

The Good Shepherd

Psalm 23:1-6

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. [6] Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

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Forward

A Psalm of David

In describing the Lord as a shepherd, David wrote out of his own experience because he had spent his early years caring for sheep (1 Samuel 16:10-11).

Sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd for provision, guidance, and protection.

The New Testament calls Jesus the good shepherd (John 10:11); the great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20); and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4).

As the Lord is the good shepherd, so we are his sheep—not frightened, passive animals, but obedient followers, wise enough to follow one who will lead us in the right places and in right ways.

This psalm does not focus on the animal-like qualities of sheep, but on the discipleship qualities of those who follow. When you recognize the good shepherd, follow him!

May you be encouraged to be a loving shepherd as you care the flock God has given you.

Chapter 1

God had chosen David.

1 Samuel 16:10-11

Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither.

Sheep are completely dependent on the shepherd for provision, guidance, and protection.

David was anointed king, but it was done in secret; he was not publicly anointed until much later (2 Samuel 2:4; 2 Samuel 5:3). Saul was still legally the king, but God was preparing David for his future responsibilities. The anointing oil poured over David's head stood for holiness.

It was used to set people or objects apart for God's service. Each king and high priest of Israel was anointed with oil. This commissioned him as God's representative to the nation. Although God rejected Saul's kingship by not allowing any of his descendants to sit on Israel's throne, Saul himself remained in his position until his death.

Harps were popular musical instruments in Saul's day, and their music is still known for its soothing qualities. The simplest harps were merely two pieces of wood fastened at right angles to each other. The strings were stretched across the wood to give the harp a triangular shape.

Simple strings could be made of twisted grasses, but better strings were made of dried animal intestine.

Harps could have up to 40 strings and were louder than the smaller three or four-stringed instruments called lyres. David, known for his shepherding skills and bravery, was also an accomplished harpist and musician who would eventually write many of the psalms found in the Bible.

The New Testament calls Jesus the good shepherd

John 10:11

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.

A hired hand tends the sheep for money, while the shepherd does it for love. The shepherd owns the sheep and is committed to them. Jesus is not merely doing a job; he is committed to love us and even lay down his life for us. False teachers and false prophets do not have this commitment.

The great shepherd

Hebrews 13:20

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

This verse includes two significant results of Christ's death and resurrection. God works in us to make us the kind of people that would please him, and he equips us to do the kind of *work* that would please him. Let God change you from within and then use you to help others.

The head shepherd

1 Peter 5:4

And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

As the Lord is the good shepherd, so we are his sheep—not frightened, passive animals, but obedient followers, wise enough to follow one who will lead us in the right places and in right ways. This psalm does not focus on the animal-like qualities of sheep but on the discipleship qualities of those who follow. When you recognize the good shepherd, follow him!

When we allow God, our shepherd, to guide us, we have contentment. When we choose to sin and go our own way, however, we cannot blame God for the environment we create for ourselves. Our shepherd knows the "green meadows" and "peaceful streams" that will restore us. We will reach these places only by following him obediently. Rebelling against the shepherd's leading is actually rebelling against our own best interests. We must remember this the next time we are tempted to go our own way rather than the shepherd's way.

Death casts a frightening shadow over us because we are entirely helpless in its presence. We can struggle with other enemies—pain, suffering, disease, injury—but strength and courage cannot overcome death. It has the final word. Only one person can walk with us through death's dark valley and bring us safely to the other side—the God of life, our shepherd. Because life is uncertain, we should follow this shepherd who offers us eternal comfort.

Ps 23:5, 6

In ancient Near Eastern culture, at a banquet it was customary to anoint a person with fragrant oil as a lotion. Hosts were also expected to protect their guests at all costs.

God offers the protection of a host even when enemies surround us. In the final scene of this psalm, we see that believers will dwell with God. God, the perfect shepherd and host, promises to guide and protect us throughout our life and to bring us into his house forever.

False shepherds who led the flock astray

Ezekiel 34:10

Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.

Those shepherds who failed their flock would be removed from office and held responsible for what happened to the people they were supposed to lead. Christian leaders must heed this warning and care for their flock, or total failure and judgment will be the result (see 1 Cor. 9:24-27). True leadership focuses on helping others, not just on getting ahead.

Shepherds that look to their own way

Isaiah 56:11

Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.

The “watchmen” were the nation’s leaders. The leaders of Israel were blind to every danger. Apathetic about their people’s needs, they were more concerned about satisfying their own greed. Leadership’s special privileges can cause leaders either to sacrifice for the good of their people or to sacrifice their people for their own greed. If you are in a leadership position, use it for the good of your people.

Chapter 2

Prophecy against the shepherds of Israel

Ezekiel 34:2

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?

Ezekiel called the exiles “Israel,” referring to all Jews in captivity from both the northern and southern kingdoms. Ezekiel criticized Israel’s leaders for taking care of themselves rather than taking care of their people.

He outlined their sins (Ezekiel 34:1-6) and pronounced judgment upon them (Ezekiel 34:7-10). Then he promised that a true shepherd (the Messiah) would come who would take care of the people as the other leaders were supposed to do (Ezekiel 34:11-31).

This beautiful message portrays the fate of the present shepherds, the work of the new shepherd, and the future of the sheep.

Jeremiah 50:6

My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting place/

BAD SHEPHERDS VERSUS GOOD SHEPHERDS

Bad shepherds:

1. Take care of themselves.
2. Worry about their own health.
3. Rules harshly and brutally
4. Abandon and scatter the sheep.
5. Keep the best for themselves.

Good Shepherds:

1. Take care of the flock.
2. Strengthen the weak and sick.
3. They search for the lost.
4. Rule lovingly and gently
5. Gather and protect the sheep
6. Give the best to the sheep.

Chapter 3

Christ as the Good Shepherd

Zech. 13:7

Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.

Just before his arrest, Jesus quoted from this verse, referring to himself and his disciples (Matthew 26:31-32). He knew beforehand that his disciples would scatter when he was arrested. The Roman “sword” was the military power that put Christ to death.

Jesus, the great shepherd

Hebrews 13:20

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

The writer recognizes the need for prayer. Christian leaders are especially vulnerable to criticism from others, pride (if they succeed), depression (if they fail), and Satan’s constant efforts to destroy their work for God. They desperately need our prayers! For whom should you regularly pray?

I will set shepherds over them.

Ezekiel 34:23

And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.

In contrast to the present evil shepherds (leaders) of God's people (Ezekiel 34:1-6), God will send a perfect shepherd, the Messiah ("my servant David"), who will take care of every need his people have and set up a kingdom of perfect peace and justice (see Psalm 23; Jeremiah 23:5-6; John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20-21; Rev. 21). "Peace" here means more than the absence of conflict. It is contentment, fulfillment, and security.

Jesus knows his sheep.

John 10:14

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine.

We have been made perfect, yet we are "being made holy." Through his death and resurrection, Christ, once for all, made his believers perfect in God's sight. At the same time, he is making them holy (progressively cleansed and set apart for his special use) in their daily pilgrimage here.

We should not be surprised, ashamed, or shocked that we still need to grow. God is not finished with us. We can encourage this growth process by deliberately applying Scripture to all areas of our lives, by accepting the discipline and guidance Christ provides, and by giving him control of our desires and goals.

Chapter 4

Shepherds go before and lead the sheep

Psalm 77:20

Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

The people of Israel rebelled and were not faithful to God (Psalm 78:8); forgot about the wonders God had done (Psalm 78:11-12); put God to the test by making demands from him (Psalm 78:18); lied to him and tried to flatter him (Psalm 78:36); and continued to turn away from him even after he did great works on their behalf (Psalm 78:42-56).

This is recorded in God's Word so that we can avoid the same errors. In 1 Cor. 10:5-12, Paul used this classic story of Israel's unfaithfulness to warn the early Christians to be faithful.

Psalm 80:1

To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim-Eduth, A Psalm of Asaph.
Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.

Cherubim are mighty angels.

The Shepherd guided the sheep.

Psalm 78:52

But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.

This was the Passover described in Exodus 12:29-30 when all the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain. The “tents of Ham” refers to Noah’s second son, who was the ancestor of the Egyptians. Ham is sometimes used as a synonym for Egypt.

Shepherds who defend the sheep

Amos 3:12

Thus saith the Lord; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria in the corner of a bed, and in Damascus in a couch.

The enemy mentioned here was Assyria, who conquered Israel and did just as Amos predicted. The people were scattered to foreign lands, and foreigners were placed in the land to keep the peace. Israel’s leaders had robbed their defenseless countrymen, and here they would be rendered defenseless by the Assyrians. Amos added that even if the Israelites tried to repent, it would be too late. The destruction would be so complete that nothing of value would be left.

Shepherds who search for the sheep

Ezekiel 34:12

As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

God promises to take over as shepherd of his scattered flock. When our leaders fail us, we must not despair but remember that God is in control and that he promises to return and care for his flock. Thus we know that we can turn to God for help. He is still in control and can transform any tragic situation to produce good for his kingdom (see Genesis 50:20; Romans 8:28).

Chapter 5

The shepherd searches for the one lost sheep.

Luke 15:4-5

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

It may seem foolish for the shepherd to leave 99 sheep to go search for just one. But the shepherd knew that the 99 would be safe in the sheepfold, whereas the lost sheep was in danger.

Because each sheep was of high value, the shepherd knew that it was worthwhile to search diligently for the lost one. God's love for each individual is so great that he seeks each one out and rejoices when he or she is "found."

Jesus associated with sinners because he wanted to bring the lost sheep—people considered beyond hope—the gospel of God's kingdom. Before you were a believer, God sought you; and his love is still seeking those who are yet lost.

We may be able to understand a God who would forgive sinners who come to him for mercy. But a God who tenderly searches for sinners and then joyfully forgives them must possess an extraordinary love! This is the kind of love that prompted Jesus to come to earth to search for lost people and save them. This is the kind of extraordinary love that God has for you. If you feel far from God, don't despair. He is searching for you.

Shepherds illustrating God of Israel

Psalm 77:20

Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

God will raise up shepherds to lead the flock.

Jeremiah 23:14

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evil doers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

How did the nation become so corrupt? A major factor was false prophecy. The false prophets had a large, enthusiastic audience and were very popular because they made the people believe that all was well. By contrast, Jeremiah's message from God was unpopular because it showed the people how bad they were.

There are four warning signs of false prophets—characteristics we need to watch for even today. (1) They may appear to speak God's message, but they do not live according to his principles. (2) They water down God's message in order to make it more palatable. (3) They encourage their listeners, often subtly, to disobey God. (4) They tend to be arrogant and self-serving, appealing to the desires of their audience instead of being true to God's Word.

Sodom and Gomorrah were sinful cities destroyed by God (Genesis 19:23-24). In the Bible they typify the ultimate in degrading, sinful behavior and rebellion against God.

Matthew 11:28

**Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.**



To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I
accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

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