Psalm 23, 139

"The Lord is My Shepherd…" Ps. 23:1

Day 1
Read Psalm 23:1-3
The Shepherd

1. What does each word at the beginning of Psalm 23 indicate about David's relationship with God? *(How does this psalm fit David's background? 2 Samuel 7:8)*

> ***Digging Deeper***
> Read Ezekiel 34 for a detailed description of the shepherd's care.

- *"The Lord* (Jehovah)
- *is*
- *my*
- *Shepherd"*

2. From the following, what picture did God give of Himself as Israel's shepherd?
   - Psalm 78:52,53
   - Isaiah 40:11
   - Isaiah 49:9-10

3. Underline the other illustrations God used to show His loving care.
   - Exodus 19:4 "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself". NIV
   - Deuteronomy 1:30-31 "The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes, 31 and in the desert. There you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place." NIV (See also Hosea 11:3)
   - Isaiah 66:13 "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem." NIV *(See also Zephaniah 3:17)*

4. Read John 10:3-4, 11-15. How did Jesus describe Himself and what did He say about his relationship with the sheep?

   - What did Jesus say about those who are and those who are not His sheep? John 10:25-28

5. Because the Lord (*Jehovah*: the Eternal God) was his Shepherd, what confidence did David have? 23:1b *(Share different translations.)*

- What promise do we have in Christ? Philippians 4:19

Digging Deeper
Read the excerpt from the book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* at the end of the lesson.

6. What kind of care or comfort do each of the word pictures in 23:2-3 convey to you?

- 23:2a He makes me lie down in green pastures
- 23:2b *He leads me beside quiet waters*
- 23:3a *He restores my soul* (See also Isaiah 40:31)
- 23:3b *He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.*

7. What does Isaiah 53:6 indicate about the nature of sheep?

FYI: "By nature, sheep are helpless creatures. They depend on shepherds to lead them to water and pasture, to fight off wild beasts…they tend to wander off and fall into a crevice or get caught in a thorn bush. Then the shepherd must leave the rest of his flock to search for the stray." - Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary

lie down: "Sheep frequently are alarmed and actually run over each other, racing away from something that startles them. The shepherd corrects the problem by catching a sheep and gently, yet firmly, forcing it to lie down and feed quietly on the grass beneath its feet…***quiet waters***: Sheep are instinctively afraid of running water…As a result, even though tired and hot from a blistering day, thirsty sheep will only stand and stare at the fast-flowing stream but never drink. Uncertainty keeps them from needed refreshment." - Charles Swindoll (73,74)

restores my soul: "The Hebrew word "restore" means 'turning back' or 'refreshing.' Perhaps the sheep has strayed off of the trail to nibble on some interesting looking plant, little knowing that it is poisonous. Or perhaps it has gotten separated from the flock and a predator is ready to pounce. Sheep also can become 'cast,' where they roll onto their backs and are not able to right themselves. A sheep left in such a position will die unless the shepherd helps it get upright within a few hours." - Steven Cole

guides me: "The Palestinian shepherd was a master at reading tracks. Many marks and paths sprawled across the rugged terrain. Some were made by wilderness beasts; other by robbers lying in wait. The wind also etched its subtle 'track' in the sand. To the untrained, dull eye of the sheep, they all looked alike - like real paths. But they led nowhere. The sheep were wise to follow only their shepherd, who always led them along the 'right track.' After all, it was the shepherd's reputation that was at stake: 'for His name's sake.'" - Charles Swindoll (75)

Applying the Word: *What would identify as the green pastures or quiet waters to which the Lord has led you?*

Day 2
Read Psalm 23:4-6
Fearful times

8. What did David choose to do about the difficult and fearful times in his life? 23:4a

- Why was he fearless? 23:4b *(Note the shift to the more intimate and personal "You/Thou.")*

9. Picture a shepherd protecting his sheep from harm with his rod and staff. How would you explain that in terms of the Lord's protection in your life?

FYI: "**Valleys** have the best source of water and thus provide the best feeding spots on the way to higher ground. But there are dangers involved…it points to a fearful place of extreme danger and darkness." - Steven Cole

"If we are in His will, we need not fear either man or devil. The word '**evil'** in this verse can refer to evil men, evil phenomena, or to dangers of any kind." - Henry Morris (56)

"Notice the psalmist says that because 'You are with me,' he is kept from being afraid. Mark it down, my friend. There is no experience, no valley (no matter how severe or uncertain) that we must journey alone." - Charles Swindoll (77)

"**His presence** overcomes the worst thing that remains: the fear...'*Thou*', at this point of danger, replaces the more distant '*He*', in a person-to-person address; for the Shepherd is no longer ahead, to lead, but alongside to escort. In times of need, companionship is good; and he is armed…" - Derek Kidner (128)

"If we know that Jesus, the Great Shepherd is leading us; if we know that He is in absolute control of all of the paths of life, then we can pass through the shadows in peace and security, Psa. 37:23." - Alan Carr

"***Your rod and your staff*** reminds us of the club that a shepherd would use to protect his sheet from the attacks of wild animals and the staff or crook he would use to guide them in the right way." - The Africa Bible Commentary (631)

10. What do you think David meant by the things he said the Lord had done for him during times of conflict?

- *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies* (v 5) (See Romans 8:28,31; Jude 24)

- *You anoint my head with oil* (Compare 2 Cor. 1:21-22)

- *My cup overflows* (Romans 15:13; Ephesians 1:7,8; 2:7; 3:20; 1 Corinthians 2:9)

11. After reflecting on the Lord's goodness to him in this life, with what confident hope did David end his psalm? 23:6 (Compare Romans 8:37-39)

FYI: "Mercy is the covenant-word rendered 'steadfast love' elsewhere…Together with ***goodness*** it suggests the steady kindness and support that one can count on in the family or between firm friends. With God these qualities are not merely solid and dependable, but vigorous - for to *follow* does not mean here to bring up the rear but to pursue."
- Derek Kidner (130)

"Those of us who know that Jesus Christ has conquered death can say with confidence and trust that the Lord will be with us not only all the days of our lives, but beyond our life on earth, so that we shall *dwell in the house of the Lord forever*." - The Africa Bible Commentary (612)

Applying the Word: *Where do you most need to be assured and comforted by your Shepherd's care today? Ask him to make His constant presence and care a reality in your life.*

Day 3
Read Psalm 139:1-12

FYI: "Psalm 139 is a remarkable testimony to the attributes of God. It is divided into four stanzas of six verses each… The first stanza says that God knows everything about each of us; the second says He sees everything around us; the third shows that He does everything for us; and the last notes that He judges everything in us." - Henry Morris (669)

"[Psalm 139] provides the reader with a calm certainty that there is a definite link between himself and his Lord -that no one has been flung haphazardly or accidentally into time and space. This ancient song makes God seem real, personal, and involved because, in fact, He is…To the psalmist, God is there; better than that, God is here. He is reachable, knowable, available, and real. All alienation is removed…Not only is He here, but He is involved and interested in each individual on this speck-of-a-planet called Earth." - Charles Swindoll (262,263)

God's perfect knowledge

12. List the verbs or phrases in 139:1-4 that describe God's understanding of us.

- 139:1 - *i.e. "searched," "know me"*
- 139:2
- 139:3
- 139:4

13. What does this knowledge indicate about even our most ordinary, mundane moments/hidden thoughts/secretive acts?

- What do Psalms 44:21 and Proverbs 16:2 say about how deeply God can examine us?

IT'S HEBREW TO ME: ***Searched*** "OT #2713 *chaqar*; to penetrate; hence, to examine intimately" - Strong's Concordance

"God understands what prompts us to think certain thoughts. He therefore understands the hidden, unspoken motives behind our actions…The word '**scrutinize**' [***discern*** - NIV] translates the Hebrew word that means 'to sift.' It is the idea of submitting oneself to minute scrutiny…As a result of this phenomenal insight, He is thoroughly acquainted with us - and I mean thoroughly!" - Charles Swindoll (264,265)

"God knows our motives, desires, and words before they are expressed. In short, He knows His servants completely. But as v. 5 makes clear, the purpose of His intimate knowledge of His servants is protective and helpful, not judgmental and condemning." - The Nelson Study Bible (1020)

14. What control and care did the Lord exert over David's life? 139:5

- How was David affected by all of this? 139:6

IT'S HEBREW TO ME: ***Hem me in/hedged me /enclosed me*** "OT:6696 *tsuwr*; to cramp, i.e. confine" - Strong's Concordance

"This is a translation of a Hebrew term used for the besieging of a city in battle - closing off all escape routes…The idea is that God has us in inescapable situations and there steadies us, directs us, restrains us, keeps us from running and escaping from that situation…but He stays near and steadies us with His hand so that you and I might learn valuable lessons." - Charles Swindoll (266)

15. Underline how God's understanding is described in the following.

- Psalm 147:5 Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. NIV
- Isaiah 40:28 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. NIV
- Isaiah 55:9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. NIV
- Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! NIV
- Colossians 2:3 Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. NIV

- How does this knowledge affect you?

God's constant presence

16. After contemplating God's perfect knowledge (omnipotence), why might David have asked the next questions? 139:7 (How can God's omnipotence and omnipresence be both wonderful and frightful?)

- What was the answer? 139:8-9 (See also Jeremiah 23:24)

FYI: "There are two different ways in which the words *where can I go* can be understood. One is that David wanted to flee from the presence of God, but could not. The second view takes the words as a celebration of God's mercy, that there was no place in all creation where David the servant of God would find himself separated from God's presence"
- The Nelson Study Bible (1020)

"We fear being totally exposed. But the amazing thing is, this God who knows us so thoroughly, who knows every awful thought we ever have, desires to have a relationship with us." - Steven Cole

The wings of the dawn (139:9):
"Most likely it describes the rays of the morning sun that flash across the sky. Perhaps we could paraphrase it more technically by saying: 'If I could travel the speed of light.'" - Charles Swindoll (268,269)

"There may well be the thought of the great span of the heavens from one horizon to the other." - Derek Kidner (501)

17. Even though God knew ***everything*** about him, what kind of relationship was David confident God would have with Him? 139:10 (See Hebrews 13:5,6)

18. How is man tempted to limit God? 139:11 (See also Isaiah 29:15)

Digging Deeper
For physical and spiritual meanings of darkness and light see Job 34:21-22 and Acts 26:18

- What is the truth? 139:12 (See Daniel 2:22)

FYI: Darkness (v. 11) "Here David stretches his imagination to the brink…This is an expansion of the words of v. 8. 'If I make my bed in hell.' David suggests this as the one place in the universe where God would not be present. But even though God is opposed to all darkness, God would turn the darkness into light in order to find His servant David. As in Ps. 18:7-12, the Lord would overturn the structure of the universe to save the person who worshiped Him."
- The Nelson Study Bible (1020)

Applying the Word: *"Tonight, step outside. If the air is clear and the sky cloudless, look up at the expanse of starts. Stay long enough to allow your mind to grasp the immensity of the galaxy above you. Then remind yourself that you are more significant to your Creator than all of those stars combined. They will pass away, you are eternal." - Charles Swindoll (263)*
How does this Psalm speak to any insecure feelings that you have?

Day 4
Read Psalm 139:13-24
God's amazing power

19. What did David recognize about God's presence and control in His life? 139:13 (Cp. Ephesians 1:4)

> ***FYI:*** "The ***'You'*** in each declaration is very emphatic. The idea is 'You, Yourself, and no other.' It is neither 'nature' nor 'Mother Nature' who performs the miracle in the womb; it is God alone, and no other…
> ***'form'*** When this verb appears in the original Hebrew, if often carried the idea of 'originate.' God originates our inward parts. " - Charles Swindoll (274)

20. List the verbs and adverbs that describe God's work in creating you.

- v. 13 (See also Jeremiah 1:5)
- v. 14
- v. 15 (See Ecclesiastes 11:5)

> ***Digging Deeper***
> Compare what Christ is credited for creating in John 1:3 and Colossians 1:15-17.

> IT'S HEBREW TO ME: v. 13 ***knit together/wove*** "OT:5526 *cakak or sakak* ; to entwine as a screen; by implication, to fence in, cover over, (figuratively) protect" - Strong's Concordance
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> "The verb *sanak* suggests the idea of knitting together like an interwoven mass or thicket. God is involved in placing all the organs and various parts of our body together in such a well-ordered fashion, it forms a veritable 'thicket' of muscle, tendons, bone, blood, veins, and arteries." - Charles Swindoll (174)
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> ***Secret…depths of the earth*** "This is an idiomatic expression for a protected place, a concealed and safe place-as one may hide his treasure by burying it. No doubt this 'secret place' is a reference to the womb." - Charles Swindoll (276)
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> v. 15 ***woven together*** / ***curiously or skillfully wrought*** "OT:7551 *raqam* ; to variegate color, i.e. embroider; by implication, to fabricate. Also translated KJV - embroiderer, needlework." - Strong's Concordance
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> "The marvels of embryonic growth are still largely unexplained by scientists, but God knows!...***Curiously wrought*** means; 'embroidered,' a striking description of the double-helical DNA molecular program, which organizes part by part the beautiful structure of the whole infant." - Henry Morris (669)
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> "Augustine observed, 'Men go abroad to wonder at the heights of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of the rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motions of the stars; and they pass by themselves without wondering' (in *Reader's Digest* [1/92], p. 9). Every person has in his or her body sufficient proof that God exists. To ignore that kind of evidence renders a person without excuse (Rom. 1:18-23)." - Steven Cole

21. What other plans for your life has God made? 139:16 *(What do verses 4 and 6 indicate about the extent of God's understanding and His view of time?)*

22. What did David say about the extent of God's thoughts toward him? 139:17,18 (See also Psalm 40:5)

- What did Jesus say about how closely God keeps track of us? Matthew 10:28-31

FYI: "David… considers God's innumerable thoughts toward him…He is not exaggerating. Even in his own body there is an unimaginable wealth of detail, every point of it from the mind of God. Such divine knowledge is not only 'wonderful' (vs. 6) but *precious*, since it carried its own proof of infinite commitment: God will not leave the work of his hands to chance or to ultimate extinction…
The words *I am still with thee* (18b)…can be given no limit, even by death. '*When I awake'* may therefore have…a glimpse of resurrection (see Ps. 17:15)." - Derek Kidner (503)

"To come to the end of all our thinking and understanding, and to be able to say, *I am still with you* is a privilege and blessing beyond what words can tell." - The Africa Bible Commentary (739)

23. Underline the words that describe or define the extent of God's love:

- Exodus 34:6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, NIV
- Psalm 36:5 Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. NIV
- Psalm 36:7 How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. NIV
- Psalm 89:2 I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself. NIV
- Psalm 103:17 But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD's love is with those who fear him, NIV
- Psalm 118:29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. NIV
- Psalm 119:64 The earth is filled with your love, O LORD; teach me your decrees. NIV
- Ephesians 3:17-19 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. NIV
- 1 John 4:8-10 …God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. NIV

<u>David's response</u>

24. After contemplating God's greatness and goodness to us, why do you think David suddenly switched to his hatred of evil? 139:19 (See Proverbs 8:13)

25. What reasons did David give for this hatred? 139:19b-21

Digging Deeper
Read the article "*Do the Imprecatory Psalms and Christian Ethics Clash?*"

- How does David's frankness affect you?

FYI: "The term 'hate' denotes a decision to reject something in favor of something else. Unlike the English word, it does not wish harm or ill will upon another; the Hebrew concept of 'hate' involved a turning away. To hate someone in the Old Testament is to turn your back upon them." - Charles Swindoll (280)

(Definition: "***Imprecatory psalms***… are those that invoke judgment, calamity, or curses, upon one's enemies or those perceived as the enemies of God." - http://en.wikipedia.org

"*Cries for vengeance*: The sudden transitions in the psalms from humble devotion to fiery imprecation create an problem for the Christian, who is assured that all Scripture is inspired and profitable, but equally that he himself is to bless those who curse him [see Luke 6:27-31]…
The gospel, to be sure, radically redirects our concern…by introducing…the cross, and…the life to come…Without these certainties, only a cynic could feel no impatience to see justice triumphant and evil men broken; and these authors were no cynics…We cannot truly hear [the gospel's] answers until we have felt the force of their questions."
- Derek Kidner (39,40)

"C.S Lewis has remarked that we may 'learn from them that the absence of indignation may be an alarming symptom.' We should be disturbed about sin and aroused for righteousness. A further lesson is that the most bitter feelings can be resolved in the presence of God. The psalmist did not take the matter into his own hands but laid it out before God. We should not jump to the conclusion, however, that God shares his feelings about the transgressor, although He certainly cannot endure sin." - C. Hassel Bullock (146)

26. What "evil" did David focus on next? 139:23,24 List what he prayed for God to do.

IT'S HEBREW TO ME: 139:24 "***offensive/wicked***" OT:6090 `*otseb*; an idol (as fashioned); also pain (bodily or mental)
- Strong's Concordance

"***'lest I follow any path that grieves thee'…that is 'hurtful'***, whether to God or man - recognizing that sin is never an isolated incident." - Derek Kidner (504)

Applying the Word:
Charles Swindoll asks: "Do you want to be a person whose walk with God is intimate and deep? Honestly now, is Christianity simply a ticket to heaven for you, or is it the very root and foundation of your life?"

Open your heart to pray David's prayer in 139:23,24. Record what He reveals to you and what He leads you to do.

Psalm 23, 139

"I Shall not Want"

When all is said and done the welfare of any flock is entirely dependent upon the management afforded them by their owner.

The tenant sheepman on the farm next to my first ranch was the most indifferent manager I had ever met. He was not concerned about the condition of his sheep. His land was neglected. He gave little or no time to his flock, letting them pretty well forage for themselves as best they could, both summer and winter. They fell prey to dogs, cougars and rustlers.

Every year these poor creatures were forced to gnaw away at bare brown fields and impoverished pastures. Every winter there was a shortage of nourishing hay and wholesome grain to feed the hungry ewes. Shelter to safeguard and protect the suffering sheep from storms and blizzards was scanty and inadequate.

They had only polluted, muddy water to drink. There had been a lack of salt and other trace minerals needed to offset their sickly pastures. In their thin, weak and diseased condition these poor sheep were a pathetic sight.

In my mind's eye I can still see them standing at the fence, huddled sadly in little knots, staring wistfully through the wires at the rich pastures on the other side.

To all their distress, the heartless, selfish owner seemed utterly callous and indifferent. He simply did not care. What if his sheep did WANT green grass; fresh water; shade; safety or shelter from the storms? What if they did WANT relief from wounds, bruises, disease and parasites?

He ignored their needs -- he couldn't care less. Why should he -- they were just sheep -- fit only for the slaughterhouse…

I have become increasingly aware of one thing ... It is ... the Master in people's lives who makes the difference in their destiny…

Despite an unparalleled wealth in material assets we are outstandingly insecure and unsure of ourselves and well nigh bankrupt in spiritual values. Always men are searching for safety beyond themselves. They are restless, unsettled, covetous, greedy for more -- wanting this and that, yet never really satisfied in spirit.

By contrast the simple Christian, the humble person, the Shepherd's sheep can stand up proudly and boast. "The Lord is my Shepherd -- I shall not want."

I am completely satisfied with His management of my life. Why? Because He is the sheepman to whom no trouble is too great as He cares for His flock. He is the Rancher who is outstanding because of His fondness for sheep -- who loves them for their own sake as well as His personal pleasure in them. He will, if necessary, be on the job twenty-four hours a day to see that they are properly provided for in every detail. Above all, He is very jealous of His name and high reputation as "The Good Shepherd."

He is the owner who delights in His flock. For Him there is no greater reward, no deeper satisfaction, than that of seeing His sheep contented, well fed, safe and flourishing under His care. This is indeed His very 'life.' He gives all He has to it. He literally lays Himself out for those who are His.

He will go to no end of trouble and labor to supply them with the finest grazing, the richest pasturage, ample winter feed, and clean water. He will spare Himself no pains to provide shelter from storms, protection from ruthless enemies and the diseases and parasites to which sheep are so susceptible.

No wonder Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd -- the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." And again, "I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it more abundantly."

From early dawn until late at night this utterly self-less Shepherd is alert to the welfare of His flock. For the diligent sheepman rises early and goes out first thing every morning without fail to look over his flock. It is the initial, intimate contact of the day. With a practiced, searching, sympathetic eye he examines the sheep to see that they are fit and content and able to be on their feet. In an instant he can tell if they have been molested during the night -- whether any are ill or if there are some which require special attention.

Repeatedly throughout the day he casts his eye over the flock to make sure that all is well.

Nor even at night is he oblivious to their needs. He sleeps as it were 'with one eye and both ears open' ready at the least sign of trouble to leap up and protect his own.

This is a sublime picture of the care given to those whose lives are under Christ's control. He knows all about their lives from morning to night.

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits -- even the God of our salvation.

"He that keepeth thee will not slumber or sleep."

- Phillip Keller (28-32)