

Experiencing the Shepherd's Protection

Principles of victory for difficult days

Psalm 23:4

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Take your Bible and open it to Psalm 23. Today I want to talk to you about the Shepherd's protection over your life and some principles of victory for difficult days.

We have been going through Psalm 23 and today I want us to focus on verse 4. But let's start with **verse 1**, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. (2) He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, (3) He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (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."

In Israel there is a real valley called "The Valley of the Shadow of Death." It's a steep, deep and narrow canyon. The sun only hits the bottom of it when it's directly over head at high noon. The rest of the time the bottom of the canyon is dark. It's a dark valley. Thieves and murderers would hide in the valley to attack those who went through it. It could often be a very scary and dangerous place to pass through.

However, life is full of these valleys. Valleys that are difficult and hard. Sometimes these valleys take the shape of cancer, of divorce, or the death of a loved one. These valleys can be described as a financial crisis or losing your job. Sometimes these valleys are emotional valleys where we are overshadowed by discouragement, worry, anxiety, loneliness, or the lack of purpose in our life. No matter how big or how deep or how threatening your valley looks there are six things you need to wrap your heart, your faith, and your mind around and not let go when it comes to valleys in life. Six principles of victory for difficult times. Six things that God wants us to believe, practice and say.

1. I will expect difficult days: “Even though”

Number one. You should approach the valleys of life saying, “I will expect difficult days.” Notice how **verse 4** starts, “Even though.” Whether the day is easy or difficult I am ready for it. To expect difficult days is not a negative or pessimistic perspective, it is a Jesus perspective. In **John 16:33**, Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” As a Believer you know valleys are coming, but you also know who has overcome the valley.

To go through hard times successfully, you must put the glasses of reality on and understand that your life is not going to be sunshine and tea every day. Some days Satan is going to huff and puff and try to blow your house down and knock the wind out of you spiritually. You need to be ready for those days.

Even when you are living for Christ and standing up for Him and doing it right you will have hard days. God says in **1 Peter 4:12**, “Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.” One of the reasons many believers struggle through problems and trials in life is because they don’t think it should happen to them. And when it does happen they say, “God, why me?” or “God, what did I do to deserve this?” or they question God’s goodness and wisdom, “God, why did You let this happen?”

Right now, your God is telling you to prepare your mind, emotions, and actions now in order to face the valley later. Lock down in your life the spiritual habits that build spiritual muscles. Lock down prayer, study of God’s Word, meditating on God’s Word, and hanging out with godly people. This will build an **Even Though Theology**. It doesn’t matter if it is an easy day or a difficult day you are ready for it. You are prepared to face it.

So don’t let difficult days surprise you, be ready for them. Get up every morning with the armor of God on and say, “I am ready to face this day *even though* Satan may throw everything he’s got at me, *even though* that person I work with will try to discourage me, *even though* I may not understand what is happening around or to me, *even though* I am lied about, misunderstood or misquoted... I am a child of God. It doesn’t matter if it is sunny or cloudy, dry or wet, this is the day the Lord has made and I’m going to serve Him and love Him and represent Him well today. I am going to have an **Even Though Theology**. It makes no difference what the day may bring. I am ready for it.”

2. I will not quit because of difficult days: “I walk”

The first principle of victory is to expect difficult days, so they don't take you by surprise. This brings us to **the next principle. Here is where you say, “I will not quit because of difficult days.”** Look at **verse 4** again, “Even though I walk...” It doesn't say “Even though I lie down in the valley,” or “Even though I stop in the valley,” or “Even though I quit in the valley.” The Bible says, “Even though I walk.”

When you are in a valley don't throw in the towel. Don't wave the white flag of defeat and give up. Even if you are going through a valley and stumble, don't stay down. Get back up and keep on going. **Proverbs 24:16** says, “Though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again.” There is Someone inside of you that when you fall causes you to get back up. That Someone in you says, “You are not a quitter. You are a winner. You are a conqueror. I made you. I created you. I filled you. I have given you the power of the Holy Spirit.” You get up and continue to walk through this valley. Step by step. Day by day. Week by week. Month by month. You are not going to stop. You are not going to give up. You are not going to quit. You are an overcoming child of God.

How are you going to walk through this valley? You are going to walk with integrity. You knew it was coming and you made up your mind back then that you would not quit if this happened.

According to Romans 8:1 you are going to walk according to the Spirit in this valley. According to 2 Corinthians 5:7 you will walk by faith in this valley. Based on Ephesians 2:10 you will walk in good works while in this valley. Based on Ephesians 4:1 you will walk a life that is worthy of the calling you have received from God. Based on Ephesians 5:2 you will walk a life of love in this valley. According to Colossians 4:5 you will walk in wisdom toward others while in the valley.

I am asking you to make a decision today that when you get into a valley you will walk in that valley in such a way that it honors the Shepherd you are following. Don't quit. Don't give up. Keep on walking because the end of the valley may be just around the corner.

3. I will understand difficult days are temporary: “through”

This brings us to our **third principle. Here is where you say, “I will understand difficult days are temporary.”** Look at what **Psalm 23:4** says, “Even though I walk through the valley.” God does not want you to build your house in that valley. You are just passing

through. This heartache is only temporary. This pain is only for awhile. There are brighter and better days ahead. If you have pitched your tent in this valley, then you need to pick up stakes and march on. God does not *lead* you into a valley in order to *leave* you in the valley. He is not leading you to a dead end. The shepherd would never lead his sheep through a *barren place* unless he was leading them to a *better place*. God has a destination in mind for your life and its not the valley. Jesus didn't die on the cross and resurrect from the dead so that you could live your life in the valley of the shadow of death.

4. I will be courageous in difficult days: "I will fear no evil"

You can face difficult days with victory because you expect them, because you will not quit when they happen and you understand they are only temporary. **The fourth principle. Here is where you say, "I will be courageous in difficult times."** You will face them with boldness. **Psalm 23:4** teaches us to say, "I will fear no evil." As God's sheep, as one of His people you can go through life without fear of anything evil. Let's look at this word "evil" (Hebrew: ra). It appears about 800 times in the Bible. This word "evil" refers to anything bad, discomfoting, wicked, or a displeasure of any kind. It is a very broad, generic word to describe everything bad.

A. Evil refers to the morally bad.

It can refer to the morally bad. Lying is evil. Murder is evil. Stealing is evil. Slander is evil. Those are all bad things in the Bible. So, when the Lord is your Shepherd and you are His sheep following close to Him you don't have to fear evil of any kind. You don't have to be afraid of what people will say to you, about you, or do to you. People may say evil things to you, evil things about you, or even do evil things to hurt you. But you do not have to walk in fear of these people or their actions. Jesus said in **Luke 12:4**, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more harm." **Psalm 56:11** says, "In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" Faith and fear cannot live together. One of the ways you know that you have complete faith in God is that you have no fear of man. Where there is faith there is no fear of man.

B. Evil refers to the naturally bad.

Evil refers to the morally bad, but **it can also refer to the naturally bad.** The Bible refers to natural disasters as evil. A hurricane, tornado, or flood is bad. When a storm is approaching we should not be afraid of them. We should be wise and take cover, but we should not fear them. **Psalm 46:1** says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-

present help in trouble. (2) Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, (3) though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.” To be afraid of thunder, lightning, snow, rain, winds, or earthquakes should not be a part of a Spirit filled faith walking believer. You are not afraid of any natural disaster.

C. Evil refers to the circumstantially bad.

Evil refers to the morally bad and the naturally bad, but **it can also refer to the circumstantially bad**. This is any bad situation that could create stress, worry, depression, or discouragement. Some folks are afraid of losing their jobs, afraid of what the doctor might say, afraid of what might happen. **Psalm 112:7** says, “He [the righteous person] will have no fear of bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. (8) His heart is secure, he will have no fear.”

D. Evil refers to the physically bad.

Evil refers to the morally bad, naturally bad, and the circumstantially bad, but **it can also refer to the physically bad**. Any kind of sickness, illness, or other physical problems. Unhealthy fear should not be apart of the believer’s character. God redeemed you from that and filled you with His Holy Spirit so that you are not dominated by the spirit of timidity. The “saved you” is a bold, courageous, victorious, full of faith and confident person. **1 Peter 3:14** says, “Even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.’” God does not want you to walk around in fear.

5. I will trust God to be with me in difficult days: “for You are with me”

This brings us to **the fifth principle. Here is where you say, “I will trust God to be with me in difficult days.” Psalm 23:4** teaches us to say, “You are with me.” You can go into any difficult day, any hard situation, uncertain circumstances, hospital, or in a court knowing that God is with you. It doesn’t matter if it’s a morally bad day, naturally bad day, circumstantially bad day, or a physically bad day you can face them with faith and confidence knowing God is with you.

You never go into a valley alone. If you are a single parent and if you feel like you are in a valley then you need to know that you are not alone. God is with you and helping you raise those kids. You may not see it, but God is placing people into your kids lives that will influence them for His kingdom. God is helping you provide for those kids. He loves

them more than you. He knows what they need more than you. He is with you. He will give you the wisdom regarding what to say, when to say it, and how to say it.

No matter what valley you are in, God is with you. He is not going to leave you. He is not going to abandon you. As a matter of fact, He will do a lot of things for you that you don't even know about.

6. I will be comforted in difficult days: “Your rod and staff, they comfort me”

Now listen. Every child of God and every soldier of Christ can face any valley. You have already settled and said: I will expect difficult days. They will not take me by surprise. I will not quit because it gets tough. I will understand that rough days are only temporary. I will be courageous when days are difficult and I will trust God during those tough times knowing He has promised me that He will not leave me.

Number six. You can also say, “I will be comforted in difficult times.” God is going to minister to you through your valley. **Psalm 23:4** teaches us to say, “Your rod and staff, they comfort me.” Going through a valley is not easy. You need comfort from God operating in your life. How does God comfort you and put you at ease when you are in the valley. How do you relax in the valley of the shadow of death? In the crisis? You know the presence of God is there and He can help you with His rod and staff.

A “rod” was basically about two feet long, at the end of it was a heavy knot. Shepherds were very skilled at throwing the rod, like a spear, at anything that would attack the sheep. They used this to defend the sheep against other animals or thieves trying to steal them. They used the rod to defend the sheep. God is saying, “When you go through the valley, I’m defending you and protecting you.” Knowing that God is going to protect you and defend you brings you comfort while going through the valley.

A “staff” was a long stick with a large hook at the end of it. The shepherd would use the large hook to wrap around the sheep’s body and pull the sheep close to him, pull him out of bushes that he got tangled in, or help lift him out of a hole he fell in. God is saying, “When you go through the valley I’ll help you get out of the messes you get yourself in and I’ll pull you up out of the holes you may fall in. You can count on Me. I’ll be there.”

God is saying, “Whether something is trying to hurt you or you are trying to hurt yourself, I am going to use my rod and staff to protect you and keep you close.”

Conclusion

God does not want you to simply accept the valley, He wants you to succeed through it. But when you look at verse 4 you can't help but to notice that shadow over the valley is caused by death. Death can cast a long and dark shadow. Many people are afraid of death. Perhaps that is you. One of the reasons people are afraid of death is because they are not ready for death. God wants you to be ready. **Hebrews 2:14** says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, He [Jesus] too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy Him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – (15) and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." You don't have to be afraid of death nor its shadow. If you receive Jesus Christ you will receive eternal life and freedom from death. Would you like to do that today? [Prayer].