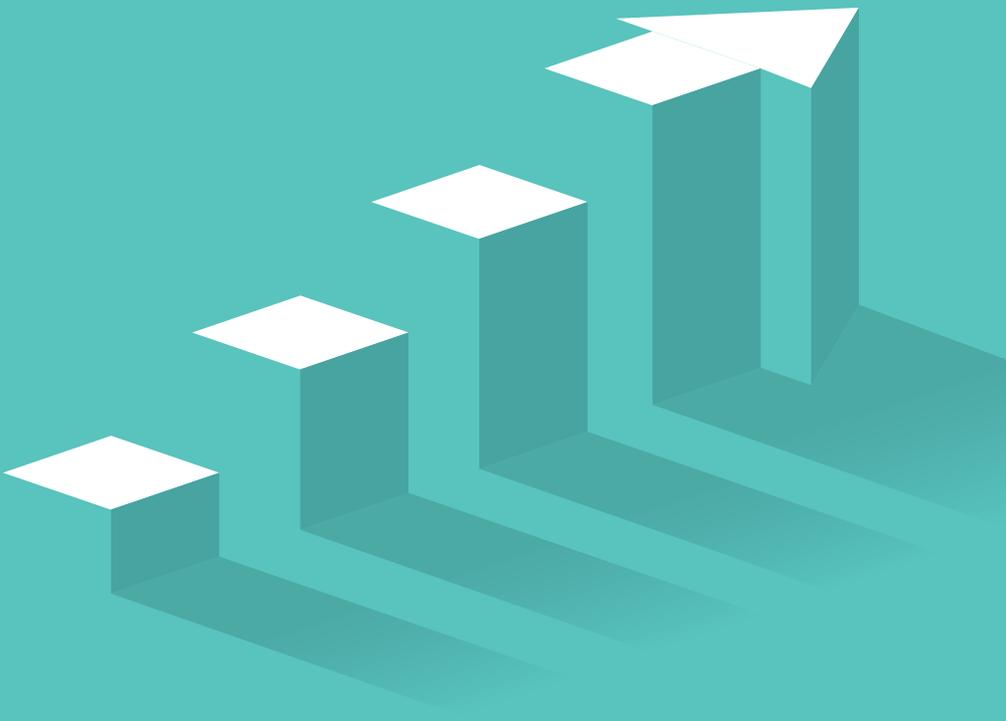


# where am I going?

DR. BARRY BUZZA



AND HOW CAN I GET THERE?

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**Author of the Book**

**Where Am I Going? And How can I get There?**

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**Published by:** Life Pathways

**Distributed by:**

Life Pathways

1460 Lansdowne Drive

Coquitlam, BC, V3E 2N9

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**WHERE AM I GOING? AND HOW CAN I GET THERE?**

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LIFE  
PATHWAYS

*This book is an abbreviated rewrite and update of “Life Journey”, written by Barry Buzzza in 1998, as a series of letters to his daughter Kelly. “Life Journey” was the author’s first book, written to help people of all ages answer some of the fundamental life questions that we all ask. “Who am I?” “Why am I here?” “Where am I going?”*

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# Introduction

As both, his pastor and his best friend, I stood over John's open casket and wondered out loud to the grieving congregation.

“What if it's true that when I die, my soul lives on?

What if it's true that the real me is the person inside, rather than my body, which everyone sees?

What if it's true that my entire life was planned, and that there really is an assigned purpose for me to fulfill?”

“How would I live my life today if I believed that the answers to those questions were, ‘Yes it is true!?’

Would it make a difference?”

Even though I loved him as a friend, I was always secretly a little bit envious of John. He seemed to have had everything that

we guys dream of having. He was six feet, four inches tall, had dark well groomed hair and almost black happy eyes. His white teeth glistened when he smiled — and he smiled a lot. Why wouldn't he? John was not only handsome, he was also generously gifted. I suspect that much of his apparent confidence flowed from the fact that people were attracted to him, right from his childhood. Wherever its source, my friend exuded charisma.

It didn't surprise me at all when he landed that prized job with the Vancouver Stock exchange, right out of university. He seemed to attract money like a magnet. And women — John had the pick of the crop. He appeared to have had it all — good looks, success, applause, romance, athletic prowess, personality; at least until that fateful Thursday, only days before his thirty-ninth birthday. While taking a shower, my friend noticed a lump almost the size of a golf ball in his groin — not painful, but quite concerning.

It all happened more quickly than any of us, especially John, expected. The malignant tumour spread aggressively through his blood, ultimately invading his liver. That strong, seemingly invincible, man lived only eighty days after his diagnosis. I remember so vividly, one sunny afternoon, sitting with him in his small colourless hospital room. He was a sallow, yellowy, frightened shadow of his former self, scared that he would not see the next day. I'll never forget the words which John whispered to me just before he drifted off to sleep that day. "Barry I feel so sad ... I didn't know it would be over so quickly." Then my friend haltingly and soberly lamented, "I didn't plan for this day!"

I held his limp hand tightly, as he closed his eyes and fell into a restless sleep. Three days later, John, the handsome, affable jock, was dead.

There I was, his friend, as well as his Pastor, officiating at his funeral. As I reflected on the questions which I had asked John's family and friends, about the deeper meaning of life, I knew the answers. Yes, it is true that when we die, our souls live on. It is true that the person inside is who we really are; our lives were planned long before we were born, and there has been given to each of us an assigned purpose to fulfill.

Life is much more than looking good, making money, being happy and having a family and friends who love us. The health of our souls has a great deal to do with how we cross the finish line.

### **A poem with a purpose**

Three thousand years ago, an elderly king in Israel, named David, took a six mile journey south of his palace in Jerusalem, to the small village, in which he was born and raised. Bethlehem would one day be very famous as the birthplace of Jesus, but back then, it was just a sleepy little town of a couple of hundred families, a few merchants, but mostly of farmers and shepherds.

David was almost seventy years of age, and very near the end of his life, when he made this last visit to the fields just outside of Bethlehem. His life, as the commander of an army of warriors and as King of Israel, as well as the husband and father of a large dysfunctional family, had been hectic, dangerous and challenging, even while fiscally and politically successful. But in those waning days, he simply wanted to go back to where it all began, to sit quietly with a flock of contented sheep, from whom he'd learned some of his most important lessons about life.

As the elderly king sat cross legged under the shade of a large Tamarisk tree, his bodyguards eyeing him carefully, he began to strum his favourite harp and hum a wistful melody. It wasn't long before words came to mind and he mouthed what is now one of the most famous songs ever written. We simply know it as psalm 23, but this profound twelve line poem, written by King David on that warm spring day, holds the keys to living with inner health and ultimate purpose. It clearly marks the hills and valleys, stopping points and destination intended for every life. It also introduces us to the shepherd, who faithfully watches over his sheep, guiding them to fresh water and nourishing food, while protecting them from danger, and ultimately leading them to fulfill their purpose for which they were born.

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.  
He restores my soul.  
He leads 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 lovingkindness shall follow me all the days of  
my life,  
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

### Psalm 23

As I've thought about David's psalm, over the past several years since John's death, I've come to see it as a prophetic summary

of how life was intended to unfold by our Creator. I've taught its subtle, but profound, principles in conferences, with mostly pastors, throughout the world, but in this abbreviated Ebook I'd like to apply them, in a simple and thoughtfully way, to you, as well as to your and my neighbours. I've been challenged by Jesus, as well as by Mr Rogers, to love my neighbours as much as I love my family. You'll no doubt remember his famous command, "Love your neighbour as yourself."

Our word, "neighbour" comes from the old English phrase, "the farmer next to you", so how appropriate it would be for us to use the agrarian metaphors of shepherd, sheep and pasture, to relate how life works, to the farmer who lives next door to us. In these twelve principles of King David's old song, let's see if we can discover together "where we are going, and how we can get there".

## CHAPTER 1

# The Game of Life

*The Lord is my Shepherd — I shall not want*

*Some of you who, like I, have been around for a while, may remember the Milton Bradley board game called “The Game of Life”. Susan I used to play it with our girls when they were young. It had a winding road which traversed hills and valleys, that curved from one corner, to the opposite one on the twenty-four inch game board. That path represented the road of life — and so it began at birth, wound through the college years, marriage, family and career. It included a wide array of experiences, both good and bad, some chosen and some that came as surprises, but at the end of the game, one of us would win by finishing first, with the most money in our hands.*

I remember explaining to Kelly and Kristy that the game, although accurate in some respects, did not represent a healthy view of our lives. Neither how quickly we maneuvered through the ups

and downs of life, or how much money we would have in our bank accounts when we died, is a desirable marker of a successful life. Rather, life has a purpose, direction, defining rules, parameters, many choices and a desired destination. Every choice that we make along the way will have a corresponding consequence — and that’s what Psalm 23 teaches.

David’s psalm can be divided into four parts. The first introduces us to our Shepherd, who loves us and desires to lead us down the path of life, which he has specifically designed for each of us. This first part gives us the thesis; **“If we choose the Lord as our guide, we will be satisfied with life”**. Then Part two describes the up times on our journey — the refreshing, nurturing and exhilarating seasons of our lives.

Part three brings our path into and through the dark valleys — the difficult, lonely and more painful times. Finally in the last section, the road encourages the traveller again and leads to the finish line. The poet reminds us that there is hope, and even though we may have not always seen it, there has, all along, been a purpose and plan. The psalm has a delightfully happy ending, promising that goodness and loving kindness will follow us, and that we will ultimately dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

## **Transcendence**

There are four basic spiritual needs which every person has — identity, significance, transcendence and loving relationships. Let’s think for a moment about the third one, transcendence. We all need an anchor beyond ourselves. Think of a kite flying in the sky. Let go of the string that the young child is holding on to, and the kite will tumble to the ground. It will not fly freely without its anchor. Like a

tree needs to be held firmly by its unseen root system, we all need something beyond ourselves to nourish us and to hold us firmly in times of stormy opposition.

I'm looking now at the fake Persian rug that we have in our front hallway. We may not like the idea, but are told that in every carpet in our homes, thousands of tiny mites live. These microscopic creatures live their entire lives in our small six foot wide rug. Now let's imagine that two of the little critters are having a conversation with each other. After an exhausting day of hiking up and down the inch long fibres, one of the tiny mites, in frustration, says to his friend, "You know Norman, this world, that we live in, doesn't make any sense! It seems like it's just a purposeless maze of hills and valleys with no design whatsoever!" The second mite agrees.

We can obviously see that the two tiny insects lack the perspective of the person who stands above the beautifully designed Persian rug. It is a masterpiece of colour and design, but the dust mites can't see it from their small, confined world, living between the dusty fibres.

And I can in some ways understand the perspective of the mites. I too wonder what's going on sometimes. Why did my beautiful mom die of lung cancer when she was only forty-two, and had six teenagers still at home? Why did I have to get fired, as a young husband, from my job as a truck driver? (Actually I did deserve it.). Why did that earthquake devastate the homes of some of my friends in Indonesia last month? Why didn't God step in and stop that bear from clawing and biting the little girl up our street?

You can add your many questions to mine, but for now, knowing that there is someone bigger than I am, who knows the answers,

because he has a higher and broader perspective than I do, helps me to trust him with my life circumstances.

## **The shepherd and his sheep**

Let's think about David's way of life, as a young man, for a moment. He was a shepherd, and he knew that sheep are one of the only creatures who simply would not survive without a shepherd watching over them. If a woolly sheep were to lie down to scratch himself by rolling over on his back, he would be in deathly trouble. Because the sheep's legs are so small, unlike a horse or a cow, he wouldn't have enough weight in his legs to roll himself back onto his feet again. It's called being "cast down", and without a shepherd who could respond to his bleating cry, he would literally die. And to add to their incapability of keeping upright, they are defenceless against predators, they aren't smart enough to find good pastures, and they also have a recalcitrant tendency to wander off the path and get lost. Sheep need a shepherd, and that's why in his psalm, David compared us humans to sheep.

Our shepherd is the Lord God, our Creator. Our journey must begin with a relationship with him. As simple as coming to God and saying, "Lord, I'm not sure all that I'm doing right now, but I do know that, like the sheep, I need help." That's how it begins — the rest will unfold as we continue down the path of life.

The next step is to begin learning to trust his leadership. As I write this chapter in 2020, the world has been thrown into a tail-spin by the Covid 19 virus. It appears, as I listen to the daily news, like everything is out of control. Stores, parks, community centres and churches are closed; and we are told by health officials that

we must stay isolated inside of our homes. We're headed toward 30% unemployment, our dollar is sinking as fast as the Titanic and people are feeling increasingly anxious. My trip to Ethiopia and Uganda, where I should be this week, where hundreds of pastors are waiting for our planned conferences, and where we have already invested thousands of dollars, is cancelled. People are getting sick and many are dying at an unprecedented rate. It's a fear filled time in our whole world.

I'm learning that the word, "disappointment" is only one letter away from a vastly different, and much more healthy, perspective — "his appointment". It's not that God causes these things (I'll write about that big subject later in this book), but if he is our Shepherd, he has a wonderful way of turning manure into fertilizer. He can actually help us grow stronger in tougher times.

## **I shall not want**

One of the determining factors that will help us successfully move down our "Game of Life" is a good attitude. I love what Victor Frankl recorded in his memoirs, while being detained in a German concentration camp during World War 2, "*The one thing that you cannot take away from me is the way I choose to respond to what you do to me. The last of one's freedoms is to choose our attitude in any given circumstance.*"

The kind of attitude that we choose can have a profound affect on how our life unfolds. I know two brothers who were both raised by an abusive alcoholic father. I have spent several hours counseling one of the brothers through his failed marriage, as well as his own ongoing alcoholism. The problems that have arisen from his

attitudes have affected every relationship he has had over the past forty years. In one of our sessions, I asked William why he kept drinking when it was obvious how much havoc alcohol had played in his life. His answer was simply, “Because I had an alcoholic father!”

On another occasion I was chatting with William’s brother who is a tea totaler and has been a successful husband and father for seventeen years. When I asked him why he had abstained from alcohol all of his life, his answer surprised me. It was exactly the same as his brother’s “It’s because I had an alcoholic father!” Same circumstances — different attitude!

*“I shall not want”* simply means *“I will be satisfied”*. When we choose to follow someone who has already seen the path ahead, and who knows how to traverse difficult sections of the road, we will be satisfied with our choice. It’s a mystery to me why so many of us would choose to go it on our own, without a guide, and fall into so much trouble, but I guess that is what sheep do. Thank God that we each have the freedom and privilege of walking out our journey, with our Shepherd, from today onward. We don’t have to it do alone.

And so the journey down our destined path goes, from this first principle onward. We can choose to walk through the uncharted territory ahead of us, by ourselves, as independents, or we can get on the right path by deciding to follow the Lord, our Shepherd. If we choose the latter, the journey is predictable and we are guaranteed success in the end. It will not always be easy, but it will always be good.

## CHAPTER 2

# Green Pastures

*He makes me lie down in green pastures*

Now that we've chosen to follow our shepherd, he places us mystically on the right path, which he has long ago prepared for us; and then the journey begins. To me, the sheep, feeding on the lush green pastures, is a picture of the nourishing of our souls. In contrast to our bodies, which in my case is failing from day to day, our souls are eternal. In this chapter I'm writing about how to nourish our souls and keep them healthy.

Over five decades ago, after Susan and I were first married, we were working in different ends of the greater Vancouver area. Neither parts of the city were very accessible by transit and so we needed a second car. Times were tough back then and our budget for another car was about \$150. I was surprised and delighted when I came across a black 1952 Hillman (the Hillman was an English

car — back before Japanese and Korean cars hit the market) for just that amount.

When I brought my little car home, I invested in a couple of black spray bombs and repainted my purchase. I foolishly figured, if a car looked good, it would run better! Then I painted two white racing stripes from bumper to bumper — so it would run faster.

My friend Calvin and I used to leave together for work at about 6 am every day. After a couple of months of daily use, my Hillman wouldn't start without a push to get the motor turning over. Within another three months, Calvin would have had to push me about six blocks before we could get the engine humming! The old car had seen better days.

That Hillman serves to illustrate the three different parts to our human make-up. To begin with, I owned the car. The papers and insurance were in my name, so the car belonged to me. That right of ownership can be compared to our **human spirit**, which I'll be writing about in the following chapter. Our spirit is owned by either ourself or by the Lord, the shepherd. The choice is up to each of us, but God wants to hold the title deed to our spirit. Then he, like I did with my car, will have complete right of ownership.

Secondly, my old Hillman looked good. With its classic leather seats and my new super paint job, I'm sure everyone who saw it was jealous, at least that's what I imagined in my naive youthful mind. In reality though, that ten dollar paint job and those flashy racing stripes were all show. It actually ran like an old tank!

The external appearance of my car compares to our **physical bodies**. We can look good and appear to have it all together, but at the same time be desperately trying to keep our soul from falling

apart on the inside. Many of us spend countless hours and many dollars pampering, primping and pumping our bodies, which will only last for seventy or eighty years, while totally neglecting to nurture the health of our souls, which will live on forever.

**The soul**, in my silly illustration, was the car's engine and power train. That's where the problem was. My Hillman didn't need to be washed again, or another paint job; it needed a complete makeover on the inside. In this new millennium, we have ways of keeping our bodies healthier and in better shape than ever before, but the sad fact is that most of us are neglecting our souls. Let's consider the health of our souls for a minute.

## **He makes me lie down in green pastures**

Sheep are skittish creatures, and they also have no natural means of defence. Because of emotional and physical weaknesses, they will not relax and lie down until several conditions are met. First is that they need **freedom from fear**. The shepherd must be vigilant, with rifle and rod, as he watches out for either, real or imagined, hungry predators. Usually the mere presence of the shepherd is enough to ensure their confident rest. In our human world, our shepherd is also constantly on lookout for possible dangers lurking in the darkness. When we understand the truth that God is watching over us and that he loves us, it helps us to enjoy freedom from fear and lie down securely.

Then secondly, for sheep to lie down and rest, they need **freedom from friction**. In the world of sheep, just as chickens have a "pecking order" and dogs bow to the "top dog", there is what is called a "butting order". The most assertive ewe or ram will battle

any challengers to gain its position as Lord of the lot. She or he will decide where and when they want to walk, graze or lie down ahead of every other sheep.

Today we hear a lot about “my rights”. Scores of books, blogs and articles warn us to look out for number one! But in the world where the Lord is our shepherd, he, and he only, is number one, and we all must learn to have the humble attitude of a servant. The person willing to be second, or even last, is the one who will be nourished and lie down satisfied in the green pastures. This is the place of peace. Ultimately, freedom from friction has more to do with our attitude than with our position in life.

Thirdly, sheep need **freedom from flies**. They will not lie down unless those pesky black flies or ticks are taken care of. Sheep are well protected from insects on their bodies because of their thick wool, so the flies love to bite them, and even lay their eggs, in the soft tissue around their noses. This will itch incessantly and drive the sheep to distraction, so their attentive shepherd will lovingly rub a protective chemical repellent over his sheep’s muzzles.

What’s bugging you? Is it an angry family member, or your boss who seems to love picking on you? Is it a health problem? Or the sadness of not being able to find a good job? Of course the Lord, our shepherd, doesn’t cause the annoyances, but he will use them as teachers, to press us toward himself, so he can help us work through attitudes of unforgiveness, envy, gossip, bitterness and hate. Again, our attitudes, regarding the irritations of life, will either, bring us to distraction, or press us toward maturity and peace.

Lastly, sheep will not lie down in green pastures unless they have **freedom from hunger**. The sheep in David’s poem have obviously

been well fed — that’s why they can stop grazing, and lie down in contentment and peace.

## **Soul food**

And that brings us to the question, “What’s for dinner?” How is my soul being nourished? If my soul includes my will, mind, emotions and attitudes, what is each eating? What does the metaphor of green pastures, as it relates to the feeding of our souls, look like? The shepherd’s job is to lead us to the green pastures, but just like in the nourishment of our physical bodies, it’s our job is to eat the right foods.

The king of our lives is **our will**. This is where we make our life choices. Every day we make thousands of big and little decisions, which will either promote our soul’s health, or cause sickness in our soul. Two recommended habits necessary to keep our wills healthy, are to surround ourselves with positive influences and to consciously and constantly make wise choices. Whom do we hang around with? Whom do we listen to? What voices speak into our lives on the TV or the Internet? What are we reading?

One of the current needs that we all seem to have in our North American world is for rest. We cannot make wise choices if we are always running, so our shepherd sometimes “makes us” lie down in green pastures. As I wrote earlier, our world today is in lock-down because of the virus called Covid 19. As quickly spreading and debilitating as the virus is, it has forced most of us into quarantine. All sports, civic and business meetings, and even churches, are cancelled. Perhaps there’s some good here — we are forced to slow

down, rest more, maybe read a good book or spend more time just talking with our family.

Secondly, we need nourishing food for **our mind**. The computer expression is “garbage in, garbage out.” Susan loves to fill our home with positive worship music. Whether she’s sitting playing the piano and singing, or the volume on our Sonos speakers, placed all over the house, is on full, our home is filled with good music. Again, what are we reading? What pictures fill our minds? Are we being challenged in continuous education? Do we spend time thinking through controversial issues, rather than let the news commentators do our thinking for us?

And then we need to be nourished in **our imagination**. I was taught as a boy that my imagination could be used as the devil’s playground, if I allowed him entrance through my thoughts. Thankfully, the king (that’s my will) stands at the door of my mind, and has the power to allow or refuse entrance to the various voices. When my soul is underfed, malnourished, or eats a diet of unhealthy food, I’ve found that my imagination becomes an easy area of my life in which I can become sloppy. The problem is that unhealthy pictures in our imagination usually filter into our thinking patterns, words and actions.

Lastly we need to keep **our emotions** well nourished. I often use the toilet as an illustration of how to keep stronger in our emotions. There’s a tank at the back of our toilets which holds clean water. If the water tank is full, then we are able to flush away the stinky stuff that daily gets dropped into our lives. But if the tank is empty, then when the bad stuff happens, or someone says something disheartening, we are unable to flush it away, and it sticks around, smelling up our whole lives.

We all have an invisible emotional tank attached to our souls. Think of the water in that tank as courage, which we all need constantly in order to thrive. When we are encouraged, the water in the tank goes up. When we are discouraged, the water goes down. So what we need is a daily input of courage. Most of us don't have a cheerleader shouting "Way to go!" "You're terrific!" "Wow, you are so beautiful!" at us every day, so we have to make sure our tank of courage remains full by filling our lives with rest, positive reading or listening, a good friend and the life-giving words of our shepherd.

If you're a parent, please take note. A child's soul is primarily shaped in the early years of his or her life. The words you say, and the example you give, when your children are at home will shape them for a life-time. Remember that "more is caught than taught".

As the wise King Solomon wrote. *"Train up a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it!"* Psychology today agrees.

So this has been our rest stop on the highway of life. Our family, over the years when our girls were young, would often drive about 24 hours from BC to California for a holiday. We'd pack an ice box full of sandwiches, drinks and snacks, and we'd be on our way. Every hour or so along Highway 5, we'd stop at a rest area, eat a bit, use the washrooms and throw a frisbee around. We all need the rest stops to maintain our strength for the long journey ahead.

## CHAPTER 3

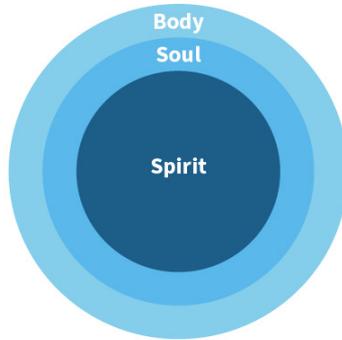
# Quiet Waters

*He leads me beside the quiet waters*

Sheep, just like you and I, require plenty of water to live. Their bodies, on average, are made up of 70% water. Without a regular intake of water, a sheep's health and strength would be in serious jeopardy, so the sheep's intense physical need for water is a good picture of our spiritual need for God. In the Bible, water is often used as a metaphor for God's life-giving Spirit. *Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'*” Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive... John 7:38-39

Even though some of our human characteristics can be compared to those of certain animals, one of the most significant parts of our humanity, which separates us from cats and dogs, is our spiritual nature. We all have, naturally, a deep thirst for spiritual life, which

cannot be satisfied by physical, emotional or mental pleasures. It's difficult to diagram our human make up because our spirit, soul and body are not clearly divisible, but think of a circular target with three concentric circles, one inside the other. The body is the outside case, but inside the body is our soul, and inside the soul is our spirit.



Every one of us has a God-given thirst for a transcendent relationship outside of ourselves. Just as having a caring shepherd is necessary to help the sheep find water, so our shepherd is the only one who can satisfy our spiritual thirst. The phrase, *He leads me beside quiet waters*, suggests that without our shepherd leading us to the thirst quenching living waters, our spirits would dry up and ultimately die.

### **He leads me**

Three simple one syllable words — *he*, *leads* and *me*. There are two pronouns and one verb. The two pronouns, *he* and *me*, refer to the shepherd and his sheep. There is a leader and a follower; both are necessary to complete the progressive action of the verb, "*leads*".

First we need a leader. Without his leading us to the quiet waters, we could easily die of thirst in this wasteland of life. Secondly, we need to follow him. I'm not sure why it is, but we, like sheep, have this perverse independent tendency of refusing to follow leadership. Even though we may know that the Lord wants nothing but the best for us, we often choose to go our own way, rather than his.

Phillip Keller, in his book, *"A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23"* described a scene which he observed of some sheep being led down a path to a picturesque mountain stream. Even though there were crystal clear snow fed waters nestled within the forest of green trees, he noticed that several sheep stopped to drink from small, dingy, mud filled pools along the trail. The pools were not only filled with stirred up mud, but were also polluted with the urine and waste of sheep, who had passed there before them. The water was contaminated with poisonous germs, which could eventually destroy the sheep with parasites and disease.

When we think about those silly sheep drinking that unhealthy water, we cringe inside. How could they do that? Don't they see the sparkling fresh water that their shepherd is leading them to? Why don't they trust the one who knows better and has their best interests at heart? Like those sheep, our spiritual nourishment can only come if we choose to follow the one who knows how to find good water.

So you may be asking, "how does God lead me to the quiet waters, so that I can satisfy my spiritual thirst?" The simple answer is "through difficult times". When I say simple, I mean that it's easy to say, but to actually understand how my shepherd uses difficult times to lead us to quiet waters, will take some serious thought.

One of the key elements necessary to follow God's leading is faith. Do you remember from the movie years ago when Indiana Jones was searching for the holy grail. Running, from his enemies, through the mountains, he came to the end of the trail. Before him lay a vast gulf, between where he was and a place of safety on the mountain at least a hundred feet away. How could he cross the treacherous divide?

Suddenly a beam of light appeared before him that formed an invisible bridge between him and the other side. The only way to safety, was for him to step out onto the invisible shaft of light. Gingerly, he took a step, and then another and another, across the unseen bridge, until he arrived safely on the opposite side. That beam of light is like the faith, which we often have to step out on, to get to the other side where we want to go. To us, following a shepherd, whom we can't see, down a path where we have never travelled before, takes just about as much faith as it did for the professor to step off the cliff onto an invisible bridge. Such faith only grows as we face impossible obstacles in difficult and challenging times.

## **Life has a rhythm to it**

The path of life winds up and down through hills and valleys, dangerous forests with howling predators, and through frightening nights of bleak darkness. Consider the 24 hour cycle of night and day — dark, black, lonely nights are regularly followed by a morning sunrise and the comforting warmth of daylight.

Think of the seasons of the year, especially where we live in British Columbia, Canada. Spring is here now as I write these words. The daylight stretches longer with each passing day, daffodils brighten

our gardens and blossoms bloom on our Japanese cherry trees. Near the end of June, summer arrives and the sun doesn't set until after 9 pm. Cherries hang low on the trees, summer flowers brighten our gardens with a rainbow of colour. People come out of the houses, which they were cocooned in over the winter, wedding music can be heard almost every weekend, sports fields are full of boys and girls running and laughing.

And then by early October, we feel a cool breeze in the air, the leaves begin to fall after the last apples are picked, and the days shorten. It's in late October that we plant daffodil and tulip bulbs several inches deep in the soil. They need at least nine weeks in the cool, wet, dark soil before they rise again from the dead. Fall is a beautiful transition month which leads into the December, through March, Winter season.

Winter looks like death has dawned. Rain falls almost every day, except when the temperature dips below freezing; then it turns to snow. The deciduous trees are bare of leaves and the grasses turn dull brown. The only bright spots are our wonderful Thanksgiving and Christmas celebrations. Those Christian holidays bring hope and the promise of Easter ahead.

And then comes Spring back in all of its newness! Round and around the merry-go-round of our world spins. We get used to the changes and we learn that even though it's winter, spring will come again! There's a rhythm to all of nature. The cycles of the wind and the cycles of the water, to the cycles of the earth and sun, as well as that of fallen leaves becoming soil, which will in turn produce new trees, leaves and seeds.

That rhythm was designed by our Creator for human life also. Consider the seven days our week. Day to work and night to sleep for six days, and then comes the sabbath (which literally means “stop”). As the Bible says “evening and morning were the first day”. I love the way the people of Ethiopia count time. Our 6 pm is their 12 pm, and our 6 am is their 12 am. It works like God intended. Evening begins at the same time darkness begins to fall, and that means slow down and rest. Then at 12 am (our 6 am), the light comes and they begin their day of work. Twelve hours of rest at the beginning of the day and then follow 12 hours of work. And so on and so on.

*“Evening and morning”*. In our Western world, we may wake up at 6 am and invite God to join us in our day. But in God’s world, the new day has already been going for twelve hours. He has been wide awake and preparing our day. When we get up at 6 am, rather than asking our shepherd to join us in our new day, he invites us to join him in his day already half over. Do you see the difference? This is God’s world, and he has asked us to join him in his work. It’s not my world, where I ask God to help me in my work!

## **It’s all about balance**

Think for a moment how you find rest in your personal life. If you were to make a pie chart of your life, you might include time for sleep, rest, eating, working, family time, exercise, personal hygiene, worship and whatever else you do. Look at your chart and notice how much time you have allotted to spend at the quiet waters?

What do you do that refreshes your spirit? We take time for eating, sleeping and exercising our bodies, which will only grow weaker and weaker before they die. We, hopefully, as I wrote about in the

last chapter, will spend adequate time caring for our souls, and that's good; but how much time in our 24 hour day, and our seven day week, do we spend nourishing our spiritual lives.

Now think back to creation, why do you think God said “Remember the Sabbath, to keep it Holy.” Our English word “Holy” has the same root as our words, “whole, heathy, and happy”. Our shepherd's intention is that we set one day apart each day to enrich our personal wholeness, health and happiness.

So far along our search for our life purpose, you've probably noted the first three principles:

1. Choose the Lord as our shepherd
2. Stop, after you're nourished in your soul, and rest in the rich green pastures
3. Take time to refill your spiritual tank at the quiet waters

Each of the three is all pretty easy and fun. Life is looking good in this first part of the journey. But understand that these three vital steps are in preparation for the more challenging days that lay before us. If we don't practise these first three disciplines, we will most likely fail in the difficult days ahead. There's still a couple of more principles which are vitally necessary before we enter the winter season, “*the valley of the shadow of death*”, the next being, the restoring of our broken souls.

## CHAPTER 4

# A Stop at the Hospital

*He restores my soul*

Over a thousand years ago, a little ditty was written to teach children about the consequences of Adam's and Eve's fall from grace. Most of us learned it, but don't know the meaning.

*Jack and Jill went up the hill, to fetch a pail of water.*

*Jack fell down and broke his crown,*

*And Jill came tumbling after.*

In those days, before printing had been invented, songs and riddles, which were easy to memorize, were used to teach children important life lessons. Once we get the main point, it's easy to interpret this short riddle. Jack and Jill represent Adam and Eve, or all males and females. Water represents a well nourished life, (like we saw in the last chapter). Jack and Jill went searching for a fulfilling life, but we all know that water is not found "up the hill";

rather, it's found at the bottom of the hill — so they were going to the wrong place to find the right thing.

The consequence of their foolish decision was that Jack, who was the head of his family, fell. He not only fell from grace, and failed to find what he was looking for, but he also “broke his crown”. Besides the crown being part of his head, it represents rulership and authority. Adam lost both, rulership and authority, when he disobeyed God's directive. And then, Eve (Jill) fell also. Adam's family was affected negatively by his willful disobedience. The poem ends in loss and despair. There is no hope given.

### **He restores my soul**

That is, until God steps in, in his mercy. Like a tree whose roots have been disconnected from the soil, or a fish outside of the water, humankind has been disconnected from our Creator. Every time I go to the grocery store with Susan, and I happen to get that shopping cart with the bad wheel, I think of this dilemma. The one bad wheel keeps directing the cart off track, and if I did not stop it, the cart would bash into the shelf on the aisle's side.

Because we, even young children, are broken from the fall, we desperately need our shepherd's help. I often use my daughter's old bicycle wheel to illustrate this truth.

I have both wheels from her little bike and keep them in my office. One of the wheels is intact, but from the other one, I cut out the axle, so that the spokes hang loosely from the rim.

I hold the broken wheel in my hand and ask the person whom I am counselling, “What's wrong with this picture?” And of course they always respond, “The axle is missing!”

I continue. “This wheel was created by its manufacturer for a purpose — to be part of a bicycle which would take my daughter from our home, to her friend’s home down the street.” And of course, they agree. “But”, I continue, “the bicycle cannot fulfill its purpose because the axle is missing!” As we follow through with this simple picture, think of the tire and rim as our body, which also was created for a definite purpose. The spokes then, are the various facets of my life. They represent my marriage, family, time, gifting, energy, work, leisure; and also my soul area — my attitudes, personality, will, emotions and mind.

The problem is that they are disconnected from the intended center of our life. God, our Creator planned humanity, so that every facet of our lives would be connected to him. He is supposed to be our center, our axle, but sadly, we have been disconnected, and therefore we cannot fulfill his intended purpose.

A bit ago I wrote about a sheep that has been “cast down”. When he lies down and wiggles onto his back to scratch an itch, the sheep can easily get caught upside down in a slight hollow in the pasture. He is then unable to right himself, and unless the shepherd hears his cries, the poor sheep will ultimately die.

When the shepherd hears his sheep’s bleating, he will come to the rescue. He will help the sheep stand upright again. But not only that, the shepherd will massage the legs of the cast down sheep, until the blood begins to circulate again, and the sheep can stand on his own.

The bicycle repairman will reattach the spokes to the right axle, so the bike can be used for its purpose again. The shepherd will help his fallen sheep to stand again, so it can continue life as

it was meant to be. And the Lord, our shepherd, will restore our broken souls so that we can move along the right path to fulfill our personal purpose.

But notice the word “*restores*” more closely. It’s not a once only act — the verb is purposely written in the progressive perfect tense. It infers that the action continues on now, and as long as we live. I’ve been a follower of my shepherd for well over six decades and I’m still in repair. The process will continue throughout my life — thank God that my shepherd will never give up on me and say, “That’s enough Barry. I’m sick and tired of picking you up. You’re on your own now!” He loves me and will never leave me.

Of course you’re asking the questions now, “How does God repair me? How does he get me back on the path when I have wandered from his guidance?” Hold on — the answer is coming. You may not like it, but he does it by leading me through difficult terrain, where I am pressed into relying totally on him. We’re getting to that delightful principle, but first the promise, if I’m willing to follow, “*He leads me on the right path*”.

## CHAPTER 5

# The right Path

*He guides me in the Path of Righteousness for His Name's sake*

The sad fact is that, throughout history, most people have been pretty messed up. Our fore-parents have infected the entire population with their brokenness, and we are doing the same with our present generation. We live in a world of broken people, broken families, broken international relationships, broken economies, a broken justice system and a broken environment.

In the same way as Jack and Jill were broken in their fictitious fall, our human fall has fractured us through and through. Some of us feel like our souls are so badly damaged that nothing could ever repair us. The truth is, however, that our shepherd has offered to not just repair us — rather, he wants to give us brand new lives.

The simple statement of David's psalm, *He guides me down the path of righteousness*, was reflective of his own experiences as a

shepherd. He had led his sheep down enough paths to know that they were both willful and stubborn. Not only do sheep have minds of their own, but those minds of theirs are not particularly bright. They often get themselves into life threatening messes, because of their many poor choices.

Sheep are creatures of habit, and because of that, they will often make the same mistakes that they may have succumbed to only hours before. Like people, they can often fall into ruts, or dangerous streams, which can be destructive to their health and welfare. For example, sheep, without leadership, will graze in the same pastures until they are ruined. They will even eat the grass roots, or walk about in their own manure, and not have the sense to move on to new greener pastures. This causes devastation to grasslands and will also spread disease from one animal to another. They not only destroy their environment, but they destroy each other in the process. Sound familiar?

That's why sheep are one creature who needs to be constantly led by a shepherd. They require more care and guidance than any other animal. A good shepherd is always looking ahead for green pastures. He keeps his sheep moving every day. By changing courses regularly, even the sheep's waste products become fertilizer for future grass growth, rather than becoming disease promoting cesspools. Wise shepherds know how to take even the negatives and make them into positives.

### **Getting out of the ruts of life**

In my life, there have been several memorable pivotal points when my shepherd has had to jar me out of my comfortable ruts. My dad was a successful businessman and owned four lumber yards, so I

grew up in the building supply business. Our dad's desire was for his three sons to take over the business when we were old enough. To follow in dad's business would have been the easiest route for me to take, but as honourable as his work was, it was not what God had planned for either, me or my brothers. On two occasions, which I will never forget, my shepherd pulled me out of the rut I was in, and forcefully pressed me in a new direction.

The first one was very difficult for me, but at the same time, made my decision to leave the building supply business much easier. My mom died just as I was graduating from High School and it was so devastating for my dad, that he sold his entire business. Everything he'd done over the years had been to make my mom happy by providing well for her and us kids, but since she was gone, his motivation ended. I continued to work for the new owners of his business while I was in College, but after about three or four years, they fired me. I probably deserved to be fired because I really wasn't cut out to be a truck driver, but I was by then married to Susan, and it was humiliating to go home after "the talk" and tell her that I'd lost my job.

From there I began to search for a new job. I'd never had to job-hunt before, and had surprising difficulty finding a place to work. Finally I found one. For the first time in my life, after several years of working as a labourer, I had to wear a suit and tie to my new job. It was a frightening career move for me, but as I look back on that valley experience, it propelled me into one of the best seasons of my life.

The second pivotal point came after ten years in the business world, where I'd probably learned more about life, than in my four years at Bible College. The call to be a pastor had been shaping

my thinking since I was eighteen. (A wonderful surprise came one Sunday when a lady visiting our church, who'd been a good friend of my mom, told me that my mom had been praying, since I was a boy, that I would one day be a pastor), and during that time, Susan and I had started a church from our neighbourhood. By July 1980, our young church had grown to about seventy new believers and I felt my shepherd pressing me to quit my job and go full time into pastoring. I knew that our young church could not support our family (by that time our two daughters were in school), but I felt like Indiana Jones stepping on to the invisible bridge, I just had to take a step of faith. Financially and security wise, the choice was difficult, but because I felt pretty sure that my shepherd was leading me, and that he was trustworthy, we took the big step. And the transition went amazingly well. My shepherd knew my future and my destiny better than I did — he knew that the right path would ultimately lead me and our family to greener pastures. Again, it was a dark winter season that shifted my life direction, and as always, spring followed closely behind.

### **For His name's sake**

When I was about ten years of age, one Saturday afternoon, I was out with my dad working in the garden. I remember him snipping off a Black-eyed Susan and taking the flower in his hands. "Barry", he said, "this flower is like our lives. It's here for a short time, brings pleasure to us, and then it dies. The petals of this flower are its reputation. Every one of us makes choices in our lives that have consequences. Each choice we make affects our reputation, and a good reputation takes a long time to form, just like this flower. From a tiny seed, it has to send down roots, develop a stem and leaves, and finally open up its blossoms into these beautiful yellow

petals. The petals that surround its black center reflect the health of the flower.”

As he said that, my dad asked me to rip off one of the petals. I did that, and he then asked me to rip off another, and another. “By removing those three petals”, he continued, “you’ve made three choices. Now I want you to put the three petals back on!” I looked at him incredulously, and replied “You know that I can’t do that, dad!”

The lesson was not lost on me. Even though the conversation took place over sixty years ago, I well remember my dad saying authoritatively, but kindly, to me, “Barry, that’s like our family name. If any of us makes serious unhealthy life choices, there will be long lasting consequences. Our reputation — our name, Buzza, will be damaged irreparably. The only way that our name can be restored, like this flower, is to begin again with a seed and regrow a new Black-eyed Susan.”

In this psalm, David underscored that principle when he wrote, *“He leads me in the right path, for his name’s sake”* As a follower of my shepherd, I represent him and bear his name to those in my circle of influence.

## **There are rules to follow**

Let’s think for a few minutes about the path of life, as a trip to another city, a few hundred kilometres away. We have a GPS which will help us with directions; there will be lots of signs along the road helping us to find our way; and there are, of course, rules to follow — and there are stopping places where both our car and our bodies will get refuelled. We’ll pass schools, restaurants, playgrounds, gas stations, police cars with radar, and we may even see

an accident, a stalled car or encounter some other crisis. Each of those circumstances serves to illustrate the journey on which we have embarked, down the path of life.

Consider the rules. I have been accused, by those who know me well, of not abiding by all the rules of life. I think I'm a bit better now than I was when I was a teenager, and I'll tell you why. It was in 1965, and I was on my way to my dad's lumber yard to work, one cloudy Saturday morning. A new law had just been passed in BC, that motorcycle riders had to wear helmets. Many riders complained about, and even resisted, the new law, but as a good citizen, I complied.

I was riding my Suzuki motorcycle about 90 km per hour down the highway, headed for Vancouver, not thinking about anything important, when suddenly, without warning, a car coming the opposite way, illegally made a left hand turn right in front of me. Although I quickly jammed on my brakes, I had no time to stop, and I plowed into the side of the car, still going about 60 km per hour. When I hit the back door of the vehicle, I flew about forty feet over it, and landed on my head far beyond the car, which was taking off like a bullet.

I would not be here today, or if I were, I'd no doubt be immobilized in some way, if it hadn't been for the helmet which I had reluctantly worn. Thank God for that wisely given law, and that I was obedient to it. Rules and laws are sometimes hard to follow, but they are ultimately written for our good. I think of the ten rules of life that Moses recorded, (the Ten Commandments) and considering how keeping those laws has more than once saved my life, I'm thankful that they are there to set boundaries for us on our journeys.

There are at least three lessons that I learned on that day when I was only nineteen years of age. One, as I've just written, was that **rules are written for our good**. The second is that **we always have to watch out for the other guy** who may not be obeying the rules, and thirdly, **we have to forgive, even those who fail us**. The guy who made that illegal turn in front of me ran from the scene, and the police finally found him getting drunk inside a local bar. He claimed that someone had stolen his car and he knew nothing about the accident. If I hadn't forgiven him and paid for the repairs myself, I'd be still suffering the consequences of my unforgiveness today.

We've already considered the rest areas along the way. There are also playgrounds and restaurants that are there to help refresh us on our journeys. And then there are, as well, unforeseen crises that hit us when we least expect it. Crises are very difficult times in life — divorce, accidents, death, sickness, loss of work, financial failure, teen-age pregnancies, run-away children. Even though they are not caused by God, he has a wonderful way of using them to positively shape us. We'll talk more about that in the next few chapters. We'll also consider how our shepherd guides us with his voice, as well as with his written Word.

As a possible assignment, I've found it helpful to list 10-20 of the most influential pivotal points that we've encountered along the way. Some good and some bad, but how have they shaped us or pressed us onto a different road? Hopefully we can see how our shepherd has been using even critical times to either help us avoid an unwise detour, or to get us back onto the right path.

## CHAPTER 6

# A Walk on the Dark Side

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;*

Susan and I live between the Coast Mountains on our north, and the Fraser Valley in the south. The valley below our home is rather famous for its grain and vegetable produce here in the west of Canada, but on the mountains, as beautiful as they are, there are no farms, only trees and snow. The principle is that **life flows from the valleys.**

There was one more unforgettable life experience, which I neglected to mention in the last chapter. It's another sad story, that I don't confess to many people, but because it serves to illustrate the ultimate good that came from a dark valley season in my life, I'll tell you about it here. Between my job in my dad's former company

and the one with Canadian Forest products, which served me so well, I had short stint at another local Building Supply outlet. As before, I liked the people with whom I worked and I did well at serving customers, but I was never very apt with operating machinery.

On one ominous snowy winter day, my boss decided to shut down his business a bit early. Too much snow kept any customers from coming in, so there was no point in remaining open. Working with the others, to close up everything quickly, I jumped onto the biggest forklift and was driving it into the large shed where we kept all the dry lumber and plywood. Without realizing that the boom was up too high, I rammed it into the 12"x12" cedar beam which held up the roof, and knocked it off its support. The entire roof didn't cave in, but it did fall about half a meter under the weight of the snow. If I were to have backed up and removed the forklift boom, which was by then holding the roof up, the entire building might have collapsed.

The whole staff ran to see what the noise was about, and there I sat, red-faced, and guilty on the forklift. The boss said firmly to me, "Barry just go home. We'll take it from here!" Thankfully he didn't fire me on the spot. (I was still hurting from being let go only months before), but I did decide that evening, that driving forklifts and trucks was not for me. It was then, in that dark valley, that I continued my search for a sit down job! And in a few months, came the beginning of my new career in business. That valley of humiliation was just one more of the seasons of shift in my life direction. Sadly, there were still many more to come! As I look back on my twenty years of careers in the secular world, it's those dark winter seasons that I remember most vividly. And that's because, like in our Fraser Valley, life flows most vibrantly from the valley.

## **The shepherd works hardest in the valley**

A good shepherd, like David, was well acquainted with this dangerous trek through valleys. Each spring a shepherd would begin the long journey with his sheep, up to the high country toward the lush summer range. Then again, in the autumn, early snow would chase them back down those same valleys, before the cold winter season set in. The valleys were difficult and dangerous, but the trek was ultimately necessary for the health of the sheep. Of course the shepherd would never lead his sheep where he'd not been before. He was well aware of the potential of swollen rivers and the possibility of rockslides. He knew where the poisonous plants were, the waiting places of wild animals, and the dangers of a sudden sleet or hail storm.

Safely arriving at their destination, either the grassy tablelands in the springtime, or the rich well watered lowlands in the fall, made the sheep's bi-annual trek worth the challenges. The treachery of the descent through the valleys would increase, as the sheep were led through steep rock walled canyons. The high rock cliffs cast long cold dark shadows over the flock of sheep as they walked, and crafty predators would wait in hiding for their tastey prey. Coyotes, wolves, bears and cougars were ravenous after a long cold winter. Rock slides and avalanches were an ever present danger and sudden sleet or snow storms were always a possibility. A wise shepherd knew the skies and was ever ready to protect his sheep from the cold. Sheep's wool is easily drenched by rain and sleet, and because they have thin skin, they are susceptible to pneumonia and other respiratory illnesses. Death in the valley is always a real possibility for every sheep. Shepherds knew it well and so stayed very close to their sheep on the bi-annual trek through the valleys.

King David, when he wrote this psalm, was very aware of the ebb and flow of seasons in his life. For seventy years he'd experienced the difficult winters as well as the fruitful summer seasons. His journal reveals the many hills and valleys of his life. As a teenager, David was a strong, athletic musician. His reputation on the harp and with poetic songs, won him an audience in the king's court. As a young man, working with King Saul, perhaps as an armour bearer, he had the unusual serendipitous opportunity to battle against the renown giant, Goliath — and he was victorious. The maidens danced and sang their songs of praise about the handsome young hero. Life for David, by the time he was twenty, took him to the mountaintop of emotional happiness.

But what goes up, just as with a Ferris Wheel, must come down! The upshot of the girls' applause was that David's boss, King Saul, became insanely jealous of him. The young soldier quickly became a most wanted fugitive, running for his life. He hid in caves, ate whatever he could find, and often cried out in despair to his shepherd. On many days, he felt alone and wished that he could run away from it all, or even that he would die. That long ten year, dark winter season was a humbling, seeming failure in his life — but unknown to him, spring was just around the corner.

His nemesis, King Saul, who was also his father-in-law, died in battle, when David was thirty. By popular demand, and also because of the destiny God had designed for him, David was anointed as the new king of Judah. His reign was not without ongoing challenges, but was mostly very successful. Military victories were summer high points along the way, especially when he captured Jerusalem and it became his Capital City, but by midlife, he took another tumble into a dark winter season.

When he was in his late forties, David had an affair with one of his best friend's wife. He might have got away with it, if Bathsheba hadn't become pregnant with his baby. Things moved from bad to worse. His initial coverup led ultimately to the murder of his trusted friend Uriah, and as often happens, that ended in David's suffering from severe depression, which consequently, negatively infected his leadership.

It seemed that King David would never fully recover from both, his own failures and the resulting devastation of his family's dysfunction. But his return to the right path into the sunshine of spring, although long and winding, ultimately regained his happiness and victory.

What carried the famous psalmist and king through his many seasons in the valleys of the shadow of death? How did he hold on during those many dark days? We know quite a bit about both, his feelings of despair and his enduring faith, through those challenging seasons, because David recorded them in his journals as well as his psalms.

On one of his low days, while hiding for his life in a cave, David wrote,

*Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my pleas for mercy!  
In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!  
For the enemy has crushed my life to the ground;  
He has made me sit in darkness like those long dead.  
Therefore my spirit faints within me;  
My heart within me is appalled.  
Answer me quickly, O Lord!  
My spirit fails! Hide not your face from me,  
lest I be like those who go down to the pit.*

*Let me hear in the morning of your steadfast love, For in you I trust.  
Make me know the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.*

Psalms 143:1-8

## **Five points to ponder**

There are at least five things that we can learn from David's challenging treks through the valley of the shadow of death. First, even though he often felt like he was drowning in the overpowering waves of adversity, he knew that **he was firmly anchored in his shepherd's love and care**. His foundation was unshakable.

Secondly **David knew how to pray**, or at least cry out to God. There was no religious formality to it. Sometimes it was only a loud cry "Help!" He simply believed that his shepherd was always near, was always listening to his pleas and cared enough to come to his aide. But he also knew by experience that his Lord would come only when the time was just right. There are priceless life lessons sometimes learned because the shepherd waits until we are emotionally and spiritually ready for rescue.

And thirdly, like we do, **David made a daily choice to either follow his shepherd's lead or to reject it and walk forward on his own**. When he successfully made the choice to walk close to his shepherd, he passed through the valley seasons, much faster than he did when he decided to go it on his own. It is true that we grow through our failures, but choosing to follow him in the first place, and learning from the mistakes of those who have gone before us, is the quicker and easier pathway to maturity.

Fourthly, **adversity will come, regardless of how well we keep up our guard, and how closely we stay beside the shepherd on**

**the right path.** There will always be a certain amount of opposition in every life. It is a necessary part of our Creator's design for our lives. And lastly, and this is a tough one, pain is a gift. The pain and opposition that we experience throughout our life journey is allowed because it helps us to grow stronger. I'll write more about this in the next couple of letters, but for now it's something to begin thinking about — **pain is a gift** for which we'd do well to be thankful!

## CHAPTER 7

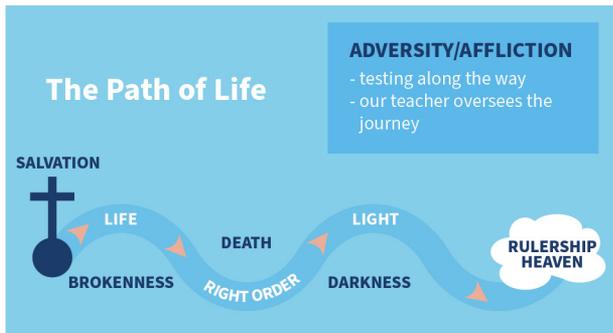
# No Fear

*I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*

Fear is a debilitating emotion, which no doubt, all of us have experienced many times in our lives. Just watch the news on TV any evening, and there are enough fearful things happening to scare any of us. This Covid 19 virus, they say could kill millions world-wide; there's a financial downturn of at least 30%, the greatest loss since the Great Depression; jobs are being lost by the thousands; people are taking advantage of the locked up stores, breaking in and stealing; our government leaders, as well as scientists, are confused, and nobody seems to have the answers we are looking for. Fear can be good in that it tends to jar the adrenaline in our bodies, so that we are more alert and less apathetic, but it also works negatively in both, our thinking and the ultimate health of our bodies.

Notice the subtle, but significant, pronoun change in this sentence. “*For you are with me*”. Up to this point, the poet has been singing, “*He makes me lie down; He leads me; He restore my soul ...*”. Did you see it? Now as he slides into the valley of the shadow of death, David changes the pronoun to “you”. “You are with me!” When there’s fear, we tend to look for help, and that’s when we discover anew that the shepherd is right there with us.

Then look at the word “*evil*”. My dictionary describes evil as “morally bad, wicked; causing injury or any other undesirable result; marked by threatening misfortune or distress.” You’ll remember the pathway that we’ve looked at, called “*the path of righteousness*”, or “*the path of life*”. In the shepherd’s handbook, he also refers to our being on the path as “*walking in the light*”. So if we’re on the path in the light, then anything outside the path is darkness. When we get off the lighted path, into the shadows and ultimately into the darkness, that is where evil lurks. Evil is anything that would divert us from the right path — the path of light.



There is something about fear that tends to get a grip on us. I remember more than once when one of our girls was out at night, later than we expected her to be. Say we’d set their curfew at 10

pm and the time was 10:30 pm. In those days, when the girls were young, we didn't have cell phones with "find my friend", and so we had no way of knowing what was happening or where they were.

One night Kristy was out for a walk with her cousin, and she was not home when we expected her to be. Susan was getting more and more upset and anxious as the minutes ticked on. I was assuring her that everything was ok, but at the same time, I was secretly dealing the same gripping fear, feeling that something was wrong. Susan insisted that we get in our car and try to find her, so we drove fretfully, from place to place, throughout our neighbourhood for an hour. Still not seeing our teenaged daughter, and with fear tightening its grip, we finally came home again. When we walked in the door, Kristy came out of her bedroom in her pyjamas and queried, "Where were you guys? I was worried sick about you!" She'd been home for two hours and not wanting to bother us, had gone straight to her room.

Notice how David phrased his psalm, "*though I walk through the shadow of death*". The reassuring words of our shepherd are that "*I'll never leave you; I'll never drop you!*" For those who have put their trust in our God's forgiveness and love, physical death is merely a shadow — he promised that we have eternal life. Even death of our bodies is not really death. As he wrote in another place, "*Death is swallowed up in victory*".

### **Why do we go through these dark valleys?**

So we ask the question, "If our shepherd loves us and is always with us, why do we go through these scary times?" I can think of five reasons.

The first, and probably the most common reason that **we go through challenging seasons, is because of our own bad choices.**

Why did I get fired from my job as a truck driver? It was because I made some foolish decisions, like the time I left the lumberyard with a very full load, and rather than chain and cinch my load securely down, I tied it with a rope. It was no wonder that as I sloppily shifted gears, while driving up a steep hill, my entire load slid off the truck and down the road behind me!

It was my unwise choice, as well as my bad driving, that precipitated the consequences.

We choose our life mates. I'm not particularly sympathetic with a man who complains about his wife's weaknesses — after all, he chose her. And besides that, our wives' behaviour is most often a reflection of the way we, as husbands, treat them. I have a friend who is dying of lung cancer. He was warned by his doctor ten years ago that if he didn't stop smoking, his body would be in serious danger. He didn't stop, and today he's suffering the consequence of his choice.

Secondly, many times **we suffer difficulties because of the bad choices of others.** The victim of an accident because a drunk driver wandered into their lane, the victim of spousal abuse, or even the thousands who are dying of this current Covid 19 virus — all are suffering as the result of someone, over whom we had no control, making a bad choice. Our environmental crisis is here because we, and our older generations, have been bad stewards of our planet.

Then sometimes **we go through winter seasons because of the broken world** in which we live. Tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, and cancer are all a result of our fallen world. When our fore

parents fell out of harmony with their Creator, the world which we were given to manage, slipped into disorder. Our genes, as well as our environment, fell into discord with the music of our creator, and some of the diseases with which we suffer, are the sour fruit of our poisoned soil.

**The devil is set on destroying humanity.** Every day we each face sumptuous temptations that our invisible spiritual enemy places in our path. “Eat this forbidden fruit; lust after that other woman; take that thing that doesn’t belong to you; it’s all about you — you are more important than the other guy; give that person the finger for what he did to you; don’t you dare forgive your dad for the way he mistreated you ...”. It’s no wonder that our shepherd warned us, *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity (an open door) to the devil.”* And *“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”*

And finally, **God himself can cause us to go through winter seasons.** This is perhaps the most curious cause of trouble that we have to face. Why would God cause us pain? The reason that we have trouble with this concept is because our concept of pain is flawed. In the last chapter, I wrote that we should be thankful for **the gift of pain**, and I’d like to explain here why that is.

Some of my favourite books were written by Philip Keller and Dr Paul Brandt, who travelled together for several years. For example, Keller just republished his latest book, *“Fearfully and Wonderfully Made”*, which recounts many of the life lessons that he learned alongside Dr Brandt, who was a medical doctor working with leprosy patients in India.

Leprosy is a sickness of the nerves, so a leper loses feeling in his nervous system.

Think of a time you may have inadvertently touched a hot surface of an iron or a stove. The immediate shot of pain that your nerves sent to your brain, screamed at you, “Take your hand away from that heat. It’s dangerous!” But a leper, who has lost his sense of pain, doesn’t feel a thing, and leaves his hand in the stove until he finally smells something burning!

Or consider your eyes that constantly, although subconsciously, feel the subtle touch of minute flecks of dust. Without a thought in your conscious mind, because of the gift of pain, your eyelashes go to work and brush away the foreign invaders, like a busy windshield wiper. The leper does not have the God-given blessing of pain, so he suffers irreparable damage to his body, because there are no warning signals telling him to care for himself. Let’s thank our shepherd now for the wonderful gift of pain.

## **The benefits of pain**

There are several benefits that we need to consider, which we gain from our painful walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Many years ago, a young Hebrew teenager, named Joseph, was treated cruelly by his jealous brothers. They hated him, and so sold Joseph as a slave to an Egyptian family. Joseph suffered not only physical beatings, but also constant painful mental and emotional abuse for thirteen long years, until finally something very good came along. Spring eventually followed his painful winter season. When he met his brothers again after several years, Joseph not only forgave them, but said to his abusers. *“Don’t be afraid of me ... You intended to harm me, but **God intended it all for good.** He brought*

*me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.*

A benefit that most of us have experienced, because of the gift of pain, is when we discover that something is out of alignment. Just as we know that when our car shakes and rattles, the wheels are out of alignment, so it is with our bodies. If I have pain in my legs or shoulders, a chiropractor will tell me that the bones of my spine are out of alignment. And it can be the same in my emotional or spiritual life, if I go through an extended period of anxiety, anger, sadness or depression, there is likely something out of alignment, in either my human relationships, or my relationship with my shepherd. My life goes along most smoothly and pain free when I am in healthy relationship with others and with God.

**Going through the valley of the shadow of death builds character.** By the time I was halfway through Bible College, at twenty years of age, I thought that I had life pretty well figured out. That's why they call a second year College student a Sophomore. The roots of the word are "Sophos" which means wise, "Moron", which means fool. Anyone who is thirty or over understands that it's in getting through the difficulties in life, that we grow in character. A spoiled child has been spared from difficulties by doting parents, but he is "spoiled" by their thoughtless overprotection. We throw spoiled apples away because they are no good.

**Both purity and faith grow in the valley times.** When a chunk of precious metal goes through the fire, it comes out purer. The hotter the fire is, the purer it becomes. Every time our shepherd guides us through another valley, our faith in his wisdom and love grows. We realize, as we mature, that in ourselves, we are not capable of

getting through some of life's difficult challenges unscathed, so we are humbled by our shepherd's love and his protective care. When we are pressed out of the place of our personal security, we have two choices. We can fall flat on our face, or we can in faith, reach out to someone beyond ourselves for help. Because he is with us, more than we ever imagined we could accomplish with our personal ability, is now possible.

## CHAPTER 8

# Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child

*Your rod ... it comforts me*

A while ago, I was having breakfast with a forty year old man and he shared his life journey story with me. He told me how he is finally getting his life on the right track.

He also described to me his adult years of emotional instability, failure in business, floundering marriage and family, his battles with substance abuse and ongoing unhappiness. Wondering why his journey had been so troublesome, I asked him about his early childhood and the choices that he'd made as a teenager.

His mother had died when he was only a toddler and his dad had literally given him away for a stranger to raise. Throughout his maturing years, there had been a glaring lack of love, and no

structure or discipline at all. He had been free to do whatever he wanted during his teens. He ate whatever he wanted, came and went whenever he pleased, hung around with whomever he felt like, and did anything he chose to do.

As he was talking, I was thinking, “Wow! This is the type of freedom that every young teenager wants. “No one telling me what to do; no boundaries, no rules, no discipline!! That’s total freedom”, but for this man, he said it had been the undoing of any hope of success in his life over the past four decades.

The subject of discipline has been in hot debate over these past sixty years. Psychologists have bounced back and forth between the value of using strong loving discipline, and letting our children be free to make their own rules and their own choices. Children’s rights or parental control are the two extremes.

Although I wasn’t a bad child, I do remember a few specific occasions when my dad and mom had to discipline me. And I also remember the resulting life lessons that their parental authority taught me. When I was ten years of age, my dad began taking me with him to work on Saturday mornings. Dad figured he’d get an early start on teaching me and my siblings good work habits, so I swept floors, burned garbage, filled nail bins and straightened moulding bins for \$.25 an hour.

One day, as I was waiting for my dad to take me home after work, while wandering around the hardware department, I eyed some lumber crayons, which sold for a few pennies each. Although I had no particular use for them, I stuffed four different coloured crayons into my pocket. As dad and I drove home, I felt the weight of the crayons burning in my pocket, as well as the pang

of a guilty conscience. After getting home, I realized that someone would catch me if I used the crayons, so I hid them in the back of my sock drawer.

They sat there for a couple of weeks, until my mom found the stolen stash, while putting away my laundry. When she asked where I'd taken them from, my first instinct was to lie, so I told her that Eric, the hardware department manager, had given them to me. Since my crime was so devious and my face reflected my guilt, she read my mind, so she felt it necessary to tell dad about the crayons.

I tried the crying thing and sincerely as possible said I was sorry, but it wasn't good enough. My dad, after considering that this would be an important life lesson, told me that I'd have to take the crayons back to where I'd stolen them from, and also apologize to Eric for my deceit. I still remember how humiliated and embarrassed I was as I paid my penance — but because of that, I've never stolen anything since that memorable day. My mom and dad loved me so much that they wanted me to learn the virtue of honesty early in my life.

It's true what the Bible says, "*a father who loves his child will discipline him*". The word "discipline" and the word "disciple" are almost synonymous — a disciple is simply a follower or a learner. Disciplining our children means teaching them to follow the rules in our home, in their school, in our society and in our relationship with our shepherd. The rod, which every shepherd would carry as part of his basic equipment, just like the Billy Stick that a policeman keeps in his belt, is a metaphor for discipline.

The adage, "*Spare the rod and spoil the child*" does not mean that we should beat our son or daughter with a rod; rather it symbolically means that we should discipline, or disciple, our child. We

should love our children, and also love ourselves enough, to ensure that discipline is used to help us understand healthy boundaries, and stay within the parameters of the right path. The rod, in psalm 23, represents the many ways that our shepherd uses discipline to teach us how to be successful and fulfilled in our life journeys. It's no wonder that David says, "Your rod comforts me". The end result of a disciplined life is satisfaction and comfort.

### **The farmer, athlete and soldier**

Consider three careers which underline the principle that discipline is necessary to the success of our life journey. Can you imagine a farmer who isn't disciplined and doesn't work hard at removing the weeds from his vegetable garden, fertilize his crops, turn on the sprinkling system on a dry day, or bring in the harvest when it's ready? Imagine the farmer just doesn't feel like getting up at 6 am when the alarm goes off. Can you see him, though the crops are ripe and ready for harvest, deciding to go fishing instead?

Of course the idea is ludicrous. The farmer knows his business; he knows the seasons, understands the cycle of his crops, and he has learned by experience what to do and when to do it. Like a baby ready to be born, ripe crops wait for no man — when they are ready, the farmer must get to work. If not, he will fail in his chosen profession.

Likewise we cannot conceive of an athlete who does not consistently discipline himself to daily watch his food intake, diligently keep his body toned to precision or not regularly practice his skills until it hurts. An athlete must be always ready to go when the starting whistle blows. Disciplined self-denial is the name of the game — it determines whether he will be a winner or a loser.

Think also of a soldier who is undisciplined, does not know his place in rank or who refuses to take orders. If he isn't well practised with his rifle, he won't be able to shoot straight. You wouldn't want him driving a tank, dropping bombs from an airplane, or standing face to face in combat with an enemy. An undisciplined soldier is an oxymoron. The very idea does not compute.

So it is with each of us. The rod of discipline is as necessary to a healthy balanced life, as it is in the life of a farmer, an athlete or a soldier. Our good shepherd, as well as loving parents, teachers, police force, bosses at work and our own will power, are all gifts to us for the purpose of keeping us within the parameters of the right path as we walk out our destined life journey.

Some considerations of this short statement, "*Your rod comforts me*", are worthy of a brief mention. First of all, **too much wool or too much fat are not good for us**. Wool is a shepherd's bread and butter, so one might think that the more wool a sheep produces, the better it would be, but not so. Wool on a sheep can get matted with mud, burrs and manure, and weigh the sheep down. Although sheep resist being sheered and it's hard work for the shepherd, it must be done for the animal's own good.

People today in North America, including you and me, tend to want to accumulate stuff. Too much of cars, clothes, furniture or toys, tends to weigh us down and hold us back from realizing our prepared destiny. A friend of mine lost everything she owned in a house fire. It seemed like the worst day of her life when it happened, but some weeks later, she told me that it was the best thing that had ever happened, because her life priorities shifted that day. She was pressed into deeper dependence on her shepherd, and became much more aware of his voice, and what he was saying

was really important in her life than the stuff she'd accumulated. The tragedy served as a discipline and ultimately led her down a different path — a road of new beginnings. Even we humans need to be sheered from time to time.

Secondly, in times of discipline, we are reminded, as I have previously written, that **laws and rules are set for our own good**; and thirdly, that **pain can be very positive in our lives**. You'll remember what I emphasized in the last chapter — pain is a gift that we should be thankful for.

And that's why, principle number four is so important; **we sometimes need to let others suffer awhile**. A book, that I've given to some of our leaders to read is called, "When helping hurts". Whether it's in working with the self inflicted poorest on skid row, or with the destitute pastor in the hills of Ethiopia, I've learned that the best way to help people is to help them help themselves. It's the old adage, "*Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime*", that teaches the best way to help people.

A couple, whom I know, are both "mercy people". They are the nicest people you'd ever want to meet, who would not want anyone to suffer for any reason. Their two sons however, who are both in their thirties, are selfish and inconsiderate. They were "spoiled" by their parent's desire to be "nice". They rarely, if ever, heard the word "no" from either parent and they avoid taking responsibility for anything or anyone in their lives. One son has never held down a job in his life, and dad still slips him money whenever he asks. He is currently rebounding from a second failed live-in relationship and he has moved back home, where his mom is lovingly feeding him, washing his clothes and nursing his self inflicted wounds.

His brother, who also still lives at home, attempted suicide last year after a long battle with drugs and alcohol. While I was counselling the parents after their son's attempted suicide, they cried relentlessly. They have thoroughly loved their boys — so what went wrong? Why have both of their sons failed so miserably? The answer comes from the successful farmer's, athlete's and soldier's disciplined way of life. As the old saying goes, "no pain — no gain"! The boys need to suffer, and pay their own debts; and mom and dad need to back off and let their sons go through the natural consequences of their own bad decisions.

Like most kids, I didn't like discipline as a child. My mom and dad said, as most parents do, whenever they spanked us kids, "This hurts me more than it does you" and of course we didn't believe them at the time. But we did the same with our girls, and they have done likewise with their children, and our testimony to you is that we are now enjoying four generations of healthy purposeful adults. Loving discipline is one of the key principles which will help keep our children firmly on the right path.

## CHAPTER 9

# The Shepherd Speaks

*Your staff — it comforts me*

There's an old story about a man and his wife, who were watching TV together. The man, on the show that they were watching, leaned over to his girl, with flowers in hand, and told her how beautiful she was and how much he loved her. The wife, watching the romantic interchange, wistfully turned toward her aloof husband and asked him, "Ernie, why don't you ever tell me, like that man, that you love me?"

He didn't even make a gesture as he responded, "Ethel I told you that I loved you when we were married, and if I ever change my mind I'll let you know!"

As sad as the humour is, that thoughtless husband is what many people think our good shepherd is like. "I told you that I loved you two thousand years ago, and if I ever change my mind I'll let you

know.” But our shepherd is not mute and he’s not thoughtless. The character of our Lord is that he desires to talk with his people. In psalm 23, the shepherd’s staff is a picture of his desire to communicate with his sheep.

There are at least four ways that a shepherd uses his staff to guide his sheep. The first is with new born lambs. Sometimes in the excitement of the birthing season, newborn lambs will become separated from their mothers. So that he doesn’t physically touch the lambs and imprint his scent on them, which might cause mom to reject her baby, he would pick them up with the crook of his staff and gently place them next to their mommy.

Secondly, his staff is used to reach out as an extension of his arm, and catch individual sheep for examination. He draws the timid sheep close to himself so that he can better care for his needs. And then thirdly, the staff is used to guide the sheep. As shepherd and sheep are walking together along a new or difficult trail, the shepherd will sometimes lovingly press his staff against the sheep, to guide him wherever he wants his animal to go. The sheep actually like this personal attention. It would be akin to your affectionately patting your dog, and saying “You’re a good girl!” The shepherd’s touching his sheep is as important to their health as a mother’s touch is to her baby.

Another use of the staff is evident in the parable about a shepherd who was counting his sheep. When he noticed that one was missing, he immediately left the ninety-nine who were safe, behind, and went searching for the one lost sheep. When he found him stuck in a crevice, or caught in the thick of a briar, he would reach in with the crook of his staff and rescue the frightened sheep from danger. The staff is a symbol of the shepherd’s love, care, guidance

and protection. We, like sheep, have the promise of our shepherd, that he is always near to keep us from straying, draw us close for our personal care, guide us down the right path, and rescue us from imminent danger.

### **Our shepherd is not mute**

The word “*comforts*” here in this text, originally written in Hebrew, literally means “to come alongside”. The one who comes alongside us, while we are trudging through the valley of the shadow of death, is our comforter. He not only shows us the way to walk, but he also talks with us and listens to us. The staff then, represents his communicating with us, both his written Word and also his spoken words.

Remember the story of the Jewish Rabbi, the Catholic Priest and the Baptist pastor, who went fishing together? They were in the boat, not too far from land when the rabbi said to his friends, “I forgot my thermos of coffee. It’s back at the shore.”

The pastor suggested that they row back to shore and get it, but the rabbi responded, “It’s ok I’ll walk.” With that, he stepped out of the boat and walked across the water, got his thermos, returned, and hopped back into the boat.

Just as the rabbi climbed into the boat, the priest exclaimed, “I forgot to bring the bait.” Without hesitation, he then walked across the water, picked up the bait and returned to the boat. The pastor looked on incredulously, with mouth wide open, but he figured if a Jew and a Catholic had that much faith, to step out and walk on water, then surely a Baptist should be able to walk on water too. With a burst of bravado, he stepped out of the boat, onto the water, and promptly sank! As the other two men leaned over to rescue

their humiliated friend from the waters, they smiled at each other, laughed and said, "I guess we should have told him where the rocks were!" Our shepherd comforts us, as he guides us through our life journey, by showing us where the rocks are, that we can step on.

## **How to improve our hearing**

After telling his disciples one of his most insightful stories about seed planted on four different types of soil, Jesus compared the hard soil, rocky soil, weedy soil and the good soil to the way we listen. The spiritual ears of some of us, maybe all of us at times, are turned off like the hard soil; some of us have ears that only hear partially, like the soil with big rocks in it; others' hearing is distorted by the confusing signals of many other voices trying to get our attention, like the weedy soil. But our shepherd wants us to learn to focus on his voice, like the good soil, that received the healthy seed and produced much fruit.

After giving the parable, Jesus said to his followers, "*Consider carefully how you listen. With the measure you use, it will be given to use, and even more.*" In other words, if we listen half heartedly, we will hear only a little bit; but if we learn to listen more carefully, we will hear more, and there will even be a bonus for those of us who have soft attentive hearts.

He goes on, "*To those who are open to my teaching, more understanding will be given, but to those who are not listening, even what they have will be taken away from them.*"

You've heard it said, "Use it — or lose it!" If I don't use my arm for a long time, it will gradually atrophy. Doctors tell us that older people do not lose their ability to remember, as much as they

may think. They simply do not continue using their brain and stop learning. Even in a healthy octogenarian, the more he exercises his brain, the more capacity he will have to learn and remember.

### **Follow the light**

Our shepherd talks with us every day. He signals to us when to turn a corner, slow down, or go faster. Begin today sharpening your wifly signal to hear his voice. It's amazing to think that our shepherd, who controls the universe, has a personal plan for our life journeys. He not only created us with eternal destinies, but he willingly communicates with us as to how we can move into that destiny.

One warm Sunday afternoon, a few years ago, my brother Dave and his wife, Carol, took Susan and me out on their boat for a ride in the Burrard Inlet. It was in the early evening, as we were returning to the marina, the sun was setting and it was getting darker. When we were about a mile from the dock, Dave pointed out to me, two bright lights that were shining from the shore of Port Moody. The lights, he explained, had been strategically placed to guide boaters into their berth when it was dark outside. If the captain were to see two separate lights, he would know that he was off course, but when the two white lights blended and became one, he would be assured that he was right on target.

What a fascinating metaphor for the way our shepherd guides us with his staff. The two lights are the Bible, which I think of as the owner's instruction manual, and his spoken words. There have been times in my life when I thought I heard something from my shepherd, but it didn't seem to line up with the principles in God's Word. Only when both line up together, do I know that I'm on the right road.

Listening to our shepherd is not as difficult as we tend to think. I've never heard God speak in an audible voice, as some have. Sometimes I hear him in a dream, or while I'm lying awake in bed, but typically for me it's more like he puts a thought in my mind. I've come to recognize the various voices that speak in my mind — sometimes it's my imagination, or something I may have read or heard during the day, or it may be the enemy's negative voice, and other times it's my shepherd. When I hear his words in my mind, and it's not something I would have thought up myself, I see if it lines up with what's in the Bible, and if it does, I might check with a wise friend to see if they concur, and if he or she does, I believe it's my shepherd's voice. Then I step forward to see what doors open or close, while keeping on listening for further instruction. It might be an encouraging, inspirational, directive or corrective word. Like with anything we do well, we have to practise listening. The more we pay attention, and obey, the better we'll hear.

## CHAPTER 10

# Surrounded by my Enemies

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies*

The last time that I was in Korea, I took the time to climb a mountain where a battle, during the Korean War, was fought. From where I stood on the heights, I could see North Korea and could even hear the sounds of their testing bombs miles away. The reason that this was so memorable to me, was because I was standing on top of a concrete bunker, build during the war in the early 1950's. In my mind were pictures of eighteen or nineteen year old boys hiding in these bunkers, as the enemy charged up the hill toward them with guns blazing. I went inside the cramped concrete structure, with slits for windows, and in my imagination, pictured the frightened boys listening to the sounds of grenades and AK47's exploding nearby.

It was the closest I have ever felt to a person being surrounded by his mortal enemies.

Although I have never experienced the horrors of a physical war, with guns and bombs exploding around me, I have many times seen and felt the pain and fear of many people, who were in the face of spiritual attack. As a pastor, I have sat and prayed with people, on a regular basis, who were under attack by enemies of their soul, such as divorce, loneliness, unemployment, cancer, rebellious children, suicide and depression.

But I have also seen something else, even more powerful than enemy attacks. I have seen, time after time, the shepherd of our souls, preparing a feast and setting it right in front of that same person who was under enemy fire.

It wasn't long ago, that I sat in my office with a woman, who was in the very heart of a life and death battle with the enemy, whose guns were blazing. I had not met her before, but she came to me in desperation, for guidance and prayer. Her whole story is too personal to unveil in detail, but in summary, this forty something woman was suffering from a debilitating illness, because of which, she was not able to work. Her income was far below what she needed to live on; her estranged husband had just gone through an operation to change his body into a woman's; her two teenaged sons were suffering from the consequences of their dad's choices and were acting out in unhealthy ways, and her best friend was going through a debilitating loss herself, and so was pulling back from their friendship. The enemy was firing directly at this Christian women from every side.

As we considered her challenging journey through the “*valley of the shadow of death*”, I didn’t want to be insensitive to her pain and flippantly respond, “Don’t worry — God is good, and everything will be ok!”, but at the same time, I did want to encourage her with the truth that God knew what she was suffering from and he really did care. I reminded her that God usually does his best work in our most difficult times.

As we were talking through her situation, she revealed to me, through her tears, that God had, over the last couple of weeks, given her a vision of something to do in the midst of her struggles. She told me, and I heartily concurred with her plan, that she was thinking about writing a book about what she and her husband were going through with his unhappy trans-sexualism . Both he and she, as well as their children, had gained priceless insights, through the very negative circumstances, which could encourage and help thousands of people going through similar secret valleys. As we talked and prayed together, she and I both agreed that God was walking with her through a life shift, as she traversed this difficult valley. She left my office expectant, sensing that her shepherd was already preparing a nourishing table, in the presence of her enemies.

### **You prepare a table before me**

What the psalmist was referring to by using the word “table”, was a “Mesa”, which is Spanish for table. In Israel, mesas, those flat topped hills, make ideal feeding places for sheep. Early in the spring, after the snow thaws, the shepherd would scout out these mountain fields, to prepare for the sheep’s summer season. He’d lay out blocks of salt and other minerals for nourishment, and check the growth of grass in different areas. Often, hidden among healthy plants,

are poisonous weeds which can paralyze a young lamb with only one bite. The shepherd would either pull out the weeds or keep his sheep a safe distance from them to avoid any possible danger.

Although wise predators know enough to keep out of the sight of a wary shepherd, he is constantly aware of their presence. And sheep, sensing wild animals around, instinctively know that they should stay close under their shepherd's protection.

Just as in the sheep's world, there is a very real spiritual enemy, with the evil intent of getting us off track and away from the covering of our shepherd, lurking in our world. He is as real as the enemies in the world of both, David the shepherd and also David the warrior. I'd like to unmask him now so that we don't fear him as much as we would if he were behind his disguise. The personification of evil is the devil or satan. Both are the same being, who menacingly stalks us as we walk down the right path. He has two predictable disguises — either he dresses as an angel of light, like the big bad wolf in the Little Red Ridinghood story, or he disguises himself as a roaring lion, who's growl alone is enough to thoroughly frighten us.

When we tear off his mask, we realize that in comparison to our shepherd, he is really very weak. For us, who like sheep, can be devoured, or at least waylaid, by his tactics, the only appropriate response is to stick very close to our shepherd. The shepherd's staff will keep us aware of the enemy's deception, and his rod will protect us from ultimate harm.

Now back to the tableland — and remember that we're still on the downward swing of this psalm. We're going through the valley of the shadow of death, where his rod of discipline, and his staff of his word, are keeping us on track. We're surrounded by

our enemies, and because of their presence, we are pressed into close proximity with our shepherd. That's the benefit of weakness. It keeps us dependant on our shepherd. rather than "I'll do it my way!"; it's "I'll do it his way!" That's why when we're weak, we are strong — because doing it his way always leads us to success.

Here in the presence of our enemy, the shepherd has prepared a bountiful table for us. This is the place where we can be healed and nourished in our souls more than any other place in our journey. Although it may feel like the worst of time, it's really the best, because here, close beside us, he can most clearly guide us down the right path, and best restore our souls.

### **A check-up for our souls**

Every year, whether I feel like it or not, I go for a physical check-up at my doctor's office, where she does a lot of probing. She checks my lungs, because my mother died of lung cancer, and my heart because my dad suffered symptoms of a heart attack when he was about my age; and because it's good for me, she checks every other part of my aging body for any signs of ill health.

A good shepherd also makes sure his sheep are enjoying good health with regular check-ups. And that's what our shepherd does for us in these dark valley seasons. I could share many stories of tests that the Lord has put me through. We each have personal weaknesses and points of vulnerability, that need to be watched closely. We should give ourselves personal check-ups regularly, but because we don't always see our own weakness, and are often self deceived, our shepherd is there to helps us.

Pride can be a big point of weakness for me. I may mask it by calling it self confidence, but the fact is that “*pride goes before destruction*”, and I need to be aware of my familial tendencies. I could tell you of how he has checked me in this area of my soul, but it’s too embarrassing.

How about integrity? Integrity means to be in unity — my mind, mouth and heart. Duplicity is when I’m dishonest and say or do something different from what’s inside. My spirit must be in harmony with my shepherd’s plans for me, my mind and emotions must submit to my spirit, and my words and actions must be in unity with my mind. That’s integrity.

How’s my trust and my patience? Do I trust my shepherd enough to go where he is leading me, even through the valley of the shadow of death? Am I patient enough to wait for his timing, rather than rushing ahead on my own time schedule? There are many questions that we should ask ourselves in these testing seasons: How’s my motives in the decision I’m making? Is this about me and my selfish desires? What’s my attitude in this difficult situation? Am I grateful that my shepherd is maturing me through this struggle? Do I love others more than I love myself? Am I being completely honest?

### **How can I get back on track?**

If you want to find out what liquid is inside a sponge, you simply have to squeeze it. Like the sponge, when my shepherd wants to show me what’s inside my heart, he simply has to squeeze it with a little bit of pressure. As painful as the squeeze might be, our knowing what’s really inside us is the first step in the process of restoring our souls. Rather than excusing ourselves or blaming someone else for our failures, we can take the three steps necessary to bring us

back to the right path. The three steps are confession, repentance and self-discipline.

**Confession simply means to come into agreement.** It's the opposite of self deception. When my conscience tells me I'm doing something with a wrong motive, and I realize that I've wandered off the right path, to confess means that I've come into agreement with God. I have sinned. I have failed. No excuses — I was wrong. Then step two must quickly follow. I must repent. I've wandered from the path and I **have to turn about face and get back to a healthy place.** I need to tell God that he's right, confess to the person I've wronged and then tell myself that what I thought, said or did, was out of order.

When I do that, whether the person forgives me or not, is not my problem — God forgives me and I have to forgive myself. Then I may have to do some repair work to heal the person I hurt, and the souls which may have been wounded because of my words or actions. There may also be consequences that I have to pay. That's all part of repentance.

Thirdly comes **the self discipline I need to stay on the right** path. If I have a certain tendency to wander, like the shopping cart with a broken wheel, my determination, working together with my shepherd's encouragement and strength, are what I need to move toward wholeness and health again. Lots happens in the presence of our enemies. Whether it's good or bad depends upon our attitude and our response to the shepherd's squeeze. But as hard as it may be, whatever healing takes place in our soul, in these valley seasons, is to prepare us for the next stop on our journey. You'll see, in the chapter which follows, that it will be well worth our struggle.

## CHAPTER 11

# Ready for my destiny

*You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows*

There is a life principle which all of us have likely experienced, and that many of us intellectually get, but most still do not emotionally understand. It is that “death must always precede fruitfulness”. A grain of wheat, for example, will always remain a single seed until it is buried in the ground and dies. Only after it is seemingly dead and gone, is it transformed into a stalk, and multiplied a hundred times over. All great leaders will testify that they grew into their positions through lessons learned in the furnace of failure.

A bank president was once asked by his zealous young protege, how he'd attained such great success. His answer was a succinct, “Through wise decisions.” When asked how he had learned to make wise decisions, he responded, “Through experience.”

Finally the young man pinned him down with his final question, “But how did you get the experience?” And his answer was, “Through failure!”

We’re presently still in the “*valley of the shadow of death*” on our journey, but that’s where we hear most clearly, the shepherd’s voice offering us a bountifully set table.

The table represents our shepherd’s provision, which appears only after we have nothing of ourselves left on which we can rely. Those feelings of hopelessness, fear and inadequacy are not good in themselves, but they are often the doorway to the place of humility, where the bountiful table is set.

And now we’re going to look at the what’s being offered on the table before us. “*You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.*” This is a key principle of David’s psalm, so we want to take our time in thinking it through. To understand what’s at the heart of this pastoral metaphor, we need to see the grid through which the poet, who had been a shepherd through all his growing years, was seeing. There are four significant words to reflect on — *anointing, oil, cup and overflow*. Each picture represents a profound life principle.

## **The anointing oil**

Anointing, in this psalm refers to the intimate connection between the shepherd and his sheep. A caring shepherd in the Middle East would often rub a compound of olive oil, sulphur and spices on his sheep’s muzzles to protect them from pesky insects, as well as to heal them from scratches or infected bites. Sheep love to be pampered by their shepherd’s touch.

The word “**anoint**” literally meant to smear oil on someone. In David’s era, about 3000 years ago, a mixture of olive oil and spices was used to anoint people for three different positions of authority. The High Priest would use it to anoint a king or queen, a prophet, or a priest for their service. The “**olive oil**” was a symbol of the sufficiency and authority of the Lord, who was present there with the person being anointed, to prepare and empower him or her to fulfill their divinely destined assignment. The idea was that as the High Priest poured oil over the candidate’s head, the Spirit of God was entering and filling the person’s soul. Like it was when David himself was anointed by the prophet Samuel. *“Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David from that day on.”*

The oil, representing the authority and enablement of the Lord, coming upon the teenage boy, is a picture of all of us being anointed and empowered to move forward into our own divine destiny. Even after he was anointed by Samuel, David still had many years of training and preparation to go through, before he would be ready to sit on his destined throne. Like a China cup, which has been made from common clay, must go through the fiery furnace several times before it is ready for use, so David had to endure years of difficult, life threatening experiences, before he was to become one of the most successful and renown kings in human history.

In my own experience, I first felt an inner sense of destiny when I was eighteen years of age. Then, when I was thirty (as Joseph, David and Jesus also were), I knew that the time had arrived for me to step into my God-ordained profession. It wasn’t until five years after that, that I was literally anointed with oil by Dr Rolf McPherson; and then again twenty-five years later, when I was

ordained as the President of our Denomination in Canada. Destiny takes time to discover.

Years ago, in our Vancouver newspaper, The Sun, there was a contest printed, where a mystery picture was slowly unveiled, little by little, each day. On the first day no one could interpret the picture; then on the second, third and fourth days, as more of the object was revealed, hundreds of guesses were submitted as to what it was, but nobody was right. Several days later, as more of it could be seen, someone finally guessed what the picture was — a kitchen blender. And she won the prize.

I think that's the way it is in our lives, and maybe it was in King David's life also. For a long time, after the anointing process begins, we may not fully realize what's happening, until sometimes years later, as more of the picture is revealed. But when we do finally understand what our destiny is, then our cups fill up and hopefully begin running over.

### **Our cup runs over**

The psalm reads, *“you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.”* While **the oil** represents the sufficiency and authority that the shepherd gives us to move forward in our gifting, **the cup** symbolizes the experiences and the circumstances of life into which we have been sovereignly placed. These are situations, both good and bad, that life hands to us, which we must face and respond to.

So our cup then, is “our lot in life”. Remember what Jesus prayed, before going to die on the cross *“Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me, but nevertheless not my will, but yours be done”*. Some of us have been given a big, happy cup, while others of us,

like Jesus, have been handed a “difficult cup”. Remember though, that “*to whom much is given, much is required*”. The bigger and seemingly better, your cup is, the more expectation your Creator has for you, and therefore the tougher your final judgment will be.

Let me interject here that there is a process by which we can determine our personal destinies. I’ve written another book, you may want to read at this time that outlines seven steps to uncovering our personal God-ordained purpose, which I often refer to as our destiny. This is what I wrote on the cover jacket of “*Seven Colours*”.

Before any of us was even conceived, our Creator planned each of our entire eternal lives. He decided who we would be, where and when we would be born, and why we would live our lives. He set purpose and destiny in his plans for every one of us. King David wrote in his Book of Hymns, You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.

Author, Barry Buzza, looks at both the positive and negative circumstances of our lives, as seven colors that have been divinely designed into a coat of destiny. Looking thoughtfully at how the colors are woven together will give readers profound insight into who we are and why we were born. Living our lives with purpose will bring us fruitfulness and fulfillment.

Now back to psalm 23, where David wrote, “*My cup overflows*”. Everyone of us is born with a predestined purpose in our Creator’s mind. The gifting, strength and wisdom that he offers us, to fulfill that purpose, are always more than enough. The expectation of our Creator is that they will not only fill our cup, but they will run over the brim to stimulate and encourage those whom we encounter,

in our circle of influence, every day. The principle illustrated by the overflowing cup is “give and it shall be given to you”. The more we give away, the more we have for ourselves. It’s important to keep in mind, that if we are resistant in sharing what we’ve been given, the flow of blessing will either dry up or begin to rot. If we respond to his blessings with generous overflow, then he will keep on refilling our cups.

### **What is my vision for the future?**

Consider the jigsaw puzzles, which many of us have put together. First, you’ll note that there is a picture of the completed puzzle on the lid of the box in which the puzzle comes. That picture, in my simple illustration, represents your ultimate purpose — what you’ll look like when your journey on earth has been completed. (That’s what your family and friends will talk about at your funeral) The challenge is that we ourselves will never get to see the ultimate picture before we die. We’re putting the puzzle together without ever getting a peek at the finished product pictured on the lid. Only our shepherd, who sees the future, knows what the final picture will look like.

Secondly, there are some puzzles made for children, with only 10 or 20 pieces, while there are other much more difficult puzzles, of maybe 5000 pieces, which are made for the seasoned gamers. Your shepherd will decide for you which puzzle you will be assigned, but then of course, he will also give you the wisdom and ability to complete whatever you’ve been entrusted with.

Like I would, you probably begin putting your puzzles together by finding the four corner pieces, and then you locate all the straight edges to make the outer frame. When that’s complete, we begin

to see a vision of the size and shape of what we will ultimately see when the picture is complete. These side pieces represent the things in life that I wrote about in “Seven Colours” — what are our gifts, talents, education, experiences, skills and passions? They give us hints as to who we are meant to become as we mature in life.

After that, we place the various pieces of our puzzle in coloured sections. The pinks will be the flower bed, the browns are the barn and the many blues will make up the sky. We put together one section and then another. There is such excitement when we find the puzzle piece that connects one section to another. In our life journey, as we mature into new phases, we also see those connections, and then we finally understand why our shepherd let us go through that dark valley years before. Those are “aha moments”. They were allowed to happen so that we’d be prepared to help another person through his similar life situation, or that we would be ready to face an even bigger challenge later in life.

It’s so rewarding, as we put our jigsaw puzzle together, and finally get to see it taking shape. And it’s the same in real life. We’ll make lots of mistakes, even try to jam a piece in to make it fit where it doesn’t belong, but as we persevere, the picture of our destiny will begin to make sense. If it doesn’t, as we’re going through the process, the promise is that one day we will understand.

One final thought while we’re picturing our lives as a jigsaw puzzle, is that after it’s complete, or we’re done with it, there will be someone looking at it who will judge whether you were successful or not. They’ll say either “Ooh that piece shouldn’t have been put there. It just doesn’t fit!” or they’ll ask, “Why did you give up before it was finished?” Or hopefully someone will slap you on the back and say, “Wow! Good job; well done!”

And like that, our Creator will be our judge one day. We'll be held accountable for how we used our gifts, special abilities, money, wisdom, time, and influence which we had been given, and how much of what we'd been blessed with, did we give away to those around us.

### **What is success?**

This is the guiding question, above every other question, that we should be asking as we traverse the road before us. "What is success?" Success is defined as **fulfilling the life purpose and destiny assigned to us by our Creator**. We could, in theory, be rich, famous, beautiful and powerful, and still not be truly successful. None of those qualities is a prerequisite to ultimate success.

The iPad, on which I'm writing, has a different measure of success, than the glass holding water that sits beside me. The iPad doesn't have to hold water and the glass doesn't need to print a book. It's not the size, shape or expense that determines success — it's simply being who we were made to be. Successfully fulfilling our life purpose is both a one time event and also an ongoing daily adventure. Sometimes it's a word or gesture, or a thing that we do on a specific occasion; but it's also living each day on the right path, while listening and responding obediently to the guiding voice of our shepherd.

## CHAPTER 12

# Where am I Going?

*Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever*

So back to the questions we began with — Where am I going? and how can I get there? So far, as we've journeyed with David on the ferris wheel of life, it's been an exhilarating; sometimes exhausting and discomfoting; but always challenging and faith producing ride. This path that we are on has been designed by our shepherd to keep us trusting him each day; to bring us to health and wholeness, and ultimately to lead us to successfully completing our destined assignment. This last stanza of psalm 23 assumes that we have been following our shepherd's lead so far, through the hills and valleys of life. His promise is now, if we've stayed the course, that goodness and lovingkindness will follow us for the remainder of our journey.

As I am writing this last chapter, it's Holy Week, which precedes

Easter. Today is Tuesday and in three more days, we will reflect on Jesus' death on the cross. Then on Sunday, we will celebrate his resurrection from the dead. Death and resurrection are the two extremes of this Holy Week. That theme was emphasized by Jesus on the Tuesday before his death. He was talking with some Greek visitors in Jerusalem, who were trying to persuade him to come with them to Greece. They said that he would be dearly loved and generously rewarded for his teachings, on Mars Hill in Athens, where philosophers and teachers were valued and appreciated.

Jesus' answer would no doubt have shocked the Greek truth seekers. He said, *"I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels — a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity."* And of course he then refused their offer.

Much like I said to my daughters, while playing "The Game of Life", as I was explaining the real meaning of life, Jesus was saying, *"Life is not about having a big audience applauding us, making lots of money, and living in freedom and happiness. Rather, real life is about dying to ourselves, and then being resurrected in God's divine power to fulfill his plans of fruitfulness and multiplication."*

Looking out my front window now, I see dozens of beautiful yellow daffodils, waving in the gentle spring breeze. I didn't plant those flowers two weeks ago. On a cold day last October, I placed rather homely brown bulbs, about eight inches deep in the soil. Over these past four winter months, through a long season of rain, snow, darkness and cold, the bulbs have remained in the black, wet soil. Then, it was on a cool, sunny day in late February, that I got my

first glimpse of hope — a little green leaf sprouted out of the soil. And then three weeks later, the first daffodil made its debut. Now, in April, my garden happily sings with dozens of beautiful flowers. Spring time has come at last.

Springtime always reminds me of our shepherd's miracle power in our lives. Like when a caterpillar morphs into a butterfly. The Easter touch is everywhere!

### **Goodness and loving kindness follow**

What an expression of utter confidence in the shepherd! No matter what we have come through, or will yet face in life, the psalmist assures us that when we are closely following the good shepherd, he will never lead us anywhere that will not ultimately make us better people. He has the ability and the goodness to make even the poor choices we have made, or that others have made without our consent, propel us further down the right path towards maturity.

That word, "*lovingkindness*" in the Hebrew language is very meaningful. It is the promise that one person makes to another, to love them regardless of how they respond. It's the love that a good parent has for his or her children, even when we are appalled by their behaviour. We parents may be disappointed by a choice our child has made, and we may, at the time, not have warm loving feelings about our child, but he is still our child and we always want what's best for him. We will love him no matter what happens — that's lovingkindness. And it's that love that our shepherd has for his sheep.

Notice that "*goodness and lovingkindness follow us*". I see in

that statement that there is a legacy left on the trail of the man or

woman who faithfully follows the shepherd. Where I am going will determine what I leave in my wake. If I follow my own personal self oriented desires, make lots of money and leave a legacy of financial blessings, my children will no doubt, temporarily be very happy and thankful. But if I follow my shepherd's lead, then whether there's money in my will or not, my children will enjoy the eternal fruit of a wholesome and purposeful heritage.

A thousand years before David wrote this psalm, God spoke concerning his great grandfather, Abraham, about ultimate purpose. He said, *"For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just."* To me, that's success. That's where I want to go!

I love the story of Johnny Appleseed. It may be largely folklore, but as the legend goes, Johnny Chapman would go to the apple cider factory, and gather bags of apple seeds from the waste pile. As he wandered across the American plains, in the mid eighteenth hundreds, preaching the Gospel, he would plant apple seeds from east to west. Johnny never got to eat from those apple trees which grew over the years, but pioneer families, who followed him, twenty years later, were often sustained through difficult winter seasons by apples on trees, that he had planted years before. We don't merely live for ourselves, but for the generations who follow in our wake.

### **Don't let fog discourage you**

On July 4, 1952, Florence Chadic attempted to swim from Catalina Island to the California Coast. She was well prepared for the challenge, having crossed the English Channel successfully both ways.

The water was numbing cold as she waded into the Pacific Ocean that day, and the fog was so thick that Florence could hardly see the boats that were in her party. Several times, sharks had to be scared away with rifle blasts, but despite the adversity, Florence swam fifteen hours before she finally asked her team to take her out of the water. Although her trainer tried to encourage her to continue, she insisted on quitting. When she looked ahead, all she could see was fog, and so Florence quit only one half mile from her goal. She gave up, not because of cold, fear, exhaustion or even the sharks — she quit because of the fog.

As you and I walk down the path of life, we are bound to hit foggy patches from time to time. It may seem like staying the course is nearly impossible. We may feel like we will never reach our destination, but the word of our shepherd is “Don’t give up! Hang in there.” The other shore is within reach and we are going to make it!

This picturesque psalm opened with two significant words, which unlock its many hidden secrets, “The Lord”; and now it closes with the same two words, “The Lord”.

Those two one syllable words give us the key to a successful life journey. If the Lord is at the beginning of our life and we stay with him until the end, our journey promises to be fulfilling and fruitful. In one of David’s other psalms, he wrote,

“You know when I sit down or stand up.  
You know my thoughts even when I’m far away.  
You see me when I travel and when I rest at home.  
You know everything I do.  
You know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord.  
You go before me and follow me.

You place Your hand of blessing on my head.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand!”

I can't think of a better way to end this short book. My shepherd's hand is upon your head. He is there beside you right now. That knowledge is too wonderful for me; it's too great for me to understand! My prayer for you, dear reader, is that *“as you walk out the days, which have sovereignly been ordered for you, may you be constantly aware of your shepherd's love for you and his presence with you; and may you keep in pace with him, so that you see his plans fully fulfilled in all that you do and say.”*

# About the author



Dr Barry Buzza has been married to Susan for over 51 years, and their two daughters, as well as their six children, all serve in ministry in Northside Church, which they planted from their neighbourhood in 1979. Northside has planted ten churches in cities east of Vancouver Canada and has

sponsored hundreds of church plants in Asia and Africa. Barry has served as Professor at Pacific Life Bible College, as President of the Foursquare Church in Canada and has written thirty books on Christian life and Pastoring.

## **OTHER BOOKS BY BARRY BUZZA**

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### **Good Mourning**

#### *From Darkness to Morning Sunrise in Seasons of Loss*

This book describes the process of mourning. Grief is an inner tearing of the soul that we experience in a time of great loss. It describes the process of good mourning which is necessary to help us walk through a season of grief toward healing. When loss unsettles our life journey and grief rips through our soul, God's intention is that joy will come in our mourning!

### **Higher Ground**

#### *A Twelve Step Guide to Spiritual Wholeness*

This manual is intended as a Twelve Step interactive guide to be used in small group discussion, in conjunction with homework, to guide us through the process of healing the whole person.

### **Life Journey**

#### *Unveiling the Mystery of Your Life's Destiny*

Life Journey addresses our need for anchoring with answers to questions such as: Why do I exist? What is life all about? How can I fill this gaping hole in my soul? Is there a purpose to my life? Do I have a destiny?

## **Life Centre**

### *A Primer on Spiritual Alignment*

Life Centre clearly and succinctly describes the process of our getting connected to God.

## **The Red Thread (Books 1, 2 &3)**

### *The life-line which stretches from God to us and back again.*

The Red Thread is the story of Jesus, from Genesis to Revelation. It provides a Bible reading guide easy-to-read commentary and practical application for each of the 52 chapters, can be used for individual reading, small group study (a study guide is also available) or for an entire church 1 year Bible overview.

## **Beta**

### *Basic nutrients for growth in the Christian life*

The Alpha course was designed by Nicky Gumbel to help people find a relationship with the God who created them. The Beta course is also an eleven week study to run parallel with Alpha. Beta focuses its participants on the Church and how we can find our place in the body of Christ.

## **The Secret of Happiness**

### *I Just Want to Be Happy*

The “Secret to Happiness” reveals in a candid and easy to understand way how to find true and lasting happiness.

## **Sumphoneo**

### *The church is like a symphony orchestra.*

In this biographical book Pastor Barry tells the story of how the church he pastors, Northside Church was birthed and grew to maturity

over 30 years. Learn from his failures and successes, many priceless leadership lessons.

## **Dying Well**

### *Preparing ourselves for the inevitable*

The questions this book will answer are:

- How can I prepare myself spiritually for my future death?
- How can I help my family through the loss by taking care of practical issues?
- How can I leave a legacy that will make a difference for years after I'm gone?
- What do you do immediately after someone you love dies?

## **His Story**

### *The Story of God unfolded through Bible Characters.*

His Story, co-written by Pastor Barry and his two granddaughters, is a series of relevant life lessons, gleaned from the biographies of forty Bible characters and the meanings of their names. Some you will recognize and others.

## **Seven Colours**

Seven Colours will help readers to answer questions each of us is asking, "Who am I?", "Why am I here?" and "How can I find fulfillment in my life?" By considering seven aspects of our lives, and putting the pieces together, the author enlightens and challenges us to understand, "Divine Destiny" and the "Meaning of our Existence".

## **Teach us to Pray**

Teach us to Pray is a simple explanation of Jesus' profound 114 word lesson, which we call, the Lord's Prayer. These seven easy-to-

practice types of prayer will mystically open the windows of heaven and bring us into partnership with the Creator of our universe.

**Dancing with the King, Walking with the King,  
Sitting with the King (A Kingdom Trilogy)**

*Keeping in step with the Master*

The most important subject in the Bible is clearly said to be the Kingdom of God. This series of books will teach us what the Kingdom of God is, where we fit into the divine plan and how we can eternally partner with King Jesus in rulership.

**Joseph's Excellent Bad Day**

A children's story (ages 6-10) Teaches how every child was created for a divine purpose. It describes the pathway God has designed to point the way to that purpose.

**The Secret of Happiness**

A children's story (ages 6-12) Illustrated by Jenn Kirby. This simple tale is profound enough to change the life of adults, but simple enough to be understood by a grade 1 child.

**Sarah and the Prince**

*A children's story ( ages 7-12)*

Taken from Ezekiel's prophecy, that graphically describes God's plan of how every person young and old is invited to share His kingdom authority and privilege.

**Go Power | Go Power Study Guide**

This book, as well as the accompanying Study Guide, capsulize the Missional task that Jesus has assigned the Church. Written for small

group discussion, Go Power will challenge and stimulate anyone who reads and considers the implications of Jesus' words, "I chose you and anointed you that you would go and bear fruit."

### **The Most Important Thing - The Kingdom of God**

This 140 page book has been written as a Study Guide. This study takes many of the significant Scriptures on the Kingdom of God, adds commentary, and puts them in an easy to understand order, to lead the reader into spiritual depth and practical use of the Kingdom authority of the Believer.

### **Serendipities of the Pastorate**

By studying the life of David, Pastor Barry pulls out 70 leadership lessons for both pastors and all leaders. This book has been translated into 6 languages.

### **Pastor to Pastor**

This book is the culmination of life lessons that the Author has learned over the past 50 years of ministry. With both his own failures and successes in mind, Pastor Barry has written about 70 life and leadership lessons applicable to the life of any pastor or leader.

### **Goodness Follows**

This book on what makes a healthy marriage comes from Pastor Barry's life lessons learned in his own 50+ years of marriage to Susan, and also his decades of marriage counselling. "Goodness Follows" is based on the rhythms of David's life described in his 23rd psalm.