

35. The Book of Psalms 23:2a

The Great Shepherd-Part 3

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
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This morning I want to draw your attention once again to Psalm 23. Psalm 23 is probably the best known and most loved of all the psalms. Yet as Christians living in 21st century America—much of the significance behind this incredible psalm escapes us.

III. He Makes Me to Lie Down in Green Pastures—verse 2a

Psalm 23:1–2 (NKJV)

¹ The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me to lie down in green pastures...

This I believe is the one statement which most effectively describes the person who has made Jesus their Shepherd. For this is a picture of the contented Christian resting in the peace, security and tranquility of the Shepherd's presence and provision.

Matthew 11:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

John 14:27 (NKJV)

²⁷ Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

This is quite a contrast from how the Bible describes the unbeliever (i.e., 'the wicked')—

Isaiah 57:20–21 (NKJV)

²⁰ But the wicked *are* like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. ²¹ "*There is no peace,*" Says my God, "*for the wicked.*"

I said a moment ago that this statement should be the one which best describes the heart and life of a Christian. Yet so often Jesus' sheep are not at peace in their hearts, and their lives are far from reflecting the inner rest which should characterize their relationship with the good and great Shepherd.

If you find yourself fitting into that category—knowing Jesus and yet not experiencing the peace He promised—listen carefully.

Perhaps the answer lies in David's understanding of sheep as he likens himself to one and the Lord to his Shepherd—when he said, "**He makes me to lie down...**"

David knew that the strange thing about sheep, because of their timid nature, is that—it is almost impossible for them to be made to '*lie down*' unless 4 requirements are met:

1. *Due to their timidity they refuse to lie down unless they are free from all fear.*
2. *Because of the social behavior within the flock, sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with other sheep in the flock.*
3. *If tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down and be at rest.*
4. *Sheep will not lie down unless they are free from hunger.*

So, to say it again—for a sheep to lie down and rest it must be free from—fear, strife, aggravations and hunger. But the important aspect of this analogy is that—only the shepherd can provide the flock with freedom from these anxieties.

As we look at these 4 hindrances to true rest in the Christian life let's remember that ultimately, it's only our Shepherd Who can free us from these things which is why we must look to Him if we're going to be able to say, "*He makes me to lie down*" (be at peace and rest).

A. Freedom from Fear

It's not generally known but sheep are so timid and easily panicked that even a jackrabbit that comes bounding out from behind a bush can stampede the whole flock!

If there's even the slightest suspicion of danger from predators the sheep will stand up ready to run for their lives! The reason being is because sheep are almost totally defenseless—they have no natural defense mechanisms. They have no sharp teeth or claws; they have no protective covering; they can't climb a tree, burrow into the ground or fly away—all they can do is run!

But an interesting thing happens to the sheep even when there's the suspicion of danger nearby—the presence of the shepherd instantly has a soothing and calming effect on the flock. There's nothing like the presence of the shepherd to put the flock at ease and dispel their fears—and the same is true with Jesus' sheep.

There's nothing like the awareness that my Shepherd is near to cause fear and anxiety of the unknown to disappear and be replaced with peace.

John 16:33 (NKJV)

³³ These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

Psalms 23:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with me...

B. Freedom from strife

The second thing the shepherd must deliver his sheep from if they're going to have rest is—tension, strife and competition from within the flock.

Phillip Keller in his book, "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23" talks about this—

"In every animal society there is an established order of dominance or status within the group. With chickens it's called the 'pecking order'; with cattle it's called the 'horning order'—among sheep it's referred to as the 'butting order.' Generally, a domineering, aggressive old ewe will be boss over a number of other sheep. She maintains her position of authority by butting and driving other ewes and lambs away from the best grazing areas. Following behind her in precise order the other sheep all establish and maintain their exact position in the flock by using the same tactics of butting and thrusting at those beneath them in the social order."

He goes on to say that because of all this fighting, conflict and competition within the flock the sheep can't lie down and rest because they are constantly having to stand up and defend themselves against the attacks from other sheep.

Keller—*"This continuous conflict, jealousy and infighting can have very serious consequences—the sheep become edgy, tense, discontented and restless—they lose weight and become irritable."*

But again, the interesting thing is that whenever the shepherd comes into view—the sheep quickly forget their foolish rivalry and stop their fighting—the shepherd's presence makes a remarkable difference in their behavior.

The flock of God otherwise known as the Church of Jesus Christ, isn't any different. We're not free from a tendency towards jealousy and petty rivalries. In fact, internal strife and discord brought about by competition and fighting in an attempt to grab prestige and power—has destroyed many a church.

The solution is to focus our attention on our Shepherd.

When our eyes are on Jesus and not on those around us it has a way of putting to an end the competition and conflict within the flock—He becomes the focus of the church, not me or my petty agenda.

The more I draw close to Him, the less I feel the need to compete with others or draw attention to myself. **The result is *peace and rest*.**

C. Freedom from parasites and insects

Freedom from the torment of parasites and insects is essential if the sheep are going to lie down and rest.

Again, Phillip Keller provides some needed insight from a shepherd's perspective—

"Sheep especially in the summer can be tormented unmercifully by several kinds of biting flies and ticks. Also, they can be tortured internally by parasites which they can pick up from unclean drinking water. When tormented by these things it is literally impossible for them to lie down and rest. Instead, they are constantly stomping their legs, shaking their heads or running for some cover. A good shepherd will apply various types of insect repellents to the sheep. He will see that they are dipped to clear their fleeces of ticks and administer the proper medication to rid their system of parasites."

In the Christian life there are some strong parallels. The '*parasites*' are those things that torture us from within—the hurts and bitterness that we carry in our hearts towards those who have wronged us. Things that are '*eating us up*' from the inside which often we can't seem to get rid of.

But if left undealt with will drain us of our strength, joy, and peace—weakening our spiritual man even as a parasite weakens our physical man. The *'insects'* are things that torment us from without—the people or situations in our lives that are constantly *'bugging us.'*

They can be any petty annoyance or frustrating circumstance that we have to face on a daily basis—whether you're talking about work, family or church.

Here again we must look to our Shepherd for help.

He is our *'medicine'* Who rids our hearts of pain, grief, bitterness and anger when we take the time to *'drink in'* His presence as we read His Word and meditate upon Him—something a lot of Christians fail to do (they just *'stew'* on these aggravations).

It's also our Good Shepherd Who *'applies'* the soothing balm of the Holy Spirit ('the anointing of the Spirit') for the daily irritations of life as we come to Him in prayer and give Him everything that is bothering or irritating us—

Philippians 4:6–7 (NKJV)

⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God [*fruit of the Spirit*], which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

When we come to Him in prayer and give Him everything that is bothering or *'bugging'* us—He then takes over and becomes the bearer of my burdens—if I'll leave it with Him.

Only then will His strength fill our hearts and His soothing calmness come over us—the peace that comes from giving everything over to Him to handle.

D. Freedom from hunger

Finally, if the sheep are going to lie down they must be free from hunger. This of course is clearly implied in the statement—**“He makes me to lie down in green pastures.”**

It was the shepherd who led his sheep to green pastures where they could feed until they were satisfied—and only then could they lie down and rest.

In this analogy our Shepherd Himself becomes our *'food'*—even as Jesus said, *“I am the Bread of Life.”* (John 6:35)

When you partake of Jesus and are saved—you're no longer hungering inside, looking for fulfillment in life—you're satisfied! (see Last week's message) But also, the Word of God, for the Christian, becomes our spiritual food each and every day—

- Job said, *“I have esteemed Your Word more important than my daily bread”.*
- Jeremiah, *“When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart's delight...”* (15:16)

As long as you *'graze'* every day in the green pastures of God's Word you'll be spiritually satisfied—but you need to feed on it like sheep feed on grass. Sheep are *'ruminates'*—they chew the cud (explain and relate to meditating on God's Word)—Joshua 1:8.

So, I believe the **'green pastures'** that David had in mind here in Psalm 23 was—yes, the Word of God—but more specifically the promises of God He has given to us in His Word!

Peter calls them *“great and precious promises”* in 2 Peter 2:4.

These would include—the promise of salvation to those who have put their faith in Jesus which causes us to stop striving in our own strength and hard work in trying to earn our salvation by going to church, lighting candles, praying rosaries, keeping holy days, and sacraments etc.

This allows us to rest in His completed work—

Matthew 11:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (from the works of the Law—religion).

So, the promises of salvation cause us to rest—but also, the promises that deal with our physical needs as well—

Philippians 4:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

I think for most people worry is just a regular part of their life—for some it seems to be their favorite pastime! ***But worry isn't benign or harmless***—it has some very devastating and debilitating physical and psychological consequences attached to it.

As far back as March 31, 1961 Time Magazine published a cover story on the presence of anxiety in America. The article was entitled, “Guilt and Anxiety”. It stated that,

“The breakdown of faith in God coupled with the accelerated pace and high tension of modern life have produced intense anxiety in many millions of people—so much so that in fact it would be correct to call worry one of the most widespread and debilitating ailments of our time.”

Sixty-five years later we can say that that statement is no less true today—in fact it's truer today than ever before.

Physical conditions such as heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, nervous breakdowns and other ailments brought on by stress fueled by worry—have reached epidemic proportions in our society today.

When the psalmist said, *“Do not worry it only causes harm”* (Psalm 38:7) we now understand what he meant!

But aside from all of the physical and psychological problems associated with worry—it also has profound *spiritual* consequences attached to it as well.

The Bible says that worry for the child of God—is a sin.

One pastor said it well—

*“Worry is the opposite of faith—and without faith it is impossible to please God.
Worry is saying to God, “I know You mean well by the promises in Your Word—but I'm not sure You can pull it off.”
Worry is the sin of distrusting the promises, and therefore, the Person and power of God.*

Worry makes God a liar Who makes great promises—but promises He knew He couldn't make good on."

Worry will rob you of your peace, your joy, your fruitfulness, growth, blessings—and even your fellowship with God. There's no way you can be at peace and rest ('lie down') if you worry about things.

The Greek word for 'worry' literally means *"to be drawn in different directions"*.

Worry makes you feel as though you're being pulled in many different directions at once. You feel out of control where problems and people are pulling you every which way, demanding your time and energy until you think you're going to snap.

The English word 'worry' comes from an old German root word which meant *"to choke or to strangle."*

That is exactly what worry does—it is a kind of mental and emotional strangulation which probably causes more mental and physical afflictions than any other single cause!

But worry will also strangle and cut off the flow of the Holy Spirit in your life, robbing you of joy, peace and all the other fruits of the Spirit.

Now we human beings are prone to worry about all kinds of things—big things, little things, foolish things and serious things but nothing more than basic things—things that are basic to life such as food and drink, clothing and shelter.

Is there are cure for worry and anxiety?

YES, faith!

- Faith is the antidote for fear and worry.
- Worry is really only the absence of faith.
- That's why worry is so bad for you spiritually because it's the absence of faith and faith is our spiritual umbilical cord that connects us to God and allows everything we need to survive and flourish spiritually to flow from God into our lives.
- Worry strangles and cuts off that flow!

So, when we talk about overcoming worry, we really need to talk about increasing our faith. As our faith increases, worry will decrease proportionately.

Look at it this way, how do you overcome darkness?—by fighting against the darkness? No, by turning on the light.

How do you overcome cold?—by fighting against it? No, by turning up the heat.

How do you overcome worry?—by spending years in therapy learning how to fight worry? No, as a believer you overcome worry by increasing your faith.

The Bible says that, *"faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."*

So, when it comes to having faith in God to provide our basic necessities—we first have to know what He has promised us in His Word with regard to basic necessities.

One of the classic passages in the Bible that teaches us what God has promised to provide for His children in the way of basic necessities is Matthew 6:25-34:

Matthew 6:25–34 (NLT)

²⁵ “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn’t life more than food, and your body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren’t you far more valuable to him than they are? ²⁷ Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? ²⁸ “And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don’t work or make their clothing, ²⁹ yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. ³⁰ And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? ³¹ “So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ ³² These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. ³³ Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. ³⁴ “So don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

Notice that Jesus 6 times in these verses commands us “*not to worry*” about our basic necessities (or about anything!).

We must learn to trust in our Shepherd—because only then can we “lie down in peace and be at rest!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

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