



## Praying Psalm 23:

### Following the Shepherd of our Souls

*Led by Bill Gaultiere*

*& the Spiritual Formation Ministries Team*

*Five Wednesdays, 7 to 9 pm, through October 7, 2009*

*Crystal Cathedral, Family Life Center 470*

### WEEK 2: Be Still with Jesus

*"He makes me lie down..." (Psalm 23:2)*

*September 16, 2009*

Is the Good Shepherd Good Enough for You?

Last week asked the question, who is the shepherd we turn to in our lives? And we looked closely into the story of Lisa, the alcoholic. She learned to turn to Jesus and pray,

"Your love, O Lord, is better than wine!" (Psalm 63:3).

(You can read an article based on last week's teaching on the Crystal Cathedral website.

Jesus became "good enough" for Lisa. He became her portion. Not just in her doctrinal beliefs or the priorities she listed on paper, but in how she responded to being lonely or bored, what she thought about during the day, what she relied on when she was nervous at a party.

This whole series on "Praying Psalm 23: Following the Shepherd of our Souls" is based on the idea that Jesus is a Good Shepherd - really good! That God is good and gracious, caring and kind. God is beautiful in every way and he blesses us continually - though we often don't notice and we often struggle to feel his blessings.

Probably all of us in this room believe that "God is good." But many of us have difficulties fully trusting that "God is good to me."

Here's a test: When you consider examples of human suffering and injustice can you say, "God is good always. He is compassionate and helpful"?

Let's make the test personal: Can you look back over your whole life - the good and the bad - and say, "God has been good to me always"?

For many of us, if we're honest about our feelings and go deep enough into our hearts, there's a point where we're not sure about God. I'm opening up a can of worms here and we don't have time to put each worm back in the can, but I just want for you and me to consider how much we trust God. It's the essential starting point in our relationship with God.

The key to our learning to trust God completely is to realize that every moment of every day - on bright, sunny days, and on dark, cold days - that Jesus' words are true:

"Think again about how you're living in light of your wonderful opportunity: right now you can participate in the glorious kingdom of the heavens in your midst" (Matthew 4:17, PAR).

The greatest blessing of a lifetime and eternity is that you and I can say with the Apostle John:

"I am the disciple that Jesus loves!"

O dear Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit... give us eyes to see your unseen kingdom; give us eyes of faith; give us soft hearts to appreciate your goodness in all things.

### **Singing Psalm 23**

I hope that it's been meaningful for you this past week to enter into Psalm 23. I've been turning it over and over in my mind - in whole and different verses that I particularly relate to - while I brush my teeth, drive my car, walk around, wait, lie in bed...

I especially find it helpful to chant Psalm 23! The only problem is that when I open my mouth to sing, our worship leader Beth Groombridge's voice doesn't come out!

It reminds me of something my dad experienced. When he was in sixth grade, his class was preparing to sing Christmas songs as part of a school musical. Everyone was excited to be a part of the Christmas celebration! To prepare for the event, the teacher listened to each child sing. When it was my dad's turn, he sang out with joy, but the teacher winced and said, "Jim, you need to go into the 'No Notes' group!"

"No Notes!" What a denunciation. The "No Notes" group was comprised mostly of the athletes who didn't make musical notes. They had big muscles and out of tune vocal cords. They didn't sing - they grunted and growled! So, the teacher told my dad and his friends that, during the Christmas musical, they were to move their mouths and pretend to sing without making any noise. That was the "No Notes" group.

Sadly, my dad got the message that his singing to Christ wasn't pleasing so he shouldn't do it.

Obviously, Jesus would never do that! He would never downgrade anyone into the "No Notes" group.

"The LORD does not look at the things people look at... He looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

When we sing praise to God, he's not critiquing our musical ability - he's listening to our hearts and appreciating the love we express for him (Isaiah 29:13). When we express appreciation and admiration to the Lord, he is blessed by it! It ministers to him!

I thank the Lord that I overcame my resistances and tried singing Psalms like Psalm 23. I've found that putting my own tune to sing some of my favorite Psalms has been amazing. It has helped to nurture my relationship with Christ. It has been a powerful way to meditate on Scripture that has brought new insights from God's Word. God has used my singing of Psalms to lift my spirits - to draw my attention upwards and put a smile on my face!

### **The Soul Seasons of Psalm 23**

Chanting Psalm 23 has helped me to appreciate the different soul seasons that we go through and their importance for our spiritual growth. It's helped me to form the intention of my heart on following Good Shepherd in each season, with each verse or aspect of my life with him.

- Winter: resting with Good Shepherd at the home ranch.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside still waters.

- Spring: beginning a new path! (We'll talk on this next week!)

He restores my soul;

He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake

- Summer: growing through struggles. (We'll cover this in week 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

- Fall: bearing fruit. (We'll cover this in week 5)

You anoint my head with oil; My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

### **Green Pastures and Still Waters (How Good Shepherd Restores our Souls)**

We all want our souls to be restored by God!

What is the "soul"? It's the deepest part of us.

It's also the most encompassing part of ourselves; it integrates all the other parts (heart/spirit/will, mind, body, social). This is why the Psalmist often talks to his own soul:

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (Psalm 42:5, 11).

Our soul is the flow of our life. It's meant to be like a stream, flowing with God's life-giving waters.

What does it mean to be "restored"? We all have parts of ourselves that are broken, ways that our lives are not functioning as God intended. To have our souls restored is to heal the broken parts so that they work well.

The order of the verses in Psalm 23 is very important. One of the things we learn is how it is that our souls are restored.

- Pray, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Worship the Father, Son, and Spirit.
- Learn to let the Lord "make us" lie down in green pastures and to lead us beside still waters.

C.S. Lewis hits the nail on the head. Read his description of what it looks like to learn to rest in God...

The real problem of the Christian life comes where people do not usually look for it. It comes the very moment you wake up each morning. All your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists simply in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in. And so on, all day. Standing back from all your natural fussings and frettings; coming in out of the wind.

We can only do it for moments at first. But from those moments the new sort of life will be spreading through our system: because now we are letting Him work at the right part of us. It is the difference between paint, which is merely laid on the surface, and a dye or stain which soaks right through (Mere Christianity).

An example of how you can do this is to stay lying in bed after you wake up. My wife Kristi is good at this. I'm not. But I've been practicing on some mornings.

If it's time to get up, don't let yourself fall back asleep. But if you're anxious to get your day started, force yourself to continue lying in bed - resist the wild animals rushing at you to get things done - and use the time to meditate and pray slowly through Palm 23...

Resolve not to hurry and rush...

Keep drawing your mind back to sit in the green pastures, beside the still waters, and at Good Shepherd's feet...

Submit to Jesus each thing you have to do in the day ahead. Pray for his kingdom to come, his will to be done in you and through you...

## **POINT TO PONDER**

- What is Jesus teaching you?

- How can your group or a friend pray for you about this?

## PRAYER PRACTICE

**BREATH PRAYER:** This is a type of Centering Prayer. It's an ancient way to pray. Once you learn it, it's delightful, peaceful, grounding, simplifying. It's really a way of meditating on a short phrase of Scripture. You can breathe slowly in or out as you say this scripture/prayer slowly. And it's a way to let your breathing become praying to God. Here's one based on Psalm 62:1,5 for you to try:

**In Christ alone my soul finds rest.** (slowly breathe in, breathe out)

**In Christ alone my soul** (breathe in, breathe out)

**In Christ alone** (breathe in, breathe out)

**In Christ** (breathe in, breathe out)

## WEEKLY EXPERIMENT

We want to practice praying Psalm 23 to help us to rest in Good Shepherd's love, to lie down in his green pastures and beside his still waters. It'd be good to each day pick one way to try resting with Jesus. Here are some options for what that might look like...

- Sleep: Sleep or stay in bed for at least seven (7) hours.
- Slowing: Purposely drive in the slow lane on the freeway, or choose the longest line at the store, or take a slow walk to pray and cultivate the attitude of going at a slower pace with Jesus.
- Waiting: Linger awake in bed in the morning to push back the "wild animals" (e.g., anxiety to get things done or about what you don't want to face that day) so we can rest with Christ through prayer, meditation, listening.
- Centering Prayer: Give at least five minutes to being quiet, breathing deep, and "centering down" in a short, simple Scripture "breath prayer" that you gently and slowly repeat to yourself like, "The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want." Or "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). Or the one we did together: "In Christ alone my soul finds rest... In Christ alone my soul... In Christ alone... In Christ..." (based on Psalm 62:1,5).
- Solitude: Set aside at least an hour of Sabbath time to be alone with Jesus doing something you enjoy that will help you to interact with him in prayer: e.g., take a walk or hike, find a beautiful place in nature, sit in a quiet place in your home to meditate deeply on a passage of Scripture and journal. The idea is not to catch up on your reading or do a lot of Bible study, but simply to be with Jesus in a way that refreshes you and connects you with him as your Good Shepherd.