


# Creative Living Bible Study



## In the Care of the Good Shepherd

*Reflections on the Twenty-Third Psalm*

This book belongs to:



# In the Care of the Good Shepherd

*Reflections on the Twenty-Third Psalm*

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Printed in the United States of America  
ISBN: 1-932395-66-0

# In the Care of the Good Shepherd

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# IN THE CARE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

## *REFLECTIONS ON PSALM 23*

### LESSON 1

#### INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most beloved Psalm and one of the most treasured pieces of literature in the world is Psalm 23. In this beautiful writing, David, who had been a shepherd before becoming a king in ancient Israel, describes the deep fulfillment of being a "sheep" in the LORD's pasture.

What makes Psalm 23 so explosive with meaning and at the same time so comforting to the soul is the beautiful imagery of a sheep under the care of a good shepherd. David uses this word picture with amazing brevity to declare the peace, nurture, guidance, protection and hope found in allowing the LORD to direct our lives.

Therefore, to understand Psalm 23 it helps to have some understanding about the relationship between a sheep and its shepherd. First of all, sheep are not smart animals; they are dirty and smelly and completely vulnerable to predators, pests, and starvation. Their only defense is to run, and they can't run very fast. Sheep also have an impulsive "herd mentality" and will follow the herd even if it is over a cliff.

In spite of their shortcomings and great needs, the good shepherd patiently and painstakingly devotes himself to his sheep, knowing and caring for them individually. He guides, protects, and provides for the

totally dependent sheep in such a way that they thrive and feel completely secure in his care.

God is making some wonderful statements about His own heart toward us through this word picture. The first is that He wants to personally lead and watch over our lives. The Creator and sustainer of the universe in all His majesty wants to guide, protect and provide for you and me as completely as a good shepherd cares for his sheep. He is saying that we can trust Him with the details of our lives rather than trust the unstable sources of help in our ever-changing world.

Secondly, the LORD wants to care for us even with our imperfections and constant needs. The fact that we are compared with sheep that are anything but perfect and "together" means that He knows we will never be, either. His love and care are unconditional when we choose Him as the shepherd of our lives, and He is never inconvenienced by our continual needs.

The comparison with sheep also depicts us as completely vulnerable to many destructive forces, with death being the final and inescapable enemy. But the LORD, who is all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise and present everywhere, promises to oversee our lives in such a way that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives, and we will "dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

A final aspect of Psalm 23's imagery, with the sheep grazing in green pastures, is peace. Even when the sheep face dreadful, even life-threatening situations, they are secure that the shepherd is in control and will not leave them. This is also God's promise: He will never leave us. We can have an inner peace knowing the LORD will remain by our side and give us His strength whatever may come.

Perhaps Psalm 23 is still so loved today because we are all wounded and needy people. Everyone is challenged by issues of failure, insecurity, injustice, emotional wounds and the struggles of life. In the study of this beautiful passage of God's Word, we will see a sure path to peace, security and joy despite the difficulties of our human experience. We will discover that all our needs can be met in the care of the Good Shepherd.

## *TRUSTING THE GOOD SHEPHERD*

*"The LORD is my Shepherd..."*

These opening words of Psalm 23 have been compared to a sheep bragging to another sheep across the fence, "The LORD is *my* shepherd." As a child might speak with joy and pride about a good father, the author is speaking with pride and joy that he belongs to and is personally cared for by the LORD.

As we move forward in time to the words of Jesus in John 10:1-8, we discover that Christ is the Good Shepherd whom David knew and loved. The Son of God took on human form, lived among men and died on a cross to show the world the loving, trustworthy, and holy nature of God. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus promises "life to the full" now and eternally to those who follow Him (John 10:10b, 27-28).

So we see that Psalm 23 is in fact a loving invitation from the LORD Jesus Christ to trust Him completely as the Good Shepherd of our individual lives. But to yield our lives to the LORD in this way, we have to first believe that He is trustworthy.

In this first lesson, we will look at the character of the Good Shepherd, especially His unconditional love, that motivates us to trust Him.

1. What does this imagery of Psalm 23 reveal about the relationship the LORD wants to have with us?

**Reference:** Note 1, *LORD*, and Note 2, *Shepherd*, p. 12.

2. a. To thus care for His "sheep," the LORD must have overall control over their lives. Who (or what) do people allow to control their lives instead of the LORD?

b. What are some results of these choices in people's lives?

3 a. What do the following verses tell us about the LORD that would motivate us to let him shepherd our lives?

Psalm 100:3,5

Psalm 34:18

Jeremiah 29:11

b. What promises does He make to you when you trust Him with your life?

Psalm 121:3

Isaiah 46:4

**Reference:** *Optional Study on the Attributes of God*, p. 11.

4. To trust the LORD as the Shepherd of our lives, we have to know He loves us and will always do what is in our best interest.

a. How do the following passages describe the LORD's love?

Psalm 36:5, 7

Psalm 86:5

b. The Bible states that "God is love" (1 John 4:16). How does 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a describe God's love?

5. a. Jesus told a parable about a prodigal son who left home and squandered his inheritance on loose living. Destitute, he decided to return to his father, confess his wrong, and ask to be his father's servant. What was the father's response?

Luke 15:21-24

b. What was Jesus showing us about God's love for those who stray from Him and return with a humble, repentant heart?



6. What do the following verses reveal about God's readiness to forgive and help us when we are truly sorry for our sin?

Isaiah 1:18

Psalm 32:5

7. The reason God can justly forgive our sin when we are genuinely repentant is that in the Person of His Son Jesus Christ, God Himself took the penalty for our sin when Jesus died on the cross. What do these verses tell us about the extent of the LORD's love for us?

John 3:16

Romans 5:8

**Reference:** Note 3, *Why did Christ have to die in my place?* p. 12.

8. The Scriptures tell us that God was in Christ, seeking to reconcile the world to Himself (Hebrews 1:3; John 14:9-10). What do you observe about God's love as reflected in the life of His Son?

John 10:11

Galatians 2:20c

Romans 8:34

Romans 8:38-39

9. How does Psalm 23:6 sum up the rewards of a lifestyle of trust and dependence on the LORD?

## S U M M A R Y

10. What have you observed in this lesson about the relationship the LORD wants to have with you?

11. What does the LORD promise you as you allow Him to be the Good Shepherd of your life? What truths or promises stand out to you from this lesson?

12. a. How do the Scriptures describe God's love for you?

b. What does the cross of Christ prove about God's love?

13. Scripture tells us that we must individually invite Christ into our lives in order to be right with God and have Him as the Shepherd of our lives.

John 1:12 says: *"Yet to all who received Him [Jesus Christ], to those who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God...."*

Revelation 3:20 (Jesus speaking): *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with Me."*

If you have never opened the door of your life to Jesus Christ, or if you want to reaffirm your desire to have Him lead your life, the following is a suggested prayer.

*Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life and make me the kind of person You want me to be.*

If you prayed this prayer, what is Christ's promise to you in Revelation 3:20 above?

What assurance can you have from John 10:27 below?

Hebrews 13:5b below?

John 10:27 (Jesus speaking) *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."*

Hebrews 13:5b *"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."*

14. The better we know the LORD, the more we will trust Him. The following study can help you know God better.

***Optional study on the attributes of God.***

His Majesty: 1 Chronicles 29:12

Faithfulness: Psalm 36:5

Goodness: Nahum 1:7

Grace: Romans 3:23-24 (Titus 3:7)

God's Graciousness and Patience: Psalm 103:8

Greatness: Psalm 145:3

Holiness: (purity; separate from sin) Psalm 99:5 (Isaiah 5:16)

His Immutability (He does not change): Psalm 102:27 (Heb. 13:8)

Impartiality: Job 34:19 (Acts 10:34-35)

Justice: Psalm 33:5

Love: John 3:16

Mercy: Psalm 103:10-12 (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Omnipotence (all-powerful): Luke 1:37 (Job 42:2)

Omnipresence (everywhere present): Psalm 139:7-10

Omniscience (all-knowing): Hebrews 4:13 (Job 31:4)

Providence (care):

    Providing: Philippians 4:19

    Protecting: Psalm 91:4

    Guiding: Proverbs 2:8

Righteousness: Deuteronomy 32:4

Sovereignty: Daniel 2:20-22

His Ways and Laws: Psalm 18:30; Psalm 19:7-8,11

Understanding: Psalm 147:5 (1 Chronicles 28:9b)

Wisdom: Isaiah 28:29 (James 1:5)

For further study: *The Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer; *Knowing God* by J. I. Packer; *Your God Is Too Small* by J. B. Phillips

## LESSON 1 NOTES

1 LORD, or YHWH, pronounced "Yahweh." This is the Hebrew word used in Psalm 23. It is the very personal name of God that He gave to His people in Exodus 3:15 when he met Moses through the burning bush. It means "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be." It is the name that expressed His character as the dependable and faithful God who desires the full trust of his people (see Exodus 3:12, where "I will be" is completed by "with you"; see also Exodus 34:5-7). YHWH is the third person form of the same verb, *to be*, and means *He is* or *He will be* which is the form of the verb used when *we* speak of God. (i.e. God says, "I AM," and we say, "He is.") It is translated LORD in the NIV translation. *The NIV Study Bible*, pp. 91, 279.

2 *Shepherd* (Psalm 23:1) was "a widely used metaphor for kings in the ancient Near East, and also in Israel. Here David the king acknowledges that the LORD is his Shepherd-King. For Jesus as the shepherd of His people see John 10:11, 14; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 5:4; Rev 7:17." *The NIV Study Bible*, p. 807.

3 "Why did Christ have to die in my place?" This is one of the most important yet least understood questions of the Christian faith. The following explanations of two biblical terms answer this question:

**a. Redemption** is a biblical word meaning "to buy out" or "to set free by the payment of a price (ransom)" and refers to a slave being purchased out of slavery. Romans 3:24 says we are "justified freely by his grace through the *redemption* that came by Christ Jesus." As born sinners, we are in the slave market of sin, so to speak. But Christ, the only free man who ever lived (because He was sinless), paid the ransom price of His own blood to purchase sinners out of the slave market of sin and set them free to become sons of God. Only by the price of death can one be set free (Romans 6:23), and only one who is free (sinless as Christ was; cf. Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21) can buy a slave's freedom. By paying the ransom price of His shed blood, Jesus purchased the person who puts faith in Him out of the slave market of sin and sets him free to become a son of God (Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:5-6; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Gal 4:4-5).

**b. Justification** refers to God declaring us "not guilty" and righteous in his sight, even though we are guilty of sin. God is able to do this because of the life and death of Jesus Christ acting as man's substitute.

When God declares a person righteous in His sight, He does so on the basis of the life and death of the One who was acting on his behalf. "Jesus our LORD...was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:24-25). When we put faith in Jesus Christ to save us from sin, God declares us justified, or not guilty, and righteous. We are justified by the death of Christ which paid the penalty for our sin, and we are justified by the life of Christ whose life of righteousness is also credited to us. This justification, which is all by God's grace and received by faith, brings us into fellowship with God as a child in His family.