

Dallas Willard's short commentary on Psalm 23 from 'Life without Lack'

The Lord is my shepherd.

In other words, I'm in the care of someone else. I'm not the one in charge. I've taken my kingdom and surrendered it to the kingdom of God. I am living the with-God life. The Lord is my shepherd. And what follows from that?

I shall not want.

That's the natural result. I shall not lack anything. That's what Jesus teaches: "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and everything else will be added (Matt. 6: 33).

He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

What kind of a sheep lies down in a green pasture? A sheep that has eaten its fill. If a sheep is in a green pasture and she's not full, she'll be eating, not lying down.

He leads me beside the still waters.

A sheep that is being led beside still water is a sheep that is not thirsty. Jesus said to the woman at the well, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4: 13-14).

He restores my soul.

The broken depths of my soul are healed and reintegrated in a life in union with God: the eternal kind of life.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

The effect of the restoration of my soul is that I walk in paths of righteousness on his behalf as a natural expression of my renewed inner nature. As I walk these paths, my trust in the Shepherd runs so deep that I can declare:

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

A life without lack is one that carries no fear of evil. Our confidence in God soars far above wants and fears. Would you like to have a life without fear, a life of soaring faith? It seems like Jesus was constantly saying to his friends, "Fear not! Fear not!" Imagine what that would be like. No fear of life, ageing or death, disease or hunger, no fear of any person or creature, not even the loss of all your possessions. You can live without fear even in the midst of a world dominated by fear. I could easily have chosen "fear no evil" as this book's theme, because we are talking about a life from which fear is eliminated. While the psalmist clearly knows about life's dangers, he can still say, "I will fear no evil." Why? Please read his answer out loud:

For You are with me.

The central truth of this book is that the complete sufficiency of the life without lack is based upon the presence of God, and he is most clearly and fully present to us in Jesus Christ, Immanuel, God with us.

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

I know from experience that the rod and staff represent the Shepherd's strength and protective care. In this safe place where I have no fear, I am at liberty to enjoy the overwhelming generosity of my Shepherd.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Since I love my enemies,* I would not feast upon a delicious meal in their presence and let them stand there hungry. The abundance of God's provision and safety in my life is so great, I would invite them to enjoy what God has prepared for me.

You anoint my head with oil.

Here you might think in terms of hot showers and warm fluffy towels, things that make us feel clean, comfortable, and special, and how God makes that possible. He is not only interested in my having something wonderful to eat, but also in blessing me with a life that is full and free and powerful in him—including clothing, comfortable furnishings, joyful experiences, and deep relationships. So much so that the abundance of God's provision rings out from the psalmist's pen:

My cup is full!

Is that what it says? No. "My cup runs over." I have more than my cup will hold. So much that I can be as generous as my Shepherd without fear of ever running out. So much so that I am convinced:

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

This is a description of the eternal life available to us now in the kingdom of the heavens; the abundant with-God life that comes from following the Shepherd, where we dwell and abide with God in the fullness of his life—a life in which all the promises of Christ's gospel are realised. Because of this we have no reason to be anxious (Phil. 4: 6-7); the world is a perfectly safe place for us to be.