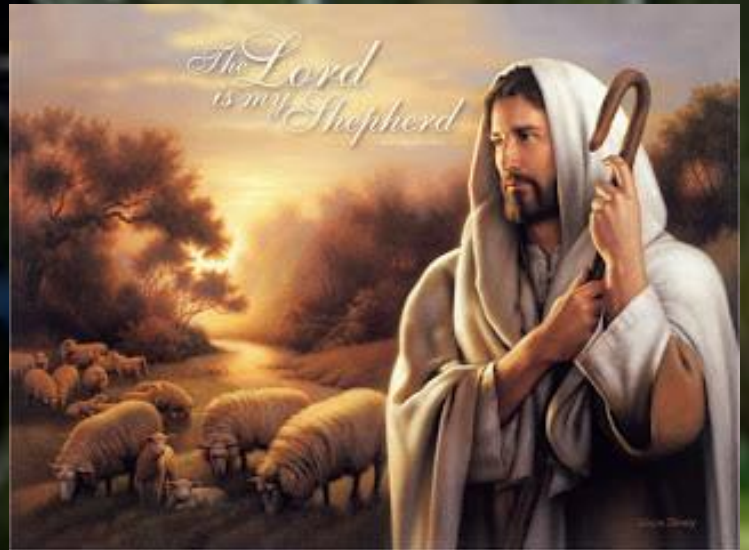


23 Lessons from Psalm 23

Christian Home Week, 2016



¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. ³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴ 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. ⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. ⁶ 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.

INTRODUCTION

The words of the 23rd psalm continue to comfort countless of persons. For Christian Home Week, consider going through the psalm as follows. There are a total of 23 devotionals in addition to introductions so feel free to pick and choose what you would like to go through.

Introduction

1. The Setting: Psalm 22, 24.
2. The Sheep: Psalm 23

Verse One

3. The Shepherd: *The LORD is my shepherd* (v. 1a.)
4. The Satisfaction: *I shall not want* (v. 1b)

Verse Two

5. The Settling: *He maketh me to lie down* (v. 2a)
6. The Sustenance of the : *in green pastures* (v. 2b)
7. The Submission of the sheep: *He leadeth me* (v. 2c)
8. The Serenity of Shepherd's lead: *beside the still waters* (v. 2d)

Verse Three

9. The Soul's Restoration: *He restoreth my soul* (v. 3a)
10. The Salvation of Righteousness: *He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness*
11. The Sake of His Name: *for His name's sake* (v. 3b)

Verse Four

12. The Steps through the Valley: *Yea, though I walk through the valley* (v. 4a)
13. The Shadow of Death: *of the shadow of death* (v. 4b)
14. The Separation from Fear: *I will fear no evil* (v. 4c)
15. The Staying of the Savior: *for Thou art with me* (v. 4d)
16. The Soothing Protection *Thy rod and Thy staff* (v. 4e)
17. The Solace in Correction: *they comfort me* (v. 4f)

Verse Five

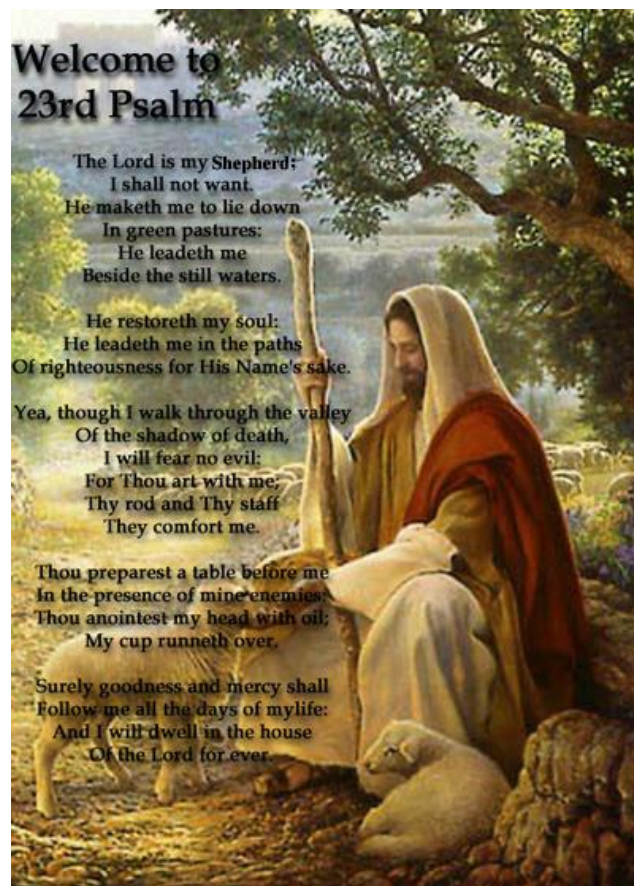
18. The Supply of Nourishment: *Thou preparest a table before me* (v. 5a)
19. The Surrounding of Adversity: *in the Presence of mine enemies* (v. 5b)
20. The Sanctification of the Spirit: *Thou anointest my head with oil* (v. 5c)
21. The Superabundance of the Spirit: *my cup runneth over* (v. 5d)

Verse Six

22. The Surety of Earthly Blessings: *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life* (v. 6a)
23. The Sanctuary of Eternal Blessings: *and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.* (v. 6b)

Introduction Part 1. Set between Suffering and Sovereignty

Introduction to Psalm 23



Between the Suffering Christ of Psalm 22 and the Sovereign Christ of Psalm 24 is the Shepherd Christ of Psalm 23. Of this psalm, Martin Luther said, "Of all the figures that are applied to God in the Old Testament, that of a shepherd is the most beautiful. It brings to the godly, when they read it or hear it, as it were, a confidence, a consolation or security, like the word father."

The Shepherd's psalm is nestled between Christ's suffering and sovereignty, providing that confidence and consolation Luther wrote about. When you look at this psalm, you find the feelings of suffering, but also a song. That is a picture of the caring shepherd. The good shepherd knows about the wounds of life, wounds you may think, "These will never heal up."

But the fact that Christ has suffered as seen in psalm 22 is proof that God can identify with us and our wounds. Psalm 22 begins with "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*" quoted by Christ on the cross, and showing us that He identifies with our utter despair.

The fact that Christ is sovereign as seen in psalm 24 is proof that God can rescue us from our problems. The psalm which follows the Shepherd's psalm promises a triumphant return of the King of Glory and the Lord of hosts who will come valiantly through the mighty gates and everlasting doors. "*The King of glory shall come in. 'Who is this King of glory?' The Lord strong and mighty. The Lord mighty in battle*" (Ps. 24:7b-8).

And the fact that Christ is our Shepherd as we will see in this study is proof that God's loving care will watch over us dumb, helpless, needy sheep.

"Lord Jesus, help us this month to see You as our Shepherd who watches over us, relating with our human weaknesses and reigning with your godly strength. Amen."

Introduction Part 2. The Sheep: You make the Shepherd Happy

C.H. Spurgeon said of the 23rd Psalm, ***“It is David’s Heavenly Pastoral; a surpassing ode, which none of the daughters of music can excel...This is the pearl of Psalms whose soft and pure radiance delights every eye.”***

Perhaps it is so loved because it is told from the vantage point of a sheep. The identification of a shepherd towards his sheep is something Christ used repeatedly.

In English, sheep can be singular or plural, but the 23rd Psalm is written in the first person. We must see the writer not as “us” or “we”, but “me” and “I”. He is “my” Shepherd because I belong to Him. Jesus called me “His.” What a wonderful thing.

Luke 15:6 says *“And when he came home, he called together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, ‘Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.’”* Do you know that when you became one of His sheep, He rejoiced and got the whole host of heaven to rejoice.

Do you know you can’t cover up who you are and if you could, God wouldn’t love you more? You can’t cover up who you are and Jesus doesn’t love you any less. Read John 10:14-16 *“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine ¹⁵ As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* In the Greek, there is no period between verse 14 and 15. Just as Jesus knows His Father and just as the Father knows the Son, Jesus knows all about you, even the numbers of your head and loves you anyway.

Because I am His sheep, I believe and follow Him. See John 10:26 *“But you believe not, because you are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”*

This second lesson on the sheep is that I am important to the Shepherd.

***“Thank you Lord Jesus in delighting in me.
Help me remember today that I am important to you
and I bring you joy. Amen.”***



3. The Shepherd: When My Shepherd and God's Shepherd met

Verse 1a: Psalm 23

Albert Barnes wrote, "The psalm has always been regarded as one of exquisite beauty. The leading thought is his full belief that God would provide for him, and that he would never be left to want."

The word "LORD" is the name *Jehovah, Yah-weh*, a name Jesus uses in the Seven "I AM" statements in gospel of John[1] and the book of the Revelation.[2] Jesus literally means "Jehovah is Salvation." When Moses needed to define who God was, God revealed Himself as Jehovah (Exod. 3:14), "the self-existent One" (Scofield).

Secondly notice that the Shepherd is *mine*. Spurgeon said that the sweetest word in the sweetest psalm is the word "my." He is *my* Substitute, receiving the affliction we deserve. The word "shepherd" in a Hebrew dictionary is next to the word "friend." When you read this psalm, do not read as a poem or as a mere work of literature. Read it as one who knows the Shepherd intimately.

Third, Jesus is God's Shepherd. The phrase "my shepherd" is only used again in Zech. 13:7 "*Awake, O sword, against my shepherd ... saith the LORD of hosts: smite the shepherd...*" God's Shepherd is not a hireling who runs from danger. He justified me in His death (John 10:10), sanctifies me in His life ("*that Great Shepherd of the sheep (will make) you perfect in every good work to do his will,*" Heb. 13:20-21), and "*And when the chief Shepherd shall appear,*" (1 Pet. 5:4) He will glorify me.

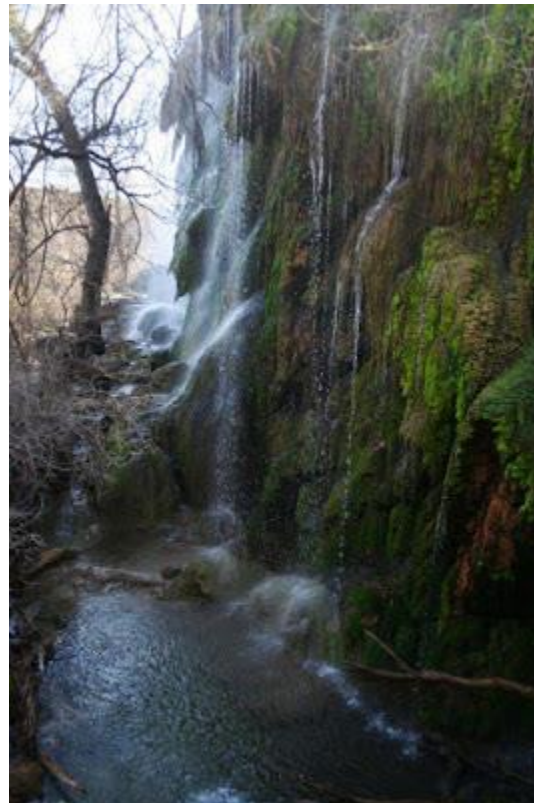
My shepherd and God's shepherd met at Calvary, making Him "*who knew no sin to become sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God*" (2 Cor. 5:21).

"My Lord and My Shepherd, I glorify you for loving me enough to die for me, living for me to sanctify me, and for never leaving me. Thank you for becoming God's Shepherd for me."

[1] **Seven Intransitive "I AM" Statements in John:** ¹"I AM that speaks to you" (John 4:26); ²"I AM, do not fear" (John 6:20); ³"If you do not believe that I AM" (John 8:24); ⁴"...you will know that I AM" (John 8:28); ⁵"Before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58); ⁶"You may believe that I AM" (John 13:19); ⁷"Jesus said to them, 'I AM'" (John 18:5).

Seven Transitive "I AM" Statements in John: ¹"I AM the Bread of Life" (John 6:35, 48, 51); ²"I AM the Light of the World" (John 8:12, 9:5); ³"I AM the Door" (John 10:9); ⁴"I AM the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11, 14); ⁵"I AM the Resurrection and the Life" (John 11:25); ⁶"I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life" (John 14:6); ⁷"I AM the True Vine" (John 15:1, 5).

[2] **Seven "I AM" Statements in Revelation:** ¹"I AM Alpha and Omega" (Revelation 1:8, 11, 21:6, 22:13); ²"I AM the beginning and the ending" (Revelation 1:8, 21:6, 22:13); ³"I AM the first and the last" (Revelation 1:11, 17, 22:13); ⁴"I AM He that liveth..." (Revelation 1:18); ⁵"I AM He which searcheth the reins and hearts" (Revelation 2:23); ⁶"I AM the root and offspring of David" (Revelation 22:16); ⁷"I AM the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16).



4. The Satisfaction: With Him, what do you lack? Without Him, what do you have?

Psalm 23:1b

Baptist pastor F.B. Meyer said of Psalm 23 “Come hither, weary ones, restless ones, heavy-laden ones; sit down in this cool and calm resort, while the music of its rhythm charms away the thoughts that break your peace. How safe and blessed are you to whom the Lord is Shepherd! Put down this volume and repeat again, in holy reverie, the well-known words to the end, and see if they do not build themselves into a refuge on which the storms may break in vain.”



A little girl was quoting from memory the 23rd Psalm, but did not quite get it right: “The Lord is my shepherd, He is all I want.” She may not have gotten it verbatim but she did capture the heart of David, “He is all I want.”

When I come to the Lord as my Shepherd, I am satisfied in Him. I may lack material things, I certainly will not be perfect, but I can find contentment in Christ, not because of material fullness but *in spite* of my lacking. Jesus said it also on the Sermon on the Mount, “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied*” (Matt. 5:6, ESV). I shall not be in lack or short of anything I need when I rely on God.

R.B. Thieme Jr. said that because the word “want” is in the Greek version of the Old Testament in the imperfect tense, it could be translated “I cannot want or lack for anything.” That can be true because if you are not wanting something you don’t have, you do not have any feelings of

unfulfillment.

Hmm. That’s too many double negatives. Let me say it this way. If the only thing you want is what you have, you only have feelings of fulfillment.

Hmm again. Maybe I should say what Jesus said, “*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*” (Matthew 16:26). When John D. Rockefeller, one of the wealthiest men in the world, died, someone asked “how much did he leave?” His accountant answered, “all of it.”

The rich young ruler kept all the rules, but missed the Shepherd. Jesus said, “One thing you lack: go your way, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven.”

You know the rest of the story. He went away sadly because he loved the world which left him empty and left the Shepherd who loved him fully.

If Jesus is your Shepherd, what do you lack? If He is not your Shepherd, what do you have?

Father, grant me contentment today. Let me treasure you in my life and forget the things that I don't have. Help me to find you as all I want and find fulfillment in that alone. Amen

5. The Settling of His Refreshing: "He makes me to lie down"

Psalm 23:2a



Professor and Author Dr. Kyle M. Yates expressed it eloquently: ***“Because He loves me as the good Shepherd, I shall never want. Does He leave out anything in the world that a soul can possibly need? Every material and every spiritual need is provided for helpless, needy creatures who look to the Shepherd for such satisfactions. Only in Him can they be found.”***

Parallel passages. The Shepherd satisfies me and He also settles me down. The imagery of lying down is found in other verses. Job 11:19 says *“Also you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid...”* Ps. 4:8 proclaims, *“I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for only You, LORD, make me dwell in safety.”* In Isa. 17:2: *“...they shall be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”* Eze. 34:14-15 expounds the imagery even further, *“I will feed them in a good pasture and on the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there they shall lie in a good fold, and in a lush pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord GOD.”* Also in Zeph. 3:13 speaks of God’s people, *“...for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid.”*

Peace. Sheep are naturally and easily frightened; it is difficult for a shepherd to make his flock to lie down in complete repose. “Lie down” literally means the folding of the legs in a reclining position. Imagine the care a shepherd has to have to make his skittish and scared sheep to be completely comfortable in lying down. A good shepherd will provide peace. Jesus makes me lie down with His peace that passes all understanding. Unlike the world’s peace (John 14:27), His peace is internal and eternal. Hebrews 13:20-21 says, *“Now the God of peace, who from the dead brought our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep...may He make you complete.”*

Protection. There must be safety from harm, predators, sounds and even each other. Sadly we like sheep can also need protection from each other. The Shepherd settles His sheep by providing protection. Once secure, the legs of the sheep fold down and lay down with their “bellies nestled deep in the long shoots of grass. A still pond on one side, the watching shepherd on the other...Who is in charge? The shepherd.” (Max Lucado, *Traveling Light*, pg. 40).

Passion of the Shepherd. What motivates Christ to make me lie down? Matthew 9:36 says, *“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”* His love makes me lie down. Not by force or coercion but by the immanence of His great love and compassion.

Fold your legs today and recline in His peace.

Lie down in the shadow of the Shepherd’s protection.

Rest in lush pastureland of His passionate love for you.

“Dear Shepherd of my soul, I am so stubborn and skittish and scared sometimes. Thank you for making me to lie down in You. Amen.”

6. The Sustenance of His Residence: "in green pastures"

Psalm 23:2b

"Do more beloved words exist?" asked Max Lucado. "Framed and hung in hospital halls, scratched on prison walls, quoted by the young, and whispered by the dying. In these lines sailors have found a harbor, the frightened have found a father, and strugglers have found a friend. Can you find ears on which these words have never fallen?"

A shepherd has a destination in mind as he takes out his flock. So does the Good Shepherd for me. The word "pastures" can also be translated as places of habitation, residences, even houses. The destined habitation for the sheep is a place which would be full of nourishment. So also is God's destination for me.



One way a shepherd will "make" his sheep lie down is to fill them full of nourishment. Often, I am anxious and do not lie down and rest in my Lord because I fail to feast on the spiritual nourishment my Shepherd has for me.

In John 6:35, Jesus said, *"I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."* I am to be nourished by residing in the Word of God. Matthew 4:4 proclaims that *"man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."*

The sheep feast in green, lush pastures, filled with freshly sprouted grass. For the sheep to fully digest the grass, they must consume and then rest to allow for several stages of digestion. They graze during the day and then chew their cud for digestion throughout the night. Likewise, it is not enough for my spiritual nourishment to simply feast on the Word in the day. I must put the words into practice during the dark and long nights of my spiritual journey. I must *"hunger and thirst for righteousness"* in order for me to be filled.

Grazing on food more easily digested than grass can cause the sheep to become bloated and even die. I need the milk of the Word but also the meat of spiritual food. Without internalizing the word, applying it and practicing the righteousness of God during hard and dark times, God's truths will never be fully realized.

What is on your spiritual menu? Is Christ residing in you? Are you reading His Word? Is His righteousness what you hunger and thirst for?

My Shepherd, I have failed. I have longed for spiritual food that is not in your prepared pastures. I want to eat food by day but not properly apply it in the dark nights. Forgive me. Feed me in your pastureland. Amen.

7. The Submission to His Rule: "He leadeth me"

Psalm 23:2c

Martin Luther wrote, *"Of all the figures that are applied to God in the Old Testament that of a shepherd is the most beautiful. (T)he sweet word shepherd...brings to the godly...a confidence, a consolation or security, like the word father. A sheep can only live through the help, protection, and care of its shepherd. As soon as it loses him, it is exposed to dangers of every kind, and must perish, for it cannot help itself. The reason is, it is a poor, weak, silly creature. But weak creature though it be, it has the habit of keeping diligently near its shepherd, of depending upon his help and protection; it follows wherever he leads, and, if it can only be near him, it cares for nothing, is afraid of no one, but feels secure and happy, for it wants for nothing."*

The Leading Shepherd. My Shepherd knows how to lead. He gets in front of me, never leading from behind. John 10:4 *"And when he put forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice."* In Israel, it is the butcher, not the shepherd, who walks behind the sheep. He leads because He has gone before me...

i) **In Evil Temptations** - Heb. 2:18 says, *"For in that He Himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted."* Heb. 4:15 *"For we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points He was tempted as we are, yet without sin."*

ii) **In Earthly Humiliation** - Phil. 2 *"⁵Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in the form of God, did not think it robbery to be equal with God: ⁷But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: ⁸And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*

iii) **In Eternal Restoration** - Revelation 7:17 *"For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."* He is the Good Shepherd because He is also the Lamb who identifies with us and our needs.

The Led Sheep. Twice in this short psalm, I am encouraged to relish the leadership of my Shepherd, first here in verse two in His leading me in serene refreshment and then again in the following verse for His leading me in sanctifying righteousness. Because my Shepherd has gone before me, I can trust Him because He knows where He came from and where He is going. John 8:14 *"Jesus answered ... 'for I know whence I came, and whither I go; but ye cannot tell whence I come, and whither I go.'"*

Not only does Jesus know the way, Jesus *is* the way. John 14:5-6 *"⁵ Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we know not where You are going; and how can we know the way?' ⁶ Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me.'"* Sheep are nearsighted, cannot smell water, and have no sense of direction. As a result, they cannot find still waters on their own. But when I know the Shepherd, I know the way, even if I cannot see nor sense the direction I am going.

Most of all, my Shepherd knows me by name and because He has spoken to me so often and so lovingly, I know His voice, especially when he calls my name. *"the sheep hear (the shepherd's) voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out."*

***"Savior, like a shepherd lead me,
much I need Your tender care;
in Your pleasant pastures feed me,
for our use Your folds prepare.
Blessed Jesus, You have bought me, I am Yours ."***

8. The Serenity of His Rest: “beside the still waters”

Psalm 23:2d

Our Pastor, Dr. Randy Wallace, used the 23rd Psalm to talk with the preschoolers and it reminded me how versatile this psalm is...children memorize it and yet it is one of the most used verses at the funerals.

Restful waters. The waters are not just still, they are what I call “resting waters.” In nearly every other location in the Old Testament, the word used for “still” is translated “rest.” (see blueletterbible.org).

Jesus said, “*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” (Matt. 11:28-30). If I am uptight about things of this world, I need to remember that is not God's will for me.



This is not just a “New Testament” revelation. God has always wanted me to be at rest. One day a week He calls me to “rest”. After all, He created Adam and Even in a garden! The same word for “still” waters is also used in Isa. 32:17 *“the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever. And My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”* Our dwelling place is to be at rest; our habitation is to be peaceful.

Isaiah 28:12 says, *“This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest and this is the refreshing...”* but then the verse ends with **“yet they would not hear.”** O stubborn sheep, hear this today! O foolish lamb, listen to My Shepherd and follow His leading to those restful waters.

Relaxing Waters. Sheep will not go to rapidly running water. Even if their short legs could help them in swimming, their wooly coats would soon weigh them down. The phrase, “The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you” is seen in the fact that a good shepherd will gently lead his sheep alongside calm waters.

Refreshing Waters. Neither will my Shepherd allow me to drink from stagnant, putrid waters. Without a strong sense of smell, a sheep will not care from what waters he drinks. Keller writes, **“When sheep are thirsty, they become restless and set out in search of water to satisfy their thirst. If not led to the good water supplies of clean, pure water, they will often end up drinking from the polluted pot holes.”**

Do you have a spiritual sheep nose? When thirsty do you go to just any water? Let the Shepherd lead you to resting, relaxing, refreshing waters.

“Shepherd, I am Thine, Thou dost befriend me, be the guardian of my way; Keep Thy flock from sin, defend me; seek me when I go astray. Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus! Hear O hear me when I pray. Amen.”

23 LESSONS FROM THE 23RD PSALM

PART 2: LESSONS 9-11

W.A. Criswell said, “*He restoreth my soul, He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.’ First the man is accepted. He is restored, “He restoreth my soul.” That’s first, then the works that God we pray will bless. It is so in the tabernacle and in the temple. First is the altar, the sacrifice, the atonement for sins and then the door into the house of God, into the sanctuary of the Lord. First the man is atoned for. First he is accepted. Then he approaches God.*”



The Soul’s Restoration. “He restores my soul” (v. 3a). My soul can be restored! How? What does that mean? Notice what bookends this part of the psalm--Before: “He leads beside the still waters.” After: “He leads me in paths of righteousness.”

In the middle of the two acts of His beckoning call to follow Him is the very act of God’s restoration within my soul. Twice I am told to follow His leadership because He will be leading me to restore the very essence of my being!

The Shepherd’s Leading. Before we get to Lesson 9, let us look at a real-life story about what it means to be led by Christ.

“He Leadeth Me, He Leadeth Me.”

On March 26th, 1862, in the midst of the heaviest fighting of the Civil War, a young man fresh out of theological school, was supply preaching at the First Baptist Church in Philadelphia. At the mid-week service, Joseph Gilmore taught on the 23rd Psalm.

He later wrote, “I did not get further than the words ‘He Leadeth Me.’ Those words took hold of me as they had never done before, and I saw them in a significance and wondrous beauty of which I had never dreamed.”

Gilmore spoke of how God’s leadership and our submission is the one significant fact in human experience, that it makes no difference how we are led, or where we are led to, as long as we are sure that God is leading us. After the meeting, Pastor Gilmore penciled the following words

*He leadeth me, O blessed thought! /
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!*

*Whatever I do, wherever I be /
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.*

*Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom, /
Sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,*

*By waters still, over troubled sea, /
Still 'tis His hand that leadeth me.*

*And when my task on earth is done, /
When by Thy grace the victory's won,*

*Even death's cold wave I will not flee, /
Since God through Jordan leadeth me.*

*He leadeth me, He leadeth me, /
By His own hand He leadeth me;*

*His faithful follower I would be /
For by His hand He leadeth me.*

Unknown to him, his wife took the words he wrote, sent it to a Boston paper and William B. Bradbury set it to music. About three years later, Gilmore went to Rochester, New York, to preach as a candidate before the Second Baptist Church. Going into their chapel, Gilmore casually wondered what the church would be singing. He opened the hymnal and was shocked to see his own words there, written quickly yet identically to how it was printed on the pages before him.

Is your soul in need of restoration, of healing? Perhaps when you submit to His leading, healing will occur. Tomorrow we will discuss more of the soul's restoration.

***“Lord, I will place my hand in Thine,
and never murmur nor repine;
I will be content, whatever lot I see,
Since it is You, my God, Who leadeth me.
Amen.”***

9. The Soul's Restoration: "He restoreth my soul"

Psalm 23:3a



Phillip Keller, a shepherd and author of *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, says, ***"It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. Our mass mind (or mob instincts), our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are all parallels of profound importance. Yet despite these adverse characteristics Christ chooses us, buys us, calls us by name, makes us His own and delights in caring for us."***

What is the "soul" and why would it need to be restored? The soul is a part of the "human trinity" of my body, soul, and spirit. 1 Thess. 5:23 says that all three need to be sanctified and preserved completely. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Good Shepherd does not restore the souls of those who do not belong to Him. He only returns what was once at a better place, close to the Shepherd's heart. A person who is not saved cannot have a restoration of soul, unless he first is saved.

I spoke with a brother in Christ today who was clearly and admittedly agitated and irritated. What's worse, I was the cause for his irritation. What was even worse than that, I saw myself and my easily troubled and unrestored emotions of irritations in him. In fact, if truth be told, the worst of all is, I have acted far worse than he did and I told him so. My soul, even though saved, needs to be restored from time to time. But God cannot restore something that has never been stored in the first place.

My soul can be redeemed or reclaimed by God from danger, either physical or spiritual harm (see Ps. 49:15, 34:22, 55:18, 69:18, Ps 71:23). It can be instructed (Ps. 13:2, 19:7, 139:14) and is the seat of my appetites, desires, emotions, and personality. Therefore my soul can be "cast down" (Ps. 42:5-6, 11) or sad (Ps. 35:12) or happy (see Ps 35:9, 86:4) or vain (Ps 24:4, Ps 34:2) or patient (Ps 33:20).

A shepherd counts and looks for his sheep not only because they wander off, but because they can often become physically cast down and unable to get back up. Without the help of a shepherd, they might never upright themselves and die within hours.

Shepherds are not the only ones who look for cast down sheep. Predators do as well. Jesus said to ***"beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."*** Paul also spoke of wolves entering into the church. Acts 20:29 ***"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock."***

A restored soul will journey beside restful waters on a righteous way and that is why the soul's restoration is placed between two commands to follow the leading shepherd. Let God and God alone lead your mind, will, and emotions.

***Heavenly Father, Thank You Lord for saving my soul,
Thank You Lord for making me whole; Thank You Lord, for giving to me
Thy great salvation so rich and free; Amen.****

*Words by Bill and Gloria Gaither

10: The Steps of Righteousness: He leads me in the paths of righteousness

Psalm 23:3b



Baptist pastor and professor F.B. Meyer referred to Ps. 23 as the psalm of psalms, and that ***“This psalm speaks in language that the universal heart of man can comprehend. It exercises a spell that can charm away the griefs that bid a bold defiance to philosophy and mirth... It is an oasis in the desert...it is one of the most holy places in the temple of Scripture.”***

The Shepherd leads beside the still waters for my soul’s restoration and by the paths of righteousness are for His Name’s sake. I am born in sin, walking in paths of unrighteousness. Like sheep, I am prone to wander by

my very nature. Isa 53:6 says, *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”*

I am born again to walk in paths of righteousness. The Lord who is my shepherd searched for me and when He found me, He bore me on His shoulders and carried me home. Luke 15:6 says, *“And when the shepherd came home, he called together his friends and neighbors, and said them, ‘Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.’”*

A New Path. I am born again to walk on new paths. *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”* (Prov. 3:5-6). I am born again by faith to walk by faith, based on God’s word. *“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him”* *“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which lives and abides forever.”* (Col. 2:6 with 1 Peter 1:23). Being born again is not just about a new life, it is also about a new way of life; it is a walk on a new path. It is called *“the washing of regeneration”* and *“the renewal of the Holy Spirit”* (Titus 3:5).

As a result of my restored soul, my paths have changed. True sheep put their faith in the Shepherd, placing their trust so deeply that their actions naturally follow what they truly believe. That’s why Jesus said unbelief shown by not following is a sign of not being His sheep. *“But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you.”* (John 10:26).

A new produce. True sheep follow in the path of the Shepherd. A shepherd who has a wandering sheep may have to break its leg so that it will stay close to the shepherd and to the flock. Adversities bring me closer to the shepherd and also to the right paths. *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”* (John 10:27). Using a different analogy in John 15, Jesus said *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away (lifts up); and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”* A branch on the ground will not bear fruit and must be taken or lifted up. Even fruit bearing branches must be pruned so to bring forth fruits of righteousness, a new produce.

A new people. True sheep hear his voice with a tender heart. We are now His people and I am a new person, no longer with a hardened heart but a hearing heart. *“For he is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today if you hear his voice, do not harden not your heart...”* (Ps. 95:7-8)

“Dear Lord, make a walk on new paths of righteousness. I’ve been down the other road and I don’t like where it leads. Bear new fruit in me and help me live my new life hearing your voice ringing in my ears. Amen.”

11: The Sake of His Reputation: "for His name's sake"

Psalm 23:3c

Why do parents get so much pride and joy out of their children and now I am finding out of our grandchildren? True I raised them, but they are the ones who are studying, working, succeeding and yes sometimes stumbling (of course that's when they become *Melissa's* kids!). And yet I enjoy their joys and am sad at their sorrows. It's in the fine print or even the unwritten part of the contract, I suppose, of being a parent (wait! There's a contract?!).

So it is and so much more in being a child of God. What I do as a sheep of my Shepherd reflects on His name and His reputation. True, He is holy and nothing I do adds to or takes away from His holiness. But how I obey is just as related to His name's sake just in the same way that when our children do well, I feel honored and when they are not doing well, I feel burdened.

That's why the Shepherd leads me on righteousness paths: For HIS name's sake. For me, obedience restores my soul, but it is for His glory. *"For... Your name's sake lead me, and guide me"* (Psalms 31:3). You see, God seeks a relationship and not a religion, but that relationship means that my actions **relate** to Him. Jesus used a sheep falling into a pit to show our relationship is more important than obeying God out of legalism.

Matt. 12:11-12 says, *"¹¹Then He said to them, 'What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? ¹²Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.'*"

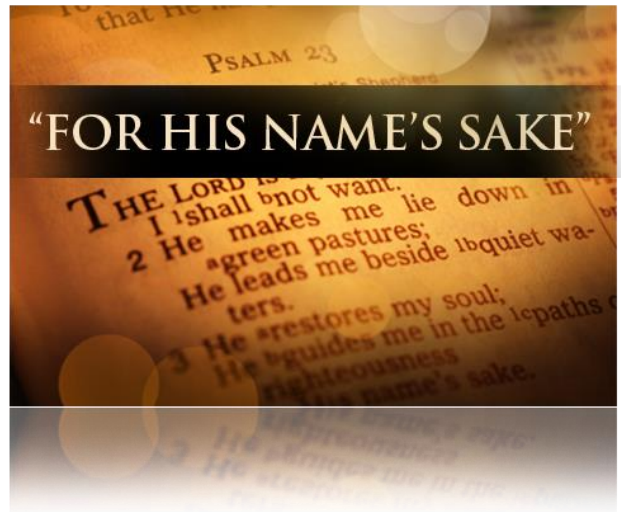
Religious works doesn't save us. It is for His name's sake that He saved us. His forgiveness is His mark on His sheep, signifying we are His. *"For Your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity for it is great."* (Psalm 25:11 and Psalm 79:9). John wrote his first epistle to tell his friends that we are forgiven for the sake of His great name. *"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven, for His name's sake."* (1 John 2:12).

If our salvation is for His name's sake, what is the purpose of our good works? Also for His name's sake! *"For My name's sake you have labored and not fainted."* (Revelation 2:3). In fact, just about everything God does, from answering our prayers (2 Chronicles 6:32) to even not forsaking us (1 Samuel 12:22), is for His glory, His reputation.

But watch this: *"If My people who are **called by My name** will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

Do you see what He did there? We are called by His name. We are joint heirs with Christ. When Christ died, He included us in His last will and testament. That's why we call it the New Testament. His Great Name is our inheritance.

Lord Jesus, lead me so that I may glorify You for Your name's sake. In the NAME of JESUS CHRIST I pray. Amen



23 LESSONS FROM THE 23RD PSALM, PART 3



We have reached the halfway point of the psalm and it takes a turn for the dark. There are words of shadows and death, of evil and fear. Darkness is just as much a part of God's creation as light. He can use the evil for His glory just as He can the good.

There really is an actual valley called "the shadow of death." Adrian Rogers said, ***"There is a valley called the valley of the shadow of death. If you were to go there you could seek it out. It starts up between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, up about 2,700 feet above sea level. And there is a little spring that comes out of the hillside there. And it starts a little rivulet. And sometimes it's full of water and the water cascades down. Sometimes there's only a trickle that goes through it."***

**A valley occurs because water cuts through it,
leaving the fertile remnants of the river's journey to feed the soil.**

As we look at part three of the 23rd psalm, we will see six parts in a single verse, the sheep's walk, death's shadow, the sheep's fearlessness, the Shepherd's presence, and the soothing and solace of the Shepherd's protection and correction.

One of the greatest aspects of being a Christian is how God uses bad, even evil, and turns it around for God's good and glory. Most clearly in the Old Testament, we see it in the life of Joseph, whose brothers sold him into slavery, and yet God used it for good for deliverance.

In the New Testament, we see God redeeming the worst event in all of history, the death of the only begotten Son of God, and turning it around for the best event in all of humanity—the resurrection of the one and only Son of Man.

This truth, and this fourth verse of the 23rd Psalm, can best be summarized in the often quoted but never fully explored depth of the verse found in Romans 8:28, ***"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."***

As we approach the season of the celebration of the resurrection of the Son of God, let us pledge anew to learn the lessons from the lengthening days of Lent and the shortening hours of darkness. Among those lessons are that light dispels darkness and evil can never extinguish good. While Satan and his power is great, God is greater still.

And while the last and final enemy is death, ***"Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."*** And He will reign until He has put all enemies under His feet. One day, this corruptible body and world will be clothed with incorruption; someday, this mortal will be fully dressed with immortality. Therefore we ask, confidently knowing the answer, ***"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"*** (See 1 Cor. 15:20-55)

And the answer is found in the empty tomb.

"Father, as I enter into this week of looking at verse 4 of the Shepherd's Psalm, let me pray as Jesus taught me to pray, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen."

12. Steps through the Valley: "Yea, though I walk through the valley"

Psalm 23:4a

Continuing from yesterday, Adrian Rogers said of the literal valley located in Israel called "The Valley of the Shadow of Death"

"...But over the centuries (a river) has cut a ravine, a chasm, if you will, a little Grand Canyon, in those Judean hills. It starts up there and it flows down, down, down, down, down 1300 feet below sea level to the Dead Sea. This ravine, this canyon, is called the valley of the shadow of death because it is so narrow that at the bottom in some places it's only about 12 feet wide. ..."

A shadow can be threatening, even scary, but in all reality a shadow has no substance. In fact, the very presence of a shadow means that somewhere, there is a light.



There is a little word at the beginning of this verse, in the King James is "yea" and no it is not a cheer like "yea, team!" (I believe that would be "Yay, team, anyway.") The word in Hebrew is equally short, GAM, and is also translated as "moreover" or "even still."

So, after my Shepherd has made me, led me, restored me and led me again, even still I will walk through the valley. In other words, this part of the journey is not unexpected to my Shepherd. Yes, He could lead me away from this valley, but just as he was in charge of the other leading, I must trust Him in this dark portion of my journey.

The word "though" implies that we will ALL walk through dark valleys. Some translations put it as "even though," signifying that it's not a matter of if, but when. We could read the first two words as "Even still and even though." Without the Shepherd I would not make it through. With the Shepherd, I cannot do otherwise than walk through this valley. He will not leave me alone.

I will not run through this valley, and neither will I stop and give up. I shall walk through this part of my journey. It is a process, a vital part of my growth. All of my paths thus far have led me to trust Him and now my path is a point of what Henry Blackaby would call a "crisis of belief." Do I really trust my Shepherd.

I will not run through nor run from this valley. I will not stop, delay nor avoid this valley. I will walk, without pensive or frantic urgency nor complacent denial. I will walk but not alone. I know this valley is not the end of my journey, it is a passage. "This too shall pass."

As a sheep on this journey for now 54 years and about 45 years with the Shepherd, I have found my growth and confidence in my Shepherd does not grow in the pastures, nor on the mountains but in the valleys. Growth occurs in the valley, not on the mountaintops.

"Gracious Shepherd, I glorify You because I know that your leading will never take me beyond your grace will keep me. I will walk through any valley as long as I know You are with me."