

A MARINE ON PATROL THROUGH THE VALLEY OF DEATH

An excerpt from Marine George Sexton's Eulogy, delivered October 13, 2021, Tennessee State Veterans Cemetery

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth 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 thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 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 for ever."

The Psalmist David's experience was much like a Marine on patrol: experiencing unrest, hostility, weariness, danger, and the perplexing problems that accompany a grunt in the performance of his duties. David knew by experience what it was to suffer grief over the loss of family members, friends, and brothers-in-arms.

Likewise, over the years, the twenty-third Psalm has given comfort to multitudes of those experiencing grief. David is addressing each of us here today who have assembled in this sacred garden of stones and valor, to honor Marine George Sexton. We've been left behind on the battlefields of this world to carry-on in his absence, and may we always have the courage to continue the fight, in the highest tradition of the Corps.

I. In the first verse David acknowledges our Supreme Commandant as the One Who supplies our every need. "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want..."

History has often repeated the tactical error of commanders in the field, advancing far beyond their logistical supply. Hence, their progress is halted for a lack of food and water, adequate clothing, ammunition, fuel, and equipment.

Though brilliant tacticians, this was true of Hannibal, Alexander, Napoleon, Washington, Lee, Von Reichenau and McArthur. I have read that Schwarzkopf's push in Iraq was also plagued with logistical problems. Even former President Donald Trump was told by our military leaders that our troops were out of ammunition, and they were in dire want of replenishment.

In contrast, God's arsenal shall never be depleted. The Lord's supply-line shall always reach us when we are in need. For, *"...my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."*

When the heart seems to be breaking because of grief, we may claim His promise to meet our every need. *"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want..."* for need, for rest, for guidance, for courage, for comfort, and for peace.

Therefore, we have a future of no want, no worry, and no weakness.

II. Verse two promises rest and relaxation. "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters."

Our Marines have fought in mountainous terrain, on jungle trails, in rice paddy sludge, on frozen wastelands, and through burning sands. They have experienced the violence of beach assaults and the intensity of urban house-to-house warfare. They have fought on land, on sea, and in the air.

When an artillery battery clears the top of a hill with 'white phosphorus,' followed by a squad of Marines disembarking the rear of a Boeing CH-46 Sea Knight Helicopter, these grunts will oftentimes anticipate the violence of the firefight that will ensue within that white cloud.

When the battle is over, when the smoke clears, when our fallen comrades are covered with ponchos, and when there follows an eerie silence, we move out from the scorched hillside, and we rest our battle fatigued men by lying down in green pastures.

Grief is a similar circumstance, and the promise is good as we honor our flag draped, fallen Marines. When a loved one is taken in death, there is a crying need for comfort and rest that comes only from God. The raging torrents of life's struggles become peaceful and silent, as our Heavenly Point-Man leads us to still waters.

III. The third verse speaks of restoration. *"He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."*

The soul becomes burdened with emotional disturbance, the heart grows weary with sorrow, and once again we are led down "...paths of righteousness..." to restore us. Rearmed and ready to take on future challenges, and we are renewed with strength and courage to carry-on.

IV. Verse four talks about God's guiding, protecting, and leading. *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."*

The motto of the 3rd Bn, 26th Marines is that of 'Path Finders'. I've witnessed point-men wielding aggressive machetes to cut trails through impassable jungle, and I have observed brave grunts volunteering to walk point to protect their fellow Devil Dogs, and to lead them safely to their next objective.

- A) First of all, to be a point man and a guide, one must be out in the front. Prior to anyone's death, the Lord Jesus Christ has already blazed the trail and cut a safe path. He is able to lead us "...through the shadow of death..." He is also out in front of those in sorrow, ever ready to give comfort.
- B) Secondly, God leads us "...through the valley..." and away from the dangerous minefields of evil. He also leads us away from sorrow beyond which we can bear. He leads us to wholesome thoughts and actions of faith. Only through faith and dependability on God can we bear the burden of grief gracefully.
- C) Finally, no person or word of condolences is able to supply the deep need of the innermost being like the presence of God. He is omnipresent; He is always there for us.

V. Verse five pictures our Supreme Commandant welcoming home those who have fought the battles. *"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."*

As we reflect on this passage, we can almost visualize George saddling up, and moving out on his final patrol. The Lord has led George "...through the valley of the shadow of death..." triumphantly.

And we can almost hear the voice of God welcoming George home. *"...Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."*

VI. Verse six speaks of our Final Duty Station. *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."*

Our Divine Point-Man has led the way to safety. God has sent out Marine Goodness and Marine Mercy to guard George's flanks, and Tail-End Charlie to protect his back, like every good squad leader.

The Lord has led the way, and;

"...Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

It's the end of the journey for George; he is home at last.

The twenty-third Psalm is a favorite passage of Scripture for Marines because it continually gives comfort, and because it is so very personal. Sixteen times we have the personal pronouns (I, me, my, and mine) appear.

*"The LORD is **my** shepherd; **I** shall not want. He maketh **me** to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth **me** beside the still waters. He restoreth **my** soul: he leadeth **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 thou art with **me**; thy rod and thy staff they comfort **me**. 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 for ever."*

Let me illustrate with this story.

Shortly after dusk, a platoon of Marines that were dug-in for the night came under a heavy B-40 and RPG rocket barrage, and there followed the subsequent response of blowing Claymores, and the return of small arms fire. Amid the clamor of the fight, there was heard the dreaded call of 'Corpsman Up.' Doc crawled to a Marine who had extensive wounds and immediately began the systematic evaluation of his condition and the feverish binding of his wounds.

In the thick of a 'firefight' an Officer, a Senior NCO, or a Company Corpsman will, of necessity, also serve as their Chaplain to give our wounded spiritual comfort.

Realizing the extent of the Marine's wounds, Doc told the grunt that God would see him through the valley, and his standing with the Lord could be made perfect, by grace through faith, in a moment's notice. *"For whosoever (you can put your name here) shall call upon the Name of the Lord, shall be saved."*

As the Marine began to slip into shock, the Corpsman said, "it is as simple as taking hold of your ring finger by faith." Doc systematically pointed to each finger beginning with the thumb and emphasized the fourth finger. *"The LORD is **my** shepherd."*

Doc received word that there were more casualties that needed help. He told the Marine that he would return as soon as possible, and he crawled away with the messenger.

After giving aid to two other wounded men, Doc made his way back to the first Marine. He found him lying silent in death with a look of peace on his face, a faint smile on his lips, and his ring finger was held tightly upon his chest as an indication of his faith and claim to the promise of eternal life. *The LORD is **my** shepherd. "...and **I** will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."*

Semper Fidelis

Chaplain Ron

Master Sergeant George Lester Sexton, United States Marine Corps. Our brother served with honor during the Vietnam War, and was the recipient of the Combat Action Ribbon, Navy Unit Commendation, Presidential Unit Citation, and numerous other Medals and Awards. George was a Charter Member and one of the Founders of the Lt Alexander Bonnyman Detachment, along with Frank Waller, Virgil Young, Nolan Sharbel, and Bill Gerst. George also served as the Commandant in 2000, and was State Chaplain for a number of years. Esprit de Corps, NEVER FORGET.

