

Digital Detox, Reclaiming the Abundant Life, Psalm 23, 9/22/24, Pastor Terry Foester

Opening: From Deconstruction to Reconstruction

After our 7-day digital detox, how are you feeling? Over the last two weeks, we've explored how screens shape our lives—stealing time, adding anxiety, and impacting relationships. This culminated in a tech fast. Over the next two weeks, we shift from breaking down to rebuilding. Today is an invitation to embrace abundant life.

Reclaiming the Abundant Life

In our Christian walk, it's easy to miss our most important connection: our relationship with God. How do we reclaim the abundant life that Jesus promised?

King David knew this intimacy with God.

1 Samuel 13:14: "...The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart..."
Acts 13:22: "...I have found David...a man after my heart, who will do all my will."

Psalm 23: Abundant Life Described Differently

David describes the abundant life in Psalm 23, not as a manual, but as a prayer—a metaphor for both the beauty and sorrow of everyday life, discovering the right path that leads to God.

As you listen, put yourself in a posture of humility, hungry for more intimacy with the Lord.

Psalm 23 (A Psalm of David):

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters.

3 He restores my soul; he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 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.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

David, a shepherd called to lead God's people, sees himself as a sheep. To call God "my Shepherd" is to embrace total dependence and humility.

In all of David's experiences; a warrior & bear killer, harp playing musician, anointed prince, chosen king, father, grandfather, leader of a nation... in his most rooted self, David realized he was like a sheep. Of all the roles and identities David could have emphasized, he chose being a sheep!

With all your identities and capabilities, would you humble yourself as a sheep?

Illustration: Milo Gets the Classic Role! (See Photo)

It's the moment that children across the nation eagerly await around Christmas time... receiving a coveted role in the school nativity. But with so many students, teachers have to get creative. And that's exactly what 6-year-old Milo Joyce's teachers did when they gave him the prestigious role as 'door holder number 3'!

His mom caught the conversation on her phone.

"Guess what I am for the Nativity? I'm a classic one," he told his mother in a now-viral TikTok video, prompting her to guess he landed a lead role of Joseph, one of the three wise men, or an innkeeper.

As he clutches a Christmas book on his lap, Milo explains: "I'm Door Holder Number 3. I'll be holding doors!" adding that he was excited by the news: "I was like, 'I'm a door holder. Get in there! Let's go! Yes!'"

Milo... he gets it. He's content with his role. He wasn't even a sheep for crying out loud. (Yes, I see the irony of me using a TikTok example as an illustration. Trust me, the irony is not lost on me).

To have a Shepherd, you must learn to be like a sheep.

Let's Talk About Phones and Want

To be a sheep is to be in want. Every time we grab our phones, we want something.

What if Psalm 23 were written today? Would it read, "The Lord is my iPhone, I shall have all the answers immediately!" NO WAY!

Psalm 23, the prayer of David's life, invites us to discover the Good Shepherd. His invitation will form us along the challenging path, and on this path, we will learn to be content in any situation. Psalm 23 is a path to discover the Good Shepherd.

Discovering the Good Shepherd: Four Ways

1. Pausing in the Space Between Need and the Answer

David's Shepherd doesn't provide instant answers. Instead, he makes the sheep lie down; there's slowness by the still water, the meandering brook, the misty meadow. Over time, the shepherd provides restoration and guidance. To pause in the space between is to embrace REST!

Illustration: Even in sermon prep, I felt the pain of wanting more. At one point, I ended up shopping for new Nikes! We're all uncomfortable with being in want.

In this tender way, The Good Shepherd does his work in the space between the need and the answer. This can be uncomfortable. Phones shorten the distance between question and answer—just Google it!

I wonder if we've become so comfortable filling the spaces between us and the Lord.

When we're with our friends and our family, we intuitively know to put the phone down, or sometimes we're told to do so! Set it aside, off of the dinner table when we're with our family, when we're with our friends.

When we're alone, it's different. I've been wondering if our phone use is creating an unnecessary middleman between us and the Lord.

2. Letting Go of Fear in the Valley

David leaves the still waters and follows this path into the valley of the shadow of death. His lack of fear isn't due to circumstances but to God's presence. The Lord is with him!

It's there when the sheep is alone in the dark valley. He doesn't know what he needs. He receives the correction of the rod, the guidance, and the tender embrace of the shepherd's staff.

The rod and staff are a reminder to the sheep that the Good Shepherd is there in the valley, and in this way, they become a comfort.

Even when we can't see God in the valley, his correction, his guidance—they are signs of his presence.

What is our version of fear? A common experience is "feeling anxious." To feel anxious is to sense the complication in the demands of everyday difficulties. Feeling anxious is like "falling to pieces." The opposite of anxiety is peace. Peace is wholeness. Inner peace is trusting Jesus in the midst of the broken pieces of your world.

Surprisingly...the valley is the place to let go of fear, to let go of feeling anxious.

3. Embracing the Comfort of Discipline

Our screens and Netflix make us feel comfortable. God's comfort often involves correction. Hebrews 12 teaches that God disciplines those He loves. His guidance, even when uncomfortable, signals His presence.

Illustration: Comfortable on the Couch: Netflix, Popcorn & Kombucha

We are like undisciplined sheep, unable to receive the comfort of his rod, the comfort of his staff because we're so comfortable.

Spiritual Disciplines: "A discipline for the spiritual life is simply an activity undertaken to bring us into effective cooperation with Christ and His Kingdom." (Dallas Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines).

4. Trusting that His Provision is Best

The table, the anointing, the overflowing cup—these are pictures of God's provision in David's earthly experience.

David was frequently pursued by enemies, yet during those times, his allies provided him with sustenance, setting a table before him. Anointed as king despite being the youngest and most unlikely candidate, David had to wait patiently for Saul's reign to end. His "cup overflows" with God's promise: "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16), signifying God's enduring favor and the eternal legacy promised to his lineage.

This provision is Jesus. Some of Jesus' last spoken words, in the last chapter of Revelation: "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star" (Rev. 22:16).

The ultimate provision we receive is the Good Shepherd himself, through salvation. Psalm 23 begins and ends with the Lord.

Jesus: The Good Shepherd

Jesus contrasts His role as the Good Shepherd with the work of the enemy.

John 10:10-11

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. **I am the good shepherd.** The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Living as Sheep: Practical Steps

Understanding our role as sheep means taking intentional steps to reconnect with the Good Shepherd. Rediscover the Good Shepherd by implementing one or two of these practices:

- Surrender your life to Jesus, the Good Shepherd
- Schedule a weekly hour of device-free solitude
- Commit to a daily one-minute pause of reliance on Jesus
- Begin an in-depth study of a book of the Bible
- Keep your phone out of the bedroom at night
- Spend weekly time in nature seeking the Lord
- Serve others in quietness and humility
- Prioritize friendships that keep you accountable

Conclusion & Closing Prayer:

No one naturally desires to be a sheep, but Jesus, our Good Shepherd, chose to become like us. He completed his mission without the use of a screen. And in a surprising turn, the Good Shepherd became like us, taking on the form of a sheep to save the world.

Will you let this Good Shepherd be your shepherd?

We all face the struggle of digital distraction—our neighbors, classmates, and co-workers – they face the same distraction. The entire world needs the abundant life found under the care of the Good Shepherd. Let's embrace this invitation, not with pride or awkwardness, but by living lives that reflect His way.

Closing Prayer: Lord, thank you for being our Good Shepherd. Help us to embrace our role as sheep, fully dependent on you. Guide us through the valleys, correct us with your rod, and comfort us with your staff. Lead us into your abundant life, and help us to live in a way that reflects your care to the world around us. Amen.