

# Psalm 23

## Lesson 3

He Makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures

Leader Guide

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

Leader Guide Bible Studies

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## **Lesson 3, Psalm 23, A Psalm of David**

### **“He makes me lie down in green pastures.”**

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.  
To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen. *Philippians 4:19-20*

#### **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**

The assurance of entering God’s rest is one that every Christian places their hope in. Sheep, however, have difficulty in finding rest. They do not lie down unless four factors are met. The flock needs to be free from fear. As timid and defenseless prey, they are never naturally free from their fear of predators. Sheep must also be free from the dominance and butting of other sheep in the flock before they can rest. They need to be free from the irritation of pests and be fed before they can lie down and rest. The diligent work of the shepherd and his reassuring presence in the flock allows the sheep to find rest. Likewise, our awareness of the presence of Christ and knowing that God is in control of our lives delivers us from fear - even amid

uncertainty, anxiety, calamity, and misfortune. In this lesson, we will look at the work of Christ to free us from fear, petty rivalry, irritations, and spiritual hunger.

1. Do you find freedom from fear an easy promise to have faith in despite the turmoil around you?

a. Share with the group how you have experienced assurance in a fearful situation.

2. Jesus began and ended his earthly ministry, telling his disciples not to be afraid (Luke 5:11 and John 14:27), with many other warnings in between. Why were these warnings so important/significant?

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men."

Lk 5:11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Jn 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

3. What truths enable Christians to be courageous and at peace in the face of fear?

a. Matthew 28:19-20, Christ has promised to be **with us always, to the very end of the age.**

Mt 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

b. John 14:16, Christ promised to give **us the Holy Spirit to be with us forever.**

Jn 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—

c. Matthew 18:20, Christ promises to be **with us with us whenever we are with other believers.**

Mt 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

d. Romans 8:35, 38-39, Christ promises that **nothing can separate us from his love.**

Ro 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

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, 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.

e. Philippians 3:20, Our citizenship is **in heaven.**

Phil 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>21</sup> who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

d. John 5:24, Christ promises we have **crossed over from death to eternal life.**

Jn 5:24 "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.

4. Freedom from tension or anxiety. As a shepherd, Pastor Keller needed to discipline old ewes who established their dominance in the flock by butting other sheep and lambs. Pastor Keller saw this behavior in his flock as a parallel to the assertion for self-recognition, petty jealousies, gossip, arrogance, and competition in all human organizations. Self-centered behavior is such a natural part of us that Paul felt compelled to warn each of his churches to guard against it. How does Christ equip you to guard yourself against this behavior?

a. John 5:17. We are equipped by Christ by **obeying his command to love others.**

Jn 15:17 **This is my command: Love each other.**

b. Philippians 2:3-5, We are equipped by Christ by **having the attitude of Christ and serving others.** (Also Ephesians 5:21, 1 Peter 4:10, 1 Corinthians 10:24)

Phil 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

c. Romans 12:2, We are equipped by Christ by **the renewal of our minds.**

Ro 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is —his good, pleasing and perfect will.

d. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, We are equipped by Christ by **reading and meditating on the Scriptures.**

<sup>2Ti 3:16</sup> All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

5. The Shepherd continually looks over his flock for signs of restlessness. Sheep cannot be at rest when flies, ticks, and insect pests torment them. At the first sign of an infestation, the shepherd moves his flock to a better shelter and treats them with chemical repellants (sheep dip). Our lives also have flies, the ever-reoccurring, disagreeable irritants that rob us of peace and rest. The neighbor's dog barks incessantly, babies cry, and the kid behind us kicks our chair on a plane – you can fill in the rest. How do we respond to these irritants? Let's look at a few examples from the Bible and see how they responded to these divine appointments.
  - a. After the death of his cousin John, Jesus sought a solitary place to pray with his disciples but was interrupted by a crowd of at least 5000 hungry people, so he **fed them**. Matthew 14:13-21
  - b. On the way to his death in Jerusalem, Jesus' disciples argued over who would be greatest in heaven, so Jesus **washed their feet**. John 13:5-15
  - c. Paul and Silas were arrested and beaten for healing a slave girl, so while in prison stocks, they **prayed and sang hymns to the other prisoners**. Acts 16:22-25
  - d. Jesus' disciples did not understand his parables, so he **instructed them**. Matthew 13:36-43.
  - e. Jesus arrived hot and thirsty at a well in Samaria and was met by a woman gathering water, so he **asked her for water and told her he was the Messiah**. John 4:7-26
6. How can looking at daily irritants as divine appointments help you respond to them in a more God-pleasing manner?
7. A land of milk and honey is a literal agricultural term for fertile springs and summer pastures, where sheep nurse their young and pollinators produce honey. The shepherd prepares these fields by clearing rocks, digging wells, preparing the soil, and planting grass, legumes, and grain. He delights in seeing his flock well-fed, content, and nourished by his pasture. Pastor Keller equated the shepherd's work of preparing the pasture to God's work of changing our hearts.

How has God changed and prepared your heart like the shepherd prepared the pastures?

**In our lives, God removes unbelief and sows his word to produce contentment and peace. Sometimes, in our perverseness and sin, we prefer to feed our minds and spirit in the rocks and barren ground the world offers. The Good Shepherd continues to beckon, and His Spirit continues to transform our mind through the scriptures toward a victorious life of overcoming sin, contentment and peace, confident in God's management of our life.**

8. Sheep in green pastures evoke an image of rest. Just as David knew how to be content with God's provision in any circumstance, he also knew how to rest in God. David writes in Psalm 62, "5 Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.

Ps 62:6 He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken."

Entering God's rest does not come easily for 21<sup>st</sup>-century Christians. We are often so filled with our plans, ideas of work to do, and our own efforts that we scarcely find time to rest, listen, and yield to God's timing, teaching, and leading. Christ is the perfect example of yielding to God's will. His entire purpose was to speak God's word and do his will. He would retreat with his disciples to quiet places to listen to his father and pray, sometimes through the night. Jesus promised to give rest to all who were weary and burdened if they would learn from him and take up his yolk of gentleness and humility (Matthew 11:28-30).

Mary, the sister of Martha, modeled finding rest in Jesus. Mary took time from the family's busy schedule to sit at the feet of Jesus to enjoy his presence and listen to his teaching. Martha complained, but Jesus told her that Mary had chosen better. (Luke 10:38-42).

How do you find rest in Christ?

9. The peace of the flock is a result of the shepherd's work meeting their needs and being in their presence. What does the Good Shepherd do to help you face your fears, maintain your composure while irritated, or give you his rest?

### **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.