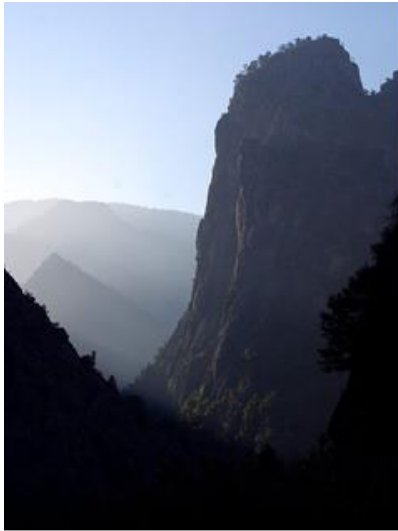




**“Weeping may
endure for a
night, but joy
comes in the
morning.”**

Psalm 30:5

Reflections of Grace REFLECTIONS OF GRACE



Upheld by God's right hand!

"When I remember You on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, Therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. My soul follows close behind You; Your right hand upholds me. Psalm 63:6-8

It is when God's sovereign script takes us beyond our own strength that He graciously shows Himself most faithful as we quietly wait upon Him. In our darkest moments, the Father gives His children the greatest opportunities to show forth His light.

Why this? Why now? Why me? In the midst of physical and emotional pain, the most devout believers can be tempted to ask, "Why, God?" **When Christians cannot understand what God is doing, we can praise Him for Who He is.** In Psalm 139, we read that the LORD not only forms us exactly as He wants us, but He even ordains the number of our days beginning at our conception. He reaches into the womb to fashion each of us to fulfill our part in the detailed script that He has authored and wisely directs in every detail. He knows our path, our thoughts, our words. He is with us in all places and at all times. As our all-powerful Protector and Provider, He has His hedge about us. We can be assured that every test that God sends is there for His purpose. When Christians trust in His grace and mercy, the very things which can cause unbelievers to despair can be used for God's glory and the eternal good of those who share our trials with us, or who watch us go through them.

Take heart, Christian! Your Father ordained every detail of your journey Home. When pain, grief or discouragement tempt you to question what He is doing, petition the Holy Spirit to enable you to embrace His will like Christ did in His hour of agony— "Abba, Father, *all things are possible for You.* Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, ***not what I will, but what You will.***"

There are at times dark, grievous pains that plague the souls of men. They sorely press upon the heart deep sorrows without end. Through such a pain, I cried to God from trouble's deep despair. The ache of body, soul, and mind defied all comfort shared.

Adrift, I then complained to God; my spirit was o'erwhelmed. I anguished through black, sleepless nights, and words escaped my tongue. When I considered days gone by and night songs filled with praise, both doubts and questions raged within. "Where is the God of grace?"

Then trust prevailed from out the script my Sov'reign penned for me. Though dark this chapter of my life, I humbly bowed my knee. I thought upon the grace of God amidst past toils and tears. His faithfulness then held me fast with strength to persevere.



The Father of Mercy and God of all Comfort.

There can be no greater comfort in trials or in grief than to rest in the promises of God Who is our Father through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

II Corinthians 1:2-5

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.”

Great Father of mercies and God of all comfort--
What wonderful names for the King of my life!
My Healer and Helper in heartache and sorrow
Is always beside me through sickness and strife.

Great Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
I rest in the grace and the peace You bestow.
In each tribulation, You show Yourself steadfast.
‘Midst trial and testing, Your faithfulness shows.

Great Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
Your wise providence brings both pleasure and pain.
Though pressed beyond measure, I trust in Your goodness
That grants consolation ‘midst sunshine and rain.

Great Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
Empow’r me to lift up those weary with care,
To come alongside them, to love and to guide them--
A channel of comfort through whom hope is shared.

Great Father of mercies and God of all comfort,
I praise You for graciously answering prayer
In ways that compel me to further petition
My God, Who is able to meet all life’s cares.



My Hope is in the Lord!

“Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.”

Psalm 42:5

“This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.” Lamentations 3:21-22

“The Heav’ns Declare the Glory of God!”

My Father whispers gently in the dawn of morning skies
With vibrant, pastel anthems that fall softly on my eyes.
His mercy and compassion bring fresh hope with each new day,
Reminding me that He ordains all things that come my way.

Though brilliance of the noonday Sun will not permit my gaze,
My Father’s holy purity outshines these blinding rays
That are a wanting emblem of the glory ‘round God’s throne—
Mere shadows of that excellence, unique to Him alone.

Then slowly a crescendo swells in praise to The Most High
In flaming gold and violet tones that bring a soul-deep sigh.
The Lord of all creation bids His Sun to take its flight,
And herald forth in other lands His majesty and might.

Soft twilight melts this splendor into deep’ning shades of blue,
And ushers in night’s lullabies in subtle, calming hues.
A serenade of peace they bring to saints at end of day
Who thank God for His faithfulness as Guardian, Hope and Stay.

With darkness comes a dazzling host across an ebon span.
The wonder of their vast array inspires the mind of man,
But night skies sing a *special song* to those who fear God’s name.
They fan a passion deep within, His glory to proclaim.

The God Who is my Father sends hope’s message day and night
That He will strengthen and provide no matter what my plight.
He grants amazing grace for me to trust that He is near,
And rest in His wise providence ‘midst sorrows, joys and fears.



The LORD is my Shepherd.

David begins Psalm 23 by telling about a personal relationship with his Shepherd.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.”

What a source of comfort it is for those who are placing their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ to be able to say, **“The LORD is my Shepherd.”** The name, LORD, refers to Jehovah, the true and living God. He is the eternal and unchanging “I AM” Who was, Who is and Who will always be. It is with confidence and comfort that David declares The LORD is MY shepherd.

If the LORD is our Shepherd, we can rest in the promise of His provision.

“I shall not want” speaks of resources. We are to trust God as our Provider and demonstrate contentment with His provision for us. Christ taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” Paul encouraged Christians with this promise: “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). David wrote, “I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread” (Psalm 37:25).

“He makes me to lie down in green pastures” speaks of rest from fretfulness and wandering. Isaiah asked, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the LORD, The Creator of the ends of the earth, Neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, And to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall, But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint” (40:28-31).

If the LORD is our Shepherd, we can rest in the promise of His peace.

“He leads me beside the still water” speaks of a time for reflection. It is a time to meditate upon where our Shepherd has led us and what He has done for us. Isaiah prayed, “You will keep him in perfect peace, Whose mind is stayed on You, Because he trusts in You” (26:3).



The LORD is my Savior and Sanctifier.

Psalm 23:3 leads us to the most important aspect of the Psalm that touches eternity--

“He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.”

Each of us must answer the most important questions that anyone could ponder. Has God restored *my* soul? Is God leading *me* in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake?”

“He restores my soul” speaks of salvation or purity through the Shepherd. Christianity is a radical transformation by God that brings spiritually dead people to spiritual life. A person must first be born of the Spirit before he can be lead by the Spirit. Being born of the Spirit involves *believing* in your heart and *confessing* with your mouth that God has raised Christ from the dead in victory over sin and death (Romans 10:9). More than just knowledge of God and lip service to God, it involves placing your **complete and constant trust** in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Shepherd. “I am the *good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep*” (Jn.10:11, 14-15). Christianity is more than a way of life; it is a state of being that begins with your confession of faith. You become one of Christ's “sheep.”

“He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake” speaks of sanctification or growth in grace. God is most glorified in us when we become like His Son. Christians can rest in the truth that God is blending all things that He brings into our lives to make us more like our Lord. “And we know that all things work *together* for good to *those who love God*, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” The text goes on to state that nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:28-39).

For those who have become Christ's sheep through saving faith in Who He is and what He accomplished in His death and resurrection, there are great benefits for time and for eternity. As we delight in Him, He delights to meet our needs for our good and His glory. In Psalm 37 David wrote, “*Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.... The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds him with His hand*” (4-7; 23-24). As we delight our self in Who Christ is, we delight our self in the sometimes severe mercies that He ordains (II Corinthians 12:7-10).



We have the promised presence of the Shepherd.

“...He (God) Himself has said, ‘I will not in any way fail you nor give you up nor leave you without support. I will not, I will not, I will not in any degree leave you helpless, or forsake nor let [you] down, relax My hold on you.—Assuredly not!’” Hebrews 13:5b-6a (Amplified Bible)

As Christ’s sheep, we can be assured that our destination lies *through* “the valley.” “Yea, though I walk *through* the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil....” This speaks of a *temporary* journey that leads to “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” It is the valley of the shadow of death. For believers, death has lost its sting and the grave has lost its victory because of Christ’s triumph over both. Like some of the saints listed in Hebrews 11, our journey may involve extreme hardship, but we can rest assured that Heaven lies ahead!

As Christ’s sheep, we can rest assured that our Defender is always with us. “For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me. David does not deny that evil may come into our lives. The word, evil, means “adversity, affliction, bad, calamity, displeasure, distress, grief, harm, hurt, ill, mischief, misery, sorrow, trouble, wretchedness, wrong.” David said that he would fear no evil because his all-powerful, all-knowing Shepherd is with him. Our understanding of Who Christ is determines our response to adversity and opportunity. The more we know about our Shepherd, the greater will be our comfort in times of difficulty. The Psalmist, Asaph, testified, “...I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, And afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. **My flesh and my heart fail, BUT GOD is the strength of my heart and my portion forever**” (73:23-26).

When the valley is my portion and my feet grow tired and sore,
I can see my Savior's ‘footprints’ where He's travelled on before.
Though the way grows dark and narrow as His chosen path I trod,
I can hear His calm assurance, “Be thou still; I am thy God.”

When my flesh and heart both faileth, and all human hope seems gone,
Thou, oh God, my Strength and Portion, take my hand and lead me on.
To Thy Spirit's bless'd assurance, and Thy Word of comfort sweet,
I would flee for daily refuge and snatch vict'ry from defeat.

Take my burdens, Great Sustainer. In my fear I'll trust in Thee.
Make my life a light for loved ones who, this valley, walk with me.
Perfect peace past understanding is Thy joy so full and free.
Keep me faithful and abiding—I in Christ, and Christ in Thee.



We have great prospects because of the Shepherd.

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness (“sweet reasonableness”) be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*”

Philippians 4:4-7

David ponders the prospects that are his because his Shepherd is sovereign: “You prepare a table before me *in the presence* of my enemies: You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.” Christ promised that those who place their faith in Him are eternally secure. “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. *And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.* My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one” (John 10:27-29).

God’s blessing is for time and for eternity. Those who are placing saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ can have the assurance that this world is not our home and that our Shepherd is leading us beyond the valley of the shadow of death to a land of eternal day. The Bible also speaks of goats who mingle with the sheep and can even *play the part of a sheep when it is convenient*, but the Shepherd is not the Master of their life. They do not *possess the purity He provides* in salvation and therefore they do not *pursue the purity He demands* in sanctification. They do not possess the *peace of His presence as Enabler, Comforter, Teacher and Guide!* They do not truly trust in His *power to protect them and to provide for them*. They have an external religion, but not a saving relationship with the Shepherd. Praise God if you are one of Christ’s sheep! Flee to Him by faith if you are not!

Christ said, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, *as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats*. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels...' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:31-34, 41, 46). The writer of Hebrews calls Christ the great Shepherd. He says to the sheep, “Now may the *God of peace* who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that **great Shepherd** of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, *make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*” (13:20-21)



If you have the assurance that you are one of Christ's sheep, you can rejoice in His provision, peace, purity, presence and protection. You can look forward to the prospects of faith becoming sight and hope becoming reality for ever and ever. If you have any doubt about your relationship with Christ, come to Him by faith. Ask God to forgive you of your sins and to cleanse you of all unrighteousness. Ask God to apply the righteousness of Christ to your eternal account as you trust entirely and exclusively in Him as your Savior. Ask God to lead your restored soul in paths of righteousness for His name sake.

May God in His grace and mercy enable you to pray—

Dear Father of mercies and God of all comfort, I thank You for Your abundant grace that saved me and even now sustains me; for Your "tender mercies that are new every morning;" for your great faithfulness in protecting me and providing for me. I praise You for Who You are, the Almighty Who can do anything that glorifies Your holy name. I long to honor You by embracing Your providence for my life, but I am weak, Lord. During the ceaseless temptation to want my will, and to be discontent, or to be bitter over my circumstances, give me strength to pray like the Savior in His hour of agony: "Father, all things are possible for You. Take this cup away from Me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what You will." Guide my steps in these times of uncertainty. Comfort me with a sense of Your presence. Help me in turn to comfort others by resting in Your promise to "never leave us or forsake us." When feelings of helplessness threaten to overwhelm me, I need Your grace to "be anxious for nothing." When discouragement presses down upon me, I need Your mercy to "rejoice in all things and to pray with thanksgiving." When doubts seem to consume me, I need to "trust in You with all my heart and to not lean on my own understanding." Oh Father, when I do not know what to pray, may Your precious Spirit intercede for me with "groanings which cannot be uttered" so that even the wordless yearnings of my heart are a sweet-smelling savor to You. You have made me exactly as You wanted me to be. You have ordained my path and my days. I rest in You alone as my Creator, my Savior, my King, my Comforter, my Guide, my Shepherd, my Father.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Galatians 6:2

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