



"He Makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures"

Psalm 23 (NKJV)

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will 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 anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Our 21 month old granddaughter recently had her first day in a K-1 class that she attends twice a week. When it came time for a "nap," we were told that she absolutely refused to lie down. Instead, she went over to the wall crying her eyes out. This was not her baby bed where she takes a nap and those precious ladies were not her momma. She was not going to have anything to do with it.

How difficult is it for you to rest? For you to lie down? We have heard this morning in our Scripture reading, by Tyler and April, that God rested on the seventh day and put into law later that, on the Sabbath, everybody was to rest. And we learned how Jesus has provided for us a better rest than Moses or Joshua could have ever imagined. It is not the place where you rest but instead the person in which you rest.

In the Bible, humans are often compared to sheep, and when it comes to the issue of rest, there is no better way to illustrate our need for rest or what keeps us from rest.

Phillip Keller became a shepherd and wrote a book in 1979 revealing his adventures of being a shepherd himself, and he speaks to this issue of sheep not wanting to lie down.

He said, "It is impossible for sheep to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met."

This morning, I want us to look at those four requirements...

1. Free from Fear
2. Free from Friction
3. Free from Flies and Fleas
4. Free from the Fear of Hunger

Notice the word "free" that is repeated. A flock that is restless, discontented, always agitated and disturbed never does well. And the same with people.

So let's look closer at how to be "made to lie down in green pastures."

I. Free from Fear

Sheep have little or no means of self-defense. They are helpless, timid, feeble creatures whose first response to the sightless fear is to run.

Pregnant lambs chased by predators will slip their unborn lambs and lose them in abortion.

Sheep are such light sleepers that even a unseen small rabbit bouncing in a bush that is heard by the sheep can startle one sheep causing it to run, and the entire flock will stampede. So just a sound will cause the sheep to be disturbed.

So, a "good Shepherd" will sleep lightly and be ever ready to respond to the slightest sound and fear raised in a lamb. And when the shepherd appears in sight of the sheep, they are calmed from their fears.

Oh, that God we have a "good Shepherd" who never sleeps or slumbers.

He is always awake and present. He is a present help in time of need. He is a refuge.

To see the Shepherd's presence in our life should cause our fear to cease.

"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields,
keeping watch over their flock by night."

Luke 2:8

We live with so much uncertainty. The news of a terror attack, another shooting, trouble in the family, friends, church. Cancer - loss of job.

Do you live in anxiety or quiet rest?

We stress about stuff that never happens. As **Matthew 6:34** says not to worry about tomorrow by bringing those worriers into today.

I believe David was older where writing this Psalm, and he had a calm assurance of the presence of the Shepherd. He had seen his Shepherd deliver him from the bear, the giant Goliath, Saul, and rebellious Absalom.

My Shepherd has everything under control so we can rest.

We teach our children to pray "Now I lay me down to sleep, pray my Lord my soul to keep."

"God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

I Timothy 1:7

A sound mind - one at ease, at peace.

II. Free from Friction

Because of the social behavior within the flocks, sheep had to be free from the friction with others of their kind. As it is with humans, there is tension, rivalry, cruel competition within the flock.

Every animal society has an established order of dominance or status.

- Chickens have a pecking order.
- Cattle have a horning order.
- Sheep have a butting order.

Arrogant, cunning and domineering sheep will boss other sheep around. They will butt and drive other sheep away from the best grazing or places to lie down.

So when the domineering, butting sheep are around, the other sheep will not lie down in contentment, but must stand up and defend themselves and their territory.

When sheep become edgy, tense, discontented and restless, they lose weight. When they lose weight, they are prone to sickness, disease, and even death.

But when the Shepherd arrives, the butting stops, the foolish rivalries cease, and the territorial fighting ends.

Does this sound familiar to us? Tension? Competition between ranks?

We try to bully our way up the corporate ladder or into that social group.

Are we fighting for our rights as if that is the Christian thing to do?

Jealousies - pet peeves grow - hatred - envy - people get hurt.

One of the great marks of the Christian life is contentment.

"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."

Phillipians 4:11

"Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey..."

Ezekiel 34:21-22

Our Shepherd has compassion on the poor, the weak, the disadvantaged, the less. In fact, He said, "The first shall be last..."

The presence of the Shepherd puts an end to rivalry and self-promotion.

We know who we are in Christ and we seek to walk humbly with our God. We have experienced the mercy of the Lord and we can easily grant mercy to others.

If you have to butt your way somewhere, most likely God is not in it.

III. Free from Flies and Fleas

Free from pests, flies, parasites. We will talk more about this when we talk about "anointing my head with oil."

But just to say that nasal flies, ticks, parasites – especially in the summer – are very bothersome to sheep. They are constantly on their feet, shaking their heads, and seeking relief. But when the Shepherd "anoints my head with oil" – it soothes us with a protection from the flies and fleas.

As Christians, we are constantly "bugged." Demons, flesh, problems....

But oil is always a representative of the Holy Spirit, and when the oil is poured over us, the Holy Spirit brings quietness – serenity – strength and calmness.

IV. Free from the Fear of Hunger

Most of areas where great numbers of sheep are raised are in countries that are dry/semi-arid and not in areas that are known for green pastures.

Palestine, as you may remember, is known for its rocky terrain. When Satan tempted Jesus to "turn the stones into bread," he knew that would mean everybody in Palestine could eat well.

Green pastures don't just happen by chance. A lot of work, labor and toil goes into removing the stone, preparing the ground, plant the grass and keeping it to produce food for the flock. And you have to keep sheep moving around, for if they stay in one place, they will chew down to the root, thus killing the grass.

For the best production of milk for the mothers, it requires good pastures.

Hungry sheep, like hungry men, are always discontented, looking for food.

Sheep are not like goats. Goats will eat anything, anywhere. They will eat the filthiest things – cigar butts, rags, briars. Anything...

But sheep are clean-natured animals that won't eat anything unclean.

May I ask you? **What are you eating? What do you have an appetite for?**
It may tell you a lot about who you are.

Jesus told Peter "Feed my sheep." **John 21:16**

One of the responsibilities of Elders are to "feed and care for the sheep." **1 Peter 5:14**

What do you eat? Where do you eat? What satisfies your soul? Is it the world's entertainment?
It's like eating cotton candy while sitting at Ruth Chris Steak House.

The Word of God is our meat and our drink. It is always fresh, available, rich, plentiful, and nutritious.

In the wilderness, God provided to His people manna. Manna was white, which speaks of its purity, and tasted like honey, which speaks of sweetness.

But God promised His people the land of His rest was a "land flowing with milk and honey."

Peak season – flowing...

No wonder the Psalmist said in **Psalms 119: 103** "How sweet are Your words to my taste, Sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

This wonderful "Pearl of Psalms" begins with rest. Surprised? Shocked? Do you need rest? Release from tension? Stress? Bullying? Fear?

The Christian life is a life of rest – resting in Christ – no more searching. We have been found!

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
Matthew 11:28