

*What Is In The Valley?

Ps 23:4 ERV says *Even if I walk through a valley as dark as the grave, I will not be afraid of any danger, because you are with me. Your rod and staff comfort me.*

Introduction: About 140 miles long, from the head of Last Chance Canyon in the north, to where the Amargosa River makes its big bend near Saratoga Springs in the south, this valley snakes its way across the country.

Many have ventured into it. Many have lost their lives in it. It is a hot and barren place. It is one valley a person really needs to know about before venturing into it. A wise question to ask would certainly be "What Is In The Valley?" Death Valley is one of the most famous in the United States.

Valleys are not only a part of nature but valleys are a part of our spiritual journey as well. There is always a valley between two mountains. Before each mountain top experience **comes a walk down below in a valley.**

Some folks can live on the mountain top with the Lord for extended periods of time but some others can't for one reason or another. They seem to reach the mountain top, live there a while but then comes a wind of defeat or a wind of discouragement and the wind blows us **right down to the bottom of the mountain again.**

Some valleys are wide, some are narrow. Some are on rough ground and some on smooth ground. Did you stop to think that most suicides occur when a person is in a valley of depression and discouragement and most marriages break up while one or both mates are there.

I suggest that if we are going to be successful in climbing the mountain, then we must become familiar with the valley.

Today I want to look at some particular things about a valley. First remember this about the valley

I. Valleys are inevitable

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and our sins are forgiven, we enter into eternal life, and we can look forward to spending eternity in heaven with God. **The question** we want to think about here though is, What about the earthly part of our journey to our heavenly destination

In this imperfect world suffering occurs and no one is immune from it. There is an old parable that says "**All Sunshine and no rain makes a desert.**" What that means is, life is a mixture of

pain and pleasure, of victory and defeat, success and failure, of sunshine and rain, and of mountain tops and valleys.

Note: If you are in a valley, it does not mean you are a bad person, or it doesn't mean that you are more sinful than someone else. What it does mean though is that you are a real person. No one is exempt from the problems of life. Actually scripture says in

Acts 14:21,22 says After preaching the Good News in Derbe and making many disciples, Paul and Barnabas returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Posada, where they strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships to enter the Kingdom of God.

Question: Has anyone here ever read "Pilgrim's Progress"? Let me simply read what Frank Allen points out, He writes,

"A large portion of "Pilgrim's Progress " is an exposition of this truth. From the very beginning of his journey towards the Celestial City, Christian encountered all kinds of tribulation. They troubled him all the way to the very gate of the City. The Christian is threatened by enemies of the cross; he is tempted by men who represent themselves to be disciples; he is drawn away by his own lusts; he is held up to the scorn of the world; in fact wherever he turns, he meets with trials in this world. They that will live godly must suffer persecution. "

In Leonard Sweet's book "*Strong in all the Broken Places*" he tells the story of George Everett Ross, a pastor who himself was overwhelmed with difficulty and tragedy who said this in one of his sermons:

That pastor wrote "I have served in the ministry thirty years, almost thirty-one. I have come to understand that there are two kinds of faith. One says if and the other says though.

One says: "If everything goes well, if my life is prosperous, if I'm happy, if no one I love dies, if I'm successful, then I will believe in God and say my prayers and go to the church and give what I can afford."

The other says: though the cause of evil prosper, though I sweat in Gethsemane, though I must drink my cup at Calvary—nevertheless, precisely then, I will trust the Lord who made me.

So Job cries: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust Him." In another of the great psalms David sings: "Though the waters roar and swell, and though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea. . . the Lord of hosts is with me, the God of Jacob is my strength."

- Yes Valleys are inevitable

II. God controls the depth and the length of a valley experience. Notice this,

A. A season of suffering can seem longer if we are in a tremendous amount of pain. True isn't it?

B. Suffering throws us off balance. Losing anything-- a position, a friendship or a marriage, or something else precious or losing everything can cause a person to wonder, *Why did God do this to me?*

When dealing with God the question "Why" is a most used question. Why do bad people seem to get away with everything but good people struggle. Why do children go hungry? Why do babies die? Why do good people die while bad people seem to live to old age. I am sure you could come up with some why questions for God without having to think too long.

C. The deeper the valley, the greater the work God will be able to do through it.

I am reminded of these words of Jesus when the situation in your valley looks deep, dark, and menacing. Matthew 19:26 And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

D. The valley experience might be shorter and less painful if it takes only a little suffering to bring about deeper surrender to God in your life. Resisting Him on the other hand will typically lengthen a period of suffering.

E. God is more interested in our character or nature than He is about our comfort.

And as I just said, time in the valley of suffering molds our nature to be helpful because as we suffer, it can make our life richer because, we will be better able to understand the sufferings of another person and we will want to walk along with them. And because of that, we can come to the end of our journey with the knowledge that, in our pain, we have helped another human being live a little easier through their pain.

F. With the Lord, we always have hope.

You and I have the Good Shepherd living within, guiding, comforting, strengthening, and protecting us. In other words I will have everything I need wherever I am in the valley

III. The valley is A Temporary Place

He knows our weaknesses and he will not suffer us to spend more time there that we can bear.

1 Corinthians 10:13 says *There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

I honestly believe that without doing any damage to the text I might say this verse this way.
There hath no valley taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to walk in that valley any farther than you are able; but will in that valley also make a way to climb up out of it , that ye may be able to bear it.

Note: God is an encourager, not a discourager by leaving us in the valley of life too long. Listen to the encouragement in Joshua 1:6-9

"Be strong and courageous, for you shall give this people possession of the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. "Only be strong and very courageous; be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, so that you may have success wherever you go. "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

Thought: Yes something to remember about the valley is that it is not our permanent dwelling place on this journey through life.

IV. Who and what is in the valley

A. God is There. (v.4) "...for thou art with me."

Lets think about it this way: The only way God can speak to some of us is in the valley.

Some Christians get high up the mountain and their ears get stopped up and they can't hear God speak. Some get so high in the mountains that they get in the fog and can't see spiritually.

Question: Isn't it true that when things go well we forget about God but from the valley floor and we are trying to make sense of what just happened, we cry out to him

B. There is a different living standard there.

Sometimes the only way to get the right spiritual diet is to go to the valley. God may have to take us down there in order to take us up to the mountain top.

C. Ground Zero is there.

(v.4) "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..."

The valley is the ground floor for success. It is the only access to the mountain. It is where the elevator door to go up is located. If you enter an elevator at the top floor, **the only direction is down.**

Maybe you know a high school student, a college student, a mom, a dad, a teacher, a married couple or someone else who is in the valley **and can't seem to get out**. Maybe you know someone who is considering throwing in the towel. Maybe you know someone who can't seem to get a handle on their relationships.

If it is you, get on the elevator. If it is someone you know, help them get on the elevator because it is about ready to leave the launching pad, and the mountain top is the first stop.

D. Intense Fighting is There.

Thus the need for (v.4) "thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

David and Goliath held their epic battle in a valley between two mountains I Samuel 17:1-3 lays out the scene for us.

The Philistines gathered their armies together for war. They met at Socoh in Judah. Their camp was between Socoh and Azekah, at a town called Ephes Dammim. Saul and the Israelite soldiers also gathered together. Their camp was in the Valley of Elah. Saul's soldiers were lined up and ready to fight the Philistines. The Philistines were on one hill. The Israelites were on the other hill. The valley was between them.

These valleys that we often find ourselves in is always a place of decision. Am I going to stay here or am I going to climb the mountain? We must grapple with our decisions and trust the Lord so we can make the right choice.

There is a battle between the flesh and the spirit. Will I make the decision to stay in the world or climb the mountain to spiritual attainment. Will I trust myself or the Lord? Will I depend on my strength or the rod and staff of the Lord?

Note: The only reason for staying in the valley is that we don't make a decision to get out.

Don't forget: Most successful people made life changing decisions while in the valley.

Remember what the prodigal son said, Luke 15:17-20 *"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.'* So he got up and went to his father.

In the valley of despair he chose to get out of that valley. He was tired of fighting. *Yes,* Valleys are where significant battles of faith are fought. And either won or lost.

E. Grace is There.

(Ps. 23 v.5-6) *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Luke 3:5, *"Every valley shall be filled, every mountain and hill shall be brought low."* That simply means that the mountain is accessible to all who trust the Lord and start climbing.

Romans 8:28, reminds us that *"All things work together for good to them who love God."* All things including our painful valley experiences

Thought: What about it? Are we going to stay in the valley the rest of our life? We don't need to. Why don't we choose to get out today? Why don't we decide to start climbing the mountain today?

V. How to get out of the valley 3 paths we need to take

A. The Path Of Prayer - Waiting on the lord - We are commended to pray - 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says *pray without ceasing*. In other words, Never stop praying.

Our job is to pray about our valley, his is to answer and show the way out. Isaiah 30:20,21 reminds us *Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and suffering for drink, he will still be with you to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes. Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left.*

B. The Path Of Praise - Worshiping - Every person who walks through a long, dark, and painful valley would do well to adopt an attitude of praise!

A couple brief examples:

Luther Bridgers authored this great hymn " There Within My Heart A Melody" in 1910 just after losing his entire family in a tragic house fire.

Another is Horatio Spafford who wrote, "It is Well with My Soul"

Here is the story of this hymn

In 1873, Spafford scheduled a boat trip to Europe in order to give his wife and daughters a much needed vacation and time to recover from the tragedy.

He also went to join Moody and Sankey on an evangelistic campaign in England.

Spafford sent his wife and daughters ahead of him while he remained in Chicago to take care of some unexpected last minute business.

Several days later he received notice that his family's ship had encountered a collision. All four of his daughters drowned; only his wife had survived.

With a heavy heart, Spafford boarded a boat that would take him to his grieving Anna in England.

It was on this trip that he penned those now famous words, When sorrow like sea billows roll; it is well, it is well with my soul..

One last example: Ann Steele born in 1717 was another lady who spent time in valleys She lost her mother at age 3. At age 19, a severe hip injury made her a lifelong invalid. At age 21, her fiancé drowned the day before they were to be married, so, she lived with her father and stepmother, who cared for her health problems, and who fixed her an elegant room with a fireplace to write her poems. She assisted her father in his pastoral labors, although for the last 9 years of her life, she was never able to leave her bed yet from this series of tragedies rose some 144 hymns and 34 versified Psalms

And there are still others though we do not have time to touch on them all. Someone left us this great challenge to think about. They said, If we cannot praise the Lord in the valley, then we have no business praising Him when we are on the mountain!

C. The Path Of Practice - Walking -

When we fail to walk with the Lord, we bring dishonor to Him and more discouragement to our own hearts. A consistent walk on the other hand is a path out of the dark valley!

Thought: We can't stop circumstances from coming into our lives and having them drag us into a valley but with prayer, praise, and practice we can see to it that they don't keep us there

In Conc. It is GOD Himself who walks with us through life's trials to deliver us from all evil and fear.

Yes, the valley is where we do our struggling, it is where we have to cry sometimes, and yes the valley is inevitable through out our journey in life, but *GOD* comforts us with the assurance that even earthly death will never separate our souls from dwelling in His holy presence forever in Heaven!

I don't know about you but in the midst of all my struggles and the fact that the valley is only a temporary place is worth shouting about because it is our reassurance that "troubles don't last forever."