Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption

"Surrounded. Eyes on the Shepherd, Not on the Shadows"

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Psalms 23, 53, 83, 113, 143; *Judg. 4–8; Ex. 3:7–8.*

There are seasons when it feels as though trouble is coming from every direction. You deal with one difficulty, only to find another waiting. A diagnosis, a strained relationship, or an empty chair can make the shadows seem awfully large. Sometimes the hardest part is what begins happening *within* us. We become overwhelmed. We start trembling at what might happen next. Our eyes move from the Lord to what threatens us until the shadows are all we see.

Five Psalms—53, 83, 143, 113, and 23—bring us back to one vital truth: we may be surrounded, but we are not abandoned. They begin with a world where wickedness seems to prevail and God's people are being devoured. They move through cries for intervention, mercy, and praise for the God who sees the lowly. And then Psalm 23 brings it all together. We are the sheep of His pasture, dependent on our Shepherd. The issue is where our eyes are fixed. When we're surrounded, our eyes need to be on the Shepherd, not on the shadows.

1. WHEN FEAR SURROUNDS YOU, REMEMBER WHO SEES AND WHO FIGHTS (Ps. 53; 83). Psalm 53 opens with the foolishness of living as though there is no God. The corruption is like an apple decaying from within. The psalmist says, *"There is no one who does good"* (Ps. 53:2). God's people are being consumed as casually as someone eats bread, and fear is a very real response. Yet in the middle of this picture comes a startling description of people in great dread where there is nothing to fear (Ps. 53:6). Why? Because God scatters those who besiege His people. The threat feels enormous, but the Lord has not lost sight of those who belong to Him. Fear grows when we forget who stands with us.

Psalm 83 gives a voice to that desperate moment: *"God, do not keep silent"* (Ps. 83:2). Israel is pictured surrounded by nations, with even Assyria bearing down. They want to seize God's pasturelands and destroy His treasured people. The psalmist remembers what God has done in the days of the judges and cries for Him to act again. This is not a demand that God do our bidding. It begins with belonging to Him and walking in His purposes. And its ultimate desire is that even the enemies would seek His name and know that ADONAI alone is Most High over all the earth (Ps. 83:17–19). When outnumbered, we cannot fight every battle ourselves. We call on the Lord, remembering what He has done and trusting Him to go before us.

2. WHEN YOUR SOUL IS EXHAUSTED, REACH FOR HIS MERCY AND FOLLOW HIS LEADING (Ps. 143; 113). In Psalm 143, David is not speaking as someone who has everything under control. An enemy pursues his soul; his life feels crushed into the ground; darkness surrounds him. His heart has become a desolate wasteland. He cries out for God to hear his prayer, but he does not base that request on his own goodness. He says, *"For in Your eyes no one living is righteous"* (Ps. 143:2). That connects directly with Psalm 53. We cannot claim to have earned His intervention. We appeal to His faithfulness, His righteousness, His graciousness, and His covenant love. David remembers the works of God's hands and spreads his own hands toward Him like parched ground waiting for rain. Exhausted, he knows where to turn.

Then comes a beautiful change in focus. David asks to hear God's lovingkindness in the morning, to know the way he should walk, and to be taught to do what pleases Him (Ps. 143:8–10). He does not merely ask, "Get me out of this trouble." **He asks, "Lead me in Your way.**" Psalm 113 shows us why that trust is well placed. The Lord is enthroned above all nations, yet He lowers Himself to see. He raises the insignificant from the dust, lifts the needy from the refuse pile, and gives them a place of dignity. He saw Israel in slavery and came down to deliver. He is not distant from the weary. He sees. He hears. He acts. From the rising of the sun to its setting, His name is worthy of praise—not because our circumstances are always good, but because He is.

3. WHEN YOU WALK THROUGH SHADOWS, KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE SHEPHERD (Ps. 23). Psalm 23 gathers all these images into one picture. *"ADONAI is my shepherd, I shall not want"* (Ps. 23:1). He leads His sheep beside waters of rest, restores their souls, and guides them in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. But notice where those *paths of righteousness* sometimes lead. They may lead straight through the valley of the shadow of death. Walking in the Lord's will does not mean that every day will be bright and sunny. There may be snarling predators in the darkness and enemies waiting to devour. The psalm never says danger has disappeared. Instead, David says, *"I will fear no evil, for You are with me"* (Ps. 23:4). His comfort is the Shepherd's presence, rod, and staff.

And then the Shepherd prepares a table in the very presence of his enemies (Ps. 23:5). Think about that. The sheep are still surrounded, yet the Shepherd provides a place to feed. They can receive His provision because He is with them. David closes by declaring that goodness and mercy (*Chesed)* will follow him all his days (Ps. 23:6). The word for "follow" carries the force of pursuit. Though enemies pursue us, God's *tov*—goodness—and *chesed*—covenant love—pursue us. Psalm 53 looks for goodness among humanity and finds none; Psalm 23 reminds us that goodness comes from ADONAI Himself. Don't spend your life staring into the shadows. Listen to the Shepherd's voice. Walk where He leads. Receive what He provides. He has not promised an absence of valleys; He has promised His presence through them.

CONCLUSION: Surrounded by His Presence

Sometimes we find ourselves trembling and trembling, even when the Lord is calling us to trust Him. The shadows may be real, but they are not the whole story. The Shepherd who guides us through the valley is the same God who sees the afflicted, hears the desperate cry, remembers His covenant, and fights for His purposes. Remember His faithfulness yesterday and trust Him for tomorrow. We can lift our voices in praise before the circumstances change. That is not denial; it is confidence in the One who remains faithful. Our strength is not our ability to control or overcome. We come before Him with prayer, praise, thanksgiving, and surrendered hearts.

So today, bring Him the fear you've been carrying. Bring Him the burden you have been trying to fight alone, the grief that makes you feel isolated, and the uncertainty that has kept your eyes on the shadows. Perhaps you have wandered from His paths. Turn to Him now. Ask Him to forgive you, restore your soul, and teach you to walk in His ways. If all you can manage is a whisper, whisper His name. If all you recognize is His presence, count that blessing. Surrender the battle to the Shepherd. You may feel surrounded, but you are not alone. Fix your eyes on Him and let His presence surround you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In Ps. 53 and 83, what changes when God's people remember that the battle concerns His purposes rather than their own strength?
2. How does David's appeal to God's mercy in Ps. 143 challenge the tendency to rely on our own goodness or ability?
3. What does Ps. 113 reveal about the way ADONAI responds to people who are weary, overlooked, or without power?
4. Which “shadows”—financial pressure, strained relationships, grief, fear about the future, or something else—have captured your attention recently? What would it look like to fix your eyes on the Shepherd today?
5. Where are you trying to fight a battle alone? What specific act of prayer, thanksgiving, or obedience could express your trust in the Lord this week?

CLOSING PRAYER

Avinu Malkenu, Our Father, Our King, there are times when everything around us feels overwhelming and the shadows seem so large. Forgive us for fixing our eyes on what threatens us instead of on You. Thank You that You see us, hear our cries, and never abandon the sheep of Your pasture. Remind us of Your faithfulness in days gone by. Teach us to do what pleases You, and let Your good Spirit lead us in paths of righteousness for Your name's sake. Even when those paths take us through dark valleys, keep our eyes on You. Restore our weary souls, surround us with Your presence, and fill our mouths with praise. Let us remember that Your goodness and Your chesed pursue us all our days.

B’Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.