



PRESSURE POINTS

**An in depth look at the 23rd Psalm
(part 4)**

How To Use This Life Group Study Guide

1. Review your message notes from Greg's sermon.
2. Write out your answers to the questions below.
3. Discuss your answers with your Life Group.

Relieving the Pressure of My Loneliness

"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." - Psalm 23:4 (NKJV)

Even though Jesus clearly taught that loving God was the GREATEST command, it is no where close to the most frequent command found in Scripture. The command that is repeated more often than any other in the Bible is "FEAR NOT!" 366 times God tells us not to be afraid. In virtually every instance when we find the words '**FEAR NOT**' in the Bible it is in the imperative form. God is not merely suggesting that we not be afraid. He is COMMANDING us to not be afraid. What is the big deal about fear? If it was so terrible why didn't it make the infamous list of the Seven Deadly Sins? Here is a question to consider with your group:

Why do you think God tells us to stop being afraid more often than He tells us anything else?

The fact is we have the nature of sheep and one of the traits of sheep is that they panic easily. They can be pretty jumpy creatures, and so can we. When we are born we have only two fears: the fear of falling and the fear of loud noises. But by the time we reach adulthood, our fears have become so numerous that the word 'fear' doesn't even do them justice anymore. We start calling them '*phobias*'. We simply slap prefixes on them so we can tell them apart. The last time I checked experts had

identified more than five hundred phobias. One publication reported, “Ordinary children today are more fearful than psychiatric patients were in the 1950s.” The Bible reveals that God knows we tend toward fear, particularly as we respond to uncertainty and change.

No human emotion poses a greater threat to our health and happiness than fear. Think about it. Do you ever see happiness and fear together? In fact here is another question to discuss with your group:

Can a person be happy and afraid at the same time?

In this week’s message Greg pointed out that one of the principle fears we face is loneliness. Behind many of the things we say we are afraid of is really a fear of loneliness. (Darkness, Death, Divorce, Disease, Disability, etc.) Loneliness is one of the most excruciating feelings a person can ever have, and one that God Himself said from the very beginning is “not good.” From Genesis on God set out to establish fellowship as one of the principle components of His purpose for us on earth. The Lord’s desire is for companionship, fellowship, relationship, and communion with those who will respond to Him in like manner. In the New Testament we read how Jesus, our Shepherd, developed a very close relationship with a group of men (sheep) we call the apostles. Jesus’ final words to His apostles in Matthew 28 were these: ***“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*** Jesus seemed to have an intense concern that His disciples would know with certainty that He would never abandon them although everyone else might. The presence of God in our lives not only gives us reason for courage rather than fear, it also offers companionship when we are anxious about feeling alone.

For Further Study and Personal Reflection and Discussion:

1. Across the entire Bible God consistently sends the message, ‘Don’t be afraid, for I am with you.’ Read Jesus’ words in Matthew 14:27: ***“Take Courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”*** Discuss the correlation of Jesus’ words to not be afraid and the reminder of his presence with them. Talk about the difference in facing darkness with someone by your side as opposed to by yourself.

2. Eliminating your fear involves more than working up your courage; this is a spiritual battle that requires you to develop faith. Name some specific ways you can build your faith.
3. Ask group members to identify areas of their life in which they exhibit more fear than faith. Then read Mark 9:24 and pause and pray asking God to help your unbelief.

4. Read Romans 8: 35, 38-39. NOTHING can separate you from God. However, you can still experience a tormenting feeling of emptiness, fear, and even loneliness even though you are not alone. Remember these are FEELINGS and feelings are subject to what you do about them. Some people allow feelings to rule their life and it leads them away from God. Others, however allow their feelings to draw them closer to God into an more intimate relationship. Discuss specific steps we can take to control our feelings rather than allowing our feelings to control us.

5. One of the most valuable experiences in life is a true friendship. We often take friends for granted. We often don't appreciate them until they are no longer there. Friends are part of God's plan to combat loneliness as we face trials in life. Make a list of the traits you personally want in a friend and share with the group.

6. Review your list above and ask yourself if you are willing to BE this kind of friend. Read Proverbs 18:24: "*A man who has friends must himself be friendly.*" Discuss why it is so difficult to be a friend. Try to think of someone to whom you can be a friend, write their name down, pray for them, and contact them this week

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7. Ask everyone who will to share the name of a friend who has played a significant role in their life.
 8. Before concluding your group time in prayer ask if anyone would be willing to share a personal experience of how God, as their Shepherd, led them through their own 'valley of the shadow of death'.
 9. PRAY!