soul needs now.

- Maybe verse 3 is far as you can get for now so your soul can recover?

But the Psalm does go on. Soon enough, the Good Shepherd has you up on your feet to travel **the paths of higher righteousness** that honor God.

- Righteous and Justice are the same word in the Biblical languages.

Strengthening in Righteousness trains us for the time of trial ahead as we go down again into **the valley of deep and dangerous shadows.**

- Isn’t this where we find ourselves now in this time of pandemic? On guard against the possibility of unseeable dangers lurking in the shadows.
- Remember that Jesus is not just comfort; Jesus is God’s wisdom incarnate. To follow Jesus is also to walk wisely through this valley. This is no time for foolishness. Or rushing the shadows to prove them empty. Not all of them are.
- **The Rod and Staff**, correction and protection; they equally give comfort.

I’m endless intrigued by the next image, the Lord setting up a **banqueting table** for us on the other side of the valley, but **in the presence of my enemies.** What does that mean?

- Is the enemy defeated and we’re taunting it?
- Or has the enemy followed us out of the valley?
- Or is this just “my enemy,” just some person who would not need to remain my enemy if only we would reconcile? So, the Lord has called us to eat together in peace as a last restoration before we can finish the journey to the Big House.
- Forgiveness, the defeat of the final enemy.
- Images can mean different things at different times. How does this one speak to you?

To be **anointed** is to be chosen by God. The **cup running over** doesn’t really mean it’s spilling on the table. It means the cup is never empty and is completely satisfying to your soul. It brings us full circle to verse 1 and is why you are never in want.

Goodness and Mercy are twin sheepdogs that herd you along from behind so that you follow the Good Shepherd all the way home to dwell in the Father’s house forever.

Psalm 23. It’s so good! For the sake of your own soul and everyone else around you, give your soul the care and feeding it needs through daily pray and Bible reading. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will meet you there and restores your soul. Amen.