

Psalm 23:4
Sermon date: October 4, 2026

Ice breaker

- 1) When you were a kid, what was the place that scared you most in the dark — the basement, the closet, the hallway, the woods behind the house? What could make it less scary?

Unpack It

What stood out to you from Sunday's sermon and why? What was a takeaway or something that left you wondering about?

Historical Context (or just fun facts you may not know)

"The shadow of death" is one Hebrew word: tsalmaveth. It means something like "death-shadow" or "deepest darkness," which is why many newer translations say "darkest valley." Job uses it for the gloom of the grave (Job 10:21–22; 38:17). It covers literal mortal danger but also any darkness so thick you can't see your way, grief, depression, illness, fear. The verse isn't only for funerals.

The valleys were real and dangerous. In Judea, shepherds moved flocks seasonally from the lowlands up to summer pasture, and the route ran through narrow wadis (ravines). Some, like the Wadi Qelt between Jerusalem and Jericho, are so deep and narrow that the floor sits in shadow much of the day. Those gorges hid wolves, lions, and bandits (the Good Samaritan was robbed on that very road), and flash floods could roar through without warning. The valley wasn't a detour it was the path to the better pasture. Verse 4 comes right after "he leads me in right paths." Sometimes the right path runs straight through the dark.

"Walk through" not "camp in." The verb pictures movement. The valley is a passage, not a destination.

Diving In

Read together: Psalm 23

Diving Deeper

- 1) Verse 3 says the Shepherd leads us in "right paths." Verse 4 immediately puts us in the darkest valley. What does that sit with you that the valley can be on the right path, not a wrong turn off of it?
- 2) David switches from "he" to "you" right at the valley. Why do you think he starts speaking directly to God there? What changes when we stop talking about God and start talking to him?
- 3) David says "I will fear no evil," not "there is no evil." What's the difference between denying danger and not fearing it?
- 4) What valley are you walking through right now, or did you walk through recently? You don't have to give details if you are not comfortable.
- 5) When you're in the dark, is your instinct to talk about God (analyze, explain, question) or to talk to him? What would it look like to shift from "he" to "you" this week?
- 6) The valley was often the only road to the better pasture. Looking back, has a hard season ever led you somewhere you couldn't have reached any other way?
- 7) What fear has been loudest in your life lately? What would it mean to say "I will fear no evil" to that specific fear without pretending it isn't real?
- 8) Someone in your life may be in the valley right now. Verse 4's comfort is presence, not answers. Who could you simply be with this week, not to fix it, just to walk beside them?

Closing It Out With Prayer

1. Dim the lights if you can. Invite the group to sit in a minute of silence and picture their current valley or someone else's.
2. Have someone read verse 4 slowly, twice. The second time, invite everyone to pray it silently in the first person, directly to God: "Even though I walk through _____, I will not be afraid, for you are with me."
3. Then pray together. Each person names one valley, their own or someone they love.