

## “The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm”

The much beloved 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm says, “*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*”<sup>2</sup> *He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.*”<sup>3</sup> *He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.*”<sup>4</sup> *Yea, 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 runs over.*”<sup>6</sup> *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”*

*There was a Sunday school teacher who asked her group of children if any of them could quote the entire twenty-third Psalm. A little girl was among those who raised their hands. A bit skeptical, the teacher asked if she could really quote the entire Psalm. The little girl came to the podium, faced the class, made a little bow, and said: “**The Lord is my shepherd, that’s all I want.**” She then bowed again and sat down. She may have overlooked a few verses, but that little girl captured the essence of David’s heart in Psalm 23. The idea throughout the Psalm is that we are utterly blessed and cared for in the Shepherd’s care, and there is nothing else that we desire.*

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm teaches us that ***in this life the Good Shepherd gives us everything we need.*** Sorry to tell you this (since we’re compared to sheep in the Scriptures), but sheep are among the dumbest and dirtiest animals in the world; they require more attention than any other livestock. The overriding principle of this Psalm is that sheep can’t make it without a shepherd. The only reason David could say, “*I shall not want,*” is because he could first say, “*The Lord is my Shepherd.*” The Good Shepherd makes His sheep lie down in green pastures. He makes sure that we are taken care of and completely satisfied. Sometimes God must force us to slow down and re-evaluate our priorities and realize once again our great need for God. Blessed are those who never lose sight of the things that matter most. The Good Shepherd also leads His sheep beside quiet waters. Sheep are afraid of swiftly moving water, and a good shepherd knows that, so he/she diverts the water to make a quiet little pool where the sheep can drink. God also knows our weaknesses and limitations. He promises to protect us from the temptations that we can’t handle, and He never forces us into situations in which we cannot cope. The Good Shepherd also restores our souls. A lost sheep cannot find its way home, so the shepherd must restore the stray, or it is lost forever. Jesus Christ went to the cross and died in our place to restore our souls! The Good Shepherd also guides His sheep in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Satan tries to lead stray sheep down the wide road that leads to destruction. The Good Shepherd leads His sheep onto and along the straight and narrow path that leads to life.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm also teaches that ***in the face of death the Good Shepherd protects us from evil.*** People’s eyes often fill with tears when they hear the beautiful words in Psalm 23:4, “*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me...*” A lot of people are bothered by the fear of dying, and Satan uses that fear as a weapon to terrorize vulnerable people. But our Savior is with us when death roars its worst at us, so we don’t need to be afraid. Though its exact time is uncertain, somewhere in all of our journeys we must cross the

valley of the shadow of death. Either we walk that way with Christ, or we walk that way alone. Sometimes people feel like they don't really need God, and they live their lives accordingly. But when death approaches, we all want to run to Someone stronger. May people come to know the blessings of being close to the Lord in this life, so they'll know the blessings of His accompanying presence when death calls our name.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm also teaches that ***after death the Good Shepherd promises eternal life***. Thank God for His blessings and faithfulness in this life, and thank God for His mercy and grace as we prepare for eternal life. God is so loving, merciful, forgiving, understanding, good, etc. – may we lavish our love and worship upon Him! *A famous actor was once the guest of honor at a social gathering where he received many requests to recite favorite excerpts from various literary works. An old preacher who happened to be there asked the actor to recite the twenty-third Psalm. The actor agreed on the condition that the preacher would also recite it. The actor's recitation was beautifully intoned with great dramatic emphasis for which he received lengthy applause. The preacher's voice was rough and broken from many years of preaching, and his diction was anything but polished. But when he finished there was not a dry eye in the room. When someone asked the actor what made the difference, he replied "I know the Psalm, but he knows the Shepherd."*

## **Discussion Guide/Action Steps**

1. Do you personally know the Shepherd? Are you able to truly say, "*The Lord is MY Shepherd?*"
2. Are you facing any uncertainties in life, right now, that you need the Good Shepherd to faithfully guide you through?
3. Do you need the Good Shepherd's help in guiding you away from your past, and into forgiveness?
4. Has a loved one recently passed away? Do you need the Good Shepherd's comfort and assurance during this most difficult time?