

The desert can be bathed in a brilliance that overpowers even the darkest spectacles—brutal, unforgiving, inescapable white light that can drive one fairly mad with its blinding intensity. The desert can also be a place of abysmal darkness—a place void of its own light, yet far from the light shared by others. It can contain a blackness blacker than a shut up room, blacker than the black on the near side of your eyelids.

Passing Through the Pitch of Night

QUITE A NUMBER OF YEARS AGO, I was in the desert on such a night. As is its disposition during the hottest summer months, there was little cooling of the desert after the sun's demise. Instead, on this night the wind picked up—an unrelenting sirocco that torched everything in its path; bare metal touched meant singed skin. There was not a sound but the howling of that hot wind like a lamenting coyote.

There was no light: no moon, no stars—nothing. The world had disappeared and left in its wake a black, empty void. Fingers held before the eyes were as invisible as if they were not even there. In that blackness I stood motionless, sweating and sand-dusted, afraid to move—afraid to move in any direction—afraid that I might somehow step off the edge of the universe.

With treachery and deceit, Absalom had stolen the allegiance of the people of Israel from his father, David. And now David was on the run. At the moment, his world was as arid and brittle as a desert; his expectations were as dark and dismal as a black, moonless night. At such a time, he could find no comfort but the comfort of the Lord. And he wrote,

*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want...*



*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.*

NOWHERE IN SCRIPTURE WILL YOU FIND the literal phrase “personal Savior.” But we certainly have, in this psalm, a perfect likeness of His being. The Shepherd described in this song is generous—

I shall not want.
supplying everything we will ever want or need. He is thoughtful, and always thinking of our comfort.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.
Our shepherd knows that our life needs moments of peace, from which we may drink from His nourishment until filled.

He leads me beside quiet waters.
He is more than just a simple friend, but a supernatural God who has the power to revive and replace what has been lost.

He restores my soul

He gently leads us down the correct life pathway—

He guides me in the paths of righteousness

not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it brings glory to His name.

For His name's sake.



Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I fear no evil, for You are with me;

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil;

My cup overflows.

DAVID BEGINS AS A SHEEP REQUIRING PROTECTION, but ends as the Lord's honored guest at a banquet. As it begins, the Good Shepherd is still leading His charge through a dark and fearful place. Strange, unnatural sounds surround them; loathsome creatures wishing to do them harm lurk in the shadowy crevices. Yet the sheep is unafraid, happily trotting beside his beloved Shepherd. The disturbing sounds have no impact on him, the darkness hides nothing unfamiliar.

Why is he unafraid? Two reasons: he walks so closely and steadily by the Shepherd that he knows Him intimately. The sheep knows His personality, His tender compassion for those in His charge. But he also knows the value of the two instruments clutched in the shepherd's hands: the rod and staff. With the one, He strikes out against those who might bring harm to His sheep; with the other, He gently guides the wanderer to safety on His chosen path.



*Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Psalm 23

A SHIP CARRYING OVER ONE THOUSAND MEN can generate a lot of garbage. On the good ship *Chicago*, during the Vietnam War, it was the practice of the mess cooks to toss their plastic bags of garbage off the ship's fantail, there to mingle in the churning wake, before slipping slowly down to Davey Jones' locker. During a six-month voyage, a lot of garbage was tossed into that ship's wake.

What is in your wake? What follows behind you as discards of your life?

As we journey through life, we leave a wake, a trail of impressions, feelings, works, consequences, promises and dreams. Every day we affect lives, whether we realize it or not. We can affect them positively or negatively; we can touch people with the mind of God

or the agenda of the flesh; we can leave in our wake goodness and lovingkindness or we can toss bags of garbage over the side.

This very personal song closes with a shout of triumph. Through it all—through trials, darkness, fearful wanderings, pleasant meditations, evil misgivings, and bountiful feasts—through every passage of life, we have a house—a haven, a sanctuary, a temple—to which we can always return to dwell.

In the presence of the Lord we can rest, as if in a tranquil field or by a placid brook; in His house, we are restored to righteousness; there we find sanctuary from the evil and harm that so regularly confronts us; there we find comfort, peace, and a table overflowing with His bounty.

And we are filled.

One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the Lord
And to meditate in His temple.
For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle;
In the secret place of His tent He will hide me;
He will lift me up on a rock.
And now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me,
And I will offer in His tent sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to the Lord.

Psalms 27:4-6