

Life Without Lack – Living in the Fullness of Psalm 23, by Dallas Willard
All Saints 50+ Class
March 14, 2021 – The LORD is my shepherd – Class 2

Psalm 23:1-6 (The Message)	Psalm 23:1-6 (The Living Bible)
<p>23 ¹⁻³ GOD, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.</p> <p>⁴ Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure.</p> <p>⁵ You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.</p> <p>⁶ Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of GOD for the rest of my life.</p>	<p>23 Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need!</p> <p>²⁻³ He lets me rest in the meadow grass and leads me beside the quiet streams. He gives me new strength. He helps me do what honors him the most.</p> <p>⁴ Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way.</p> <p>⁵ You provide delicious food for me in the presence of my enemies. You have welcomed me as your guest; blessings overflow!</p> <p>⁶ Your goodness and unfailing kindness shall be with me all of my life, and afterwards I will live with you forever in your home.</p>

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are from the book, *Life Without Lack*, by Dallas Willard.

"The experience of a life without lack depends first and foremost upon the presence of God in our lives, because the source of this life is God himself." (p. 1)

A few questions to get the conversation started...

- What is a thought or truth from Psalm 23 that was helpful to you this week?
- The Message and The Living Bible are paraphrases not translations. Do they help you? Why?
- Why do you think God would want us to think of Him as a shepherd?
- What have you ever learned about the social status of being a shepherd in David's time?
- What are some 2021 occupations that might be considered in the same light?

1. Who is the LORD of Psalm 23?

- When David wrote Psalm 23 and said "The LORD is my shepherd" who is "the LORD?"
- What is the significance of David calling the LORD "my shepherd?"
- Who do the Hebrew names YHWH or Yahweh refer to?
- How does having the New Testament change our understanding of "The Lord is my shepherd?"

What is in a name?

pp. 17 - 18 – "God's power and personality, then, are perceived in both nature and history. In addition, his character is revealed in his names. Two of the primary names that come to us in the Old Testament are *Elohim* and *Yahweh*. *Elohim* reveals God's great creative and governing power, as in Genesis chapter 1. *Yahweh* (also translated as *Jehovah*) has the primary sense of a self-subsistent eternal being—one who does not depend on anyone else for his existence, but has 'life in Himself' (Jn 5:26).

“Abram calls the Lord *Adonai* in Genesis 15:2, which has a personal, possessive sense of ‘my Lord,’ and is often used in conjunction with *Yahweh*. *Yahweh Adonai* describes a personal, covenant-making God who hold people as his friends. God also identifies himself to Abram as *El Shaddai* in Genesis 17:1-2, the almighty God, all-abundant to his people. As he progressively reveals himself in the Old Testament, the names of God help us see more of the nature, personality, and character of God.

“In the third chapter of Exodus, we find Moses responding to God’s assignment to deliver the Israelites from the Egyptians, essentially saying, ‘So, I’m going to go back down to Egypt, am I? And what is it I am going to do there? God tells him, and in verses 13 and 14, Moses finally gets around to asking, ‘Well, what is your name? What shall I say to them?’ God responds with this puzzling statement: ‘I AM THAT I AM...’ Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’

“This is not just a name like Charlie or Bill or Mary or Tanya. ‘I AM’ is a statement of the nature of God as *being*—self-sustaining, self-sufficing, all-powerful, self-determined being. ‘I am that I am’ means, ‘My being sustains My being.’ It is something that only God can say. Jesus affirmed this when he declared, ‘As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself’ (Jn 5:26).

“So God’s essential nature can be characterized in this way: God is an immaterial, intelligent, and free personal being, of perfect goodness, wisdom and power, who made the universe and continues to sustain it, as well as to govern and direct it in his providence.”

The Lord is my shepherd...

“To whom did he refer? He referred to Jehovah, the Lord God of Israel.

“His statement was confirmed by Jesus the Christ. When He was God incarnate amongst men, He declared emphatically, ‘I am the good shepherd.’

“But who is this Christ?

“Our view of Him is often too small—too cramped—too provincial—too human.

“And because it is, we feel unwilling to allow Him to have authority and control—much less outright ownership of our lives.”

W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (p. 16)

- Keller says our view of Christ is too small. Do you think that is true? If so, in what way?

2. Jesus is Our “Good Shepherd”

John 10:11-14 (NIV) – “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me....

Hebrews 13:20 (NIV) – May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep....

1 Peter 2:25 (NIV) – For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 5:4 (NIV) – And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

- All these verses call Jesus the good shepherd. What does this mean?

pp. 33 – 34 – “...Paul spoke of ‘the boundless riches of Christ’ (Eph 3:8). At the center of these ‘riches’ is Christ himself, for he is, in fact, that being of complete self-sufficiency we have been focusing upon. He is the Shepherd-LORD of the Twenty-Third Psalm, Yahweh in the flesh!”

“...That is why Jesus, in complete confidence, could just lay down his life... Why? Because he understood his relationship to his Father. Jesus is the first person who ever fully lived Psalm 23:1—‘The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want.’ His union with the Father was such that he never knew lack or fear. The Father was Jesus’ Shepherd, just as Jesus is ours. As Jesus knew no fear, so can we.”

“Yet the staggering fact remains that Christ, the Creator of such an enormous universe of overwhelming magnitude, deigns to call Himself my Shepherd and invites me to consider myself His sheep—His special object of affection and attention. Who better to care for me?

– W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (p. 19)

3. The Character of Our Good Shepherd

p. xvii – “We will begin by focusing on the glorious, eternal, all-sufficient, omnipotent Creator of the universe whose greatness surpasses anything we could imagine. Unlimited in resources, just as he is unlimited in love, he is the Good Shepherd who generously provides for our every need.”

p. 10 – “A joyous God fills the universe. Joy is the ultimate word describing God and his world. Creation was an act of joy, of delight in the goodness of what was done. It is precisely because God is like this, and because we can know that he is like this, that a life of full contentment is possible.”

p. 18 – “So God’s essential nature can be characterized in this way: God is an immaterial, intelligent, and free personal being, of perfect goodness, wisdom and power, who made the universe and continues to sustain it, as well as to govern and direct it in his providence.”

p. 19 – “It is important to embrace that God’s moral absolutes as loving, beneficent, and generous flow out of the plenitude of his being. Why are we not generous? Maybe we are afraid that we don’t have enough. But God is never in that position; his love and his giving are unlimited. They reach beyond any imaginable boundaries because of what he is in himself.

“...take upon yourself the task of making these realities about God a part of your mind, to understand that God is a certain kind of being; that he existed before the creation of the earth in all his plenitude. God is not now sitting off in some distant corner of the universe like a neglected senior citizen in the cosmos, waiting to see if someone will pay attention to him... He is surrounded by unlimited glorious beings that he made, who worship him and praise him.

“Even more fundamental, there is a constant communion among the great persons of the Trinity itself. ...That is the being upon whom a life without lack relies. Such a life is guaranteed for those whose minds are set upon this God in faith.”

p. 22 – “Glory refers to the effulgent nature of God and the realm where he dwells. God’s glory includes all the heavenly realms—the heavens and the earth that his word created. That is glory. This same glory was in Jesus, and a central part of his ministry was revealing that glory...”

p. 23 – “God is not worried that he is going to run out of something. God is beyond rich. He is overflowing

with everything that is good and everything we need. He has so much that he will never run out of any of it. It is so very important to remember this when we are fretting over a perceived need. In such a time we may be tempted to think that maybe, just maybe, God is as stingy and small as we are. He is not. God loves to give. God loves to forgive. God loves to just gush forth with his goodness (Jn 4:14). Nothing so delights him as giving to anyone and everyone who will receive. 'For God so love the world that He gave ... (Jn 3:16)."

p. 31 – "There is absolutely nothing that God lacks. We must understand this, because the overflowing sufficiency that we will experience when Yahweh is our Shepherd lies in the all-sufficiency of the Shepherd himself. If we do not understand the all-sufficiency of the Shepherd, we will never experience that sufficiency in relationship to him. What we need, God has—in infinite supply.

"To take the name of God in vain, then, is simply to speak or think or imagine God as being less than he actually is. And like Israel, we, too, require a long, steady education in this direction. Those who take time to increasingly come to know and trust God as he truly is, are laying the sure foundation of a life without lack."

- Willard uses the word "*plenitude*" 10-12 times in his book. What is a definition of this word?
- Willard uses the phrases "*overflowing sufficiency*," "*all-sufficient*," and "*all-sufficiency*" a number of times. What is important to us about God's character being "*all-sufficient*?"

Generosity Beyond Compare

Romans 8:32 (NIV) – 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?

"The fact that God deals with his children on the basis of grace without regard to merit or demerit is a staggering concept. It's opposed to almost everything we've been taught about life. We've been generally conditioned to think that if we work hard and 'pay our dues,' we'll be rewarded in proportion to our work: 'you do so much, you deserve so much.'

"But God's grace doesn't operate on a reward-for-works basis. It's much better than that. God is generous beyond all measure or comparison. The Scripture says, 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son'; and Paul spoke of this as God's 'inexpressible gift (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 9:15). God's inexpressible generosity, however, does not stop at saving us; it provides for all our needs and blessings throughout our entire lives. As Paul said in Romans 8:32, 'he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' Paul used the argument of the greater to the lesser to teach us God's generosity. No blessing we'll ever receive can possibly compare with the gift of God's Son dying for us. God demonstrated his gracious generosity to the ultimate at the cross. And Paul based the assurance that we can expect God to meet all our other needs throughout life on the fact that God has already met our greatest need.

"Note that Paul said God will 'graciously' or freely give us all things. Just as salvation is given freely to all who trust in Christ, so all blessings are given freely to us, also through faith in Christ."

– Jerry Bridges, *Navigators Holiness Day by Day Blog* (3/9/21)

4. Characteristics of a Shepherd

From Timothy Laniak, *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks—Rediscovering Biblical Leadership*:

- a) p. 36 – **Caring** – “Shepherding requires a wide range of competencies and tasks, but they understand that it begins with a compassionate heart for individual sheep.”
- b) p. 47 – **Knowledgeable, Persevering & Ingenious** – “...knowledge and perseverance are requirements for survival in this part of the world.” “[Shepherds] are ingenious when it comes to finding, keeping, maintaining, and guarding water sources.”
- c) p. 49 – **Diligent & Faithful Simultaneously** – “...the custom reflects a recognition that everything we have ultimately comes from God.”
- d) p. 59 – **Nourishing** – “If you care for sheep, you feed them all the time.”
- e) p. 67 – **Physically Caring** – “What strikes me in all of these procedures is that shepherding requires touch. It might be running their hands along the spine, lifting the eyelids, or pulling back the ears. It might be rubbing oil or applying a poultice. Whatever the condition, shepherds can’t simply stand at a distance. They need to touch the sheep. ...Such preventative, precautionary, proactive measures only happen with direct physical contact.”
- f) p. 75 – **Guiding, Not Driving** – “Casualties come to some that are ‘driven hard,’ especially in the name of ministry.”
- g) p. 90 – **Life-Giving** – “...good shepherds can provide life-sustaining gifts (peace, rest, restoration, proper pace) for their flocks...”
- h) p. 101 – **Know & Be Known** – “Sheep know they belong to a shepherd. They are named, known, and counted every day.”
 - p. 104 – The shepherd knows the sheep and calls them by name (Jn 10:3-4; Jer 33:13)
 - p. 105 – Know well the faces of your flock (Prov 27:23)
- i) p. 103 – **Caring & Incarnational** – “If I weren’t with them every day, I shouldn’t be their shepherd.”
 - p. 235 – “If I weren’t out with the sheep every day; I wouldn’t know what they need.”
- j) p. 109 – **Present** – In the wilderness the only reliable source of security, for defenseless sheep, comes from the shepherd’s presence.
 - p. 255 – “Sheep run when they sense danger, their only hope for protection comes from the shepherd’s presence.”
- k) p. 110 - 111 – **Courageous** – the shepherd’s role of protector requires courage. The shepherd is required to come between the danger and the sheep. Shepherds were tender toward their own flocks and fierce toward the dangers they faced. Jesus compared himself to a good shepherd who wouldn’t run in the presence of a snarling wolf (Jn 10:12).
- l) p. 116 – **Watchful** – “Shepherds spend a great deal of their time watching their flocks. At first this activity looks like passive inactivity, but watchfulness involves continuous surveillance and active attention to what is happening...and constant concern over what might happen. You can’t afford losses due to a ‘failure of imagination.’” “Shepherds are watchmen and guards over the flock.”
 - p. 268 “Watching requires attentiveness. They are processing the variables of the ever-changing environment.”
- m) p. 139 – 143 – **Gatekeeper** – A shepherd is a gatekeeper through whom access to the sheep is obtained. (John 10: 7-11; John 10:1-5)
- n) p. 182 – **Aware Sleeper** – “It’s easy to fall asleep. But sleep has deadly consequences. They say a good shepherd sleeps, like a panther, with one eye open.”
- o) p. 189 – **Hard Working, Trustworthy, Adaptable, Persistent & Wise** – “For the flock to move ahead toward the shepherd’s goals of productivity and reproduction, we’ll see the need for the shepherding traits of hard work, trustworthiness, adaptability, persistence and wisdom.”
 - p. 249 – “Adaptability, literally and figuratively, ‘goes with the territory.’”
- p) p. 195 – **Leader** – “Shepherds usually lead by walking in front of the flock with an occasional look

behind them, using a whistle or special call to keep the horde in line. The notion of 'leading' a flock comes from this obvious physical reality of being in front."

- q) p. 201 – **On Track** – "Good shepherds lead their flocks *on the right paths*."
 - r) p. 231 – **Flock-Minded** – "To 'think flock' means to make decisions with a priority on the welfare of the collective whole."
 - s) p. 243 – **Patient** – with sick animals, with bad weather, with all kinds of circumstances
- As you look at this list of the characteristics of a good shepherd, what strikes you as important?
 - Who has been a good shepherd in your life? What are some of the characteristics they demonstrated to you?

5. We're Dependent Upon God for Our Being

Romans 1:20 (NIV) – 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.

p. 26 – 27 "If you are afraid of going out of existence, fear no more. Why? Because God, in creation, has imparted an aspect of himself into you. Being made in God's image means, among other things, that you are an eternal being and you can create. But, unlike God, you are not self-subsistent; you are dependent upon God for your being.

"...The important point here is that you have in yourself the Romans 1:20 experience of the invisible originating the visible. That is why, when you look around at the things that are visible, you can know two things they share in common. First, they came into existence and, sooner or later, will pass out of existence. Second, each of them was created from an invisible source...

"If I had to pull all this together in one phrase, I would say it is the experience of free will. By making you in his image, God has given you, in your will, the power of origination, the power to create and to bring things into existence. You, then, are the best clue to the nature of God, understanding that while your powers and being are limited and dependent, God's are not. Everything that exists outside of God exists because of God."

6. The Nature of Sheep—They're Dumb!

"Sheep do not 'just take care of themselves' as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care.

"It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways as will be seen... Our mass mind (or mob instincts), our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are all parallels of profound importance.

"Yet despite these adverse characteristics Christ chooses us, buys us, calls us by name, makes us His own, and delights in caring for us. – W. Phillip Keller; *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*; p. 22.

- How do you like being called a sheep?
- Do you think it is fair to call you a sheep?

7. Challenge

Have you taken on the challenge to memorize Psalm 23?