



M o n d a y

Psalm 23

Jim mentioned this last weekend that shepherding was a lowly position, but that two of the most significant Old Testament figures were both shepherds (Moses and David). Jesus' disciples were also common working folks (fisherman); though at least one was a tax collector, a despised profession (many tax collectors were seen as traitors and cheats). Have you ever felt disqualified or under qualified? David discovered his sufficiency in the Lord. He did not rely on himself but when he came to the end of himself, he was able to receive the power of God, a power sufficient enough to kill giants, lions and bears and also to lead a nation into its golden era. David was the baby in the family. He was often left alone and given jobs no one else wanted. But as an adult, those very jobs enabled him to fulfill God's great plan for his life. Moses ended up as a shepherd only after murdering an Egyptian. He was Jewish, but had been raised in Pharaoh's palace and separated from his people which enabled him to have the best education possible. God used Moses' unique past to position him to lead God's people from slavery to the Promised Land. What makes up your arsenal of gifts and talents? Are there things in your past that you wish were different? Is it possible that God has positioned you, with your particular talents, skills, gifts, and past, to be of special use to Him now? This will only happen if you also come to the end of yourself and rely first and foremost on God's Holy Spirit. Start today by not being ashamed of your past or present and offer it all to God. Your greatest challenge might mean being willing to be honest and open with others about your past. Don't forget that being a shepherd was considered unclean, but Jesus, at the cross, took care of all our uncleanness.

Daily Prayer

God be present and guide those who are going through difficult times.

T u e s d a y

John 10

When I think of being a shepherd I think of one man watching out for a hundred sheep or more, sheep that one day will be slaughtered for food. But in ancient times, though sheep were used as a sacrificial animal, they were mainly raised for their wool. Thus being a shepherd was not like herding cattle. It was more like having dogs and cats for pets. A shepherd had an intimate knowledge of each of his sheep, a close and tender relationship. In verse 4 it says that the shepherd goes ahead of the sheep and the sheep follow. What an awesome picture of God's desire for a relationship with us. He does not desire to go behind us pushing us or forcing us into submission. Instead He desires that we follow closely behind (if you are feeling driven, you are probably not following appropriately). If we follow closely, He will enable us to go through the dangerous valleys of life successfully, and He will lead us into places of peace and refreshment. But, again, we need to follow. Such following involves obedience; it involves living life as He lived. It involves learning to be a shepherd ourselves. How was Jesus a shepherd? He gave His life for others. Our lives are not meant to be for obtaining the most toys. Our lives are meant to be spent for others. The bumper sticker that reads: "he who has the most toys wins" should actually read "he who has spent all he has for others wins." There are some great promises in this chapter. There is the promise that nothing can snatch us from the Good Shepherd's hands. Whatever you are facing today will not defeat you. The Good Shepherd will protect and provide. There is also the promise that the sheep will know His voice (verse 4-5). Do you recognize Jesus' voice in your life? There are so many different voices crying out to us pulling us in so many different directions. Be sure to take time today and listen to the voice of the Father. It often comes in a quiet whisper. One way that might help you listen is to turn off the car radio or your ipod today and instead walk and drive around in silence asking God to make you aware of His voice

Daily Prayer

Restore me and lead me to drink in more of your spirit into my life.

W e d n e s d a y

Psalm 23; John 10; Ephesians 1:5-23

Have you ever wished that the circumstances of your life were different? As parents we desire the best for our children, but that best often depends on our resources. A slave's life before the Civil War depended on the resources and character of his or her owner. And sheep are only as good as their shepherd. What a great Shepherd we have.

Sometimes I lose sight of the resources that are at my disposal, because I lose sight of how great our Shepherd is. If God is our Shepherd what does that say about our potential? But to have the Great Shepherd be our guide and our provider, we must be willing to be owned by Him; and so the questions become: Do I really belong to Him? Do I really recognize His right to me? Do I respond to His authority and acknowledge His ownership? Do I find freedom and complete fulfillment in this arrangement? Do I sense a purpose and deep contentment because I am under His direction? Do I know rest and repose in addition to a sense of exciting adventure in belonging to Him?* With God as our Shepherd we are able to live free of all fear; for He comforts us, enables us to lie down in green pastures and he restores and leads us through all danger. Sheep are fearful animals filled with aggravation and tension; they fear each other, pests, adversity and hunger. It is the Shepherd's job to bring peace to His flock so they do not scatter in all directions and harm themselves. What do you fear? Fear often causes us to make wrong choices. God has the power and resources to provide protection. Are you taking advantage of it?

*Questions from *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23* by Phillip Keller

Daily Prayer

God protect me, my family, and my friends from spiritual and physical harm.

T h u r s d a y

Joshua 1; 2 Timothy 1:7

The true sign of a good leader is whether his followers are positioned to step in and continue on after the leader is gone. David was a man after God's own heart. He lived in passionate dependence on God; but his leadership skills were lacking at times. When it comes to Old Testament leaders, Moses and Elijah stand out. Both men were able to train up disciples to take their place (Joshua and Elisha). Paul is probably one of the greatest missionaries that ever lived. More than any of the other disciples, he is responsible for the spread of the church into the Gentile world and eventually into all of the Roman Empire. What was his secret? It was simple. Every place he went he trained others to take up his place. It is often said that Christianity is not so much "taught" as it is "caught." Besides your children, who are you training up to take your place? And how do you go about training others? In this first chapter of Joshua we get an idea. Joshua is told to be strong, courageous and obedient. If he is, God promises to bless his leadership, and the people promise to follow him. This last weekend Jim talked about taking "risks." It is when we take risks that we have "defining moments" with God, where we see God and when we experience God as our shepherd. Taking a risk requires being strong, courageous and obedient. Here is a risk for today: Ask God to bring someone into your life today with whom you can share a "defining moment." Take a risk and ask God to show you someone in your life that He wants you to shepherd. Then begin to pour your life into that person. Spend time with them, be open and honest with them and pray with them. Enable them to see how you are listening to Jesus and being obedient to His word. Ask God to show you if there is some area of your life that is not being lived out in obedience, and ask His help to change you. I once heard someone say that those who are on the front line of the battle field seldom complain about the food. They are just happy to be alive another day, so what if their food comes from a can and is cold. It is those back behind the lines in the safety of camp that complain about the food. If you find yourself today complaining, might it be because you are not risking for Jesus? By the way, having a "sound" mind is a disciplined mind. Where do you lack discipline in your life? Where do you need to courageously love?

Daily Prayer

Cast out the fear that keeps those who hesitate to follow you.

F r i d a y

Psalms 31; 1 Samuel 24

We live in a society of self-help books. But in this Psalm we discover that the only true help comes from God. It does not come when we look to our friends, our resources, or our abilities and ingenuity. It does not come when we take matters into our own hands or get out in front of God. It comes when we look to God. I love the Psalms because they come out of the experiences of life. There are times when I feel weak, overcome with sorrow, when my enemies seem to have the upper hand and my friends are nowhere to be found. Yet, even when I feel surrounded, I am never cut off from God. He is faithful and promises to bring me into spacious places. In Lamentations 3:22-24 we have the promise that because of God's great love, we will not be consumed; every morning there are new "mercies" (King James), and so we are to wait for Him to act. There have been times in my life when I have said to myself: "If you can just get through today, God promises a new mercy tomorrow." That promise has allowed me to "wait" on God, on His timing and His way. I have always loved the story in 1 Samuel 24. Saul was trying to kill David, but David would not take matters into his own hands. He waited on God's perfect timing and way. David knew that God's anointing had left Saul and fallen on David, but David would not force the issue. Where are you tempted to "force" God's hand or provision rather than waiting on God's perfect way and timing?

Daily Prayer

Help me to overflow with God's grace and mercy today.

David

Many of the Psalms are written by King David. Upon entering the Promised Land (the land of Israel), the nation was divided into 12 tribes or territories. After a number of years these tribes desired to be "like other nations" unified under a King. Saul was the first King of Israel; but rather than following God's ways and timing, he took matters into his own hands and got out in front of God. God's response was to withdraw his blessing from Saul and to anoint a new King, David. Though David was anointed King, it was not until a number of years later after Saul's death that David actually became King. David received the promise, but had to wait for its actualization. The wait was filled with peaks and valleys.

In 1 Samuel 16 when the Judge Samuel (the person at the time who acted in the role of God's priest or prophet) goes to Bethlehem to anoint David as King, he does not yet know who he is to anoint, just that it will be one of Jesse's sons. Jesse has seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel was impressed; but God told Samuel not to look at the outward appearance, and that God would show Samuel the person whose heart was right before Him. When not one of the seven met God's requirements, Samuel asked Jesse if he had another son. Almost as an afterthought Jesse responds, "Well, there is the youngest that is tending the sheep." Everyone waits while David is called in from the fields. Samuel, in secret, anoints David as King; and everyone goes back to the daily routine of life as if nothing had happened.

But it had. Over the next years, Israel would find itself at war with the Philistines. David would, seemingly by accident (though nothing is an accident with God), arrive on the scene as Goliath is challenging the Israelites to a one-on-one, winner-take-all battle. The young teenager, David, steps up to the challenge. Victory in this battle leads to David moving into Saul's palace. During the next years David would play his lyre for Saul, marry one of his daughters, become best friends with his son, Jonathan, and fight with great success in the army. Saul became increasingly jealous and tried to kill David on numerous occasions, eventually forcing David to run from Saul's house. For the next years David went into hiding as Saul pursued him throughout the land with the aim to kill him. On one occasion David had the opportunity to kill Saul (1 Samuel 24). He decided not to take matters into his own hands but to "wait on the Lord" and His timing (see Psalm 31). Eventually, after Saul's death, David assumed the throne to which God had already anointed him.

As King, David led Israel into its Golden Era. David, though, was not perfect. One year, rather than going out with the army to fight, he stayed home. His sloth led to his committing adultery with Bathsheba and eventually having her husband killed. Upon being confronted with his sin, David repented; but he suffered the consequences of losing his son. In God's gracious forgiveness David and Bathsheba had another son, Solomon, who eventually became king (See Psalm 51). Towards the end of his life, one of David's sons tried to forcefully take the throne from David. Again, rather than fighting with his son, David waited on the Lord and let God be his justifier. David was far from perfect, and his family was filled with dysfunction; but throughout all the ups and downs of his life, he had a heart for God. Thus, he is known as Israel's greatest King, a man after God's own heart, and received numerous promises from God including the fact that one of his sons (Jesus) would sit on Israel's throne throughout eternity.