

The Lord is My Shepherd, pt.6

This evening we will continue in our series looking at Psalm 23 (turn there...)

The Lord has led us through and taught us some incredible truths concerning Himself and how He relates to us as His people!

And we have been considering these things under the umbrella of two questions:

1. “Who is God?” and
2. “Who is God to Me?”

In v. 1, David says, “the LORD is my Shepherd”

Well, who is this Lord?

In answering this question we have been reminded and I hope deeply impressed with the greatest and goodness of God!

But just for review:

He is the God of the omni’s!

- **Omnipotent**—He has comprehensive, total and complete power and might! He never lacks strength or needs a spotter! He is all powerful!
 - This means that God's power never wanes or diminishes! It never loses its potency! It is constant and consistent! God never needs a “breather!”

He is also...

- **Omniscience**—He has comprehensive, total and complete knowledge and understanding. He knows everything, both things that are possible and things that are actual!

There are no facts that are not known by God!

In fact, facts are facts because God is!!

There is never a time (nor will there ever be a time) where God says, “I do not know!”

The words **ignorant, learning, inform, discover, find out, study and education** is a word that only applies to the realm of humanity, not God!

God has never discovered or found out anything!

He knows all!

God’s omniscience coupled with His omnipotence, is the reason why prayer is meaningful!

Because when you pray, you are praying to the God who knows all and has the power to bring about what you ask for!

Prayer would be a waste of time if you had to pray to a god who needed a tutor or a spotter to help Him with His bench press!

But the God we serve is the God who arrests the wind and enables the world to spin on its axis! He is powerful!

The God we serve is the God who knows **every detail** of **every person** in **every place** in **every generation!**

Our Lord is omniscient

Our God is not only omnipotent and omniscient, He is also, ..

Omnibenevolent– He is comprehensively, total and completely good!

He is **only, always** and **forever** goodness.

So, catch this, because He is all-goodness, this means that He can **only do** good!

Goodness comes forth from God as naturally as light and heat comes from the Sun.

This means that God **cannot** or **will not** ever do anything evil or anything that contradicts goodness!

I am going to get a head of myself with this (but that's ok...)

Because God is good and cannot under no circumstances do evil, your suffering, your valley of deep darkness IS GOOD!!!!

Why? Because you entered that valley as a result of you being sent there BY THE GOD OF GOODNESS!!!!

What we must do is see the suffering we endure as a good thing!

(NOW, let me make a quick clarification...)

When evils are perpetrated against you, it is EVIL! That is without question!

For example, the evil committed against Joseph was just that, evil! His brothers sinned against him and God!

And the same is true for you! If someone sins against you, it is indeed evil and should be seen as such!

AND, (not but) AND AT THE SAME time God is still seen as good and accomplishing good despite the evil and the affliction you experience!

So, even though you may experience evil, that evil can still be good because of how God can use it!

We have to tell with this tension: That our good God sometimes uses evil to accomplish His good purposes!

Here is just one example from scripture:

For example, the Psalmist says, in Psalm 119:71 “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn your statutes.”

Notice, how the Psalmist interprets his affliction as good that happened to him!

And what's more fascinating is that in v. 68, a few verses before this, the Psalmist says to God, “You **are** good and **do** good;..”

So, affliction (even if its perpetrated evil) can be good because it is used by God to accomplish His purposes.

Does that make sense!

This is the omnibenevolence of God! That He is all goodness and can only do good!

So, who is the Lord, He is **Omnipotent**, **Omniscient**, **Omnibenevolent** and the last omni I will put before you, is that He is omnipresence.

Omnipresence– That God’s is comprehensively, totally and completely present with all of His being.

That is to say there is not a place where God is not present with the fullness of His being!

The passage that communicates this truth most clearly is Psalm 139:7–12,

“Where shall I go from your Spirit?

Or where shall I flee from your presence?

8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!

If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

9 If I take the wings of the morning

and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

10 even there your hand shall lead me,

and your right hand shall hold me.

11 If I say, “Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and the light about me be night,”

12 even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is bright as the day,

for darkness is as light with you.

This text informs of the fact that God is never un-occupying a given place!

He is present and all places, at all times with the totality of His being!

He is 100% present here, as well as in east Africa, as well as the most northern tip of Alaska.

He is even present in the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean!

This is who this Lord is!

He is **Omnipotent, Omniscient, Omnibenevolent**, Omnipresence God, who reveals Himself as a shepherd to his people!

This is the answer to our second question: “Who is God to me?” He is to me, to us our Shepherd!

And as we considered this wonderful reality of the Lord being our Shepherd, we have done so under two headings:

- 1. The Shepherd's Initiative** and
- 2. The Shepherd's care**

The **Shepherd's Initiative** was exploration of the shepherd's love by granting us access into His sheepfold!

We noted that the Shepherd sovereignly chose not only the sheep He wanted to enter the sheep fold, but the means by which they would enter!

And in His sovereign kindness, He chose you to be a sheep and the means was the Lord Jesus Christ, who willingly gave His life as a sacrifice and substitute for the forgiveness of your sins!

That's the **shepherd's initiative**.

As we considered the **Shepherd's Care**, we were overwhelmed by the reality of our Shepherd's serious attention to caring and managing us as His sheep!

Our Shepherd is *intentional, thoughtful* and *meticulous* in *His care*.

He is *tender, direct* and leads us with **determined dedication**.

He is a conscientious, calculated and *committed* Shepherd.

And we get all this from the vv. 2–3.

The two words we used to describe His care for us was in vv. 1–3 was that:
He cares by

- 1. Providing** for us!
- 2. Protecting** us!

Last week, we looked at another way that our Shepherd cares for us and that was by His presence among us

- 3. We started to look at His care in His presence with us!**

And we see this in v. 4 where David says, (read)

God cares for us by being present with us!

But before we address God's presence with us, I was led to give consideration to the reality of suffering and entering into "valleys of the shadow of death!" or "valleys of deep darkness."

And what we consider last time was that

- 1. God is absolutely, totally, completely and unashamedly sovereign of ALL human suffering. (2x)**

That is to say, your suffering comes as a result of God sovereignly **ordaining** and **fully** His purposes in and through your suffering.

There is NOTHING (AB-SO-LUTE-LY NO-THING) that enters into your life that has not FIRST come from the hand of God!

So, what this means is that: You enter into "valleys of deep darkness" because you are led there by your Shepherd!"

What you and I have to come to grips with AND fully embrace is that suffering is an indispensable part of God's plan for you!

And the more you embrace this reality, the better you will be able to endure and persevere in the midst of your trial!

Now, at this point, I think it would be helpful to take a brief look at "WHY" God allows trials, suffering or in the terms of our text, "valleys of deep darkness."

I hinted at it briefly last week, but I want to put a little weight on this.

Because, as we look at "why" God uses trials, we can begin to understand His purposes.

And in understanding His purposes, we will be able to enter these valleys with assurance, confidence, hope and faith!

And trust me, this scenic route will lead us back to Psalm 23.

Now, as we begin to look at this, we are aware that many people, even saints, ask the question, “Why God, why am I suffering?” Anybody ever ask this!

Ok, we are about to look at several answers that God gives you to your question of “Why?”

One answer can be found in Romans 5:1–4 (read)

In this passage, Paul gives a compounding effect that suffer has upon us as we go through a valley of deep darkness.

The first thing he says is that it produces endurance.

- This endurance is a patient, steadfast and constant perseverance.

Endurance has to do with not swerving from faith in the midst of trials. But being able to bear up under the trial.

It is a spiritual strength that is developed.

Secondly, Endurance produces character,

- Character is something that has proven worth! Character deals with the disposition of a person who has tried and proven genuine.

Thirdly, character produces hope,

- Hope is an eager expectation or confidence of being with God!

Hope is a future oriented confidence that is the desire to receive what your heart longs for!

So, “why?” trials, God says that He is producing **patience**, while at the same time producing you in a tested and proven **character**, that results in you having **hope** to be with God where He is!

So, we can say that God uses trials to mature you as a believer and make you long for heaven.

Turn to Romans 8:28–29 (read)

What is clear from the passage is that God uses all things (INCLUDING SUFFERING) to conform you to into the image of Christ!

The crazy thing is that we all pray to be more like Jesus.

But what we often fail to realize is that God uses “valleys of deep darkness” to do that!

Trials are the Christ shaped mold that God uses to conform us into the pattern of Christ!

So, what you must understand, especially in the midst of trials, is that you are being transformed!

We often lose sight of that and focus so much on the valley that we do not realize that we God is actually transforming us!!

So, here is a challenging point of application:

When, in your heart, you resist the valley God is leading you into, you are resisting God and His perfect will for your sanctification!

In order words, you are saying to God, “God, I do not want you to conform me into the image of Christ!”

And without realizing it, we stand in arrogant opposition to God!

God uses suffering to sanctify you!

One more text that reinforces the point, 1 Peter 1:6–8

What Peter tells us here is that suffering is a crucible where the fire burns away the impurities of your faith and refines it!

- In the valley God is burning away doubt and increasing faith!
- In the valley God is burning away self-sufficiency and increasing your God-dependency!
- In the valley God is burning away your attachment to this world, and creating in you a longing for the new heavens and the new earth!

And if you do not understand this you will constantly and continually be frustrated in the midst of trials!

You will feel lost and in constant confusion!

Why? Because you are failing to recognize, even in the midst of your pains, that God is working on you!

That God is working to accomplish His purposes in you!

And one thing that I did not want you to miss from this passage, is that God says that He will reward the genuineness of your faith after you have endured trials!

Catch this (reread)

Peter says, as believers we will endure trials...and as we endure trials, God is proving the genuineness of our faith, with the **ultimate outcome of us receiving praise, glory and honor from God when Jesus returns!**

Now, I know that it is possible that when you first read this you may think that Peter is referring to *God* receiving praise, glory and honor through our suffering.

But no, Peter is actually saying we receive this!

Peter is saying that by virtue of our tested and genuine faith it will ultimately result *in us* receiving praise, glory and honor from God!

Now, I know we are used to praise, glory and honor being reserved for and given to God!

But contextually, Peter is saying that this is what we *receive* from God!

Now, these words praise, glory and honor are really interchangeable; there is great overlap between them.

Collectively these words carried the idea that at the end of this life and as we are standing before:

- that God will applaud our faith;
- that He will bestow His stamp of approval upon our faith;
- that He will commend our faith as worthy;
- that He will commend our faith as being excellent!

That He will heap upon us praise, honor and glory!!!

This is a wonderful truth!!

Now, please do not think that this praise, glory and honor rivals the praise, glory and honor that the triune God will receive.

Of course not!!!

The praise, glory and honor that God receives is a transcendent praise, glory and honor!

It is the praise, glory and honor that only a Sovereign God can receive.

The praise, glory and honor that we receive is:

- the praise, glory and honor a servant receives from the Master for being faithful!
- It is the praise, glory and honor that a child receives from their parents for being faithful!

This is the type of praise, glory and honor that we are talking about!

That God, at the return of Jesus Christ, will give approval/or accreditation to our faith!

- He will praise (or give commend) your faith!
- After we have endured trials, God will say to us what we all desire for Him to say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant!”

This is wonderful news, because what this means is that your suffering is not in vain; your trials are not meaningless!

God is actually using trials as a means by which He will reward you on that great day!

So, this should change your perspective on enduring trials!

Instead of trials being viewed as an inconvenient and uninvited trouble, see trials an opportunity for you to grow in faith, knowing that as you, the Lord is keeping a record of it in heaven.

Instead of viewing trials as being overwhelming burdens that interrupts life, see them as opportunities for you to draw closer to the Lord, while anticipating the fact that He will reward you on that great last day!

In a real way, the motivation for enduring trials and the hope you should have in them, is the fact that God will one day shower upon you praise, honor and glory for your faithful endurance!!

Saint, your trials are not meaningless! You will be rewarded by God!

So, “why trial?” “Why valleys of deep darkness?” “What is the purpose of trials?”

God gives us at least three passages that reveals to us the answers:

God uses trials to:

1. God says that He is produce **patience**, while at the same time producing you in a tested and proven **character**, that results in you having **hope** to be with God where He is!
2. God uses suffering to sanctify you; making you more like Christ!
3. To prove the genuineness of our faith, with the **ultimate outcome of us receiving praise, glory and honor from God when Jesus returns!**

So, my dear Brother and Sister, when the Good Shepherd leads you into paths of deep darkness rest assured that God is working on you, He is present with you and will reward you for faithful endurance!

Do not lose heart, look to the shepherd, who loves and cares for you!

And know, if He brought you to this valley, He will sustain you in the midst of it!

Let's pray!