

The Lord is My Shepherd!

[Read Psalm 23 NRSV]

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; ³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me. ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

[Read James 5:13-16 NRSV]

¹³Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

Opening Image

Have you ever felt completely alone? Have you ever felt totally isolated? Have you ever felt abandoned by friends and family? In the movie, *Castaway*, the main character Chuck Noland played by actor Tom Hanks finds himself completely alone and abandoned due to a tragic aircraft accident.

Chuck is marooned on a desert island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. He does not have any human or animal companions. He does not have a cellphone. He does not have a computer or the internet. He does not

have a radio or TV. He is far away from the shipping lanes and airline traffic. No one will see him or any kind of rescue signal. He is totally alone.

He is in a terrible predicament. What can he do to keep himself from going crazy due to the complete and total isolation he is experiencing? His loneliness and lack of a rescue plan drives him to consider killing himself with a hangman's noose.

He finally invents another person from a volleyball and names him Wilson. Wilson is someone he can talk to. Wilson is someone that helps to keep him going. Wilson gives him hope. Wilson helps him survive until he can be rescued.

Sometimes we may feel isolated or alone even in a room full of people. Where can we turn for companionship? Not just any companionship but Christian companionship? What does the Bible say?

Transition to Scripture

Our scriptures from Psalm 23 and James chapter 5 tell us that we are never alone. Psalm 23 tells us that God is always with us while James chapter 5 reminds us that we can always turn to our Christian community for comfort and healing. Unlike the movie *Castaway*, we do not need to invent someone to talk with. We can always turn to our loving God and our Christian community. Let's take a closer look at Psalm 23.

Intro to Scripture

Psalm 23 celebrates the one true God as shepherd and host. The images that the Psalm evokes in our minds are ones of trust, comfort, peace and tranquility. These serene images make Psalm 23 the most popular and well known of all the Psalms. Although these images are there, this is a mere surface level reading of a Psalm that has a far deeper message for us today.

David, a king and the author of Psalm 23, gives his total obedience to God by saying, "The Lord is my shepherd." Even though he is a king, he acknowledges God as his superior. David puts God first.

Trust in God

King David has total faith and trust that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will provide for him, guide him, and be with him in good times and bad times. It is noteworthy that the Psalm begins and ends with God. The writer, King David, is in God's care from the beginning to the end.

David's Life filled with Turmoil

We know from scripture that David's life was not all roses. King Saul tried to kill him. He had an affair with another man's wife. His son with Bathsheba died in infancy. Another son, Absalom, staged a military coup against him. Through all this turmoil, David remained faithful to God but that did not guarantee him an easy life of wealth, health, and leisure. David's life like ours has its peaks and valleys but he is comforted by his

relationship with God. God gave him confidence and assurance that no matter what happened to him that God was close by to him.

Close Relationship with God

David has a close relationship with God. David makes this clear in verse one with the phrase, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." This simple statement is loaded with information. The Hebrew word for "Lord" is *YHWH* or Yahweh.

Yahweh is the personal name of God revealed to Moses in Exodus (Ex 3:14). David shows that he has a close relationship with God because they are on a first name basis. Not only does David have a close relationship with God but David, a shepherd himself, goes on to say that God is his shepherd. What does he mean when he says the Lord is his shepherd?

Shepherd Defined

A shepherd is an owner and manager of sheep. Sheep are not very smart animals. Sheep require a shepherd because they do not know what is best for them. Years ago, I worked with a friend that tended some sheep at his father's ranch.

I learned very quickly that sheep require a lot of attention and cannot take care of themselves. They will eat grass all the way down to the roots and destroy entire fields if left unattended. Sheep need to be moved from one field to the next to preserve the root system of the grass.

They will drink from infested pools of water and get sick unless they are led to clean running streams. They are very timid and easy prey for predators. Predators are a constant problem. My friend and I would drive a truck through the fields to check on the sheep and look for predators. A pack of wild dogs can kill over 200 sheep in one night. Taking care of sheep is a lifetime commitment.

First Reason

God takes this commitment seriously because God is our loving, forgiving, and merciful creator. Jesus shows us God's concern and care for us through his love, mercy, and compassion for the least, the lost, the hungry, the sick, the poor, and the sinners.

The fact that God is our creator and that God's character is self-giving love should be enough to say that God has the credentials to be our shepherd. This is the first reason we should acknowledge God as our shepherd. There are two additional reasons that we should acknowledge God as our shepherd.

Second Reason

The second reason we should acknowledge God as our shepherd is because God paid for us with the life of Jesus Christ. The sheep that belonged to my friend were paid for by the blood and sweat of his labor. He gave up his body to physical labor to pay for his sheep.

In the same manner God bought us with a price. We were created in the image of God to be in communion with God for eternity. When our love for God failed and we turned away from God, God continued to pursue us and worked to restore our relationship. God sent his only Son to rescue us from sin and death. Jesus died on a cross to take away our sins and restore our relationship with God. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son for us.

Third Reason

The third reason we should acknowledge God as our shepherd is because God continually gives of God's self for us. Jesus told his disciples that they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit after Jesus ascended to heaven. The Holy Spirit teaches, convicts, and guides our daily lives. The Spirit not only speaks to us but intercedes for us.

Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans that we do not know how to pray but the Spirit, who knows the mind of God, intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words according to the will of God (Rom 8:26-27). The Holy Spirit assures us that God cares for us and is with us.

Stephen Ministry

God is a loving community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus builds a community of disciples on earth not based on blood relationships but based on love for one another. When Jesus ascends to the Father he

does not abandon his community of faith. Jesus empowers his community by sending the Holy Spirit. In our Christian community we have special trained volunteers, Stephen Ministers, who are here to journey with us during our difficult days.

Stephen Ministry Sunday

Today we are celebrating our Stephen Ministry program. I chose scripture passages from Psalm 23 and James chapter 5 this morning because they exemplify what our Stephen Ministers do for our congregation.

The After People

People often ask, "What exactly is a Stephen Minister?" One way to put it is that Stephen Ministers are the "**After People.**" Stephen Ministers are there: (1) **after** the phone call you hoped you'd never get; (2) **after** the divorce papers are served and the bottom falls out of your life; (3) **after** the funeral, when everyone has left and the emotions you've held at bay come crashing in on you (4) **after** the doctor says, "I'm sorry, but there's nothing more we can do." (5) **after** the nursing home director shakes your hand and says, "Welcome to your new home." (6) **after** the last child honks the horn, waves, and drives away—and the house suddenly seems empty (7) **after** the gavel goes down, the handcuffs go on, and your loved one is led away (8) **after** the baby arrives, demanding more of you than you ever dreamed possible (9) **after** you find a pink slip with your final paycheck (10)

after your family and friends have heard your story one too many times, but you still need to talk it out.

Stephen Ministers are the "**After People.**" They are ready to come alongside you—or your friends, neighbors, coworkers, or relatives—and provide comfort and support for as long after as needed.

Anointing and Prayers

So, consider coming to our Wednesday night Oasis Worship Service at 5:30pm to hear a message, receive Holy Communion, and take the opportunity to pray with one of our Stephen Ministers. In James Chapter 5 we learn that we should call upon the elders of the church to pray for us and receive an anointing from them.

Referral

Or consider asking for a referral to see a Stephen Minister. In Psalm 23 we learn that Jesus walks with us in both the good times and the bad times. Our Stephen Ministers are here to journey with you in both the good times and the bad times.

Invitation

Do you need to talk to someone that you can trust to keep things confidential? Do you need a Christian friend to walk with you through the dark valleys of life? I invite you to come to the altar rail **during the final hymn** and pray with one of our trained Stephen Ministers because you are never alone.

Come to the Altar Rail

Just as God is with us always, our Stephen Ministers are here for you.

Come to the altar rail and unburden yourself from your pain. A Stephen Minister will listen to your concerns. ***Come to the altar rail*** and share with God your deepest and darkest fears. A Stephen Minister will pray with you.

Finally, come to the altar rail and know that you are a beloved Child of God. A Stephen Minister will anoint you with oil. In God's house and in the Christian Community you are never alone!

In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen

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