



## 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting 2020 - WEEK 1: Living by Grace

### Day 1 – Monday 24<sup>th</sup> February

***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.***

**—Psalm 23:1-3a**

We'll read these words each day this week. Let them sink in. Write them in a journal, paraphrase them in your own words, perhaps even commit them to memory. Your challenge and joy is to live with these words. Specifically, please experiment with the following spiritual disciplines:

*This Week and Throughout the 40 Days...*

#### *Try Journaling*

As you go through the 40 Days, please keep a journal (or writing jotter) of your responses and experiences each day. This will also be important for reflecting in your Small Group discussions each week.

*This Week's Spiritual Discipline...*

#### *Try Praying like this*

Father, please give me eyes to see your gracious daily provisions in my life - even in the ordinary things of the day (like a warm bed, a wardrobe of clothes, a comfortable pair of shoes, a hot shower, the ability to see, hear, walk, think, feel, etc).

Father, please give me eyes to see examples of your grace all around me – (in the beauty of nature, in the face of a friend, in activities that bring me joy, in my church family, etc).

- a. As you pray over your life, note down in a journal - God's everyday acts of grace in your life?

#### *Try Giving God the Opportunity to Restore your Soul*

Lord, I believe you want to lead me to green pastures and quiet waters each day this week. I will follow you there. (The Shepherd may invite you to join Him in his Word, or in quietness and solitude, or on a walk, or in a creative activity, or at an art gallery, or when you walk the dog, or, or, or...). Note in your journal...

- b. What effects are you noticing on your level of contentment as you choose to follow Him, and reflect on his daily blessings to you and his care for you?

## Day 2 – Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> February

Some insightful background notes from John Ortberg about the writer of Psalm 23, David.

*Whatever impression you might have from your reading of Psalm 23, David's life was anything but smooth and serene.*

*After killing Goliath, David's rise to prominence enraged the insecure and arguably insane King Saul. David was literally stalked by Saul. Forced to live as a fugitive, David narrowly escaped multiple assassination attempts.*

*David was also no stranger to crushing grief. Jonathan, his most trusted friend—one who "became one in spirit with David" (1 Sam. 18:1)—was killed along with Saul in battle. David also lost an infant son and a grown son to death.*

*David knew shame and regret. He not only committed adultery, he engaged in an elaborate cover-up scheme. When that didn't work, in desperation, he caused the offended husband to be killed. Confronted by Nathan the prophet, David finally repented, although it was a horrible stain on his public and private reputation.*

*David also had daily pressures from his role as political and military leader of the nation. His kingdom was threatened by civil war and he was forced to run for his life. His pain was multiplied because his very own son, Absalom, led the rebellion.*

*The unvarnished emotions accompanying life's ups and downs flow through David's many psalms:*  
- "I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping." —Psalm 6:6  
- "Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I am in distress... My strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak." —Psalm 31:9-10  
- "Answer me with your sure salvation. Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver from those who hate me, from the deep waters." —Psalm 69:13-14

*Against this landscape—one punctuated by pressure, opposition, fear, grief, guilt, uncertainty—David confidently asserts, "The LORD is my shepherd." As you meditate on the Twenty-third Psalm during the coming weeks, keep in mind the turmoil of David's life circumstances. Whatever you discover about the Good Shepherd of David's soul, realize that God acted this way on behalf of a man embroiled in personal and national uncertainties. None of these problems could prevail against the powerful grace God offered.*

In the middle of all of this, David writes...

***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.***  
**—Psalm 23:1-3a**

As you read through the first three verses of Psalm 23, imagine for a moment that none of it is true. Paraphrase the psalm in your journal so that it says just the opposite ("The LORD is not my shepherd, I shall always be in want...etc"). And reflect today...

What would your life be like if those 'opposite' statements were your reality?

Thankfully, this is not our reality, and Psalm 23 is wonderfully TRUE for all God's flock. Speak these truths (v1-3a) out loud, and pray them over your life – thankful today for your Good Shepherd.

### Day 3 – Wednesday 26th February

***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.***

**—Psalm 23:1-3a**

Please read John 10.11-13

Jesus points out that there is a big difference between the Hired Hand (paid to look after the sheep), and the Shepherd himself.

Use the following chart to reflect on the contrast in attitude of a Hired Hand with the Shepherd. Note your responses in your journal.

#### **Attitude & Action**

#### **Hired Hand**

#### **Shepherd**

Emotional and Personal Attachment to the flock

Attitude & Involvement when danger appears

Type of Care

In light of these contrasts, summarise in your journal what it means to you that Jesus is your Shepherd.

### Day 4 – Thursday 27th February

***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.***

**—Psalm 23:1-3a**

Read John 10.7-18 and 27-30, and note your responses to the following questions in your journal today.

- What does Jesus call himself in verses 7-9?
- What does he mean by this figure of speech?
- What does he call himself in verse 11?
- What additional facts do we learn about this Good Shepherd in verses 11-15 and 27-30?

As strange as it may seem, it is not always easy to get sheep to lie down. They tend to resist rest, for instance, when they are fearful (sheep are easily panicked) or competing with others (sheep are prone to turf wars).

- Note in your journal the kinds of things make you resist lying down in the Shepherd's care?

## Day 5 – Friday 28<sup>th</sup> February

***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.***

**—Psalm 23:1-3a**

The sound of flowing water might sound refreshing to us, but it is frightening to sheep. A shepherd must find still waters, or the sheep will not drink. Please journal your reflections today on the following...

- a. What might a 'still waters' experience look like in your life?
- b. Describe a 'still waters' experience that you remember well.
- c. What part did God play in bringing about such an experience?
- d. What was your responsibility in getting the experience?

The phrase "He restores my soul" connotes bringing something back, a returning or regrouping. Isaiah 49:5 uses the same verb to mean 'gather', and Isaiah 58: 12 translates it as 'rebuild' in the sense of restoring destroyed streets and houses. Psalm 19:7 says the law of God revives the soul, using this same verb.

- e. With what you know about David, note in your journal what concrete ways you think David needed this gracious restoring work of God in his life?
- f. How about you?

## Day 6 – Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> February

***The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.***

**—Psalm 23:1-3a**

Knowing God as your Shepherd leads steadfastly to contentment. That contentment doesn't come from always getting your desires; it comes from trusting that what God gives you is enough.

Consider these searching words from author Max Lucado:

*"What if God says no? What if the request is delayed or even denied?... If God says, "I've given you my grace, and that is enough," will you be content? Content. That's the word. A state of heart in which you would be at peace if God gave you nothing more than he already has." —Max Lucado, In the Grip of Grace*

*How Content are You?*

Make a note in your journal today about how content you feel according to the scale below, with your reflections on the two questions that follow:

1. Very Content
2. Somewhat Content
3. Not feeling much of anything
4. Mildly Discontent
5. Regularly Discontent

- a. How can you be authentic with God about your desires while still cultivating a contented spirit?
- b. What are the greatest barriers in your life that keep you from seeing God as a green-pasture-loving, still-water-giving, soul-restoring Shepherd?

## Day 7 – Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> March

Sermon – Living in Grace

Please journal your own notes from the Sermon today...