

**Life Without Lack – Living in the Fullness of Psalm 23, by Dallas Willard**

**All Saints 50+ Class**

**April 11, 2021 – Life Without Fear – Class 4**

<b>Psalm 23:1-6 (NIV 2011)</b>	<b>Psalm 23:1-6 (KJV)</b>
<p><sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.</p>	<p><sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. <sup>3</sup> He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. <sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.</p>

A few questions to get the conversation started...

- What is a thought or truth from Psalm 23 that you found helpful this past week?
- Does a life without fear sound like hyperbole?
- What are some of the fears that COVID-19 has brought into your life?
- Is anyone working on memorizing Psalm 23? How is it going? (No recitation necessary)

**1. Living Without Fear – Trusting in God’s Plenitude & Sufficiency**

p. 32 – “Jesus taught us not to be afraid of those who can kill the body. He also discussed other fears people have, each of which he gently and intelligently dismissed. You can live completely without fear. God is the kind of being who, if you will place yourself in his hands, in trust, will ensure that nothing can ever happen to you that will make you say, ‘I’m afraid’ or ‘I don’t have enough.’ ... What do you fear? Whatever came to mind, I want you to know that you have nothing to fear. If you doubt this, I urge you to ask God to give you a peace about this. Let me say again: no matter what you fear, you can live without that fear. You do not have to be afraid of anything. Nothing. Absolutely nothing—not death, not the loss of loved ones, not being without someone to care for you.... If you will take the time required to come to know and trust God as he is, asking the Lord to give light to your mind, you can come to a place of perfect peace and fearlessness. Because God is with you, you can live without fear. This is precisely what the Shepherd Psalm is talking about.”

p. 33 – “...fear and worry are worthless—indeed, vain—emotions. If you are frightened or afraid, there is no use feeling guilty about it. What you need to do is fix your mind upon God and ask him to fill your mind with himself. And as your mind is transformed, your whole personality will be transformed, including your body and your feelings. The transformation of the self away from a life of fear and insufficiency takes place as we fix our minds upon God as he truly is.”

pp. 33-34 – “...Paul spoke of ‘the boundless riches of Christ’ (Eph 3:8). At the center of these ‘riches’ is Christ himself, for he is, in fact, that being of complete self-sufficiency we have been focusing upon. He is the Shepherd-LORD of the Twenty-Third Psalm, Yahweh in the flesh! ... That is why Jesus, in complete

confidence, could just lay down his life... Why? Because he understood his relationship to his Father. Jesus is the first person who ever fully lived Psalm 23:1—‘The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want.’ His union with the Father was such that he never knew lack or fear. The Father was Jesus’ Shepherd, just as Jesus is ours. As Jesus knew no fear, so can we.”

p. 35 – “At the center of so many of our difficulties is fear—fear of rejection, fear of failure, fear of death, fear of sickness, fear of not being able to take care of ourselves in old age, fear of what may happen to our loved ones.... There are so very many things to frighten us. What is the answer to all our fears? Love. The love that comes out of plenitude—out of the fullness of God’s sufficiency. We read 1 Jn 4:18 that ‘there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.’ As the KJV puts it, ‘Fear hath torment.’ To fear is to be tormented, but to be loved perfectly—and to know it—is to be free of fear’s torment.”

p. 36 – “Even severe fears can be faced when we are confident in the strength and generosity of God—and in the fact that his kingdom isn’t shaken, and he is not undone by these things.”

p. 38 – “It is important to realize that God’s power is meant to be at the disposal of human beings.”

p. 86 – “Jesus’ basic idea about this world—with all its evil, pushed to the limit in what he went through going toward and nailed upon the cross—is that this world is a perfectly good and safe place for anyone to be, no matter the circumstances, if they have placed their lives in the hands of Jesus and his Father. In such a world we never have to do what we know to be wrong, and we never need to be afraid. Jesus practiced what he preached, even as he was tortured and killed. And multitudes of his followers have chosen to do the same.”

“Let come what may. Storms may break about me, predators may attack, the rivers of reverses may threaten to inundate me. But because He is in the situation with me, I shall not fear.... The basic question is not whether we have many or few valleys. It is not whether those valleys are dark or merely dim with shadows. The question is how do I react to them? How do I go through them? How do I cope with the calamities that come my way? ... With Christ I face them calmly. With His gracious Spirit to guide me I face them fearlessly.” — W. Phillip Keller; *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, pp. 107-109

- Is living without fear really possible? Why or why not?
- What are the attitudes and perspectives that characterize a life without fear?
- Who is a person that you know that seems to live without fear? What characterizes their life?
- What is a circumstance or situation in your life requiring faith or trust in the Good Shepherd?
- Describe a situation in your life that you have found difficult to live without fear?
- What is it about Jesus that frees you from fear?
- What is the difference between fear and concern?

## 2. Promises in Scripture – God’s Care & Provision

**Psalm 4:8 (NIV)** – I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

**Psalm 32:7 (NIV)** – You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

**Psalm 62:5-8 (NIV)** – Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him. <sup>6</sup>He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. <sup>7</sup>My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. <sup>8</sup>Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

**Psalms 91:1-2 (NIV)** – He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.  
<sup>2</sup> I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

**Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)** – Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;  
in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.<sup>6</sup>

**Proverbs 18:10 (NIV)** – The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.

**Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)** – So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

**Nahum 1:7 (NIV)** – The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,

**Philippians 4:13, 19 (NIV)** – I can do everything through him who gives me strength.... And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

**1 Peter 5:7 (NIV)** – Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

**Hebrews 2:18 (NIV)** – Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

- What do these verses tell us about God's promised care?
- Which of these verses seem most important to you at this time? Why?
- How do you "cast all your anxiety on him" (1 Peter 5:7)?

### **3. Trust in God: The Key to Life – The Gift of Faith**

pp. 94-95 – "Faith—trust—is the key that unlocks our readiness to receive God's sufficiency in our lives. Given how we commonly use these words today, it is helpful to replace all occurrences of faith in the Bible with trust... To have faith in God is simply to trust God, to rely upon him in the face of all fears.... The best-known definition of faith in the Bible is this: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (Heb 11:1). Substance means what stands under something (sub-substance or understanding). Faith is the substance of things hoped for in this way: when we have faith, we act in relationship with God to bring what we hope for into reality. Faith is also 'the evidence of things not seen.' What are the 'things' not seen? In the same passage, a few lines later, we are told that 'the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible (Heb 11:3). The phrase 'things not seen' refers to the word, or even energy, of God in action. When we have faith, that is sure evidence that the word of the unseen God is active in us. Faith is a gift; God creates it in our hearts."

p. 97 – "Many people misunderstand faith; it often falls into the category of mystery or superstition.... Faith, however, is not a mystery. We experience it day in and day out. In its most basic aspect, faith is simply reliance upon something in both attitude and action. It may or may not involve reliance upon God. I have faith in my car..."

p. 98 – "Again, faith is reliance (trust/confidence) revealed in attitude and action.... Attitude can be understood as a continuing posture we have in life, our basic way of being in the world. It is here, in our fundamental posture toward life, where the real spiritual goods are needed most of all... From Jesus' perspective, the person who merely acts righteously falls into the category of being pharisaical or legalistically righteous. The righteousness of the kingdom of God, however, is the righteousness of the heart (Mk 7:6).... Now faith has two main parts: one is vision and one is desire, or will. Vision is seeing reality as it is, or in the case of the future, as it could be for us. Desire is wanting reality to be as it is, or as we hope it could be. To have the faith necessary to live into our hoped-for future is to trust with the psalmist

that 'goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life' (Ps 23:6)."

p. 99 – "In summary, you cannot live without faith. Faith is tied to the future. Faith has the elements of desire and vision. The element of vision comes from our contact with reality or words about reality, which in turn brings about a certain attitude and action. We are now going to see how faith is transformed, growing richer through our contact with the greatest reality of all—God."

pp. 100-101 – "...faith is a gift. ... God is more concerned with who you are becoming than in what you can accomplish with your faith. He desires that you become the kind of person who can joyfully and easily receive an abundance of faith and power—the gift of great faith from God, who knows when, what kind, and how much to give us."

pp. 101-115 – Three stages of faith... as seen in the life of Job:

- **First: The *faith of propriety*:** "Job trusted God to be good to him if he lived a proper and upright life. He had obviously heard that if you do good things, God would be pleased and would provide for and protect you." A faith of propriety is concerned about the benefits that come from serving God. "...this kind of faith is essentially superstitious and relies heavily on ritual, for it believes that it must get everything just right to reap the benefits. It involves a vision of God that has him up in heaven looking down to see if you are going to make any mistakes. If you do you are in trouble." When things don't go well, when we start to suffer, then we lose our sense of "the faith of propriety."
- **Second: The *faith of desperation*:** "The faith of desperation—trusting faith—digs in, holds on, clings tight, and says, 'I don't care what's going to happen, I am holding on to God!' ...Desperation faith is all about trusting God when the shaking begins and everything crumbles around you." "Often God allows us to reach the point of desperation so we can learn how to trust. It is a hard lesson, but an essential one. The life without lack is known by those who have learned how to trust God in the moment of need. For it is in that moment, when everything else is gone, that you know the reality of God... "...a life without lack is all about knowing the unlimited sufficiency of God in the moment of need." "When you're betrayed, abandoned, lied about, and scandalized; when you are sick with a fatal disease; when your finances are going down the drain... that is the moment to trust. And in trusting you will know God..." "...when you have nowhere else to turn except to God, and you turn to him, your faith of desperation will meet the fullness of God, and you will taste the life without lack as you discover the depths of the faith of sufficiency."
- **Third: The *faith of sufficiency*:** "What made the difference for Job was that he hung in there and his faith of desperation carried him to the point where God showed up and Job could say, 'I've heard about you, but now I've seen you.' It was an undeniable experience of God, and it changed his life. His vision of God was now so great that he realized what had happened to him didn't matter. That is the deep faith of sufficiency." "This is why we need to live in clear view of the cross. When we look at what Christ did for us on the cross and keep that at the center of our vision, there are not many things that will bother us, or even matter at all. When we realize that Christ went willingly to the cross on our behalf, trusting in the greatness of his Father, it casts a transformative light on our own sufferings. That's what Job saw. Job beheld the greatness of God." "We cannot truly see ourselves until we see God, but as long as our eyes are fixed on ourselves, we cannot see God. We must focus on God if we are to know the sufficiency of God."
- Willard seems to equate "faith" and "trust." Are they the same thing?
- Is it possible to experience the faith of sufficiency without first experiencing the faith of desperation?

#### 4. Experiencing God & Growing in Faith—so we can say: “Now I’ve seen it with my own eyes”

p. 116 – Speaking of deep experiences of God: “One of our problems—and I am particularly speaking to those of us who spend a lot of time in churches—is that we think that experiences like these are only for very special people. But that is not so. Such experiences are for everyone. God will reveal himself to you. All of us can come to trust God as Job did, if we want it and if we seek it. In this regard, it is important to recognize that Job, Jacob, and the Syro-Phoenician woman did not arrive at their relentless faith in God’s all-sufficiency simply by trying to trust in the greatness of God. It was a result of two things: they sought the Lord and the Lord showed up.... It is the same with you and me. You should not try to do this in your own power. Seek the Lord and wait for him to show up. Set time aside to devote yourself to prayer and other spiritual disciplines that will strengthen your faith and prepare you to receive from him. Listen for God when you pray. Watch for him and wait on him... If the Lord does not show up when and how you think he should, you must not be upset with him or with yourself. Just keep seeking. When we begin to seek the Lord, some things must change—some outside of us and some inside of us—before we can bear the vision of God. These changes can take time, and God, in his mercy, gives them time.”

**John 14:23 (NIV)** – Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

p. 116 (about Jn 14:23:) – “Jesus means that he and the Father will be moving through and about us in our lives. He will speak to us. He will act on our behalf, and we will know the presence of God in our lives. If you are in doubt about this, I beg you not to say, ‘Oh, well, I’m just supposed to believe.’ Do not do that. Seek the Lord. Ask him to reveal himself to you and give you the faith of sufficiency that knows no bounds.”

p. 117 – “If you want to have a deeper, more trusting faith, seek God and be prepared to go with him. He will bring you into a faith of sufficiency as he reveals himself uniquely to you.”

p. 121 – “The truth of God’s grace is that we never merit the good that is done to us. Grace is opposed to earning, but it is not opposed to effort, because effort is action and earning is attitude.... If you want faith, ask God for it. And when you ask God, be willing to let him take you through what is necessary to prepare you for it.”

- Willard says: “God is not opposed to effort; God is opposed to earning.” What does this mean?

p. 157 – “Faith (trust), death to self, and agape love support our Psalm 23 life as a triangle of sufficiency. Each is a precious gift of God, who, in his graciousness, gives them to us and enables us to receive them in ever increasing abundance. He gives them to the willing, seeking heart through a process in which that willing and seeking is consistent, and even that is a gift.”

p. 158 – “Remember, faith has two parts: will and vision. We must be willing to see God as he is before God can further reveal himself to us and give us more faith. This requires us to live in such a way that we are consistently seeking him and growing in our faith, and this attitude of life requires more and more death to self as we go along.... Death to self is submitting all your desires to God. This abandonment of the self to God is the way to experience abundance in God. It means that, in God’s hands, we are content for him to take charge of outcomes. And in that posture we make way for him to live in us and be with us, in order to achieve what is best for us and for others far beyond anything we can even imagine.... The more faith we have in God, the more death to self becomes the natural daily way for us. Jesus’ suffering and physical death on the cross became the extreme expression of death to self as well as the ultimate symbol of our new life. He so graced the ugly instrument on which he died that the cross has become the most widely exhibited and recognized symbol on earth. But it is more than a symbol for us; it is a new way of living in confident fullness in God and his goodness.... It is essential to remember that Jesus did not give himself up to God in death with an attitude of resignation. He gave himself up in faith, certain that he would rise again and that the kernel of wheat that fell to the ground would bring forth abundant fruit. Death to self is

abandonment to God in faith. It is laying down satisfaction of my desires with confidence in the greatness and plenitude of God.”

## 5. Knowing God

“I walked in the sunshine with a scholar who had effectively forfeited his prospects of academic advancement by clashing with church dignitaries over the gospel of grace. “But it doesn’t matter,” he said at length, “for I’ve known God and they haven’t.” The remark was a mere parenthesis, a passing comment on something I had said, but it has stuck with me, and set me thinking.... Not many of us, I think, would ever naturally say that we have known God. The words imply a definiteness and matter-of-factness of experience to which most of us, if we are honest, have to admit that we are still strangers. We claim, perhaps, to have a testimony, and can rattle off our conversion story with the best of them; we say that we know God—this, after all, is what evangelicals are expected to say; but would it occur to us to say, without hesitation, and with reference to particular events in our personal history, that we have known God? I doubt it, for I suspect that with most of us experience of God has never become so vivid as that...”

— J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, pp. 24-25

### Knowing God Verses Knowing About God

- One can know a great deal *about* God without much knowledge of him.
- One can know a great deal about godliness without much knowledge of God.

### Evidence of Knowing God

- Those who know God have great energy for God.
- Those who know God have great thoughts of God.
- Those who know God show great boldness for God.
- Those who know God have great contentment in God.

— From J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Chapter 2: The People Who Know Their God)

“Do we desire such knowledge of God? Then two things follow. First, we must recognize how much we lack knowledge of God. We must learn to measure ourselves, not by our knowledge about God, not by our gifts and responsibilities in the church, but by how we pray and what goes on in our hearts. Many of us, I suspect, have no idea how impoverished we are at this level. Let us ask the Lord to show us. Second, we must seek the Savior. When He was on earth, He invited ordinary people to company with Him; thus they came to know Him, and in knowing Him, to know His Father. The Old Testament records pre-incarnate manifestations of the Lord Jesus doing the same thing—companying with men and women, in character as the angel of the Lord, in order that men might know Him.”

— J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, p. 32

“This change was not an overnight revolution. As God’s reality dawns more on my heart, slowly and painfully and through many tears, the simplest pleasures of this world have become sources of daily happiness. It is only as I have become, for lack of a better term, more *heavenly minded* that I can see the material world for the astonishingly good divine gift that it is.... I can sincerely say, without any sentimentality or exaggeration, that I’ve never been happier in my life, that I’ve never had more days filled with comfort. But it is equally true that I’ve never had so many days of grief. One of our dearest friends lost her husband to cancer six years ago. Even now, she says, she might seem fine, and then out of nowhere some reminder or thought will sideswipe her and cripple her with sorrow.... Yes. But I have come to be grateful for those sideswipes, because they remind me to reorient myself to the convictions of my head and the processes of my heart. When I take time to remember how to deal with my fears and savor my joys, the consolations are stronger and sweeter than ever.”

— Tim Keller, “Growing My Faith in the Face of Death,” *The Atlantic Magazine*, March 7, 2021

- How are you doing in knowing God? What are ways we die to self and abandon ourselves to God?