



Staff Devotions

Devotion 1: The Lord Is My Shepherd

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Psalm 23:1

There's no doubt about it—our kids are anxious. Over 22% of children are in therapy, while 40% of high schoolers have experienced persistent hopelessness or sadness. They deal with household substance abuse, parental incarceration, neighborhood violence, and unmet basic needs. Social media, interpersonal relationship drama, and world events all contribute to instability among our youth. They don't know where to turn for comfort.

Moralistic, therapeutic deism is a dominant worldview among their parents. They believe in a god—a supreme being—who has no connection to the world he created, no personal involvement in their lives, and no demands on how they live. This worldview has an appearance of morality—the highest good is to be good to others—but no basis for saying one action is wrong and another is right. They ignore the biblical foundation for morality and instead impose their own idea of right and wrong; morality is based on “my truth” rather than absolute truth. And this worldview is therapeutic—the purpose for living is my own personal happiness; there is no higher purpose.

Without an anchor for their soul and the knowledge of a sovereign Savior who loves them and is working out all things for their good, it's no wonder our kids are lost. They're wandering on the wrong path of their own making, filled with worry and fear, depressed about their lack of happiness, and unsure of what the future holds for them.

This week, we are introducing kids to the gentle Good Shepherd through the life of David and Psalm 23. They will meet the God who created them in his image, with great care, for his glory, and the good of all of us. The God who loved the world so much that he gave his Son as a sacrifice for sin. The God who leads us on the right path, who offers comfort in every trial, who provides for all our needs, and in whom every promise is “yes” and “amen.”

Today, as you prepare to share with the children, first remind yourself of who Jesus is—is he *your* shepherd? Have you crossed from being a lost sheep to a beloved member

of his fold? Does he know you (John 10:14)? Do you run to the chief shepherd and overseer of your soul when you are anxious (1 Peter 2:25)? Is he the shepherd and rock on which you build your life (Genesis 49:24)? Do you know that he will lovingly carry you forever (Psalm 28:9)?

What amazing mercy that we can say, “The Lord is *my* shepherd.” That the Creator of the universe is *my* personal shepherd. Is he yours? May we pray that we live our lives in light of this Good Shepherd as the Puritans did.

Lord of all being,
There is one thing that deserves my greatest care,
that calls forth my ardent desires,
That is, that I may answer the great end for which
I am made—
to glorify thee who hast given me being,
and to do all the good I can for my fellow men;
Verily life is not worth having
if it be not improved for this noble purpose.
Yet, Lord, how little is this the thought of mankind!
Most men seem to live for themselves,
without much or any regard for thy glory,
or for the good of others;
They earnestly desire and eagerly pursue
the riches, honours, pleasures of this life,
as if they supposed that wealth, greatness, merriment,
could make their immortal souls happy;
But, alas, what false delusive dreams are these!
And how miserable ere long will those be that sleep in them,
for all our happiness consists in loving thee,
and being holy as thou art holy.
Help me to know continually
that there can be no true happiness,
no fulfilling of thy purpose for me,
apart from a life lived in and for the Son of thy love.

— Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 13.



Devotion 2: The Lord Is My Leader

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. Psalm 23:2–3

The algorithms on TikTok and other social media channels bombard our kids with doubts about the existence of God and the reliability of his Word. They learn in school that the universe came into existence on its own and that they are products of evolutionary processes acting over millions of years. They are asking, “Does God really exist?” It’s a question that has crossed the mind of every person at some point. Before we answer that question, let’s ask another question: How can we even know to question the surety of God’s existence?

Here’s the answer: Apart from the perfect, truthful, unchanging, eternal God of the Bible, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3) and from whom comes knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 9:10), we cannot know anything. Think about it. If there is no god—no ultimate standard of truth and knowledge—and we are simply the product of random processes operating on chemicals over time, then the thoughts in our brains are nothing more than the product of random chemical interactions. How could we *know* anything? The one true God of the Bible has created each person in his image and given us the ability to think rationally, to question thoughtfully, to know truth fully. And he has revealed himself to all people so that everyone is without excuse (Romans 1:18–21). We can know the one true God exists because we have the ability to know in the first place. And we can praise him that he freely gives wisdom to those who ask for it (James 1:5).

Since God exists, we can also know that his Word is true and trustworthy. Over 3,000 times, the authors of the Bible claimed to be speaking or writing the words of God, and they reference the godly authority of other writers (Daniel 9:2; 1 Timothy 1:18; 2 Peter 1:21, 3:15–16). While on earth, Jesus referred to the Old Testament scriptures as truth and from the Holy Spirit (Matthew 19:4; Mark 12:36; Luke 11:49–51; John 5:46, 17:17). And God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

Since the Bible is the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16), we can trust that God has given us accurate historical accounts and that he will lead us on righteous paths when we obey the guidelines he has set for his creation through the power

of the Holy Spirit. We can joyfully cross from the wrong path to the right path when we become his children through repentance and faith in Jesus and willingly submit to the way he wants us to live. We can anchor our morality in the Word of the Good Shepherd who wants only good for us.

Today, as we encourage our children to look to the Lord and to follow his righteous paths, let’s think about the behaviors and activities we may participate in that aren’t on the right path. Do you gossip in the neighborhood chat? Tell white lies on social media? Envy the lives of those on Instagram? Do you anger quickly? Are you impatient with your children? Christ is calling us to the path of righteousness (Colossians 3:5–10). Are you engaging with his Word and desiring for him to conform you to his image through it? May we pray this with the Puritans:

O God of truth,
I thank thee for the holy Scriptures,
their precepts, promises, directions, light.
In them may I learn more of Christ,
be enabled to retain his truth
and have grace to follow it.
Help me to lift up the gates of my soul that he may come in
and show me himself when I search the Scriptures,
for I have no lines to fathom its depths,
no wings to soar to its heights.
By his aid may I be enabled to explore all its truths,
love them with all my heart,
embrace them with all my power,
engraft them into my life. . . .
From it show me how my words have often been unfaithful
to thee,
injurious to my fellow-men,
empty of grace, full of folly,
dishonouring to my calling.
Then write thy own words upon my heart and inscribe them
on my lips;
So shall all glory be to thee in my reading of thy Word!

— Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 190.



Devotion 3: The Lord Is My Comforter

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. Psalm 23:4

After a frustrating day, a friend asked, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” Yet we know that no one is good—no, not one—except the Good Shepherd, who defines goodness.

As the infinitely good God, the Creator fashioned a world that manifested his goodness according to his pleasure and for his glory. He established rules for his creation to follow. The standard to which he holds his creation is himself: absolute goodness. With one bite of fruit, Adam fell short of that standard. With every act of disobedience, we too fall short.

Because God is absolutely pure and holy, untouched by sin, he cannot partake in sin nor approve of it in others. He established a penalty for falling short of his standard: death. The goodness and holiness of God demands that he judge sin. As the righteous judge, he had no choice but to carry out the punishment that he had set for breaking his rules. He placed a curse on his beloved creation. All of creation now groans under the weight of that curse. He imposed a sentence from which we have no means of escaping on our own. We can’t get away from our punishment for sin, which is death, eternal separation from our Creator.

When a murderer is given a sentence for his crime, do we blame the judge who sentenced him? The answer to the age-old question “Why?” lies not at the feet of the Creator but in the bite of a fruit by man.

When we walk through the valley brought on by the curse, we can know that the same God who cursed his creation also provided a way of escape from the curse—Jesus Christ. Jesus took on flesh so that he could live the obedient life Adam didn’t live while experiencing every temptation we experience. Because he knows what it means to be human (for Jesus walked through the valley of the shadow of death many times with those around him), he can offer

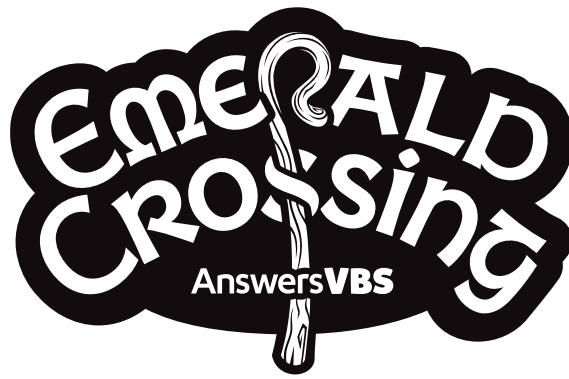
the comfort we need when we go through our own valleys. Knowing that Jesus is sovereign over all and that nothing happens apart from his good decrees for us, we can cross from living in fear to walking in the peace that only he can give.

As you share the Lord as comforter with our children, be careful to emphasize that the mess we find ourselves in is not the fault of our good and loving Creator. This will help children answer the “why” question when they encounter a tragedy or simply have a bad day. In general, these are results of living in a cursed world, which is the deserved punishment for sin. We need to also continually point them toward the great gift that the Creator has for us (salvation through Jesus Christ) and the comfort he provides through his Word.

Read Psalm 89:14 and think about the words of this Puritan prayer:

Thou Maker and Sustainer of all things,
Day and night are thine,
heaven and earth declare thy glory;
But I, a creature of thy power and bounty, have sinned
against thee
by resisting the dictates of conscience,
the demands of thy law,
the calls of thy gospel;
yet I live under the dispensation of a given hope.
Deliver me from worldly dispositions,
for I am born from above and bound for glory.
May I view and long after holiness
as the beauty and dignity of the soul.

— Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 139.



Devotion 4: The Lord Is My Provider

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Psalm 23:5

“Good luck’ with that!” “I’ve had a bit of ‘bad luck’ lately.” We often say this in an offhand way, but if we aren’t careful with our words, we can inadvertently teach kids a sort of syncretism—I believe in God but I also believe in luck. Yet the two are mutually exclusive. God is sovereign, and nothing happens to us apart from his good plans for us. He is the one who prepares the table for us and overflows our cups. There is no room for inanimate luck to somehow drive our lives.

We may not kiss the Blarney Stone, but how often do we engage in activities that counter our trust in God and his provision for us? Ever read a horoscope? Checked the tarot cards? Hung a rabbit’s foot on the rearview mirror? Knocked on wood to keep bad circumstances away? Used crystals to promote good energy? Thanked “Mother Nature” for a good weather forecast? Asked for good vibes or good thoughts? Sent positivity into the universe? Hidden in a closet on Friday the 13th? Used Phil’s shadow on Groundhog Day to form your opinions on the advent of spring?

In his letter to the people of Colossae, Paul demonstrated the supremacy of Jesus in all things. As you read Colossians 1:15–20, think about what the acknowledgment of luck does to the sufficiency of our Creator and Savior.

David knew from reading about the life of his ancestor Abraham that the Lord provided what he needed (Genesis 22:1–14). On Mount Moriah, God had provided the ram for Abraham to sacrifice in place of Isaac. Later, David’s son Solomon would build the temple on Mount Moriah, providing a stable place for people to meet with God. And still later, near Mount Moriah, the descendant of Abraham and David who had been promised to both, Jesus Christ, was sacrificed on the cross—the ultimate provision by the king of the universe.

When we are tempted to grumble about our circumstances, a form of idol worship (“I know better than God what is good for me!”), or praise luck instead of the provision of our God, let’s remember who God is and how he has provided in the past, provides in the present, and will continue to provide in the future.

May this Puritan prayer tune our hearts to sing our thankfulness to Jehovah Jireh, our provider, alone.

I bless thee for the soul thou hast created,
for adorning it, sanctifying it, though it is fixed in
barren soil;
for the body thou hast given me,
for preserving its strength and vigour,
for providing senses to enjoy delights,
for the ease and freedom of my limbs,
for hands, eyes, ears that do thy bidding;
for thy royal bounty providing my daily support,
for a full table and overflowing cup,
for appetite, taste, sweetness,
for social joys of relatives and friends,
for ability to serve others,
for a heart that feels sorrows and necessities,
for a mind to care for my fellow-men,
for opportunities of spreading happiness around,
for loved ones in the joys of heaven,
for my own expectation of seeing thee clearly.
I love thee above the powers of language to express,
for what thou art to thy creatures.
Increase my love, O my God, through time and eternity.

— Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 15.



Devotion 5: The Lord Is My Promise Keeper

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever. Psalm 23:6

If you are hosting your VBS in June, you are likely inundated with rainbows—those formed after the spring rains or those featured in storefronts and in parades. The former are a reminder that God is a promise keeper. After the flood that was sent in judgment on the wickedness of mankind, God gave the beautiful rainbow as a sign of his promise to never flood the earth again. The latter come from those who shake their fists at their holy Creator, determined to live their lives on their own terms, building their faith on the shaky ground of man-made morality.

Our kids are caught up in the undercurrents of this new morality—they have friends who are “out,” friends who are furries, friends who are whatever they choose to be. Once they become emotionally involved, it’s more difficult to say with certainty, “Thus says the Lord.” For example, a friend said, “But what about Steve, who is like an uncle to my kids? How can I tell him his lifestyle is wrong when he’s so fun to be around?” This is part of that moralistic, therapeutic deism worldview—if there is a god, he wants people to be happy in whatever they do and can’t lay claim to their lives.

Yet the *real* rainbow shows us there is a personal God—the one who created us in his image—who has defined right from wrong. Anyone who rebels in *any* way is under his wrath (Proverbs 6:16–19) and needs to repent of sin and trust in Jesus for salvation. In the days of Noah, God showed his wrath on sin and his provision of salvation from judgment through the ark. And he showed—through the rainbow—his mercy for those who walk in newness of life. For us, this personal God has given his personal revelation through his Word and provided his personal salvation through the Word, Jesus Christ. These promises, found in the Bible, provide a sure foundation on which we can stand and proclaim with boldness the need for all to repent, receive salvation, and walk the right path with their gentle Good Shepherd.

Today, as you share with the children, evaluate your own foundation. Are you tossed to and fro by every “new” idea?

Does your position on right and wrong change based on your involvement with others? Or do you stand firm on the unchanging Word of God, evaluating each teaching in light of what Scripture says, then sharing the true gospel with those around you who need to hear it?

May we pray with the Puritans that the Lord, our promise keeper, would continually remind us that his Word is sure and we can trust it. We look forward to the fulfillment of all his promises in that future time when his children will surely have a place in his courts forever.

Glorious Jehovah, my covenant God,
All thy promises in Christ Jesus are yea and amen,
and all shall be fulfilled.
Thou hast spoken them, and they shall be done,
commanded, and they shall come to pass.
Yet I have often doubted them,
have lived at times as if there were no God.
Lord, forgive me that death in life,
when I have found something apart from thee,
when I have been content with ephemeral things. . . .
Help me to leave my concerns in thy hands,
for thou hast power over evil,
and bringest from it an infinite progression of good,
until thy purposes are fulfilled. . . .
Grant me a distinct advance in the divine life;
May I reach a higher platform,
leave the mists of doubt and fear in the valley,
and climb to hill-tops of eternal security in Christ
by simply believing that he cannot lie,
or turn from his purpose.
Grant me the confidence I ought to have in him
who is worthy to be praised, and who is blessed for
evermore.

— Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 132.