

**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)**

Fear is a great motivator generating a 'fight or flight' response. However, there can be such terrible fear that a person is paralyzed. We call that fear, dread.

Fear drains the emotion, fatigues the mind, and saps energy from the body. Unpredictable reactions are common as are poor choices.

In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm David describes yet another response to fear, but not to fear in general, the fear of evil. The poor economy might shake us up as it threatens our retirement or career. Poor health can certainly be a fearful thing. We might feel pressures in our home life or at work and, as a result, fear the potential negative results. But evil? Ha! Why fear evil?

In general, people do not seem to fear evil, perhaps out of arrogant confidence, but probably more out of ignorance. We are more like a small child in a canoe idly drifting toward a waterfall not understanding its devastating power. We prefer not to think about evil and its power in our lives.

Satan does not pound at our door announcing himself and intentions. He is subtle and quiet as he offers enticements difficult for us to refuse. If we would simply reflect on our past, we would acknowledge how sin and evil have had control over us. We *should* fear evil, and yet....

David wrote, "I fear no evil." He must have known the terror of evil and its incredible strength. Yet, he had no fear because he took comfort in someone who was stronger and able to provide protection from evil and safety.

The shepherd's rod was a tool used against predators, but also as a tool to discipline of the sheep.

The rod represents God's protection of his sheep from the evil one.

The Apostle Paul wrote that God would not allow anyone to be tempted beyond what he could handle. That tells us that there are temptations that God knows will certainly overpower us. So, He will not allow those temptations.

The Apostle Paul also wrote that God would provide a way of escape for the temptations he does allow. So, when there are appealing enticements, we can know that God is confident that we can handle the temptation. He will provide a way out.

The Hebrew writer encourages Christians to have a good attitude regarding the discipline of God. Though discipline is not pleasant, it is for our good. The purpose of discipline is always to restore. Our Great Shepherd protects us and restores us.

The staff uniquely identifies a shepherd and is used to lead and work the sheep. The staff is virtually an extension of the shepherd's arm. He uses it to gently pick up lambs and place them with their mother, to nudge sheep before they can wander off, and even to make simple contact with a sheep. In the latter case it is not unlike a father walking side-by-side with his child. The simple touch conveys safety and acceptance.

The rod and staff together represent the Great Shepherd's contact with his sheep. Whether through a painful lesson learned with the rod of discipline or the gentle reminder of his presence with his staff, he is ever near, protecting, guiding, training, leading...comforting his sheep in the face of danger. With God as our shepherd, there is no reason to fear evil. We can have confidence as he leads us to our spiritual home.