

[Psalm 23](#) is probably one of the most well known Bible verses. But what exactly is “the valley of the shadow of death”? Here we see Christian needing to pass through it on his journey to the Celestial City, it was inevitable. There isn't one born again believer who will not at some point in their journey go through these kinds of valleys. But take courage, because James 1:2-4 says this; “*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*”

It is here in the valley, that satan unleashes the most hellish things and persons that go together with death. Notice that it's not death itself, but the shadow of death. It's a facsimile of what death is and what eternal separation from God will look like. They're like death traffickers, like drug or porn traffickers; these are meant to bring you down to bondage and death itself. Christian meets men who have fled the way to the Celestial City out of terror, before they've even arrived at the valley, discouraging Christian to not go there. Has that happened to you before? People come into your life to discourage you from moving forward in your walk with Jesus. Here is what they may tell you:

- a) They bring you an evil report full of fear about what lies ahead, yet it seems as though they're only governed by their own personal and sensual hesitations and do not really want to follow God's perfect will.
- b) They speak about the hellish creatures they see, which are actually demons. The spiritual warfare is very real.
- c) They convey the howling and shriek of people condemned to hell.
- d) They relate the discouraging clouds of confusion; that death brings depression, chaos, gloom and disarray.
- e) Ultimately they describe their rejection to Christ himself. They're shrinking back and ultimately will be consumed by death and destruction.

What's your vision, dream, calling or ministry that you know God is calling you to? All of these trials that these two men mentioned are assigned to keep you from fulfilling it. Ephesians 6:12 says; “*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*” Flesh and blood could be the voices of family, friends, co-workers, government, sickness etc. We have to always remember that it's a spiritual warfare that we wage.

As Christian starts his walk into the valley, he has his sword (the word of God) drawn, he encounters a ditch on one side and a quagmire on the other. The ditch represents those who insist that you live by the law as the Pharisees did with Jesus. Jesus came to fulfill the law, but religion or the law, want to keep you bound. Hence Jesus calls them the blind leading the blind that will fall into a ditch. [Matthew 15:10-14](#). The quagmire has no bottom, it brings fear and defilement and your ultimatum is death by drowning. I'm sure we've all experienced either indoors or outdoors when it's pitch black and you're doing everything you can to maintain your balance, equilibrium, sense of direction from not falling or hurting yourself. This is what Christian experiences as he traverses this narrow path in darkness. It reminds me of what Paul says in II Corinthians 7:5; “*...our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears.*” It's in times like this when all you can do is to continue to put one foot in front of the other. You may not seem to be the poster man or woman of faith, yet that's exactly what faith is, walking without always seeing where you're going. You're being obedient; you're walking by faith not by sight. It says of Abraham that “*he went out, not knowing where he was going*”, Hebrews 11:8. In the calling, election, vision, direction, ministry and dream that God has called you to, this is what you'll need to do at times. Jesus says in John 8:12; “*...I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.*”

Christian is not only overwhelmed by his circumstances but he now comes upon the yawning mouth of hell! Jesus relates hell as this in Matthew 13:41-42; “*The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all*

*things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*” It’s so overpowering, that Christian relies on another weapon called, ‘All-Prayer’. What is all-prayer? Ephesians 6:12 says; “*praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.*” When the fiery darts are flying, when hell seems to be licking at your feet, when everyone around you is discouraging you from pressing on and it seems as though you could easily fall into the ditch or the quagmire, here is what you do....pray in the Spirit! These voices may be blaring in your ears or they may be subtle suggestions with threats that will petrify your soul. They tell you to quit, to give up, that Jesus doesn’t love you, that you’ll never get healed, that you’ll lose your job...it could be a myriad of lies. Use the prayer language that the Holy Spirit has given you, pray with all prayers and supplications as Christian did.

These demonic attacks can be so severe that at times the devil falsely accuses and lies to you saying that they’re your thoughts, that you’re not even born again and you doubt your salvation. But James 4:7 says; “*Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” Pray in the Spirit and speak the word of God. The devil will flee in terror! Seek to find out where these suggestive voices are coming from and silence them. As being a Christian you can’t be possessed by the devil according to I Corinthians 6:20, but deceitful spirits may try to deceive you as it says in I Timothy 4:1; “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.*” Continue to pray and the Holy Spirit will reveal this to you and deliver you. Walk and pray, walk and pray! You’ll be surprised like Christian, to hear and see others passing through this same valley. You can encourage one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 says; “*And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*”

Be encouraged, the valley in your life will end, the day will dawn and you’ll be able to walk with steadfastness. That doesn’t mean that there will be no more trials as we see Christian had to continue to skirt around in his walk, but the light of Jesus illuminated his path so he could see clearly.

Two last devilish monsters loom ahead of Christian as he’s leaving his valley. In John Bunyan’s day, he identifies two evil forces which were at work that left a carnage of destruction in the lives of people; one was paganism and the other Catholicism. They seemed happy to reside together and both venomously opposed Christianity to the point of killing Christians. It would seem that with the advance of Christianity, paganism which is a term describing other religions, other than Christianity, had died and Catholicism, identified as the Pope, was losing its grip on the people. So here, Bunyan describes paganism as being dead (maybe a little over optimistic) and the Pope, only being able to taunt Christians in their personal walk with Jesus Christ, not having the power to lord it over them any longer. However, even with the birth of the Reformation and over the last few hundred years, we’ve seen an increase in paganism and Catholicism. Both of these continue to taunt, mock and even persecute Christians.

In bringing this message to a close, those of you who are in Christ Jesus, be wary of false religions (paganism) wanting to lump everyone to believe that ultimately they all believe the same thing, they serve the same God and they’re going to the same heaven. This is a lie! Jesus explicitly says in John 14:6; “*I AM the way, I AM the truth, and I AM the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.*” Be careful of false religions – including counterfeit Christianity – wanting to unify, to pray together, fellowship together, and bring religious peace together. It is clear deception. If you don’t know Jesus Christ as your Saviour, you can receive Him by simply asking Him to forgive you of your sin of rejecting him, and by faith, confess him as Lord and Saviour of your life and He will come and live in you through the power of the Holy Spirit!