



FEAR LESS

INTRODUCTION

Start with prayer, then read...



READ: Ezekiel 34:1–16a



REFLECTION QUESTION:

How does this passage describe God as our shepherd?



REFLECTION QUESTION:

What language and images does God use to describe how a good shepherd provides for his sheep?

DIGGING DEEPER

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing... You prepare a table before me... my cup overflows” – Psalm 23:1, 5 (NIV)

When God first established Israel's monarchy, the people were asking for a king so they could be like all of the other nations. God warned them that a king would take their sons for his army and their daughters to work in his palace. He would take the best of their servants, their cattle and flocks, and their produce for his own use (1 Samuel 8:10–18).

Yet, even though the cost of having a king would be steep, God knew the people would demand a king anyway. Therefore, He had written specific instructions in His law about how their kings must not be like those of other nations— selfishly multiplying wealth, wives, and horses for themselves. Instead, they

must selflessly memorize and follow God's law. They must not consider themselves better than anyone else in the kingdom, but act as servant leaders (Deuteronomy 17:14–20).

As it turns out, Israel's leaders had not been good shepherds for hundreds of years, so God took over. He rescued His flock and cared for them Himself. Ezekiel described bountiful provision and rest under God's care. They would feed in a rich pasture in every part of the land—the ravines, the mountains, and all the settlements. The Good Shepherd is Jehovah Jireh, our Great Provider.

Jesus described Himself the same way when He talked about being the Good Shepherd in John 10. When He described Himself as the gate, it not only described Him being the way to salvation but also the entrance to safety, provision, and abundant life today. It's not just about going through the door into heaven. It's about going in and out and finding protection and providence in the pasture (John 10:9). The same images of rest, peace, and abundant provision is found mentioned in green pastures and still waters of Psalm 23.

In the ancient near East, shepherds had to move their flocks around often to find green pastures. If they found a good spot, the flock would eat, then they would have to move to a new place, sometimes a day's journey away or more. But Jesus said that when you are part of His flock, when He is your shepherd, you “come in and go out and find pasture” like it's no big deal. You don't have to move all around in search of the next green pasture. When God is your shepherd, you will be provided for.

APPLYING IT TO LIFE

Things seem really uncertain right now for all of us. Whether you have lost your job, your hours have been cut, your business is in danger of closing, or you're concerned about the stock market or the economy in general. We have concerns about both our health and safety and our financial provision. But God shows His people over and over that He is their Provider. Think about how He provided miraculously in the wilderness of the Old Testament when He rained down food from heaven. Or in the New Testament on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, when He multiplied the fish and the loaves. Jesus provided for us spiritually, but He also ensures we have our daily bread.

You don't have to worry or stress about the future. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that when you seek God's kingdom first, whatever you need will be given to you, so there is no need to worry (Matthew 6:25–34). Paul wrote, “My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:19). Not necessarily all of our wants, but all of our needs.



REFLECTION QUESTION:

Think back to times when things were uncertain, but God provided for your needs. How can you use those stories to encourage yourself and others in this time?



REFLECTION QUESTION:

How can we realistically not worry about the state of our economy or our personal provision during such a volatile time?



REFLECTION QUESTION:

If we really trusted God to provide, how would it change the decisions we make and the way we live our lives during this time?

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: EXPRESS GRATITUDE

Our natural response to God's abundant provision is gratitude. The spiritual discipline of gratitude also helps us to notice God's provision when it happens and appreciate the little things He provides for us every day. The regular discipline of thanksgiving actually changes our hearts and our lives.

Paul encourages us to "give thanks in all circumstances," even the difficult times (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18). That doesn't just mean to find the good things to thank God for during a hard time, but to thank Him even for the hard times, because they bring us closer to Him, teach us hard truths, and mold us into who He wants us to be.

In *One Thousand Gifts*, Ann Voskamp wrote, "Giving thanks in everything prepares the way that God might show us His fullest salvation in Christ. The act of sacrificing thank offerings to God—even for the bread and cup of cost, for cancer and crucifixion—this prepares the way for God to show us His fullest salvation from bitter, angry, resentful lives and from all sin that estranges us from Him . . . It is what prepares the way for salvation's whole restoration."¹

To practice gratitude today, take some time before going to bed to write down what you were thankful for throughout. Keep this going for a few days. The more you practice gratitude, the more you will see things to be thankful for throughout your life, even the hard things. Also, as you write them down, you can look back at all the ways God has blessed you in the past weeks, months, and years.

¹ Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).