



Psalm 23

“The LORD is my Shepherd, I lack nothing.”

This week we study the best known and best loved of all psalms, Psalm 23. This psalm is a song of trust or confidence in God. Author, David, reflects on the work of God using the metaphor of a shepherd and his flock. David recalls the protection of God through the dangers of life as well as the blessings God has bestowed on him. Reflecting on God’s faithful work and protection leads the psalmist to conclude that God will restore him to a lasting communion with the Lord. Some present the psalm as having two familiar metaphors; the Lord as shepherd (1-4) and host of a banquet (5-6), while other commentators consider the entire psalm to be written from the viewpoint of sheep and the goodness of the shepherd. Either way the song reflects the confidence of the author in relying on the Lord with no need to fear.

1 The LORD is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing.

*2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside the quiet waters,*

3 He restores my soul.

He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.

*4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and staff, they comfort me.*

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup overflows.

*6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

The Lord as Shepherd (1-4)

The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall lack nothing.

It is natural for God’s people to regard him as the Shepherd of the sheep as they recall how God brought them to the Promised Land, however, right away in the 23rd Psalm we notice the personal tone. Told here is the intimate relationship of God with one of his people.

God has promised to care for His people but he also cares intimately for each individual. Read the psalm out loud giving emphasis to the personal pronouns.

Look at the psalm again this time noting everything that the sheep do not lack. Here are a few thoughts to get you started:

I shall not lack rest—why? He makes me lie down.

I shall not lack food—why? He gives me green pastures.

I shall not lack peace—why? He leads me to quiet waters.

I shall not lack encouragement—why? He restores my soul.

As believers, we know that Christ referred to Himself as the Shepherd. Look up the following references where Jesus explains He is 'The Shepherd'.

John 10:11 and 14

1 Peter 5:4

Hebrews 13:20

Jesus is the good shepherd that provides all the needs for His followers.

Questions to consider:

Who is your shepherd? In whom do you trust when you are feeling afraid? To whom do you turn for direction? Share how you can rely daily on the good shepherd.

Verses 2 and 3

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,

He leads me beside the quiet waters,

3 He restores my soul.

He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Just as the physical body needs water, scripture clearly points out that the human soul has a capacity and need for the water of the Holy Spirit. When sheep are thirsty they become restless and set out in search of water to satisfy their thirst. If sheep are not led to clean drinking water when they are thirsty, they often end up drinking water from polluted sources filled with parasites and germs. In the same manner, Christ made it clear that thirsty souls of men and women can only be fully satisfied when their capacity and thirst for spiritual life is fully quenched by drawing on Himself. Saint Augustine summed it up so well, "*O God! Thou hast made us for Thyself and our souls are restless, searching, 'til they find their rest in Thee.*"

When David wrote Psalm 23 he knew this truth. Looking at life from the standpoint of sheep he says the shepherd alone knows where the still, quiet, deep, clean, pure water is to be found that alone can satisfy His sheep and keep them fit and strong.

Questions to consider:

Where do you spend time drinking in the still waters that give life? Is your time with God regular and consistent? Do you have a place where God meets with you; where to wait to hear His voice? Share or write down a time when God refreshed your soul. Why do you think God does this?

Verse 4

*4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and staff, they comfort me.*

The shepherd leads his flock to higher pastures up the rocky mountain during the intense heat of the summer. He does this to take his sheep to the best fields. But to get there he must lead them through the valley—the safest way to the top. The valley provides good grazing, clear water and an easier path to reach higher elevations. The valley also hides unwanted predators. The shepherd must be watchful, carefully guarding the sheep as they travel. Through storms, landslides and predator attacks the shepherd watches over his flock so they need not fear and arrive safely at the lush upper fields. In life, we will have valleys—no question about it. We know that Christ as our shepherd is walking with us, guiding, teaching, protecting.

Questions to consider:

How do you react to the valleys in your life? How do you go through them?

With Christ we can face the valleys with confidence and serenity. Sharing and remembering past experiences that God has walked us through builds strength and confidence. Share how God helped you to go through a difficult time. What did you learn about the character of God?

Verses 5 and 6

*5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

As the shepherd brings his flock to a new field, before allowing them to enter, he carefully inspects the field for danger. When finding snake holes, he pours a circle of oil at the top of the hole and pours oil over each sheep's head. When the snakes sense the sheep overhead and attempt to attack from their holes, they are unable to do so. Their smooth bodies cannot pass over the slippery oil. The oil on the sheep's head acts as a repellent in case a snake does get close. In a very literal sense the shepherd prepares the table—the meadow—and the sheep are able to graze in abundance right in the enemy's presence.

The last verse tells us that God brings goodness and love behind us all our days. Our Lord deals with us so kindly, so graciously! He goes before us (v. 3) and behind us (v. 6).

Read Ephesians 3:20. How lavishly our Father provides! What abundance He gives us!

Questions to consider:

What do you deserve? Take a mental inventory of your blessings including relationships, money, possessions, standard of living and express your response to God in prayer. Do you know someone that is feeling uncertain about their future? Take time to call them with encouragement!