



*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 mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

- Psalm 23

The best stories all have something in common: challenge. How lame would Star Wars be if upon receiving his father's lightsaber, the galaxy was suddenly saved. What about if once receiving the genie Aladdin had simply wished that everything was perfect? Pretty boring. Of if Moana was simply the story of a girl picking up coconuts in her village...and that was it. Stories have deeper meaning because we see people engaging in challenging circumstances and overcoming them. Why do you think NBC lines up hours of stories of athletes during the Olympics? Their stories of struggle and perseverance enhance the whole Olympic experience!

But what there is something these stories don't always share. Challenge and trial don't always end in the timeframe we want them to. In life there isn't often a nice ending that wraps everything up creating a clean ending. Instead, we live in a sinful and fallen world where sickness, trial, and temptation are active around us. These things bring tough seasons and heartache to our own lives. Sometimes small, other times seemingly insurmountable, our stories aren't easy.

In fact, being a Christian doesn't make our lives easier! Jesus tells His disciples in John 16:33, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation..." That is a promise from the savior. In this world you **WILL** have trouble.

Not might.

Not maybe.

Not "if only you do the right things".

No, in this world you **will have** tribulation.

But don't ever just read the first part of that verse. It ends like this: "But take heart; I have overcome the world." In your troubles you are never alone. Never. Not once. Not now, not in the future. You have Jesus with you through it all. Sometimes we think that He is only with us when things are going well, but that is false. He promises over and over again that He is always with us!

Psalm 23 is a blessing for us as Christians. While we walk in this world full of joy and sorrow, we remember the Lord is our shepherd! He shows us flowing streams where there is peace, rest, and growth. When the valleys seem to close in and the darkness of the world surrounds us, God is there too.

In this life it is not *if* we have tough times, it is *when*. But Jesus is walking with us. He is there to make sure that in our stories we are never alone in good times and in bad.

### Prayer

Lord, walk with me in joy. Walk with me in trials. Show me that I am not alone. Thank you that you are always with me. Amen.

### Journaling Questions

- When was the last time you felt you were walking through hard times? How did you sense God was with you?
- If you know hard times will happen, how do you prepare in following Jesus during the good times?