

You Don't Have to be Afraid Anymore:

Reflections on Psalm 23 For People with Cancer

*A companion to the video series,
designed for individual or group use*

**Prepared by Dr. Ken Curtis
with
Christian History Institute
and
Vision Video**



For a free catalog of our videos contact:

Gateway Films/Vision Video
P.O. Box 540, Worcester, PA 19490
Phone: 1-800-523-0226
Fax: 610-584-6643
E-Mail: info@visionvideo.com
Web: www.visionvideo.com



You Don't Have to be Afraid Anymore:
Reflections on Psalm 23 For People with Cancer
Companion Guide

Table of contents

Psalm 23	3
Why Psalm 23?	4
A Word of Welcome from presenter, Dr. Ken Curtis	5
Practical Suggestions for Dealing with Cancer	6
Session 1: Introduction to David and Psalm 23	8
Session 2: The Lord is my Shepherd	9
Session 3: I shall not be in want	10
Session 4: Green pastures and quiet waters	11
Session 5: He restores my soul	12
Session 6: Paths of righteousness	13
Session 7: The valley of the shadow of death	14
Session 8: Your rod and your staff comfort me	15
Session 9: You prepare a table before me	16
Session 10: You anoint my head with oil	17
Session 11: My cup overflows	18
Session 12: Goodness and love shall follow me	19
Session 13: I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever ...	20
Prayer inspired by Psalm 23	21

The 23rd Psalm

The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
Even 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.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

— New International Version



You Don't Have to be Afraid Anymore: Reflections on Psalm 23 For People with Cancer

Why Psalm 23?

Words matter! Think of the affirming power of the words “I love you.” Or the paralyzing effect on a child who is told repeatedly “you are stupid.”

As we think of the power of words to affect us we stand back in amazement at the words of the 23rd psalm. What is it about this brief and simple affirmation that has maintained its potency in such a unique way some 3,000 years after it was first uttered? How many other words can you think of that have a similar longevity? Why have these words so easily crossed centuries and cultures? Why have these words so often been made a centerpiece for some of life's most critical moments—at the personal, community and national levels?

There is no simple answer to such questions. It is something we intuitively grasp more than something we can analyze. But minimally we can say this:

The 23rd psalm reminds us that life inevitably has its uncertainties, reversals and fears. There are times when our resources, wisdom and strength are simply inadequate. In such times we need not despair but can move forward in confidence that we are not alone in this universe. There is One with us, who not only knows us, but cares for us and guides us. There is a way through our difficulties that will bring us past the trauma of the moment. That being so, we can pause, take a deep breath, remind ourselves of the bigger picture and face our situation with confidence, courage, trust and hope.

Won't you come along? Come on a journey into familiar words. These words have been present in our most trying times, yet they keep on giving the more we tap into their riches. May you find truth, comfort and hope along the way.

A Word of Welcome from DVD Presenter Ken Curtis

One difficulty I had in preparing the video series as a whole—and in attempting to prepare this guide—is knowing to whom to direct it. People with cancer have many different kinds of cancer and their cancers are detected at many different stages. Some are dealing with advanced cancers that are consuming all their strength, while others are practically symptom free and able to carry on a relatively normal life.

Cancer also provokes many kinds of responses. For some people the most immediate need is relief from physical discomfort and pain. For others the shock of finding they have cancer has brought long-buried emotional issues to the forefront. For still others, their ongoing responsibilities now weigh heavily as they contemplate who will help fill their role if they cannot continue to function as they are accustomed. Financial matters are an unavoidable center of anxiety for many. Others find themselves caught up in a spiritual crisis, wondering if their faith will sustain them. Some, who have not paid much attention to matters of faith, wonder if they can still seek and find the Lord they had so little time for in the past.

I also had to keep in mind that more than individuals get cancer. Whole families do! The entire intimate circle of loved ones is caught up in coping with the disease. Consequently, this resource is often viewed by family and friends, along with the person with cancer.

Thus, while preparing this companion piece I struggled with whether it should be for an individual and offer primarily thoughts for reflection or if it would be better targeted to small groups for discussion. In the end, I decided not to target the content to any specific need or concern. The psalm itself is so universal in its appeal and attraction that it crosses all the barriers and addresses the issues of the heart and mind in a way that offers hope to all, regardless of the particular situation. So I shall simply try to go to some windows, raise the shades, and peek into the psalm.

My hope is that the thoughts and questions in these sessions will prove fruitful for both group discussion and personal reflection. Each participant is encouraged to use their own journal or notebook to record thoughts on the suggested questions. Please feel free to pick and choose or modify the material as needed. My one recommendation is that you take your time. Do no more than one session per day, in order to allow the content to soak in. In order to really apply each concept, one session per week may make more sense.

Finally, this project is really all about the richness of a beautiful psalm. While you work through this material, take time to read and meditate on Psalm 23 every day. Allow yourself to melt into this psalm or let it melt into you. Let the psalm become part of your consciousness and outlook on life. In all likelihood, you will experience new understandings of your own circumstances, which will make this time of study highly personal and fruitful.

A Few Practical Suggestions For Dealing With Cancer

- **Keep a journal.** When I was first diagnosed with cancer, a close friend offered this advice: Take good notes! I did not understand at the time the wisdom of his counsel. But I have come to highly value the documentation of my journey through the thickets of the cancer world. Having a log of what has happened and how I have reacted to it has proved invaluable. Cancer can be devastating. There is no way to soften the blow. This uninvited intruder defines the rest of your life to a significant degree. Things are going to be different. You are going to change—one way or another. There is no choice about that. But to some degree, you can choose how you will change, how you will respond to the changes that you cannot control and how you will get a grip on the changes over which you do have some discretion. It is so important for you to be able to go back and track your experience. You will find new strength in seeing how you got through the intimidating experiences and survived the frightening moments. This will give you strength for the future. So get a journal or notebook and take good notes.

Come to think of it, if David hadn't kept a kind of a journal all those years ago, the many psalms he penned that bring so much comfort to so many may have been lost to the world forever. Your words don't have to be as eloquent as David's, but they will still serve the purpose. Who knows how many people will be blessed through the thoughts you record? On a practical note, "journaling" can happen in many ways. If the traditional pen and paper is not for you, try using a computer log, a tape recorder or even a video camera. All are ways to record your thoughts and feelings.

- **Accept and value the support of others.** There will be family and friends who want to assist you. Their love and support is an important source of strength, even though you may be hesitant or embarrassed to accept at first. One friend called and gave me a much-needed admonition when she heard of my diagnosis. This lady knew I lived a busy life and was immersed in my work. She was blunt. "You are at a place now where you have to make some changes," she said. "You need to pay a lot more attention to yourself and concentrate on getting well." That was so helpful in bringing me to the point of giving myself permission to concentrate on dealing with my disease and allowing others to take on some of my responsibilities at work and home. I have come to view their gifts of time and energy as a tangible expression of love and care, a blessing of incomparable worth.

A Few Practical Suggestions For Dealing With Cancer (continued)

- **Strengthen your prayer life.** Now is the time to increase the time you spend in prayer. A great place to start is with the prayer found on page 21, which is based on Psalm 23. Many also use the familiar Lord's Prayer. Use these as a starting point for eventually reaching out to God in your own words. You will find yourself with increased comfort and strength for each new challenge.
- **Music can help.** David knew this well. As a youth David played his harp and relieved King Saul's agitated heart. Two musical renditions of Psalm 23 are included on the DVDvideo. You will find that listening to the words set to music will further deepen the impact of the words of the psalm in your heart. Further, all the music included in our program is available on a separate CD titled *And Sheep May Safely Graze*, available through Vision Video.
- **Be good to yourself.** My diagnosis has led me to a desire to take the best possible care of my body. It wasn't easy changing habits that were developed over a lifetime, but the results have been very positive. I now find I face most days with more energy and vigor. If you haven't already, begin to learn all you can about proper nutrition and exercise for your particular condition. Then put your knowledge into practice. Your body will thank you with an increased energy level and you'll enjoy the benefits that come with doing all you can to help your immune system.

*“What God told you in the light never doubt
when you are in the dark.”*

V. Raymond Edman

Session 1: *Introduction to David and Psalm 23*

Psalm 23 has been a “best seller” for literally thousands of years. What modern music artist can hope for fame to last even a century, let alone millennia? What is it about this work of art that makes it so accessible and universal? The rich imagery of Psalm 23 is possibly so powerful largely because it is so commonplace. There is nothing dramatic. It simply taps into the everyday to connect with our own ordinariness. Using common language and common images of a shepherd and his sheep, David drives new awareness deep into our souls. Let’s begin our journey into the depths of this remarkable “best seller.”

- Begin this session by reading Psalm 23, found on page 3 of this resource.
- What are some of your memories surrounding Psalm 23? How did the psalm connect with the situations you recall?
- What images in the psalm are most meaningful for you? Why?
- Describe what you know of David, the author of the psalm. Think about his experiences, his personality, and his faith.

View the Introduction of *Reflections on Psalm 23*

- Were any parts of Ken’s experiences relatable for you?
- What has been your biggest struggle in the last six months?
- Are there portions of Psalm 23 that you are already beginning to see with fresh insight? Which lines seem richest to you?

To Ponder and Practice: *This week, read Psalm 23 every day. Let the words and images speak to you and your experience. Before the next session, take some time to rewrite the psalm in your own words.*

Session 2: *The Lord is my Shepherd.*

The gentle pastoral words “the Lord is my Shepherd” in reality set forth a radical view of life. We are not ultimately in charge! We soon come to recognize that there is a power greater than ours, and we’d best let God be the Shepherd. Think deeply and answer the following questions as honestly as possible.

- What or who has primarily ruled your life? On what have you spent the most time, money and energy? In other words, what has consumed your thoughts and motivated your most important decisions?
- Describe in your own words the relationship of shepherd to sheep. How does this analogy fit with your views of God interacting with people?

View video segment.

- How does the analogy of the shepherd help you understand God’s loving care for you?
- Is it hard for you to trust God with your future? Why or why not?
- What do you find frightening about trusting God? What comfort do you find in knowing you have a Shepherd?
- If God has been supreme in your life, how do you find your relationship to God changed or deepened through your cancer experience?
- If you have not felt close to God and are now thinking about God’s place in your life, consider what it will mean to surrender the sovereignty over your own being to the Shepherd. Be specific and write down how you will go down this pathway.

To Ponder and Practice: *In your journal, write a letter to God expressing some of the honest feelings and emotions you’ve experienced since your diagnosis. What are your fears? What causes you to get angry? When these feelings emerge, practice sharing them with the Shepherd who loves you. Be specific. Practice trusting God with your feelings and with your future.*

Session 3: *I shall not be in want.*

Have you noticed the techniques of modern advertising? It's all about creating "need." The advertisers manufacture a feeling of "want" or "need" in you and then you buy their products! How different is David's view. He recommends we adopt a "pre-commitment to contentment," meaning that we do not need to let frustration and comparison to others rule our lives.

- Have you ever seen a child's Christmas list? What are some things you'd find there? Now, what types of things would be on the list of someone in their 20's, their 30's, 40's, and so on?
- What would be on your ideal Christmas list right now?
- Reflect on what you have been given. Whether or not you are currently battling health problems, now is a good time to think of the marvel of your own body and the healing powers resident therein. It is also a good time to look at your life. What are the good things that have happened to you in the last week? The last month? How about the last year or even decade?

View video segment.

- Think of difficult times you have been through when you thought that you just did not have the resources—whether emotional, physical, financial, intellectual, whatever—to get through. How did you make it?
- On the other hand, think of times when you have wanted something desperately, only to find upon receiving it, that it quickly lost its appeal.
- Take time to rewrite the phrase "I shall not want," in positive form by leaving out the word "not."

I shall _____.

To Ponder and Practice: *Each day this week, write one sentence about someone who has encouraged you or believed in you or loved you at some point in your life. Write another sentence describing what difference that made.*

Session 4: *He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters.*

Life can come at us at a dizzying pace, with schedules that are impossible to manage. We are constantly bombarded by the need to do more, to have more and to be more. But, our Shepherd has something else entirely in mind when he invites us to lie down in green pastures and stroll leisurely by quiet waters. Refreshment, rest and renewal are waiting for us, if we'll just allow the Shepherd to lead.

- What is a place that has been special to you—your favorite place—where you are most at home and comfortable? Can you still go there? If not physically, is there comfort in revisiting this place through your memory or imagination? What is it about this place that brings you peace and comfort?
- Take a moment now to visit your special place through memories. Relax. Absorb the atmosphere. Allow this place to be a springboard for reflections. What do you smell? How is the lighting? What sounds are familiar and soothing? What makes this a special place?
- What does “inner rest” mean to you? How does your physical environment affect your inner peace?

View video segment

- Do you allow yourself the rest you need for your body to do its job? What specific ways have you fought against God's plan for rest? How has our hurried and rushed world contributed to this?
- What burdens have you been carrying that you can lay down to lighten your load? What offers of help have you refused? Why? Have you been blessed by helping others in need? Now is the time to bless others by allowing them to help you!
- “Green pastures” suggests that we treat our bodies with care. Have you adjusted your diet to allow optimum nutrition to aid your situation? If you haven't done so yet, look into the important area of cancer and nutrition. Focus on whole and healthy foods as God provided, rather than the modified, processed items which can rob you of energy and nutrition. For example, did you know that cancer feeds on sugar?

To Ponder and Practice: *This week, take time for quiet rest every single day. Don't feel guilty for not being “productive!” You need this time by the quiet waters. Turn off the TV and get rid of other noise and interruptions. Rest your body, your emotions and your spirit as you focus on inner peace and the Shepherd. Keep your journal handy and record your thoughts. Your second assignment this week is to say “yes” to an offer for help and see how you bless the giver even as he or she blesses you!*

Session 5: *He restores my soul.*

There are levels of meaning for King David in giving us these words. This phrase follows right after the mention of the still waters and would seem related to that. The still waters bring us refreshment and new energy in our inner being. But, for David the restoration of soul also meant facing his sins, getting his heart right with God and getting his relationships right with others.

- Have you ever struggled with feelings of worthlessness? When you look at yourself through the eyes of the Shepherd, what do you see?
- When were the times when you were renewed in the inner self, when life took on a new glow, when your senses were awakened to enjoy your surrounding world with new appreciation?

View video segment

- What are the two keys that are presented for restoring a broken life?
- Have you felt the negative effects of holding on to resentment and unforgiveness? Whom do you need to forgive? Name the specific resentments that you can work to release.
- What wrongs have you done for which you have made excuses? Whose forgiveness do you need to seek in order to release you both from inner pain?
- Have you struggled with the question “Why me?” What will it take for God to restore your soul and assure you that cancer is not a punishment?

To Ponder and Practice: *This week, continue your quiet time and take your shortcomings to God. Ask for His forgiveness and ask Him to restore your soul. Journal about your conversations with God. As you feel led, make things right with those you've offended or hurt and forgive those who've hurt you over the years. As you do, both you and the other party will be released through forgiveness.*

Session 6: *He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

Isn't it astounding that each of us can have some constructive role in this world that will make a difference? In the final analysis, only God is able to really evaluate the relative importance of what we do with our lives. Recall how Jesus cautioned us to remember "the last shall be first." Our task is to be faithful to what is before us and what we *can* do.

- Each person is made in a unique way and has a unique purpose on the earth. Can you identify a unique purpose God has given you?
- What needs do you see in your corner of the world (family members, neighbors, etc.)? If you had unlimited resources and energy, what specific needs would you most like to meet?
- Have you discovered, through your illness, a new awareness, ability, or opportunity?

View video segment

- What is the difference between "self-righteous" and "righteous?"
- What experiences have you had that brought honor to God's name?
- Is there something God would want you to do today or tomorrow, in His name?
- No one on earth is fully righteous. How does the illustration of the sheep walking around the mountain, gradually progressing higher, encourage you?

To Ponder and Practice: *This week continue the good habits you've begun: quiet, restful meditation and journaling. Also take time this week to fill a purpose that only you can do. This could be praying for others, sharing a word of encouragement with a friend or family member or even writing a letter of concern or compliment to a TV station.*

Session 7: Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

All people live in the shadow of death, but for cancer patients the shadow can feel closer and darker. If you are dealing with cancer, you have had to face the reality that life on earth will end one day. And yes, you may be battered and bruised. There have been times when you have been numb and afraid. But remind yourself—you are still here! You have made it this far. Maybe there are more mountains to climb but take it one day at a time.

- What major life events have you planned for, well in advance? (weddings, graduations, retirement?) How long did you spend planning for these events?
- Which of God’s promises have you seen kept? How does this strengthen your faith in God’s promise of eternal life?

View video segment

- Since we don’t face major trials every day of our lives, we rarely plan how to respond to them. How could planning a response to trials be useful when the time comes?
- Malcolm Muggeridge, the great British journalist once said when he looked back over his long and eventful life, he had to conclude that the most difficult and painful experiences of his life were the most valuable. Does this resonate with you?
- How have your own trials been valuable to your overall well-being?
- How could the trial you are currently facing also be used for good?

***To Ponder and Practice:** This week, pray each morning and evening with a purpose of expressing gratitude to God. Begin with the following list and add more reasons to be thankful each time you pray and journal:*

*I am safe.
I will be brave.
I am not alone.
God is with me.
God promises to stay with me.*

If God is with me, I do not need to be afraid anymore.

Session 8: *Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

The rod and the staff symbolize protection and correction. Rather than viewing them as our enemies, we can see them as an incomparable source of comfort. You are worth guiding, correcting, and disciplining. You are like a champion athlete with the best coach. God is getting you ready for something greater. If you have been put through paces that seem like more than you can understand, then at least make room for the thought that one day you will eventually see it in a new and larger light. God did not give you cancer. Yet, the experience will not be wasted. God will use it for good.

- When bad things have happened to you through life, have you tended to place blame or have you just accepted them?
- Have you found yourself looking for someone or something to blame for your crisis with cancer? Who or what have you blamed?

View video segment

- How can you stop asking who is to blame for your cancer?
- What good can come from this trial?
- What “blooms” have you already seen emerging from your cancer trial?

So many have used these exact words: *Cancer was one of the best things that ever happened to me. It was my wake up call. Take time now to journal answers to the following questions:*

- What might God be saying to me through this trial?
- What is God showing me?
- Where is God taking me that I have not been before?

To Ponder and Practice: *This week, continue taking time for quiet meditation and journaling. Each day try to think of one positive result of your struggle with cancer. Be sure to record your thoughts in your journal.*

Session 9: You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

What is the enemy? Is it cancer? Though cancer is a cruel thief it cannot get at that which is most precious: who you really are! You are far more than your cancer. Even in the midst of this trial and in the presence of this “enemy,” resolve to come to the table and find the goodness of life and the greatness of God.

- Think of the last time you lingered over a meal. Who dined with you and what did you discuss? Who prepared the food? What is memorable about this occasion?
- Name 10 good things that you can celebrate, that cannot be taken away from you, no matter what.

View video segment

- How strongly do you identify with the human desire for “fight” or “flight” in the face of danger? Compare these very normal responses to the alternate suggestion to “prepare a table.”
- Does your view of God lean toward the mean tyrant? Imagine God preparing a table full of good things for you. Does this help to re-shape your image of God?
- What gives you reason to rejoice? What good things have you seen God prepare for you, even in the presence of your enemy?
- Imagine King David in the midst of a battle. The opposing army is approaching over the next hill, ready for a fight. But, David makes a stunning move. He calls his men together and instructs them to lay down their swords, take off their armor and begin to set a table for a feast. What might the impact be?
- Do you have someone in your life who might be considered an enemy? How might sharing a meal together help to build a bridge for understanding and a restored relationship?
- Cancer can take away our freedoms and choices, even our dignity. Yet we can still find reasons to celebrate. Where do you still have areas of discretion and choice that you can exercise despite having to deal with the effects of your disease?

To Ponder and Practice: *This week continue to find time for quiet reflection, prayer and journaling. Journal the specific things you celebrate, even in the face of cancer. Also, plan a celebration, large or small, to enjoy with someone special. It could be as simple as sharing a cup of tea by candle light or as extravagant as dancing the night away! The important thing is to make the choice to celebrate what is good, even in the presence of the enemy.*

Session 10: *You anoint my head with oil.*

This promise is so reassuring. David experienced times when the presence of God was so real; he felt such caring attention, it was as if he was being pampered. When you open yourself up and wait in the presence of the Lord, there will be times when you get a glimpse of God's extravagant grace and how truly special you are to Him. God's care for you will come in ways that you can sense, even when it's hard to express it in words. In his last days, a friend who was dying from cancer told me how he became so aware of the presence of God, that he was engaged in an ongoing conversation with the Lord. He added the surprising observation that this ongoing conversation with God was for the most part *nonverbal*.

- Do you have baby oil or some other type of oil in your home? What are some of the uses for such a product?
- When do you feel especially aware of God's presence and care? Begin by asking what comforts and relaxes you and helps you focus on God?

View video segment

- What were some of the specific uses for anointing oil mentioned in the program? If you were being anointed by the Lord, what type of anointing would you request (healing, protection, purpose, and so forth)?
- Bear in mind that the maker and host of the universe welcomes you. God delights in lavishing you with attention! In what ways has God "anointed you" with healing oil?
- Look around at the blessing of this earth, this life and your loved ones and hear God saying "You are special to me. You matter. You have a place in my world and creation. I am so glad to have you here. I want to do everything I can to make you feel at home, welcome, and happy. Don't get distracted. Bathe in my love."

To Ponder and Practice: *This week during your quiet times of prayer and meditation, really bask in the love of the Creator. Focus on God's presence. Feel God's comfort and grace wash over you and consider how very special you are to God. Continue to journal your thoughts and add a list of the specific ways God has pampered you. Optional: Invite a pastor or other church leader to come and anoint you with oil, praying for your healing.*

Session 11: *My cup overflows.*

Hopefully, by now you have accepted that your life has meaning. No matter how distressing your situation, you are learning new lessons of gratitude. Energy and joy are released as you look *at the gift of being you* and as you reflect upon the treasure of your personal history and experience. Your spirit is lifted as you become more aware of the miracle of life and the blessing of being on this planet made in the image of God. As you let the profound mystery of this take over your thoughts and fill your heart and mind, let it overflow. Celebrate and rejoice in whatever way is most meaningful to you.

- What are some of the ways you've been impacted by these "reflections" on Psalm 23, so far?
- Think of your life as a cup containing blessings. How full would you describe your cup of blessings?

View video segment

- David took something of high value, in terms of its cost, and chose to give it to the Lord, rather than consume it for his own relief and comfort. In so doing, he honored the men who risked everything to provide the water in the first place. What specific blessings can you pour out on those around you? Words, comfort, encouragement, prayers, forgiveness?
- As we ponder the good things God is showing us and doing for us, we are immensely blessed. How can you share this blessing with those you come in contact with?

I wrote a wise and godly friend about a time when it seemed day by day I was finding unusual and new exhilaration at the start of every day. He replied with these words, "Our Lord will never get tired of filling your cup with the Joy of serving Him, don't try to ration it. What you're experiencing is real and there is no shortage when you're in His Will. Relax and soak it up. The Joy of the Lord really is our strength!"

Let your cup overflow!!

To Ponder and Practice: *This week continue your practice of quiet times and recording your thoughts in a journal. Also, look for an opportunity every day to allow your cup to overflow a blessing. Bless someone each and every day with a smile, a kind word, an encouraging note or a prayer! You have been abundantly blessed, and now it's up to you to bless others.*

Session 12: *Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.*

It can be so hard to affirm these words when dealing with a catastrophic illness. Many go through a stage when they realize that they can never go back to what was. In other words, things will never be “normal” again. But one friend, having to live with an overwhelming condition in his family, shared with me: “No, your life never does go back to normal. That just is not going to happen. But what you find is a new normal. And in this new normal things are not as they were but there are new dimensions to life that bring you God’s goodness and love in new ways.”

- Think of a difficult or negative experience you’ve gone through in your life (not cancer). As you look back, what are some of the positives that came from that experience? To take it one step further, are there experiences you’ve had that appeared to be a real negative blow at the outset, but soon turned into a positive?
- Are there parts of your life that may never be quite the same now that you are dealing with cancer? Describe the old “normal,” compared to the new reality.

View video segment

- How has goodness and love surprised you when you least expected it?
- Does more goodness and love fill your life when you expect it and anticipate it?

It is good to reflect how, if God is Lord of the universe and is Shepherd over your life, then whatever the circumstances—regardless of the uncertainties—things are going to turn out all right. Romans 8:28 tells us that “...all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose.”

- What is the goodness and love that follows us? How do we recognize it?
- Though cancer robs the body, it can’t touch the most valuable parts of you. Review the journaling you did in Session 9, regarding the good things God has done for you and the good you can do. Now that some time has past, what else can you add to the list?

To Ponder and Practice: *This week in your quiet times, reflect on the good outcomes that have resulted from your illness. Come up with something new each day and record your observations in your journal.*

Session 13: *And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

When we come right down to it we need to recall how we are all just passing guests here on earth. Our days are numbered. Though we will get every single day that God has ordained for us on earth, there is far more waiting for us. We are called to be permanent residents of the family and household of God! Our ultimate and eternal destiny is with God. We can rejoice and sit back in wonder and awe, contemplating how we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

- Have you considered heaven? If heaven exists, what might it be like?
- Are those who believe in a literal heaven acting in arrogance or ignorance? What difference does it make if Scripture is true and heaven exists?

View video segment

- David's dream of building a temple would not happen in his lifetime. What dreams or plans might God ask you to lay aside? Are you able to trust God to work all for good, even if His plans differ from your own?
- What difference would it make if you considered each and every day a gift to be treasured while looking toward your ultimate reward in heaven?
- Think of the joys of heaven. Read over and over the words from Revelation given below and let each phrase wash over your consciousness and give you anticipation for what is to come. Let it provide you with new stamina and strength to meet what you have to face today.

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Revelation 21:2-4 (NIV)

If this is true, then what can be more important than preparing our hearts and minds to become residents of God's eternal household? The familiar words of John 3:16 (NRSV) set forth how: ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."***

To Ponder and Practice: Hopefully by now, you've fully established your good habits of taking daily time with God and journaling your thoughts and feelings. This week, reread the passages above and journal about your dreams of heaven. What will it be like there? What are you looking forward to? How will it be to meet the good Shepherd?



Prayer inspired by Psalm 23

Thank you, O God, that I have been given another day as an honored guest on your good earth. I also give thanks for a Lord who leads me and loves me.

Thank you for the security of knowing the shepherd provides, and this day and in the future I will always have what I really need.

I rejoice you bring me to times and places of rest, where I can shut out the noise and find my vitality, courage and hope renewed.

I celebrate the grace you have given me to face my sins and my frequent failure to reflect your love. I also celebrate your kindness, forgiveness, and loving embrace of restoration.

Keep leading so my life can go in a good direction, and let me make some small difference in this world, a difference that matters to you and that you eagerly accept when done in your name.

I am so grateful that you give me the courage to name and face my fears, even the big one of dying. And I affirm now, in advance, that no matter what awaits me, I shall be strong because you have promised to be with me.

I am under the Shepherd's protection and correction. I am coming to see how your correction is protection. So, in my trials, I will shun bitterness and look expectantly at how you will show your love, even in awful circumstances.

My enemy is not in charge. I am the guest of God. I will feast at your table no matter what the circumstances around me. And I will be receptive to your surprises, even those that require me to restore strained relationships.

I don't know why you take such interest in me and show me such favor, but I accept it as the way you decide to run your world and treat us humans. So I am just going to revel in your lavish kindness and attention.

And that generosity fills my heart to overflowing — it lifts my spirit and helps me rise above the trials and difficulties and rejoice regardless of my circumstances.

So as I look things over, I know there is so much I do not understand at the moment. But I do know that in retrospect I will see how you were working all things together for good. I am so eager to see what you are really up to in your big world and in my little one.

O Lord, I know the one sure thing in this world is that you are trustworthy. When you say you look forward to sharing human companionship in the world to come, I believe you and look forward to that more than anything and realize that your presence and friendship is what I was made for. Thank you.

I go forward to face this day with these affirmations being my expression of love and gratitude to you.