

POINTS TO PONDER

"God is our shepherd; we will not have want for anything."

— *Psalm 23.1*

"If the promise concerns only God's gifts, then God becomes only instrumental to human hope, and the hoper lives in a world of commodities, which in the end give neither joy nor safety.

Thus it is affirmed that Yahweh is the true heart's desire of human persons, the true joy of human life, and the sure possibility of life lives in hope."

— *Walter Brueggemann, in Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*

"Most people living now, and that have ever lived, experience deficiencies in their lives; including the basic necessities of life. If we interpret this passage to mean that God will supply us with all our needs if we just think and live as if God is our shepherd, then it is patently false. Life doesn't work that way, and we all know it; whether we want to admit it or not. But if we have trust in God and God's ways first and foremost in our lives, then, whether we end up lacking in the basic needs of life, what we are blessed with is the trust that our lives will have meaning, purpose, and significance beyond our lack. We ought to strive to create a world in which none is lacking in the basic necessities; but until that time comes, if it ever does, we are to recognize that our lives have worth independently of our circumstances. What we don't have want of is not material and physical needs, but rather the spiritual need of knowing we are blessed when we live lives based in our trust of God's ways."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/26/2023*

"God entices us lie down in green pastures; and leads us beside still waters."

— *Psalm 23.2*

"How often do we take to renew and refresh our spirit?

God prods us to enjoy the beauty of nature daily.

Nature gives us not only physical, but spiritual sustenance.

Green pastures open our mind and heart to God's voice.

The banalities and stresses of human existence are washed away by still waters."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/4/2017*

"God does 'make' us do this, as it is sometimes translated. God doesn't force us to do anything, else that would be a denial of God's gift of free will to us. But, mytho-poetically speaking, it does make sense that we feel the enticement of God to look out for our own spiritual well-being. And people have long known that being out in nature is one of the best things we can do for our spirits.

When we feel too busy to take a break, that is when we most need a break. Spiritual sustenance is more important than all the various things that we busy our lives with doing. Whether we accomplished a particular task, even a noble one, is less important than whether we refreshed and renewed our spirit so that we kept on the path of our divine shepherd. No human duty is as important than our spiritual duty to be faithful to God's virtues and values; and the latter can only be accomplished if we dedicate ourselves to setting boundaries that allow us to be led by God rather than the demands of the world."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/26/2023*

"God restores our souls, and leads us in right paths for the sake of God's ways."

— *Psalm 23.3*

"Stress reduction is not an end in itself, but a means to more purposeful, soul-enriching activity. Our purpose should not be whatever we select, but rather that which puts us on the right path."

— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/4/2017*

"Our souls are not restored by our accomplishments. Our souls are restored by being faithful to God's virtues and values. We may be renowned for extraordinarily human accomplishments, but it means nothing if it was not in accordance with the law of love, the path of peace, and the joy of justice. When we are led to walk a life of rightful living, our soul is rejuvenated. It doesn't mean that life will not be hard, or that we won't know plenteous hardships and resistance to doing the right thing; rather it means that despite all of this turmoil that we be blessed in knowing we have acted with integrity in accordance to God's noblest purposes for our lives."

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/26/2023

"Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we fear no evil."

— Psalm 23.4ab

"(Psalm 23) describes an approach to *trustful living* just as much as it provides comfort in the face of loss or the unknown."

— Rev. Kathryn Matthews, ucc.org

"Again, we should not take this literally. Will we have fears at times? Of course. But we will not let our fears, if we trust in God's ways, determine our decisions and course of action. When others manipulate things, and try to coerce us to do their will and not God's, there may be threats and penalties that follow for us making God, not them, our shepherd.

While these often don't lead to death, sometimes they have. I know people, including clergy, so pressured to not be themselves that they have committed suicide. I know others who were so stressed by having to choose between doing what they believed was the right thing versus doing what others wanted them to do that they died by heart attacks, strokes, or other stress-induced medical conditions.

While hopefully dedicating ourselves to God's ways will ultimately be our comfort and restoration to sound spiritual health, it doesn't always work out this way. Even so, even if the worse happens, we are not to fear what happens to us when we have committed our ways to God's ways. Life is too precious to let anyone or anything other than God to be the shepherd of our lives. Better to walk to our deaths than to stop trusting in God's ways."

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/26/2023

"You prepare a table before us in the presence of our adversaries."

— Psalm 23.5a

"Most of us would prefer a table set in the presence of our friends and loved ones; but God sets it in the presence of our adversaries.

Shared meals heal us and them, reminding us that we must care for one another. If we cannot be hospitable and caring towards all, then we have missed God's message."

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/4/2017

"When we live with integrity, not trying to control others and not letting them control us, but rather letting God's ways guide us in all of our decision-making, it is as if we have a table open to all people – even our adversaries. Granted, there is a time to no longer allow abuse to happen, but as long as there is hope for the possibility of resolution, we can all sit down at the table of siblinghood and remember that it is God, not us, who is the host who invites us all into loving relationship. We each much choose to do the loving thing, not the things we'd most prefer others to do, while keeping our faith and hope alive until it is clear that love is not shared by everyone around the table."

— Rev. Bret S. Myers, 4/26/2023

"Surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the abode of God our whole lives long."

— *Psalm 23.6*

“God may shepherd us, but we are to shepherd virtue.
If goodness and mercy are to follow us, then we must live and lead lives of goodness and mercy.
If we make virtues a part of our character, then wherever we may go, they will follow.
The Biblical testimony is that being virtuous *is* living in God’s presence.”
— *Rev. Bret S. Myers, 5/4/2017*