

(Coming out of *Wide as the Sky*)

<< **Soft piano playing during Scripture reading** >>

Mark will read Psalm 119:165-176

Times in our lives when what we really need are not answers

- More information
- More things to do

Just space, silence

- Opportunity to reflect
- Take a time out
- To regroup
- To PAUSE

Look thru Scripture, extraordinary encounters with God

- Moses, burning bush, took off sandals, fell on his face
- Isaiah

Throughout history, moments where we come to a
Greater glimpse of who we are, who God is, and how desperately we need him

Our hope for this series, as we *PAUSE*
A time to renew, refocus, remember, and refuel

Easier for some of us – reflective, contemplative
But even those of you who move, like to get things done, there is value in taking time to pause

Ever spent time with a personal trainer, rest between sets is as important as lifting the weights

Having been involved in ministry for 25+ years,
One thing I'm learning we aren't very kind to our hearts.

- Pace, constantly on
- Demands
- Neglect

So as we begin this series, let's open our hearts

- Invite God to speak
- Open yourself up to God
- NO questions / NO answers
 - I'm here
 - If you're here, I invite you to meet me

Pray

Teaching

Today we take a closer look at Psalm 23

- Possibly the most familiar Psalm
- Usually read at funerals... *rarely get to hear it for ourselves*

Psalm 23:1 NLT

The Lord is my shepherd;

I have all that I need.

This opening verse is a bit troubling for me

1. I have never owned any sheep
2. I don't often feel like I have all I need, often quite the opposite

What does it mean that God is a shepherd?

As shepherd, the Lord offers us:

1. Rest

Psalm 23:2 NLT

He lets me rest in green meadows;

he leads me beside peaceful streams.

Rest = sprawl

- Have you ever been at the end of yourself?
- Laid on the floor?

- Green meadows = lush growing environment, satisfying, flourishing
- Peaceful streams = waters of rest

We live in a culture that teaches us to want everything, to never be satisfied – more, more, more

- Lost the ability to be at rest.
- To be settled.

If you were God, what are the top 10 rules you would put into place?

Exodus 20:8-10a NLT

Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work.

(Sabbath made the top 10)

THESE 2 verses not on screen:

Exodus 33:14b NIV

My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28 NLT

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

"Let's me" or "makes me"

- Compels me – like grabbing a child from an oncoming car
- Natural inclination is to run to God
- I can tell I'm coming to know who he is because I find myself running to him more often

Questions:

- When and where in the rhythm of your day are you seeking God for rest?
 - Your soul was not made to go in 5th gear, all the time
- When was the last time you felt genuinely refreshed?
- When troubles arise, to whom or to what are you most likely to run?
- Metaphor – green meadows, but also very real and practical:
Only in the last 40-50 years have we been able to live entirely indoors

2. Strength

Psalm 23:3 NLT

He renews my strength.

He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.

Literally, *restores my soul* = provides a strength from within

Who, as a parent, wouldn't like more genuine strength?

- As a teacher, care-giver....
- As a young single person trying to make your way.

He guides me along right paths

- Picture a dirt road with worn down tire tracks
- Or a trail that has been packed down

There is a direct correlation between the decisions we make and the drive we have to move forward. Have you ever made a really good decision, and it compelled you to move forward? How about a bad decision and it paralyzed you?

Every time you hear his voice and follow, something strengthens inside

- Something shifts
- Direction of our lives becomes clearer
- Our souls become stronger

The opposite is also true. Every time we close ourselves off to his guidance, our path becomes broken, lost confused, darkness, and over time we lose the strength to go on because we're not sure where we're headed.

Why God gives us a path to follow

Questions:

- Are you coming to know an inner strength that carries you further...?
- Are the decisions you're making leading you into greater life and clarity of purpose?

3. Protection and Comfort

Psalm 23:4 NLT

Even when I walk through the darkest valley,

I will not be afraid,

for you are close beside me.

Your rod and your staff

protect and comfort me.

Steep valley, narrow gorge = Dark shadow | Death-shadow

Sometimes the dark valleys we find ourselves in are result of

1. Broken world
2. Brokenness of the people around us, the choices they make
3. Our own failures

Sometimes we think that because our world is out of control, that God is out of control
That because we are in a dark place, the light must have gone out.

King David went through all these things.

1 John 4:18 – the love of God drives out all fear

When you experience fear, that's simply a place where God's love has yet to invade.

Shepherds use the rod and staff for all sorts of things:

- Correcting and redirecting
- As weapons to protect and defend from wolves, lions, bears
- Getting branches and rocks out of the way
- In counting the sheep
- In pulling back some of the wool to examine a wounded sheep
- Hook the neck of the sheep and bring it back from wandering away

Ultimately, as the text says: to protect and bring comfort

Questions:

- As a shepherd, how has God been using his rod and staff in your life?
- More specifically:
 - In what area is he offering you his comfort?
 - What guidance has he given you, that if you listen, it will protect you from danger?

4. A Feast

Might be the toughest one for me

Psalm 23:5 NLT

You prepare a feast for me

in the presence of my enemies.

You honor me by anointing my head with oil.

My cup overflows with blessings.

Literally, *you prepare a table*

In this context, it's a full table, a spread

It's one thing to have strength to make it through, to get to the end...

But this says, there is a feast in the midst of my enemies

- In the midst of the trouble all around us
- Everything coming against us

Revelation 19:6-7 NLT

6 Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder:

"Praise the Lord!

For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

7 Let us be glad and rejoice,

and let us give honor to him.

For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb,

and his bride has prepared herself.

Luke 15

We must celebrate with a feast

Questions:

1. What would it look like to be full of greater joy in your everyday life?
2. To feel like our cup is overflowing

5. His forever commitment to us

Psalm 23:6 NLT

Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the Lord
forever.

‘follow me’ – pursue me = put in flight, run after, chase

Reckless Love

- Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God
- Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine

House of the Lord = how our individual lives affect those around us.

Think of a group of sheep (flock, herd, band or mob) – as several begin moving in a particular direction, soon the entire herd is moving in that direction.

What if one by one, row by row, your friends at school, the people you work with, the people in your family...

All of Mauldin, Simpsonville hearing the voice of God and being renewed.

Deuteronomy 7:9

Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unfailing love on those who love him and obey his commands.

Do you see a problem there? We have not obeyed all his commands.

2 Corinthians 5:21 NLT

For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Closing

Notice what is offered to us...

1. Rest
2. Strength
3. Protection and comfort
4. A feast
5. God's faithfulness

We often think of things we need most as being on the outside.

What God has to give us is on the inside.

The Lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need

- I have all that I need because what I need is him
- Central mission of Brookwood is to pursue a relationship with Jesus.
- He alone can meet the deepest longings in your soul.
- Longs to renew us.

Our Memory Verse this week:

Isaiah 40:31 NASB

(indented just like this)

Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength;

They will mount up with wings like eagles,

They will run and not get tired,

They will walk and not become weary.

There is an inseparable link between truth and trust

Maybe you've had a difficult time trusting God
Because you've never known anyone to be trustworthy.

Beautiful news

- Even if you don't belong to God
- He still calls out to you

May not have softened your heart toward him

- But if you hear his voice today,
- Yes I want you to come in...
- He will renew your life
- Renew your strength
- Lead you on a path of greater and greater awareness of who God is and the life he has for you.

A moment of quiet reflection

<< Care Volunteers quietly come forward during this time of prayer >>

1. Use the Discussion Guide to help you experience God in the Scriptures.
2. If you want to connect with someone to talk or pray
 - Care volunteers up front
 - Care Connection room

May God renew each of us this week. Amen. Amen.