

Fearless in the Valley of Shadows

Psalm 23

Advent & Children's Message: Peace
Charlie Brown Christmas

Psalm 23

A Song of David

I AM is my Shepherd, I do not lack.
In verdant pastures he lays me down
By restful waters he cares for me
He revitalizes my life, my soul
He leads me on good, righteousness ways for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through a valley of darkness
I do not fear evil, because you are with me.
Your rod and staff comfort me.
You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and kindness will pursue me all the days of my life,
And I will return to live in the house of I AM for eternity.

Nature of the Psalms

The Psalms are a personal expression made public.
It is about expressing yourself in ways that can be understood.
They allow us to realize we are not alone.
That being human, being among God's people is a shared experience.
We learn to pray through the psalms but we also learn about ourselves.

The Most Wonderfully Stressful Time of the Year!

It is not true that the greatest numbers of suicide are during the Christmas season.
In fact, December has the least suicide of any other month.
Experts say it is because you are often surrounded by your support system during Christmas.
Suicide, however, makes a 40% jump after Christmas in January.

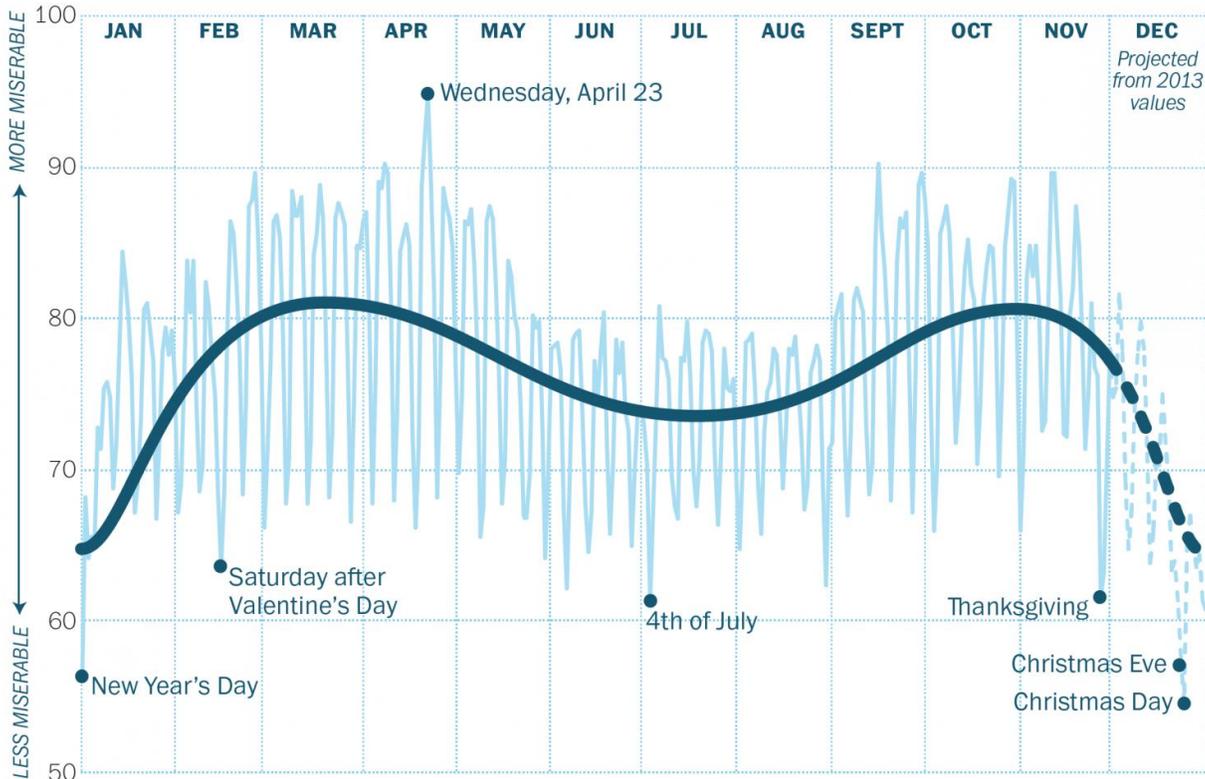




Again, some who are in the know say this is because of the let down that comes both after Christmas and New Year's resolutions. What we do know, however, is that Christmas is one of the most stressful and depressing times of the year.

Daily Misery Index, 2014

Higher numbers = more search interest for “depression,” “anxiety,” “pain,” “stress” and “fatigue.”
Light blue line (—) shows raw value, darker line (●) shows trend.



WASHINGTONPOST.COM/**WONKBLOG**

Source: Google Trends

The reasons

according to psychcentral.com are:

1. Finances - Shopping for gifts and commercialism, end of year finances
2. Stressed - overworked, over-tired, not enough sleep, finishing for the holidays, shopping!
3. Loneliness
4. Grief - you remember those you once celebrated with, friends and family who have passed
5. Estrangement - broken relationships, guilt, resentment
6. Divorce - balancing children and family within divided relationships
7. Pleasing - You try to make others happy by meeting their expectations - parties, gifts, happy face
8. SAD - Seasonal Affective Disorder

A Song of David

The youngest of 8 boys, he was the one that didn't seem to matter.

He fought Goliath.

He serves Saul but Saul is jealous.

He marries Saul's daughter and is best friends with Saul's son Jonathan.

Saul turns on him and he is cut off from his wife (she is married off to someone else!) and best friend.

He was hunted by Saul for 10 years.

He lives like a fugitive and even among his enemies, the Philistines.

Jonathan is separated from him during those years and eventually killed by the Philistines.

He eventually becomes King but his life is full of court intrigues.

He deals with famine, disease, murder and death.

He commits adultery and murder.

He has many wives.

His son rapes and commits incest with Tamar, his daughter.
Absolom, Tamar's full brother, kills Amnon and eventually drives David from Jerusalem in a coup.
Absolom is eventually killed by David's fighters.
In his failing health and old age he survives another coup.
This is a author of the Shepherd's Psalm.

What is Stressing You Out?: Write it down.

Shepherd of Souls:

I AM is my Shepherd, I do not lack.

Is God really your shepherd?
Or do you rely on your own wits, wealth or effort?
Do you feel more content or lack?
Even with little we can be content.
It is not about what or how much you have.
It is about who you are with.
A baby cries when it is not embraced.

Embraced

*In verdant pastures he lays me down
By restful waters he cares for me
He revitalizes my life, my soul
He leads me on good paths for his name's sake.*

God is not like any shepherd.
He lays you down.
He cares for you.
He give life and vitality when you are desiccated.
These are passive verbs - in other words, God is taking care of you.
You are not the one who has to make their place in the world.
He takes you to higher ground.

Can you really relax and let God care for us?

The Valley of Shadows

*Even though I walk through a valley of darkness
I do not fear evil, because you are with me.
Your rod and staff comfort me.
You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

Notice the shift from third person reference to first person.
He is not talking about God but to God.

The valley of shadows a place of grief and danger.
Evil is not only personalized evil - it means all that is bad.
Why? Because he is present.

The rod and staff are weapons used to defend you.
They make you safe.
Who is attacking you?

He feasts you in front of your enemies.
Who can eat when under stress, especially with enemies?

Anointing is a sign of blessing/favour and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

My cup overflows.

In your stress, are you able to turn from it and find peace?
How?
By recognizing God's favour.
By trusting him.

Pray this in your own heart.

Every Day & Forever

*Surely goodness and kindness will pursue me all the days of my life,
And I will return to live in the house of I AM forever.*

It never ends.
No one can rob you of this peace, except maybe yourself.

Only one thing happens to a person who is anxious.
It is called hell.
Hell on earth.
No peace, no contentment, only war and struggle.
Not only for you, but you make it hell for everyone else around you.
Your mother, your father, your children, your family, your friends, your coworkers, your church,
your boss, your clients, even total strangers.

Anxiety is contagious.
It is an epidemic that makes ebola look like child's play.
It affects over 40 million people in North America.
That is 20% of the population. At a cost of 42 billion dollars estimated in the U.S.
[\[http://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics\]](http://www.adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics)
That is 1 out of every 5 people in this room.
Even that can make you feel anxious.

But there was angel who told us not to be afraid.
"Fear not," he said.
"Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth,
peace to those upon whom his favour rests."
These were words given to shepherds.

And make no mistake, Jesus lays claim to being the good shepherd. (John 10)
Three times he says, "I AM the good shepherd..."
This shepherd.
This psalm.
Your Shepherd.
My Shepherd.

He is *Sar-Shalom*
The Prince of Peace,

and for those who believe,
he gives true peace.

[Communion]

"The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:5-7)