23

An interactive
devotional journey

SCOTT R. WARD

THE INVITATION:

When you pick up this little journal and are holding it in your hands you are picking up an invitation to slow down and quiet your life while you engage it. Take a moment before proceeding to silence all the technology that may surround you-- this is a time to "unplug" everything except the voice of God and the prompting of His Spirit.

In this journal you will find passages of scripture broken down by sentence or by phrase to immerse yourself in and to ponder for a time. Along with scripture you will find passages from my own journal as I have experienced these words of scripture for myself. After reading the scripture, and after considering the thoughts the Spirit bought to my mind, pray and ask Jesus to guide you into your own personal encounter with Him and application of His word.

Along with recording/journaling your thoughts and feelings feel free to add color/feeling/emotion to the simple line drawings that go with each passage with colored pencils, pastels or even crayons if you please. If you are encountering this journal at a spiritual retreat you may even be given an unbound copy with the opportunity to customize and bind it yourself after adding extra pages for more writing or for watercolor paintings or whatever you may choose to add to help you in encountering and expressing your thoughts and feelings about the Words of God presented in the pages here.

May God bless you as you enter the stillness of His presence—earnestly seeking to hear His voice and be drawn closer to His heart as you open yours up to Him.

--Scott R Ward

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD:

Lord Jesus I choose you this day to be my guide. I ask you to lead me along life's way. I recognize that I do not know the way myself and I've grown tired of stumbling and falling into the rocks and briars. Shedding my own blood is a painful waste--yours has paid the price in full. You alone have successfully endured this world and defeated the foe. Please carry me in your arms to the same righteous end through the power of your spirit and the grace of your interceding love…

I SHALL NOT WANT:

Thank You for this—the promise that if I choose you as my shepherd I will never be in want! Thank you for always taking care of me and providing for me. Help me to recognize you as the one who does indeed provide all I have. Help me to be satisfied with what you see fit for me to have. Help me to not be covetous of those who have more. Help me to know when I have what I need and to then take the time I would otherwise spend in pursuing more--and spend it with You instead…

HE MAKES ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES:

Rich, verdant green--emanating life. Pastures roll and flow across plains and hillsides providing food and habitat for myriad creatures--a peaceful ecosystem where all are dependent on the others to have what they individually need.

Taking time to be in green pastures is time to get back into nature and to be reminded of the original way we were created to be. It is time to reflect on our connection with our maker and also with the world around us as its designated keepers. It is also a time to be thankful to God for his nurture and care and to examine our lives in the context of the lives around us and how to better be used by God to be a benefit to our world. It is a time of thankful and thoughtful reflection…

HE LEADS ME BESIDE STILL WATERS:

Lord, there's just something about water that is so captivating and deep. I love to see water in its various forms and I love to feel water in its various states and temperatures. Water nurtures our bodies and sustains life within ourselves and in the world around us as nothing else can. Water is a part of us and speaks to us in more ways than we can count weather it be rising steam, freezing snow, crashing waves or a hot drink to warm us inside our bodies--there is something innate and intrinsic about its very nature that is in our nature as well. Perhaps this is why peaceful waters have the distinct ability to bring peace to our souls and to our lives as few things on this earth can. For me still waters are a place I naturally come to to find peace and rest and conversation with my Lord…

HE RESTORES MY SOUL:

Jesus, you know my soul needs restoring daily. We live in a harsh world--a brutal world who's ruler is from the dark side and he is a ruler that seeks destruction--destruction of our lives, our souls and destruction of the physical world around us as well.

While many are deceived into thinking that restoration can happen via food, drink, sensual experiences or material things--the Psalmist here convincingly demonstrates how true restoration of the soul can only happen deep within us when we open our hearts and our lives to the touch of the shepherd's loving, healing and nurturing hand. And it happens only as we spend time with him alone in the places that remind us and help us to revisit the green pastures and still waters we have known throughout our lives…

HE LEADS ME INTO PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAMES SAKE:

I want to follow you wherever you lead. I believe that a path of righteousness is a path of helpfulness--benefiting others and ourselves. When we choose to follow the Shepherd and to benefit from His nurture and care it is natural to feel a desire welling up within us to share that nurture and care with the world around us--this is strong evidence of the Spirit of God in our lives.

Paths of righteousness can be humanitarian, environmental and spiritual in nature--these paths involve being the hands and feet of Jesus in a world that is desperately in need of "the touch of the Master's hand." It is through blessing others that we become blessed ourselves--this is the path that Jesus Christ himself walked in this world and He beckons us to follow…

EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH
THE VALLEY OF THE
SHADOW OF DEATH
I WILL FEAR NO EVIL
BECAUSE YOU ARE WITH ME:

We all face different valleys--different struggles. What is easy for one is difficult and sometimes nearly impossible for another--but we all struggle--sometimes fiercely. Life, at times, can be so difficult--whether through pervasive evil attacking us or through our own foolish mistakes—that we feel like death may be certain and near. Other times we may even wish for death irrationally—picturing it as our only escape or rescue.

I don't know why we tend to forget you, Jesus, when we need you most, but we often do because of the dark clouds of the devil. This passage reminds us, if we read or recite it often enough, that you are always with us--leaving footprints in the sand or on the rocks or the thorns or even in the fire. You are always there beside us, lifting us, protecting us and always working tirelessly to bring us home.

YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF PROTECT AND COMFORT ME:

How do you feel when you get to spend time with a friend who is in great physical shape and has excellent self defense and/or fighting skills? If you don't have a friend like this try to image what it would be like. Do you feel, or do you think you would feel, safer--especially if you happened upon a bad neighborhood or a dangerous situation?

Hopefully these types of situations don't happen to you often--but if/when they do it can really feel good to have that big and capable friend. It can even make you feel more capable yourself and a lot more confident when you are in that kind of company and that kind of confidence can even make you change the way you carry yourself and the way you look at the world around you when compared to the way you approach life alone.

When you choose to walk with Jesus there will still be fights--maybe a lot of them--but the end result is always sure--you will win via His confidence, strength and skill--in fact the battle is already won and the outcome is sure!

YOU PREPARE A FEAST BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES:

Feast, food--party! Celebration is always good and can even be amazing depending on how great the victory is that has been won. In this case--it is a celebration of life--eternal life that has been won at the peril of even our very souls.

Eternal death is the other option that is on the table but for those who choose well and follow through with that wise choice on a daily basis--the party will be like no other that has ever been seen in the universe and will continue on vigorously and passionately for a very long time--possibly even for what may seem like an eternity—because it is… And finally, all those that laughed at you or put you down over the years will see you for who you really are--a princess or prince--a legitimate child of the eternal King, the Creator of the universe--King Jesus Christ Himself!

YOU HONOR ME BY ANOINTING MY HEAD WITH OIL. MY CUP OVERFLOWS WITH BLESSINGS:

Honor cannot be requested--it can only be given freely to one who is respected, cherished and loved by the one who is the adoring giver. To think that the God of the universe wants to honor you and me is nothing less than awe-inspiring. We could never earn or deserve this privilege--it is a free gift of grace that our Father desires to give His beloved children.

The anointing with oil is to remind us—as the oil trickles down our cheeks and necks—that we are His chosen ones--the ones for whom He gave all--even His very life. The anointing is also a public declaration for all the universe to see--that we are cherished beyond measure and beloved beyond compare. It will be a truly unforgettable declaration and demonstration for all the ceaseless ages of eternity!

SURELY YOUR GOODNESS AND UNFAILING LOVE WILL PURSUE ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, AND I WILL LIVE IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER:

The feeling of being pursued is like no other. To be wanted, to be desired and loved to the point of being persistently pursued almost seems desperate. Could God really be desperate for us? Could He really want to be with us so badly, so fiercely? What is it about us that could cause the Father, Son and Spirit to desire community and intimacy with us and what could so readily make Jesus so willingly leave the beauties and glories of heaven behind to come and be with us and ultimately lay down His life for us? Is it really just because we are His children? His beloved offspring that is so much a part of Himself that He would rather die than be separated from us?

Such divine love, such divine pursuit and grace will surely be the topic of intimate and deep conversations for millions of years to come in the re-created and perfected world-- the coming world without end. Amen…