

**No Fear**

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 23:4 (NNAS)

Fear is a great motivator. It is fear that generates a 'fight or flight' response within a person. On the one hand a person responds with boldness and courage, perhaps even with a touch of anger. In the heat of the moment it is worth the risk. Stand firm or even attack: Fight!

It is the same fear that can bring about a completely opposite reaction. Danger dictates. Security and safety are more important. The risk is too great: Flight!

Perhaps there is not an English word that fits with the 'fight or flight' response duo to describe a third reaction to fear: dread. The fear is so great that a fight is certain to be lost, but flight is hopeless. There is not place of safety and no chance of overcoming the enemy: Dread.

Fear drains the emotion, fatigues the mind, and saps energy from the body. Unpredictable reactions often result and poor choices are made.

In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm David writes of another response to fear, but not to fear in general, the fear of evil. We do not fear evil in our day. The poor economy might shake us up as it threatens our retirement or career. Poor health can certainly be a fearful thing. We may feel great pressures in our home life or at work and, as a result, fear the potential negative results. But evil? Ha! Why fear evil?

As a people, we do not fear evil, yet it is not because we have confidence, but ignorance. We are sometimes as foolish in our attitude toward evil as a small child who would idly drift in a canoe toward a waterfall not understanding the powerful danger. We prefer not to think about evil and its power over the human.

Satan does not pound at the door announcing his identity and intentions. He is stronger than man yet he approaches quietly with enticements difficult for us to refuse. If we would just consider for a moment our own past, we would acknowledge how sin and evil have had control over us. We should fear evil, and yet . . . .

The fact that David wrote, "I fear no evil," shows that he knew the terror of evil and something about its strength. Yet, he did not fear evil, not

because he ignored it, but because he took comfort in someone who was stronger and who protected him.

The shepherd's rod was a tool used against predators, but also as a tool for discipline of the sheep. As such, the sheep would be protected from danger approaching from outside the flock: wolves, lions, thieves, and they would be protected from themselves.

The rod represents God's protection of his sheep from the evil one. The Apostle Paul writes that God "will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able." There are temptations that God knows will certainly overpower us. He protects us by not allowing those into our lives.

The rod also represents God's protection of his sheep from the evil within. The Apostle Paul continues, "but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it." So, when there are enticements that appeal to us, God provides a way out.

The Hebrew writer encourages us to have a good attitude toward the discipline of God. Though it is not pleasant, it is for our good. The purpose of discipline is always to restore. So we see that God protects us and restores us.

The staff uniquely identifies a shepherd and is used to lead and work the sheep. The staff is virtually an extension of the shepherd's arm. He uses it to gently picking up lambs to place them with their mother, to nudge sheep before they can wander, and even to make simple contact with a sheep. In the latter case it is not unlike a father walking hand-in-hand with his child. The simple touch conveys safety and acceptance.

The rod and staff together represent the Great Shepherd's contact with his sheep. Whether through a painful lesson learned with the rod of discipline or the gentle reminder of his presence with his staff, he is ever near, protecting, guiding, training, leading . . . comforting his sheep in the face of danger. With God as our shepherd, we can have confidence in reaching our destination.

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