

Aidan's Way Day 18

Deep Dive

Thank you for joining me in prayer on this the eighteenth day of my three-week pilgrimage from Iona to Lindisfarne in the footsteps of Saint Aidan, praying the Bible together each day in our usual way. Today I am traversing the windswept Cheviot hills, finally crossing the border from Scotland into the ancient Kingdom of Northumbria, in northeast England, passing the Iron Age fort at Yeavinger Bell and weaving my way down into the old market town of Wooler!

(Want to know more about this unique series on pilgrimage? Check out the special introductory day, "An Introduction to Pilgrimage").

Pause

As I enter prayer now, I pause to be still; to breathe slowly, to re-centre my scattered senses upon the presence of God.

Pause and pray

Prayer of Approach

High King of Heaven, would You walk with me and talk with me as I seek to follow in the footsteps of Your servant Aidan today? I have set my heart on pilgrimage, so challenge me and change me, cleanse and rearrange me, until the fire that burned in Aidan's heart, burns brightly in mine.

Rejoice and Reflect

Looking out across these rolling hills to the valleys below, dotted with sheep, I rejoice once again in the shepherd of my soul, joining with the ancient praise of all God's pilgrim people in the famous words of Psalm 23:

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
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 23:1-4 (NKJV)

Pause and pray

Today, instead of moving on from the Psalm to another passage of Scripture in the usual way, I am going to return to Psalm 23, deliberately going deeper, circling these familiar words, excavating fresh insight from them in prayer...

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
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Psalm 23:1-4 (NKJV)

Like the winding paths I've been following for almost three weeks, the way of faith is more like a labyrinth full of twists and turns than a linear progression from A to B. And as for Lectio Divina², in many ways it is in itself an affront to efficiency, requiring me to read slowly, repetitively, and with imagination – today's four verses three times through. This circular approach to the scriptures, and particularly to the Psalms, would have been entirely familiar to Aidan walking this way almost 1400 years ago. Monks in the Celtic traditions were required to memorise and recite all 150 Psalms as they walked and worked. And so I find myself wondering whether this long-lost art of memorising and meditating upon psalms might once again – In this age of digital distraction – become a key to knowing and having 'the mind of Christ' (1 Cor. 2:16)?

Ask

And so, walking slowly through verses 1 and 2 of today's Psalm now, I explore its rich imagery with my imagination. What do these green pastures and still waters actually look like? What sounds am I hearing? What emotions am I feeling? In what particular ways is God 'making me' lie down?

Pause and pray

Thinking of someone who finds themselves walking 'the valley of the shadow of death', perhaps with a terminal diagnosis, or the pain of a recent bereavement, I take hold of a few words from this Psalm and apply them in prayer to this person's situation today.

Pause and pray

Yield

As I return to these four verses a third time, I go deeper still, listening again for a particular word or phrase that the Holy Spirit may be highlighting to me today...

The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
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 23:1-4 (NKJV)

What word or phrase jumped out at me from these verses?

The late great Dallas Willard challenges me to "memorise and turn over in [my mind] key portions of Scripture [because] this is the primary discipline for the thought life. And if you think this is impossible for you, think again. You can remember all sorts of things, and you can remember Scripture too. As you do, your mind will be filled with light, and your life will be reoriented around God, because you are choosing to focus on him and are spending time and effort on this permanently worthwhile activity."³

Pause and pray

Yielding Prayer

I turn these verses into a yielding prayer:

*Lord, You are my shepherd, and I can be a bit of a dumb sheep.
I will follow Your lead gratefully today into moments of rest;
I will kneel to drink delightfully today from Your still waters.
I will stop striving long enough for You to restore my soul;
I will let You lead my feet on the trails of right relationship.*

Yielding Promise

And now, as I prepare to take this time of prayer into the coming day, the Lord who loves me promises me in Psalm 1 that if I will just delight in His law, and meditate upon it day and night...

I will be like a tree planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.
My leaves will never wither,
and I will prosper in all I do.

Personalised from Psalm 1:2-3 (NLT)

Closing Prayer

*Father, help me to live this day to the full,
being true to You, in every way.*

*Jesus, help me to give myself away to others,
being kind to everyone I meet.*

*Spirit, help me to love the lost,
proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.*

Amen.

¹You can follow Pete's pilgrimage and hear the occasional song inspired by the journey on 'The Pilgrim Podcast' available at www.PeteGreig.info.

²Lectio Divina, literally 'sacred reading' is an ancient approach to meditating upon Scripture and other devotional material. Lectio 365 derives its name and approach to 'praying the Bible' from here.

³Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), p80.