

# We are the Sheep of His Pasture

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[Psalm 23](#) is such beautiful prose from David. It has so many things we desire – green pastures, still waters, paths of righteousness, protection from death, vindication from our enemies, our cup overflowing, goodness and mercy following us, dwelling in the house of the Lord.

But as a shepherd, David's perspective reveals more than meets the eye.

We often think of it as a comforting passage. We think about how these metaphors apply to the circumstances in our lives. It's such a great one to meditate on when we're afraid or discouraged, or when we're grateful and want to worship.

We know that David wrote this, but it doesn't tell us when. I'm guessing it was while he was a shepherd, before he was a king, before he knew he would be a king. He's thinking about sheep and shepherding. He's probably in the wilderness as he's pondering this.

And so that's how I thought about it. I imagined David tending and guiding sheep through the wilderness. He would have gone through valleys, steep paths, lush meadows, desert areas, rocky areas. He has hot days, cold nights, wind, rain, draught.

But the green pastures, still waters, paths of righteousness, protection from death for himself and the sheep - these are literal things he needed and was dealing with in the wilderness.

I believe David was thinking of Jehovah caring for him the same way he was caring for his sheep. David knows how to be a good shepherd, and he recognized that that's exactly what Jehovah was doing for him. He was comparing himself to the sheep.

So for a few minutes imagine how David was caring for his sheep and what these things meant for the

sheep. That will give us a deeper understanding of his description of how God cares for us.

## The Moral of the Story

I'm going to give you the punchline of this message right up front, because I want you to consider it as you think through this: We have to become like these sheep and dwell in the care of our Shepherd in order to reap these blessings.

As you read this, listen for the Spirit's nudge for anyplace in your circumstances where you may want to be more like a sheep. Think of any place where you might be making your own trail, seeking your own water, trying to protect yourself, or maybe any place where your life is not abundant. What can we learn from these sheep about surrendering fully to the Shepherd's provision and guidance?

## Verse by Verse

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

The shepherd is responsible for caring for all the sheep's' needs. Sheep are completely dependent on their shepherd. This is David's very first point. This summarizes this whole Psalm and the role of the shepherd. The sheep are looking to him for everything and would not be able to survive on their own.

David is declaring that just as that's his role for these sheep, it's also how God is caring for him. He is completely trusting that he's in God's hands and he will never need to look elsewhere.

He's not just saying, "I promise I won't ask for more." No, he's confident that he will never lack for anything. He's found God to be faithful for everything he needs.

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

A good shepherd is always seeking fields of good grasses where the sheep can get nourishment and bed down - food and rest. Food so abundant that they are staying there overnight, not grazing as they walk. They are able to rest from seeking another pasture, because there's plenty right in this green pasture, giving them rest from their journey.

When we know where our next meal is coming from, we can rest. God desires for us to be in a place of faith with him where we can stop wandering, stop striving for things, but know that we can rest in his abundant provisions.

<sup>2b</sup> *"He leads me beside the still waters."*

Sheep won't drink from swift running water. They cannot swim and will likely die if they fall in. The shepherd is always searching for still water so that the sheep will not be afraid, but go to it and drink.

Spiritually this is about the things we seek for fulfillment, meaning and happiness. Remember the woman at the well in John 4: 13-14:

*"He who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks the water I shall give him shall never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water, springing up into everlasting life."*

This is the still water he wants to give us. He quenches our thirst forever.

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

The word restore in Hebrew is [#H7725](#) – "Shuv" meaning return. In Hebrew thought waking up in the morning is a type of restoring or reviving our soul, God returning our soul to us. He restores our soul every morning. I'm sure David would awake every morning, and maybe even through the night, and check on his sheep, to guard them through the night.

God does the same for us, watching over us through the night and faithfully reviving us every morning. There's a Hebrew blessing said after you wake up: "I give thanks before you, King living and eternal, for you have returned within me my soul with compassion; abundant is your faithfulness."

<sup>3b</sup> *"He leads me in the paths of righteousness."*

What are paths of righteousness for sheep? Shepherds go ahead and look for the best route (safety, water, food, etc.) They are looking for the path that will be the very best route to give the sheep what they need. It may not be the shortest route, or a familiar route, same as last time, but it will be the best route for what the shepherd knows they need.

This translates exactly to what the Lord does for us. Remember Deut. 1:30-33:

*"The Lord your God, who goes before you, He will fight for you, according to all He did for you in Egypt before your eyes, and in the wilderness where you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place. Yet, for all that, you did not believe the Lord your God, who went in the way before you to search out a place for you to pitch your tents, to show you the way you should go, in the fire by night and in the cloud by day."*

The Good Shepherd will never lead us astray. We can't see what's ahead, we have to trust that his way is the very best way for us.

<sup>3c</sup> *"For his name's sake."*

In looking at this verse in Hebrew, righteousness includes justice and the reference to his name also includes his reputation. When we follow his leading, it is right and just, because that's who he is. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne." (Psalm 89:14) We can trust his path for us based on his character and reputation.

<sup>4a</sup> *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. For you are with me."*

Some translations say the "death dark valley." This was a literal concern for sheep. I'm sure they sometimes had to cross some frightening places on their route, with things that could literally kill them. If the shepherd was afraid, the sheep could feel it. But when the shepherd draws near them and is not scared and frantic, it calms them. They will not fear because they know he is with them. He makes himself known and visible.

<sup>4b</sup> *"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*

And that's what the rod and staff are for. The rod is to scare off or defend them from predators. The staff is what is used to guide the sheep and rescue them if needed. It's comforting when they feel the staff against them confirming direction or showing them where to go, especially in a dark or dangerous area. They are relying on the shepherd to get them through safely.

The Lord has a rod and staff. He has a lot of ways to guide us and comfort us. We need to seek out his rod that defends us. What would that be? His word, his promises, his truth. We need to seek out his staff. What would that include? Prayer, waiting on him, asking for prayer, obedience. I find it so comforting when he gives me instruction, because I know he's covering me when I'm obeying him.

What is your valley of death or a death dark valley that makes you afraid? He will draw near to us when we are in danger or fearful. But we have to be willing to seek him out and draw nearer to him in those times as well.

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

Sometimes the best place for a sheep to eat is dangerous, or can be if they don't have a good shepherd. But David could fend off even lions and bears, as he told Saul ([1 Samuel 17:33-35](#)). Imagine

the perfect meadow, but there are predators around. I imagine David could sit up on a rock or a high spot and watch. He knew he could defend them if he had to, with his sling shot, or his rod. He didn't let the predators stop his flock from the good grazing areas, because he knew he could defend them. And the sheep went on grazing and drinking because David was keeping watch over them.

This is similar to the picture we see with Bilaam in [Numbers 22-24](#). Balak and Bilaam were overlooking the Israelites from the mountaintop, wanting to curse them, but they could not. Sometimes we aren't even aware that our enemy has laid a trap for us, or is trying to curse us, because our God is speaking blessing over us and defending us from spiritual forces of evil that we cannot see. We can enjoy abundant life despite our enemy, because just as David is doing this literally for his flock, God is doing it spiritually for us.

<sup>5a</sup> *"You anoint my head with oil."*

Bugs get into the noses of sheep and can lay eggs. That can get into their brain and make them mentally crazy. Shepherds put oil on their sheep's heads because it keeps the bugs from being able to land; it keeps away pests that could harm them.

So this reference is actually about protection. When we see oil in the Bible, it's usually connected with consecrating, setting something apart. Maybe David is referring to us being protected from the enemy getting into our mind, those things that seem so small at first, but then can multiply and propagate in our thinking. The Lord sets us apart as his child, under his authority, claiming us and our mind as his.

Verses 4-5 are about dangers and enemies, until we get to the cup. The cup should really be part of verse 6, because it's all about the blessings that result from a good shepherd.

<sup>5c</sup> *"My cup runs over."*

The term "cup" is often used figuratively, as in "a cup of judgement." Elsewhere in Psalms we see "the inheritance of my cup," "the portion of their cup." This is referring to their fate, their future, their lot. If the shepherd does all of these things for the sheep, they are blessed, their fate is one of blessing. This word "runneth over" or "overflows" is actually the word "saturated." The sheep's portion is saturated in blessing. And this is how David feels. God does all of the things a good shepherd should do. And David understands that he is saturated in blessing because of how God takes care of him.

<sup>6a</sup> *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."*

This is more about this cup of blessing, now adding goodness and mercy to it. "Mercy" here is the Hebrew word "chesed," also meaning steadfast love. It's a covenantal love, a commitment to love. When the shepherd is giving the sheep goodness and mercy, they live an abundant life. Just as he has mercy on his sheep – a commitment to love them for all of their life, The Lord has mercy on us.

John 10:11-12

*"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them."*

We can have an abundant life, because our Good Shepherd has a covenant love for us for our whole life. He will never leave us or forsake us.

<sup>6b</sup> *"And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."*

And here is David's response. He is going to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. "Dwell" means rest, the word is "yashab," from which we get the word Shabbat. It means to abide or remain. David

is going to make sure he stays under the Lord's care - in his house, in his flock - forever. He's going to abide in him. He's going to return God's faithfulness with faithfulness to God.

### **We are the sheep of his pasture**

And this is the punchline I told you at the beginning: We have to become like these sheep and dwell/rest in the care of our Shepherd in order to reap these blessings. We have to trust him and let him be our Shepherd and not get out in front of him, or try to find our own pasture or water. In him is everything we need and he wants to be the one to give it to us.

In thinking about this in my own life, I realize it's hard to be a sheep when you're human. We have cars, and our own money, the internet, talking heads and advertising, etc. There are things just trying to pull us away. We actually have the wherewithal to go our own ways and make changes in our lives, decide where we live, who we listen to, what we do with our time. These are temptations that make it more difficult to follow our Shepherd. We have to choose to be completely dependent on him. We have to harness our own will and partner with him in his plan.

Sometimes that's hard, until we understand how fantastic he is and the amazing plans he has for us. Being the sheep of The Good Shepherd brings us everything we are looking for: fulfillment, love, peace. He wants us to abide in him, because he's the only one that can bring us abundant and eternal life as it was intended.

### **Psalms 100**

*"Make a joyful shout to the LORD, all you lands!"*

<sup>2</sup> *Serve the LORD with gladness;*

*Come before His presence with singing.*

<sup>3</sup> *Know that the LORD, He is God;*

*It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;*

*We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

<sup>4</sup> *Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful and bless His name.*

<sup>5</sup> *For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations."*