



## **A Painful Path – Part 1**

### **Well-Meaning but Misguided Friends**

**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well, the most famous Psalm in the Bible, the 23rd Psalm, begins with the words "The Lord is my shepherd." The Lord is my shepherd. That's a great, rich, classic image and depiction of our relationship with God. He is our shepherd. He is our guide. He is our leader. He is our authority. His direction in our lives is our obligation. He is exercising leadership. He's a good leader. He has a path for us that's best. He is our guide, our king, our shepherd.

The psalm goes on in the next two verses in Psalm 23 to explain the paths of righteousness that he's taking us down. And it's described with some welcome words right out of the gate like "green pastures" and "still waters." And all that's great. And we want that. We love that. We pray for that. And that just seems like a perfect pastoral picture of the Good Shepherd sheep following into green pastures and still waters. You know the psalm. And by the fourth verse, we have a different image of the path of righteousness. It's depicted with the unsettling words of "valley," "darkness" and even the scary word "death."

The reality of the Christian life and being someone who is following the Good Shepherd certainly doesn't mean and never has been promised in Scripture to somehow exempt us from the "valley of the shadow of death" and all the things that go with that imagery. And perhaps you're here today and you're saying, "Yeah, I know a little bit about that in terms of my life right now. I claim to be a Christian, I claim that he's a good shepherd, I want to follow God, but my life, I'm in the middle of some kind of a valley, some kind of darkness, some kind of deprivation, some kind of situation that I don't prefer. It's less than what I would prefer.

It's actually so substandard it is painful, it's loss, it's protracted trouble. It's a diagnosis that has just upset my whole life. It is a loss of a job. It's family problems, it's marital issues. It's a wayward kid. It's something about my home, my life, the security of things. And all of a sudden now I find myself as a Christian walking through something I certainly would qualify as a valley. And if you are here this morning you saw the ad that is on the bulletin cover this morning for the series. It's not going to be a surprise to you that the series that we're in Acts 21 is going to be about that dark valley that you might be in. If you say, "Well, I'm right now in the middle of green pastures and still waters." Well, that's fantastic. But I have news for you. You probably won't be there for long. You'll be there for a while. But then eventually the Good Shepherd will lead you down a path of righteousness that is darker and more painful and difficult.

And even if you somehow seem to slalom your way through all of that and you just seem to be one of these who just experiences a long season of green pastures and still waters, you've got people around you, you have people in your small group, in your sub-congregation, probably sitting in the row that you're in who are going through those dark valleys and you need to be equipped and know how to respond to those in a dark valley.



And the reason I bring all this up in our study of Acts 21 is because Paul is certainly going through all of those kinds of things. He's going through a dark valley and God is leading him into a new season, a new segment of this that seems to be even darker. As it says in the fifth verse of Psalm 23, he's going to be surrounded by enemies. Now, of course, the Good Shepherd's going to provide a "table before him," but it's going to be "in the presence of his enemies." It's going to include mounting opposition. Maybe you're in the middle of some pending litigation in your life. Maybe there's some trouble that you're in at work or in your family. But all of us are going to experience what Paul has experienced to some degree. The kind is going to be the same. We will have struggles. And I want to minister to you as my primary audience for the next four weeks as we study the 21st Chapter of Acts.

I want to identify with Paul, who holds himself out here as a good example. "Keep your eyes on me. The pattern you've seen in me, you see it in other people, you ought to follow it. You ought to imitate it." And he is a great example for us of someone who's willing to follow the Good Shepherd, even when the valley gets dark and painful. So that's the primary audience. And the secondary audience is, listen, you're going to need to minister to people for the rest of your Christian life who are going through the dark shadow.

So let us look at the 21st chapter here. We'll break it into four parts. This week let me deal with the first 16 verses, as shocking as that is, get your jaw off the floor. (audience laughing) Sixteen verses we are going to cover. Now, part of the reason for this is that Luke has now joined the team again. We've seen him come in and out of this, but all the personal pronouns here are plural and Luke, the writer of Acts, is including himself. So we're getting details here in the next couple of chapters that are, you know, like he's passing by the island of Cyprus and he's describing it. It's just like, okay, we got a lot of detail here.

Part of that is in God's providence is to show the historicity of this text, we're not reading the Book of Mormon here. This is a book that is based in history. It is based in real eyewitness testimony. And so we have a lot of detail here that thankfully we can work through as, in a pastoral setting, in a church setting, we can work through and glean the pastoral lesson from this and we can seek to apply it to our lives or maybe in your case, "Mr. Green Pastures Still Waters," you can apply it to those around you.

If we're in a New Testament survey class this would be different. I will read this for you with commentary. I won't even promise at all that I won't give you commentary, I'll give you some commentary here, which will try to answer some of the questions that are surfaced just by reading the text. So let's do that, the first sixteen verses and what we're seeing is Paul going into a dark valley here. It's dark. He can't see the light at the end of the tunnel. This is going to be a dark season. But as I do that, the outline here emerges very simply. It's a simple set of concepts.

And I guess even before we read it, we should start with some background because you should put yourself in the sandals of the Apostle Paul and know, I'll give you two passages here before we get to Acts 21, where this is part of the specially revealed pathway for him with detail that you and I aren't going to get in our lives. It's much like Peter. Remember Peter



in John 21? The resurrected Christ comes and he says you're going to be bound and you are going to be led off, you're going to go a way that you don't want to go. And he's depicting the way in which Peter would die.

Now we don't get that kind of road map, but God gave Peter, who, by the way, is the quarterback of the first half of Acts. He gets that realization that he's going to be a martyr for Christ. Well, Paul, the second half of Acts, the quarterback of the second half, the apostle to the Gentiles, he also gets some of that forecast of his future. Now, we don't know the details of ours, but we do know that the principle and the kind of struggles that we're going to have are going to move from green pastures and still waters into valleys and hopefully back out into green pastures and still waters. And for most of us, barring the return of Christ, we're going to end up being in the valley of the shadow of literal physical death. And so we just know this is going to be a reality for us. But for him, it was much more specific in terms of God's special revelation of him saying here's what's going to happen.

And it starts with Ananias in Chapter 9, so go to Chapter 9. Ananias is not the Ananias who dies in Chapter 5, Acts 5. We're talking about the Ananias who lived in Damascus when Paul, then known as Saul of Tarsus, was going up to persecute Christians. And you remember he got knocked off his horse and all of that, and now he's blinded and he's there. And God's Spirit, Jesus specifically, tells Ananias here's what I want you to know about the guy that you are afraid to go talk to. You're going to share the message of the gospel with him. But, you just need to know what I've called out for him to do in his life.

So with all of that, can you look at Chapter 9 verse 15? It says in verse 15, "The Lord said to him," to Ananias, "Go," I know you're afraid, but go and talk to this guy, Saul of Tarsus, soon to be the Apostle Paul, "for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." Right? All that sounds really good, like "Great, I'm going to lead this guy to Christ, he is going to be like a superstar in the Church, he is going to go share the gospel with kings," which we're about to get into by the way, in Chapters 22 and following in our study of Acts.

But look at verse 16. Here's where it turns into the valley of the shadow of death, and "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." Okay. All of us have the general promise, right? Jesus said, if you follow me, they hated me, they're going to hate you. We have lots of promises in the Bible that we're going to go through the valleys of the shadow of all kinds of irritating, frustrating difficulties in the Christian life. But God was going to, much like he did with Peter, give him more specifics about some of the stuff he was going to suffer.

By the time we get to the chapter just preceding the chapter of our study today, which is Chapter 20, scurry back to Chapter 20, let's look at Paul's resolve to go to Jerusalem knowing it was going to be difficult. And here's what he says in the last study when we were in Miletus there and he was talking to the leaders of the church in Ephesus, look at Chapter 20, let's start in verse 22. When he's resolved to go, but he knows what's coming, at least in general, he says, "And now behold, behold, I'm going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit." I know this is where the Good Shepherd is leading me, "not knowing what will happen to me there,



except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me."

So he knows that going to Jerusalem is going to include "afflictions and imprisonment." That was no surprise to him, because God, unlike for our lives, he's giving him some special revelation as to what's going to happen to him as he goes to Jerusalem. So that's where we're going. I've got a map there at the bottom of your worksheet. Do you see that map? Or you could download the digital worksheet, it's there. We're going to go 700 miles on a journey today really quickly in the first 16 verses of this passage. And we're going to see him go from Miletus, where our whole series last time was based as he was there in that port city. He's going to get on a ship now and he's going to get his way to ultimately to Caesarea and into Jerusalem, as you see on the map.

So let's read this with some commentary, knowing that he knows what's going to happen, at least in general terms, that this is going to be a really dark valley of his Christian ministry. And perhaps you can identify thinking, yeah, I feel like I'm in that as well with the stuff I got on my plate. Okay. Verse 1. Are you ready? Acts 21:1. "And when we," this is Luke and the team, "had parted from them," that's the leaders of the church at Ephesus who were meeting him at Miletus, the port city, "we set sail, and we came by a straight course to Cos," which my map didn't have Cos but is right directly south of Miletus. That's the first stop. "And the next day to Rhodes and from there to Patara. That's where Pastor Nick was from by the way. Remember that sermon from way a long time ago? Pastor Nick, Pastor Saint Nicholas they call him of Christmas fame. That's where he was born and did his ministry in Myra. But anyway. It's a wasted sentence or two, but I just thought some of you would go, "I remember that sermon." No one remembered the sermon.

Verse 2, "And having found a ship crossing to Phoenicia." Now, look at your map. Phoenicia, that's the region there north of Israel. "We went aboard and set sail." So we found a ship that's going the way we want to go, we're trying to get to Jerusalem. "And when we'd come in sight of Cyprus, leaving it on the left side, we sailed to Syria," a more specific area there north of Israel, "and we landed in Tyre," an even more specific area, that's a city. "For there the ship was to unload its cargo."

Now, if you know the region, if you're going to go to Jerusalem, you going to go to Maritime Caesarea, right? Caesarea Maritime we call it. And that is the port city that you would naturally go to to get Jerusalem. Well, they didn't go there because they're on a cargo ship and they're just trying to find a ride out there. And so they end up way north. But it was a good ride to get to where they were across the Mediterranean. And it says that it unloaded its cargo there. Verse 4, but while we're there, he says, "We sought out the disciples, and we stayed there for seven days."

So he's a week up in Tyre and he found Christians there, he got them together and notice what happened. "And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem." Now I'm going to make a big deal of this, even though, you know, you think I'm tap dancing. I'm not tap dancing, but this is not "by the Spirit" they were telling him not to go to Jerusalem. This is



"through the Spirit," through the information they got from the Spirit, which the Spirit had already made clear to Paul. It's going to be hard. "Afflictions and imprisonment await you there."

Well, they're getting this. They're getting God giving this special revelation about Paul's future and their conclusion was much like you'll see later in this passage, they go, "We don't want you to go then." Verse 5, "When our days they were ended," they stayed there a week, "we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach we prayed and we said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home."

It sounds a lot like Miletus. Remember they'd come all the way down from Ephesus. And now at the end, the last thing we studied when we were together in Acts is they're crying and they're hugging and they're saying goodbye and it's all this parting, tearful goodbye. Well, this is just a week. He'd been there for three years earlier ministering in Ephesus. Yeah, he had a tight relationship. Well, here they feel the same way. This is an important person, the apostle to the Gentiles, an important player in Christianity and we know he's going and he's going to suffer there and so they're walking him down to the ship.

So he gets on the ship there on the Mediterranean, and it says in verse 7, "When they finished the voyage from Tyre, they arrived at Ptolemais, and they were greeted by the brothers there and they stayed for one day." So they had a short stop there with Christians and that's it. Well, we got to get down to Caesarea so we can get on the road to Jerusalem. It says, "On the next day," verse 8, "we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist."

Now Sunday school grads, why would they call him Philip the evangelist? Philip the evangelist, by the way, evangelists, is just the word "Euangélion," which is the word "good news" or "gospel." And really this is like Philip, the gospel guy. He shares the gospel. He's an evangelist, he shares the gospel. And if you think back in Acts we got a guy named Philip who shared the gospel and it's important to know that he's not the Philip of the 12 apostles. So that's why he has this statement here. He's the one we learned about early in the book of Acts. He's out sharing the gospel in Chapter 7. And this is Philip the evangelist.

And he's not only just Philip the evangelist of Chapter 7, he was one of the seven. Now the seven, you might remember in Chapter 6 of Acts when we studied it, he was a ministry leader. Ministry, by the way, is the English translation of the word "Diaphanēs." We sometimes transliterate that word as "deacon," one of the first prototypical deacons in Acts 6. They were given the responsibility to serve tables and be exemplary leaders in the church of Jerusalem and this is one of them. So, Philip, not the apostle, the evangelist, the gospel guy, and the guy who was chosen as one of the seven to serve in the church of Jerusalem, well, we stayed with him.

So now he's in Caesarea, a key port city. From here we don't sail anymore. We're going to go inland to Jerusalem. That's the whole goal of this trip. "They entered the house of Philip the



evangelist, one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied." Now, again, if we're teaching a New Testament survey class we're going to like we're going to dig deep into that. But just to satisfy some curiosity, if that spins your mind around, like what in the world was that all about?

Remember what I've said throughout the study of Acts as we've been studying Acts for a long time now. We often talk about the difference between teaching New Testament truths in the book of Acts and comparing that to, contrasting that with teaching New Testament truths now. I get up and teach the Bible, women who are in our women's Bible study get up and teach the Bible. They teach the Bible, particularly the New Testament truths from New Testament texts, and we call them teachers.

Well in the early church we were teaching New Testament truths without a written New Testament text because it hadn't been written yet. And so those people were called prophets and the prophets or those who had the gift of prophecy as we read about in many of the early letters of the New Testament, they were given the task of teaching people about Christ, about the fulfillment of how the Old Testament was fulfilled in Christ, his ministry, what he did, his death, the implications of his death, his resurrection, all that needed to be taught to the Church. We needed New Testament truths taught to the church but they didn't have a New Testament, so they were given this endowment of God to be teachers in the Church.

Now you're saying, Well, wait a minute, the preachers in our church, you've already made a big point of that, even though you're the last guy in Southern California to believe this, is that pastors are supposed to be men and not women, because that's how God set this up in the Church. Which, by the way, he can make the rules for his Church any way he wants. Our job is to figure out what he said and to do it. If he said only red-headed guys could be pastors, then I guess I'm defrocked today because my hair is not red. Or if he said you got to have big earlobes or whatever, I guess I qualify for that, but whatever the requirement is, God is going to make his requirements and we're going to follow them. Just because it's not cool anymore doesn't mean we abandon it.

But we know that God is set up as the ultimate top leadership of administrating and the word is ruling even in the pastoral epistles and teaching and preaching over the mixed congregation, that's a gender-specific role. Right? And it doesn't matter if we don't like it. That's what it says and that's what we're going to do. He's the Good Shepherd. His course is that so we do it. Well, what is this all about? It's no different than us saying we got a cadre of gals who are teaching in our women's Bible study. In our case, I think we have over 700 people signed up learning in our women's Bible study and we have women teaching in that because that is a role that the Bible points out clearly in Scripture is absolutely appropriate. And we have no problem saying we have Bible teachers who are gals.

Well, in this case we have prophets in the sense that they are teaching New Testament truths to the early church and they are teaching without a New Testament. But we know because God doesn't contradict himself throughout the Scripture, this was a ministry to the gals in the



church at Caesarea. And if you think that's a leap, it's not. We can spend a whole sermon on that or a series if you'd like.

We've touched on that a little bit in the book of Acts, but that's just to satisfy some of your curiosity or to anticipate some of your objections, or if your head just spins around talking about you've got four unmarried daughters who prophesize, I don't understand that you should remember that this is all coming in the flow of Acts Chapter 2 verse 17, which was a quote of Joel Chapter 2, that the Church was going to have this new work done with the "Spirit of God was going to be poured out into the people; and your sons and daughters will prophesy." Remember that line from Joel 2 quoted in Acts 2? "Yes, we remember that Pastor Mike."

Well, in that passage again we're seeing the fulfillment. This is one of the inclusions, a line we have no knowledge of what they were teaching, what were the women's Bible studies like. We don't know. But it is listed here as a reminder that God was fulfilling the promise that he would endow his Church with the necessary gifts to have the Church functioning as it ought to. And in the early Church we had even in this case four of the daughters of Philip the evangelist, one of the seven, one of the deacons, if you will, of the church of Jerusalem, now residing in Caesarea. He had four daughters who were teachers of New Testament truths. Does that help a little bit?

Verse 10. "And while we were staying for many days," so we got Tyre for a week, we got Ptolemais for one day, now he's in Caesarea for many days, "A prophet named Agabus came down from Judea." And again, not the gist of the homiletical purpose of this text, but you might remember Agabus early on saying that there would be a prophecy by the Holy Spirit prophesying there would be a prophecy. In this case, it's not just teaching New Testament truths. He's telling us now about something coming in the future, specifically in the first prophecy was that there was going to be a famine in Jerusalem.

Part of what Paul's got on the ship is a big treasure chest of money that he's collected from the churches in modern-day Greece, in Achaia, and also in the Asian churches, the wealthy churches that were doing well. He was bringing relief to the famine-stricken church in Jerusalem. And all of that was because Agabus had said there's going to be a famine there. And so that's one of the prophecies. Only two times he comes up in the book of Acts or in the Bible, the second time is here. The prophet "comes down from Judea" and remember down doesn't mean he's going south. In this case he's going northwest. And he's doing that because down is always down in terms of elevation from Jerusalem. So he's coming down, coming over to Caesarea, as we might say.

And Agabus, verse 11, "And coming to us, he took Paul's belt." Now imagine this. Much like the Old Testament prophets. We see this with Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah. They sometimes do things and in this case, it's an object lesson. He takes the belt off of Paul, and you're going to pay attention when that starts happening in the middle of the church service, he takes the belt off of Paul off of his robe here "and he binds his own feet and his hands with the belt." And



you can see him sitting down like he's got his all four of his limbs tied up now, he's tied himself up.

"And he says, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit,' 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt.'"" Well, we know who owns this belt because we just saw you take it off of Paul. "They are going to deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." All this sounds like Acts Chapter 9. He's going to bring the name of Jesus not just to the Jews but the Gentiles, which he's been doing, and now to kings, which we're about to see him do in Chapters 22 and following.

But it's all going to start with him being arrested, being bound, handcuffed, tied up, and then he's going to be given over from the leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem to the Gentile leaders. Verse 12, "When we heard this," who's we? Luke, Philip, Philip's daughters, the teachers there in the church who were teaching women's ministry, the people in the church, all the people who were there had the natural reaction, the reflexive reaction of saying we urge you not to go up to Jerusalem. "When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem.

And Paul responded," verse 13, if you want to highlight any passage in this text right here, "Paul answered, "What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus," because that's what I'm called to do. And if he's going to lead me into green pastures, that's great. If he's going to lead me into the valley of the shadow of death and literally die in Jerusalem, bring it on, because that's all I'm concerned about, is following the Good Shepherd. "And since he would not be persuaded, we ceased." Thanks, Luke and Philip and the rest. Good. Stop. Stop breaking his heart.

"And they said," now, here's another one to underline, "let the will of the Lord be done." Let the will of the Lord be done. Right? And the will of the Lord, I guess must be that Paul is going to Jerusalem and he's going to be arrested and handed over to the Gentiles. "And after these days we got ready," so Luke is with him now, "and went up to Jerusalem." So they went east to Jerusalem, southeast. "And some of the disciples from Caesarea went with us." Just like in Miletus, these Ephesians leaders went all the way to the port and they were hugging on him on the way. And then even in Tyre after a week they're accompany him down to the beach, to the ship. Now they're saying, well, this is the road to Jerusalem. Some of them said, "Well, I'm going, I'm going with Paul. We know it's going to be bad for him. "So some of the disciples from Caesarea went up with us, bringing us to the house of Mnason of Cyprus, an early disciple, with whom we should lodge."

So the first 16 verses are just getting him from Miletus down the Aegean Sea, across the Mediterranean under Cyprus to north of Israel, Tyre, all the way down to Caesarea. And now he's made his way to Jerusalem. What we want to do is look at what's going on here. One of the verses I wanted you to underline there is the fact that they finally conceded in verse 14, "Let the will of the Lord be done," because what's going on in verses 1 through 3 and what happens in verses 14 through 16 is the intent to follow the Lord to Jerusalem, because that's





God's will for Paul's life. And in verses 14 through 16 people are going, okay, I guess we're going to do that, let him do that, and off he goes.

So the first three verses and the last three verses of this text, I want to take those together and just underscore for you what's going on here. And that is God's will for Paul to go to Jerusalem, even though it's a dark and painful imprisonment and afflictions await, we're going to do it. We're going to do it. Why? Because it is the will of God. If I said to you, does God have a plan for the Apostle Paul? You'd say, "Well, absolutely." Why? Because in Acts Chapter 9, when he got him saved, he said, "Hey, Ananias, here's the plan for the Apostle Paul." If I said, did God have a plan for Jesus? You'd say, "Absolutely, because Jesus, he had a plan for Jesus, a redemptive plan. It was God's will and God's purpose."

Now, if I said all that talking about the luminaries, you'd say, "Absolutely." Now, if I said, Oh, hey, hey, Christian, you're here in this room, and your problem is so different and so distant. It's 2,000 years later, it's remote. It's about your finances, it's about your health, it's about your ministry or whatever. Does God have a plan for you? See, I think most of us would say, "Well, I guess." We don't think about that quite enough. But I want to remind you that of course he does. If Jesus says he has a plan for every hair on your head and he's numbered them all, or a bird doesn't fall from the tree, Jesus said, "Apart from your Father," if God's sovereign interest and plan and will and purpose is accomplished in the lifespan of a bird, then I want to tell you you're much more valuable than birds.

God's plan certainly includes you, including the dark valley that you might be in the middle of right now. And you need to stop and you need to step back and you need to say it's not just God's redemptive plan in Christ that's planned out. It's not just the Apostle Paul's life that is planned out. It's not just my pastor or the missionaries that I support. It's not just their lives that are planned out. My life God has a plan and a purpose for me and only the most egotistical among us think about that every day. Most of us, if you're a humble Christian, you wonder about that. You think, "Really? For me. I mean, it can't be a big plan." But we need to stop and say, yes, God's plan extends to you.

Put it this way, number one, "Know God Has a Plan for You." And I'm telling you, if you're a normal, humble Christian, you've been humbled, God's humbling you, it's hard for us to compute that, but I need you to compute it. Because you affirm that God makes plans and carries them out. I just want to remind you right now, he's got a plan for you. You are the sheep of his pasture. He is leading you and he's leading you through every segment of your life. And he has a plan.

Turn with me to Ephesians Chapter 1. If you're doing our Daily Bible Reading with us, which I hope you are, the D.B.R. has brought us to Ephesians this week, Ephesians 3 this morning which was great, Ephesians 2 yesterday, Ephesians 1, the day before. We were reading Ephesians Chapter 1 and I just want to start in this passage by reminding you that all of us would have no problems affirming in Ephesians Chapter 1 that God has a plan and a purpose in what he did in Christ.



Look at verse 9 for instance. His whole point here, Ephesians 1:9, is this thing that Paul's preaching about, the plan of Christ. This is "Making known to us the mystery of his will." It was once at one time hidden, which is what Chapter 3 was all about, now it's revealed what he's going to elaborate on in what we read today in our Daily Bible Reading, "According to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth."

Now, the rest of the book is going to talk about all of that, but look at those big words. It may not have been known until "he made it known," but it was "his will," it was "his purpose," and he "set it forth" in Christ as a plan and it was the plan for the "right time." Do you see those words? You have no problem saying true on your Bible theology test this morning. Absolutely. God had a plan. Jesus was born at the right time. You can even read Daniel Chapter 9. This was all planned out in terms of the timing, it was planned out where he would be born, what he would do, how he would minister, how he'd fulfill all righteousness, how he would die in our place, how he would rise again. I believe all of that. God has a plan for Christ. He has a plan for the redemptive plan laid out in the Bible. Great. We can applaud all that. That's fantastic.

Keep reading, verse 11, now in Christ, in trying to unite all things in him, reconciling the world to himself, people from every tongue, tribe and nation, "In him we," now he's speaking if you want to be very technical about it I suppose the first century Christians who he's writing to. "We have obtained an inheritance." Right? We've legally, forensically now have been qualified to be in God's kingdom, and we're going to inherit that kingdom one day, "having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works," here's a big word, A.L.L, "all things according to the counsel of his will."

So now all of a sudden we've gone from this big redemptive plan to everybody now called to this inheritance and saying God has a plan for them. And we could say, "Well, it's just intersecting with the plan of God's redemptive plan in Christ. So, I mean, I can't be specific about all the details, and it's not the season of my cancer, or this loss of my relationship with my child or this frustration I'm having in my relationships at work or the financial downturn and my house being foreclosed." And I'm saying, yes, it does. It involves all of that.

And if I said to you right now, if you were to textually prove to me that it is true about every part of every believer's life that God has a purpose that he's working out, I hope you would raise your hand and go I know where I can find that in the Scripture because it's quoted often and it is true, and we need to let it percolate in as I think about God's plan for my life. And that verse would be Romans 8:28 if you wanted a textual text to just put it all in one sentence, right? "That for those who love God." Is that you? I hope it is. If you are called into his inheritance, you are now his child. "He works all things together for good, for those who love God and are called according to his purpose."

Now I was going to go on in the surrounding verses to explain all that. But if you look beyond just the next-door neighbor verses, you can look at the whole chapter of Romans 8 and see, guess what it involves? A lot of pain, a lot of trial, a lot of struggle, like sheep that are handed over to the slaughter. The Christian life is full of valleys and pain and difficulty and the



darkness of loneliness and pain and frustration and left turns and detours that we think this isn't planned. I never planned it. But guess what? God has planned it. We have to affirm the God of plans.

And if by the way and let me just say this, please. If you've got people whispering in your ear that they figured this whole thing out, which is, "You know, I know how this plan of God works and all he does is sit there and run the tape forward and look at what I did and then go back and kind of write it down in the plan book." Right? That's some of the explanations that are very common today. And they do this: "I figured out that old theological knot," right?

If you have anyone whispering that in your ear, or you sit here today advocating that view, I just want to ask you, how in the world did the Apostle Paul struggle with this so much that in Chapter 11 of Romans, he's standing back, mind-blowing, saying, I can't understand the inscrutable ways of God, I don't get it. This is the guy writing the New Testament and he's going mind-blown. How is it that God is a sovereign God, planning out details and yet I'm not a robot? I'm making decisions. I'm purposing things. And yet here it is that these two things are laid side-by-side. Here's Paul, mind-blown. And here is the person writing the books that you might be reading saying he figured that one out. Easy. Really? Really. Really? Really.

And anyone who is going to lay the mystery down side-by-side and we're going to say, well, this is what the Bible says and we believe it. You got a plan and purpose. I never planned the left turns. I never planned affliction. I never plan affliction for myself. You know, I really want the next five years to be really hard. Never! But God plans these things out because God... here's the word, the scary word. Don't enter. Bum, bum, bum... "Sovereign." I already read the word predestination, so we've already ruined the sermon for some of you. But the reality is, this is how it works in Scripture.

And for us to say, well, I really want a neat, tidy theology that doesn't have those kinds of issues. Well, then you just better pick some other religion, because the reality of New Testament theology and Old Testament theology is that we have these truths in tension and they both are resolved in God's mysterious, inscrutable plan. The mind of God, who can be his counselor, certainly not the guy who wrote that book telling you he can figure this out. Or the preacher who is telling you it shouldn't be a conundrum for you. It's a problem. I get it. It's a mind twister. It's going to give you a charley horse between your ears. That's just how this theological thing works.

So get used to that and know this. You think I'm in this valley because I messed up or I did this thing or my genetics weren't right, or because of this problem I made in a financial decision years ago and you think you got yourself here. And all I'm telling you is you did in terms of your human decisions. But here's the mystery of the amazing mystery of God's providence. God planned this out. You're not a robot. You're not a victim. This isn't fatalism. But God worked this out. He didn't just watch the tape to see what you would do. And he's not a good guesser. This is an Open Theism, if you know those words. Right? This is a God who plans everything. He works it out according to the counsel of his will.



A couple of passages. Proverbs 19, go there quickly. Proverbs Chapter 19. Everything in the sermon is going to be quickly, obviously, if you followed any of it so far. Pastor Mike is amped up today. Proverbs 19. Well, I missed you last week. That's why I just had to get back and try, I know get two sermons in in one. If I really cared for you I would slow down. (audience laughing) But Proverbs 19:21. These are just important truths. We need to have them. Look at verse 21, Proverbs 19:21. Are you there? Are you quick? "Many are the plans in the mind of a man," and I'm assuming your plans like mine, unless you're a masochist, are not to make your life be in more valleys. You want green pastures, you want still waters. You want to read books that will help you in the Christian life. Just have more green pastures and still waters. But, I just hate those contrastive conjunctions. "But it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand."

Do you see those going side by side? God has a plan, I'm not a robot, and yet I make plans and then God gets his purpose accomplished. This is a weird thing called the Providence of God. And in this problem of my brain, I just know that the "but" sentence here is "the purpose of the Lord will stand." I just got to deal with that. Now, go back to Chapter 16. Chapter 16 is only a couple of chapters away. Verse 9, "The heart of a man plans his way," I plan my way, I plan my way all the time, "but the Lord establishes his steps."

I did not plan when I was 18 years old, to be a pastor. I didn't plan to do most of the things I ended up doing in my life. I made my plans and then God established my steps. And I can say right now I'm here in this auditorium preaching this sermon or on the radio, if you're listening on the radio, I'm preaching this is God's plan for my life. Even though I made a bunch of decisions to get here. I believe this. And when things go bad and things get hard or things go wrong, all of those things from my perspective, the wrong of it, just because it's bad and difficult by going to Jerusalem and being arrested and handed over to the kings of the Gentiles, I got to say this is God's plan. Even though he didn't reveal it to me like he did to Peter or to Paul, at least in general terms about affliction and imprisonment, if I go to prison, I just know that's God's plan. I don't plan to go to prison. But if that happened it's God's plan.

Go back up to the beginning of this chapter, Chapter 16 verse 1. "The plans of the heart belong to man." those are my plans, "but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." I said yes to jobs. I said yes to ministry opportunities. I said yes to relationships. I said yes to things. And they came out of my mouth and they directed the path of my life. And yet really I'm saying this is a God thing. That's from the Lord. "Now, all the ways of a man are pure in his own sight." I think my plans are great, "but the Lord weighs the spirit." He knows that's not what's right. That's not where I want to take you. I'll take you over here.

Now, this may seem contradictory to you, verse 3, "Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established." Oh my plans. Finally, my plans get established. All I got to do is commit them to the Lord. Well, commit them to the Lord. Commit them to the Lord. If you're working for a boss or a manager or something and they say write that report. Now, you know, commit that to me. Submit it to me. Right? You'd realize, well, I guess he's going to edit it, he could change it. If you want a New Testament equivalent to this you can think in your mind of James Chapter 4, and he says, don't go in your mind and go, I'm going go to this city of that



city. I'm going to travel here, make a profit, come back. You don't say that. You got to say whatever you're going to say, whatever your plan is, and then you need to say this: "If the Lord wills, we will live or do this or that." Do you know that passage?

That is exactly what we mean by committing. Matter of fact, the Hebrew verb here is the verb to "roll something." If I have something here on a carpet or whatever in my tent, and I want to roll it over off of it, I'm rolling it off of my carpet onto the dirt or whatever, the stoop of my house. Rolling it over. That's the word. I'm taking my plans, which by the way, I make plans, verse 1, I make plans, they are in my heart, verse 9, but I'm rolling over my plans for the Lord. I'm holding my plans loosely and I'm knowing this: it's the will of the Lord. If it's not clear yet. Right? It's the "answer from the tongue is from the Lord." "The Lord establishes my steps."

"The Lord has made everything for his purpose," right? Including us. Right? "And even the wicked for the day of trouble." These are mind-boggling truths that everyone wants to sweep under the carpet. But the reality is, I am a person who knows that whatever situation I'm in, it's the plan of God. Fatalist? I'm not a fatalist, I'm not saying that. I'm not culpable? And now I'm saying I'm culpable. I'm not a decision-maker? Yeah. You don't have a will? I have a will. I get all that.

But I've got to recognize for this pastoral purpose this morning that whatever your situation... Do you have heart disease? It isn't because, well, you know, you were just so dumb, you know, eating all those potato chips as a kid. Right? And there may be some connection humanly speaking. But if you got heart disease, if you have arthritis, if you have a terminal brain tumor, this is God's plan. Oh, it's bad, though. God makes good plans. He's a good shepherd, but he leads us sometimes into the valley of the shadow of death.

Matter of fact, every single one of us, barring the return of Christ, that's where this all ends up. Death. And the reality is, I've got to say, okay, God has a plan for my life, including the current season I'm in right now. And it'd be good for us, I would do a lot for you this morning as your pastor, if I could get you to say that's it. Okay, yes. God's plan. I got to recognize it. I'm in the middle of God's plan. It doesn't mean there are no mid-course corrections and you might say the best thing in the plan right now is to turn left. Great. But you're right where God has planned. So I want I want purposefully not fretfully into whatever painful segment of God's plan I've got here. The shadow of the valley of death. Fine. I'm going to walk through that following the Good Shepherd.

Now back to our text and the heart of our text verses 4 through 12. And I made all my commentary when I read the text so that you wouldn't get stuck on all the details and just deal with what's happening. What's happening in Tyre is in verse 4. The end of that verse is "they were telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem." Now that was THROUGH the Spirit. Now, in what sense is that through the Spirit? Is this God's command for Paul not to go to Jerusalem? Well, that would absolutely contradict everything else we're reading in the context of this book. It is God's will for Paul to go to Jerusalem and it's God's will for him to be arrested. And it's God's will for him to be handed over to the Romans. God's will, exactly the path that God has made.



And yet here it says THROUGH the Spirit. And I made this statement when I read it. It doesn't say BY the Spirit. The conclusion that you should not go to Jerusalem is not a conclusion BY the Spirit. It was THROUGH the means of the data that the Spirit revealed. And if you think I'm stretching that, all you have to do is look down to what Agabus said, it's the same paradigm there. Agabus says, I know what's going to happen. You're going to get bound like I just was illustrating for you, hand and foot of the guy who owns this belt going to be delivered over to the Gentiles. Now, when we heard this and been through that data, what did I do with it? I interpreted it into saying, "Here's my advice for you. Don't go to Jerusalem, please. We urge you, do not go up to Jerusalem."

Question: if Paul by God's authoritative revelation is learning that you are going to be arrested, you might be beaten, whatever is included with the word affliction, and you are going to be handed over not as a free traveling missionary, but you are going to be a prisoner if you go to Jerusalem, I hope you would say exactly what Luke and Philip and his daughters and everyone at the church in Caesarea and all the Christians in Tyre after a week of spending time with Paul, they all said, "Don't go, don't go, don't go." I think you would say I'd probably join that chorus, too, just like the godly Luke said the same thing.

Why? Because we care about Paul. We don't want Paul to suffer. We don't want Paul to be arrested. We don't want Paul to go through affliction. We don't want that. Okay? I'm going to say that stems from a kind heart. That's a kindhearted response. Okay? But you need to be ready for what Paul was encountering here by being ready for the same thing in your life. Number two. Let's write it down. You need to "Expect Kindhearted Bad Advice." That's what you need to expect because this is bad advice. God's will is to go to Jerusalem. They're saying don't go to Jerusalem.

Does that sound familiar? Yeah. Do you know who you're going to get a lot of bad advice from? Your mother. Can I tell you that? (audience laughs) And you know why your mother is going to give you bad advice if you have a good relationship with your mom? Because she loves you. She's your mother. She kissed your boo-boos when you were little. She loved you so much. Now you're thinking I'm going to be a missionary in Indonesia. You might get killed. "Oh, I think maybe you can go to a better mission field."

I don't know. That's an extreme example. But why does mom give bad advice, right? Not that all of her advice is bad because she's in the auditorium today. I need to make that clear. (audience laughs) I guess I'm paying for lunch today after the service. Because she loves me. Right? A lot of bad advice is going to come from people who love you. Mary gave Jesus bad advice. Mark Chapter 3. Look it up, verses 20 to the bottom of the chapter. Mary and the brothers of Jesus show up and look at him who is so busy in his ministry. Here's what the text says in Mark 3. He had no time to eat. He couldn't take his meals.

Now, there's one thing mom is going to say when she thinks you're a workaholic and overworked. "Yeah, honey, you need to take a break." Right? Good advice is going to come from people who care about you. Tender-hearted, kind-hearted advice. And here's how it ends. Now there's a little story in the middle. But it ends with they come to a place in a house



where it's packed full of people and Jesus is doing his work. And Mary and the brothers are outside and they call and say, "We want to talk to Jesus. Have him come outside." And here is what Jesus says. Talk about a slap in the face to your mother. He says, "Who are my mother and brothers?" Aren't these that do the will of God? Whoa!

I mean, think about that. I mean, you've seen her on the Renaissance paintings. You know, she's a nice lady. And she just wants you to take a vacation, man. "Can you take your vacation? You need a break. You're not even getting your... You need to eat, boy." Right? You can see all this. And his response is, who's my mother? It's these people that do the will of God. Hey, how often did Jesus say things like that? "Night is coming, when no one man can work," right? I'm going to work as long as it's day. He says, "My Father's always working, so I'm going to be working." Here is a guy who's a workaholic to his own hurt and tender-hearted people are giving him advice. And that advice, Jesus says categorically, you're not talking like my mom right now.

Let me give you a better example that may be more clear, but it absolutely applies to Mark 3. This one's from Matthew 16. Go to Matthew 16. If you want to see something that parallels Acts 21 and Mark 3 so well, here it is. Matthew 16. Do you want a classic example? Here it is, verse 21. From that time on. Here's a great parallel. Jesus is going to go to Jerusalem. "From that time on Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders," that's the head honchos, "and the chief priests," those are the top religious leaders, "and the scribes," those are the professorial types, "and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

Now, if I hear that sentence out of the mouth of the one that I care about and love, I'm going to really pass right over that last phrase "on the third day be raised" because I don't even know what that means because that doesn't happen. So all I'm hearing is "suffer many things" from important people and "be killed." Now, if I said I'm going to Jerusalem and I'm going to suffer many things and be killed, I hope if you like me, you'd say, "Ah... There's a great little resort on the Dead Sea's shores, and we can go get our mud baths and we can avoid all that. Let's go somewhere else."

Enter Peter, who loved Jesus, verse 22. "And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.'" And I'm going to go, yay, Peter, you love Jesus. You don't want him to be hurt. Verse 23, "But he turned and said to Peter..." That's great. What time does resort check-in start? I need a break. I should have listened to my mom back there earlier in my ministry. You're right. I'm not up really for all that either. Instead he says, "Get behind me, Satan!" Now, you think it's hard to say are you really my mom with that advice? Can you imagine your best buddy here, the number one guy on your team? "Hey, get behind me, Satan!" Look up the Greek word by the way, "Get behind me." That word is sometimes used for "go die." I mean, literally. And like the academic lexicon, it's like "go die Satan!" I mean, that's not winning friends and influencing people kind of vocabulary. That's horrible!



I mean, mom's going to be hurt going, "What do you mean I'm not your mother?" Right? Here you are Satan to me right now. By the way, do you know what the word Satan means? The word "Satân" means? It means adversary. You're an adversary. That's why the next word is good in the sentence when he uses this word to describe it, "You are a hindrance to me." You're becoming adversarial to me. Now, why? "For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." Do you want a good response to Mary and Jesus' brothers? Same one.

Do you know what you're thinking of right now? Things that would really work well in the priorities of people, not the priorities of God. So I think your mind is in the wrong place because the priority advice that you should be giving me is, is this glorifying to God? Are you following God on the path that he has for you? Are you doing the right thing? And all I'm telling you is if you are in a valley, you're going to have kind-hearted people telling you, "I've got advice for you, I'm your Christian brother, I'm your Christian sister, and this will alleviate your pain." And I get it because when I get a headache, I go to the medicine cabinet. I see if I have any Tylenol. I see if I have any ibuprofen. I would like the pain to go away.

Now Christian advice is the same way. They go, "You know what? I just don't know if you should continue in this. It's real. This is hard. And I think maybe you should rethink whether this is really good for you." I mean, there are so many in this room. Let's go from audience one, which is if you're going through the valley to audience two you're helping people through the valley, I just do not want you to be Satan. Would that be good? Don't be Satan. Satan gives advice to people based on what is most comfortable or easy for them. These are the "things of man." They like to say things like, "Well, if that marriage is really as bad as you say, well, then, you know, I guess, you know, I'm compassionate and loving. God is love. He wouldn't want you to go through all that. Well, I guess this covenant you made before God, let's just end that right now. I mean, I got a good family attorney that you can talk to."

That can come from your sisters in a small group, particularly when we start putting labels on the guy. He's a narcissist, right? Or this is abuse. No, I'm not saying there are not at least two biblical grounds for a legitimate amputation. Right? And it's an amputation. Let's just remember what it is. But I'm just telling you how often in the name of Christianity do people try to love on each other with advice that's nothing more than the verbalization of something that really just is magnifying the "things of man." Not the "things of God."

Sometimes your marriage is the valley of the shadow of death. And I'm just telling you, the advice is not let's just figure out what would alleviate the pain. Oh, of course I'd like to mitigate pain. I never planned for adversity in my life. But I'm just telling you let's just think this through. We've got to think again about what the priority is. If you're giving advice, let's make sure we're giving good, godly advice, not Satanic advice.

Peter, he's the first senior preaching pastor of the church, it's a megachurch, in Jerusalem. By Acts 2 there are thousands of people listening to Peter preach and his pastoral advice in these passages is "No, no no." I'm just telling you, good people like Luke can give bad advice. We're urging him not to go. You became an adversary, a hindrance to the will of God. You





said, I know God is leading you down this path. And whatever the reasons are, a biblical reason to be on this path, and we're trying to tell you to get off. Why? Because we care about you. Be careful of people who are coming to "care about you" in the name of God and trying to give you an easy out. Sometimes there isn't an easy out.

I'm going to leave you a passage that will give you at least three examples of how the hardships might be a part of the right commitment to God. Go to Second Timothy Chapter 2. Second Timothy 2. Paul is writing to Timothy. He's a pastor in Ephesus and guess what comes with the pastorate? A lot of headaches. I can say that firsthand. Let me tell you, I know. In the pastorate a lot of headaches and it's a lot worse, I'm sure, in the first-century Asian city of Ephesus than it is even here in Orange County. So he's got a hard job.

Now, he says in this passage, verse 3, look at it with me. Second Timothy Chapter 2 verse 3. Here's his response to Timothy who's in a job that he knows is inherently difficult. He says, take a vacation. Insulate yourself. Have your assistant take more of the calls. Don't read the critical letters. No. "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus, because no soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits." Now if the illustration in my Christian life in this text is like a military service, then to compare that with civilian life, which is well, after World War II, let's have a washing machine. Let's have a refrigerator and let's get microwaves and dishwashers and let's make our lives convenient, that's civilian life. It's not eating the M.R.E.'s on the field and digging out, you know, trenches and foxholes. That's warfare. This is domestic life. And he said in your role as a Christian leader your aim is to please the one who enlisted you. And so this job has inherent difficulty.

Hey, Mom, your job as a mother has inherent difficulties. And there is a lot of advice you can get even from Christian books about parenting that will make it easier but it's not right. I mean, let's just think about the screen phase. Do you really want me to get at this point? Just tell me I'm running out of time because... Right? Putting your kids in front of screens all day long, I'm just telling you, let's just think this through, there are easy ways to placate your kids. Or there's the real discipleship that comes with the job of being a mom or a dad. Discipline. Some of you will not discipline your kids because it's hard. And you know what you want? You want a Christian book that will tell you how to slalom your way through the difficulties so you don't have to do it. Or you can have good, godly advice. Say suffer hardship with me as a good soldier. Suck it up, mom and dad, and do what you know is right.

See, because the path isn't the easy path, it's the godly path. Jesus said it this way. It's the narrow path. It's the narrow path and the small gate and the way, here's how we put it, the way that is hard. That's Matthew 7:14. "The way that is hard that leads to life" and some of the roles that you have in verses 3 and 4, are going to include something difficult. And the advice for someone in a difficult situation sometimes is just to be tougher than the situation by enduring hardship. By the grace of God and the Spirit of God, keep going. Do you follow that?

Next verse. Another example. Another reason that sometimes hardships are a necessary part of the path. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. Now, I never, well, I guess I did in junior high, I ran terrible track, but I ran for a semester. That was a



painful thought just to even go back to that day. But when I was running and my side was hurting and all we had between me and cutting right across the field was a tiny little curb. Everybody's ahead of me. I'd love just to do that. That would be great. But guess what? I'd be disqualified because that's not the rule. You got to stay on the track. Duh. Right?

Shortcuts. Cutting corners in the Christian life. God's got a set of rules. Here's how you play the Christian life. Here are the rules. I take you and your small groups to Psalm 119 this week and I make you try to digest the first eight verses just to remind you, the rules are there for us from God, the moral strictures of the Bible, if you want to call them that, fine, they are what they are. And if I keep them I'm going to have my flesh wage war against my soul, against those things. But to be a Christian, sometimes obedience is just going to be difficult. So the hardships on your path may be there because you're just trying to be an obedient Christian. I mean, maybe even just forgiving the person instead of taking revenge on the person at work. That may be the hard thing, but you're keeping the rules.

So the hard path for you, whatever it is that you thought of when I said you're going through the valley of the shadow, whatever that shadowy reality is. Maybe it's the loneliness of being alone, but you could have compromised the rules of God by being unequally yoked or some other thing. And you're saying, no, I'm not going to do that because the rules say that I do what God asks me to do because his directives are my obligation. And therefore sometimes I need someone to come alongside and say suffer hardship as a good soldier, keep the rules like a good athlete. Instead of, "Well, you know, I guess God loves you. He only wants what's best for you. So let's just cut across to the green pastures. We'll get out of this valley path." Do you follow what I'm saying?

So sometimes for the sake of your position, sometimes for the sake of your just obedience to Christ. And how about this, verse 6. Sometimes because you are a farmer and the farmer is described as a hardworking farmer. Now I know he gets the advantage of sharing in the crops, and when we're preaching this passage in its context we get on to that. But let's just stop with that phrase "hardworking farmer." Now we go to the grocery store to get our food, most of us, and we don't know some of that. But I would tell you, if you thought about farming or, you know, your grandpa or whatever, you know people who farm or maybe who knows, you came from a farming background, this is hard work. And the bigger the farm, the more hard work it is.

Every Christian is not the same. This is where you employ the word stewardship. Stewardship is God giving you some kind of field, some kind of opportunity. Jesus told stories about, you know, passing out the mina or giving the talents, the pictures of money, one guy gets five, one guy gets three, one guy gets one. The pictures of God allotting things differently. If you're the brightest person in the room, do you follow me here? You've got a bigger field just with that. Some of you have the most widely influential employer situation. You're a powerful person in South Orange County, right? You have a broader field. Maybe you're the most gifted person spiritually in the room. You have a broader field.



You have a stewardship based on what God gifts you. Some bear fruit 30, some 60, some hundredfold, but you better maximize your fruitfulness. So I'm going to say this: sometimes the hardships are necessary just as a part of your stewardship in your field. Like what has God given you? Well you better develop that to its fullest. And if you have a 100-acre field that's different than the guy who's got a half-acre field. And so yeah, you can be in the Christian life and the lanes are different than the barriers. We have the guardrails of God's word, as it says in Psalm 119, I think it's verse 32. We "run in the way of his commands," but within that way there's a stewardship of different lanes and you might have a lane that's a little more filled with potholes than that guy. Stop dreaming of the greener pastures in lane two. You're in lane seven. You got to stay in lane seven if that is your stewardship.

And just know that with that it's a lot like number one or Letter "A" or whatever I called it, you might have hardships because of the particular role you have. You're in a particular role. That's true. You got to keep the rules as a Christian. That's true. And it could be that just God is giving you some opportunities that I don't have or that she doesn't have or that he doesn't have. We got to maximize that. And so your job may be harder. There may be more struggles or there may be more sweat involved.

And I won't take you to Second Corinthians Chapter 12, but we've talked a lot about that through our last series. Paul is given this thorn in the flesh and it was all to manage his character with all the responsibilities he had, and that was something God would not take away. So the hardships of his life included a muffler, a governor on his life to keep him where God wanted him to be. And he said after pleading that it would go away, he said, I realize now God wants this in my life so the valley of the shadow of death for me is a chronic illness for the rest of my life. That is my lot. That is my cross to bear. And I will say God's grace is sufficient and I'll glory in the weakness because this is the lane God called me to. I am now running off-road, my lane doesn't even feel paved anymore. And he says it's all right. I'll stay in my lane.

Verse 13. Back to our text, please. Just as you're turning there, I want to remind you not to be Rehoboam. Don't follow the pattern of heretics who love to surround themselves with people who just tell them what they want to hear. Bad advice can be very addictive. You want more of it and don't. If you know the story of Rehoboam, the son of Saul and he just brought people around and they told him what he wanted to hear. And it was horrible and the results were bad. Even though they're part of God's plan of discipline on the nation.

Verse 13, thankfully, just one verse here left to tackle. "Paul answered, 'Why are you doing this? Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of Jesus.'" Go back to Chapter 20. You see him say the same kind of thing in Chapter 20, that same picture of resilience. Look at verse 22 that I read initially, "I'm going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what's going to happen," but I know it's going to be bad. "Except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But," verse 24, "I do not account my life is of any value nor precious to myself." Well, guess what? A lot of your kind-hearted advisers, your life is precious to them. Your comfort is precious to them. But he says no. The things of God. "If



only I may finish the course in the ministry that I receive from the Lord, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God." And that's his lane because he's a public speaker, he's a missionary, he's an apostle.

Well, in our passage, of course, he's saying the same thing, and that is I'm going to stay on course. I'm going to follow God's plan for my life. And right now it involves a bad marriage. Right now it involves bad health. Right now it involves cancer. Right now it involves financial collapse. Right now it involves unemployment. Right now it involves whatever it involves for you. And I'm going to continue to follow the Shepherd. I'm going to do it. I'm going to tenaciously or let's put it this way, number three, I'm going to "Courageously Stay on God's Track," and not just within the parameters, the guardrails. And some of you are careening into the ditch. Get out of the ditch. Get back on the path.

And then I'm going to say, make sure you're in the lane that God has carved out for you. Your position, your role, your giftedness, your stewardship, and stay in that lane until God makes it clear it's time to move. And it better be clear based on more than your mom's advice. Do you follow me? It ought to be because you know this is God's constraining of your life that it's time to get into lane eight. But until then, you stay in the lane that God has you in and you follow him tenaciously, courageously staying on track.

And this reminds you that Romans 8:28, the purpose of God, it is not accomplished by you just constantly looking for relief. The long-term benefit of the good purpose of God being played out in his big scheme of things, it's produced through the faithfulness of day-to-day, saying I'm just buckling down and doing this. Suffering hardship as a good soldier until God brings me into, I hope, another season of green pastures and still waters. Until then, I follow.

So what is it for you? Worker. Employee. Employer. Husband. Wife. Student. Ministry leader. What is it to walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord to be tenaciously and courageously staying in your lane? I know much of this sermon was frontloaded. I get it. But just at the end, it just speaks for itself. It's just such a good text. Why would I be having people getting me off the path? I'm not going to have them weeping and breaking my heart. I'm going to say, stop. I want the will of the Lord to be done. I'm ready to not only be in prison but even to die in Jerusalem even if that is going to cost me a ton.

Following is hard. Kids do it better. That's why Jesus said it's a lot like a kid following their parent. You got to become like a child in the sense that you've got to trust the Good Shepherd. And I think of that when my kids were little, I think about how they would be willing to walk into any dangerous situation because they didn't even perceive danger half the time. But as long as I had my big old fat hand down there and they had their little hand in mine we could walk down back alleys in the worst parts of L.A. and it was like, "Oh..." and off they went because they trusted me.

Like I've said many times your kids don't get it. They don't pile into the minivan as eight-year-olds and go, "Did you pay the insurance premium this month?" Right? "How much gas do you



have in the tank? Did you check the air pressure in the tires?" They don't think that way. They think you're in the seat, you got this figured out. Okay, here we go. Off we go.

Did you grow up in a church where you had printed hymnals and stood up and sang out of hymnals? Remember that some of the old timers? One thing you didn't want to be back in that day is in the third verse of any hymn. Because you know how that works, right? One, two and four. Worship leaders didn't know how to count, apparently. One, two, and four. Or the pastors wouldn't let them have enough time for all four verses. But one, two and four.

I came across a hymn when I was researching and studying for you this week and I read the whole hymn a couple of times and that third verse just kept jumping out at me. I thought, well, this is the verse I never sang as a kid. It was written by an old Baptist poet and pastor and leader, seminarian, and he wrote this hymn a long time ago, over a hundred years ago. And you might remember singing it in church "He Leadeth Me." Remember that old English hymn? He leadeth me.

The third verse was so good as I just reacquainted myself with it this week. Because it has that picture of what we need when we're walking through the valley of the shadow of death. We don't fear. Right? Because he's with us. "His rod and his staff, they comfort us." We've got to have that in our minds. Listen to the third verse of this old hymn. "Lord, I would clasp thy hand in mine, nor ever murmur nor repine; content, whatever lot I see, since 'tis my God that leadeth me." And then chorus. "He leadeth me, he leadeth me; by his own hand he leadeth me: his faithful follower I would be, for by his hand he leadeth me." I just love that line when it says, "nor ever murmur nor repine." Do you know what the word repine means? Like I never fret, never, never despair.

I'm going to walk. Why? Because I'm going to "clasp thy hand in mine." His hand in mine. I'm going to hold his hand and I'm going to walk and follow the Shepherd. And you might be going through some really hard times right now, but you got to bear down. You got to buckle down. You got to trust that the Lord will give you strength to "run with endurance the race that's set before you."

And if someone's whispering in your ear, I don't care if it's your mom telling you to compromise, to find an easy out, do something for yourself. Don't think of the things of God. Think of things for you. You just need to rebuff that. Don't be rude to your mother. But whatever your friend is saying to you, if you know it's taking you into a lane that's not God's will or, God forbid, off the path entirely past the guardrails. Right? You know, you're out of bounds. You got to get back on the path today and you got to say I'm willing to go through the hardness, whatever the difficulty is, whatever the loneliness is, whatever the deprivation is, and say, I'm going to trust until God the Good Shepherd brings me back into a level path in the green pasture.

God, lead us please, circumstantially, providentially, as we follow your revealed truth. I do pray for our small groups this week. If there's ever a sermon that needs to be discussed in a small group, I pray that everyone hearing my voice would get in one of our small groups and



discuss these discussion questions, which will certainly have us grappling with and absorbing those first eight verses of Psalm 119 that remind us how important your word and your commands are and they keep us on the path if we would just see and know that if we love you, we'd keep your commandments, we'd understand that the Good Shepherd has got a good path. It's the best path, you're our guide, your leadership can be trusted. And I pray we would trust that even when it's hard, even when it's difficult, even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death. God, embolden us, strengthen us today I pray.

In Jesus name. Amen.