

Psalm 23

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[0 : 00] I find it helpful, both in my personal life and in our family's life, as well as in my role as a pastor of this church, to step back and to take stock of where we've been in the past and where we're going in the future.

And for me, the new year is often a time when I do that. Over the last two weeks, I've had some time to reflect, and I wanted to begin this morning by sharing some reflections on where I think we are as a church.

Just in the last six months, the Lord has done some wonderful and exciting things in this church. Let me just highlight three areas. First of all, the church plant in New London that we are praying and working towards.

It's been a particular encouragement for me, working with this group of believers from New London. Every time I go out there, there are new people who I haven't met before who are joining their Bible studies and coming to our church plant prayer meetings and discussion meetings.

Friends and co-workers that people have been praying for for months or years have come to faith in Jesus and are beginning to walk with Him. In December, they had 40 people come to their monthly co-ed Bible study.

[1 : 17] God is doing some wonderful things, and it's exciting for us to be a part of helping a new movement and laying the foundation for what we pray will ultimately be a new church.

Second, our church's mission to New Haven. I believe that God is shaping us into a church that is increasingly international. If you just look around the room on almost any Sunday morning, even today, you can see people from all over the world, literally.

And this is who we are as a church. And God has been putting it on people's hearts to be welcoming people from all over the world and finding ways to introduce them to Jesus, whom we love, whom we love so dearly.

At the same time, I believe that God is also shaping us into a church with a heart for our city, including the many in our city who are broken and hurting and needy.

And we, too, recognize our own brokenness and our hurt and our neediness as well. But some of us have been thinking and praying about starting a Christian addiction recovery group.

[2 : 30] And that's something that we've been praying and discussing about. There's a small group of people who have started meeting and praying about starting a Christian health clinic to provide holistic Christian-based care to people who need it.

God is bringing people to this church. Some of you here aren't just people from all other parts of the world who have come to New Haven, but people who have been born and raised here. Or maybe even more miraculously, people who have come here from other places and don't have any plans to leave.

And we praise God that God is giving us a heart for the city that he's put us in. Third, within our church family, we have had an explosion of new life.

We have had 11 new babies in the last six months. Six in December alone. Now, that's a record. And so for that reason and others, we're considering our building space needs.

How we can best use and adapt the space that we do have. Whether we need to build more space somehow for children's ministry and for multi-purpose meeting spaces and things like that.

[3 : 40] We've also celebrated several baptisms during the past year. Testimonies to the work of God's Spirit and bringing people to new life in Jesus. And those are always awesome opportunities.

And there are other people who are interested in baptism and we're talking with them and preparing them so we can look forward to more. So it is an exciting time to be part of this church. At the same time, the last six months, for me at least, have been one of the most difficult and stressful times in

our church.

Many of you have been facing and are facing personal trials. Whether it's grieving the death of a loved one who's passed away or caring for a child who's not doing well or struggling in a difficult marriage or trying to survive financially or simply being wearied by the constant fast pace and the onslaught of life.

Every week at our staff meeting, we pray for a list of people who are sick or recovering from illness. And as the list continues to grow, the list continues to grow. But you know, we're not just a list of individuals who are facing our own struggles.

We're a body of believers knit together in Jesus Christ. And so when we're a body, when one person is sorrowful, when one part is hurting, we all share in that hurt and that sorrow.

[5 : 05] For many of us, our hearts have been particularly burdened for Pastor Matt and Brandy. As Brandy's cancer continues to spread throughout her body and recently causing her much pain.

We weep with them. We pray that God would do a miracle even as we face the reality that we are not in control of our life or our death.

We face not only trials, physical and emotional, but also spiritual temptation. And the devil in our trial seeks to exaggerate our sinful tendencies, to drive us to anger and anxiety and despair, or to sow discord among brothers and sisters in Christ, or to distract and confuse us in a bunch of different ways.

And over the last six months, I've been more acutely aware of the reality that every day we are in a spiritual battle, that we do have an enemy who wants to steal and kill and destroy, who wants to divide, frustrate and discourage us.

And as I look ahead into this new year, I don't see an easy solution. I don't see a quick fix to our trials and temptations. There's a long road ahead.

[6 : 26] None of us can see exactly where it will lead. And so at the same time, I believe this is a very exciting time to be part of this church that God's brought us together for this purpose.

And yet, it's a hard and difficult time at the same time. And I don't know how you're feeling individually and in your own families. You may be feeling one or both of those as well.

But what I want to look at this morning is what we need to know in order to face whatever may come in this new year. For our text this morning, I've chosen Psalm 23. You can turn there in the Bible.

It's page 458 in the Pew Bibles if you're looking at one of those. It's probably one of the most famous passages in the Bible. But it's a wonderful passage.

It's well known for good reason. Now, since it's a psalm, psalms are designed for corporate worship and prayer. I'd like us to read it responsibly. We don't usually do this, but I'm going to read verse 1.

[7 : 31] Then you can respond with verse 2. Then I'll read verse 3 and so on. So Psalm 23. Let's read together.

The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

For you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil.

My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

[8 : 34] Amen. Now this is a very rich psalm. We could approach it from several angles. We could do a biographical study of the life of David and how God called him to be a shepherd of Israel.

We could do a cultural background study of shepherds in the ancient Near East and what light that sheds on this passage. We could do a literary study of the grammar and the rhythm and the parallelism of the psalm.

And all of those approaches could be fruitful in their own way. But today I want to focus on one thing. I want to focus on how Jesus lived out this psalm.

And what it looks like for us to know and follow Jesus as our good shepherd today. And in particular I want to look at three pictures of how Jesus is this kind of shepherd.

This shepherd that is described in this psalm. From three parts, three incidents in Jesus' life on earth. So the first thing I want to look at is how Jesus feeds us through his word.

[9 : 35] And we see this particularly in the New Testament in the feeding of the 5,000. But verses 1 and 2, it says, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Now in the New Testament, there's this story of Jesus feeding this group of 5,000 people. Actually it's more than that. 5,000 men plus women and children in the wilderness. And in that passage, before he feeds them with bread and fish, it says that Jesus saw, Mark 6, 34 says, Jesus saw that the people were like sheep without a shepherd.

And so he began teaching them many things. In other words, Jesus recognized that their greatest need was a spiritual need that could be met by his word, by his teaching.

They were people who were confused. They were insecure. They were prone to latch on to anyone who would come their way promising a better life. And so Jesus taught them with his word all day until the evening.

Now, of course, by the evening time, they were hungry. And so that's where the food comes in. Jesus not only feeds them with his word, he also feeds them dinner. It says he made them sit down on the green grass.

[10 : 56] There's actually not many places in the New Testament where the grass is described as green or where colors are used in the Gospels. But it's one of the few places that points it out. You see, Jesus is living out this good shepherd who makes his sheep lie down in green pastures.

And then at the end it says he fed them until they ate and were satisfied. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. In other words, I'm satisfied.

I have everything I need. You know, I'm told that usually sheep don't lie down if they're hungry or if they're afraid. They lie down only when they're satisfied and secure.

And that's what Jesus does for us. He makes us satisfied and secure. He feeds and provides for us through his word. Now we think of that story in terms of the food that he fed them, but he spent all day teaching them.

He fed them with his word. And Jesus feeds us today in the same way. He sees us. And like the crowds back then, he sees that we too, apart from him, are like sheep without a shepherd.

[12 : 08] And so he comes to teach us many things. To generously give us his wisdom so that we can feed on him and lay down and rest.

So as we seek to move forward in planting a church in New London, in coming alongside those who are needy in our city, in sharing the gospel with people from all over the world, Jesus' word will sustain us, equip us, and direct us.

As we raise children and seek to live as godly families, Jesus' word is what we need to be fed and sustained and satisfied.

And it's the same as we face trials and temptations. As we face uncertainties and spiritual battles, Jesus' word will comfort us, uphold us, and keep our eyes fixed on our captain in the fight.

As we walk through the wilderness, his word is a lamp unto our feet and a light to our path. So brothers and sisters, may we sit at Jesus' feet this year and listen to him.

[13 : 17] May we come together every Sunday and every time we gather for small groups or Sunday school classes, hungry for his word, anticipating that God will meet with us and speak to us through his word.

May we fight to carve out the time to listen to Jesus' word personally and in our families. Now, I know it's not easy. I find it's a constant battle for me to carve out time alone with God in reading the word and prayer.

It's a battle that I feel like I've never been able to say I've won it. But it's always something that I'm in the middle of. Because there are a thousand things in this world that call for our attention.

Think of all the things that call for your attention. Text message alerts. Crying toddlers. Demanding bosses. Unanswered emails. Dirty dishes in the sink.

People asking you for help. All kinds of things. Good things. Bad things and different things. But hard as it may be, we must fight to carve out time to listen to God's word.

[14 : 34] So that we can respond to all these other voices and all these other requests and all these other invitations. Not just frantically flying from one thing to another and lurching in all different directions and getting nowhere, but keeping our eyes on our shepherd and following him as we respond to everything else that comes into our life.

And what does this look like? Well, the challenge may look different for each one of you. A year or two ago, I was talking to a medical resident. And at that time, he was working literally 90 hours a

week in the hospital.

Now, I know there's a law that says 80 hours a week, but all the medical residents know that that law is not really followed. And he was in a program that was actually exempt from that law. So they could require him to work more than 80 hours a week.

He said, the only time I have during my day consistently to sit and think is when I go to the bathroom. And so he says, I make it a habit. I have the Bible on my phone.

And I make it a habit to read the Bible on my phone in the hospital bathroom. And so that while I'm in the middle of my work, I can be filling my mind with God's word and seeking to display the fruits of the spirit in my workplace instead of falling into some of the negative patterns in my workplace.

[15 : 55] Or historical example. This is a little extreme as well. But Susanna Wesley gave birth to 19 children in 19 years. Nine of them died as infants.

But she had to raise 10 of them to adulthood. She had a rocking chair where she would sit down and pull her apron over her face and she would tell her children not to bother her for a few minutes. And she did this consistently so her children knew. They knew the drill. Mommy sits in her chair and puts her apron over her face. It means she's praying. And you don't bother her for a few minutes. So even in the middle of being constantly pregnant and raising that many children, she fought to carve out time to listen to the Lord and to be with Him.

Now, I don't know what it looks like for you. Most of our life circumstances are not quite that extreme. Most of us are not working 90 hours a week. Most of us are not raising 10 children or being caught pregnant for most of 19 years.

[17 : 05] But it's worth the effort to fight to carve out the time to read and meditate on God's word, whether that means getting up early in the morning, spending time at night, or setting a routine with your spouse so that one of you can watch the kids and the other one can have some time alone with the Lord.

If you need some structure, there's Bible reading plans on the back table. It's called More Precious Than Gold. They're free. You can pick up one of those if that would help you to have some structure in how you read through the Bible this year.

It gives some different tracks that you can follow. If you've never had the habit of reading the Bible, ask somebody else who you think might have and say, how do you do it?

Could I join you maybe once a week for your time reading the Bible and praying just to do it with you? That's how you learn these things is by seeing other people doing them and by trial and error yourself as well.

But, brothers and sisters, let's spend time in the Word of God, both individually and corporately. Jesus feeds us and He meets us and He satisfies us with the wisdom in His Word.

[18 : 22] So that's the first way that Jesus is our Good Shepherd. He feeds us through His Word. But the second way that Jesus is our Good Shepherd is that Jesus comes near to us with His presence when we're overwhelmed and distressed.

And in the New Testament where we see this, one place where we see this, is in the story that comes right after the feeding of the 5,000 in Matthew, Mark, and John. Luke doesn't include it. But in three of the four Gospels, they finish this long day where Jesus had been teaching them all day and then He makes the disciples feed dinner to all these guys, 5,000 guys.

Goodness, that's a big catering job. And then He sends the disciples in a boat across the lake and He goes up the mountain to pray. And so they were already tired before this.

They had a long day out in the hot desert sun. Then they were feeding, then they were the catering crew for a 5,000 person dinner. And now they're rowing across the lake and they have a stiff headwind coming the wrong way.

[19 : 25] And so they're rowing for almost the whole night. And then around 4 or 5 a.m., Jesus comes out to them walking on the lake.

And they did exactly what you and I would do if we were in that situation. They totally freaked out. And they think He's a ghost. And He says, Take heart. It's me.

I am. Don't be afraid. And He gets into the boat and immediately the wind dies down and the waters become still.

Now, if you notice, the 23rd Psalm begins by talking about the Lord feeding us and making us lie down in green pastures. And the next verse says, He leads me beside still waters.

In other words, He brings peace in the midst of chaos and confusion and overwhelming circumstances. And verse 4 says, Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death or row through the middle of the night on a dark lake with the wind coming against me, even there you are with me and I will fear no evil.

[20 : 40] So in this account, and you can find it at the end of Mark chapter 6 if you want to read it, Jesus sends His disciples across the lake into the storm.

And we have to say that Jesus knew what they were facing. Jesus wasn't surprised by the storm that they encountered. He saw how it affected them on the lake as He was praying for them on the hillside.

And you know, sometimes Jesus calls us to do hard things and make sacrifices for the sake of His mission to seek and save more lost sheep.

The disciples had spent the whole day in the hot sun. And then Jesus had asked them to feed dinner to 5,000 men. And then He had sent them rowing all night in a boat on a stormy lake. They were exhausted. Now we have some exciting opportunities before us as a church. The opportunity to support a new church plant. The opportunity to introduce people to Jesus from all over the world.

[21 : 50] To reach people in our city who are broken and hurting. To raise children. To be godly men and women in the family of the church. But none of these things are easy.

They all have a cost. They all have a cost. Of time and energy and money. They call for humility and patience.

The word patience can be translated long suffering. Now sacrifice and humility and patient endurance may sound like noble and lofty virtues.

But they don't always feel good. When you're in the middle of a stormy night trying to row across a lake. When you've been awakened for the fourth time in the night with a sick child.

When you're trying to reach out to a friend who is in some trouble. But the promise of Jesus is this. That when we walk with him.

[22 : 57] That when we walk in obedience to him that he is never far away from us. He is always interceding for us. As Jesus was on the hillside all night while the disciples were facing the storm he was praying.

And he was praying for them. You see even when God seems most far away. Even when we feel exhausted. overwhelmed by life and far away from God.

When we've made sacrifices to follow Jesus and we don't and we feel burned out. Jesus comes near to meet us. And strengthen us.

And encourage us. And give rest to our weary souls and bodies. And to let us know as he said to his disciples it's me. I'm here.

You're not alone. This is how Jesus is our good shepherd. He comes near to us with his presence. And you know sometimes Jesus mercy to weary disciples comes in very concrete tangible material packages.

[24 : 07] Like a good night's sleep. Or a satisfying meal cooked and delivered by a friend. or a solitary walk through snow covered woods.

Or an unexpected gift when finances are shorn. Jesus feeds us with his word. We need to see that. And in some way that's a primary and important and essential.

But Jesus also knows and cares for our very concrete bodily weaknesses. when we're just exhausted and can't and feel like we can't make it any longer.

He reassures us sometimes in very concrete ways of his love and his shepherding care. There's a story in the Old Testament of the prophet Elijah. And the prophet Elijah had endured an intense conflict with the wicked king Ahab of Israel and all his prophets of the false god Baal.

And Queen Jezebel hated him. So she vowed to kill him and so Elijah ran away into the desert and he just crashed. He had been standing for God and proclaiming his word amidst intense opposition and he finally it just got too much for him.

[25 : 32] He was exhausted. He was burned out. He was depressed. He said, Lord, I don't want to be a prophet anymore. I don't even want to be alive anymore. It's enough.

Just take my life. And you know what God said to him? God said, you need some sleep. Go to sleep. So he slept for a long time.

And then you know what he did when he was sleeping? God sent an angel. But the angel didn't come with a message. The angel came to cook him dinner. And he said, Elijah, wake up. Your dinner's ready. Here you go. Hot off the fire with a glass of cool water. Then go to sleep again. Then the angel came back and cooked him breakfast.

And then Elijah took a long walk for 40 days and 40 nights through the desert. And after that long walk, he was finally ready to hear God's word.

[26 : 38] Do you know that sometimes that's how broken down we can get? I don't know if you've been there. But sometimes that's how broken down we can get. We're so exhausted.

We're so burned out that we can hardly hear the word of God and find comfort in it. And Jesus is very merciful. He sends his messengers to cook us meals and let us sleep.

You know, sometimes the best way to come alongside someone who is really suffering, who's totally overwhelmed, who's fighting a hard battle, is not to go to them and preach a sermon or quote a long list of Bible verses or give them lots of advice, but to bring them a meal or bring them a plate of cookies or shovel their walk without asking or offer to babysit their kids for two hours just so they can sleep or so they can go for a walk in the woods on a beautiful snowy day.

If somebody offers you a gift like that, don't refuse it out of pride. You know, sometimes we refuse help from others because we're proud of being self-sufficient and never needing anything from anyone.

But you know, as Christians, in Jesus Christ, we've all received salvation, which is a gift that we can never deserve and that we can never repay.

[28 : 11] So don't be ashamed to receive much smaller gifts from another person. It's all part of Jesus, your Good Shepherd's, provision for you.

He's sending someone your way to let you know that he sees you and that he loves you and that he's with you and he hasn't abandoned you.

If you really don't need what somebody else gives you, pay it forward. Right? Find a way to give it to somebody else. Offer the same thing to them. Pass on the blessing.

Jesus feeds us with his word. He comes to meet us with his presence in very tangible and concrete ways. And he says, take heart.

I'm here. Don't be afraid. Finally, the last thing we see is that Jesus pursues us to shield us from danger and bring us safely home.

[29 : 15] Verse 3 says, he restores my soul. That word restores means repairs or it could mean brings back.

In other words, Jesus comes to bring us back when we've wandered away, to renew us when we've, when we're, the flame is flickering low.

He leads us in passive righteousness. He prepares a table for us in the midst of our enemies. And verse 6 says, surely goodness and steadfast love will follow me.

In other words, that means God's goodness and steadfast love in Jesus Christ will chase us down for the rest of our lives. You see, God doesn't merely respond to our requests.

But he initiates with us and he follows through all the way to the end. We see this in Jesus' life most particularly at the end of his life and the events leading up to his death on the cross.

[30 : 21] Mark chapter 14, verse 27 and 28, Jesus said to his disciples, he said, you will all fall away for it is written, I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.

But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. In other words, Jesus goes before us in his death on the cross.

And he also goes before us in his resurrection from the dead. In his death on the cross, Jesus is the good shepherd laying down his life for the sheep.

And he goes before us in his resurrection when he takes up his life again as the triumphant victor over death and the grave. Jesus has overcome our greatest enemies in his death and resurrection. He has overcome the world that seeks to allure us with false hopes and false promises. He has rendered powerless the devil, the accuser who seeks to condemn us.

[31 : 26] He has defeated death like no one else ever has. But Jesus has not only defeated the world and the devil and death, the enemies outside of us, he's also conquered our sin.

Because you see, sometimes we are our own worst enemy. Sometimes our own worst, sometimes our circumstances are not our greatest enemy.

Other people are not our greatest enemy. Even Satan may not be our greatest enemy. Sometimes it's our own sinful nature. Our self-destructive habits that we get into.

Our pride that we refuse to let go of. But you know what? On the cross, Jesus has conquered even that. He died to free us from the penalty that we deserve for our sin.

And he has placed his Holy Spirit within all who believe in him so that we can be free from the power, the enslaving power of sin. And he perseveres with us to the end until a day when we will one day be free from any sin at all.

[32 : 48] When we see him face to face. You see, Jesus is our good shepherd from beginning to end. Who protects us from our enemies outside us and our enemies within us. From our own worst tendencies.

It says, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You know, as a shepherd, part of the purpose of a rod is to beat off predators, bears, and wolves that want to come and eat the sheep.

But part of the purpose of a rod and the staff is to keep the sheep in line. to discipline the sheep. To bring them out of thorny bushes that they've got themselves in and pull them out.

Apparently, I've heard that sometimes a shepherd will even injure a sheep temporarily if that sheep is prone to wander away into fatal danger so that the injured sheep would stay with the flock and stay with the shepherd and therefore be protected even though the sheep is limping.

You see, Jesus knows the tendencies that we have to sabotage ourselves to... Jesus knows our own worst tendencies and he will even shield us by his grace from those as our good shepherd.

[34 : 14] He has come to shield us from danger and bring us safely home. So whether we're going forth boldly in mission for Jesus' sake or whether we're struggling through trials and temptations for Jesus' sake, we can be confident that Jesus, our good shepherd, has gone before us and that he pursues us.

to shield us from danger and bring us safely home. And that is good news that we can count on. We can count on that in life and we can count on that in death that Jesus has gone before us.

I want to close with a verse from the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul went forth boldly proclaiming Jesus throughout the world and the Apostle Paul faced more trials and temptations than probably almost any of us will face in our lifetime.

Fightings within, fears without, he says. And when he was sitting in a cold Roman prison facing the prospect of almost certain death, he wrote the book of 2 Timothy, which is probably the last letter that he wrote.

And in the book of 2 Timothy, he speaks confidently about the promise of life in Christ Jesus, the grace given us in Jesus before the beginning of time and revealed through the appearing of Jesus who destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light.

[35 : 44] And he says, God has given us a spirit not of fear but of power, of love, and of self-control. So don't be ashamed of the good news of Jesus. Go forth and proclaim it in season and out of season with great patience and careful instruction.

He speaks confidently but he also speaks honestly about the hardships of living as a follower of Jesus. He says, Timothy, the Christian life is like being a loyal soldier.

It's like being a disciplined athlete. It's like being a hard-working farmer. Not easy jobs. Not stress-free life.

He says, God has called us to share in suffering for the gospel of Jesus. He says, some people have abandoned the faith. They've swerved from the truth.

They get caught in quarrels about words. He says, there will be terrible times in the latter days. But he ends this letter with these words. 2 Timothy 4.18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

[37 : 00] To him be the glory forever and ever. That was Paul's, one of Paul's last words. words. Jesus, my faithful shepherd, will rescue me from every evil attack, every evil deed, and he will bring me safely home.

That's what we need to know in this new year. Let us pray. A prayer for the new year.

O love beyond compare, you are good when you give and when you take away. When the sun shines upon me, when the night gathers over me.

You have loved me before the foundation of the world and in love you redeemed my soul. You love me still in spite of my hard heart, my ingratitude, my distrust.

Your goodness has been with me through another year, leading me through a twisting wilderness in retreat, helping me to advance when beaten back, making sure headway.

[38 : 25] Your goodness will be with me in the year ahead. I hoist, sail, and draw up anchor with you as the blessed pilot of my future as of my past.

I bless you that you have veiled my eyes to the waters ahead. If you have appointed storms of tribulation, you will be with me in them. If I have to pass through tempests of persecution and temptation, I shall not drown.

If I am to die, I will see your face the sooner. If a painful end is to be my lot, grant me grace that my faith fail not.

If I am to be cast aside from the service I love, I can make no stipulation. Only glorify yourself in me. Whether in comfort or trial as a chosen vessel always fit for your use.

Amen. Well, this morning we come to the Lord's table. To the table of the shepherd who laid down his life for us.

[39 : 39] And in the Lord's supper, Jesus has fed us with his word and he comes near to us in a very concrete, tangible, physical way through broken bread and poured out juice.

Paul says, the cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

In other words, Jesus is present here at this table, in this fellowship, by his Holy Spirit, so that when we receive the bread and the cup, we are assured that Jesus' love for us and Jesus' promise to us in his death and his resurrection is just as real, even more real, than this piece of bread and this cup of grape juice.

Jesus has prepared his table for us. So if you're here, if you're a believer in Jesus Christ, if he is your good shepherd who laid down his life for you on the cross and rose again three days later, and if you are part of his flock, part of his church, whether it's this church or another local church, take, eat, and drink and be assured of his love for you today.

If you don't believe in Jesus, if you're still exploring and working through things, we're glad you're here today. I hope that you'll see this as an invitation to consider who Jesus is.

[41 : 16] If you don't believe in Jesus, don't take the bread and the cup, just pass them by, it's fine, but just take this time to consider what it would mean for you to take Jesus as your good shepherd.

You can even pray. Say, Jesus, take me. I don't want to live my life for myself anymore. I want you to be my shepherd. I want to be yours forever.

And he will hear and answer that prayer. For those who are serving communion, come to the front now. John, would you give thanks for the bread?

Thank you. Thank you. Lord, how precious the words of this psalm.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.