



## 40 Days of Prayer and Fasting 2020 – WEEK 3: Sustaining Grace

### Day 15 – Monday 9<sup>th</sup> March

***Even though I walk through the darkest valley (or, 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.***

John Ortberg writes, "What is the "valley of the shadow of death"? In the original Hebrew, the words translated "shadow of death" are all actually just one word. This term does not necessarily just mean the time immediately preceding death (as it is often understood). The literal translation is "deep darkness." Job uses the term to describe the darkness that people try to hide in when they cover evil actions (see **Job 24:16-17 and 34:22**). The same Hebrew word is used to describe confusion (**Job 12:22**), sadness (**Job 16:16**), or physical places like a lonely desert (**Jer. 2:6**) or a mine shaft (**Job 28:3**). It can signify the darkest moments of the night (**Amos 5:8**). It is certainly no coincidence that the prophet Isaiah used this term when he predicted the coming of Jesus, the One who ultimately dispels spiritual darkness (**Isa. 9:2**).

So, when you read that God is with us in the valley of the shadow of death, realize it is a rich phrase that encompasses all of life's dark, overwhelming experiences."

- a. Take a moment to paraphrase **Psalm 23.4** in your journal in your own words
- b. For David, verse 4 of Psalm 23 is the point where he stops referencing God and starts speaking to God directly.  
Turn your attention to what has been troubling you lately.  
Where do you find your mind drifting to when you're not doing something?  
Is there a 'dark valley' situation about which you can't seem to stop worrying?  
Write that specific 'dark valley' concern in your journal:
- c. Now go one step deeper.  
Why does it seem so overwhelming?
- d. Pinpoint your greatest fear about this 'dark valley' matter:  
Talk to your Good Shepherd about it now

## Day 16 – Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March

***Even though I walk through the darkest valley (or, 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.***

Read this excerpt from a Bill Hybels sermon,

"There I am, in the Burger King. It's still dark outside and I have a backbreaking weight crushing the inner life out of me. My mind is already spinning about "Plan B's" - thinking about possible alliances, thinking about dark, stupid, foolish things.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever come to the absolute end of your human endurance? Maybe it was physical pain, or maybe it was emotional upheaval that had your foundations rocking. Maybe it was a family breakdown with a spouse or a child that threatened to shatter your fragile heart. Do you remember when you were there?

Perhaps you are there right now and you feel panicky. You wonder what you are going to do to survive. You are starting to doubt that God can be trusted with your problem.

In my moment of deep distress, after just having read **2 Chronicles 16.8-9**, I decided I needed to do business with God right then. I wrote out the verse in my journal and started praying it through to God. I said, "God, I see you just as this verse describes. I see you searching the planet, your eyes going to and fro, searching the globe looking to strongly support someone with a back-breaking problem. I've got that kind of problem. You say that your only qualifier is that I demonstrate a willingness to trust you completely. Well, here I am and here's my heart. I'm going to abandon every other pain-reducing plan that has been spinning around in my head. No treaties, no compromises, no Plan Bs. I will not take matters into my own hands. I will look to you alone." As mystical as it sounds, I felt a strange kind of relief come over my heart. In **Philippians 4:7**, the apostle Paul calls it "the peace.. which transcends all understanding.

Are you in desperate need of some strong support? Then he is saying to you, "I will meet you in the middle of whatever it is. I will come to you with power and gentleness. I will strongly support you in this. I will either provide a solution or I will give you my grace to bear up under it and walk out on the other side. The deal is though, I need you to bet everything on me." All he's looking for is a yes."

- a. In relation to the 'dark-valley concern' you identified yesterday, is there any way you're considering a "Plan B", rather than trusting and obeying God for it?  
Tell God honestly about any compromising or 'taking things into your own hands' options that look good to you, or to which you have already started to fall prey. Specifically identify any such actions (or intentions) right now in your journal.

Please read **2 Chronicles 16.8-9** (For King Asa, he chose to go his own way, and it went pear-shaped)

- b. Are you in desperate need of some strong support? Then he is saying to you, "I will meet you in the middle of whatever it is. I will come to you with power and gentleness. I will strongly support you in this. I will either provide a solution or I will give you my grace to bear up under it and walk out on the other side. The deal is though, I need you to bet everything on me." All he's looking for is a yes." Are you willing?  
As you pray today and commit to follow God's lead, is there anything you sense God is telling you to do?  
Are there any aspects of the problem that could be improved by your choice or actions?

## Day 17 – Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> March

***Even though I walk through the darkest valley (or, 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.***

Phillip Keller makes this observation about the spiritually transforming power of dark valleys: "In the Christian life we often speak of wanting "to move onto higher ground with God." How we long to live above the lowlands of life. We speak of mountaintop experiences.

Often we get an erroneous idea about how this takes place. It is as though we imagined we could be "air lifted" onto higher ground. On the rough trail of the Christian life this is not so. As with ordinary sheep management, so with God's people, one only gains higher ground by climbing up slowly through the valleys.

The Shepherd leads his flock gently, but persistently up the paths that wind through the dark valleys. It should be noticed that the verse states, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." It does not say I die there, or stop there, (or ran out of there) - but rather "I walk through."

- a. This verse speaks of walking through dark valleys in life. What is the significance of 'walking' in dark valley experiences for our spiritual progress?
- b. Psalm 23:4 also says, "I will fear no evil." Note that it does not say there will be no evil in or around our lives. In your own words, why should we fear no evil, like David, even though it may be all around?

## Day 18 – Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March

***Even though I walk through the darkest valley (or, 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.***

- a. There were several uses for a shepherd's rod, which was a short, clublike instrument. The shepherd uses it to beat away wild animals and robbers, and prod and correct his sheep from wandering dangerously.
- b. In light of how a shepherd uses his rod, how might God's rod be a source of protection to you in a dark valley?
- c. A shepherd might use his staff to rescue a sheep tangled in a thicket or stuck in mud. Shepherds would also nudge their sheep with the staff, indicating the direction to walk. Sometimes just the touch of the crook was enough to reassure a sheep—it was a way for a shepherd and sheep to "stay in touch."  
How might you have experienced God's staff in your 'dark valley' situations to comfort you?

## Day 19 – Friday 13<sup>th</sup> March

***Even though I walk through the darkest valley (or, 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.***

Read the following two passages and summarise God's promises - specifically as they apply to your 'dark valley' situation.

a. **Isaiah 40:28-31**

b. **Isaiah 43:1-3**

## Day 20 – Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> March

***Even though I walk through the darkest valley (or, 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.***

Read again **2 Chronicles 16.9**

You've heard God's promises and commitment to you. Now it's your turn to declare your intentions and "bet everything" on God. Write your own expression of trust to him.

Finally, this week, take David's words with you—"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Whenever you feel trust eroding and fear welling up, dwell on those words. Remind yourself in that moment that you are cared for by a gracious and powerful Shepherd.

## Day 21 – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> March

**Sermon – Grace for Regrets**

**Your own notes from the Sermon today...**