



STORM SHELTER

GOD'S EMBRACE IN THE PSALMS



PHILIP NATION

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Storms are coming. Find shelter.

Hardly a day goes by that I don't check the weather app on my phone. Why? Because I want to know what I might face today. I want to be prepared for sunshine or rain, powdery snow or ice on the roads, clear skies or a tornado.

I wish I had an app that would give me a different kind of forecast. I need an app that will give me the forecast for the real storms of my life—the storms in relationships, temptations, trouble at work, and the general chaos of the daily grind. Unfortunately, no such app exists. Instead, we typically put one foot in front of the other and slog through each day as it comes.

But we don't have to live that way.

We know two things for sure about the storms of life:

1. Storms are going to happen.
2. We're never alone, even when life assaults us with all of its brutality.

I'm glad you're taking this journey with me as we study a few psalms—ancient worship songs—to learn where God is and what God is doing in the middle of our storms. At times we may feel like asking, "Where is God when life is hard?" There are important answers to that question, as the psalms will help us see. But this study offers more than just information about God. *Storm Shelter* will also help you answer the question, "Where do I go when life gets tough?"

Let's learn to live in the middle of the ancient lyrics, these wonderful psalms. Let's encounter the truth that God does show up personally in our lives, no matter what storm comes our way. He is our storm shelter.



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SESSION 1

THE SHELTER OF GOD'S PRESENCE



What is the biggest storm you've ever encountered?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLpresence

THE POINT

God is with me no matter what I'm facing.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

I knew what I wanted to say, but my mouth wouldn't cooperate. I thought: *Why am I so tongue-tied? I must be tired.* But after trying again to answer my wife's question, I found I was physically speechless. After a few frantic moments, the paramedics were called. It was all a blur from there. Sirens. Wheeling through the emergency room. Getting a CAT scan of my brain.

The diagnosis was a transient ischemic attack (TIA), often called a "mini-stroke." There's nothing quite like being 41 years old and hearing a vascular neurologist say: "You really dodged a bullet. You should have died."

We've all experienced the pain of an unexpected crisis. When it happens, we scramble for shelter. We need something to cover us in the midst of the storm. The good news is that no matter what you're facing, God is present. He doesn't offer some sterile room as a shelter during your storms. *He* is the shelter. His presence with us is the only thing that can make sense of this life.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Psalm 23:1-6 (HCSB)

- 1** The LORD is my shepherd; there is nothing I lack.
- 2** He lets me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.
- 3** He renews my life; He leads me along the right paths for His name's sake.
- 4** Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.
- 5** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
- 6** Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live.

Key Words

Anoint (v. 5)—The Hebrew term denotes the pouring of perfumed oil on a guest's head (Luke 7:46). Psalm 23:5 describes God honoring David as His special guest.



Psalm 23:1-3

Psalm 23 has been a Christian favorite for centuries, but don't let your familiarity with these verses allow you to miss the vital truths they communicate. Specifically, David reminds us of three things God does for us as our Shepherd:

- 1. He guides us.** Sheep aren't smart. They often wander aimlessly into one problem after another. That's why a shepherd's staff has a hook on one end—to haul sheep out of holes and ravines when they fall in. Likewise, God desires to help you navigate the tough places of life. When we're pulled off course or wander away, His presence guides us back onto "the right paths." The Shepherd isn't just interested in our rescue, but also our restoration.
- 2. He provides for us.** A shepherd does more than just keep the sheep out of trouble; he also provides for their needs. God does the same for us. Because He is such a good Shepherd, we will lack nothing. In the midst of life's needs, sorrows, and grief, God provides perfectly for us.
- 3. He renews us.** The psalm refers to green pastures (a place of rest) and still waters (a source of refreshment). It's only through God's presence in our lives that we can reach and enjoy these places of refreshment.

God is our Shepherd, which means we must submit to His care. When we try to take control, we only get ourselves deeper into trouble. It's like those Chinese finger traps—when you put your fingers in either end, any attempt to pull them out only causes the trap to tighten its grip. Similarly, when we struggle through life's difficulties in our own strength, we only tighten the grip that pain has on us.

God's presence brings about freedom, joy, and release from our struggle. When we decide to stop struggling and start trusting, we experience the relief and renewal we need.

**What's your
initial reaction to
these verses?**

QUESTION #2

GREEN PASTURES

Select the image that best represents your ideal situation for rest and refreshment.



How can you intentionally seek God's presence during times of rest and refreshment?

"The right way to approach God is to stretch out our hands and ask of One who we know has the heart of a Father!"

—DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

What sometimes keeps us from recognizing God's presence?

QUESTION #3

Psalm 23:4-5

As we move deeper into Psalm 23, we see that God protects us as our Shepherd. Because we know our weaknesses, it's easy to imagine ourselves as defenseless sheep wandering alone at midnight. We can't see the predators lurking in the shadows, but we sense their presence. We feel helpless and hopeless.

It's in these circumstances we need to remember the reality of God's protection. The shepherd's rod can be used to defend the sheep—and even as an offensive weapon. The staff can also be used to protect from harm. These images remind us that God is strong enough to protect us from any storm.

In addition to protecting us, God's presence gives us comfort. As the Scriptures say: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8:31). God Himself is the one who uses His power on our behalf when we face darkness and the predatory nature of this world.

Finally, God's presence brings about courage. Consider the dark valleys of life you must pass through. In many circumstances, there's really very little you can do to make things better. It's through prayer—through connecting with the presence of God in our lives—that we gain our courage.

- ▶ When the diagnosis comes, all you can do is take the medicine. And pray.
- ▶ When the company is headed toward a financial downturn, all you can do is work hard. And pray.
- ▶ When a relationship is on the verge of collapse, all you can do is love deeply. And pray.

The imagery in verse 5 points to celebration. Specifically, the enemy is forced to watch as we celebrate. A huge banquet table is set before us. It's a time to feast and be glad because God is with us. We are the honored guests, and God has set us apart unto Himself. When we dine with the King, our cup will overflow with more of God's abundance than we can ever consume.

How has God's presence in your life made you braver than you would be otherwise?

QUESTION #4

Psalm 23:6

Psalm 23 is comforting because of what it tells us about God and what He will do on our behalf. For many people, though, the real question isn't, "What will God do for me?" The real question is, "Will God love me?" Most of us are looking for love and acceptance.

The wonderful answer to that question is yes. God does love us! In many ways, that's the core message of Psalm 23.

David taught us through his psalm that God's goodness and faithful love will come after us—that they will be there for the rest of our lives. He was confident that God's "goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life."

- ▶ When we feel like temptation is pursuing us, God is more determined to win our hearts.
- ▶ When sorrows seem to be around every corner, the Lord is present to wipe our tears and win our hearts.
- ▶ When life is just plain hard and we don't know if we can overcome the pain, the Shepherd is present to guide us toward His love.

As long as you have breath in your lungs and a beating heart, you have the opportunity to embrace the love that longs to embrace you. God has a great desire for you: that you will live with Him. That's why He pursues you. **God desires to become your Shepherd and protect you in the deep, dark valleys of life.**

It's by His presence that you gain a sense of hope and courage. It's by His goodness that you dine at the King's table. Forever.



What does it mean to you that God's goodness and love pursue you?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

Consider the following suggestions for living in the reality of God's presence and care:

- ▶ **Evaluate.** Identify circumstances in your life where you need protection, comfort, or care. Pray that God will help you be more sensitive to His presence in those situations.
- ▶ **Memorize.** Commit Psalm 23 to memory as an internal reminder of God's presence in your life.
- ▶ **Share.** Create printed cards or sheets with the words of Psalm 23. Share these with people who need the encouragement and support of God's presence.



My health problems were temporary. After treatment, I'm back to my normal self. But those experiences helped me take shelter in the presence of God. You can do the same. In the unexpected moments of life, let God's loving presence be your shelter.

Well-Placed Confidence



"I tell you, Peter," He said, "the rooster will not crow today until you deny three times that you know Me!" (Luke 22:34).

The words must have hung in the air, pointed and powerful. The disciples had just been arguing about who was to be the greatest in Jesus' kingdom. With Peter in the middle of the fray, Jesus' words cut to the heart.

To continue reading "Well-Placed Confidence" from *HomeLife* magazine, visit BibleStudiesforLife.com/articles.



My group's prayer requests

A series of 15 horizontal dotted lines for writing.

My thoughts