



Praying Psalm 23:

Following the Shepherd of our Souls

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& the Spiritual Formation Ministries Team

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

Crystal Cathedral, Family Life Center 470

WEEK 5: Relying on the Holy Spirit to Bear Fruit

"He anoints my head with oil..." (Psalm 23:5-6)

October 7, 2009

My dad and I were talking about how we are the "sheople" of the Lord's pasture in the "Come and Grow" meetings. Did you know that you a "sheople"!

Simplicity

Autumn is here! I'm enjoying the cooler temperatures and the changing of the leaves. How about you?

I have a good friend named Michael who is in New England with his wife right now. He's really enjoying fall color!

Michael is one of the pastors in a spiritual formation group for pastors that I've been leading for over four years now. He's a funny guy. He said to me, "My wife and I aren't going to drive all over New England to see all the fall color. We're just going to stay in one spot and enjoy it. We'll walk and talk and sit and relax. We don't need to see lots and lots of trees. One tree in fall color is as good as another!"

So this week I've been enjoying praying for Michael and his wife as they are in New England enjoying their tree. I think he's found the tree in Psalm 1 and he's meditating on it to become like it! ("His delight is in the law of the Lord and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by the stream of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.")

Michael is like that. He keeps his life simple and uncluttered. When other pastors flock to the latest seminar on leadership principles, he hesitates. He asks himself, "Do I need this? Will it help me grow in my intimacy with Christ?"

He saves ample space in his schedule for prayer and Scripture meditation - and for people. He goes to the same coffee shop regularly to help him form relationships with the workers so he can share Christ with them.

In ministry, he's careful about adding programs to the church calendar. He keeps time open so he can go to the high school basketball game with other families in his church. And he puts priority on meeting with other men individually and in groups to disciple them to Jesus.

What I appreciate about Michael is the same thing I appreciate about Psalm 23: *Simplicity*.

When you have Psalm 23 in your heart, you have what you need to lead you on a journey of apprenticeship to Jesus, the Good Shepherd of your soul.

The Autumn of the Soul

We're in our last week going through Psalm 23. In our journey with the Good Shepherd, we've come to the soul season of autumn. The season of bearing fruit.

Jesus said, "The good tree bears good fruit" (Matthew 7:17). How do we bear the good fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? Remember it's called "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-23). It's not the fruit of Bill or Jacqueline or Louise or Rocky. It's the fruit of the *Holy Spirit*.

We bear fruit not by trying hard to do it or by going to the store and buying it, but by relying on the Holy Spirit. It's natural for apple trees to bear apples and for grape vines to bear grape fruit - not grapefruit, but grape fruit!

Fruit is the natural byproduct of apple trees that are rooted in good soil. It is easy for grapevine branches that abide in the vine to bear clusters of grapes. For us to bear the fruit of love, joy, and peace - to be effective for God in all of life - we need to focus on our abiding in Christ, growing in our intimacy with him.

Relying on the Holy Spirit to bear fruit is the teaching of Psalm 23, especially in these last verses, shows us...

"You anoint my head with oil" (Psalm 23:5). The shepherd carries a special ointment that he uses to heal his sheep's cuts and scratches. It's a beautiful picture of how the Lord heals our wounds.

And it's how he anoints us for ministry. You know that our most powerful ministry to others comes out of how the Lord has healed our hurts and helped us through our struggles.

We need to be honest: *We're all wounded healers*. Like Jacob, who wrestled with God, we all walk with a limp. And as long as we have received and are continuing to receive help with our own weaknesses and needs, this is a good thing. Wounded healers are the best kind.

"My cup runs over" (Psalm 23:5). The shepherd's cup overflows to his sheep. He shares his canteen of warm wine with his sheep that catch a chill.

And this is the teaching of the Bible, that we forgive others as Christ forgives us (Colossians 3:13), love others as God has loved us (1 John 4:19), and comfort others with the comfort Christ has given to us (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). In other words, our ministry to others needs to be an overflow of Christ's ministry to us (which often comes through people in the Body of Christ).

This is why Paul says that God doesn't want us to give or minister out of emptiness or guilt, but out of cheerfulness (2 Corinthians 9:6-8).

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Psalm 23:6).

In the fall season, it starts to get cold in the high country. So the shepherd leads his sheep down from the mountain plateau back to the home ranch for the winter.

And the sheep leave green pastures of goodness and mercy behind them. This is because the wise shepherd moves his sheep around and because the sheep's manure fertilizes the grass!

Also, perhaps the shepherd can follow the sheep now. They know the way home in their heart. They've grown and matured on their journey with Good Shepherd.

Think about it. In the beginning, in our winter season, our shepherd was very directive with us. He *made* us to lie down and rest in green pastures. He *led* us beside still waters.

In springtime, when we fell down, he lovingly *restored* us to our feet again. And he *guided* us gently with his staff onto the right path.

Then, in the difficult heat of summer when we thought he left us alone in the valley of the shadow of death, surrounded by enemies, we discovered that we didn't need to fear because he was *with* us, right beside us.

Now in autumn, as we head back home, our Shepherd – the one who is goodness and mercy – *follows* right behind us. As Isaiah prophesied, "Your ears will hear a voice behind you saying this is the way; walk in it" (Isaiah 30:21).

This is how we want to be in our life with God. We all start out in the spiritual life as children, needing lots of help, living off of our emotions. And hopefully we grow up along the way. We receive help and training in discipleship to Jesus. We overcome challenges. We mature into spiritual adults. We become spiritual parents who can minister effectively to others.

“And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Psalm 23:6).

Psalm 23 ends with an exclamation point! In fact, each verse in this season of fall strikes a higher and higher note, which is why I sing it that way in my chanting of this Psalm for my devotions.

Here David speaks of practicing God’s presence continually. He indicates that each verse, each step in our journey, each season of the soul, each difficulty, and each blessing in our lives – whatever circumstances we happen to find ourselves in – is an opportunity to rejoice in the Lord! Hallelujah! I am alive in God’s kingdom! I am the disciple Jesus loves!

I don’t know about you, but I often forget this. My smile disappears. My shoulders droop under the weight of my burdens. I lose the pep in my step. And I need to remind myself through prayer and meditation or conversation with a trusted friend who is Christ’s Ambassador to me: *I am dwelling in the house of the Lord right now!*

Psalm 23 is meant to teach us to practice the presence of God. Paul calls this praying without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and keeping in step with the Spirit (Galatians 5:25).

In the Psalms, David refers to it as setting the Lord always before our minds (Psalm 16:8).

It’s why I put Psalm 23 in the special “bag” I told you about in the first week. By memorizing it and keeping close at hand, I can meditate on it verse-by-verse or breathe in and out a single verse as my lifeline for that day.

The Poetry of Psalm 23

Don’t you love the Good Shepherd statue here at the Crystal Cathedral, just east of the Arboretum? My wife Kristi played in the grass by this statue as a little girl. Some of you have similar memories.

Have you ever stopped to pray and meditate on this statute and on Psalm 23 that inspired it? What a blessing this is!

Rocky did this as part of a morning retreat I led last year: “Walking with Jesus in the Gardens of the Crystal Cathedral.” I’m leading a similar time of prayer and meditation this Saturday morning. I’ll be providing prayer starters to guide people to any of the Bible statues for a time of connecting with Jesus.

When Rocky meditated on Psalm 23 at the Good Shepherd statue, the Lord inspired him to write a beautiful poem. He’s writing poems on many of the Psalms. I’ve been doing the same. I

call them prayer poems. We've been sharing our poems and prayers over lunch to encourage one another in our discipleship to Jesus.

Weekly Experiment: Praying Psalm 23

Praying the Psalms is a practice that goes back thousands of years to the time of David. The Psalms are meant to be our school of prayer. Jesus learned to pray from the Psalms. Jesus fulfilled the Psalms, their prophecies, and the righteous life to which they point.

Where are you at in the Psalm 23 pilgrimage with Jesus, your Good Shepherd?

Perhaps one of these aspects of the Psalm begins to describe what you need to pray today?

Dear Lord Jesus Christ...

- I want to rely on you alone as my Shepherd in all things...
- Help me to rest in your green pastures, beside your still waters...
- Restore me from my struggles or hurts...
- I'm listening for your voice, eager to follow you on your good path...
- I want to learn to trust you and not fear in my dark valley...
- I know I need your rod and staff to train me to be your disciple...
- Help me to forgive and bless my enemies, even as you've done for me...
- I receive your anointing for ministry and rely on your Spirit...
- I want to be a leader for you, to leave a legacy of goodness and mercy...
- Teach me to dwell with you through prayer as I do all that I do...

Pray each line of Psalm 23 from your heart. Talk to Good Shepherd especially about the soul season (above) that you're in today and take a hold of his hand to receive his comfort and guidance (you may wish to journal your prayer, perhaps as a poem!)