

WARM-UP

- Name a friend that you can call a true companion.
- Who do you talk to when you need to process things?
- What is one hard time that you experienced? How did you get through it?

WORD *Even 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. **PSALM 23:4***

God gives us the ultimate promise of protection: that even though troubles are unavoidable in this world, our Shepherd is with us all the way. As we begin to look at our situation through God's perspective, we see that He not only helps us get over the world's troubles, He also promises eternal riches. How does God walk with us through challenging times?

1 | God is with us.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me . . . **PSALM 23:4**

(Read also **JOHN 10:27**.)

Shepherds of the time would lead their flocks from one grazing place to another. To do this, they would often pass narrow valleys between high cliffs that were filled with threats like wild animals; and because the cliffs were high, the valleys were dark. They were places of uncertainty, danger, and death. But David declared that God was with him in the valley, and this applies to us too. God doesn't just look on from a distance, but is next to us through trials and fear; through despair, grief, and injustice. We don't have to be afraid, no matter our situation. Have you ever gone through a "valley"—a challenging, dark time that you thought you could never get out of? How has God walked with you through it?

2 | He comforts and teaches us.

. . . your rod and your staff, they comfort me. **PSALM 23:3**

A shepherd's rod and staff have multiple purposes. The staff was hooked on one end to help pull sheep up if they fell, and could also be used to guide sheep in the right direction. The rod could be used as a weapon against predators, to discipline the sheep, or to give them some exercise. To be protected by God does not only mean protection from danger, but includes the lessons He teaches us and the discipline to learn and become more like Christ. There is always something that God is teaching us. What is God teaching you in this season? How have you been responding to what God is teaching you?

3 | He promises us eternal life.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. **PSALM 23:6**

(Read also **JOHN 10:28**.)

One of the greatest promises God has given His children is that of eternal life with Him. Even death on the earth does not equal spiritual death. This is an eternal hope that we have, no matter what our situation looks like. *Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life* means that we don't even have to strive for it. We are assured that God is always at work, whether we can see Him move or not. He gives us eternal life. How has this knowledge given you hope and changed the way you live? What does John 10:28 say about eternal life?

APPLICATION

- God gives us the ultimate promise of protection: that He will be with us throughout every trouble, and we will not have to fear. Claim this promise today through prayer and declare victory over fears and uncertainties.
- God is always teaching us lessons as we are molded to be more like Christ. Are there times when you need the disciplining more than the guiding function of His rod and staff? Pray to humbly accept His discipline and learn what He is teaching.
- What are some things you can do to stop striving in life, knowing that by God's grace, goodness and mercy will follow you? How can you encourage others to follow God and seek Him as their Shepherd through your example?

