

BRMC Small Group Study

FAQs When Life is Upended

Leader's Guide

Please note that this study guide accompanies the pulpit sermon. The suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study.

Scripture Passage:

Psalm 23

Context:

Our church, united with the Methodist Church in Singapore and our nation, is in the midst of taking serious measures to try to curb the spread of COVID-19. Many of us have to endure difficult circumstances, social isolation, possible unemployment, and illness. Yet within these circumstances, we can still choose to see the loving hand of God and to place our trust in Him and His goodness because He is our shepherd.

The passage sets out the Psalmist's view of God as his shepherd. He declares his trust in God his provider, protector, refresher, comforter, whose goodness and mercy was evident in the past, is now and will be forever more with him.

Lesson Objectives:

In this lesson, we will attempt to understand the following:

- When we are anxious, in the midst of difficult circumstances, we can turn to Jesus our Good Shepherd.
- We can trust in Jesus our Shepherd to protect us, to pour joy into us and to provide for us.
- We should take this time to allow God to refresh our soul:
 - pause and ponder on God's word, allowing God to speak to us
 - reflect on God's goodness seeing us through circumstances in the past, to have confidence of the future

Introductory

1. In Psalm 23 what are some of the key words used to describe or illustrate the Psalmist's response to the Lord?
 - This Psalm is attributed to King David (as the Psalmist). He uses vivid words associated with his response to the Lord God:
 - "my shepherd"
 - I lack nothing
 - Makes me lie down in green pastures
 - Leads me beside quiet or still waters
 - Refreshes or restores my soul
 - Guides or leads me
 - I will fear no evil
 - Your rod and staff they comfort me
 - Prepare a table before my enemies

- Anoint my head with oil
- My cup overflows
- Goodness and mercy, all the days of my life
- Dwell in the house of the Lord forever

Reflection

2. How do you respond to God? Have you experienced God in a way that would encourage you to respond as the Psalmist did?

- Each of these pictures that the Psalmist paints for us may bring to our minds instances of God's reality in our lives. Or perhaps we may share a hope to experience God in a way that would encourage us to respond as the Psalmist has.
- Explore with your group by inviting them to share their views and reflections on the various aspects of the Psalmist's response to God as his shepherd.
- The questions raised in the sermon provide us with an opportunity to explore further the Lord as our shepherd...

(a) Who do you turn to when your life spins out of control?

- This question seeks to focus on whom people in the group might turn to, although some may share about other things they rely on.
- The Psalmist turns to God whom he describes as his shepherd.
- Are we able to turn to God as our shepherd? What does it mean for God to be our shepherd?
 - Jesus is our Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep (John 10:11)
 - Jesus our Good Shepherd wants us to have an abundant life (John 10:10)
- Do we trust that Jesus values us and wants us to have life and life to the full? (The abundant life in Christ is a separate topic that your group could choose to discuss at another session. For now perhaps limit the discussion to a simple view that Jesus values us and wants us to experience Him as our Good Shepherd.)
- How can we have an abundant life in the midst of challenging or unpleasant circumstances?
- This leads to the next question

(b) When was a time God used an unpleasant or difficult circumstance for your good?

- The Psalmist declared that God the shepherd makes him lie down in green pastures, leads him to refresh him and guides him in the paths of righteousness.
- This is an opportunity for your group to reflect on occasions where you have been placed in unpleasant or difficult circumstances? How did God provide a way for you?
- Sometimes we may be forced into or placed in unpleasant circumstances so that we can receive restoration or refreshment of our souls.
- It is good to reflect on those times and to try to see God's loving hand overseeing all those circumstances.
- It may also be useful to discuss what it means for our soul to be refreshed.
- One aspect of refreshment or restoration is when God sees us through moments of doubt ...

(c) Have we had moments of doubt where we question God – “Sure or not?”

- As we reflect on those unpleasant and challenging circumstances, did we or do we trust that it is God working for our good? (Romans 8:28)
- In this current environment, do we trust that God is in control and sovereign over all things?
- Whenever we are in unfamiliar territory or an uncertain path, in whom do we put our trust in?
- Or are we like disciples exclaiming to Jesus, “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mark 4:38)
- The Psalmist declares that the shepherd guides him along the right path for His name’s sake and that even in the darkest valley he will fear no evil.

(d) When we take that decision to believe in God, do we fear that we will be humiliated?

- The Psalmist declares that the shepherd anoints his head with oil and his cup overflows. There is a deep sense of trust that God will honour him, even in the presence of his enemies.
- Do we have an experience of God’s anointing, which is expressed in God’s joy placed deep in us?
- The story of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) helps us to see an example of someone who had that deep sense of trust in the Lord, who experienced God’s joy inside him. Before the leaders in the Sanhedrin, Stephen looked up and saw “... heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” And while he was being stoned, prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Yet, as he fell on his knees, was able to cry out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”
- We may be tempted to say, we cannot ever be like Stephen, yet this is also an opportunity to reflect on God’s relative goodness to us, that can build us up in faith and good works ...

(e) Do you remember when God was good to you? Why do you think you need to remember these occasions?

- The Psalmist reflected on God’s goodness and mercy towards him. He remembered and was able to say with confidence that it (God’s goodness and mercy) would follow him all the days of his life, and that he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
- Have you tasted the goodness of God?
- Spend some time with your group reflecting on occasions and testimonies of God’s goodness and mercy.
- Perhaps there have been occasions where the best decisions have actually not been decisions at all, but the consequence of God closing other doors (even doors that you had originally so desired to be open).
- It is important to remember because the more you see God’s faithfulness, goodness and mercy in your life, the more confident you will be of your future being in His hands.
- How then can we express these reflections in our daily life

Application

3. How would you apply what you have discussed in your life? Perhaps you could identify one or two main areas from what you have discussed in this session and consider some practical ways you can apply it to your life?
 - Some suggestions that you might have discerned from the sermon are:
 - o Know your shepherd, declare Jesus to be your Good Shepherd!
 - o Receive refreshment (restoration) for your soul
 - Ponder on God's words
 - Be in His presence in prayer, in meditation, and while reading His words
 - o Exercise your faith – put your trust in Jesus, that He values you, that He makes or forces or guides you for your good (Romans 8:28) and for His name's sake.
 - o Remember God's goodness and mercy in your life.
 - o Share this with your family as a testimony to God and to build up each other's faith.

Prayer

4. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session.

(a) What is in your heart for yourself?

- Perhaps you want to seek Jesus and to know Him as your Good Shepherd:

"Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for revealing Yourself to me through Scripture. I believe that You are my Good Shepherd and that You laid Your life down for me. I believe that by Your death on the cross and Your resurrection, You have paid the penalty of my sins. You have redeemed me. And I trust that You have ascended to heaven to prepare a place for me in my Father's house. Indeed, I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever because of what You have done for me.

Lord Jesus may You be established in my heart forever.
Jesus in Your precious name I pray. Amen."

- Perhaps you are seeking confirmation or assurance from the Lord in these challenging times:

"Almighty Father, I confess that I have been anxious and worried for my family and for myself during these difficult times. I worry because I have not been able to hear from You or see Your hand in all the circumstances.

Father God, may You bring to my mind all the times when I have lived in Your goodness and mercy. That I may rejoice, that I may experience Your anointing and that my cup may indeed overflow.

I put my trust in Your goodness and mercy even in these unpleasant and difficult times. I pray for Your perfect and good will to be revealed in Your time.
In Jesus' name, Amen."

(b) What is in your heart for others?

- Perhaps you would like to intercede for those in need:

“Loving Father, I trust in Your compassion and comfort, in Your sovereign power to heal. Father, may You comfort and heal those who are ill, those who are labouring under physical ailments and disease of the mind.

Father, in Your mercy and grace, bring comfort to the families of those who are ill. May they experience Your peace in the midst of their circumstances, that they may look to You.

Father, may You bless and honour those who are in the frontlines: the security personnel, the cleaners, the health care workers, doctors and nurses. Thank You for their sacrifice and their courage. May they experience Your abiding joy over each of them and their families. May You especially protect their families.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

- It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.