

Time for God – Take 2

Purpose: To assist the congregation with further reflection on the theme of the Sunday service and in particular with the Congregational Bible passage.

Week beginning Sunday 26 March Still waters

Pray Pray that even in the midst of the “storms of life” we would be aware of God’s presence in our midst and his ability to support us even in the face of real challenge and difficulty.

Read Read the passage (preferably in an easy to understand version). Psalm 23.

Background This psalm has proved to be a very real help and encouragement to countless numbers of God’s people down through the ages – and it can be for us today. We need to watch though that we don’t bypass the parts that speak of the very real pressures that we can face as we go through life. Talk of the valley of the shadow of death, or of deep darkness remind us that life is not all plain sailing, and that at times it can be a sore burden. Underpinning everything though is God’s commitment to his people in every aspect of life. Written from a country perspective, even those of us who live in a rural county but whose lives are focussed on town living need to make some extra effort to take in the lessons given here.

Possible questions/points to consider

1. Try putting the emphasis on each part of the first line and ask yourself in turn what is it that this verses says to me, adds to my understanding of God and my place. 1) The LORD is my Shepherd. 2) The Lord IS my Shepherd. 3) The Lord IS my Shepherd 4) The Lord is MY Shepherd. 5) The Lord is my SHEPHERD. That’s not to suggest of course that there aren’t past and future aspects to God’s care, nor that the Lord is ONLY our Shepherd, he is of course Shepherd to lots of other people too. And there are many other names and titles that shed light on the nature of God. But for the moment let’s see if we can get as much understanding from the opening words of this psalm as we can.
2. Were there any NEW insights that came from the previous questions? If so, share them with others. How might you apply anything you’ve learned to life as it is for you just now? Or to the next time you come up against difficulties?
3. It is fair to say that while most of us hanker after a trouble free life none of us have actually gone through life without experiencing some troubles or loss even if we wouldn’t necessarily describe it as “a valley of deep darkness”. If you feel able share one or two instances of times when you have felt that life was terribly pressured or strained. (You don’t have to!) How did you cope/not cope? Did you feel able to share your troubles with God?/ If so, what difference did it make? If you weren’t able to do that were you aware of others being supportive?
4. If trouble is so much part of what it means to be a) human b) Christian what more could we do to speak about that and the resources which God wants to provide? How can we be more sensitive and supportive of others when they are going through trouble? How can we be open to receiving help from God, from others, when we are going through trouble?
5. Share any thoughts you have about the comment on Sunday that some stress is probably a good thing to keep us alert, focussed etc but that too much, certainly too much for an extended period is likely to lead to problems. How do Christians cope with stress? Are we any different from anyone else? If so, how? How can we avoid adding unnecessary stress because of our faith?
6. The Psalmist speaks about still waters, banquets, peace and harmony etc. How much of this is for heaven? Is there any room for some of this as a “foretaste”?
7. Discuss anything else arising from the passage or the service.

Prayer Lord, help us to be more aware of your presence in our midst in the troubles of life, more open to offering and receiving support and hopeful of the still waters to come. Amen.