



Is the Lord Really My Shepherd?

Psalm 23:1: (NIV2011) *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*



Among Christians, some of the most often quoted and beloved Old Testament scriptures are found in the 23rd Psalm. In very few words, these six verses paint a vivid picture of God's overwhelming care for His children. The imagery of a shepherd knowing and caring for his sheep speaks to our helplessness as we, as God's children, attempt to navigate the harsh terrain of a sin-sick world. Without our shepherd, the tumult of everyday life makes it hard to find true spiritual nourishment. Without our shepherd, we would not find absolute rest and would always feel vulnerable. We need to ask ourselves these questions: Do I put

myself completely and faithfully into the hands of my shepherd, Jesus? Do I really trust him for all things? Is Jesus the true shepherd of my life, or do I merely give him that title?



As we begin this podcast on the 23rd Psalm, I want to pause and remember my grandmother, Frances, the grandmother on my dad's side. She died many years ago. She was a very dedicated Christian who had come to this country from Italy. When I was very young, we would usually have a testimony meeting every Sunday, where she would quote the 23rd Psalm. She did not just say the words; it poured out of her very being. Her face would get serious, her brow furrowed and she would just speak this Psalm from her heart. I would like to read the Psalm in honor of my Grandma Frances because it meant so much to me growing up.



Psalms 23:1-6: (KJV)



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 forever.



This Old Testament analogy is unmistakable. David knew shepherding. He lived it night and day for many years. Psalms 23 reflects his personal experience as a shepherd caring for his flock in every way and realizing that God's care for him was so much greater in every way.

This Psalm applied to David and all of Israel when under the direct care of God, as their shepherd through the Law.

This is shown in an Ezekiel prophecy regarding Israel before and during their desolation:

Ezekiel 34:11-12: (NASB) ¹¹*For thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.* ¹²*As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.*

It is obvious that the LORD God is the shepherd of Israel here and in Psalms 23. Then the prophecy takes a turn. This Psalm ALSO applies to Jesus as our shepherd - first to "spiritual Israel" –his faithful followers - and later to natural Israel. This begins when Jesus came to earth as a man at his first advent.

Ezekiel shows the door opening for this to happen:

Ezekiel 34:23-24: (NASB) ²³*Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.* ²⁴*And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I the LORD have spoken.*



The Messiah would come from David's line. *My servant David* –this refers to Jesus as the Messiah. This identifies Jesus as the shepherd, *I (God) will set over them one shepherd (Jesus). He is the one who will feed you.* This is a beautiful way to show us that Jesus is our shepherd.

As we go through Psalms 23 verse-by-verse, we will use different translations to get a deeper understanding.



Psalms 23:1: (NIV2011)

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

Throughout the podcast we will listen to several audio clips to paint the picture of what actual shepherding looked and felt like in ancient Israel.



A wilderness Psalm, The Context of Psalms 23, Bible Context Explained

- *Psalms 23 is a wilderness Psalm. It doesn't sound like this is where it belongs, particularly since it's a Psalm about not lacking anything, and when you look at the Judean wilderness, it's a land that appears to lack absolutely everything. David is taking the perspective of his sheep and goats. He knows that what they need is not naturally here in this wilderness area - food, water, security, a sense of well-being. But the livestock don't lack anything because their eyes are not on what they're missing, but what they have - the Good Shepherd, who makes sure that He takes them in the wilderness and provides all those things that they need.*

This Psalm gives us a sense of abundance –but it is in the context of barrenness of the Judean wilderness. When we understand this, we realize just how important the shepherd is in this picture.



If the Lord is my shepherd, *I lack nothing!*

John 10:14-15: (NASB) ¹⁴*I am the good shepherd, and I know my own and my own know me,* ¹⁵*even as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

If we follow the shepherd spiritually and we give our life over to him, we completely trust him. Even if we are in the wilderness, we are not focusing on what we do not have. What we DO have is the shepherd, and we realize we can trust him for everything. We lack nothing!

Having such a shepherd (Jesus) gives us clear confidence that all of our needs WILL be met:

Philippians 4:18-20: (NASB) ¹⁸*But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.* ¹⁹*And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.* ²⁰*Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Whatever the shepherd provides for us is more than we could ever want. The Apostle Paul boldly says, *My God will supply all your needs*, maybe not all our worldly wants and desires, but certainly all our spiritual and earthly needs. *The Lord is my shepherd* - we lack nothing! This is the way we should lead our lives.

Having a “lack nothing” attitude can only be maintained by keeping our personal focus:

Hebrews 12:2-3: (NASB) ²*fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.* ³*For consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

The audio clip mentioned the sheep who do not need to look around, wondering where they will get their next meal; they just have to focus on the shepherd. This is exactly what Hebrews 12:2-3 means. Focus on Jesus as our long-term goal.

Consider (meditate on) him who has endured such hostility. If we meditate on him, we lack nothing!





**As Christians,
the very basis
of our life must be
faith in Jesus.
If I truly follow,
then I will truly
be fully cared for.**

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. There is so much to learn and apply from such a short sentence!

The idea of lacking nothing is great, but how does a shepherd fulfill it in the mountainous regions of Judea?

Our best appreciation of Psalms 23 will come when we have a clear understanding of the practical challenges and solutions a shepherd in ancient Israel would have faced.

Now that David has established the shepherd's competence, he next walks us through the main areas of life and care for which shepherds are responsible:

Psalms 23:2: (YLT)



*In pastures of tender grass He causeth me to lie down,
by quiet waters He doth lead me.*

There are four things to consider here: *tender grass, lie down, quiet waters and lead me.* The green pastures in Judea may not be what we pictured.



Green pastures, What Does Psalm 23 Really Mean, IsraelU Episode TWO

- *So, this is a tuft of grass growing in the desert. See, what happens is at night, warm air from the Mediterranean blows across the desert. When that warm, humid air hits the side of a hill or the side of a rock, a tuft of grass like this will pop up overnight. Now, in this sort of green pasture, the sheep has just enough for one mouthful - then the sheep has to look to its shepherd to say, "Where's the next mouthful," and then it looks for the next mouthful, the next mouthful, and the next mouthful. In the green pastures that David wrote about the sheep relied completely on their shepherd.*



Shepherds in this situation cannot just set the sheep loose on a hillside and let them graze until they cannot eat any more. The sheep are always looking, and the shepherd is always guiding to find the tender grass. The grass does not grow abundantly in the mountainous regions of Judea where this actually took place.



This comes down to the question: *Do I apply this example every single day to my life?*

Feeding and rest are the companion activities that when properly applied, bring new energy. Let's look again at how Jesus becomes our shepherd:

Ezekiel 34:13-15: (NASB) ¹³I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. ¹⁴I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest, declares the Lord GOD.

I will feed them on the mountains –this is what the previous audio clip described. The grass is there but has to be sought after, and the shepherd provides guidance.

Our shepherd provides a bounty of spiritual food and a unique kind of rest:

Matthew 4:3-4: (NASB) ³And the tempter came and said to him, If you are the son of God, command that these stones become bread. ⁴But he answered and said, it is written, man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

Our good shepherd is telling Satan what he is going to be feeding his sheep. Man lives on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. That was the mission of Jesus and that was where he would lead his sheep.



Sheep who follow seek to know what God's word really says.

It is good to go to church on Sunday. It is better to also dig deeply into God's word.

2 Timothy 2:15: (NASB) *Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.*

This is how the shepherd feeds us. Are we eating what he is feeding?



Sheep who follow also can rest in the assurance that our shepherd carries our load with us:

Matthew 11:28-30: (NASB) ²⁸Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Being yoked together takes work from each partner. It takes work to follow Jesus our shepherd. It also takes work to enter into his rest. We might not feel like walking where he is telling us to go, but he is our shepherd and he supports us in that work.

(Source: John Gill's Exposition on the Entire Bible) He leadeth me beside the still waters, or "waters of rest and quietness" - not to rapid torrents, which by reason of the noise they make, and the swiftness of their motion, the sheep are frightened, and not able to drink of them; but to still waters, pure and clear...that go softly..."leading"...is in a gentle way as they are able to bear it.

Sheep get spooked by rapidly rushing waters because they could easily be swept away in them. A shepherd's responsibility is to protect and guide his sheep to still waters and to find a quiet place where they can cross.

Leading the sheep to these *still waters* gives sheep security, especially in our tumultuous world.



Psalm 46 is a prophecy of end times, our times.

Listen to the difference between the roaring, foaming waters (restless humanity) and the calm streams of the river near the city of God:

Psalms 46:3-5: (NASB) ³Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. *Selah.* ⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High. ⁵God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.

This speaks of the waters roaring and foaming and the mountains quaking; it is scary. *A river whose streams make glad the city of God* - representing the true church, the true followers of Christ. The quiet river makes glad the true church in the midst of all the restlessness of humanity. This is a picture of our shepherd leading us to quiet waters, giving us peace amidst the tumult of this day.



Sheep who follow will drink only that which their shepherd leads them to:

John 4:13-14: (NASB) ¹³Jesus answered and said to her, *Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again;* ¹⁴*but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.*

Jesus assures us that he will give his followers pure water so we will never again thirst and it will bring us life. We talked about the pastures of tender grass which represent feeding on the word of God. We have the opportunity to rest because we are yoked to Jesus. He takes most of our burden, leading beside the quiet waters of truth.

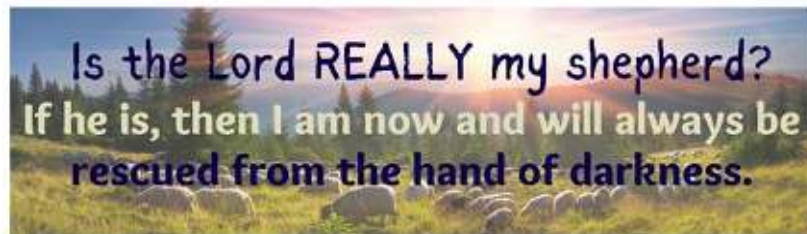


As Christians, our basic survival needs of food, water and rest are met when we follow Jesus and feed where he brings us to feed, and drink where he leads us to drink. This enables our anxiety in life to be reduced and our rest in him can come so much more easily.



Psalm 23:3: (NASB)
He restores my soul...

Literally, he saves my life...



We had a need for the shepherd before we had a relationship with him. We needed to be made right, justified to life from Adamic sin. The Hebrew word for *soul* here is *nephesh*, which means life. He restores our life; he saves our life.



The shepherd saves the lives of the sheep. We will look at two ways that this may happen.

First, enemies from without the flock can come and try to snatch a sheep away to kill it.

David had proven to be so worthy a shepherd, he was allowed to fight Goliath:

1 Samuel 17:34-36: (NASB) ³⁴But David said to Saul, your servant was tending his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵I went out after him and attacked him, and rescued it from his mouth; and when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. ³⁶Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, since he has taunted the armies of the living God.

We can see the fierceness of David's shepherding coming out in this example. He literally put his life on the line to save his sheep. What integrity, courage and strong faith this young man had to stand up for God's people against Goliath!

Jesus battled with Satan from the very start of his ministry and has proven victorious:

Luke 10:17-18: (NASB) ¹⁷The seventy returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name. ¹⁸And he said to them, I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning.

Jesus was protecting his sheep from the enemy. This is what a shepherd does.

Sheep who follow know that if they become a target of darkness, their shepherd is close by.



Second, we can need saving from the enemy within. Sometimes we misstep or fall into compromise.



My dad gave a sermon when I was a young teen on the 23rd Psalm where he mentioned cast down sheep. For the last 45 years or so this has stuck with me.



A cast sheep, How You Could Easily Save a Sheep's Life, theworkingsheepdog

- If you're a person who likes to go out walking in the countryside, it's a good idea to keep your eyes open for any sheep that might have got on their backs. Unlike many other animals, sheep don't roll onto their backs for a good scratch, or even for fun, and they certainly don't sleep on their backs. This sheep is in a desperate position. If it can't get back onto its feet very soon, it'll die. Sheep are particularly prone to getting cast, as it's called, during the spring, with the extra weight of their lambs inside them, the pregnant mums are very top-heavy and if they roll over that extra weight makes it extremely difficult for them to get back up again.



They have this vulnerability to roll over and then they are stuck; they cannot get up. Death is around the corner unless the shepherd comes and rights them.



Sheep who follow have the assurance that when we slip or fall, our shepherd can and will rescue us – he is always watching:

1 John 2:1-2: (NASB) ¹My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and he himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Jesus is our advocate; he is beside us and represents us. If we fall, he is right there helping us. This picture goes a little further than the Psalm.



Helping a cast sheep, How You Could Easily Save a Sheep's Life, theworkingsheepdog

- If you see a sheep in this position, it's very easy to save its life. Simply walk quietly and steadily up to it and roll it over. Once it's the right way up again, the sheep will probably run back to the flock, but as you can see, this sheep is still quite wobbly. She was probably on her back for some time and is finding it hard to balance again. This is because she was already in shock. She knew she was in terrible danger of dying on her back.

As Christians, we have this responsibility towards each other to help, even if we are not shepherds.



Sheep who follow know that they also have protective responsibilities towards their fellow sheep:

Galatians 6:1: (NASB) *Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.*

We need to help the brotherhood hold the high standard of holiness and faithfulness, even if mistakes are made. Help them to keep getting up and to never give up. We need to expand this to include the brotherhood working together. Sheep can be vulnerable just by slipping and falling or rolling onto their backs. The shepherd is watching and knows what to do. The shepherd can literally save their lives by remaining alert and being there to help them.



The privilege of being in a flock Jesus shepherds is incalculable. His care for us is not just for the here and now; it is for eternity. Let us watch that our every step continues to be in harmony with where our shepherd leads. Let us be continually thankful for his watchcare over us in our imperfections.

He is always there, always watching, always ready to save our lives. Let's be appreciative, aware and responsive to this help.

We are being guided to food, water and rest, and then being revived when we have trouble. We cannot find a better shepherd!

We are given the basics for survival.

Now, how does our shepherd walk us through progressing in our lives?

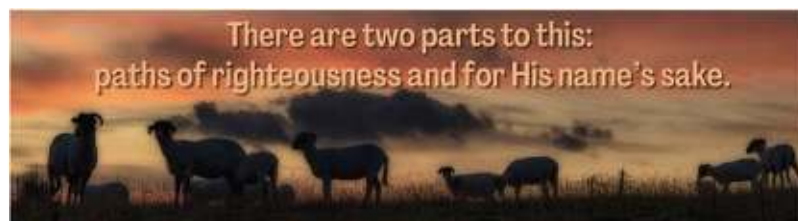
Again, David will show us more details of shepherding. Specifically, he will show us how a diligent shepherd brings his flock from one place to another so all of the basic needs of the sheep can be continually met.

Remember, the land that the shepherd guides the flock through is not a land of ease, but it is instead a land of challenge:



Psalms 23:3: (NASB)

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





Paths of righteousness, *What Does Psalm 23 Really Mean, IsraelU Episode TWO*

- The Hebrew word for path used in Psalm 23 is the same as the word used to describe someone walking around in circles. Now, when a shepherd needs to get their sheep down from the hill in the desert, they can't just let the sheep run straight down or they'll get injured because the hill is so steep. So, instead they lead the sheep around the mountain in circles. Over the years the sheep have worn these paths into the side of most hills. This is what the Bible is referring to when it speaks of paths of righteousness. This is how the shepherd of Psalm 23 gets the sheep to safety down the mountain.*

In the video, it shows some of these mountains. Literally there are these paths that go round and round to get down the mountain. Our path of righteousness does not go in a straight line either; it goes round and round. This is the way to get to our destination safely if we follow our Lord's footsteps.



*This is because I follow Jesus
for the purpose of representing Jesus himself.*



Sheep who follow know that a life of righteousness is NEVER a straight line to victory:

Psalms 51:10-13: (NASB) ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your holy spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You.

This is what a repentant heart feels like. We are grateful David expressed it so well! Repentance must come from the inside out –it is not lip service; it is life service. It is putting ourselves back on the path so we can follow the shepherd once again. We may have strayed, but with sincere repentance, we can follow the shepherd again. Righteousness is never easy and never in a straight line, for we are imperfect beings. The pictures of the mountains in Judea are interesting with their little footpaths, and sometimes a little treacherous, but the paths are safe if we follow our shepherd.



Sheep who follow know the path is difficult and are willing to walk where the shepherd leads:

Luke 9:23: (NASB) And he was saying to them all, If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me.

If we want to come after Jesus, just like a sheep follows its shepherd, this tells us what we must do. If we walk in his footsteps, he will get us there safely.



Sheep who follow know they are humbly privileged to have been called to be part of Jesus' flock:

Ephesians 2:8-10: (NASB) ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

We are not called because of our good works! Nothing we have done has merited His invitation. We are called by the grace of God for the potential He sees within us to be selfless and full of service. We are the workmanship of our shepherd. He trains his sheep so that we can survive and thrive in difficult conditions. Righteousness can only thrive when our humility to accept correction is strong.



For His name's sake

Sheep who follow are tasked with a profound purpose. Life has deep meaning.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21: (NASB) ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

That we might become the righteousness of God - there is our purpose. We are ambassadors for Christ. An ambassador is a representative of a higher power that lives in a different country. Our home is in heaven. We are to be representing heaven here on earth. We follow him for his name's sake. We walk in the paths of righteousness and the world looks at us and says, "They are just going round and round." But they do not realize that we are following the shepherd's lead and it is getting us to our goal. It is enabling our growth, our development and our maturity. We are becoming ambassadors for Christ, representatives to become the righteousness of God in Jesus, our shepherd.



Having Jesus as my shepherd is a transforming process. We need to grow and mature as we walk the difficult paths of righteousness because we are being trained to represent Jesus. Our purpose will bring us to becoming shepherds of the world in the future!

Shepherds of the world in the future, ministers of reconciliation –this is what we are called to and why we follow in the footsteps of Jesus. This is why we give up our will to do the will of God.



Psalm 23:4: (KJV)

*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.*



Dark valley, What Does Psalm 23 Really Mean, IsraelU Episode THREE

- *One of the first times I ever got to see a shepherd with his flock in Israel was in the desert at sunset and I noticed that when the sun was up and everything was light, the shepherd was leading his sheep from out in front. But as the sun went down and things got dark, the shepherd dropped back to be amongst his sheep. And that's almost exactly like what we read in Psalm 23; the Lord leads us, but when we go through a dark valley, that's when the Lord comes beside us. That's when God is with us, and that's when He comforts us.*

There is a profound sense of security because when it gets dark and dangerous, the shepherd is now in the midst of the flock. Jesus is in the midst of us, right beside us, when we have our darkest, most difficult times. It is moving to feel his presence with us during those times.



Jesus will be with us to faithfully discipline and guide us.



Valley of the shadow of death

Sheep who follow walk faithfully forward regardless of what others do:

2 Timothy 4:16-18: (NASB) ¹⁶At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. ¹⁷But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul described in his own life. When it got really tough, he had his Lord right by his side to deliver him where he needed to be delivered.



Thou art with me

Sheep who follow know that their shepherd is ALWAYS with them:

Matthew 28:19-20: (NASB) ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the son and the holy spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.



Here is a comfort beyond description: *I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* No one at that time knew that the end of the age would be over 2,000 years later. Jesus is saying: it does not matter how long; I will be with my sheep even until the very end. *Thou art with me.* It applies today as fully as it applied back then.



Rod and staff comfort

Sheep who follow know that whatever experience the shepherd brings, it is for their ultimate good:

Hebrews 12:11-13: (NIV2011) ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ¹²Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

The rod is a corrective tool and the staff guides. We think of God's providential overrulings as part of that guidance. God needs both the corrective and the guiding tool because we are imperfect. We are kept in line so that we can be taught for our own safety and maturity.

Remember in Psalms 51:10-13, David was asking to be restored. Why? In 2 Samuel 12, God sent Nathan the prophet to David to chastise him for his gross sins, and Nathan told David a story about sheep to reveal David's treachery. If anybody knew sheep, it was David. When Nathan told the metaphorical story of the rich man who had many sheep but took the one sheep from the poor man, David was furious because he was so protective of his own sheep. Nathan then said, *Thou art the man!* David needed the rod to put him back on the right path. David humbly and immediately repented, acknowledging his sin. God forgave him, but there were consequences that followed. We all suffer natural and spiritual consequences from our poor choices that we need to fulfill. *Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me...they bring us in line, they bring us the relief of knowing we can be corrected and stand up again in righteousness.* It is a powerful tool on God's part.



The hard, dark and unsettling times every sheep must go through never have to be experienced alone. If we accept the guidance and discipline of our shepherd, then we are assuring ourselves that he will continue to be by our side.

In other words, even though I walk through this sick, dark world of sin because of Adam's disobedience and death, Jesus is with me and I will not fear any evil because his rod and staff will help me. We want to be sheep who follow!

Whether we walk on a path of righteousness or through a dark and scary valley, our objective is the same. Follow our shepherd!

**We have seen ample provision, rest, protection and discipline.
What is the result of all this for the sheep?**

In the last two verses of Psalms 23, David changes the imagery a bit. He has walked us through the challenges of proper shepherding and now he focuses on the goodness and blessing that is a result of that successful shepherding.

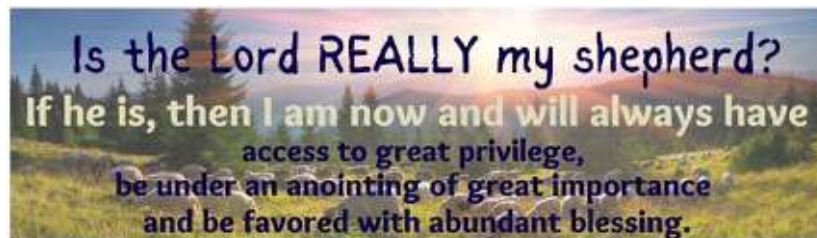
Here we will plainly see the sheep being honored with grace and favor that only a loving shepherd can give:

Psalms 23:5: (NJB)



*You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup brims over.*

You prepare a table...under the eyes of my enemies - they might not be right there, but they can see what is happening. They are observing and almost feeling the defiance of the shepherd who has taken care of his sheep and is celebrating with his sheep here and now.



Prepare a table for me

Sheep who follow understand that their privilege cannot be undone by the presence or influence of evil ones:

Psalms 91:1,4-7: (NASB) ¹He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. ⁴He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. ⁵You will not be afraid of the terror by night, or of the arrow that flies by day; ⁶of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. ⁷A thousand may fall at your side and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not approach you.

Dwelling in the shelter of the Most High means we have the advantage of the protection of God Almighty through Jesus. We do not have to fear the terror by night. Our enemies may cause a thousand to fall at our side, ten thousand at our right hand, but it shall not approach us. Even under the eyes of our enemies, we still have the blessing of following the shepherd and all that he has prepared for us.



Anoint my head with oil

Sheep who follow know they are marked by the unshakable promise of their future inheritance in the form of God's spirit:

Ephesians 1:13-14: (YLT) ¹³in whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth—the good news of your salvation—in whom also having believed, ye were sealed with the holy spirit of the promise, ¹⁴which is an earnest of our inheritance, to the redemption of the acquired possession, to the praise of His glory.



The word “earnest” is a down payment, like an engagement ring, a promise to someone you will marry. Also, in sheep, lanolin oil is produced from a gland which coats their wool. **It is not a coincidence that oil represents the holy spirit given to the followers of Christ.** What an amazing picture! When Jesus was with his followers in the upper room just before his crucifixion, he told them his Father would send the holy spirit to them. **The holy spirit was the guarantee of what was to come.** It was like an engagement promise to be his bride. What a beautiful picture.



My cup brims over

Sheep who follow, know and live by the overwhelming blessings their shepherd constantly bestows upon them:

Romans 8:37-39: (NASB) ³⁷*But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Nothing Satan can bring against us will work –this whole incredible list will not work to separate us from God or trip us up. Nothing will work because we are under the protection of the shepherd. Our blessings are enormous because we are with him. The Lord is our shepherd, *we lack nothing!* *Our cup brims over.*



It is almost impossible to describe the blessings we as "sheep" are exposed to while in the midst of the turmoil and darkness of evil. Our shepherd's love for us is tangible! It is not mere words or emotions. It is expressed in the real blessings of our real lives.

This is powerful and so true. How can we bless our enemies to show we do not fear them and we want the best for them? Jesus loved his enemies.

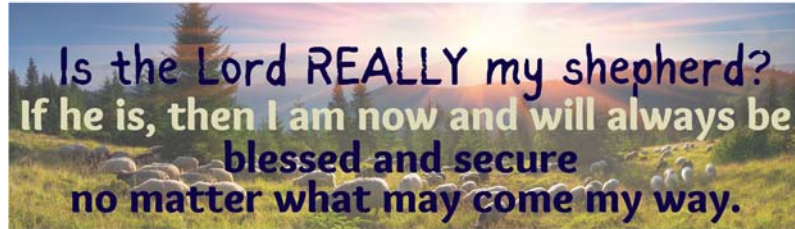
This brings to mind some dear Christian friends of ours that left another Christian church in a search for truth. Their names were maligned by the previous church which has a large presence in the area where they live. In fellowshiping with these brothers and sisters, it has been an inspiration to see them refuse to play the name-calling game. Their attitude of loving these people because God loves them is so commendable. They are following the footsteps of our shepherd. This is what it comes down to every time! Jesus died for his enemies. We can surely love ours.



Psalm 23:6: (NLT)

*Surely Your goodness and unfailing love
will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.*

As sheep, we are always worried about being pursued by the wolf or the lion or whatever. In this verse, *goodness and unfailing love are pursuing us all the days of our lives. No matter how hard we run, we cannot get away from them! We want to grasp that and hold onto it. And we will live in the house of the Lord forever.*



We may falter in our own emotions, but the fact is, if we are near our shepherd, we will be blessed and secure no matter what may come our way.



Sheep who follow understand that the source of our strength, guidance and purpose is the one God of all.

We praise Him for His plan and for giving us His son as our shepherd:

Isaiah 40:28-31: (NASB) ²⁸Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth does not become weary or tired. His understanding is inscrutable. ²⁹He gives strength to the weary, and to him who lacks might He increases power. ³⁰Though youths grow weary and tired, and vigorous young men stumble badly, ³¹Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.

If we put these verses in the context of being pursued by goodness and love all the days of our lives, we must realize, that if we stay close to the shepherd, we will be given strength, opportunity, grace, privilege and courage beyond what we would have without him.



Sheep who follow know that Jesus, as our shepherd, specifically bestowed serious shepherding responsibilities upon his sheep.

This began with the Apostle Peter, who incidentally had his own life revitalized by his shepherd, Jesus:

John 21:15-17: (NASB) ¹⁵So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Smon Peter, Smon, son of John, do you love me more than these?

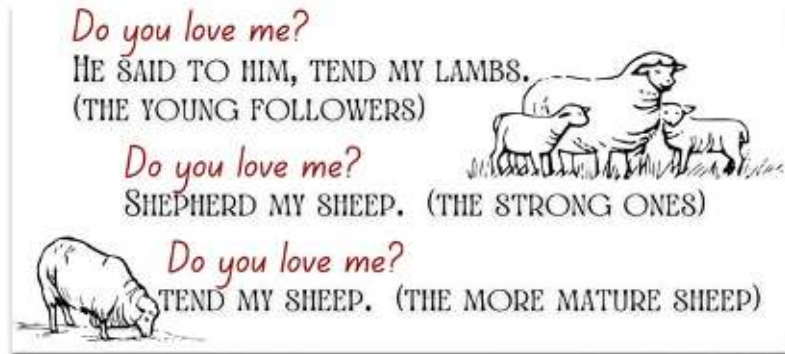


This took place right after the miraculous catch of fish. We believe Jesus is pointing to the fish and talking about Peter's livelihood.

He said to him, yes, Lord; you know that I love you. He said to him, tend my lambs. ¹⁶He said to him again a second time, Smon, son of John, do you love me? He said to him, Yes, Lord; you know that I love you. He said to him, Shepherd my sheep. ¹⁷He said to him the third time, Smon, son of John, do you love me? Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, do you love me? And he said to him, Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. Jesus said to him, tend my sheep.



Remember the context of these verses? Jesus told Peter he would deny him three times. Jesus also said he prayed for him that his faith may not fail. Was it a coincidence that Jesus asked him three times, *Do you love me?* The big lesson here is the responsibility Jesus gave Peter to shepherd the lambs, the young followers. Next, the sheep or the strong ones, and finally tend the more mature sheep, those that needed special care.



Jesus was turning over specific and broad, shepherding responsibilities to the Apostle Peter. Just as God had turned it over to Jesus, Jesus was now turning it over to the Apostle Peter. Peter, in turn, passed it on as well. It was a serious need and responsibility during the length of the Gospel Age.

The Apostle Paul also firmly encouraged spiritual responsibility among the flock as protection and encouragement would be continually needed, even up to this day:

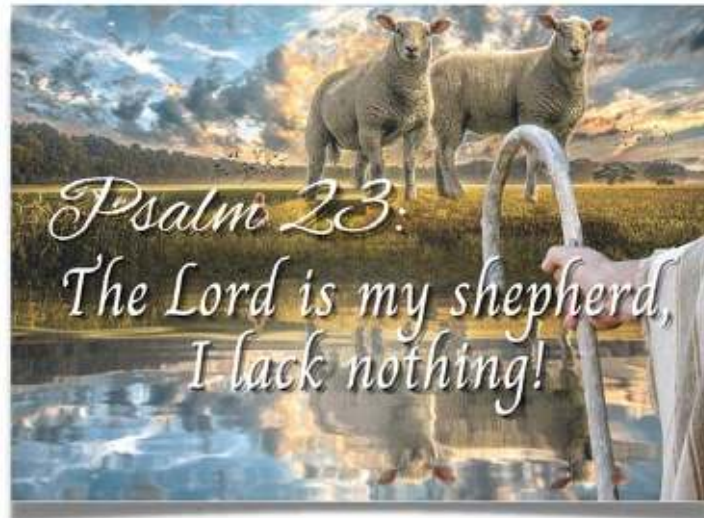
Acts 20:28-30: (NIV2011) ²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the holy spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.

The Apostles Peter and Paul each had responsibilities to shepherd which they passed on to others, who then passed it on to others, and so on. This is why we have this beautiful Psalm which shows us the incredible care Jesus, our shepherd, gives to us. We are tasked to take that and pass it on to our brotherhood.



Sheep who follow are not there to simply receive. On the contrary, our being sheep is for the sole purpose of our growth into eternal representatives of God and His son Jesus, our good shepherd. Let us follow, learn and grow, and then pass it all onto other sheep!

This is such a powerful lesson. The 23rd Psalm inspires and teaches us what Jesus wants us to know about being cared for and being secure, and then about passing it on to our brotherhood as we work alongside them.



*So, is the Lord really my shepherd?
For Jonathan, Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it..!*

All quoted scriptures are from the 1995 version of NASB unless otherwise indicated.



Join us next week for our podcast on August 22, 2022
Ep. 1243: Am I Putting New Wine in an Old Wineskin?

Study Questions follow

**Christian Questions Weekly
Newsletter**

**CQ Rewind Show Notes and
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Text
CQREWIND
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Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1242: Is The Lord Really My Shepherd?

<https://christianquestions.com/inspiration/1242-psalm-23/>

See:  **CQ Rewind**
SHOW NOTES

1. Why is it particularly appropriate that Psalm 23 is written by David? In the primary interpretation of the analogy in this Psalm, who is the shepherd? Who are the sheep? In the secondary interpretation, who is the shepherd? Who are the sheep? Who is "My servant David" in Ezekiel 34? (See Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34:11-12, 23-24)
2. What is the difference between the description of what the shepherd provides the sheep, and the Judean hills where David shepherded? The sheep's focus is on what? Why? What do the sheep lack? (See Psalm 23:1, John 10:14-15, Philippians 4:18-20, Hebrews 12:2-3)
3. How might the scarcity of grass in Judea be better for the sheep than an abundant grass pasture? What is necessary to get new energy? How does Jesus supply this for us? (See Psalm 23:2, Ezekiel 34:13-15, Matthew 4:3-4)
4. What is our responsibility for the provisions that Jesus supplies? How does Jesus help us with our walk in following him? (See Psalm 23:1, 2 Timothy 2:15, Matthew 11:28-30)
5. Why do the waters sheep drink from have to be still and quiet? Psalm 46 is a prophecy of what? The waters roaring and foaming represent what? Who does the city of God represent? What makes the city glad? Why? Summarize Psalm 23:2 from the viewpoint of true Christians. (See Psalm 23:2, Psalms 46:3-5, John 4:13-14)
6. Describe two ways the shepherd saves the lives of his sheep? What is a "cast sheep"? What is our role if we find a cast sheep? (See Psalm 23:3, 1 Samuel 17:34-36, 1 John 2:1-2, Galatians 6:1)
7. How does the shepherd lead the sheep to keep them safe in "paths of righteousness"? What must we exhibit when we are being trained by Jesus? What is the purpose for which we are being trained? Explain. (See Psalms 23:3, 51:10-13, Luke 9:23, 2 Corinthians 5:20-21)
8. How do shepherds lead their flock during daylight? How does this change when it gets dark? Why is this a comfort to us? What are the tools our shepherd uses? How is David an example of how to react to correction from God? (See Psalms 23:4, 51:10-13, Matthew 28:19-20, Hebrews 12:11-13, 2 Samuel 12)
9. What is the promise in God and Jesus preparing a table for us? If we "dwell in the shelter of the Most High," what is the guarantee? With what oil are we anointed? What can "separate us from the love of God"? If our cup brims over with blessings, how can we give back our appreciation to our shepherd? (See Psalms 23:5, 91:1-7, Ephesians 1:13-14, Romans 8:37-39)
10. What pursues us in Psalm 23:6? Can we outrun it? What are our shepherding responsibilities to the brotherhood? How will you apply these lessons in your life? (Psalm 23:6, Isaiah 40:28-31, John 21:15-17, Acts 20:28-30)