

**Janet Goodall** allows us a sneak preview of her forthcoming book *The Shepherd is My Lord*

# A Valley EXPERIENCE

**H**owever I reached this place, there is no possible evil, without or within, that our Good Shepherd is powerless to keep at bay or to slay. He is a match for them all.

I can either react to the difficulties in ways that only add to the pain, or I can respond to the nail-pierced hand that has allowed them. It can take time to make the change, for the spirit might be willing but my emotions have left me too weak for much more than SOS prayers. Some comfort comes from Paul's testimony of the solace found in his valley: 'But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"'.<sup>1</sup> Even a heavy heart can respond to that.

At times like this, it is also some comfort to know that, in his own darkest valley, the crucified Lord cried 'Why?'<sup>2</sup> I can see now the answer to his question in the light of his resurrection and my salvation; he sees already the answer to mine. Whatever the feelings, the fact is that as then, so now, he loves me with unfailing love. His presence will never fail. His power will open up the way and bring me out into the clear again. I cannot fly out of this valley on the wings of a dove, nor run away from it, but *I will walk through it*, step by step, with his help. Perhaps only then will I realise how, in this dark, strange, confined and fearful place, I have slowly come to know the Shepherd more personally than I have ever known him before. I can no longer be objective as I describe his role.

One Sunday morning I was invited to a Jewish synagogue to join a group who were discussing this particular psalm of David. It was a

privileged and interesting experience in other ways to be in the company of students whose primary focus was on the Old Testament, and I was invited to join in the discussion if I wished. There came a moment when I felt impelled to speak, as one of the company said, 'I have never understood why in the fourth verse the psalmist changes from using the third person singular to the second'. 'Why!' I found myself exclaiming, 'It's in life's valleys that we get to know him so much better. *He* leads and guides, but in the valley, *you* are with me'.

Yes, he is *my* Shepherd, and I have so far been happy to accept the many benefits he provides for all of us in his flock. Now he has proved himself faithful on a more intimate and personal level, when I have been in big trouble and utterly dependent on him. I'm getting to know him better because I've not just been one amongst many. We have walked this lonely way together. Whether I come out the other side to find myself face to face with my Lord and Shepherd, death behind and eternal life still stretching ahead, or whether the end of the valley finds me still walking beside him here on earth, the outcome is up to him. The certainty is that he is with me, all the way, and banishes fear. I will therefore fear no evil.

*Janet Goodall is a retired paediatric consultant in Stoke on Trent*

## references

1. 2 Corinthians 12:9
2. Matthew 27:46