

life groups

NorthStar Church

“Pour It Out” Pt 2 at South Campus

Scott Cagle – South Campus

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Psalm 23

Main Point

This message helps us understand that God has wired us with various emotions. We CAN live life with joy and fulfillment no matter what circumstances come our way.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Quickly jot down some of the characteristics or attributes of God that immediately come to mind, such as “holy” or “wise.” What attributes readily come to mind?

How might your view of what God is like affect the way you live when life is going the way you want it to? When everything is “good” in your life?

The Bible uses many different metaphors to describe God. Many of them highlight God’s holiness, wisdom and glory. The Bible compares God to a lion, an eagle, the sun, a light, a fountain, a rock, a tower, and a shield — all similes and metaphors meant to help us understand who God is and what He is like. In Psalm 23, David personally relates to God as his Shepherd. This is important because it gives you insight into how you can relate to God on a personal level. And as Scott points out, this Psalm offers three secrets to happiness no matter life’s circumstance.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 23:1-3.

- I. The Secret to a happy life: The Lord is my Shepherd! “You shall have no other gods before me”... “He who Was and Is to come”... “a very present help”

Thousands of years ago, contemplating God’s good care of him, David said, “I lack nothing.” Have you ever been this content? Why or why not?

David is able to say this only because he knew God as his Shepherd. The fact that David views God this way implies that he is a sheep. Sheep are not the brightest creatures and would likely not live long without the guidance and provision of the shepherd. David views God as the One who is providing for him, caring for him, and guiding him--thus all his needs are met. Your greatest need in life is not food, or clothing, or shelter, but to have a personal relationship with the God who made you.

What does verse 2 tell you about how God cares for your needs?

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 23:4-5.

II. The Secret to a happy death:

David uses this expression – “All the days of my life”. As you look back in your life you can see all the ways He has pursued you with goodness and mercy. What are some ways that God showed up in your life in days gone by?

What kind of paths does God lead David down? What is God’s motive in leading David in this way (v. 4)?

David recognizes that God leads him down the right paths “for the sake of his reputation.” The path that God leads us down may not always be easy, but it will be right. And God does this for His own glory and name. In other words, God’s motive in leading us is to glorify Himself. The fact that we get to see and personally experience God’s glory is further evidence of God’s perfect provision.

How might knowing that God leads you down the right paths for the sake of His reputation give us confidence in God’s guidance in our lives?

Knowing that God promises to guide you for the sake of his reputation should give you tremendous confidence that God will lead you well. God has put His own name and reputation on the line for us and He will not let His name be profaned or fall into disrepute. This should give you deep assurance that God is going to provide for, protect, and guide you.

David shifts in verse 5 from envisioning God as a Shepherd to describing Him as the host of a banquet. Do any of God’s actions in verse 5 surprise you?

David envisions God anointing his head with oil which is a mark of friendship, acceptance, and celebration. This is a surprising description of God because He is holy. This is further evidence that this psalm finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, because it is only through Christ that we can relate to God as a friend (see John 15:15).

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 23:6.

III. The secret to a happy eternity: dwelling in the house of the Lord forever!

Ask a volunteer to read John 10:11-21.

In what ways is Jesus the fulfillment of Psalm 23?

What is the difference between the hired hand and the good shepherd (vv. 12-16)?

While the shepherd in Ancient Israel would be expected to take greater care to guide and protect his sheep than a hired hand would, it would be astonishing for anyone to willingly give up their life for a flock of sheep. This is why the Bible refers to the cross as a “stumbling block.” It is difficult for many to comprehend that a holy God would stoop so low as to give up His life for stubborn, foolish, and unruly sheep and yet this is exactly what Jesus did.

Why is it important that Jesus laid down His life of His “own free will” (v. 18)?

The fact that no one could take Jesus’ life from Him highlights both Jesus’ ultimate authority and profound love. Jesus didn’t have to go the cross. He chose to and He did so out of love for God and love for us.

How might viewing Christ as your Shepherd give you confidence to walk through “the darkest valley”?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How might remembering what Jesus did on the cross equip you to face trials?

How can you face death without fear? How might meditating on Psalm 23 help you be prepared?

Who do you know that needs to hear about how Jesus is the Good Shepherd who willingly lays down His life for the sheep? How might you strike up a spiritual conversation with them this week?

As Scott pointed out:

1. Know Him
2. Live for Him in happiness
3. Be with Him in joy
4. Celebrate Him throughout eternity!

Pray

Pray that you would delight in the abundant provision of Jesus. Thank God for the making you able to face death without fear. Ask that He would make you passionate about telling others how good and gracious Christ our Shepherd is.

Commentary

Psalm 23:1-6

23:1 The Lord is often referred to as the Shepherd of His people, Israel (74:1; 80:1; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11-16). In the ancient Near East, kings were commonly known as the shepherds of their people. Since Yahweh is the true King, the title Shepherd is most appropriate.

23:2-3 Takes me to is a Hebrew form implying causality, showing that God is the cause of the refreshment. Right paths might have a twofold idea. In keeping with the shepherd and sheep image, it can mean safe paths that are free from danger. In the larger context of wisdom literature it refers to paths of righteousness, though usually that would contrast one path of life with another leading to death. The former idea is probably the primary meaning here.

23:4 Some argue that the Hebrew term tsalmaweth is related to an Akkadian word (tselem) that means “deep darkness.” Others say it comes from two Hebrew words, tsal and moth, and means “shadow of death.” It

occurs approximately 20 times in the OT. It is clear that it implies intense darkness that represents extreme danger (Job 10:21; 28:3; Jer 2:6). Darkest fits this specific context, since it is in the darkest valley where the greatest danger (such as a predator) lurks for sheep.

23:5 The image shifts from shepherd to friend. The identification of Yahweh with a shepherd emphasizes His care and protection, but He is much more than that for a person who is in close fellowship with Him. While protection from enemies is still implied, it is intensified with the image of a feast that is served while the enemies look on. In Jewish society oil was a symbol for rejoicing (104:15) and was also used in the welcoming of guests (45:7; 92:10; Lk 7:46).

23:6 The verb pursue is commonly used for attackers, but here Yahweh's goodness and faithful love are personified as the ones who chased the psalmist throughout his life. For the rest of my life represents the Hebrew "for the length of days." This is equivalent to the parallel "all the days of my life." Though some translate this as "forever," it is nowhere else used that way but always refers to one's earthly life (91:16; Pr 3:2,16). Live (yashav) is similar to the word for "return" (shuv). In this verbal form, it differs only in the vowels. It is possible that the request is to return to the sanctuary of Yahweh throughout one's life, although the preposition in argues for the idea of "live."