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## **Still Waters 2 – 11.22.9 – Rejecting the rat race, returning to the shepherd**

Once again, let's begin by reading together **Psalm 23**

### **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 Bible teaches that God wants to be the Shepherd of our souls. And the mark of a good shepherd is that his sheep are rested, healthy, at peace and not harassed by the parasites of worry and hurry and stress.

How are you doing with that?

Last week we said that it gives others a poor idea about who our Shepherd is when our lives are crazy-busy and out-of-control. Today we're going to talk about what it does to us, and I hope we can live differently through the holidays than we have before – let others do the rushing around.

It's not easy though. The days of the rotary phone are gone, and no one wants to tolerate a device that takes so long to dial. Sure it's faster than a letter or a walk across town to see

someone, but it isn't fast enough. We're so well-trained that we want to do two or three things at once.

On Amazon there is a product that offers the ultimate in squeezing productivity into those wasted moments – it's the **Laptop Steering Wheel Desk!** Whether you need to update that spreadsheet for tomorrow's meeting or play a little Farmville on Facebook, here's the tool to help you squeeze in some extra computer time.

Occasionally a product on Amazon seems so silly that people gang up on it and make fun of it. You can submit user photos and user reviews of products, and here are some of the user photos for the Laptop Steering Wheel desk.

(Auto-advancing slides)

And here's one awesome customer review: *I loved my Laptop Steering Wheel Desk so much I got one for my 90yr old mother. She is an avid crossword puzzle fan and now she can work on them while she is driving back and forth from bingo at the senior center. One cautionary note: Be careful of those jerks that stop at yellow lights; my poor mother rear ended one and the airbag drove the desk back into her stomach which ruptured her spleen. Well after a short down time I'm glad to say she is back on the road and cranking out those NY Times crosswords once again. Thanks Laptop Steering Wheel Desk. You have made my mother's life more complete.*

We say that the Lord is our shepherd, but is he really the one we are following? If we know the quietness of still waters and the rest of green pastures, then yes, that's Him. But if my life is the same mad scramble for money or self-worth or pleasure as anyone's I'd better remember that there are other shepherds that want to lead us. They are harsh taskmasters, Jesus says in **John 10**, who only want to steal our rest and kill and destroy. In contrast, Jesus says: **I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full (John 10:10).**

There is a lot about the way of a shepherd with sheep, especially in the old world way of doing things, that teaches us about Jesus our Shepherd. You don't drive sheep, you lead them. You drive cattle and you force hogs into narrow chutes to get them where you want them to go, but sheep learn to recognize the voice of the shepherd and follow him.

J. Vernon McGee, the great preacher of the mid-twentieth century, was in Israel with a group of American Christians, and he taught them a lesson about how the shepherd was gentle and loving toward his sheep. Shepherding is personal, not a factory farm arrangement, and shepherds lead their sheep, gently.

McGee and the group got on a tour bus and set out on a drive, and much to his surprise they came across a man driving a flock of sheep along the road. It upset him so much that he stopped the bus and grabbed a translator and got out and confronted this man: "I just got done telling these people that shepherds in the Middle East don't drive sheep, that they lead them and deal with them gently, like Jesus does with us. What do you think you're doing?!"

When he finished his rant, the man said to the translator: "Would you please tell this crazy American that I'm not the shepherd, I'm the butcher. I'm driving them to the slaughter."

Now let me ask you: The master you're following...is it leading you or driving you? Are you heading to green pastures and still waters, or to the slaughter? Is it the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls...or the butcher?

**Isaiah 40:10-11** gives us another description of our shepherd:

**<sup>10</sup> See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,  
and his arm rules for him.  
See, his reward is with him,  
and his recompense accompanies him.**

What do you see there? Power. Strength. Might. The ability to force people to do what he wants. Sounds like a lot of kings and rulers. But no:

**<sup>11</sup> He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
He gathers the lambs in his arms  
and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have young.**

So again: Are you being led into life, or are you being driven to death?

One of the most used passages about evangelism is **Matthew 9:35f** where Jesus told his disciples that **“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few”**. But just before that line, it says that Jesus looked around, and **when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd**. False shepherds, false gods leave you hanging when they want to. Make money or popularity your shepherd, and you’ll eventually find yourself harassed and helpless. In **Matthew 9**, this is a call to evangelism, to take the True Shepherd to the people who don’t know him. But what about when we are the ones who are the harassed and helpless? What if it’s the Christians who are the ones working so hard to provide a beautiful home that they lose ability to live the life they imagined in it?

It’s actually a common problem. We KNOW the one who has life, but we haven’t yet decided to live it his way. We still believe that he’s here to bless our hurry, make our materialism more enjoyable, and grease the gears of our pursuit of happiness. But he never promised that because that isn’t where abundant life lies.

Well, that’s the diagnosis. What’s the cure? **1 Peter 2:25** talks about people who have turned it around, saying: **For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. How do you do that?**

Here’s a clue: **Mark 6:30-31** - <sup>30</sup>**The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup>Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” <sup>32</sup>So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.**

A lot of us would have taken that situation as something to brag about. “The Lord is really blessing our work! So many people that we didn’t have a chance to eat! I guess we’ll have time to eat in heaven! There’s work to be done here. Look’s like another night at the drive-thru!” Mark doesn’t paint it that way at all, because Jesus doesn’t see it that way.

Earlier in **Mark**, Jesus responded the same way to similar “success”: In **Mark 1:32-38** - <sup>32</sup>**That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. <sup>33</sup>The whole town gathered at the door, <sup>34</sup>and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.**

<sup>35</sup>**Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. <sup>36</sup>Simon and his companions went to look for him, <sup>37</sup>and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”**

<sup>38</sup>**Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”**

Notice the simple practices: Time alone with God; Focus on the things God has for HIM to do rather than chasing after what everyone else thinks he should do.

In his book *The Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg writes: "Not long after moving to Chicago, I called a wise friend to ask for some spiritual direction. I described the pace at which things tend to move in my current setting. I told him about the rhythms of our family life and about the present condition of my heart, as best I could discern it. What did I need to do, I asked him, to be spiritually healthy?"

Long pause.

"You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life", he said at last. Another long pause.

"Okay, I've written that one down", I told him, a little impatiently. "That's a good one. Now what else is there?" I had many things to do, and this was a long-distance conversation, so I was anxious to cram as many units of spiritual wisdom into the least amount of time possible.

Another long pause.

"There is nothing else", he said.

**You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.**

What if your doctor told you that this was a matter of life and death to you?

In fact, it may be. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry.

You can't love people in a hurry. You can't get to know your kids and nourish them with your blessing in a hurry. You can pray in a hurry if you have to, but you cannot get to know God and walk with him in a hurry. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life. There is nothing else.

Just this week, I found myself, briefly, with an unexpected free evening. For many weeks, Sunday through Wednesday evening has been automatically planned out for me with ministry work, and very often some of the other three nights get taken too. I'm not complaining. As my wife likes to point out, I have a flexible schedule and a five minute commute, so I have it good! But I had been on a roll for quite awhile. Now all the sudden I had a free evening that I hadn't accounted for. How did I feel about it? Anxious. Even a little fearful.

It isn't that I didn't have things at home that I needed to do and things I wanted to do. It was the fear of being responsible for the choice.

I hear that prisoners, when they get out, are often overwhelmed with the responsibility of freedom. For years, someone told them when to get up and when to go to bed, when to eat, when to work, when to stand around and wait. Suddenly, that's all on them. It's a fearful responsibility, this thing we call freedom, and that's what I felt.

I took it as a warning sign – not to immediately cut back on things, but to retake some God-ordained responsibility for my own life. Now that's a tricky thing to say because the other side of the coin is that we are not ultimately in control of things. God is sovereign, sin happens, and things get out of our control and I often preach on the need to realize at all times that we are not really in control in this world.

And yet, the fact is that we are responsible for how we conduct our lives. If it were not so, the only command in the Bible would be: "Just pray, and see what happens".

You are responsible for choosing the life that best honors God and allows a place for him in your heart. **So take your God-given responsibility for your schedule.**

If you are an adult, a parent, you are responsible for choosing a schedule that allows you to train up your children in the way they should go. You don't get to blame your lack of choice on the fast-moving stream of circumstances. If your kids are anxious and depressed and angry because they don't have your loving and firm leadership in their lives, you don't get to tell God it's because this crazy world he created demands too many ball games and dance recitals and chances to make more money. You have the burden of freedom and the responsibility to choose well. You have the burden of saying in love, "No more!" You have to say: "We're going to take a

trip together. We are going to eat a meal together. We are going to say 'no' to 6 yr. old basketball because we said 'yes' to 6 yr old football and it isn't going to ruin your chance to play for the Hawks." And saying it in love means not saying it like a tyrant or making everyone miserable for it. What I see in the families here that are doing well is that the younger your kids are when you take up that responsibility for your family's pace, the more naturally they accept it. But wherever you are, you are responsible.

Let me put it this way: Money is important, but what if I offered you \$10 million, which I think would be enough to give you real financial security, but you knew that in exchange for it, your kids would be bitter and depressed and estranged from you...would you take the ten million? Never! What if I said that I could get your kid a scholarship in soccer, but in exchange your marriage would dry up and so would any connection to God...would you take that bargain? But that's exactly the kind of deal we cut when we allow money or activity or the opinions of others to drive us into an insane schedule where it's impossible to nurture our most important relationships.

Now when you take that responsibility, get ready to face opposition. People who go against the grain make others angry. [Paul Gruchow](#) was an author and conservationist, who said: *"It is one thing to decry the rat race...that is the good and honorable work of moralists. It is quite another thing to quit the rat race, to drop out, to refuse to run any further--that is the work of the individualist. It is offensive because it is impolite, it makes the rebuke personal. The individualist calls not his or her behavior into question, but mine."*

That means that if you jump off the treadmill, expect a call from the band director: "Don't you know that band clinic is an HONOR? Your kid isn't just rejecting her personal honor, she's letting the school down!" And expect a call from the t-ball coach: "Sir, that 6am practice is absolutely necessary. The boys from Soddy Daisy have been practicing at 5am all year, and they're going to humiliate us! Don't you care about excellence?" Expect a call from your Mom too: "You're not driving home to North Dakota for Thanksgiving? Why this could be Aunt Melba's last Thanksgiving with us. The doctor said her halitosis is a real killer!"

You might even get a call from the preacher: "Hey, all true Christians are taking part in the all-night prayer vigil. I'm only concerned about your spiritual growth, after all!"

With the preacher, you can quote Scripture: "Well, as the Lord said in **Mark 1:38** – "Let us go somewhere else". Amen and Hallelujah!

Take your God-given responsibility for your schedule.

And here's the main thing: **Take your God-given responsibility for spending time with God.** You are responsible for getting up and going off to that solitary place, like Jesus did, to pray, to reconnect with God. If that is getting crushed out, you have to see that it changes. You are responsible.

And I'm responsible too.

Very often I need to pray that prayer from **Psalms 139**:

**23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.**

**24 See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.**

Search me, and know my insecurity about money that keeps me striving.

Search me, and know how little I understand what you made ME to do, which keeps me doing everything.

Search me and know my pride which keeps me from admitting the error of my ways.

Search me and know my selfishness, which drives me to keep up my own interests to an extent that is poisoning my family.

Let's finish by praying those words from the Psalm together:

**<sup>23</sup> Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.**

**<sup>24</sup> See if there is any offensive way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.**