

From the Heart of the First Lady

His Rod And Staff Comforts Me

Psalm 23:4 (NIV) 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.

Baaah!!!

As we continue on our journey through the 23rd Psalm, we will be meditating on the second of four focal points. Whereas the first three verses place emphasis on the shepherd (**He** makes me..., **He** leads me..., **He** restores...) verse four personalizes the sheep's direct response to the shepherd's authority and care. Let's take this opportunity to do a spiritual health check by measuring our obedience while reflecting on this scripture.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death: What does it mean to walk through the valley of the shadow of death? The Hebrew word describes a deep canyon where a shepherd would lead his sheep to get them to better pasture. This is a path where sheep have to walk very carefully. There would come a time during the walk where the walls would be so high that they blocked all sunlight and the path became pitch dark. All the sheep had to go by was the voice and leading of the shepherd. At some point, all of us will find ourselves on this path. And a few of us may currently be on it. If you've ever received a bad report from your doctor, been rejected by your spouse, had a child who left the faith, or didn't know where your next dollar would come from, then welcome to the valley. It's important to note the key words "even" and "through". Everything GOD's Word revealed to us about Him is true, **EVEN** when our circumstances say otherwise; and no matter how dark or painful the trial, it will end. Who is more likely to dominate your focus in the valley – the Word of GOD or the things going bump in the night?

I will fear no evil: No one can make this statement unless you fit these criteria: you are a baptized disciple of Jesus Christ, you have a full understanding of your position in the spiritual realm (Ephesians 1:18-23), and you live according to Luke 10:19 and 1John 5:18. If this is you, then you can boldly make this statement from a place of authority and dominion that will force any predator to eventually flee – just as David did. When you know who you are and what you have in Jesus Christ, no bad news, stubborn problem or threatening condition can shake your faith in the Good Shepherd.

for you are with me: This is the sole reason we are not shaken. Our courage is based on the sure fact that we are never alone in the valley. We can draw strength from Isaiah 43:1-2 and apply this promise to any condition we face – no matter how hot, wet, deep or dark it gets. *But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have*

summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze." If we only rely on family, friends, critics, doctors or our own strength and resources, the darkness will surely overcome us. The safest way out is to follow the Shepherd's leading.

your rod and staff: As David slightly switches gears, it is no coincidence that he mentions the rod and staff (which symbolizes the Shepherd's discipline and guidance) in the same verse as comfort in the darkest valley. The rod was used to discipline the sheep that attempted to go astray. The shepherd would give the sheep a few waring whacks to get them back in line with the fold. If they still rebelled, then the rod would be used with stronger force. It is no different for us today. When we allow sin to fester in our lives our Shepherd must administer the rod of correction to discipline us. Hebrews 12:11 (NIV) says *No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.* We can all agree that it is much better to be disciplined by the Shepherd than devoured by a predator. Scriptures like Galatians 5:16-19 and Mark 7:20-23 warn us to take heed how we behave towards GOD and each other, lest we will suffer consequences (in some cases, the penalties will be eternal). *Galatians 5:19-21 (NIV) The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.* It is worth mentioning that the same rod was forcefully used to keep predators away from the sheep (see 1Samuel 17:34-35).

they comfort me: Different from the rod, the Shepherd's staff had a crook on the end that was used to single out a sheep from the fold to examine it. The Shepherd would hook the sheep by the neck, causing it to pass under the staff for close inspection. If any wounds or injuries were found, the Shepherd would tend to them. Notice David said **THEY** (not either or, but both) comfort me. This implies that our relationship with the Shepherd contains a healthy balance of discipline and healing, mourning and rejoicing, sadness and joy, repentance and refreshing, sowing and reaping. What promises from GOD encourage you through your darkest valleys and times of discipline today?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I want to live godly in Christ Jesus and I ask that You would help me to develop an attitude of obedience to Your will and an increasing trust in Your Word. Help me to grow in grace, and to develop the right godly practice and scripture purpose in life, so that You are lifted up in my heart and glorified in all I do. May I learn to praise You without ceasing and to develop an attitude of praise– and help me to be obedient to carry out all that I am called to do as a child of God – so that You increase as I decrease.
Amen

