



The Lord Is My Shepherd

Psalms 23:1-3

The International Space Station

Recently I received an unusual email from a place so extraordinary that I could not wait to read it to my congregation and put it on Facebook. A good friend has a brother who is a NASA astronaut currently serving on the International Space Station. Dr. Tom Marshburn very kindly sent me the following email:

“There is a window on the space station that provides a panoramic view of space and the Earth from our 250-mile-high vantage point. From here we see scant evidence of human life on our planet as we pass through each day, and even when flying through the night, the lights of our great cities appear and then vanish over the horizon in minutes. Civilization’s hold on Earth’s surface seems fragile and tenuous. But rather than creating a feeling of insignificance, the view provides witness to how incredibly rare and precious we all are and creates a desire to be forever thankful to our great God for our families, human fellowship, rain from clouds above, fragrant winds, sand beneath our feet, and for His goodness that we can reside here and live this life.”

I think you would agree that receiving an email from space is incredibly exciting. Think about it: Dr. Marshburn—traveling at 17,500 miles per hour and working diligently on the Space Station—pauses to give thanks to God that we “reside here and live this life.”

Now as exciting as it is to communicate with the International Space Station, remember that when we pray, we have the enormous privilege of entering the presence of almighty God and speaking to Him in the most intimate terms.

Back in January I embarked upon a new series of Sunday morning studies entitled “Fresh

Prayers for a New Year.” We recently explored Psalm 23, one of the greatest prayers in all of Scripture.

Looking forward to 2022, many of us will plan and prepare for graduations, family weddings, the birth of a new baby, a change of jobs, a house move, or retirement. These are events that impact our lives and shape our future. (And thanks to the digital playground we have access to, we will share such events on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook.)

Because of the ubiquitous convenience of smart phones, we struggle to disengage and find quiet moments of down time. Last week I read an article that said, “Our phones always promise another update to see, images to like, websites to visit, games to play, texts to read, streams to watch, forecasts to monitor, podcasts to download, headlines to scan, articles to skim, scores to check, prices to compare.”

That kind of access and semblance of control begins to make quiet moments feel like wasted moments. After all, who would sit and be still while so much life rushes by? Even if we don’t always pick up our phones, we’re often still held captive by them, wondering what new and exciting news or adventure they might hold. What might we be missing?

As difficult as quiet uninterrupted moments are to find, Scripture teaches us that quiet, prayerful moments spent in the presence of God become life-renewing, soul-strengthening moments. It is for all these reasons that exploring the opening words of Psalm 23 is worthwhile.

“The Lord Is My Shepherd” (23:1)

As a prayer, Psalm 23 reminds us that genuine prayer is an encounter with the ineffable character and nature of God Himself. It is an intimate conversation of reciprocal love, defined by a deep dependency on His provision and providence, wrapped up in adoration and thanksgiving for who He is. Prayer is never the solitary exploration of our own subjectivity. It involves awe, profound intimacy, struggle, and reality, but is never only about us.

Yet we are also tempted to think of prayer as a tool. A tool to get God to do what we wish Him to do, when to do it, and to whom. But

what if prayer is more about being and becoming than about getting? What if prayer is used by God not only to hear the heartbeat of our most intimate desires, but also as a means to bring us into a deeper life of faith, increasing our trust and dependence on Him, fashioning us into the person He is calling us to be? When we come to that realization, we find that intimacy in prayer becomes a priority, taking on greater urgency.

Psalm 23 comes from David, who was once a shepherd. It is clearly a psalm of trust and confidence. It expresses unshakeable confidence in God’s great love and is therefore one of the most captivating, charming, and beloved of all the Psalms.

Biblical scholars have speculated over the years about David’s circumstances as he wrote it. Was it when he was away from his brothers in the high country with the sheep, experiencing isolation and solitude? Was it then that David developed and became dependent on God alone? Was it then that God began the process of preparing the heart of David to be a future king? Was it late at night in quiet solitude that David wrote with deep and lasting gratitude, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want; He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul”?

“He Makes Me Lie Down” (23:2)

God’s greatest work in the life of an individual is to shape, refine, and fashion us to be more Christ-like. In so doing, “He makes me lie down.” This is often the place when our dependency on Him increases. In those moments we discover that when we pray with intensity, we break away from mediocrity. When we pray with regularity, God becomes our priority. When pray in an unhurried, solitary manner, we become fully dependent upon Him alone. Prayer often defines who we are.

A shrinking soul and a thinning faith are only renewed through intentional quiet times of prayer. There is no short cut to maturity and growth. Find time this week to pray. Access to God should never be taken for granted.