

Our Source of Certainty in Uncertain Times (Part 2): The Lord Provides for Us

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Preacher: Fred Stone

[0 : 00] Thank you again, ladies. Great job. The Stewart sisters.

Life is sometimes stressful, isn't it? I know some people are saying, no, life is always stressful. And it is for some people. And the stress can come from just about any source, can't it?

Some people in this room, you're dealing with stress related to things going on at home. For some people, it's work. For some people, it's school or it has been school.

For a lot of people, it's money. It's financial. And then there's people right now that, when I use that word stress, you're thinking about some health issues.

Your own or someone you love. The question is not, do we deal with stress? The question is, how do we deal with it? Because we all have to.

[1 : 01] How do you deal with the uncertainties of life that make your world stressful? Well, many Christians have found help for dealing with their stress from Psalm 23.

As I pointed out last week, quoting Chuck Swindoll, David wrote Psalm 23 for the dark times of uncertainty in our lives.

Dark times of uncertainty that lead to stress. Well, today, what I want us to look at is one of the ways that we as Christians, we who know the Lord as our shepherd, as he's described in Psalm 23, how we can deal better with our stress and the uncertainty of our life by trusting the Lord.

I want to be clear. There's absolutely no way for you to eliminate the stress of your life except to die. When you die, you don't worry about anything else.

But as long as you're alive, as long as you know who you are and where you are, you're going to have to deal with stress. And what we're going to look at this morning from Psalm 23, not how to make it go away, but how to better deal with it by trusting that God will always provide for us.

[2 : 27] Look at Psalm 23, the first three verses. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. We'll stop there in the middle of verse three. The first thing we need to understand about trusting the Lord to provide is this.

The Lord wisely decides what we need. Now I want you to listen. In order for this to make sense and be true, the Lord decides.

God determines what we need when we need it. Look at the last part of verse one. I shall not want. The Lord is my shepherd.

And as we looked at last week near the end of the message, we saw that the next phrase literally means the Lord is my shepherd. I shall lack nothing. Some translations, including the New International Version, translate that I lack nothing.

[3 : 35] Now don't answer out loud. How do you take that statement? The Lord is my shepherd. I shall lack nothing. Do you as a Christian ever go lacking?

Don't be super spiritual. You do. No one ever has everything they want, everything they desire, or everything they think they even need.

Just to give an example and be more spiritual. As Christians, we're supposed to experience joy in our lives, a sense of the peace of God because we're right with Him.

But let's be honest. You don't always feel joy within your soul, do you? I don't. No one does. You don't always have a sense of just peace and calmness and contentment.

Sometimes life is so stressful you think you're going to explode, don't you? The truth is, sometimes we're sad.

[4 : 50] We're frustrated. Sometimes we're anything but joyful or peaceful. Sometimes the last thing we would think, we would feel is, I lack nothing.

So what is David saying? John Piper had some comments that I think best explain what David means when he says, I shall lack nothing than anything else I've ever read.

It's very helpful. So I want to give you sort of an extended quote. We'll look at it in paragraphs. Look with me. Piper writes, Do God's sheep ever lack anything?

Sheer common sense tells us that no matter how well things are going, you always lack something. I think, therefore, that what David means is that God's sheep never lack anything that the shepherd thinks is good for them.

This is confirmed for me when I ponder verse 4 about walking through the valley of the shadow of death. The picture here is of a situation with extreme danger that could take the sheep's life if the shepherd weren't there to protect and guide with his rod and staff.

[6 : 07] But why would a shepherd lead a sheep into a valley filled with danger and death threats? Isn't the only possible answer to get to someplace better?

Think about what he's saying. When David says, I shall lack nothing, he is saying that we'll never lack anything that the Lord has wisely determined that we need.

And we'll never lack anything that the Lord has determined to give us. The good things that he provides.

Think about that. The 23rd Psalm lets us see that life is sometimes stressful when we go through the dark valleys.

Think about that. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me. In every life, there are dark valleys.

[7 : 17] Some are, for short periods of time, some seem like go on and on and on. Not anything we would ever choose for ourselves.

But a part of what God's doing in our life requires that we go through certain dark valleys. He's with us. He takes care of us as we go through them.

He provides for us as we go through them. Because he's going to get us through them. To get us where he wants us in the next part of life. If you ever doubt this.

If you ever doubt whether the Lord can be trusted to provide what we need, to determine what we need. Think about what we saw last week in John chapter 10.

Where Jesus described himself as the good shepherd who gave his life for his sheep. Who died for his sheep. Look at it. John 10. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

[8 : 19] That's really the essence of the gospel. We are sinful people. We are under the condemnation of death as a result of our sin.

But God in his grace and mercy and love sent his son Jesus into this world. To die on the cross as our substitute. To pay the penalty for our sin.

Jesus gave up his life for us. That's how much he loves us. And if he loves us like that, can't we trust him to decide what we need?

And when we need it? And whatever he determines that we need, he'll always make sure that we have it.

Paul reassures us of this in Philippians 4.19. Look at this. He says, And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

[9 : 21] Paul wrote that just a few sentences after he'd already said, I have learned to be content in whatever situation I'm in. I've learned to be content when I'm in great need.

When I don't have everything I need. I've learned to be content when I have more than I need. You see, Paul trusted that it's the Lord who decides what he needs and when he needs it.

And so in his times of coming up short, he just trusted this was God's plan. I really don't need what I think I need.

And Paul learned to be content in what God was doing in his life. He learned to trust that God knew what he was doing. And so he could say to us, Even right now, when you don't have what you think you need, you trust the Lord to supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

He'll provide what you need. He determines what you need. And he will supply it when you need it. And he determines when you need it.

[10 : 41] Now, do you trust the Lord like this? Sometimes. Do you trust the Lord like this most of the time?

Or do you argue with him? Do you get mad at God when he doesn't provide what you think you need or what you want when you want it? Or you wouldn't shake your fist and curse him.

But you're mad. You're discontent. You're disappointed in what God has or has not done. You may express it in some ways. You may get frustrated and say some things.

You may stop talking to God in prayer. You may close the Bible and forget it for a while. Or you may rebel. If God's not going to do this, forget it.

I'll do just what I want to do. We need to understand. Everyone experiences disappointments in life. No one has a life where everything is the way we want it to be.

[11 : 57] No one lives the kind of life where everything we think we need, we get when we want to get it. Life is just disappointing.

We all go through those times where we think and sometimes say, life is not fair. Heard that? Said that? Well, listen. Fair is where you go to ride rides and eat cotton candy.

Fair is where you go and do your little play stuff. Life is not fair. And that's one of the best lessons you who are graduating from high school and college need to learn if you hadn't already learned it.

And I don't know how you can live as long as you have and not have learned already. The life in this fallen, broken, sinful world is not fair as we would define fair.

Fair. You graduates, it will be helpful to you, high school, college, to accept that life is not fair as a fact of life right now and learn to deal with it.

[13 : 06] There's going to be times in your life that you're not going to get the job that you want and you think you deserve. There's times you don't get the promotion.

You're not going to get the money that you really believe should be yours. There may come a time when the boy or girl of your dreams doesn't feel the same way about you.

Or the boy or girl of your dreams turns out to be a nightmare. There are going to come these kinds of disappointments.

You know, you've already experienced a major disappointment. Not getting to finish your senior year in high school. Not getting to finish your senior year in college on campus.

Not to do the things that you always look forward to at Pickens High School, at Daniel, at Clemson, at Liberty. Like everybody else before you did.

[14 : 10] I'm sorry that it has worked out that way and I'm not making light of it. But get used to disappointments. Get used to things happening that the only way you can think of it is it's just not fair.

If you are a Christian, I'm not talking just to high school and college graduates now. If you're a Christian, I encourage you, always trust that the Lord knows what He's doing.

Even when you don't understand it. Even when you don't like it. Trust that God is in control of this world.

He created it. He manages it. And if you belong to Him, if you are His child, He loves you. He has a good plan for your life.

And nothing, no pandemic, no getting fired. No one can thwart, alter God's plan for you.

[15 : 22] God will make it happen His way and in His time. You can trust Him. One of the most helpful promises in all the Bible guarantees this.

It's in Romans 8, 28. And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love Him. Who've been called according to His purpose.

Let it sink in. The Good Shepherd of Psalm 23. He decides what we need. And then, He makes sure we get it.

He provides it. Look at this next point. The Lord graciously provides what we need. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. Look at those phrases separately.

He makes me lie down in green pastures. Philip Keller wrote a book. He was a pastor. He had lived, been a shepherd for eight years of his life. And so, he wrote a book on the 23rd Psalm from the perspective of someone who had worked with sheep as a shepherd.

[16 : 32] He says that sheep are restless animals and will not lie down until they have certain needs met. It's only then that they can be content and just be able to lie down in the green plush pasture where they can eat, they can rest, they can relax.

David's description of a sheep lying down in green pastures is a picture of trust and contentment. That's what the shepherd works to provide for his sheep.

Now, look at the next phrase. He leads me beside the still waters. Sheep, we're told, have many fears. They can't protect themselves. They're just defenseless animals.

They just have a lot of fears. But one of their fears is they're afraid of running water. And shepherds say that you can't make a sheep go up to flowing water, a river, a creek, a water with a current, and make it drink.

So, what shepherds do is they find a well. They have a dig a well. They find a pool of water somewhere. Or they'll even dam up a little spot on a river or creek where the water will be like in a pool.

[17 : 51] And that's when a sheep will feel safe and go on and drink. The idea here is David is describing the shepherd finding still water to picture a restful and peaceful scene.

Bring that to our minds. Now, let me ask you. Is your trust in the good shepherd enabling you to be content? Are you a contented person right now?

If we could somehow or another just pull back your soul, look into you, what would we find? Would we find a scene of rest or restlessness, stress?

Would we see a peaceful scene or a chaotic scene? Think about it. If your life is more stressful than restful and chaotic than peaceful, why is it?

Can you identify some reasons? Is it because of some of the things you're involved in? Some of the ways you're just wired maybe?

[19 : 06] It can't be that you enjoy it. It can't be that you enjoy just constant stress and chaos in your life, never being able to relax, never feeling content.

No one wants to live that way. Marsha Harnock wrote a poem that expresses the constant frustration and disappointment of a life that refuses the rest and peace that the good shepherd provides.

She called it Psalm 23 antithesis. Now look at the first sentence first. She says, the clock is my dictator.

I shall not rest. Now on that screen you see clock is underlined. You may need to replace that word clock with another word like job, money, power, prestige, pleasure, technology, social media, your children's activities.

You know what would best fit or how many things ought to be in that blank. Keep that in mind and now let's read the poem. The blank is my dictator.

[20 : 17] I shall not rest. It makes me lie down only when exhausted. It leads me to deep depression. It hounds my soul. It leads me in circles of frenzy for activity's sake.

Even though I run frantically from task to task, I will never get it all done. For my ideal is with me. Deadlines and my need for approval, they drive me.

They demand performance from me beyond the limits of my schedule. They anoint my head with migraines. My end basket overflows. Surely fatigue and time pressure shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the bonds of frustration forever.

Now I want you to think. Look at Psalm 23 or think about Psalm 23 as David wrote it there in the Bible. And then look at this poem that Marsha wrote.

Which best describes you normally? Which best describes your life most weeks?

[21 : 32] If that poem describes your life more often than not, aren't you tired of living that way? Do you want to change? Do you want your life to be different?

Well, if so, turn to the Lord now for help. You know, David says in this Psalm that the shepherd makes the sheep lie down in green pastures.

The shepherd leads the sheep beside the still waters. It doesn't just happen. You know, I have known people who refuse to just rest in the Lord.

Be content with Him and what He provides. I've known people who just, it just seems they cannot enjoy a close and peaceful relationship with the Lord.

And just, there's a lot of reasons. Some people like this, like that poem, they've ended up with breaking their health.

[22 : 47] Or they've ended up with a broken home. Some people like this have just lost all the joy in life. They're miserable people. And I'm talking about a lot of people, they have just about anything that money could buy, but it hasn't brought them satisfaction.

They can't find contentment. What they get, it doesn't do anything for them. Or they're looking always for the next thing. I want to ask you.

Are you more like David who could write, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want because He does all these things? Or are you more like that poem?

That something or someone has become a dictator and has a choke hold on you and is making life miserable for you.

You know, if you want to change, you can. The next phrase, the Lord lovingly restores us when we need it in verse 3.

[24 : 02] He restores my soul. But I want to emphasize something here. You got to want to change. I have known people all my life, and some of you do too, who are driven by their work.

It consumes them. They neglect their family. They don't do anything but work. And you can talk to them and they'll complain about it and they'll know this is not the way life ought to be.

It's not really the way I want it to be. But they won't change. They've got to get the next promotion. They've got to, it's their, it's an ego thing. Well, they've got to get the money that that position pays because they've got to have that lifestyle.

There are people stressed to the max. They've got more on them. They're nothing of a husband or a wife.

Everything outside the home is more important than everyone inside the home. They have children, but they're not really invested in the children.

[25 : 05] They don't really care about the children in terms of having a relationship, developing a relationship with them, living life with them. And they would say, I know I'm not the husband, I'm not the wife, I'm not the parent I ought to be.

I know some things need to change, but they just won't do it. It's like a fix. So, what I want you to understand is, you see that poem and things like that, you see how you're driven.

But if you say, yeah, that's me, and I'd like for it to be different. If you're not willing to make changes to make it different, something's wrong with you.

Something's wrong. And going back to the fact that the shepherd makes me lie down, the shepherd leads me, God has a way of making us do some things.

If that's what he's determined, he's going to make us do. Sometimes, he makes me lie down in green pastures. Actually, it works out in life.

[26 : 17] He makes me lie down in a hospital bed. Some of you will remember several years ago, Mike Rush, a member of our church, gave his testimony. He was sitting right there in the first service this morning.

He gave his testimony about there was a time in his life, he didn't care about God, he didn't care about God's people, and he threatened one pastor who came and talked to him more than one time. But Mike, out of his own words, he said, God broke my back in the woods cutting a tree.

And God put me on my back in a hospital to recover. God got my attention. God made me lie down in that hospital bed.

And that's where I met Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. If you're not a Christian and you know God's been pursuing you, I want to encourage you to give it up.

Admit your need. Humble yourself. Turn from your sin. Put your trust in Jesus now, today, while you can like this. And it could be that as a Christian, you know you're not living the life that God's called you to live.

[27 : 31] You're not being faithful to him. You're not developing your relationship with him. You're developing everything under the sun except a relationship with him. God has a way to make you lie down in green pastures.

Don't make him make you willingly, wholeheartedly. Trust that his way is the right way.

His way is the best way. Come to him now. Let him, as it says here, restore us.

Restore you. He restores my soul. David knew from personal experience there are times when a true believer can drift away from the Lord or even rebel against the Lord.

David was called in Scripture a man after God's own heart, and he sinned terribly against God. And God broke him over it. We know that from our own experience, don't we? Now, let's think.

[28 : 36] Sometimes we need restoring because, not because we've done evil things, not because we've really rebelled against God. But sometimes we just get tired, don't we? Sometimes we get tired physically, emotionally, even spiritually.

And without even realizing it or doing anything in particular, we just sort of wake up one day and realize, I'm nowhere near as close to God as I used to be, as I want to be.

Come to think about it, it's been a long time since I really and truly prayed and meant it. It felt like I had a conversation with God. It's been a long time since I actually read something like the 23rd Psalm and realized, God's speaking to me.

This is His Word. If that's you, it may be what you need to do is come back to the Lord this morning for refreshment, as well as restoration.

But if you've sinned against God, I mean flat out rebelled. And God's convicting you of that. You need to come back to Him in repentance.

[29 : 42] You need to be rescued, as well as restored. Danny Akin is the president of Southeastern Seminary. He writes about this verse and points out how important it is that we understand it's the Lord Himself who is working in us to restore us.

Look at how he says it. He says, It is the Lord who revives me when I need strength. It is the Lord who restores me and gets back on my feet and back into the fight when I stumble and fall.

It is the Lord who puts life in proper perspective and helps me see things with a Godward, eternal perspective. We don't do this for ourselves.

One of the dumbest things we can ever think is, I'm going to get right with God later. There's some things I've got to take care of right now, things I want to do right now. One day I'm going to buckle down and get serious about living a Christian life.

Or one day I am going to become a Christian. You don't decide that. I don't decide that. When the Lord pursues us, we need to hear Him.

[30 : 53] We need to obey Him then. He may not pursue us tomorrow. If you're in need of being restored, for whatever reason, I encourage you to turn to the Lord now and ask Him to help you.

If there is a sin problem that you know He's convicting you of, confess it to Him. Turn from it. Seek His forgiveness now. If it's a relationship problem, ask God to help you do your part to get restored to someone.

Make things right with someone. You know, a lot of the stress that we have in life comes from strained relationships, broken relationships, not right relationships. It gnaws at us.

And it could be that part of your problem is there's some issues you need to deal with with some people or with a person. You can't make them do anything, but you can go to them.

You can humble yourself. You can admit your problem. You can ask the question of, what do I need to do to make things like they should be between us? It could be that you're just plain tired, frustrated, because you're stressed to the max.

[32 : 12] It could be the most spiritual thing you could do is rest, sleep, take some time off, go on a vacation, have some fun.

But in order to do that, you may need to eliminate some things from your life that you don't have to do them. They're not doing anything to make your life better.

They're just dragging you down. You've got to change, make some priority adjustments. And everything's not a priority. Somebody in this room, you may need to go to the doctor and get a physical.

Your problem is not that you've walked away from the Lord or He's walked away from you. It may be that you just need some, there's some issues going on and you need to go talk to your doctor.

Or maybe you need to exercise or something like that. For some people, you think to yourself, there's just something wrong, missing in my life.

[33 : 21] I'm not close to the Lord. I'm not where I need to be, where I used to be. Talk to someone. Talk to a trusted Christian friend who knows you and will tell you the truth.

And if you are that friend that someone comes to, don't just tell them what they want to hear, what you think they want to hear. A part of being a real friend is speak the truth to someone.

If someone comes to you and they talk to you about some things going on in their life and you know what's going on and you know they're just a pitiful excuse for a husband, just say, you're a jerk of a husband to your wife.

If they're not the person they need to be with their children, tell them that. If they're doing everything under the sun except serving God through our church or their church, tell them.

Speak the truth in love, especially if they seek you out and are wanting help. But most importantly, most importantly, if you're far from the Lord this morning, if there's something going on in your life, talk to God about it.

[34 : 35] You know, we looked at the importance of prayer several weeks ago when we first were not able to meet and saw that one of the most helpful ways to deal with the stresses of life is to pray.

Paul says prayer is a key to replacing stress with peace. Look at it from Philippians 4. He says, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

You know, there may be several things that you need to do to better deal with the stress and uncertainties going on in your life. But the place to begin, the place to continue is to talk to God about it.

Talk to God. Look at His Word for wisdom, for guidance. Seek His way to deal with your issues. I want to encourage you.

Take the things that are stressing you out to God in prayer now. Ask Him to exchange His peace for your stress.

[35 : 47] That very well may be the first step to you getting a handle on whatever it is that's causing you stress in your life. Let's pray together.

Father, show us now how You want us to respond. Make it clear. Father, for some people in this room, they really need to settle it that You have the right to determine what we need.

Help them to do that. And then, Lord, help us all to know that whatever it is You've determined that we need, You will provide it.

You'll provide the right thing at the right time. You'll never let us, Your children, do without what You have decided we need. And then, Lord, if there are people in this room who truly need to experience Your restoration, Your renewal, Your salvation, make it clear to them right now.

Help them to turn to You in faith and in obedience. And let's just all, in an attitude of prayer, listen to the Lord and respond to Him in these next few minutes.

[37 : 11] Old Downloads. Only grace because He will continue to start to get in the nimmmt of prayer, A Impact Of Prayer in the sulfates.

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