

Psalm 23:4

Introduction

- One of the greatest challenges of life in a fallen world is managing fear. We are living in hostile territory and know it.
- “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what man can do to me,” *Hebrews 13:6*
- “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.” *1 Corinthians 10:13*

4 Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil; for Thou are with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.

Paraphrase

“Even though I will not be able to avoid circumstances that are threatening and scary, I need not be afraid because I have you as a Good Shepherd beside me and I can see that you are fully prepared to prevent any really bad thing from happening to me, both externally and internally.”

“Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,”

1. We cannot expect to be removed from frightening situations. Our hope should not be a life free from dire circumstances.

- God does not remove us from the valley but walks with us through it.
- The valley of the shadow of death may refer to the times in life when we feel most vulnerable.
- The word "death" is not present in this verse - or even necessarily implied by the Hebrew. The Hebrew word (salmawet) means simply a dark ravine, a gloomy wadi. A common translation is “deep darkness” or “gloom.” David has in mind those pressure zones in life, those times of ordeal that make us feel like death is upon us.
 - Job 16:16 “My face is flushed from weeping, and **deep darkness** is on my eyelids.”
 - Job 12:22 “he reveals mysteries from the darkness, and brings the **deep darkness** into light.”
 - Isa.9:2 “The people who walk in **darkness** will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them.”

- Jer.13:16 “Give glory to the Lord your God, before He brings darkness and before your feet stumble on the dusky mountains, and while you are hoping for light He makes it into **deep darkness**, and turns it into gloom.”
- Ps.107:10-14

“I fear no evil”

2. Our challenge is to face and manage our fear of what is unknown and threatening. We should expect to manage fearful situations from within.

- This is the place in the psalm where “He” changes to “Thou”? God’s companionship is so real, so precious to David, that at the mention of it, he changes unconsciously to the language of personal address. “You are with me.”
- The Hebrew word for “evil” (meaning “bad”) is often used in contrast to “good.” I should not be afraid that truly bad things will befall me. I may experience uncomfortable circumstances but they need not have a devastating, negative, destructive effect on me. Rom.8:28 comes to mind as a parallel text.

Destructive circumstances	Unpleasant circumstances
These can destroy my soul	These can make life uncomfortable
The Shepherd protects me from evil.	The Shepherd does not always protect me from uncomfortable circumstances.

Romans 8:28

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to {His or a} purpose.”

- It is assumed that we should know that **GOD IS SOVEREIGN** over the affairs of life.
- This promise refers to the experience of **CHRISTIANS**.
- God’s control extends to **ALL THINGS**.
- God works all the events of life **TOGETHER** for good.
- God’s notion of “**GOOD**” is not always what we may want.
- The **TIMETABLE** of God’s working may be longer than we would like.

“for Thou are with me”

3. Managing fear is a function of knowing who is with us. Cultivating a relationship with Christ is the best preparation for facing life’s fears.

- When sheep were transferred from their winter to their summer pastures, they often had to be led through some pretty wild terrain.

- Stephen Haboush, himself a shepherd for many years in Palestine speaks in his book, "My Shepherd Life in Galilee," of some dark valleys, 500 feet or more below sea level, where even he dreaded to take his sheep. Brigands used them as ambushes, and wild animals lay in wait in the shadows.
- "My sheep," he wrote, "would sense the danger, and gather closely to my side. My continual calling and the sense of my presence gave them confidence and allayed their fear."

“Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.”

4. Christ is committed to minister to our fears from without and from within. We should look for God’s hand working around us and in us.

- The rod is for the enemy without, Satan, who is working through the world system to destroy us. Jesus said, "He is a liar and a murderer." He's out to devour us, and so the Lord uses the club on him. But the other enemy is me, the enemy within. In the immortal words of Pogo, "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

<p>“Thy rod”</p> <p>Used to fend off predators</p> <p>Enemies from without</p> <p><i>“Lord change my circumstances.”</i></p> <p>The environment that I am in.</p> <p>The people that I am with.</p> <p>The job that I do.</p> <p>The injury that I have received.</p>	<p>“Thy staff”</p> <p>Used to correct the sheep</p> <p>Enemies from within</p> <p><i>“Lord change me.”</i></p> <p>The perspective that I take.</p> <p>The baggage that I carry.</p> <p>The fears that I have.</p> <p>The anger that I will not release.</p>
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5. The Shepherd’s tools help us manage fear by comforting us. As under shepherds we are to encourage and comfort each other in the name of the Good Shepherd.

- We can have a “rod and staff” ministry as we:
 1. Recognize our calling to pastor each other.

2. Choose to seek one another out in fellowship.
 3. Work to understand and empathize with others.
 4. Prepare to speak the truth and grace of the God to each other.
- **Ephesians 4:29** “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for the edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.”
 - **2 Corinthians 1** “³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; ⁴ who **comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.** ⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.”
 - **1 Peter 5** “¹ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; ³ nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for *God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.*”

<p>The Good Shepherd</p> <p><i>“The Word and Sacraments”</i></p> <p>Psalm 119:50</p>	<p>Under-shepherds</p> <p><i>“The fellowship of the saints”</i></p> <p>2 Corinthians 1:3-5</p>
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