

## Psalm 23 “When You Can Say, the Lord Is My Shepherd”\*\*

Series: “Learning from the Psalms: How to Put God at the Center of Life”

Main Idea: In Psalm 23 David shares about the difference it makes when you can say, the Lord is my shepherd. He shares from three perspectives.

- I. David talks *about* his 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* his 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 his shepherd makes (6).
    - A. We can experience His goodness in this life.
    - B. We will enjoy His presence forever.
- Make It Personal: Is the Lord your shepherd?
1. Do you know Him?
  2. Are you following Him?
  3. Are you resting in Him?

This is a very unusual Sunday, and it calls for a very familiar passage. It’s an unusual Sunday because we are not meeting together, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is so odd, for a Sunday to come and for us *not* to assemble together.

And yet, because of God’s kindness in the form of technology, we are connecting using our Livestream. We’ve been singing from our homes songs about God’s care, and now we together are turning our attention to a very familiar passage.

In our current series we are learning from the Psalms how to make the Lord the gravitational center of our lives. That’s what the Psalms do. They show us how to experience the Lord in the various situations of life. Two weeks ago, from Psalm 3, when you are being attacked. Last week, from Psalm 13, when the pain will not leave.

Today, we turn to what may well be 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. As soon as I say the first line, many, even those who don’t go to church, can join me...

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

*Scripture Reading: Psalm 23*

The twenty-third Psalm is known and loved by many. It dawned on me around year twenty of being your pastor that I’d never preached a message from Psalm 23, in part *because of its familiarity*. Everybody knows what Psalm 23 has to say. Or so I thought.

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\*\* 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. For a previous look at this passage, see WBC 9/23/07.

But now I don't believe that's true, 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 BC in Israel goes right over our heads in computerized America.

I grew up on a farm and spent time around cattle, pigs, horses, dogs, cats, but *no sheep*. When I read that the Lord is my *shepherd*, that image doesn't help me much, 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*.

What do we learn about the Lord from David in Psalm 23? The Lord is my *shepherd*, yes, but what does that mean, and what difference should it make in our lives? That's what we're going to find out this morning. In Psalm 23 David shares about the difference it makes when you can say, the Lord is my shepherd.

Bible scholars organize the psalm in various ways. I see three movements in it, as determined by David's use of pronouns. In the first movement, verses 1-3, David uses the pronouns "he" and "his" to refer to the Lord. But in verses 4-5 David switches to the pronouns "you" and "your," and doesn't merely speak *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 notice these three perspectives of the shepherd.

#### I. David talks *about* his 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.* David uses God's personal, covenant name. "*Yahweh*, is my shepherd." To David God isn't some cosmic power way out there, nor is God "the man upstairs," as some naively demean Him. No, He who is David's shepherd is the One who created the universe and then chose to redeem a nation, Israel, to whom He revealed His personal name. David tells us something specific about *Yahweh* in verse 1...

2. *He is our provider.* "*Yahweh* is my *shepherd*." David knew from personal experience what a shepherd did. He himself had been a shepherd. And the Bible says that when David became king he continued to be a shepherd, of *people*. Psalm 78:70-72 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."

Who is the shepherd's shepherd? *Yahweh* is, says David. He is *my* shepherd. The "my" indicates how personal this is. VanGemen 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."<sup>1</sup>

Notice what happens when Yahweh 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."<sup>2</sup> That's what a shepherd does for his sheep, and that's what God has done for me, says David.

Ten centuries later, Jesus applied this metaphor to Himself, saying in John 10: "I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd (verses 10-11)."

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 sheep. Only those who belong to the Shepherd are sheep. Prior to the new birth all men are depicted by other metaphors, such as goats or wolves.

How can you tell if a person is truly a 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 become your *Savior*. 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 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.<sup>3</sup> And those are the people who, 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."<sup>4</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> Willem VanGemeren, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Lane, p. 115.

<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> Charles Spurgeon, p. 353.

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."<sup>5</sup>

Here's the beauty of it. We have a Shepherd who provides that kind of care for His sheep. He does eliminate **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."<sup>6</sup>

What else does the Shepherd do? First, He gives His sheep rest. Next...

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

Growing up we had some cattle. I remember the experience of standing in the barn-lot and seeing our cows a hundred yards away on the hillside pasture. All I needed to do was let out a loud string to two words, *Si...calve, Si...calve*, and the cows would come running to the barn. That's what cattle do.

But sheep? I read that sheep have no sense of direction, that they don't recognize landmarks, and thus need to be led.<sup>7</sup> Sheep are totally dependent on the 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 reminds us how absolutely dependent we are on our Shepherd, and how absolutely dependable He is! We can't even find a good drink of water without Him. But He graciously leads us to water, says David, *quiet waters*.

That's because rough water is dangerous to sheep. One slip and they fall in and their water-saturated, heavy wool takes them down like an anchor. Plus sheep are skittish. Noise unsettles them. And since the Good Shepherd knows His sheep well he leads them to just the right place, to "*quiet waters*." That's not all He does...

3. *He restores His sheep.* 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

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<sup>5</sup> Phillip Keller, pp. 35-6, emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Phillip Keller, p. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Lane, p. 116.

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.”<sup>8</sup>

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.”<sup>9</sup> 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 weary souls. They get discouraged and downcast and begin to lose their zest for life. It happened to David, “a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam. 13:14).” “He restores my soul,” David admits. And the present tense verb indicates that God restored his soul over and over again.

4. *He guides His sheep.* The shepherd’s goal is to see his lambs grow quickly and become healthy mature sheep. According to Phillip Keller, that’s why a good shepherd is constantly on the lookout for good 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.

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.”<sup>10</sup>

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

Where does our Shepherd guide us? The answer brings us to a third truth about Him. David has already taught us about what He *is* and what He *does*. At the end of verse 3...

**C. We learn what He wants (3b).** Notice the two prepositional phrases that follow the verb *guides*. They reveal 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, nor 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*.

He doesn’t lead His people to leave their faithful spouses, nor to sacrifice their children on the altar of 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 our righteousness.

And why would that matter to Him? Because His agenda for us is a means to an ultimate agenda, and what’s that? Listen to David again, “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. Rather we exist *for Him*, for His honor and glory, and He does with us that which most promotes *His name’s sake*.

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<sup>8</sup> Phillip Keller, p. 61.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 62.

<sup>10</sup> Phillip Keller, p. 46.

Years ago we had some Black Angus cows that broke out of our pasture and went into the neighbor's cornfield. When *your* cows do that, it's bad news! It reflects poorly on *your reputation*. Farmers think poorly of *you* if *your* animals damage their crops.

You would think it would never happen, but it does. In spite of all the Lord does for His sheep, some still aren't satisfied. Phillip Keller shares the following:

"I once owned an ewe whose conduct exactly typified this sort of person. She was one of the most attractive sheep that ever belonged to me. Her body was beautifully proportioned. She had a strong constitution and an excellent coat of wool. Her head was clean, alert, well-set with bright eyes. She bore sturdy lambs that matured rapidly.

But in spite of all these attractive attributes she had one pronounced fault. She was restless—discontented—a fence crawler.

So much so that I came to call her 'Mrs. Gad-about.'

This one ewe produced more problems for me than almost all the rest of the flock combined.

No matter what field or pasture the sheep were in, she would search all along the fences or shoreline (we lived by the sea) looking for a loophole she could crawl through and start to feed on the other side.

It was not that she lacked pasturage. My fields were my joy and delight. No sheep in the district had better grazing.

With 'Mrs. Gad-about' it was an ingrained habit. She was simply never contented with things as they were. Often when she had forced her way through some such spot in a fence...she would end up feeding on bare, brown, burned-up pasturage of a most inferior sort.

But she never learned her lesson and continued to fence crawl time after time.

Now it would have been bad enough if she was the only one who did this. It was a sufficient problem to find her and bring her back. But the further point was that she taught her lambs the same tricks. They simply followed her example and soon were as skilled at escaping as their mother.

Even worse, however, was the example she set the other sheep. In a short time she began to lead others through the same holes...

After putting up with her perverseness for a summer I finally came to the conclusion that to save the rest of the flock from becoming unsettled, she would have to go. I could not allow one obstinate, discontented ewe to ruin the whole ranch operation.

It was a difficult decision to make, for I loved her in the same way I loved the rest. Her strength and beauty and alertness were a delight to the eye.

But 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.'"<sup>11</sup>

Be assured that our 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 turn from Him and choose paths of *unrighteousness*. It's *for His name's sake*.

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<sup>11</sup> Phillip Keller, p. 34.

In the first movement of Psalm 23 David talks *about* his shepherd. He becomes even more personal in the second movement, switching to the second person pronoun “you.”<sup>12</sup>

## II. David talks *to* his 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.”

We here learn two further insights about our 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 spend a lot of time in funeral homes. 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 the Lord is their Shepherd. 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.”<sup>13</sup>

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.”<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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

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<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Spurgeon, p. 355.

<sup>14</sup> Derek Kidner, p. 111.

<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

“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.

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.”<sup>17</sup>

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.”<sup>18</sup>

*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.

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<sup>16</sup> Phillip Keller, p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> Phillip Keller, p. 105.

<sup>18</sup> Phillip Keller, p. 116.



Are you struggling with fear? Fear can paralyze a person. The solution? Get to know the Shepherd and 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 his 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.”

Awhile back 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 titles *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.”<sup>19</sup>

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!

### Make It Personal: Is the Lord your shepherd?

Don’t rush by this all important question. Just because you can quote the 23<sup>rd</sup> 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*. But go 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 is to *rest* in Him.

*Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us (#462, TJ leading)*

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<sup>19</sup> Story taken from [www.albertmohler.com](http://www.albertmohler.com)