

Main Idea: In Psalm 23 David shares about the difference it makes when the Lord is your shepherd. He shares from three perspectives.

- I. David talks *about* the Good Shepherd (1-3).
 - A. We learn what He *is* (1).
 1. He is Yahweh.
 2. He is our provider.
 - B. We learn what He *does* (2-3a).
 1. He gives His sheep rest.
 2. He leads His sheep.
 3. He restores His sheep.
 4. He guides His sheep.
 - C. We learn what He *wants* (3b).
 1. His agenda is our righteousness.
 2. His ultimate agenda is the honor of His name.
 - II. David talks *to* the Good Shepherd (4-5).
 - A. Our shepherd may take us into dangerous circumstances (4a).
 - B. Our shepherd takes away our fear (4b-5).
 1. He is with His sheep.
 2. He uses rod and staff to comfort His sheep.
 3. He dines with His sheep in the middle of enemy territory.
 4. He treats His sheep like royalty.
 - III. David talks about the difference the Good Shepherd makes (6).
 - A. We can experience His goodness in this life.
 - B. We will enjoy His presence forever.
- Make It Personal: Is the Good Shepherd your shepherd?
1. Do you know Him?
 2. Are you following Him?
 3. Are you resting in Him?

At WBC we’re committed to knowing Christ and making Christ known. That’s why we exist. That’s why we have ministries for all ages. That’s why we have missionaries around the world. That’s why we give you the opportunity to participate in an offering every week. That’s why we have Sunday School classes and Bible studies, and of course, preach sermons. We want to help people know Christ, and equip them to make Him known to others.

So if you want to help someone know Christ, where do you look in the Bible? We almost always go to the New Testament, right? And probably to the Gospels. But this morning I want to take us to the Old Testament.

Did you realize that we can learn about Jesus Christ from the Old Testament? Jesus Himself said in John 5:39, “These are the Scriptures that testify about me.” He was talking about the Old Testament when He said that.

I’ve been listening online to John MacArthur’s current series “Seeing Christ in the Old Testament,” and I recommend it highly. We often shortchange ourselves by neglecting the first thirty-nine books of our Bible. But as MacArthur rightfully points out, the Old Testament was the only Bible Jesus ever read, and He not only read it but said He *fulfilled it*. And the early church preached Jesus from the Old Testament. Just read the sermons they preached in Acts, and read the epistles for that matter, and you’ll see literally hundreds of quotations and references to the Old Testament. The early church saw Christ in the Old Testament and preached Christ from the Old Testament.

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This message has been adapted from a sermon preached at WBC on 9/23/07 in a series on the Psalms of David.

When Jesus made His famous “I am” claims, they didn’t come out of a vacuum. He made them in light of Old Testament predictions and prophecies. For instance, in John 15:1 He said, “I am the true vine,” and He said that because in the Old Testament, in passages like Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 80:8-16, and Jeremiah 2:21, Israel was called God’s vine. But Israel failed to fulfill God’s purposes, so Jesus announced, “I am the *true* vine,” indicating He would not fail but would accomplish God’s purpose for Him.

On another occasion He said, “I am the Bread of Life,” and Jesus Himself said that claim in John 6:33 was the fulfillment of God giving His people manna in the wilderness, a story you’ll find in Numbers 11.

Or when He said in John 8:12, “I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,” His hearers surely thought of the account in Exodus 13:21 when God led the Israelites through the wilderness as a pillar of fire.

The point is, we can’t appreciate Jesus’ claims fully if we don’t know the Bible He had in mind, namely, what we call *the Old Testament*.

In the past month we’ve been marveling at Jesus’ claim in John 10, where twice He said, “I am the Good Shepherd (verses 11 & 14).” We’ve looked carefully at this New Testament account and learned tremendous truth about Jesus from it.

But there’s more to see. Jesus didn’t make that claim in a vacuum, but had His Bible in mind, again, the Old Testament. When He said, “I am the Good Shepherd,” He was drawing out a tremendous theme from the Old Testament and saying, “I am the fulfillment of it. I am the One spoken of prophetically in those passages. I am the Good Shepherd.”

So I want to go back into the Old Testament this morning. We could go to several shepherd texts in the Old Testament, but I want to take you to the one that towers above the rest.

It’s possibly the most familiar passage in all of the Bible. It’s quoted regularly at funerals, in hospitals, and in battle zones. You read it on wall hangings and sympathy cards. If I said the first line, many, even those who don’t go to church, could join me...

The Lord is my shepherd. What comes next? I shall not want.

Everybody knows what Psalm 23 has to say. Or do they? I’m not sure they do, and here’s why. According to the heading, Psalm 23 is *a psalm of David*. Prior to becoming Israel’s king, David himself was a shepherd and lived in country full of shepherds. *But there aren’t very many shepherds in our country.* So a metaphor that communicated volumes in David’s day ten centuries B.C. in Israel goes right over our heads in hi-tech America.

As I’ve shared before, I grew up on a farm and spent time around cattle, pigs, horses, dogs, and cats, but that doesn’t help me much because we had *no sheep*. So when I read that the Lord is my *shepherd*, the picture doesn’t help me, at least not based on personal experience. Thankfully, the truths in the Bible aren’t dependent upon personal experience. We can learn from the experiences and explanations of *others*.

Which is why I’ll be quoting Phillip Keller throughout this message. Phillip Keller grew up in East Africa, surrounded by simple native herders with their flocks. Later as a young man he made his living for eight years as a sheep owner and sheep rancher. Still later he became a lay pastor of a community church and shared the truths of Psalm 23 from the perspective of a shepherd. He eventually recorded those thoughts in a delightful book entitled, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*.

We’re going to get to know the Good Shepherd better from Psalm 23. There are three movements in this psalm, as determined by David’s use of pronouns. In the first movement, verses 1-3, David uses the pronouns “he” and “his” to talk about the Lord. But in verses 4-5 David switches to the pronouns “you” and “your,” and doesn’t merely

speaking *about* the Lord but *to* the Lord. He finishes the psalm in verse 6 as he began it, by dropping the “you” and once again talking *about* the Lord. Let’s walk with David through the psalm and learn about the Good Shepherd from three perspectives

I. David talks *about* the Good Shepherd (1-3).

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

In those three image-laden verses David expresses three truths about his shepherd.

A. We learn what He is (1). And what *is* He? First of all...

1. *He is Yahweh.* “*Yahweh*, is my shepherd.” David uses God’s personal, covenant name. To David God isn’t some impersonal cosmic power way out there, nor is God “the man upstairs,” as some naively assert. No, the One who is David’s shepherd is the One who relates personally to His people. He is *Yahweh*.

2. *He is our provider.* “*Yahweh* is my *shepherd*.” David, of course, had been a shepherd. And the Bible says that when David became king he continued to be a shepherd, not of sheep but of *people*.²

But who’s the shepherd’s shepherd? *The Lord* is, says David. He is *my* shepherd. The “my” indicates how personal this is. VanGemeren observes, “The temptation in ancient Israel was to speak only about ‘our’ God (cf. Deut 6:4), forgetting that the God of Israel is also the God of individuals...For this reason Psalm 23 is such a popular psalm, because it permits each believer to take its words on his lips and express in gratitude and confidence that all the demonstrations of God’s covenant love are his, too.”³

What happens when the Lord is your shepherd? David says, “I shall not be in want.” Literally, “I do not lack.” In other words, I have everything I need. *Everything*. In the rest of the psalm David will show us how the Shepherd meets those needs.

Eric Lane explains, “In these six verses he gives us a full picture of the shepherd’s daily round: walking, resting, feeding, facing danger, celebrating and returning home.”⁴ That’s what a shepherd does for his sheep, and that’s what God has done for me, says David.

What I’m about to say next is vital. *Not everyone can claim Psalm 23.* I’ll grant that nearly everyone *does*, but not everyone *can*. Why not? In order to claim that the Lord is your shepherd, you must first be a *sheep*.

You say, “Well, isn’t everybody a sheep?” No. The Bible makes it clear that we do not enter the world as the Lord’s sheep. The Bible uses other metaphors to depict the natural man, such as goats or even wolves. But nobody is a sheep from birth.

So what are the identifiers of true sheep? Jesus answered that question in John 10:27-28. “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.”

In order to say that the Lord is your *Shepherd*, He must first be your *Savior*. That means you must hear the Shepherd’s voice and follow Him, *first to the cross* where He died as a substitute for sinners like you and me. You must believe that the Shepherd died *for you*, as He said in John 10:11, “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” But you must also follow the Shepherd *to His empty tomb* and believe that He rose again

² See Psalm 78:70-72 which says, “[The Lord] chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.”

³ Willem VanGemeren, p. 215.

⁴ Eric Lane, p. 115.

from the dead, a fact He likewise predicted, in John 10:17, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.”

Those are the two marks of a true sheep. They *hear* the Shepherd’s voice. And they *follow* Him.⁵ And only those who follow Him, like David, can say, “The Lord is *my* shepherd.”

Think of it another way. As Charles Spurgeon observes, “The position of this Psalm is worthy of notice. It follows the twenty-second, which is peculiarly the Psalm of the Cross. There are no green pastures, no still waters on the other side of the twenty-second Psalm. It is only after we read, ‘My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me!’ that we come to ‘The Lord is my Shepherd.’ We must by experience know the value of the blood-shedding, and see the sword awakened against the Shepherd, before we shall be able truly to know the sweetness of the good Shepherd’s care.”⁶

Some would object, saying, “But a person can’t know for sure, can he?” David knew. He affirmed, “The Lord *is* my shepherd.” That’s what He *is*. But there’s more...

B. We learn what He *does* (2-3a). David mentions four activities of his Shepherd.

1. *He gives His sheep rest.* “He makes me lie down in green pastures.” Those of us who’ve never been around sheep might think, “What’s so special about making a sheep lie down? To get my dog to lie down all I need is a treat to bribe him. It’s not hard.”

Let’s listen to a shepherd, Phillip Keller, as he explains, “The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very make-up it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met. Owing to their timidity they refuse to lie down unless they are *free of all fear*. Because of the social behavior within a flock sheep will not lie down unless they are *free from friction* with others of their kind. If tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. Only when *free of these pests* can they relax. Lastly, sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be *free from hunger*.”

And Keller concludes, “The unique aspect of the picture is that it is only the sheepman himself who can provide release from these anxieties. It all depends upon the diligence of the owner whether or not his flock is free of disturbing influences.”⁷

Here’s the beauty of it. We have a Shepherd who provides that kind of care for His sheep. He eliminates fear, and friction, and pests, and hunger so that His lambs can lie down and rest. How? By His very presence with us. “Lo, I am *with you always*,” were His parting words (Matt. 28:20).

Keller adds, “In the course of time I came to realize that nothing so quieted and reassured the sheep as to see me in the field. The presence of their master and owner and protector put them at ease as nothing else could do, and this applied day and night.”⁸

But there’s more. First, the Good Shepherd gives His sheep rest. Secondly...

2. *He leads His sheep.* David says, “He *leads* me beside quiet waters.”

We had a couple of horses back on the farm, and if you rode them and took off their saddle and bridle, patted them on the backside and told them, “Go to the barn,” they would go, at least most of the time.

Even the cattle would obey your voice commands, again, most of the time. I can remember standing in the barn-lot and seeing our cows a hundred yards away on the

⁵ After following Jesus to the cross and empty tomb, true sheep follow Him along paths of righteousness (verse 3). As Peter later put it, they follow in His steps and “live for righteousness” (1 Pet.2:21, 24).

⁶ Charles Spurgeon, p. 353.

⁷ Phillip Keller, pp. 35-6, emphasis added.

⁸ Phillip Keller, p. 37.

hillside pasture. All I needed to do was let out a loud *Si...calve, Si...calve*, and the cows would come running to the barn.

But sheep? I've read that sheep have no sense of direction, that they don't recognize landmarks, that they don't go where you tell them to go, and therefore *need to be led*.⁹ Sheep are totally dependent on their shepherd, and not just when they are little. From birth to death they need a shepherd *to lead them*.

My friend, when God's Word calls us *sheep*, it's not meant to flatter us. It's meant to remind us how absolutely dependent we are on our Shepherd!

He leads me, says David. Where? *Beside quiet waters*.

Not just water, but quiet water. Why? Because rough water is dangerous to sheep. One slip and they fall in and their water-saturated wool takes them down like an anchor. Plus sheep are skittish. Noise unsettles them.

But since the Good Shepherd knows His sheep well he leads them to just the right place, to "*quiet waters*." But that's not all He does...

3. *He restores His sheep*. "He restores my soul."

There are times when our soul needs restored. In Psalm 42:11 the psalmist asks, "Why are you *downcast*, O my soul?" Phillip Keller says this is exactly what happens to sheep. A "cast" sheep is one that's turned over on its back and can't get up.

Keller explains: "The way it happens is this. A heavy, fat, or long fleeced sheep will lie down comfortably in some hollow or depression in the ground. It may roll on its side slightly to stretch out or relax. Suddenly the center of gravity in the body shifts so that it turns on its back far enough that the feet no longer touch the ground. It may feel a sense of panic and start to paw frantically. Frequently this only makes things worse. It rolls over even further. Now it is quite impossible for it to regain its feet."¹⁰

In time the helpless 'cast' sheep will die. Unless the shepherd intervenes. Keller said he spent many hours searching for lost sheep, and more often than not, as he puts it, "I would see it at a distance, down on its back, lying helpless."¹¹ And then he would run to the downcast sheep, put it back on its feet again, thereby *restoring* the sheep to life.

Beloved, sometimes people who love God get down and they can't get back up. They try with all their might, but they can't get up. In time, they become downcast and left to themselves they begin to lose their zest for life. It happened to David, "a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14)."

But there's hope for the downcast. "He restores my soul," says David. And the present tense verb indicates that God restored his soul over and over again.

4. *He guides His sheep*. "He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake." The shepherd's goal is to see his lambs grow quickly and become healthy mature sheep. According to Keller, that's why a good shepherd is constantly on the lookout for nutritious pasture. The more quickly the sheep eat and are filled up, the sooner they will lie down to rest quietly and ruminate. Keller says that on good forage his lambs would commonly reach 100 pounds in weight within 100 days from birth.

But to the contrary, writes Keller: "A hungry, ill-fed sheep is ever on its feet, on the move, searching for another scanty mouthful of forage to try and satisfy its gnawing hunger. Such sheep are not contented, they do not thrive, they are no use to themselves nor to their owners. They languish and lack vigor and vitality."¹²

⁹ Lane, p. 116.

¹⁰ Phillip Keller, p. 61.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 62.

¹² Phillip Keller, p. 46.

David testifies of his shepherd, “He guides me.” David didn’t live life by his own plans. He simply followed his Shepherd.

Are you following the Shepherd? You say, “It would help if I knew where He wanted to take me.” Okay, then you’ll be interested in what David says next. David just taught us about what the Good Shepherd *is* and what He *does*. At the end of verse 3...

C. We learn what He wants (3b). Notice again those two phrases that follow the verb *guides*. They reveal for us God’s intent for His sheep, His *agenda*. “He guides me [here’s the first phrase] *in paths of righteousness* [here’s the second phrase] *for his name’s sake*.” What is it that God wants? David says that first of all...

1. *His agenda is our righteousness.* God doesn’t lead us into paths of *unrighteousness*. He never tempts us. He never leads us in ways that would violate His Word. When a person says, “Well, I’ve prayed about it and I believe God’s leading me to...” and finishes the sentence with something that God’s Word forbids, you can be sure that God is *not* leading that person. God leads His people in paths of *righteousness*.

The Good Shepherd doesn’t lead His people to leave their spouses, nor to sacrifice their children for their career, nor to harbor an unforgiving spirit towards a brother, nor to stay away from church worship services. No, the Shepherd doesn’t lead His sheep down *unrighteous* paths because His agenda is always their righteousness.

And why would that matter to Him? Because His agenda for us is a means to an ultimate agenda, and what’s that? “He guides me in paths of righteousness *for his name’s sake*.” There it is...

2. *His ultimate agenda is the honor of His name.* You need to know this about the Shepherd. Yes, He cares for us but He doesn’t exist for us. To the contrary, we exist *for Him*, for His honor and glory. And He does with us that which most promotes *His name’s sake*.

Years ago we had some Black Angus cows that decided our pasture wasn’t good enough so they rooted through the fence into the neighbor’s cornfield. I’m telling you, when your cows do that, it reflects poorly, not on the cows’ reputation, but on *your* reputation.

You would think it would never happen, but in spite of all of the Lord’s provisions, His sheep can become dissatisfied and start looking for other pasture.

A few weeks ago I told you about Mrs. Gad-about. Remember her? Mrs. Gad-about was one of Phillip Keller’s ewes, a “fence-crawler,” he called her because she was never content and kept forcing her way through fences into forbidden places. Remember what Keller ended up doing with Mrs. Gad-about?

Keller writes, “One morning I took the killing knife in hand and butchered her. Her career of fence crawling was cut short. It was the only solution to the dilemma. She was a sheep, who in spite of all that I had done to give her the very best care – still wanted something else. She was not like the one who said, ‘The Lord is my Shepherd – I shall not want.’”¹³

Be assured that the Good Shepherd is very concerned about His reputation. That’s why He guides us in paths of *righteousness*, and that’s also why He takes decisive action when we choose paths of *unrighteousness*, and He does so *for His name’s sake*.

Is there anything in your life that’s not bringing honor to the reputation of your Shepherd? Anything at all? “Well, just one little thing, but it’s not that big a matter,” you say. Does He agree? The question isn’t whether you think it’s not that big a matter. The question is what He thinks. He is very concerned about His reputation, particularly in the lives of those of us who claim to be following Him.

¹³ Phillip Keller, p. 34.

So there's point one. In the first movement of Psalm 23 David talks *about* the Good Shepherd. In the second movement, he switches to the second person pronoun "you" and becomes even more personal.¹⁴

II. David talks *to* the Good Shepherd (4-5).

"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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

Here we learn two more insights regarding the Good Shepherd.

A. Our shepherd may take us into dangerous circumstances (4a). "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," says the KJV. The journey with the Shepherd is not always easy. There are valleys along the way, low points, challenges, even dangers. At times death's shadow crosses our path.

Granted, Jesus Christ defeated death, and we who know Him share in His victory. But still we face death, and at times our Shepherd guides us right into very shadow of death itself. Thankfully, He doesn't leave us there, but takes us *through* it, "*through* the valley of the shadow of death."

As a pastor I have spent a lot of time in funeral homes over the years. I'll tell you this from experience. When it comes to dealing with death, it makes all the difference in the world when grieving families know that the Lord is their Shepherd. And here's why...

B. Our shepherd takes away our fear (4b-5). "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

Spurgeon said it well, "Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path; let us then rejoice that there is a light beyond. Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not, therefore, be afraid."¹⁵

David says he didn't fear evil. What made the difference in his life? He shares four additional truths about the Shepherd that did.

1. *He is with His sheep.* "I will fear no evil, *for you are with me.*" Derek Kidner writes, "Only the Lord can lead a man through death; all other guests turn back, and the traveler must go on alone."¹⁶

Hear the promise of the Shepherd, my friend: "I will never leave you nor forsake you (Heb 13:5)." What a difference it makes knowing the Lord is *with you!* Here's something else about the Shepherd that removes fear...

2. *He uses rod and staff to comfort His sheep.* "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." A shepherd used his rod to beat away wild animals and his staff to keep the sheep under control.¹⁷ Most of us can probably visualize the shepherd's *staff*, that long walking stick that's used to hook a lamb that's snared in a briar bush. But the *rod* is perhaps less familiar. The rod is a shorter stick, a club that's particularly useful as a tool of protection. Phillip Keller shares this about the African herdsmen he observed:

Each shepherd boy, from the time he first starts to tend his father's flock, takes special pride in the selection of a rod and staff exactly suited to his own size and strength. He goes into the bush and selects a young sapling which is dug from the

¹⁴ Derek Kidner observes, "*Thou...* replaces the more distant 'He,' in a person-to-person address; for the Shepherd is no longer ahead, to lead, but alongside to escort." Derek Kidner, p. 111.

¹⁵ Charles Spurgeon, p. 355.

¹⁶ Derek Kidner, p. 111.

¹⁷ Observation by VanGemeren, p. 216.

ground. This is carved and whittled down with great care and patience. The enlarged base of the sapling where its trunk joins the roots is shaped into a smooth, rounded head of hard wood. The sapling itself is shaped to exactly fit the owner's hand. After he completes it, the shepherd boy spends hours practicing with this club, learning how to throw it with amazing speed and accuracy. It becomes his main weapon of defense for both himself and his sheep.¹⁸

“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour,” says 1 Peter 5:8. That's plenty of reason to stay close to the Shepherd, beloved. His rod and staff comfort us.

Here's something else that takes away fear.

3. *He dines with His sheep in the middle of enemy territory.* In the KJV, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

According to Keller, in the summer months the shepherd takes his sheep into the high mountain country, known as tablelands. In some of the finest sheep country in the world, the high plateaux of the sheep ranges are referred to as ‘mesas’—the Spanish word for ‘tables.’ The classic example is Table Mountain, near Cape Town, South Africa. Keller observes, “So it may be seen that what David referred to as a table was actually the entire high summer range.”¹⁹

Keller shares that the shepherd would make advance trips to locate and prepare these tablelands for his sheep, by taking along and distributing a supply of salt and other minerals at strategic spots, as well as by removing poisonous weeds. Thus, the shepherd “prepared the table” for the good of his sheep.

Notice where this table is located, “in the presence of my enemies.” David describes his enemies as looking on greedily, wanting to attack the sheep but refrain from doing so, seeing the club in the shepherd's hands. The fact is, David had many enemies: Goliath, Saul, Doeg, the Philistines, even his own son Absalom became his enemy. Sometimes God eliminates enemies, but more often than not He provides what we need right in the middle of enemy territory.

4. *He treats His sheep like royalty.* “You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” You may recall that anointing the head is what Samuel did to identify David as Israel's next king. It's probably also what David earlier did to his father's sheep.

One of the great threats to sheep are parasites, to name a few: warble flies, bot flies, heel flies, nose flies, deer flies, mosquitoes, and gnats. There's a reason we call them “pests.” Growing up, I've seen flies nearly drive our livestock crazy.

Keller comments: “At the very first sign of flies among the flock he [the shepherd] will apply an antidote to their heads. I always preferred to use a homemade remedy composed of linseed oil, sulphur and tar which was smeared over the sheep's nose and head as protection against nose flies. What an incredible transformation this would make among the sheep. Once the oil had been applied to the sheep's head there was an immediate change in behavior. Gone was the aggravation; gone the frenzy; gone the irritability and the restlessness. Instead, the sheep would start to feed quietly again, then soon lie down in peaceful contentment.”²⁰

I will fear no evil, said David. And what removed his fear? These four facts about the Shepherd: He's with me. He uses His rod and staff to comfort me. He dines with me in enemy territory. And He anoints my head, treating me like royalty.

¹⁸ Phillip Keller, p. 93.

¹⁹ Phillip Keller, p. 105.

²⁰ Phillip Keller, p. 116.

Are you struggling with fear? Fear can paralyze a person. The solution? Get to know the Good Shepherd (for starters, get in His Word every day, get under His Word every week) and then live in light of what you know.

As the psalm ends David shifts to a third perspective. After talking *about* the Shepherd and *to* the Shepherd...

III. David talks about the difference the Good Shepherd makes (6).

“Surely, goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

“Surely,” David begins and then proceeds to tell what he is sure about. That’s because when the Lord is your Shepherd two things follow, two guarantees.

A. We can experience His goodness in this life. Notice the play on words. A sheep *follows* his shepherd, but David says that something is *following* him. “Surely goodness and mercy shall *follow* me all the days of my life (KJV).” When you belong to the Shepherd, “the Hound of Heaven” as Francis Thompson describes God in his nineteenth century poem by that title, you can’t escape His goodness and mercy.

But there’s a second guarantee, says David.

B. We will enjoy His presence forever. “I *will* dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

A few years ago I read about a chaplain at Harvard University, a fellow named Greg Epstein, who doesn’t believe in God. In fact, when he presides over a funeral service he uses a book of readings appropriately titled *Funerals Without God*. Apparently, he specializes in being a clergyman who “ministers” to atheists and agnostics.

The question is, as Albert Mohler puts it, “Why do atheists and agnostics need clergy?” Good question! Mohler offers his own answer, “The reason is quite simple -- they can’t get around the big questions. A funeral requires us to face those questions as much as some might like to avoid them. Even if an atheist has no ground for hope in a life to come, he can at least be comforted by the knowledge that someone with ministerial credentials is there to commemorate his death.”²¹

You don’t have to wonder where you’ll spend eternity. If the Lord is your Shepherd, you will experience not only His goodness in this life but His presence forever!

And if you don’t know the Good Shepherd? Then you will not experience the wonder of His goodness in this life, nor will you enjoy His presence forever.

Make It Personal: Is the Good Shepherd your shepherd?

Don’t rush by this all important question. Just because you can quote the 23rd Psalm doesn’t guarantee that the Lord is your Shepherd. Be honest with yourself.

1. *Do you know Him?* Do you know Him *personally*? In order to claim Him as your Shepherd you must know Him as your *Savior*. Which means you have admitted that you are a sinner and believed that He died on the cross to pay for your sins, then triumphed over the grave for your salvation. Do you *know* Him? Then take it a step further...

2. *Are you following Him?* True sheep follow the voice of the Shepherd, in *paths of righteousness*, to be precise. Follow Him to the cross, that’s where we receive forgiveness and righteousness. And then follow in His steps, for His name’s sake.

3. *Are you resting in Him?* David could say, “I will fear no evil,” not because he was a strong man, but because He knew the Shepherd. If you know Him, beloved, the proper response (and privilege) is to *rest* in Him. He is in control. He is the *Good Shepherd*.

²¹ Story taken from www.albertmohler.com