

THE FIRST 15

Friday, July 26, 2024

Today is Friday, July 26 and we are studying what the Bible says about dark valleys.

OPENING PRAYER

I pause in the quiet stillness at the dawn of another day. There is rhythm to my life. The sun sets and rises, my heart beats within my chest, and my breath moves in and out of my body. Hours turn to days and days turn to weeks. In every season and circumstance, I am not alone. God is with me. I seek Him in the mountaintops and in the dark valleys. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:35-39

REFLECTION

In his letter to the Romans, Paul acknowledges the troubles, hardships and suffering that believers will face. All the trials Paul mentions are life-threatening - persecution, famine, nakedness, and danger. He builds up to the climax - the sword. A violent death. He quotes a Psalm comparing Christians to sheep marked for slaughter (Psalm 44:22). We have a Good Shepherd who leads His sheep through the darkest valley - the valley of the shadow of death. In the worst of circumstances, in times of immense suffering and even in the face of death, Paul paints us a picture of victory. We are more than conquerors, he says. We are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ.

Paul tells me that because of Jesus, I will have victory. Nothing will ever be able to separate me from God's love. Not death or life, not angels or demons, not the past, present or future. No powers of this world or anything in all creation. Not the highest mountain or the deepest valley. Not the distance to the moon or the bottom of the ocean. I cannot be separated from God's love. God's got me. I am His. I will be fine. Even in the valley of the shadow of death, Jesus will be leading me home, home to Him, to his Father's house with its many rooms. One of them engraved with my name on it. Nothing can come between me and my Lord. Nothing. Evil may try to scare me, worry me or cause me to doubt. Trouble may rattle me to the core of my foundation, shake me up and spin me around. I may lose my bearings and feel lost, alone and forlorn. But God's got me. The Shepherd has me in His arms and He will bring me home.

I consider where I am currently struggling in my life. What are my sources of trouble, hardship, or persecution? Where am I hungry? When do I feel naked and exposed? What are the dangers that threaten me? Perhaps disease or illness has conquered me. Maybe anger or grief has me

in its grip. Perhaps addiction has gained a foothold. Maybe anxiety or depression are claiming victory. Perhaps financial hardship is winning. Maybe sin has the upper hand. I am a conqueror, says Paul. I am more than a conqueror through Jesus. Nothing can separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus my Lord. Nothing.

Ask: What have I falsely believed could separate me from the love of God? What do I need to conquer through Jesus Christ?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You conquered sin and overcame death. On the third day, You rose from the dead in victory. The grave could not hold You, nor will it hold me. I am more than a conqueror because of Your great love. You shed Your blood for the salvation of my soul. In the face of the worst trials and even as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I know You will never leave my side. Your presence is worth more than anything in this world. Your love is stronger than anything I come up against. Thank You for being my Lord and Shepherd. Amen.