

Peace in Dark Places

By Dave Butts

*“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, ESV).*

I was a 13-year-old paperboy, getting up at 3:30 a.m. every morning to fold and pack my papers and put them on my bicycle. Off into the dark by 4 a.m., I typically finished by 5-5:30 and could crawl back into bed for a short finish to the night's sleep. It would never be allowed today, and yet my loving parents never considered it to be dangerous. Different times.

I had a large area for my route and most of it was in our lower-middle-class neighborhood. A few streets though, led me through some pretty run-down areas. To put it bluntly, today I wouldn't want to drive through the area in my car, much less send a teenager through it at night on a bike. Most of the time, I was oblivious to the possibility of danger. But occasionally a few things happened to bring fear to the surface. Nothing major, more like “things that go bump in the night,” but nonetheless, it created some fear in this 13-year-old paperboy.

How do you handle fear in dark places? In our youth group at church, we had been learning a new chorus based on the 23rd Psalm. It was a simple melody, often sung as a round, and it stuck in my mind. God used it to bring peace to me on some of those dark mornings. I would ever so softly begin to sing that simple chorus as I pedaled my bike through the rough areas.

As I focused on the one who walked with me, even through dark places, I realized that I did not need to fear any evil. Peace replaced fear because of the awareness of the presence of Christ with me.

I almost didn't use the 23rd Psalm as a text today because it doesn't actually have the word “peace” in it. Yet the entire psalm is about peace. From green pastures and still waters to dwelling forever in his house, David gives us a picture of peace and the means of peace. The key to all of what the psalm promises is the presence of God. “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, because you are with me.”

For followers of Jesus, the indwelling Spirit is an absolute promise. He is with us! The trouble often is our lack of awareness of that fact in the moment of danger or fear. That's why it is so important to bring the power of the Word of God into our lives continually. Somehow as a 13-year-old paperboy, I stumbled

onto a truth that has served me well for many years. Whether it is singing a psalm or praying it without melody, the promises of his presence will bring peace.

Lord, I am so grateful that you have provided for me green pastures to lay down in and still water to walk alongside. Thank you for preparing a table before me, even in the presence of my enemies. How grateful to know that your goodness and mercy will be with me always and that you have provided for me an eternal home. Most of all Lord, I am grateful that your presence is continually with me. Keep me aware of that amazing fact. Thank you for the peace that comes from your presence.

Make it a point each day to affirm the Lord's presence in your life. You can use the phrase from Psalm 23 and simply say . . . "because you are with me."

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