Psalm 23 (ESV): The Lord is my Shepherd

Main point: God is always with you to guide, protect, and comfort forever.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: A psalm of David.

Focus of the study:
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
3 He restores my soul.
He leads me in 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 your 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 mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Questions:
1. This is probably the most famous psalm and perhaps even passage of scripture in the whole Bible. Who wrote it? What was David’s background? I wonder if you know the famous story with David and a slingshot?
   a. David was a lowly shepherd boy. With a slingshot, he slew the giant Goliath.
   b. By the time David wrote Psalm 23, he was God’s appointed king of Israel.
2. What does David call the Lord?
   a. My shepherd – not just “a” shepherd. Why is the pronoun meaningful?
      i. Personal! Not just any old guide; God is concerned with David personally.
      ii. David is reminding the people that ultimate protection and care come from God the King, not David the King.
3. Since David sets up this picture of God as a shepherd, let’s talk about sheep. What are sheep like? What does a shepherd do?
   a. Sheep are vulnerable, not very smart, no way to defend themselves (no claws or sharp teeth), follow the pack, easily lost; sheep are dependent on a good shepherd.
   b. What is a shepherd’s job?
i. watches out for the sheep, protects, guides, cares for them

ii. How does a shepherd do this? What are the details and obstacles of the job?
   1. Constant; stays with the sheep; knows the sheep; counts them; is prepared to defend them; knows where the good land and water are.

4. What is the first thing David says is the result of the Lord being the shepherd?
   a. “I shall not want” – literally, I shall not lack for what I need
      i. What do we need from God? What do we ask for?
         1. Everything! Life itself, care, comfort, peace....

5. v. 2-3: What does David say that the shepherd does for him (a sheep)?
   a. Makes me lie down in green pastures – what does a green pasture feel like to a sheep?
      i. Lovely, lush, safe
   b. Leads me beside still waters – what is that like for a sheep?
      i. Calm; not rushing waters, which would impossible to drink from or lie down in.
         1. Where was this psalm written? Why would green pasture and still water be especially appealing?
         2. David lived in the Middle Eastern desert! Dry, harsh, little water. So the landscape David describes in this psalm—green lush, full of water, peaceful, gentle—would be wonderful and unusual.
   c. Restores my soul – what does it feel like to be restored?
   d. Leads me in paths of righteousness, or “right paths” – what is that like, when you’re on the right path, for example when you’re talking a walk or hike and know where you are?
      i. Secure; not confused or lost
   e. How do the sheep get all these benefits, everything they need? Do they work for it?
      i. No; they simply TRUST in and FOLLOW the Shepherd

6. v. 4: What does David say next? The tone changes...
   a. v. 4: “Even though I walk...” – a threat and danger emerge in this idyllic scene

7. What does a dark valley feel like?
   a. Scary, alone, confused, unsure, worried, grieving

8. Is walking through a dark valley optional? No; David writes “Even though I walk,” not “if I happen to walk.” Who has ever walked through a dark time?
   a. Not “maybe”; hardship and dark times do and will happen to everyone

9. But what does David say the Lord is doing during that walk through the valley?
   a. Keeping David from fear, because:
   b. “You [God] are with me” – and what does God have?
      i. A rod and staff – what does a shepherd use these for?
         1. Protection (to beat off predators) and guidance (to keep the sheep from walking off a cliff or away from the shepherd) → comfort and reassurance, defense

10. v. 5: The image shifts: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”
    a. Who is the host of this table? In whose house do we have this feast? How safe is it there?

11. “You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows (runneth over).” What is the sense of these verses? Is God stingy with his blessings?
    a. No – abundant, continuous. Oil is an Old Testament symbol of healing and peace, and God promises those abundantly.

12. What “enemies” do we have in our lives today?
    a. Fear; doubt; sorrow; hardship ...

13. What does David say that God will give him “all the days of my life”?

© SpiritualElderCare.com
a. v. 6: Goodness and mercy: Let’s describe what these gifts are like.

14. How sure is David that God’s goodness and mercy will be with him throughout his life? What are the words that indicates how sure he is?

- a. **Surely**: definitely, absolutely
- b. **Shall** follow me (not maybe)
- c. **All** the days (not just on good days)
- d. **I shall** dwell (not maybe)
- e. **Forever** (not temporarily, or only when things are going well and I’m feeling good)

God’s presence is with you, the same way a shepherd is with his sheep: God loves, protects, leads, guides, comforts his people, now and forever. You are not alone; you are God’s precious son or daughter.

- Ask for any prayer requests for today.
- Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
- End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace
Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.
   He leads me beside still waters.
3 He restores my soul.
   He leads me in 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 your 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 mercy shall follow me
   all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.