

You Have a Seat at the Table
P. Erica Moyer / June 13, 2021

Welcome:

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Here is the incredible Invitation: Jesus is saying, I want to be your good shepherd. He is a personal involved God who wants to be your shepherd in your life.

Can we just stop and breathe in this reality? The Good shepherd, who also happens to be God, is offering to lead you through every moment of your life!

The key for us, then, is that we allow Jesus to shepherd us. See, all of us are shepherded, whether we realize it or not. Your shepherd might not be Jesus. But something is going to lead you.

2 Peter 2:19 says, "people are slaves to whatever has mastered them."

So maybe culture is going to lead you, the anthem of the world is going to lead you, or maybe even social media will lead you.

Some of you might say that no one is leading you, that you lead yourself, and if that is you then Congratulations you are your own shepherd. You are leading yourself. You will lead yourself to still waters and green pastures.

One thing is for sure, if you are your own shepherd, it is likely that you are in want.

Unfortunately, when people take the reins of their own lives, they end up paraphrasing Psalm 23 into something like this..

I am my own shepherd, and I'm a mess.

I don't have everything I need. That's for sure.

I wouldn't know still waters if it were staring right at me.

I haven't taken a rest in a green pasture for quite some time.

I don't walk along righteousness, but I know what fear and evil are.

I seek comfort wherever I can get it.

I can't stand my enemies, I want to hurt them.

My cup definitely overflows -I'm full of angst, consumed by anger, and sorrow and rage.

I'm so full I easily spill over. I'm packed so tight, it doesn't take much for me to explode.

I don't know what is going to follow me all the days of my life, but I can tell you this one thing: My soul, not so great.

When you allow Jesus to be your shepherd, He steps into this stressed or culture and becomes your replenishing guide. He leads you, watches over you, and gives you rest.

Jesus gives you a purpose. He shows you how to deal with your enemies so that they don't tear you apart inside. He'll give you goodness and love for today, for tomorrow, and for everyday for the rest of your life.

If you let Him lead you, you're not going to lack a thing. And your life will change for the better.

But there's somethin else: When you allow Jesus to lead you, it's not simply about Him giving you good things or doing helpful things for you. In Psalm 23 we the fires way the Good Shepherd is going to lead you will require him making you do something.

You see this mandate is foundational to how Jesus cares for you. He loves you enough to make you do something vital that you are not inclined to know how to do or choose to do on your own. Why is it good to be lead? Because He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Sure, you can lie down on rocky ground if you want to. You can lie down in the heat and dust. But Jesus says, Lie down in green pastures. Get some rest, Stop trying to manage all the outcomes. Take a break in the midst of the craziness of your life and acknowledge that I'm a Good Shepherd and I have your best interest at heart. By the way, while you're resting, go ahead and eat some green grass. Allow me to nourish your soul. That's how I operate. I love you and take care of you, and any directive that I give you will be for your own benefit.

You see when God refers to us as sheep, it's a reflection of how we are wired. It's not necessarily a compliment. Sheep need leadership. God's not saying that we are cute and cuddly, he is saying that it's far too easy to have the wool pulled over our eyes. We don't see with as much discernment as we should. We don't even rest when we need to. When it comes to making decisions about our well - being, we're not unberintellects.

It is also why God leads us to still waters. Sheep lack self awareness- if a sheep sees a roaring river, it thinks it is a good place to get his thirst quenched. Never mind that the sheep is covered in about 6 layers of high thread count duvets on him, but when he sees water he gets excited and just dunks its head right into the roaring river, which does what?, it gets sucked in.

Luckily we have a good shepherd who carries a crook, a long study stick with a hook at the end of it to save his sheep and pulls us back to safety, provided of course , we let him.

Sometimes we fight the Shepherd crook and dive straight into the river. We get caught in the rapids getting dragged under by the weight of our foolish choices.

We need a good shepherd to lead us and help us make better choices. I don't know about you, but I don't always make the right choices, I don't naturally lie in green pastures. But when I allow him to be the ruler of my life, I find that

Psalm 23:3 He will restore my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

It's amazing that the good shepherd walks us through the valley of the shadow of death. God is there in the hardships, He's here with us when a loved one gets sick, He's with us when we bury someone we care for. He's close when our heart is shattered. He's close when we lose something we really hoped for.

Maybe you're experiencing the death of a relationship or the loss of a dream. You tried to get into a program and it didn't work out, you were applying for a job and didn't get it. You were positive a certain person was interested in you but turns out they only want to be friends, or maybe you and your spouse wanted to conceive but it hasn't happened yet.

We can experience any number of losses in the valley of the shadow of death; loss is a part of our human story. We all walk through grief, disappointments and discouragement. That's why it is key that even though we walk through the valley, we will fear no evil, because God Almighty- your good shepherd is right there in the midst of the difficulty with you.

Hear this, the message isn't that God is going to help you through it, the message is that God is there with you. In each storm that might come your way.

Jesus promises us peace, victory and freedom will come in the midst of problems, pains and loss, that's how we develop and "even though" kind of faith.

We need to have "Even though", kind of faith.....

- Even though, my marriage is in the toilet
- Even though, my life has not turned out the way I thought it would

- Even though I was just laid off from my job and don't know how I am going to pay my rent and feed my children.
- Even though, You fill in the blank

Even though I walk through the darkest valley

- Even though, we have lost someone in your life
- Even though we are not able to get pregnant
- Event though you just received a health diagnosis
- Even though God is with us every step of the way. Life is hard and hard things will come to us. But the reality is that we don't have to walk through those things alone. Freedom comes from being the storm and He is with us.

Psalm 23:4 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.

That is what you get when you trade whatever shepherd you got going in your life for Jesus leading your life.

In Verse 5 of Psalms, it says

Psalms 23: 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

I personally would have loved for this part to have said “ You prepare a table before me in YOUR presence, as opposed to the presence of my enemies.

I would much rather have a table prepared safely in an enclosed area with a penthouse high rise looking over a gorgeous sunset with zero views of my enemies, because why would I want them to ruin the blessing right?

I have God, an exquisite meal with all my favorite things and thats all a girl can ask for right?

But God says no, I am not going to sequester you or extract you from a broken world, but in the middle of it, whether it's circumstance, arrows coming your way, strife within your family, or marriages, whether it is finances or loss of job or loved one, a cancer diagnosis, he is saying I am going to prepare a table for you right in the middle of it.

It's a table for two. This table is in the presence of your enemies.

The specifics will be different for each one of us because after all the table is prepared with you in mind.

And for those of you who like to host, you know it is personal when you prepare your home and the food and table to where they will sit. Everything is picked out just right, it is on purpose. Everything brought out is with intention. Even if it's not elaborate, the invitation sent out by you to those you love and who you will receive in your home is intimate. It's personal.

We call this A meal with the Almighty.

God invites us to dine with Him and the invitation comes at a high price: Jesus. Redemption is completed when rebels are now in fellowship with God, enjoying God's feast.

We are all welcomed to the table of God's salvation, but the table described in psalms 23:5 is a table for two, a table of fellowship and intimacy.

So you stand at one end of the table and God is at the other end, and you are just in awe of the feast that is before you. You're a moment away from diving in but suddenly - while you and the Good Shepherd are still standing behind your chairs- you notice you're not alone.

Nobody is at the table except you, the good shepherd, but encircling you is a throng of people. You see them now. They're part of what makes this table so unique because your enemies are still in view.

The folks surrounding the table aren't happy you're there. They're scowling. Calling you names. Criticizing you, saying things about you that aren't true.

They're out to undermine your efforts. They're filled with hate. Some want to stab you in the back.

The folks encircling you are representative of your troubles. Your problems, Your stressors. You're surrounded by pressure, anxiety, addiction, divorce, depression, family collapse, all sorts of pain, and then the unthinkable happens. Right in the middle of the all the strife, The God of heaven calls you by name and says " Please, sit down"

If we are not careful,we can get so busy doing really important things in our lives, and sometimes we stay busy and do it in his name - but we have to be sure that we are not using this table he's prepared for us as fast food drive by because we are too busy to fully accept the invitation he sets before us.

Or things could go differently, you and the good shepherd could both sit down. Are you thirsty? He asks, pourin you a glass of water.. Then you dig in.

And this is the picture of "even though faith" Even though i am surrounded by my enemies God has prepared a table for me and I will sit with him.

This meal is the core of your intimate relationship with God Almighty. He doesn't promise to eliminate the conflict. He hasn't removed the reality of your problems but he has promised to prepare a table for you in the presence of your enemies.

Keep in mind that in spite of all the delicious food you're diving into, the true importance of this table is not what's on the table, it's who's at the table.

It could be easy for us to forget or not fully understand who our dinner companion truly is.

1 Timothy 1:17 God is described as " the King of all the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God.

Job compares him to the vastness of space, how earth is suspended as if over nothing, how God wraps up water in His cloud and can cover the face of the full moon. God makes out the horizon and causes pillars of heaven to quake. He can churn up the sea or blow up the skies so they become fair. "And these are but the outer fringe of his works. How faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power?"

THAT WHO IS AT YOUR TABLE!!

So now, you're at the table, and we mentioned before someone else is there. Your great enemy wants a seat at the table, he is working hard to make it happen. He knows he is not invited but he also knows he's not invited BUT he also knows that if he can win the battle of your mind, he can destroy you.

The enemy only needs the tiniest crack. A sliver of opportunity. The smallest window of doubt or uncertainty. Just like that, the Devil is sitting at your table beginning to win the battle for your mind.

So how will I know if the enemy is at my table?

1. You're entertaining the idea that it's better at another table.

John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."

So if there is a voice telling you that it is better at another table, then you know the enemy is at your table. It is the voice that says jump ship, leave your spouse for another, or don't take any responsibility. The enemy has come to steal and kill what you have.

2. You find yourself thinking you are not going to make it.

Think about it, What is God saying to you at the table... Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,

The key word is through - God is not trying to paint the picture that you and I will have no enemies, he is saying there will be enemies, but He is also saying He is with us, and we will get through this with Him.

When the enemy is at your table he will tell you - well how do you know?

- That you are not going to make it, that you will not get through this season, this difficulty and circumstance is what will take out.

How many times do we find ourselves in conversations with other people and they ask how we are doing and our response is, "Not Good, I don't think I am going to make it."

And when I say "I don't think I am going to make it, where am I getting it from? I'm not getting it from my Shepherd that just told me "we are going through the valley"

He didn't say He was taking me to the Valley of the Shadow of Death but Through the valley of the shadow of death.

3. You are hearing you are not good enough.

You know, It's not the obvious stuff that gets us tripped up, it's the less subtle things that start to take root in our hearts and in our minds. It's those small things that we allow in our minds, and in our souls.

And this is what his thought sounds like this " YOU ARE NOT GOOD ENOUGH"

How many of you look at the people around you and think man, they really have it together, It looks like they really have big things going on

But how many times do we enter into worship and into the House of God as a people who have been called by God and set apart for a reason and a purpose only to settle into our seats and full heartedly believe that

- we are not good enough
- don't have the right background
- don't have the right education
- We are not lovable or valuable

And where did that come from? Well it came from the enemy having a seat at your table.

John 10:11, it says “I am the good shepherd.” So if God is the good shepherd then we know there is a bad shepherd and if you let him he will come in to steal, kill and destroy.

4. You are starting to believe that everyone is against you.

Now listen, it could be true that you may have experienced someone talking about you, or betrayed you, or threw you under the bus, but it's not very likely that everyone is against you.

But what the enemy does is that he tries to convince you to live with closed fists, and a closed heart, and convinces you to get what you need and want then hoard it for yourself and no one else.

That mentally, makes us protect ourselves, to build walls around us, we live with the “im gonna get you before you get me” mentality.

And that is the opposite of what God wants for us. Jesus died for us so that we can live without borders and walls around our heart. He died so that we can have a life of abundance at the table with the Almighty.

He wants us to come to the table so that you know that you are loved, that you are valued, He wants you to come to the table to be reminded that you are alone and that you are on purpose.

He wants you to come to the table so if there are people against you, you can flip the script.... Okay, well bless you, have a great day!

Not out of a place of believing that people are constantly against you, because then we let the enemy in our head and in our thoughts

Instead we live from the overflow that we get from God. Here, this isn't the only charcuterie I will ever have, I serve a God of abundance - so I'm gonna share, not hoard it, and pass it around, because **Psalms 23:5 says “ You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

Even the people that hate you, you will be able to operate with open hands because there is so much at your table but more than that, it's about who is at the table with you.

And we can't stop him from doing it, he's done it in my story, done it in your story so we can expect him to prowl around, but we can't sit down at the table with the enemy.

This is my table, with my King and I am taking authority over my table. And I am not going to give the enemy a seat at my table. So what do you do? You take back your freedom

You see we have come to accept the enemy sitting at our table as normal. We give him permission to anytime we say stuff like

- Oh that's just the way it is and there's nothing i can do about it
- Anxiety is just part of the equation
- Life is just so chaotic

In the same way,we accept the false narrative about our lives that we aren't worth much to God Or anyone else for that matter. We think people don't get us. Or they don't value us, or they are flat out against us.

Or we flip to the other side - we think we deserve more, so we allow envy and greed, and comparison to cannibalize our God - given identity. We scroll our way through social media determined to get what other people have - or better yet to get more.

More stuff, more friends,more layers of protection, More likes. Or maybe another table. And before we know it , we start to talk like the enemy and think the thoughts he wants he wants to dwell on.
And that's just the way it is right?

NO! Wrong! Allowing the enemy to have a say in our lives should not be normal. In Jesus' name, we can refuse him and in all these ways, we don't need to accept them. He leads us to sins that are harming us and choking the life out of this generation, but they don't have a say in our lives.

Romans 8:10-12 says that the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives inside of us. The same resurrection power is available to us.

Jesus Christ has broken the power of sin, and God's invitation to us is to embrace a new mindset and a new way of living.

In Jesus' name we are to think of ourselves as dead to the power of sin.

In Jesus name we don't have to let the voice of the enemy dictate our lives.

In Jesus name we don't have to give into sinful desires, we can win the battle if our minds. Thank you Jesus that we are free. We are alive.

How do you refuse the enemy a seat at your table?

1. You must start from a place you identity.

Remind yourself that Jesus has already won your struggle and because you are joined with him, whatever He has won, you have won also. You are in Christ and Christ is in you. Since Christ has victory, you have access to that victory right too, right now.

2. Be proactive.

I'm gonna lock eyes on my King- Because everything will fall apart if I am locking eyes on the enemy, so instead, I will Lock eyes with the King and lock on to what he says is true about my life. I'm gonna take him at His word, because He said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

So, once again, it's not about what's on the table, it's about who's at the table. He is the bread of life and with him I will have everything.

3. Take captive of your thoughts

Perhaps the enemy has convinced you that you cannot move past your current situation. You've given into fear and have convinced yourself you have no value. Your mind is clouded because the enemy has a seat at your table.

He goes after our thought life because he knows that he can take control of your life in that way. So he waits. He is patient. He plants seeds and he waits.

But we must be victorious against the enemy's tactics by examining the seeds that have been scattered in your mind and not let them take root. It's

about pulling up and throwing away the thoughts that do not coincide with the heart of God. It's about changing the way you think.

4. The power of prayer

You see the enemy has already influenced your mind by scattering the seeds of deceit. Before the truth can set you free, you need to see the lies that are holding you hostage. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you which lies you are believing and ask him to be specific.

Is it...

- I'll never change
- I'm worth much
- The Gospel doesn't really work
- No one loves me
- No one believes in me
- I deserve to be bitter
- I deserve to be full of rage
- I am a failure
- I am my addiction
- I will always be like this

None of those thoughts have come from God. Those are not the words of the Good Shepherd. He doesn't prompt you to worry, he doesn't provoke fear, He provides clarity not chaos. He provides green pastures, not dry wastelands.

If any of those things are in your life - fear, worry, temptation, feelings of worthlessness, feelings of confusion, then guess what, the enemy has been at your table. He's shown up and dropped a seed in your thoughts and if those thoughts go unchecked, those thoughts will eventually take root and settle in your heart.

Maybe you're saying, so what if I think those thoughts, no one sees them. They are harmless. No. All the thoughts that we entertain in our mind get played out. Either your attitudes will reflect those deceptive thoughts or our behaviours will.

You have the power through Jesus Christ to take authority over who sits at your table- over who influences your thinking. You can take back your freedom and control your thoughts and emotions. You don't need to be trapped by fear, despair, or rage. Your mind doesn't have to be stressed. You don't need to wrestle anymore with harmful thoughts. You are invited to an intimate relationship with the Almighty. The table He's prepared for you is one of peace, clarity, and abundance. You don't have to give the enemy a seat at your table.

The devil wants nothing more than to crush you. He wants to steal from you everything you value. He wants to kill everything in your life that is good. Ultimately, he wants to destroy you. If he can claim the victory over your mind, then he can eventually claim the victory over your life.

But this message of Psalm 23 is that the Good Shepherd prepares a table for you. Its a table for two, and the enemy is not invited to sit. You don't have to listen to the voices of fear, rage, lust, insecurity, anxiety, despair, temptation, or defeat. He is in the battle with you.

Invitation:

Let's bow our heads.

When you allow Jesus to be your shepherd, He steps into this stressed or culture and becomes your replenishing guide. He leads you, watches over you, and gives you rest.

Jesus gives you a purpose. He shows you how to deal with your enemies so that they don't tear you apart inside. He'll give you goodness and love for today, for tomorrow, and for everyday for the rest of your life. Jesus will even give you an eternity with Him in paradise.

All of that is found in the promise of Psalm 23. If you haven't allowed Jesus to lead your life, why not start today?