

I Shall Not Want

Psalm 23:1-6

A psalm of David.

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.*

Contentment (vv. 1-2)

¹ *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*

1. Roles of a shepherd:

- Constantly on guard, watching over his sheep
- Guide: to the food and water, safe paths
- Physician: sick and injured
- Protector & defender: danger and threat – David as a shepherd, fought lions and bears
- Rescuer: pursue lost sheep – parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15
- Sacrifice: lays down his life for his sheep – the Good Shepherd in John 10

2. “My” shepherd: David recognizes that he is a sheep under the care of God

- It was not a distant proclamation; it was a personal confession.
- Many of us have memorized and can recite this psalm easily. But, have we personalized the psalm, that we can truly call God, “my shepherd”?

3. I lack nothing

It is because the Lord is his shepherd, David is content, David lacks nothing. His contentment is not in what he has. His contentment is not detaching himself from his needs and desires (like Buddhism). In his other psalms, David is honest to express his many needs to God. His contentment is not in what he has or what he doesn't have. But, David's contentment comes from knowing that the Lord is his shepherd. He receives fulfilment in the Lord that brings contentment, regardless of his circumstances.

The opposite of contentment is greed. Greed is when we are never satisfied with what we have. Whether we have little or plenty, it is not enough. A good example is corruption: people involved in corruption are usually already rich, but still greedy for more.

If we don't learn to find contentment in the Lord in the little that we have, it is more likely that we don't find contentment when we have plenty. We desire more things and we think these things can bring us fulfilment and make us content. But, it never is enough, and we will continue to chase after things to fill that desire, that greed.

Philippians 4:11-13

¹¹ I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. ¹³ I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

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

This is a picture of David's contentment, not a picture of what he has received that makes him content. Verse 4 shows that he goes through dark valleys, yet he is still content. David's contentment is not based on being in an ideal circumstance, with "green pastures and quiet waters", but his contentment results in him receiving rest at "green pastures" and nourishment beside "quiet waters".

Just as the sheep lies down in green pastures because it is well fed and content, we can "lie down", rest or sleep when we are well fed and content in the presence of God. Just as the sheep receives its nourishment beside quiet waters, God invites us to his well of living water to receive nourishment for our soul.

Trust (v. 3)

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

1. The word, "soul" in the original Hebrew language also means "life". The shepherd is constantly on guard to preserve and rescue the life of the sheep. (Look again at the roles of the shepherd above).

Take time to reflect:

- How many times have God rescued and saved us, both physically and spiritually?
- How many times have He protected and preserved us from dangers and threats?
- How many times have He pursued us when we have wandered off?

When we take time to reflect on what God has done in our lives, we learn to process things better, and we begin to understand our relationship with God and with people better. As we see how God has rescued us so many times, how He has preserved and sustained us, how He has protected us, how He has pursued us, we become grateful of who God is and what He has done.

2. God guides us along "right paths" for His name's sake

God guides us for our safety, our wellbeing, because He loves us, and He cares for us. But, He also guides us along right paths "for his name's sake".

When we read this, we have our own ideas of what it means for God to protect His name, His reputation, and why He does that. Our ideas are often corrupted by our experiences. In our experiences, people usually protect their reputation out of selfish motives, to prove their enemies wrong, to make sure we are not rejected or ashamed.

But, God does not defend His name for selfish reasons. The life of Jesus proves that. Jesus was misunderstood, falsely accused, and publicly humiliated. In defending His name, God is preserving His reputation as the covenant-keeping God, who is faithful and true to His character. His name must be defended because that is who He is; He keeps His word, He doesn't change.

Exodus 3:13-14

¹³ Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

God is who He says He is. He doesn't change. He is constant and consistent. He is not a god who changes his mind just because it does not benefit him. He is not fickle minded.

We have met people who don't keep their word; they change according to their convenience. They are fickle minded. Such people are not friends that we will call when we have a need or in an emergency, because we do not know whether we can trust them to help.

That is why it is important that God defends His name. Only with such consistent character, we know we can depend and trust God, because He is who He says He is.

Assurance (v. 4)

*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.*

1. The assurance of God's presence

When we look at the term, "right paths" in verse 3, we often think of the "green pastures and quiet waters", and we cringe at the idea that dark valleys can be "right paths" too. In the book of Philippians, Paul is in prison, yet he says his imprisonment is the right path, because the gospel is being advanced through his imprisonment. He acknowledges that his dark valley is a right path for God's name sake.

David walked through some really dark valleys. He faced constant and tremendous threats, he was at war, he was pursued by his enemies, he experienced rebellion by his family, he experience death of his son, etc. He knows the intensity that dark valleys can bring. But, he says in assurance that even though he walks through the darkest valley, he will fear no evil, because God is with him. He was so confident and assured in the midst of adversity, because he has God with him.

- Does the knowledge of "God with us" give us assurance and strength to face our dark valleys? Why or why not?

Our knowledge of "God with us" makes no difference if we do not know God personally and intimately. We draw no assurance in having a stranger stand with us through hardship. We must know God like David does, to be able to call God, "my" Shepherd.

2. The comfort of the rod and staff

The rod and staff of a shepherd is used to guide, direct, and protect the sheep, that includes setting boundaries and disciplining the sheep.

In order to guide and protect us, God confronts and corrects us when we are wrong. No one likes discipline, but it is necessary for our wellbeing and growth. God's confrontations and corrections should bring us comfort because God doesn't just leave us when we make mistakes, or to fend for ourselves in the dark valleys; but He is with us, He guides us through, and He corrects us to bring us through. In the Lord, we have the assurance that He is with us, and the comfort that He will guide us in the right paths.

- How do we respond to God's confrontations and corrections?

Thrive (v. 5)

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

1. Thrive instead of survive

God doesn't intend for us to just survive in adversity. With and in Him, we can thrive. Instead of preparing an escape plan out of our adversity, God prepares a table, feast, a celebration, for us in the presence of our enemies. Jesus embraced suffering, and face it till death. So, He understands, He identifies with us, and He helps us face the enemies, challenges, suffering, difficult situations, with the intention for us to thrive.

God does not promise the absence of dark valleys nor the absence of fear, but He promises to give us courage to walk through the dark valleys with assurance of His presence. We know we can trust Him, and that leads to contentment, being in His presence. That is the feast, the celebration we are assured.

2. The Holy Spirit protects us from sin

Shepherds use oil to protect their sheep from fleas. God protects us from sin, by giving us the Holy Spirit. As we constantly dwell in the presence of the Holy Spirit, He makes sin unattractive to us. Whatever we used to crave for in this world, gradually becomes unimportant to us, because we have found fulfilment in something greater, because we have found contentment in the presence of the Shepherd Himself. We realize our source of joy comes from the Lord. As we dwell in His presence, we are filled with contentment.

Contentment (v. 6)

*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.*

The 2011 NIV adds "your" to "goodness and love", linking goodness and love to the relationship with the Shepherd. We all have different definitions and expectations of different words, including "goodness" and "love". It is important to work through those definitions and

expectations with Scriptures, with God's truth. God's definition of goodness and love will follow us all the days of our lives, as a result of our contentment and assurance in the presence of the Lord.

The psalm ends with the psalmist being filled with contentment as he dwells in the house of the Lord, being in the presence of his shepherd.

It is not the absence of the dark valleys that gives us contentment, it is not the absence of fear that gives us contentment, it is not even having an ideal circumstance that gives us contentment; it is the Lord, His presence, that gives us contentment. It is knowing that He loves and cares for us; knowing He is faithful and true, and we can trust Him; it is knowing He is always with us through green pastures and dark valleys; it is when we know Him personally and intimately, that we can be content in the Lord.

John 10:11-15

¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 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."

Jesus is our Good Shepherd that laid down his life for us. He left His comfort; He went through life and temptation as a human; He went through pain, suffering, humiliation, and separation from His Father; and He laid down His life on the cross. So that we do not need to go through what He went through, so that we do not need to be separated from God, so that we have hope even when we go through pain and suffering.

John 10:3-5

³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.

We need to know the Good Shepherd; we need to learn to recognize His voice; we need to make Him "our" Shepherd. Then, we can find contentment and assurance in who God is, in His constant, unchanging character; knowing He loves and cares for each of us; knowing that He will pursue, protect, defend, and correct us, so that we are on the right paths. When we have assurance and contentment in the Lord, even when we go through the darkest valley, we will fear no evil.

Prayer Items

1. Contentment in the Lord
2. Assurance from the Lord's presence
3. Church:
 - a. Restarting of services & ministries: Life Explorer, Redeeming Roses, Destiny Kids & Teens
 - b. Unity in diversity
 - c. Community: opportunity & courage to Christ's witnesses
 - d. Those facing challenges in homes & workplaces
 - e. Shoban (slipped disc)
4. Covid-19
 - a. Deliverance & protection
 - b. Front-liners
 - c. Leadership of governments & companies: wisdom, integrity & compassion
 - d. Those affected: sick, vulnerable, poor, lost their jobs
 - e. Reopening of schools: wisdom, responsibility, protection
5. Malaysia
 - a. Government
 - b. Churches