



It is a common belief that these words from Psalm 23 are the most familiar and well known words of scripture. David's psalms speak of God's great compassion and grace. They are often read in those hours we find ourselves most in need of God. In situations and circumstances beyond their control, people of faith hold these words near as they seek to put their trust in God.

How does the 23rd Psalm describe the relationship that we, the sheep, have with God, our shepherd? What parts of that description do you find most meaningful to you?

In our reading yesterday, we noted the fact that "the amount of space in our hearts that is inhabited by fear limits the amount that can be occupied by love." What does Psalm 23 teach us about the love that we find in our relationship with God?

GPS for Families

GrowPrayStudy.org/family

Learning self-control is not easy for any of us. Developmentally, one of the most important tasks of growing up is learning self-regulation. As infants and toddlers, children are completely dependent on adults for all of their needs and decisions. As they grow, it is our job to help them develop their own internal system for deciding what choices to make in every situation.

Show your child one of their favorite treats, like a cupcake or brownie or ice cream. Put it within their reach, but tell them they cannot have it. Tell them if they can resist the temptation to eat it, their reward will be great. Say a prayer with them asking for self-control, and encourage them that they can do it. Distract them for a while with a book or game. After an appropriate amount of time, tell the child they have done such a good job resisting the temptation that they have earned an even better reward. Allow them to have the treat, and give them a handmade coupon for another treat of their choice later in the week.

God rewards our self-control. And, we gain it through spending time with him and through practice. Ask your child if praying and your encouragement helped him or her to feel better about resisting the temptation. As we spend time talking to God, reading his word, asking for help from others, God helps us get stronger.

MESSAGE "Losing Control and Significance"

SCRIPTURE Matthew 5:3-10

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"Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus; though He was God, He did not consider being God something to take advantage of . . ." (from Philippians 2:5-7)

Control issues are a spiritual problem with a spiritual cure. What did Jesus say about significance?

- Downcast — Seek God and God's kingdom.
- Grieving — God's joy will come.
- Humble — Inherit all that matters.
- Hungry for good — You will be filled.
- Give mercy — Get mercy.
- Pure hearts — See God more clearly.
- Make peace — Experience life as a child of God.
- Trouble — You have arrived.

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:6)

1. Sincere humility before God extends to our relationships.
2. Significance, because God loves us and we love God, must be enough.
3. Accepting grace and servicing others is the cure for what ails us.

PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen.

In the fifth chapter of Galatians, Paul offers a contrast between what he calls “the acts of the sinful nature” and what he describes beginning in verse 22 as “the fruit of the Spirit.” In verse 17 of this same chapter, he writes, “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature.”

The word control appears in the list of “fruit” cultivated by God’s spirit, but Paul makes an important distinction. It is an ability to control oneself rather than other people or circumstances that surround each individual. How might our increased ability to control ourselves help us deal with the “out of control” world we live in?

In what way might our desire to control others be seen as an “act of the sinful nature” which is actually “contrary to the Spirit”?

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Most scholars believe that the poetic words found in verses 6-11 of the second chapter of Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi come from one of the earliest hymns of the Christian faith. In that form, these words would have served as a powerful affirmation of Christ’s lordship, as well as a striking reminder of how Jesus emptied himself of his divine power and authority in order to offer us the gift of salvation. Paul implores us to follow the same path, and in doing so, to adopt the attitude of Jesus.

The picture of Jesus that is portrayed in these verses is of someone releasing control in order to serve. What does the act of releasing control reveal to us about the “attitude of Christ” that we are encouraged to adopt ourselves?

What connection do you see between humbling yourself and releasing control?

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Our reading for today comes from one of the more well-known passages of the Bible. The 13th chapter of I Corinthians verbalizes what Paul earlier describes as one of the “greater gifts,” the gift of love. One writer puts it this way, “The beauty of Christianity is in learning to love.” In these verses, Paul illustrates what it looks like to love like Jesus loved.

In our Monday reading, we looked at the contrast that Paul makes between the “acts of the sinful nature” and the “fruit of the Spirit.” Love is listed as one of those fruit. In what way does Paul define love for us here? What challenge do these words offer to our need to sometimes control others or outcomes?

If we understand love according to this definition, how might our tendency to control actually degrade our ability to love?

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In I John 4, we find these words, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.” You might think of it this way. There is a limited amount of space in our hearts. The amount that is inhabited by fear limits the amount that can be occupied by love. Our need for control is a by-product of that fear.

Feelings of isolation and separation from God stir up our anxiety and our fear. Paul seeks to undermine that thinking by affirming that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Take a moment to consider the question, “What fears do I have in my life right now?” In a moment of prayer today, ask God to help you see how fear may be fueling your desire for control.

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