

## “Where the Journey Leads”

Scripture: Psalm 23

Graphics: path, road, stream

Big Truth: In the midst of all and any loss in our lives, God is leading us always. He leads us to the quiet waters. He leads us through the valley. He leads us home to Him.

Focus Phrase: Where He leads me, I will follow.

### 1. Introduction

#### A. VIDEO - Psalm 23

#### B. PRAY!

- C. Have you ever been lost?
- D. Have you ever been lost at night?
- E. Have you ever been lost at night in the woods?
- F. Have you ever been lost at night in the woods without a lantern?
- G. Ya, me neither! Who would go into the woods at night without a lantern?
- H. Yet, there are times in our lives when we FEEL like we're lost in the woods at night without a lantern...without a light to lead the way.
- I. As we begin, I'm going to just name it for us this year: 2020 has been an unbelievably difficult year. It's been a year of pandemic...a year of isolation for many...a year of death and fear...more questions than answers...conflicting messages from family, friends, and government officials...a year of frustration and anger. In one word, 2020 has been a year of LOSS...and of feeling LOST, at times.
- J. Now, I also know that there have been some great things that have also happened this year - weddings, births, small parties, birthdays, more time to pray and dive deep into God's word. But even those things were done in a different way...and sometimes we feel like we had to navigate in the woods in the dark.
- K. Now we're getting ready for Christmas, after experiencing Thanksgiving in a different way, and our sense of loss hasn't really let up.
- L. If you're here tonight and your loss has included the death of a loved one in 2020 or any year, then your grief is even more profound.
- M. God has brought us all here tonight for a reason. You may know the reason or you may not. It has something to do with the loss we've felt in any form, but as important is the fact that our hearts are searching (seeking) for hope, even if we feel lost right now.

N. Tonight, this place, is a safe space to be still and know that God is here with us...to walk slowly with God to the place He is leading us. Beside the quiet waters. To restoration of our souls. Through the valley of death and fear. To Home...Where the Journey Leads. That's the title of this message of hope.

## 2. Scripture

- A. The book of Psalms, in the Old Testament, is actually a collections of poems and songs that were written by and for the Jewish people over hundreds of years. Some of the psalms are joyful songs of praise. Some of them are worshipful. Many of them have questions about God and what God has done, is doing, and will do.
- B. Yet more than any other category of psalm are the songs of lament. To lament is to passionately express grief or sorrow...to mourn. These psalms of lament were written to express the profound grief and deep loss we feel, but that we can't always put into words.
- C. Lament has been the experience of people throughout all time. For us tonight, it's where we begin, in lament for whatever is troubling or distressing your soul right now. It may be for someone else...or for the world.
- D. With God's help, however, it's not where we end on our journey. God will lead us somewhere tonight.
- E. Psalm 23 is a journey that leads us somewhere. It may begin in the quiet stillness of a shepherd's field, but it ends in the presence of God. This psalm is a lament and a love song. If tonight has us thinking about the depth of our grief, tonight can also be about looking up in love to the One who is our ever-present help in time of need. Let's take a walk with God tonight...and go where the journey leads.
- F. In the video we watched a few minutes ago, a young woman was walking... she was moving...she was going somewhere. We don't know where she was headed...that's for her to know, just like our individual journeys are taking us somewhere that no one else in our lives really knows, but God alone.
- G. Here are the opening words to Psalm 23...these are familiar to you, but let's take some time tonight to be in them in a new way...
- H. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."
  - i. The beginning of the journey is where we are. Seems obvious. Yet, the circumstances of our lives, our nation, our world - the places we find ourselves - are not defined by OUR perspective, but by God's.
  - ii. We are sheep, guided, loved, and protected by a God who is our Shepherd.
  - iii. I'm giving us permission tonight to stop feeling like we're the only one's responsible for our safety and well-being. We have a role to play, for sure, but God is our Good Shepherd...He is calling us...and providing for us.

- iv. Which is why the psalmist simply wrote, “I shall not want.” I am content. Not because I alone can change my circumstances, but because God is enough in the midst of the circumstances.
  - v. Let’s keep walking...
- I. “He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.”
- i. The journey is on! But it’s not you and me finding our way in the dark. It’s you and me **being led**. Actually, the first phrase is more like, “Sit down in this green pasture!”
  - ii. During times of loss and being lost, God still knows what’s best and where to find it...that green pasture.
  - iii. If you need water for a thirsty soul - whether because you’ve not taken the time to drink or you aren’t even sure you deserve to drink - God will lead you beside the quiet waters...the waters that will quiet you...refresh you...restore you.
  - iv. Along the way, God will show you the path - His path - His right path. That path is the one that leads you to the place where He knows you’ll find healing and hope.
  - v. Jesus came to earth at Christmas to heal the sin-sick world...to defeat death and sin, and raise us up to new life with Him. The right path always leads to a life with Jesus at the center of all we do.
  - vi. Let’s keep being led...
- J. “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.”
- i. The time in the valleys of life are the times when grief and fear and anger and confusion are the most profound. It can be as difficult as losing a loved one, or can be as benign as being potentially exposed to COVID or missing your family for Christmas.
  - ii. The devil wants every one of the difficult experiences in our lives to cause us to walk away from God’s right path...to wander out there in the woods in the dark without a lantern.
  - iii. God, though, knows the path, is the light, and comforts us along the darkest valley of our souls. Tonight, if you’re in a valley, the voice you hear gently calling your name is God’s voice...your Shepherd.
  - iv. So many times in the bible angels and God say to those whom they are with, “Do not be afraid.”
  - v. God is guiding and leading us...loving us...comforting us.
  - vi. Let’s keep walking...

- K. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”
- i. Being led always means that we’re heading somewhere. In this case, God is offering us sustenance, even while we’re still in the valley, surrounded by the things that cause us harm and grief...physical or otherwise.
  - ii. And when we sit down at the table that God has set before us, to commune with Him in prayer and worship, we are anointed - blessed for a purpose, and we are filled with God’s blessings to overflowing.
  - iii. It doesn’t take us long to list out all the things that are wrong right now. Yet, if we stop for just a minute as we begin that process and think of the things that are blessing us right now, the blessings outweigh the troubles.
  - iv. God is sitting with you so that you will begin to see the blessings and the provision...and respond with gratitude.
- L. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”
- i. You might think the destination of the journey is to be in heaven or to be with a loved one or even to be happy.
  - ii. Yet, the psalmist tells us, with confidence, that the destination is right here available to us...to live our lives to God...to dwell in His house with Him, now.
  - iii. So much of our anxiety comes from thinking that we need to get to somewhere else to be content. Wherever God is is the place where God is leading us. And that’s enough.
- M. As God leads and guides us along the path of the journey, to green pastures, beside the quiet waters, through the darkest valleys, to the table, and along the path every day with Him, we turn our mourning into dancing and our fear in faith.
- N. Where does the journey lead? Well, emotionally and even spiritually, it may just take you out into the woods at night without a lantern to light your way.
- O. Yet, as you allow God to take you on that journey, and provide for your every step, comfort every loss and grief, and even be your confidence when you are lost, you will find His hope in your next step.
- P. He is ready to lead you...where His journey leads.

### **3. Conclusion**

- A. On your seat when you came in, you found a lantern. There should be one for each person or family to take home tonight.
- B. This is our gift to you and a way of reminding you that is isn’t so much important where your journey is leading, but Who is leading it.

- C. Let this light be a reminder that God is the good shepherd that is always taking you on the journey that leads to Him, his love, his goodness and provision.
- D. He will light the way to Him...to Home.
- E. You don't have to be lost in the woods in the dark without a lantern anymore.
- F. Trust in God to be your light, wherever your journey leads.
- G. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all.
- H. Let's pray...