

Does Anyone here like camping? I come from a family of campers. We still camp yearly with my dad's side of the family each summer. Over the years we made many great memories as cousins. One memory is playing hide and go seek. As we got older, we challenged ourselves and added different elements to this game - like playing in the dark or switching to "kick the can". We often played in pairs so that we had someone to talk to as we waited for the person that was "it" to find us.

We also prided ourselves on finding that "sweet spot" that had a great lookout point but was totally hidden so that we would not get caught. Camping memories with this side of the family also included our Sunday Morning service. We would create a large circle with our lawn chairs in the shade, singing and taking turns reading scripture. My one aunt would have a children's message and another adult would read a devotional. It was relaxed but oh so, meaningful to have multiple generations worshipping our heavenly Father together.

Today we have that opportunity to do just that as well. Together we will pull apart one of the most well-known pieces of scripture - Psalm 23. This morning we will hear it read several times from several different translations - with different people reading each time. The hope is that these words will sink deeper into our hearts as we read Psalm 23 over and over again.

Let's start first with the NIV translation (Dave)

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters,

3 He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for His name's sake.

**4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

**5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.**

6 Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever

Object lesson taken from Robert J Morgan's book - The Lord is my Shepherd

Take a look at your left hand.

The thumb symbolizes the word "**THE**" - giving it a confident beginning. Even though the thumb is shorter than the other fingers - it is more mobile giving the other fingers a sense of confidence

The pointer finger - **LORD** - this finger automatically points up. gives us the "number one" symbol - which is our God

The middle finger - is the longest finger - it symbolizes the word "**IS**" - it connects the pointer finger to the ring finger. The word "is" tells us, we are using the present tense, The Lord IS alive, The Lord IS with us right now.

The ring finger - for married people, this finger carries a symbol of a very personal and exclusive relationship. The finger symbolizes the word "**MY**".

Last is the pinky. Though appearing weak - this smaller finger actually holds 50% of the hand's grip strength. It is positioned at the end of the hand and represents the word "**SHEPHERD**". When we come to the end of a task or even at the end of life - we can give thanks that our Good Shepherd has always been there - abiding with us. (***)

Side note after preaching this sermon at Bethel it was evaluated that this did not add to the sermon - so I took it out for Waterloo))

In Hebrew, the word for friend is derived from the Hebrew term for shepherd. In biblical times, it wasn't dogs that were man's best friends, but sheep. They bonded with their shepherds and shepherds with them. Sheep are known as prey animals - meaning they are the lowest on the food chain. They eat grass and other predators hunt and eat them. Sheep do not have a defence mechanism - like claws or running speed. Their only protection is their flock and their shepherd.

I know when I was a kid - I didn't give a second thought to how our parents protected or provided for our needs. It was just what parents did. Though, kids would often compare and feel like their "needs" were not being met.

"At Bobby's house they have a pool and can swim whenever they want - Can we have a pool? We need a pool. It's not fair that we don't have a pool." I am sure we have either said something similar or heard this before.

Whether it was a pool, a bike, going to a restaurant, a new hockey stick ... whatever - fill in the blank.

Dorothea Vuyk's sermon

It is so easy to fall into the trap of wanting something we don't have. To a kid without a pool - Bobby and his family seem to have the sweet spot because HE had something that was longed for and seen as a need. Our vision gets clouded by pride, desire, greed, or anger. Convincing ourselves that our wants are actual needs. Our prayers end up being filled with a "to do" list for God.

If we keep with the pool analogy - "Oh Lord please provide a pool for our family. You know how hot it is this summer. The kids would use it every day and we could use it as an outreach to our neighbours just for You. Thank You, Lord, for providing for all our needs."

Because the line between needs and wants and desires gets so blurred - our eyes lose focus on what the Good Shepherd is providing. Often it takes an attitude adjustment to help us realize our sweet spot.

We know that King David experienced both ends of the spectrum. First growing up as a shepherd boy and then later on in life as a king. When writing this poem, he is writing from his experience as a shepherd. He took his responsibility in the field as the caregiver of sheep very seriously. He knew what it took to feed, nurture & protect the sheep. From David's perspective, he saw God as the great Shepherd - infallible, perfect in how He looks after His flock. David experienced a close relationship with God - calling Him "my shepherd". Not just Israel's shepherd. Or his brother's Shepherd. This was a personal relationship that David had with God as his Shepherd.

Throughout the Bible, the picture of Jesus being our Good Shepherd is used. Jesus cares for us and we can depend on Him for our daily needs as well as protection from the enemy. Jesus says in John 10:14, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

The bond between Jesus our Good Shepherd and ourselves as sheep is vital - so vital - He laid down His life for us. This realization of what Jesus has done for us - changes and shapes our attitude. We no longer look for what God can give us to fulfill our to-do list. Instead, there is a switch to being thankful for what He is providing - declaring I have all I need. No more. No less.

International Children's Bible (Anna H)

The Lord is my shepherd. I have everything I need.

2 He gives me rest in green pastures. He leads me to calm water.

3 He gives me new strength. For the good of his name, he leads me on paths that are right.

4 Even if I walk through a very dark valley, I will not be afraid because you are with me.

Your rod and your shepherd's staff comfort me.

5 You prepare a meal for me in front of my enemies. You pour oil of blessing on my head.

You give me more than I can hold.

6 Surely your goodness and love will be with me all my life.

And I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

Have you ever heard of the term, "Nature soaking"? It is becoming more popular as people are realizing that they are missing something. Humans seek a sense of healing through stone massage, walking barefoot on lush green grass, or breathing deep while hiking through the buried pathways of oxygen-rich forests. Many will refer to "Mother Nature" as a being that is to be interacted with to bring them a sense of calm, peace and clarity while doing these activities. As so often with worldly ideas - there is some truth mixed in with a whole bunch of lies. It is God Who created nature - the trees, grass, flowers, even weather - for us, humans, to live in and look after. Nature is for our enjoyment, nourishment and healing. Did you know that God has often caused a remedy to grow close to something that can harm us?

For example, where ever poison ivy grows, jewelweed is growing close by. This particular plant's leaves can be crushed into a paste and placed on the affected skin, as a way to remedy the poison ivy.

So let's be clear - there is NO mother nature. There is NO "universe" that brings us into clarity or lines events to go our way. There is only ONE God - Lord of All. Jesus is the ONLY Way, Truth and Life. It is He, that created the stars, atmosphere, moon, sun, and wind.

God intended for us to lie in green pastures. Something is calming and even grounding when we spend time in nature. Whether that is hiking, trail biking, camping, swimming in the lake or sitting in our back yard with our bare

feet on the grass. The more we investigate this concept - the more we become aware of how awesome our God truly is! My prayer is - as we explore soaking in what God has created, we keep our eyes on the Creator and give Him praise & thanksgiving. Worshiping the Creator and not the created.

Moving on to the line "He leads me beside still quiet waters".... For me, this statement brings memories of cottaging at Chesley Lake. Sitting on the dock first thing in the morning with my cup of tea and listening to the water softly lapping on the shore was a great way to start the day. This slow rhythmic movement of the water hitting the dock was peaceful. It drew me in. God uses these living elements of nature that surround us to restore or refresh us deep down into our souls.

In a world that says faster is better - let's remember that God says, "Be still and know that I am God. Come lie down in the grass - the green pastures... let Me lead you to where you will find refreshment in cool still waters. I know what your body needs, I know what your heart, soul, and mind need. Come."

God leads us to places of refreshment and rejuvenation. Like a cool glass of water on a hot summer day. When we take time to slow down and enjoy nature that is around us - our hearts will overflow with thanksgiving and praise. This overflow will push out unrest, fear, chaos, and even anger. Often a time of rejuvenation gives us clarity of who we are, Who's we are, and what God is calling us to. Knowing that God is leading us down the right path. This is the sweet spot.

Often we hear this term in sports. It is that spot on a club, bat, or racket that gives the best outcome when the ball makes contact. It is the collaboration of factors coming together to make the most effective impact. Like being in the right place at the right time. God has invited us into a sweet spot that He has prepared - where we are protected, loved, and cared for. This sweet spot allows us to be MORE productive because we are working in the areas of life that God wants us to be.

How do we know if we are in this "sweet spot"? Do we need to experience God only in nature to experience His sweet spot for us? Or are there other ways to experience God? Let's read Psalm 23 again...

Psalm 23 NLT (Chesley V)

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need.

2 He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

3 He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.

4 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.

5 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.

6 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.

I think we can agree that when we feel God saying yes it is an awesome affirmation that we are heading in the right direction. Though for many of us - we just can't say with absolute confidence that this path is what God had intended for us. If we are honest - we didn't take time to pray and then listen and wait for the answer. We often pray and then use our logical minds - figuring that this direction makes the most sense.

We have a hard time waiting - whether that is for a new friend, a job change, to be accepted into a course or for new church staff to be hired including a pastor. Waiting is hard. And it can be confusing to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that we hear God's voice and will for our lives.

There are a few checks we can do after spending time in prayer being still in that sweet spot and listening for God's guidance. First - does what was heard line up with the truths of scripture? Does it give God glory? Do others with a strong relationship with Jesus agree with what was heard? And finally is there peace flooding through heart, soul and mind? When God guides us, the road itself may not be easy but often there is this peace that surpasses all understanding.

We have been created to give glory to God. As a baby reaches up to his mama in trust, knowing that she will respond by loving, protecting and providing way - we too have been created with the desire to raise our hands to our Creator. We have been made in His image - an invisible connection between Creator and the created is there. When we still ourselves long enough to feel that connection between us and God - we experience this sweet spot. It is out of that sweet spot that God guides us with His rod and staff giving Him honour in the pathway we walk.

Rods and Staffs might seem like the same tool - but they have two different jobs. The purpose of a rod is to correct or discipline. We can experience this when a door to an opportunity closes. Or a scripture verse causes us to pause and think. Or the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin - words or actions that were out of line. God uses His rod to build our character and to draw us closer to Himself. He uses his staff to protect us from harm. As a shepherd would use his staff to rescue a sheep, so God uses His staff to keep us on a pathway that is right for us. Encouraging us to stay on the path and not to wander off into the wild bush.

From the Message: (Eric M)

**1-3 God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows,
you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath
and send me in the right direction.**

**4 Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side.
Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.**

**5 You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head;
my cup brims with blessing.**

**6 Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of God
for the rest of my life.**

Did you notice that David writes the truth that as sheep of the Great Shepherd - we will still need to walk through dark valleys? As Christians, we are not exempt from the evil of this world. Watching our loved ones fight with addictions, or a disease, our children struggling with their health, school, with making friends. Financial worries, our own Relationship chaos, breakups, separations, divorces. Putdowns, shutouts, being bullied, ignored, forgotten. Feeling isolated, misunderstood and all alone.

In our social circles, we tend to be doers. If someone is sick - we make a meal. If someone had foot surgery - we rake their leaves. If some needs a roof fixed - we grab the nails and shingles. Let me be clear there is NOTHING bad about all these things.

But we tend to gravitate towards the outer help and shy away from the inner help. This heart, mind and emotional stuff usually gets shoved under the carpet. Convincing ourselves we will deal with that later. Honestly, it is not pleasant or easy. If you have ever taken a "Prayers that Heal " course - you will know what I mean. BUT brothers and sisters, WHEN we dare to take the time to question - why do I do what I do- why do I react this way ?? - and want to make changes - Jesus is right there forgiving the ugly and replacing it with faith, hope and love. Giving us a heart that is full of peace and ears that hear His voice and a mind that seeks His wisdom.

With our focus solely on Him - even though we are feeling the darkness on all sides - we can agree with James 1:2-4

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

And Romans 5:3... because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

When we are in that sweet spot - we can walk through valleys without fear because our eyes are focused on our Good Shepherd. He is walking beside us, each difficult step. The truth we hold on to - is that - If we let Him - Jesus will guide us through these times of darkness - using His rod and staff.

KJV (Coby VB)

23 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

God is so good - amen? I would like to share with you a little story. A few months ago - Coby approached me and asked what I thought vs 5 meant. I agreed to pray and ponder over it. This act of Coby being faithful to listening to God and asking me to ponder Psalm 23 - has led to the Holy Spirit nudging my heart to explore and pull this Psalm apart. When pondering verse 5 - Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies, this vision of being in a sweet spot came to me. For those who are Star Wars fans or even Space Trek followers - I vision this sweet spot one like the cloaking device or deflecting shield around the spaceship. Wouldn't be great to have an invisible barrier - knowing on the inside there is protection, peace, and prosperity - Meanwhile, on the outside of that shield, there is chaos, danger and uncertainty.

When we are in the sweet spot of keeping our eyes focused on Jesus we can focus on the feast that is being laid before us and not the valley of darkness. Our focus is on God and what He is doing and not what our enemies are planning. God is looking after you and me. We have the privilege of enjoying a personal relationship with our God.

Often we experience a deepening of friendships when we share a meal. Laughter, shared stories and experiences happen when we eat together. The world knows this. Advertising capitalizes on this. Remember the President's Choice commercials? Food, a table then a few chairs are added and before then of the commercial, the whole apartment building was eating, laughing and sharing a meal in the hallway.

Some say that sharing a meal turns friends into family. God desires this closeness with us. He desires a personal relationship with each of us. One that takes time to get to know and share thoughts, dreams, and funny stories. God calls us His own and set us apart to be His family. In Biblical times this was done by being anointed or baptized with oil. David as a young shepherd boy experience this anointing by the priest Samuel many years before he became king. God sent Samuel to the house of Jesse to anoint one of his sons as the next king that God has chosen for His people the Israelites. After going through all the older, and more important sons, Samuel asks Jesses to call in his youngest son from the field tending the sheep. On that day in the presence of his brothers, David was anointed and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.

In the past, Pastor Ray would draw a shape of a cross with oil on the forehead of those that professed their faith in Jesus. This anointing symbolized this individual saying yes to being God's coworker. We are in this sweet spot. God is looking after our needs as well as adopting us and calling us His own.

The symbol of a cup can be interpreted as a person's future. King David said in Psalm 16 - Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup. Here in Psalm 23, David is saying because his Good Shepherd is taking such good care of him - his provisions are overflowing. We experience that so often. God is so good - He not only gives us what is needed - but gives us more than we ask for. Our cups are and will continue to overflow in this sweet spot. It is out of this overflow that we give praise to God and honour Him by sharing the overflow with others around us. This could be financial or spiritual sense.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, - is how I memorized this verse as a child. Funny story here - growing up - I always saw myself with a big family - lots of kids. I figured if I was to have triplets - I would name them Shirley Goodness and Marcie - because like a mother hen - they would follow me all the days of my life :)

The NIV states, "Surely Your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life." Which might be a tad better than three teenage girls :). Here again, David is recognizing that God is all around - going before to lead and hemming in from behind with love.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. This closing statement could be David expressing his desire and understanding that he will enjoy the heavenly kingdom in God's glory. He ends this poem with a note of total surrender to live with God - under His ways here on earth. This is David's sweet spot. God leading, guiding, providing, protecting, adopting and equipping.

The question is - are we living like we belong to God's family? Are we seeking His will OR are asking for His blessing on our will? Are we living into the anointing that we have received? Can we proclaim we are enjoying the sweet spot that our Lord and Shepherd is providing for us?

Let's read the Psalm one more time. Let the words wash over you, draw you into His presence. Let them change and renew you. May these words become your truth, your sweet spot where you can be in a close relationship with our heavenly Father....

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

pray...

Welcome & Greeting and Call to Worship

Welcome to a time of worshiping our Almighty God together. (Rose) we give thanks for the healthy birth of Logan James, son of Mandy and Kyle this past Friday.

We encourage you after this formal time of singing and exploring God's word to stay for tea or coffee and chat with others. Elders will also be available in the back corner to pray with you, over you or for you.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in. I will eat with that person, and they will eat with me.

This morning we are invited to have fellowship with Jesus, to swing wide the doors of our hearts and welcome in the Lamb of God. We give You honour and glory and bow before You - our Lord Almighty!

“Lion and the Lamb” (D) Music Team (Nikki)

Scripture Team (Michelle)

“Revelation Song” (D) Music Team (Michelle)

Scripture (Confession?) Team (Brad)

“Amazing Grace(my chains are gone)” (D) Music Team (Brad)

Sunday School Kids leave – team sends kids out, plays short interlude

Prayer of God's People Grace

Include offering cause: Links2Care

Scripture Reading: Psalm 23 Various people

Message: The Sweet Spot Dorothea

"For God So Loved" (F) Music Team (Brad)

God's Parting Blessing

As we seek our sweet spot and enter God's kingdom here on earth and work in His mission field,
Remember these words spoken by Jesus in Matthew 6:30-33

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Go in His peace my friends...

"Hymn" (Praise the Lord with the Sound of Trumpets)

Stop livestream and recording