

RESTORING THE SOUL
PSALM 23
September 18, 2022

Psalm 23:4

**4 Even though I walk through 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. ¹**

The valley of the shadow of death is a foreboding image. This verse is what often resonates with grieving family members as they sit under a tent looking at the casket of a loved one as the graveside portion of a funeral is coming to a close.

Suddenly in the depths of grief this verse makes more sense than ever before.

This shadow that envelops the wanderer is a fearful reality. It is the fear of what is hidden in the darkness, the fear of what may happen, what may occur, the fear of the unknown, and at times the fear of what seemed to be safe...only to find that danger lurks.

David writes this during a time of despair in his life, but also a time of hope and a declaration of the good shepherd who never leaves nor forsakes him. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...” is a strong reminder of God’s presence in the darkest of days.

If you were to look at the topography Israel, especially where the City of David is located within the city of Jerusalem, you notice quickly the

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ps 23:4). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

rugged terrain. The mountains and especially the layout on the eastern side of the city over the Mount of Olives.

On one of our trips to Israel we pulled our bus over after visiting sites near the Dead Sea and upon heading back into the city of Jerusalem from the east. We stopped and disembarked and walked a bit. We sat and our friend Yoni began to read from the scriptures as we looked down into a valley. It was a rocky site and would not be easy to navigate if you were trying to walk through it. Yet, it was here that we learned where David escaped from those pursuing him. It was this valley and others like it that set the backdrop for the story of the Good Samaritan. It was the valley.

It is in places like this where thieves would hide. Muggings would take place. Robberies would occur. The lonely traveler could be attacked. Deceived. Brought deeper into the darkness. Hidden from others. Hidden from the eyes of fellow travelers.

Every Christian here and listening to my voice today has experienced valleys. Those moments in your life were (or are) hard. They may have been confusing. They may have been times where anxiety grew and questions about reality and life and the future and all that constitutes good and holy were in question.

Sometimes while in the valley it seems that God is absent. You pray but it seems as if it is just words that do nothing, go nowhere, and make no change. It seems.

There are some who have experienced great trauma. Great pain. Great hurt. Sadly, some have gone through such at the hands of others. Even worse, some have been harmed by those who claim to be leaders of light, but live in the shadows.

We have years of human history to use as illustrations and examples. We have centuries of depravity displayed. We have millennia of evil hiding

and hurting and we have an enemy as God's image-bearers who seeks to do more than just make us feel sad.

Jesus said this clearly...

John 10:7-11

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

¹⁰ **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.** I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.²

The thief comes ONLY to steal and kill and destroy. And...the thief is often hiding in the shadows.

Though I walk through the shadow of death.

Shadows disguise.

The shadows in the very real valley are hiding places for thieves. The dark places of our world provide seemingly secure hiding spots for evil. Fear is fueled in the darkness and the enemy has utilized that for centuries.

The shadows hide the evil and the enemy attacks the innocent from the dark places. In John Milton's poem *Paradise Lost*, Satan is called the "prince of darkness." It is appropriate.

Shadows disorient.

Sure, the mind can play tricks on us when we are in the dark. We will imagine monsters in the room, things under the bed, shapes that are innocent seen in the shadows look ominous.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 10:7–11). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

It is easy to get lost in the shadows.

In the 1990 musical adaptation of the story about Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, there is a song titled “Lost in the Darkness.”

It is a short, but intensely moving song. The lyrics state the following:

Lost in the darkness,
Silence surrounds you.
Once there was morning,
Now endless night.

If I could reach you,
I’d guide you and teach you
To walk from the darkness
Back into the light.

But...sometimes it is so very hard to walk away from the darkness.

Shadows disorient

Shadows distort reality and can be used to entrap the unsuspecting. This can lead to disorientation. What is right seems left. What is up seems down. What is unholy may seem righteous. What is evil seems good. Within the dark places, things are not always what they seem.

And within the shadows evil *may* seem to reign, sometimes leading to a cry that sounds something like David penned in the psalm right before this one.

Psalm 22

¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? ³

Sound familiar?

Everyone has valleys. Everyone faces shadows. But some, hopefully not many, experienced some shadowy valleys that were falsely propped up to be godly, holy, righteous, and even well-lit. Yet, within those dark places some disguised as good shepherds were nothing more than shadow puppets of the evil one.

The valley of the shadow of death suddenly is more to some of you than just an metaphor of grieving death of a loved one, but the loss of something else—a death of joy, a death of innocence, a death of holiness displayed, a death of trust, a death in the shadows at the hands of those with a false light.

In some cases, the harm was so severe that you packed it down, “dealt with it,” read some counseling books, ignored the pain, let it scab over, and for years you have been one of the walking wounded wearing a smile and doing your best...but with a soul injury, that resulted from a physical, mental, and emotional injury...with no one really getting it. No one understanding. In fact, you don’t even understand. The words to explain how it feels and what you’re experiencing are not there and the words that are there are not enough.

Why?

Because while in the valley of the shadow of death the evil one stole, killed, and destroyed.

Jesus spoke of this regarding little ones – our children, you as a child. For those not harmed physically, you have may have experienced such

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Ps 22:1). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

heinous heretical teaching that your image of God, the Father, the Creator, the Sustainer, the Lord of all is so warped that ... up is down, right is wrong, and anger and confusion reign.

Luke 17:1-2

And he said to his disciples, “Temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! ² It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.⁴

For those who have been harmed in the shadows, who have carried pain for so long, who have disguised it hoping it would just go away, for those who have put on their Puritan work ethic and have just pushed through in their own strength only to discover it is not enough, I go to what David said under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

David – a harmed man in a dangerous place, wondering if God had abandoned him – who cried out “My God why have you forsaken me?” comes to realization due to the goodness and grace of a God bigger than the shadows

**⁴ Even though I walk through 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.**

Evil that thrives on fear, gains strength from our anxiety, seeks to own our past by dragging us back to the shadows has no foothold.

I’ll close with this from the Prince of Preachers, Charles Spurgeon...

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Lk 17:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Let us not, therefore, be afraid. I will fear no evil. He does not say there shall not be any evil; he had got beyond even that high assurance, and knew that Jesus had put all evil away; but his fears, those shadows of evil, were gone forever. The worst evils of life are those which do not exist except in our imagination. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, but the psalmist was cured of the disease of fearing. "I will fear no evil," not even the Evil One himself; I will look upon him as a conquered foe, an enemy to be destroy, for thou art with me. This is the joy of the Christian! The little child out at sea in the storm is not frightened like all the other passengers; it is asleep in its mother's bosom; it is enough for it is that its mother is with it; and it should be enough for the believer to know Christ is with him; thy rod and thy staff, by which thou governest and rulest thy flock, the ensigns of thy sovereignty and of thy gracious care, they comfort me.⁵

I will fear no evil. You are with me! Your rod – to beat the wolves down, and your staff, to steady the walk on the paths...comforts me.

And heals.

⁵ Alistar McGrath & J.I. Packer, Series Editors), *Psalms Volume 1* by Charles Spurgeon (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 90.