

# Psalm 23

## Lesson 1

### The Lord is My Shepherd Leader Guide

A Bible Study to Accompany  
“A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23”  
by Phillip Keller

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## Lesson 1, Psalm 23, A Psalm of David “The Lord is My Shepherd”

You my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are people, and I am your God,  
declares the Sovereign LORD. (*Ezekiel 34:31*)

### Prayers

#### Luther’s Morning Prayer

Thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

### Read

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd;  
I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

### Introduction

Psalm 23 is perhaps the most familiar and the best-loved of the Psalms, describing God’s guidance, protection, provision, and loving care for us forever. From Genesis through Revelation, God is described as our shepherd, and we are his sheep. Jesus referred to himself as the Good Shepherd in John 10:11 because he loved his sheep, knew them, and would give up his life for them.

Phillip Keller wrote “A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23” because he felt many of David’s insights in the psalm were frequently overlooked. Keller’s own life, growing up on the East African frontier and making his livelihood as a shepherd and rancher during the Depression, equipped him with insights into David’s

psalm. Keller later studied soil science and land management and served as a lay pastor in his local church. "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23" is one of 64 books and devotionals he wrote before his death in 1997.

## Discussion

1. The circumstances of David's writing Psalm 23 are not known. The preceding and following psalms were written while David was under extreme stress and felt abandoned by God. Perhaps David wrote Psalm 23 to remember God's past faithfulness and care. The LORD called David "a man after My own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14) even though David was far from blameless. Let's review a few highlights from King David's life.

a. What are some of the times David experienced God's provision and protection?

1 Sa 17:34-37, **David killed bears and lions with his club.**

1 Sa 17:42-51, **David killed Goliath with a sling and a stone.**

1 Sa 16:13, **God selected him to be king despite being a shepherd and the eighth son of his father.**

1 Sa 18:14, **David was successful in everything he did.**

1 Sa 21:10, **lived in a cave**

1 Sa 22:1 **God protected David from Saul's jealousy, escaping to live with his Philistine enemies.**

2 Sam 15:13-18:18, **God protected him against his son Absalom**

b. What were some of David's failures?

2 Samuel 11:4, **David slept with Bathsheba, another man's wife**

2 Samuel 11:15. **and then had Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, killed, even though Uriah was one of David's mighty men and a member of his bodyguard (2 Samuel 23:8-39).**

2 Samuel 13:21-23, **David failed to discipline his children**

c. How could God refer to David, guilty of such gross and terrible acts, call David a man after His own heart?

**2 Samuel 12:5-Through Nathan the Prophet, David recognized his sin was worthy of death, , and accepted the terrible consequences of his sin. His child died with Bathsheba would die, other sons would die, his wives would be taken away, and he would have trouble rather than success and peace. David repented and worshipped the LORD.**

<sup>2Sa 12:13</sup> **Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You aren't going to die.**

<sup>2Sa 12:14</sup> **But you have dared to make fun of the LORD. So the son who has been born to you will die."**

**God's forgiveness is complete.**

**Jeremiah 31:34, Everyone will know me. From the least important of them to the most important, all of them will know me,” announces the LORD. “I will forgive their evil ways. I will not remember their sins anymore.”**

**Psalm 103:12, He [the LORD] has removed our lawless acts from us as far as the east is from the west. (A Psalm of David)**

2. In "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23," Pastor Keller begins with searching questions. How would you answer someone asking these questions:
  - a. Who is God?
  - b. And what is God's character?
  - c. Does God have the credentials to be my Shepherd, manager, and owner?
  - d. How do I come under His control?
  - e. How do I become the object of God's concern and diligent care?
3. The LORD is my shepherd.
  - a. What does LORD mean when we read it in our Bibles?

Ex 3:13 Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

Ex 3:14 God said to Moses, “**I AM WHO I AM**. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘**I AM**’ has sent me to you.’ ”

Ex 3:15 God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The **LORD**, the God of your fathers —the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob —has sent me to you.’ **This is my name forever**, the name by which I Am to be remembered from generation to generation.

**Yahweh is God’s personal name by which God is to be remembered from generation to generation. Orthodox Jews refuse to say it or write it. They substitute Adoni (Lord) or abbreviate YHWH)**

**Yahweh and the verb ehyeh (I AM) (root hayah) are very similar in Hebrew. When you say it, they all have the sound of breath exhaling. God renamed Abram “Abraham” and Sarai “Sarah”**

**I AM the being-one (Septuagint), I exist, I AM, I was, I will be – I have no beginning or end, I am present, independent, all-sufficient, self-existent, and the source of all existence and life. It is the verb that calls everything into existence. Let there be... light, heavens, land, water, sky, sun, moon, all life, mankind.**

- b. “Is”

If David stopped his psalm after these three words, he would have made a profound truth on the character of God – **The LORD is....**

**The LORD is** ever-present, self-existent, life-giving LORD who calls everything into existence, is my shepherd

The LORD is with us in our suffering, joy, comings, and goings. The LORD is. We can never be without his presence. Doesn’t that sound like David’s Psalm 139?

Ps 139:5 You hem me in —behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.

Ps 139:6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Ps 139:7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

Ps 139:8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

Ps 139:9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,

Ps 139:10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

- c. “My” - David’s psalm is personal – so we can all relate to it, making it so powerful. The LORD is my shepherd. Note that mid-way through the Psalm, David changes how he refers to God from “He” to “YOU.” In the first three verses, David is speaking to us – he wants us to know what God has done for him. But in verse four, David begins speaking directly to God.

**Read Psalm 23 with emphasis on “He” and “You”**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd;

I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> **He** makes me lie down in green pastures.

**He** leads me beside still waters.

<sup>3</sup> **He** restores my soul.

**He** leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> **You** prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

**you** anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

What did David want us to know about God in the first three verses?

**It is like David is saying let me tell you about God. He is not just the God of Israel or the Creator, or any thing out there in the cosmos; He is my shepherd. That is an assurance we all need to hear.**

What did David want to tell God in verses 4 and 5?

**No matter how bad it looks, I will find comfort and assurance in you, Oh LORD.**

4. Throughout our study of Psalm 23, we will see that many of our qualities are similar to the behavior of sheep – and they are not flattering. Despite their qualities, David's Psalm is written from the perspective of being a sheep in the LORD's flock, boasting the Lord as his shepherd.

- a. How did David feel toward God to call him his shepherd?

**Love, devotion, dependent, cared for, protected, led**

- b. What are some of the qualities of a good shepherd?

**A good shepherd is gentle and intelligent in their management, desires that his flock flourishes, is devoted to his flock, protects them, and provides for their needs.**

- c. What are some of the characteristics of sheep that are like humans?

**Sheep cannot care for themselves and need to be led. They are stubborn, foolish and sometimes stupid behavior, fear and timidity, and destroy their environment by overgrazing and polluting the water.**

5. In *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Pastor Keller saw God's character revealed in how everything from the largest galaxy in the universe to the smallest microbes in soil function flawlessly beyond the mind of finite man.

- a. How does Creation demonstrate God's ownership and the supremacy of Christ?

Ge 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Ge 1:2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Ge 1:3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Ge 1:4 God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.

Ro 1:20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Col 1:15 He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Col 1:16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

- b. What do you experience or see that brings God's supremacy to your mind?

6. In *"A Shepherd Looks at the Psalm 23,"* Pastor Keller tells how he acquired his flock of 30 ewes by paying cash during the Depression. The price paid was a great sacrifice for him, and it would be the first step in a long endeavor with him as their owner and protector. The sheep required endless attention and meticulous care due to their defenseless nature of fear and timidity, stubbornness, foolish and sometimes stupid behavior, and what he referred to as perverse habits. After purchasing the ewes, Pastor Keller took a sharp knife and cut their ears with a unique mark to show they were his. God also marks us as his own. How does God mark us and assure us we are his?

Read the following scripture passages and discuss some of the things God has done for us as a sign of his ownership.

- a. Ephesians 1:4-5, We know we are in Christ because **God has planned for our salvation and adoption as his children since before the creation of the world.**

Eph 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love <sup>5</sup> he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will

- b. John 6:37, We know we are in Christ because **God the Father placed us in Christ.**

Jn 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

Jn 10:27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Jn 10:28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

Jn 10:29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

- c. Ephesians 1:13, We know we are in Christ because **we received the Holy Spirit through baptism.**

Eph 1:13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,

Eph 1:14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

- d. We are under God's ownership because we were **bought with the price of Christ's blood and death.**

<sup>1Co 6:19</sup> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>1Co 6:20</sup> you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.

- e. Ephesians 2:8-10, We know we are in Christ because **God has given the gift of faith in Christ**

Eph 2:8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

- f. Romans 10:9-10, We know we are in Christ because **we confess our faith (which God has given us) that Jesus is Lord!**

Ro 10:9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

- g. Romans 8:38-39, We know we are in Christ because **nothing can separate us from his love.**

Ro 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- h. God works for **our good to bless us and provide for us.**

Ro 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Jas 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Ro 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

7. David was a shepherd and related to God through his experience, the LORD is my shepherd. How would you complete David's statement, "The LORD is my \_\_\_\_\_".

### Conclusion

Psalm 23 celebrates God's ever-present provision for every aspect of our life. God provides for our:

**Rest** -- for He makes me to lie down in green pastures.

**Peace** -- for He leads me beside the still waters.

**Forgiveness** -- for He restores my soul.

**Guidance** -- for He leads me in the paths of righteousness.

**Companionship** -- for you are with me.

**Comfort** -- for your rod and Thy staff comfort me.

**Provision** -- for Thou prepare a table before me.

**Joy** -- You anoint my head with oil and my cup runs over.

**Everything in time** -- for goodness and mercy shall follow me.

**Everything in eternity** -- for I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

### Closing, The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.