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Still Waters #1 - What frantic living says about our Shepherd - 11.15.9

Psalm 23 - A Psalm of David. (NKJV)

- ¹ The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.**
- ² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.**
- ³ He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.**
- ⁴ Yea, 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.**
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.**
- ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.**

The LORD is my shepherd...Why do sheep need a shepherd? I want to say "because they're dumb", and that may be true, but it isn't their fault. Sheep have been highly domesticated, bred for their meat and wool and not for their brains, and domesticated sheep cannot survive in the wild. Now I don't want to draw too many parallels between them and us, but when God calls us sheep, he isn't paying us a compliment.

Sheep live by not the herd mentality but the flock mentality. "I don't know where those guys are going, but I'd better go with them or I may miss out!" When people blindly follow the crowd, we call them sheep. When you look around and everyone is driving a similar car or building the same house, you scoff about sheep, or even sheep-ple. I hear that kids that want to be different (Goths, etc.) wouldn't be caught dead with an iPod. They all buy a Zune. We may be sheep but we don't want people calling us that.

Because sheep act like sheep, they need a shepherd, and **Psalm 23** isn't really about sheep at all, but rather The Shepherd. What does a shepherd provide?

1. Food - **"I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters."**
2. Safety - Wolves, human thieves and other predators want part of the flock for themselves. The shepherd won't allow that. **"Yea, 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..."**
3. Direction - Sheep don't have the good judgment to find the food and the safety. Thankfully for them, it isn't their responsibility. The shepherd leads the way. It's by his wisdom that we see the way through the valley of the shadow of death and along the paths of righteousness.

With all that in mind, what is the tone of **Psalm 23** as a result? Is it a pep-talk, a get-the-team-fired-up kind of Psalm that the local minister might read to the basketball team in *Hoosiers* before the state championship? No.

Is it a lament, a woe is me kind of verse that you might use to give words to your own sorrow? No. Is it the kind of Psalm that you might use when you want to call down curses on your enemies? Actually there are such Psalms, but this isn't one of them.

No, the tone of **Psalm 23** is comfort, peace, rest, nourishment, security. It's a hot bath at the end of the day, or a nap after Thanksgiving Dinner. Because the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. I will fear no evil. I know that goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and even after that, after I die, things will be OK and better than OK because I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

All of that leads up to this question: If your life and my life is so hectic and busy and out-of-control so that we lack peace and we can't rest and we live in fear of what will happen if we jump off the treadmill, what does that say about our shepherd?

It's not really a fair question because we are not really sheep and we can't be shepherded against our will, and if we lack peace and live with a brutal busyness, maybe people shouldn't blame the shepherd.

But they do.

And that's the point of this first sermon in this series called *Still Waters*. A crazy busy life isn't just bad for us. It's a poor witness. After all, many people are out-of-control. If we are just like them, why would they look to our Shepherd for answers?

I bring this up today...just before we jump into the Christmas rush (a diabolical pairing of words)...hoping that maybe we can choose to live differently at a time of year when people think about and talk about Jesus.

There's a book from 2007 called *Crazy-Busy: Overstretched, Overbooked and About to Snap*. It's by Edward Hallowell, a medical doctor who has worked with ADD patients and now applies that knowledge to an ADD culture. I looked at the sample on Amazon and I was amused at the title of the first chapter, The Agony of a Rotary Phone (BTW, how many here have never used one? Does anyone use one now?) Hallowell tells about going to a cottage for a family vacation where the only phone was an old rotary. He got up one morning and had to use it, and he found himself getting enraged about how long it took to wait for each number to roll around! It wasn't an emergency and he didn't have anywhere else to be, but it mad him SO mad to know that he could punch in the whole number on his cell in the time it took to dial one digit!

I haven't read the book and I don't think I'd recommend it based on the summary from Publisher's Weekly: *"Hallowell...turns what he has learned treating Attention Deficit Disorder into advice on how to cope with rampant busyness, 'the problem and the opportunity' of modern life. He explains how to turn 'the rush, the gush, the worry, and the blather (which also includes clutter)' into allies, so that one can have the things one wants with the speed, volume and emotional energy of the crazy-busy lifestyle."* I don't think having it both ways is the answer. I do think that he's put his finger on a real problem, especially with the rotary phone. It would drive me batty to use it too, even when I'm not in a rush, because I'm used to doing most things as fast as they can possibly be done. The fact is, I DO find myself in a hurry too often, and the reason is usually spiritual.

Before I get into that, let me say that most people don't think of being crazy-busy as a spiritual issue. Many people see it as simply inevitable, something that is forced upon them. And many more take a certain pride in announcing to the world how busy they are. I know people who, for decades, have been constantly telling everyone how rushed, how flat-out they are, how crazy this particular week is but how next week will be better, maybe...until they remember all the junk they committed themselves to next week. Others don't take pride in it but they see it as inevitable. "What can I do about it? The world has changed. This isn't Mayberry. We've got things to do".

I think it's deeper than that, and I invite you to look deeply at what drives you to keep running. I realize that there are people who work two jobs to keep just above the poverty line; and people who have the care of a disabled parent on their hands; and people who have a house full of kids, or maybe just one kid who is a real handful! Surprisingly, people who have those circumstances on their shoulders, even though they work hard, aren't necessarily busy in the worst sense of the word. They don't necessarily rush around, and their lives aren't necessarily complicated by a dozen different

masters. Some very hard-working people with heavy responsibilities know the Shepherd, and they drink from still waters and lie down in green pastures.

Being crazy-busy isn't inevitable. It's a choice, and very often it's a bad one, made without thinking, a pledge of loyalty to other shepherds!

In **John 10**, Jesus talked about himself as our shepherd and he warned about other shepherds: ¹ **"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. ³ The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out...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.**

Two things: One, there are other shepherds, other masters for us to follow who come into our pastures by illegitimate ways to kill, steal and destroy...and two, the result of following Jesus is abundant life.

How's that going?

Other shepherds: Jesus is talking about false teachers, false prophets, wolves in cheap clothing :) but I'm applying it to false ideas and dangerous cultural values for which we might not be able to make a direct link to one false teacher.

What after all drives us to crazy busyness? Here are some of the culprits:

- Debt - I need more work, more overtime and we both need it because we owe...big time. Do you think debt is a good and gentle shepherd? But it is a master, and once you give yourself to it, you are obliged to follow it.
- Materialism. Affluenza. The lust for bright and shiny objects, preferably made by Apple. We celebrate the birth of Christ by fanning this disease into flame. Do you think that sounds like a shepherd who jumped in over the wall? Materialism feeds debt which causes us to pay twice for things and makes us have to work harder or more than is healthy to pay the bills.
- Fear. Of missing out. Of being bored. Or boring. Or of giving your kids a substandard upbringing. I'm all for kids' sports, dance, cheerleading, music. But when these things go beyond a reasonable limit and you're eating in your car six nights a week, you should stop and wonder if you're doing it to push back some fear of being a rotten parent, some empty place that really only one True Shepherd can fill.

These are the same shepherds that the rest of the world is following. People already know about these shepherds. They don't need us to demonstrate how they work. A few people are quite satisfied following these other shepherds who have jumped over the wall, and a great many are frustrated with chasing after them, never arriving at still waters and green pastures and a restored soul. So if we say that we follow Jesus, but our lives

are just as hectic, just as out-of-control. just as frantic as theirs except that we have church obligations to run to along with everyone else...that doesn't speak well of our shepherd. It isn't fair to him, but that's how it is.

Jesus spoke directly about this difference of life he intended between the people who follow other shepherds and those who follow him. What's the difference? If we were to talk about the code of life that we insist upon for ourselves, the things for which we hold each other accountable, you know the things we'd name. We'd say: "A Christian behaves differently from the world. We behave different sexually. And we don't get drunk or high and we don't abuse other people." All good. But how often do we hold each other accountable for this standard that Jesus gave us?

Matthew 6:31-33 - ³¹So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³²For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

We take that as a word of comfort, and it is. It's also a command from a loving shepherd to which we are accountable. How are Christians different? They don't run after all these material needs. They follow a trustworthy shepherd and they don't worry about whether he can be counted on to provide.

I'm going to talk about this more next week. For now, what are we going to do about it?

Everyone I know who has peace in the center of their lives...everyone I have ever known who has it...spends regular time in quiet with the Lord. It isn't always an hour a day. It IS always more than 30 seconds.

Here's how any of us can get started with that. Take some time near the start of the day - maybe sitting on the couch, maybe outside walking in the beautiful fall weather - and pray through the **23rd Psalm** (take this insert with you). And between the verses, be quiet and let God direct your thoughts as he will.

Let's try it now. I'll read the verse or section. I'll say the prayer. Then I'll be quiet and we'll let God direct our thoughts.

**¹ The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.**

Lord, there ARE things I am concerned about, but I now put my trust in this word of yours that says I shall not be in want. You provide my needs and I will thank you and be content.

**² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.**

³ He restores my soul;

You see my need not only for food and shelter, but rest. Help me not to add anything to my schedule that isn't for me. Weed out that which isn't of you, whether it's extra work or TV or extra responsibility that isn't mine. Help me to give up frantic activity and find deep and satisfying rest.

**He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.**

Lord, where my sense of unease comes from sin, shake it out of my life, and show me now what I honestly need to face.

**⁴ Yea, 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.**

I trust you to protect me and mine from evil, even when the protection comes in the form of your loving discipline (the rod) or painful direction redirection (your staff).

**⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.**

Just as you fed the children of Israel in the desert while their enemies stalked their fringes, just as you anointed David as king even when his enemies held the throne, so too provide for and pour out your anointing upon me and my house and my loved ones, and we will continue to remember that you are Lord over any who would harm us.

**⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.**

Through all of this life and the next, Lord, I want to dwell only in your house, in your presence. Weed out the things that distract me from it.

Invitation