

## THOU ART WITH ME

*It's All Good!*

### The Good Shepherd

*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. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:1-4*

Let us then consider our Great Shepherd from the viewpoint of the sheep.

The shepherd theme is introduced in the first verse: “**The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.**”

Jacob spoke of God as “**The God who has been my shepherd all my life ...**” (Genesis. 48:15; 49:24). **The title of shepherd was given to kings, especially David** (2 Samuel. 5:2; 7:7; Psalm. 78:71), and the Messiah who was to come, of whom David was a type (Ezekiel 34:23-24; Mic. 5:4).

**Thus the Lord Jesus identified himself as the Good Shepherd** (John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4).

The picture Satan tried to paint in suggesting that God had withheld the fruit of every tree of the garden from Adam and Eve (Genesis. 3:1).

God is also portrayed as a begrudging giver in the temptation of our Lord (Matthew. 4:1-11)

**He who is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-caring, is enough; He is sufficient. With Him we need nothing else** (Psalm 73:25-26).

Israel had found God to be a faithful provider of their needs during their years in the wilderness:

**“For the Lord your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing”** (Deuteronomy 2:7).

The Israelites also had God’s assurance that they would lack nothing when they possessed the land of Canaan:

**For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and**

**pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you shall eat food without scarcity, in which you shall not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper (Deuteronomy 8:7-9).**

We must be very careful here, however, that we do not go too far. We should not understand David to mean that with God as his shepherd he had everything one could possibly desire or possess; this would be as wrong as to think that Israel never did without anything while in the wilderness ( Deuteronomy 2:7, above).

In Deuteronomy 8 Moses told the Israelites that God “let them be hungry” to test them and to teach them (vs. 2-3). The clear implication of David’s statement in Psalm 23:1 is that as one of God’s sheep he will lack nothing which is necessary for his best interest. Verses 4 and 5 confirm this as well.

As David wrote elsewhere: **The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing (Psalm 34:10, emphasis mine; also Psalm 84:11).** (Satan is compared to a roaring lion.)

### **THEN WHY SHOULD WE WORRY?**

### **3 FACTS ABOUT GOD’S GOODNESS**

1st God is the source of everything I need to live

2nd There’s nothing I need that God can’t supply “God will supply all you’ll ever need from his glorious resources in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:19

3rd God doesn’t want me worrying about anything! “Don’t worry about anything! Instead, pray about everything.” Philippians 4:6

### **THE KEY IS WHAT DAVID DISCOVERED: THOU ART WITH ME**

**Michelangelo wanted to convey is God’s determination to reach out to and be with the person he has created.**

**This picture reminds us—God is closer than we think.**

**The story of the Bible isn't primarily about the desire of people to be with God; it's about the desire of God to be with people.**

**God is never further than a prayer away. All it takes is the barest effort, the lift of a finger.**

**The central promise in the Bible is not “I will forgive you,” although of course that promise is there too. It is not the promise of life after death, although we are offered that as well.**

**The most frequent promise in the Bible is “I will be with you.”**

**Before Adam and Eve ever sinned or needed forgiveness, they were promised God's presence.**

He would walk with them in the cool of the day.

The promise came to Enoch, who “walked with God.”

It was made to Noah, and Abraham and Sarah, to Jacob and Joseph and Moses and David and Amos and Mary and Paul and too many others to list.

**It is the reason for courage: “Do not be terrified, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”**

It kept them going in darkness: **“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.”**

God gave Israel the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant and manna and the temple and a pillar of cloud and another one of fire, like so many **Post-it notes saying, “Don't forget. I am with you.”**

**When God himself came to earth, his redemptive name was Immanuel—God with us.**

When Jesus left, his promise was to send the Spirit so that **“I will be with you always, even to the end of the age.”**

At the end of time, when sin is a distant and defeated memory, and forgiveness is as obsolete as buggy whips, then it will be sung: **“Now the dwelling place of God is with human beings, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” (Revelation 21:3, NIV)**

God is determined that you should be in every respect **his friend, his companion, his dwelling place.**

I want to live with God's face toward me. I want to experience— in the dark of night as well as the light of day—the reality of the priestly blessing: **“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you” (Numbers 6:24,25, NIV)**

**Who is a candidate for such a life?** Saints and mystics, of course. The devoted and the wise. But not just them. Also people who are chronically unsatisfied. Restless people and demanding people, whiners and complainers, the impossible to please.

**One night Jacob was running away from his brother Esau, who was trying to kill him because Jacob had cheated him and deceived their father. Jacob stopped for the night, the text says, at “a certain place.” That’s a Hebrew way of saying no place in particular. Cleveland, maybe. It could have been anywhere. Some spot by the side of the road with nothing special about it.**

**But that night Jacob had a dream. He saw a ladder with angels ascending and descending. God said to him:**

**“I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac....I am with you, and will watch over you wherever you go” (Genesis 28:13, 15)**

**“When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.... This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.’”(Genesis 28:16,17, NIV).**

**“When Jacob awoke from his sleep...”** There is more than one form of sleep. It happens sometimes: the birth of a baby, an unexplained healing, a marriage that was headed for divorce being turned around, and somebody wakes up. **Somebody’s eyes get opened to the fact that God is right here in this ordinary place, this ordinary person.**

The striking phrase is, **“and I was not aware of it.”** Somehow, I was looking in the wrong direction. Apparently, **it is possible for God to be present with somebody, and for that person not to recognize that he’s there. Apparently, it is possible that God is closer than you think.**

**This is Jacob’s discovery.**

He calls this place where he had the dream: Beth-el, “the house of God”—“the place where God is present.” It is transformed for him from “a certain place”—nowhere special—to the place inhabited by God himself.

**It’s a ladder for God to come down. All the way down to where we live.**

Jacob sees his brother after two decades of separation and hatred; we wait to see if Esau will kill him. **“But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept.” (Genesis 33:4)**

After a whole childhood of living as enemies, and two decades of living as strangers—now they are brothers. And Jacob makes one of the great statements of Scripture: **“When... I saw your face, it was like seeing the face of God”(Genesis 33:10)**

**God is closer than you think.** In a city called Dothan, a servant of the prophet Elisha was terrified because he and his boss were surrounded by Israel’s enemies. **“What shall we do?” he cried. Elisha told him to chill out, for “those who are with us are more than those who are against us.”** Then he prayed for him: **“O Lord, open his eyes so that he may see.” And the Lord opened his eyes, and he saw that he was surrounded by horses and chariots of fire—the power and protection of God.**

What if every time you are challenged or burdened, you, too, are surrounded by his power and protection? And what if God should open your eyes?

**In the temple, in the night, a young boy named Samuel heard his named called out.** He thought it was the priest, Eli, and kept running into his bedroom. Finally, Eli realized that it was God speaking to Samuel—but Samuel did not yet recognize God’s voice. So Eli instructed him that the next time he heard the voice, he should assume it was from God, and invite him to speak further, and then be ruthlessly obedient.

**Two early followers of Jesus were walking on the road to Emmaus after the crucifixion. They were joined by a third man. It was Jesus, walking and talking with them—but they didn’t know it. Until he began to pray.** And then they knew. And then they said, **“Didn’t our hearts burn within us as he explained the Scripture to us?”**

**So close that he can flow in and through your life from one moment to the next like a river. So close that your heart will be beating with life because someone is walking around in there. God is closer than you think.**

The apostle Paul wrote, “Don’t quench the Spirit.” And in a sense, the whole business of spiritual life can be reduced to that single command.

**What if he is available to you and me: flowing all the time, welling up within us; quenching our unsatisfied desires, overflowing to refresh those around us?**

**What if spiritual disciplines are simply those practices that help us to stay in the flow of the Spirit?**

**What if God is at work all the time, in every place?**

**What would a life—your life—look like?**

**What if God could be that close? What if I miss him because I fail to see him in the ordinary moments of my life?**

**No one else has ever lived with a sense of the presence of God as Jesus did. And when he died, the veil that kept people out of the Holy of Holies, the veil that symbolized the separation of God and human beings, was torn in two. In Jesus, God touched Adam.**

**Now, according to the clear expectation of the teaching of Jesus, it's our turn. What happened to Enoch and Abraham, what happened to Peter, James and John; what happened to Brother Lawrence in a kitchen in France, can happen again.**

For centuries now, people have stood in line to view the picture of God and Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. **But what if the miracle that is hinted at on that fresco became a reality in our lives?**

**What if an artist greater than Michelangelo is at work on the canvas of our ordinary days?**

**“God alone is capable of making himself known as he really is,” Brother Lawrence said. “God Himself paints Himself in the depths of our souls.”**

“God Himself paints Himself in the depths of our souls.” It can happen anywhere, anytime, for anyone. Anybody's age, or season of life, or temperament, or job— these are no obstacle at all. God is closer than you think. All you have to do is lift a finger.