

## **I Fear No Evil in the Dark with my Father Shepherding Me**

*Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on June 20, 2010*

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In the dark times of the American Civil War, when the shadow of death was falling on so many soldiers in battle in the valleys, one minister was able not to fear evil, knowing the Lord was with him, and leading him. ‘I was supplying for a couple of Sundays the pulpit ... At the mid-week service, on the 26th of March, 1862, I set out to give the people an exposition of the Twenty-third Psalm, which I had given before on three or four occasions, but this time I did not get further than the words “He Leadeth Me.” Those words took hold of me as they had never done before, and I saw them in a significance and wondrous beauty of which I had never dreamed.

It was the darkest hour of the Civil War. I did not refer to that fact—that is, I don’t think I did—but it may subconsciously have led me to realize that God’s leadership is the one significant fact in human experience, that it makes no difference how we are led, or whither we are led, so long as we are sure God is leading us.

At the close of the meeting a few of us in the parlor of my host, good Deacon Wattson, kept on talking about the thought which I had emphasized; and then and there, on a blank page of the brief from which I had intended to speak, I penciled the [poem], talking and writing at the same time, then handed it to my wife and thought no more about it. She sent it to a paper published in Boston, where it was first printed. I did not know until 1865 that [it] had been set to music. I went to Rochester [New York] to preach at the Second Baptist Church ... I picked up a hymnal to see what they were singing, and opened it at [what I’d written]:’<sup>1</sup>

He leadeth me, He leadeth me, By His own hand He leadeth me;  
His faithful follower I would be, For by His hand He leadeth me.  
Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom, Sometimes where Eden’s bowers bloom,  
By waters still, over troubled sea, Still ’tis His hand that leadeth me.  
And when my task on earth is done, When by Thy grace the vict’ry’s won,  
E’en death’s cold wave I will not flee, Since God through Jordan leadeth me.

Psalm 23:2 says       “... *He leadeth me beside the still waters*”  
v. 3 says               “... *He leadeth me in paths of righteousness* ...”  
v. 4 says sometimes   “... *through the valley of the shadow of death* [but]  
                                  *I will fear no evil for thou art with me*”

The Lord doesn’t just lead us to a soul-restoring oasis all the time, or restful lush green pastures, or beside soothing quiet streams. He also is equally with us when He leads us through the dark valleys of life, and we find the Good Shepherd is sufficient there as well. On this Father’s Day, I can’t help but notice how that hymn refers to God in shepherding as well as fatherly language

3<sup>rd</sup> stanza: Lord, I would place my hand in Thine, Nor ever murmur nor repine;  
Content, whatever lot I see, Since ’tis my God that leadeth me.

When I was first a dad and we lived in an apartment complex in So Cal, I remember holding my toddler daughters hands in dangerous places (parking lots, dark public parking garage, etc.). There was no way I was going to let her or anyone take her out of my hand, but my daughter also wasn’t always appreciative of me holding her hand (neither is my one-year old son now who wants independence already and already thinks he can drive our car and do everything).

But there are times when my son, like the hymn says, puts his hand in mine, times when he wants to feel me close, then he's content.

Back in So Cal I remember walking through the underground parking garage (suburban version of a shadowy valley?) holding a daughter's hand even though she didn't want me to. Suddenly a loud truck would start its engine. Instantly she would clutch my hand tightly – the dark and danger and fear was alleviated knowing her father was with her. Well, we have a greater Father I want us to think about today, a heavenly Father who Jesus said in John 10 is greater than all, and none can snatch any He holds in His hand (10:29). And in the next verse Jesus says "*I and the Father are one.*" That chapter reveals the Father as well as the Son as the Good Shepherd, and Psalm 23:4 not only speaks of the Lord's role as Shepherd, but also as Father ("rod" in v. 4 often used of father as well as shepherd for the implement of loving discipline). The word "comfort" at the end of v. 4 is used of Holy Spirit in NT.

There are many metaphors of our Triune God in Scripture, but two of the most tender and precious ones are Shepherd and Father (the NT term *abba* is closer to the English word "daddy"). It's a special blessing for me to have my earthly father here on this Father's Day and to have a dad who is such an example and hero to me. It would be a greater blessing if I can be like him when I grow up. I grew up sitting in church hearing my father preach in church, and to have him sitting in church now hearing me preach as a shepherd of this church, and to have him ask my prayer and thoughts on things (as I do with him as well) is an unusual blessing from the Lord who leads in ways we might never expect. I love you, dad, and hope to honor you, and above all, to honor my Heavenly Father.

There's a story of the American Plain Indians that brings together the Father and Shepherd language in their understanding of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, which missionaries taught them in their language. Paul Tan's *Encyclopedia* records: 'They wanted to share its beauty and power with neighboring tribes, but it seemed impossible to overcome their mutual language barriers. Finally, a thoughtful Indian suggested they translate it into their universal sign language, which was done. The sign language of Psalm 23, translated back into literal English by missionary Isabel Crawford, reads:

1. The great father above a shepherd chief is. I am His and with Him I want not.
2. He throws out to me a rope and the name of the rope is love and He draws me to where the grass is green and the water not dangerous, and I eat and lie down and am satisfied.
3. Sometimes my heart is very weak and falls down but he lifts me up again and draws me into a good road [for] His name is wonderful.
4. Sometime, it may be very soon, it may be a long, long time, He will draw me into a valley. It is dark there, but I'll be afraid not, for it is in between those mountains that the shepherd chief will meet me and the hunger that I have in my heart all through this life will be satisfied. Sometimes He makes the love rope into a whip, but afterwards He gives me a staff to lean upon.
5. He spreads a table before me with all kinds of foods. He puts His hand upon my head and all the "tired" is gone. My cup He fills till it runs over ...
6. These roads that are "away ahead" will stay with me through this life and after; and afterwards I will go to live in the Big Teepee [House] and sit down with the shepherd chief forever.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes familiar words need a fresh perspective, and I pray that this series through Psalm 23 has been providing that and that it has been refreshing and restoring your soul, as it has been for me, too. We can't exhaust the inexhaustible treasures of any Scripture in a few weeks but what I hope to do in preaching is to open the lid of the treasure chest to reveal some of the riches that are there so that you can then explore further what Peter called "precious value" or what Paul called "unfathomable / unsearchable riches of Christ."

To see Christ as more precious and valuable and desirable and satisfying than anything else, to treasure Him, is the ultimate goal. Paul saw this as crucial to the Colossians' encouragement, love, assurance, and stability in faith so that they won't be led astray.

Col. 2:2 (ESV): *that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach **all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of ... Christ,<sup>3</sup> in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.***

I'm just a beginner in the knowledge of Christ, I'm not the source of any riches or treasure, but Christ is. My hope is to share some of what He has been kind enough to teach me and open my eyes to see for His name sake, to grant us encouragement, love, assurance, and even affection for Christ and a treasuring of Christ. My words aren't sufficient to show Christ's sufficiency—so here's some others:

Henry Ward Beecher called this Psalm about our Good Shepherd "the nightingale of the Psalms" (the nightingale bird, I'm told, is a bird that sings its sweetest when the night is darkest; Ps 23:4 can mean literally "darkest valley"). F. B. Meyer says Psalm 23 'is an oasis in the desert; it is a [place to rest] on a hill of arduous climbing; it is a [cave with shade] in a scorching noon; it is a sequestered arbour for calm and heavenly meditation ... weary ones, restless ones, heavy-laden ones; sit down in this cool and calm resort, while the music of its rhythm charms away the thoughts that break your peace. How safe and blessed are you to whom the Lord is Shepherd! ... [like quiet] streams to heal those who touch, so it is true that [this psalm's] power lies in dwelling so little upon man, and so much on [the Lord]. See how every verse tells us what *He* is doing ... Unbelief puts circumstances between itself and Christ, so as not to see Him; as the disciples did, through the mist, "and they cried out for fear." Faith puts Christ between itself and circumstances ... Unbelief fixes its gaze on men, and things, and likelihoods, and possibilities, and circumstances. Faith will not concern herself with these; she refuses to spend her time and waste her strength in considering them. Her eye is fixed steadfastly on her Lord, and she is persuaded that He is well able to supply all her need, and to carry her through all difficulties and straits.

O trembling heart, look away, and look up! Your sorrows have been multiplied indeed by looking at difficulties and second causes. Now cease from all this. Talk no more about ... rugged paths and dark valleys [your complaints or fears] but think of the love, the might, and the wisdom of the Shepherd. Love that spared not its blood! Might that made the worlds! Wisdom that named the stars! Your salvation does not depend on what you are, but on what He is. For every look at self, take ten looks at Christ. ... Tell us no more of your tears, your failures, or your 'sins; but tell us, oh, tell us, of the all-sufficiency of Jesus, and how your needs have been ... His deliverances; Sing again the old song of how all wants are swallowed up in the shepherd love of God. And emphasise each "HE" as you say again the psalm of childhood and of age.'<sup>3</sup>

Listen again as I read verses 2-3 and see if you detect a shift in v. 4

<sup>2</sup> **He** makes me to lie down in green pastures; **He** leads me beside the still waters. <sup>3</sup> **He** restores my soul; **He** leads me in the paths of righteousness For **His** name's sake. <sup>4</sup> Yea, 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. <sup>5</sup> **You** prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; **You** anoint my head with oil; **My** cup runs over.

Did you notice a difference in v. 2-3 and v. 4-5? What is it? In the flow of the psalm, to be consistent with referring to the Lord as “He / His” (5x in v. 2-3) we would expect David to write in v. 4 “*I will fear no evil, for He is with me; His rod and His staff, they comfort me.*” But what does David say? **You** are with me; **Your** rod and **Your** staff ... **You** prepare a table ... **You** anoint my head” (5x “You/Your” in v. 4-5, 5x “He/His” in v. 2-3)

This is one of the joys of inductive Bible study, careful meditation, paying attention to context, flow, little words, pronouns, verbs, etc. When you slow down, you can see nuggets of insight, sometimes gold in the river, like John Marshall saw in the valleys and quiet waters of a river in Coloma in the 1840s. I want to share with you a few reflections the sun has brought to my sight and insights in v. 4:

### 1. We should speak to the Lord in the darkness

David had been talking *about* the Lord in v. 2-3, but now he talks *to* the Lord in v. 4. In the first half of the psalm, he is speaking as a sheep to other sheep, as if in other pastures or other flocks, telling what it's like for him to have the LORD as his shepherd, what God is for me and does for me. But now in the 2nd half of the psalm, David talks to the Lord directly. It seems that whatever the nature of the darkness David was going through, his nature was to speak to the Lord in those times. It seems instinctive, sub-conscious (?) in v. 4, that the darkness itself caused David to speak to the Lord as “You,” not “He.” He addresses God as a personal Father/Shepherd and cannot just speak of his Lord in abstract 3<sup>rd</sup> person (“He/His”).

We shouldn't be able to talk a long time *about* God without talking *to* God. Prayer should be much more natural than it is for many of us - I say this as a part of that “us” as someone convicted over my ability to talk *about* God much but not talking *to* God so naturally.

One of the remarkable things in Augustine's classic *Confessions*, is the entire book is speaking to the Lord as “You/Thou/Thee.” In the Psalms, even when David is writing a song for the choir to sing about God, or when speaking to the people in a poem *about* God, as a man after God's own heart, it seems he just can't help but slip back into talking *to* God even as he sings or writes.

Psalm 18 (NKJV) *To the Chief Musician* [ESV “choirmaster,” NAS “choir director” – this would be for Pastor Jerry here, the idea is for choir/musicians to sing to God's people]. *A Psalm of David The Servant of the LORD, Who Spoke to the LORD The Words of This Song on the Day that the LORD Delivered Him from the Hand of All His Enemies and from the Hand of Saul. And He Said:*

<sup>1</sup> *I will love You, O LORD, my strength.*

<sup>2</sup> **The LORD** is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. <sup>3</sup> I will call upon **the LORD**, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies ...

... <sup>6</sup> In my distress I called upon **the LORD**, And cried out to my God; **He** heard my voice from **His** temple, And my cry came before **Him**, even to **His** ears ...

... <sup>11</sup> **He** made darkness **His** secret place ...

... <sup>14</sup> **He** sent out **His** arrows and scattered the foe, **Lightnings in abundance**, and **He** vanquished them.

<sup>15</sup> Then the channels of the sea were seen, The foundations of the world were uncovered At **Your** rebuke, **O LORD**, At the blast of the breath of **Your** nostrils.

[notice how when David speaks of the Lord delivering from darkness, storm, enemies, the illuminating power and presence of this personal LORD causes David to speak to Him directly, not “the Lord” now, but “O Lord ... You / Your”]

<sup>16</sup> **He** sent from above, **He** took me; **He** drew me out of many waters ...

... <sup>28</sup> For **You will** light my lamp; **The LORD my God will enlighten my darkness.** <sup>29</sup> For **by You** I can run against a troop, **By my God I can leap over a wall** [note the alternating parallelism]

... <sup>46</sup> The LORD liveth! Blessed be my Rock! Let the God of my salvation be exalted ...

... <sup>48</sup> **He** delivers me from my enemies. **You also lift me up** above those who rise against me; **You have delivered me** from the violent man. <sup>49</sup> Therefore I will give thanks **to You, O LORD**, among the Gentiles And sing praises **to Your** name <sup>50</sup> Great deliverance **He** gives ...

The Lord delivered David from the darkness and fears and enemies and so he knows in Ps 23 “I will fear no evil for **You** are with me.”

Prayer is not for God’s benefit, but for ours, reminding us we’re not alone. In Pilgrim’s Progress, Christian meets a valley of the shadow of death, which Bunyan describes “as dark as pitch ... of a People under unutterable misery; who there sat bound in affliction and Irons: and over that Valley hangs the discouraging cloud of confusion ...” and the only weapon that helps there is “all-prayer.”

## 2. We should grow closer to the Lord in the darkness

The language of Ps 23:4 is most intimate in its most intimidating part. I haven’t been through some of the valleys some of you have, but I know some of you can testify that those very valleys were precisely what drew you closer to the Lord. Uncertain paths, shadows looming, not knowing what’s around the corner or why you have even been brought down this trail (or trial) has proved to be the best thing for your prayer life and walk with the Lord for so many of you. I’m sure you could tell stories of this if we opened up time for that. There’s also a temptation to turn away from the Lord in such times, but sheep in danger must draw close to the shepherd. Psalm 56:3 says “When I am afraid, I will trust in you ...”

Not only is the Lord (our Father / Shepherd) there in the darkness but nothing should be more natural for us than to grow closer to Him in those valleys as we speak to Him and seek to stay close. We may feel like we’re independent self-sufficient sheep when in green pastures or relaxed by still waters, but when walking through dark valleys we’re reminded of our dependence on His sufficiency.

There was a small earthquake in San Diego during a MLB game recently, and it reminded me of the World Series game affected by the Bay Area quake years ago, and a quote from one of the players about how athletes feel pretty big and tough and cocky, but once God starts moving things around, it doesn't matter how big you are or think you are, you're scared. Biblically-speaking, God does that.

King David was a mighty warrior and conqueror but what shook things up in his life and brought him to his knees was the dark trials he went through in his own life and in his own family. We don't know which valley David was going through or thinking of when he wrote v. 4 (rebellion of Absalom, thinking back on the death of his unborn son with Bathsheba, which he expressed hope to see again, or the valley of family difficulties over many years?).

What's important, though, isn't that we know exactly which valley is being spoken of (the language of the Hebrew is not limited to death, it can mean *deepest darkness*). What's important is we know the Shepherd in a deeper way as He brings us through any valley, even the deepest and darkest valley so that we grow closer to Him.

Bunyan's Christian sang after his pilgrimage through this valley:

"O world of wonders, (I can say no less,  
That I should be preserved in that distress  
That I have met with here! O blessed be  
That hand that from it hath delivered me!  
Dangers in darkness, devils, hell, and sin,  
Did compass me, while I this [valley] was in;  
Yea, snares, and pits, and traps, and nets did lie  
My path about, that worthless, silly I  
Might have been catch'd, entangled, and cast down;  
But since I live, let Jesus wear the crown."

### 3. We should trust the Lord in the darkness and fear not

Isaiah 50:10 asks "*Who walks in darkness And has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD And rely upon his God.*"

What does that mean to trust the Lord? We throw some of these Christian phrases around, but what does that really mean? Turn to Psalm 143, for a good illustration of trust. Rather than give a text-book definition, it gives a real-life example. In the verse I just read, trust is relying upon God when we can't see (faith is not by sight in Bible). If all is well and you can see and feel God and know what He's doing and what's coming, that's not typical biblical faith/trust

Psalm 143:8 *Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, For **in You do I trust** ...* [the context defines it further]

... <sup>3</sup> *For the enemy has persecuted my soul; He has crushed my life to the ground; **He has made me dwell in darkness, Like those who have long been dead.*** <sup>4</sup> *Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me; My heart within me is distressed.*

<sup>5</sup> ***I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse*** [NIV “consider” – faith chooses to dwell on who God is and what He is doing even when it hurts and we can’t see] *the work of Your hands.* <sup>6</sup> ***I spread out my hands to You; My soul longs for You like a thirsty land.***

<sup>7</sup> ***Answer me speedily, O LORD; My spirit fails! Do not hide Your face from me, Lest I be like those who go down into the pit.***

<sup>8</sup> ***Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, For in You do I trust; Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, For I lift up my soul to You.*** <sup>9</sup> ***Deliver me, O LORD, from my enemies; In You I take shelter.*** <sup>10</sup> ***Teach me to do Your will, For You are my God; Your Spirit is good. Lead me in the land of uprightness.*** <sup>11</sup> ***Revive me, O LORD, for Your name’s sake! For Your righteousness’ sake bring my soul out of trouble.***

What we should trust about the Lord in Psalm 23:4:

### **He’s the Savior from eternal darkness**

Looking at verse 4, the phrase “*shadow of death*” was not only a literally physical danger for sheep. It’s used in the NT for salvation imagery. The 1st chapter of the gospel of Luke says Christ fulfilled the OT in giving salvation “***light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way ...***” (Lk 1:79)

Matthew 4:16 says Jesus began his ministry to fulfill the OT saying “***The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned.***” <sup>17</sup> *From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**”*

Paul calls it the *kingdom of light*, and until you repent, you’re in the domain of darkness. Every person is in one of 2 kingdoms, not just in eternity in the final kingdoms of heaven and hell, but also already, now, those who repent are transferred from the shadow of death to life and light, transferred from domain of darkness to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son by His redemption (Col. 1:13-14).

The final kingdom of Hell is a place with greater darkness than any earthly valley. The valley of Gehenna is the background for the NT term *hell*, a place of utter darkness, outer darkness, eternal darkness and judgment. All who reject Christ as Savior and Lord *should fear evil*, hell, and not just a shadow of death, but the full reality of eternal death. But if you repent and bow in faith to Jesus as King, His kingdom can be yours now, and a heavenly kingdom where there is no night or any darkness, but there will be the never-ending light of the glory of a God in whom there is *no shifting shadow*, and whose perfect love *casts out fear*, and with whom there will be *no more death!* And for those in His *spiritual* kingdom here death loses its sting!

We’ve a song to be sung to the nations, That shall lift their hearts to the Lord,  
**A song that shall conquer evil** And shatter the spear and sword ...  
 For the **darkness shall turn to dawning**, And the dawning to noonday bright;  
 And Christ’s great kingdom shall come to earth, The kingdom of love and light.  
 ... We’ve a Savior to show to the nations, **Who the path of sorrow has trod**,  
 That all of the world’s great peoples Might come to the truth of God ...

### He's the Shepherd leading through the darkness

Look at Psalm 23:4 again: “*though I walk **through** the valley of the shadow of death ...*” – you may not have noticed it in those words but there is trust that the Lord will not leave him there to die alone. It doesn't say “I *stop in* the valley” or “I'll *stay in* the valley,” but “I *walk through* the valley,” implied *out the other side* because the Shepherd is leading me. The verb is “walk” in v. 4, not “lie down” (like v. 2). Vs. 4 is not forever (only v. 6 “the house of the Lord”).

The valley isn't where Ps 23 ends, but the valley comes to an end. The darkness is temporary, it won't consume the sheep, the sheep are being led *through the valley* to v. 5 to a gracious meal, a feast for them to consume, where their cups will overflow, where their heads will be anointed and refreshed after the journey at a table prepared for them where enemies can't hurt them. Shepherds lead through dangerous ravines at times, because it's the best way to reach the higher ground, the high country. Sheep must trust Him.

Trust says: “Your way, not mine, O Lord, However dark it be!  
Lead me by Your own hand, Choose out the path for me.  
Smooth let it be, or rough, It will be still the best;  
Winding or straight, it leads, Right onward to Your rest.  
You take my cup, and it With joy or sorrow fill,  
As best to You may seem; Choose You my good or ill.”

I love what Jesus said in Luke 12:32 “*Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom.*”

### He's the Father protecting from evil darkness

Looking at Psalm 23:4 again, it doesn't say “I will encounter no evil” – what does it say? “I will *fear* no evil.” There's a difference.

Until we're in the eternal state of Christ's final kingdom, evil will be in his world all around us. But Christians shouldn't *fear* evil.

People may do evil things even to us but we can say like Joseph (Gen. 50:20) “*what you intended for evil, **God intended for good.***”

Our heavenly father not only loves His children, He is sovereign over evil, and only allows it in our lives purposefully and in doses that are not more than we can bear, and only what is necessary for our ultimate good. Evil is not a force to be feared, a power outside God's control that can harm us outside God's plan or take our life prematurely against God's sovereign will. If you look at Ps 21:11 you see that no evil plan succeeds over or thwarts God's sovereign will; it's the forces of evil that need to fear God's almighty power.

Psalm 21:11 *Though they intended evil against You And devised a plot, They will not succeed ...*  
<sup>13</sup> *Be exalted, O LORD, in Your strength; We will sing and praise Your power.*

If you don't dwell on the shadow of death, but as Psalm 91 says, "*you dwell in the shadow of the Almighty*" (v. 1), then "*you will not be afraid of the terror by night ... of the pestilence that walks in the darkness*" (v. 5-6) and v. 10 says "*no evil will befall you.*"

That doesn't mean evil vanishes altogether, but it can't vanquish me, defeat me, destroy me altogether. It develops me, deepens me in my trust and walk. "*I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*" His goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life until He takes me home, whenever He determines, to His house forever. I will fear no evil, when my father is with me

I began this sermon talking about the hymn "He Leadeth Me" and the story surrounding it in 1862 in the dark days of the Civil War. There is another notable hymn about our Shepherd that has a story taking place that same year, that I want to close with. Ira Sankey, music leader for evangelist D.L. Moody, learned about the events 13 years later, when traveling up the Delaware River by steamboat. Many passengers were on the deck, and Sankey was asked to sing. Though he intended to sing a Christmas song [it was 12/24/1875], for some reason he was driven to sing "Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us." The people listened intently, and at the conclusion of the song, a man with a rough, weather beaten face approached Sankey and said: "Did you ever serve in the Union Army?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Sankey, "in the spring of 1860."

"Can you remember if you were doing picket duty on a bright moonlit night in 1862?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Sankey, very much surprised.

"So do I," said the stranger, "but I was serving in the Confederate Army. When I saw you standing at your post I thought to myself: 'That fellow will never get away from here alive.' I raised my musket and took aim. I was standing in the shadow completely concealed while the full light of the moon was falling on you. At that instant, just as a moment ago, you raised your eyes to heaven and began to sing. Music, especially song, has always had a wonderful power over me, and I took my finger off the trigger. "'Let him sing his song to the end,' I said to myself, 'I can shoot him afterwards. He's my victim at all events, and my bullet cannot miss him.' "But the song you sang then was the song you sang just now. I heard the words perfectly:

'We are thine, do Thou befriend us: Be the guardian of our way.'

"These words stirred up many memories in my heart. I began to think of my childhood and my God-fearing mother. She had many, many times sung that song to me. But she died all too soon. Otherwise much in my life would no doubt have been different. When you had finished your song, it was impossible for me to take aim at you again. I thought: 'The Lord Who is able to save that man from certain death must surely be great and mighty' — and my arm of its own accord dropped limp at my side.

Since that time I have wandered about far and wide; but when I just now saw you standing there praying just as on that other occasion, I recognized you. Then my heart was wounded by your song; now I wish that you may help me find a cure for my sick soul."

Deeply moved, Mr. Sankey threw his arms about the man who in the days of the war had been his enemy. And this Christmas night the two went together to the manger in Bethlehem. There the stranger found Him who was their common Saviour, and Good Shepherd, who seeks for the lost sheep until He finds it. And when He had found it He lays it on His shoulders, rejoicing.<sup>4</sup>

What a story! What a Shepherd! He is sovereign and good and He is with us. Fear not as our Savior like a Shepherd leads us as well.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Osbeck. *Amazing Grace : 366 Inspiring hymn stories for daily devotions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, p. 22  
(see his account at <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/hym/h/1/hleademe.htm> )

<sup>2</sup>P.L. Tan. *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*. Garland TX: Bible Communications, #1966.

<sup>3</sup> F. B. Meyer, *The Shepherd Psalm*.

<sup>4</sup> This edition as told by a tract published by American Tract Society  
(<http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/biosankey4.pdf>). Also told in William J. Peterson, *The Complete Book of Hymns: Inspiring Stories about 600 Hymns and Praise Songs*, Tyndale, 2006, p. 405.