

\* The Heights Baptist Church \* Series: The Psalms \*  
\* Topic: The LORD is my Shepherd \* Psalm 23 \* 4/27/25 \*

MAIN POINT

As our great shepherd, God actively cares for us, guides us, and provides for us.

INTRODUCTION

**On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to ask for help when you need it? Do you readily admit when you need another's wisdom, support, encouragement, or resources? Explain.**

In Psalm 23, David uses two metaphors to describe his relationship with God. There's the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep, and the relationship between a host and his guests.

We may find it difficult to admit when we need help. But this is especially important when we need spiritual help, since we all need this help; and only God can provide it. In Psalm 23, we see ourselves as sheep who are dependent on our shepherd, and as guests being provided for by the host of the party.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 23:1-4: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

**What are some of the needs that a shepherd meets for his sheep?**

Left to themselves, sheep lack everything. They lack direction and they are completely helpless at defending themselves against any dangers that may present themselves. A good shepherd knows what the sheep need and fulfills his duty to provide for them. There are shepherds who neglect their flocks (see Ezekiel 34), but the Lord is not that kind of shepherd.

**When you think of God as your shepherd, what aspect(s) of God's character or actions does this imagery highlight?**

The same God who had proven Himself to be faithful to Israel would be faithful to provide for David. And He will be faithful to provide for all of us in Christ who look to Him as our Great Shepherd.

*Note to study leader: Consider writing the four items on the white board as people provide the answers to the following question.*

**Looking at verses 1-4, what four qualities of the shepherd are mentioned in these four verses?**

- Verse 1: God provides me with all that I need.
- Verse 2: God provides refreshment for my soul.
- Verse 3: God provides guidance for my life.
- Verse 4: God protects and comforts me.

**In verse 1, David said, "I lack nothing" when contemplating God's good care of him. What does this truth about God reveal about God and about us?**

David is able to say this because he knew God, and he was very familiar with what a good shepherd does for his sheep. The fact that David views God this way implies that he also views himself as a sheep. Sheep are not the brightest creatures and would likely not live long without the guidance and provision of the shepherd. David knows God is providing for him, caring for him, guiding him, and ensuring all his needs are met. Our greatest need as people is a personal relationship with our loving God who made us.

**Considering verse 2 and the first part of verse 3, what do I need to do to take advantage of the “green pasture and still water” times that God provides for me in my life?**

We need to choose to lie down in the green pastures that God provides. God’s peace that passes understanding is available to us as Christians (Phil. 4:4-8). Rather than being overly busy or anxious, we need to rejoice in the Lord (Phil. 4:4), pray to God with thanksgiving (Phil. 4:5-7), and think of the good things God has provided for me (Phil. 4:8).

Another way we need to take advantage of the green pastures and still waters that God provides is to observe our Sabbath rest. Jesus said that man wasn’t made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man. We are designed by God to need rest on a regular basis.

**Considering verse 3, what do I need to do to ensure I am following the right path that God is guiding me through?**

I need to be listening to Him, praying for wisdom (James 1:5), and seeking guidance from His word (Psalm 119:165), and counsel from godly Christians (Prov. 11:14). I also need to ensure I am not seeking guidance from the wrong places (Col. 2:2-3).

**How might knowing that God is leading me through this path for the His name’s sake give us confidence in God’s guidance in our lives?**

Knowing that God promises to guide us for His name’s sake should give us tremendous confidence that God will lead you well. God has put His own name and reputation on the line for us and He will not let His name be profaned or fall into disrepute. This should give us deep assurance that God is going to provide for us and guide us along the right paths.

**Considering verse 4, what kinds of paths will our good shepherd sometimes lead us through?**

David recognizes that God leads him down the paths that are best for us, even though some of them may not look all that appealing to us. The path that God leads us down may be very difficult, but it will be right. And God will ultimately use the path He leads us through for our good (Rom. 8:28, Heb. 11:6).

*“And I want to say three things primarily, and the first one is this: that the valley experiences are inevitable in the life of every believer.... The second thing I want you to notice is... the valley experiences are painful times in our life.... And thirdly, they are profitable.... God reveals Himself in the valley in a way that He does not reveal Himself on the mountain peak. So, we’re going to get a glimpse of God. We’re going to see Him in ways that we would not see Him otherwise.” Charles Stanley, “The Believer’s Valley Experiences”*

**Why might you find comfort and reassurance in God’s rod and staff (v. 4)? How do these two images help you “fear no evil” even while walking through the “darkest valley”?**

A shepherd carried a “rod” to drive off wild animals (1 Sam. 17:43; 2 Sam. 23:21) and a staff to guide and direct His sheep. These two tools remind us of God’s constant and comprehensive protection and guidance. God has promised to do whatever it takes to lead, guide, and protect us.

*“When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don’t throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer.” Corrie Ten Boom*

*“Basically, there are two paths you can walk: faith or fear. It’s impossible to simultaneously trust God and not trust God.” Charles Stanley*

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ JOHN 10:11-15

**In what ways is Jesus the fulfillment of the shepherd described in Psalm 23, and how does He compare to a hired hand?**

The good shepherd is the one who loves the sheep enough to lay down his life for them. That's how we know that Jesus is the good shepherd. And because we are certain He is good, we can, as His flock, trust Him to lead us in the right way. The flock hears the voice of Jesus through the Word of God as well as through the spiritual leadership of their pastors as they represent Jesus.

**How does viewing Christ as our Shepherd help us as we walk through “the dark valley” seasons of this life?**

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ PSALM 23:5-6: GOD OUR GENEROUS, BENEVOLENT HOST

**David shifts in verses 5-6 from envisioning God as a Shepherd to God as the host of a banquet, with us as the invited guests. What blessings are described in verse 5, and what do they signify?**

- God prepares a table before us. God provides for us.
- God anoints our head with oil.
- Our cup overflows. God abundantly provides for us.

*Note to study leader: Anointing an esteemed dinner guest's head with oil was a custom in Israel that showed hospitality and respect, showing David viewed himself as the LORD's special guest. This oil also symbolizes David's joy before the LORD, as oil was also a symbol of celebration and gladness (Isaiah 61:3 and Hebrews 1:9).*

**How does verse 6 clearly spell out the spiritual blessings we have as Christians that are described metaphorically in the previous verses?**

Surely, goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever!

APPLICATION

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ ROMANS 8:31-39

**What truths are described in these verses that show us the spiritual blessings we have as Christians that are pictured in Psalm 23?**

- If God is for us, we don't have to fear anyone who is against us.
- If God is for us, we don't have to fear any difficult circumstance that we may face.
- Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

**Consider memorizing Psalm 23 this week, and then pray through it, praising and thanking God for these blessings, or meditate on it when you are having a difficult time falling asleep.**

PRAYER

Praise God for His provision, guidance, and protection in our lives. Thank Him for the times of green pastures and still waters and ask that we take advantage of those times to rest in Him. Thank God that the dark valley times in our lives are not the final destination, but a path that God will lead us through. Thank God that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives, and that we will dwell in the house of the LORD forever!

## COMMENTARY

### Psalm 23

23:1 The Lord is often referred to as the Shepherd of His people, Israel (74:1; 80:1; Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11-16). In the ancient Near East, kings were commonly known as the shepherds of their people. Since Yahweh is the true King, the title Shepherd is most appropriate.

23:2-3 These verses show us that God is the cause of the refreshment. Right paths might have a twofold idea. In keeping with the shepherd and sheep image, it can mean safe paths that are free from danger. In the larger context of wisdom literature it refers to paths of righteousness, though usually that would contrast one path of life with another leading to death. The former idea is probably the primary meaning here.

23:4 Some argue that the Hebrew term *tsalmaweth* is related to an Akkadian word (*tselem*) that means “deep darkness.” Others say it comes from two Hebrew words, *tsal* and *moth*, and means “shadow of death.” It occurs approximately 20 times in the OT. It is clear that it implies intense darkness that represents extreme danger (Job 10:21; 28:3; Jer 2:6). *Darkest* fits this specific context, since it is in the darkest valley where the greatest danger (such as a predator) lurks for sheep.

23:5 The image shifts from shepherd to friend. The identification of Yahweh with a shepherd emphasizes His care and protection, but He is much more than that for a person who is in close fellowship with Him. While protection from enemies is still implied, it is intensified with the image of a feast that is served while the enemies look on. In Jewish society oil was a symbol for rejoicing (104:15) and was also used in the welcoming of guests (45:7; 92:10; Lk 7:46).

23:6 The verb “pursue” or “follow” is often used to describe attackers, but here Yahweh’s goodness and faithful love are personified as the ones who chased David throughout his life. “All the days of my life” represents the Hebrew “for the length of days.”