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Summer in the Psalms Part 3 - The Lord Is My Shepherd

Psalm 23:1–4

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.^[a]

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness^[b]

for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,^[c]

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

Introduction

There are few passages in all of Scripture that have brought more comfort to God's people than Psalm 23. It has been read at hospital bedsides, whispered in prison cells, quoted at funerals, and treasured in seasons of joy. Yet Psalm 23 is not just a passage for difficult days—it is a picture of how God intends His children to live every day.

David begins with a simple declaration:

"The Lord is my shepherd..."

He doesn't begin by talking about himself. He begins by talking about God.

That changes everything.

David knew what it meant to be a shepherd. Before he was a king, before he killed Goliath, before anyone knew his name, he spent countless hours watching sheep. He knew their weaknesses. He knew their fears. He knew they were completely dependent upon the shepherd.

And then David realized something profound.

The same way I cared for my sheep...God cares for me.

Isn't that a beautiful picture?

Sheep aren't known for being wise. They wander. They panic. They get themselves into danger. They cannot defend themselves. Without a shepherd, they are vulnerable.

Sound familiar?

Isaiah 53:6 says,

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way."

The problem isn't simply that we make mistakes. The problem is that we often try to become our own shepherd.

We convince ourselves:

- "I've got this."
- "I know what's best."
- "I'll figure it out."

Yet every time we try to lead ourselves, we eventually discover what sheep discover—we're not very good shepherds.

David reminds us there is another way.

When the Lord becomes your Shepherd, everything changes.

I. The Shepherd Provides Everything We Need

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside still waters." (Psalm 23:1-2)

Notice David doesn't say,

"I have everything I want."

He says,

"I shall not want."

There is a difference.

God never promised to supply every desire.

He promised to supply every need.

Paul echoes this truth in Philippians 4:19:

"And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Sheep don't spend their day searching for food.

They simply follow the shepherd.

The shepherd knows where the pasture is.

The shepherd knows where the water is.

The shepherd knows what the sheep need long before the sheep realize it themselves.

But here's something fascinating about sheep.

A sheep will not lie down unless four conditions are met.

- It must feel safe.
- It must not be fearful.
- It must not be fighting with other sheep.
- It must not be hungry.

Without the shepherd's presence, sheep remain anxious.

Without the Shepherd's presence, so do we.

How many people lie awake at night...

- worried about tomorrow,
- stressed about finances,
- anxious about their children,
- overwhelmed by uncertainty?

God says,

"Come follow Me. I'll lead you to green pastures."

Notice David says,

"He makes me lie down."

Sometimes God lovingly slows us down because He knows we need rest more than we know we need rest.

Sometimes the greatest blessing isn't another opportunity.

Sometimes it's stillness.

Sometimes God closes a door because He's protecting us.

Sometimes He leads us beside quiet waters because our souls have become exhausted by life's rushing currents.

Jesus said,

"Come unto Me...and I will give you rest."

The Shepherd doesn't simply feed His sheep.

He gives them peace.

Application

Where are you trying to provide for yourself instead of trusting God's provision?

What burden have you picked up that belongs in the Shepherd's hands?

II. The Shepherd Leads Us on the Right Path

"He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." (Psalm 23:3)

One of the hardest things in life is not knowing which direction to go.

Should I take this job?

Should I move?

Should I stay?

Should I wait?

Should I act?

Sometimes we're desperate for answers.

But David reminds us...

God doesn't just show us the destination.

He walks us there.

The Shepherd never asks sheep to find the pasture.

He simply asks them to follow.

Jesus said in John 10,

"My sheep hear My voice; I know them, and they follow Me."

Notice the order.

He speaks.

We follow.

Too often we reverse it.

We run ahead...

Then ask God to bless our plans.

But the Shepherd doesn't follow the sheep.

The sheep follow the Shepherd.

Sometimes His path makes no sense.

Imagine Abraham.

"Leave your country."

Where am I going?

"I'll tell you later."

Imagine Moses.

"Go confront Pharaoh."

Imagine Peter.

"Step out of the boat."

None of those commands made sense at first.

But **every step of obedience revealed another step of God's faithfulness.**

Sometimes God's direction doesn't make sense until you're looking back.

God is not obligated to reveal the entire journey.

He only promises enough light for the next step.

Psalm 119 says,

"Your word is a lamp unto my feet..."

Not a stadium light.

A lamp.

Just enough for the next step.

Application

Maybe today you're asking God for the entire map.

Perhaps He's simply asking you to take the next faithful step.

III. The Shepherd Walks With Us Through the Valley

"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."

This may be the most beautiful verse in the Psalm.

Notice David does **not** say...

"If I walk through the valley..."

He says,

"Though I walk..."

Valleys are inevitable.

Every believer experiences them.

Valleys of grief.

Valleys of disappointment.

Valleys of sickness.

Valleys of financial struggle.

Valleys of loneliness.

Following Jesus does not exempt us from valleys.

It guarantees we never walk through them alone.

Did you notice something remarkable?

Throughout verses 1-3 David talks **about** God.

"He leads..."

"He restores..."

"He guides..."

But when he reaches the valley...

Everything changes.

He stops talking about God.

He starts talking **to** God.

"You are with me."

Sometimes suffering has a way of making God feel closer than success ever could.

Notice David says,

"The valley of the shadow of death."

A shadow cannot hurt you.

A shadow only exists because there's light nearby.

Where there's a shadow...

There's also a light.

Jesus walked through death itself.

Because He conquered death...

For believers...

Death is no longer the substance.

It's only the shadow.

David also mentions the shepherd's rod and staff.

The rod was used to protect the sheep from predators.

The staff was used to rescue wandering sheep.

One defended.

The other directed.

Both represented the shepherd's care.

Sometimes God's rod protects us from what we cannot see.

Sometimes His staff lovingly pulls us back when we've wandered.

Neither is punishment.

Both are love.

The valley isn't evidence that God has abandoned you.

It may be evidence that He's walking closer than ever before.

Conclusion

Psalm 23 is not simply about a shepherd.

It is about **our Shepherd.**

David doesn't say,

"The Lord is **a** shepherd."

He says,

"The Lord is *my* Shepherd."

Is He yours?

Have you surrendered your life to His leadership?

Because sheep don't simply admire the shepherd.

They follow him.

Maybe today you've been trying to carry burdens that were never yours to carry.

Maybe you've been trying to lead yourself.

Maybe you've been wandering.

The invitation today is simple.

Come back to the Shepherd.

Trust His provision.

Follow His direction.

Rest in His presence.

Whether you're standing in green pastures or walking through dark valleys, the Shepherd has never left your side.

Jesus said in John 10:11,

"I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep."

That's the difference between Jesus and every other shepherd.

He didn't simply guide the sheep.

He gave His life for them.

He died on the cross so wandering sheep could come home.

He rose again so His sheep could have eternal life.

Today, the Shepherd is calling.

Will you trust Him?

Will you follow Him?

Will you rest in Him?

Because the greatest comfort in life is not knowing where you're going.

The greatest comfort is knowing **Who is leading you?**