

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 here 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"?*

- 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?*
- Surely: definitely, absolutely
 - Shall follow me (not maybe)
 - All the days (not just on good days)
 - I shall dwell (not maybe)
 - 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

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