

The Lord is My Shepherd (Psalm 23)

Pastor Kelly Sensenig

A Christian serviceman was captured by the enemy in a bygone war and was placed in a cruel prison camp. He was subjected to a torturous brainwashing process, but he would not give in. The Twenty-Third Psalm was the anchor for his mind. In the midst of discouragement and deep depression he would repeat this psalm and find spiritual and mental refreshment. It was to his advantage that his mother had taught him this great chapter while he was just a little boy.

Psalm 23 is the most beloved and well-known Psalms. It is probably one of the most read and appreciated portions in the entire Bible. This Psalm has comforted God's saints in their times of stress, illness, and at the end of life's journey, when they must face the valley of death and meet their precious Lord. This Psalm certainly has a message for the sorrowing. However, it's unfortunate that it's used primarily at funerals, because this Psalm focuses on what God does for us every day ("all the days of my life" – vs. 6) and not just at the time of our death.

Psalm 23 presents the most perfect picture of contentment that has ever been drawn. All of us have a deep craving for peace, contentment, and lasting satisfaction. It should not be forgotten that only God alone can provide these things for His children. J. Allen Blair called this Psalm "the sweet-singing nightingale of the soul." Charles Spurgeon likens this psalm to "the lark, which sings as it mounts, and mounts as it sings, until it is out of sight, and even then is not out of hearing." Alexander Maclaren said that "the world could spare many a large book better than this sunny little psalm. It has dried many tears and supplied the mould into which many hearts have poured their peaceful faith."

Louis Paul Lehman wrote:

"Think of how many times this passage has been the staff for the weary, a river of water in a dry place, a song in the midst of distress, the comfort of the sorrowing, and a soft pillow beneath the head of a dying saint."

The Setting

David wrote this Psalm but we cannot be sure when. Some suggest he wrote the Psalm as an old man, approaching the end of life's journey, as he looked back over his life and rejoiced in the goodness of God. Other think he may have written this as a younger man, as he watched and cared for his father's flocks in the Judean hills. David could have had the hills surrounding him, a harp in his hand, and his heart in tune with God when he penned these words. David spent much of his younger days caring for a "few sheep in the wilderness" (1 Sam. 17:28). He knew what it was to provide for sheep and take care of all their needs on the hills of Bethlehem.

The Psalm declares that God would prepare a table for David in the midst of his enemies (Ps. 23:5). This may give a clue to when the Psalm was written, or at least what David was reflecting about, when writing the Psalm. You will remember that David faced the wrath of his enemy Saul and "abode in the wilderness" (1 Sam. 23:14). This may be a time when David was inspired to write this beloved Psalm. Perhaps, during this time, David reminded himself that God was His Shepherd, and would provide for him.

In Second Samuel chapter fifteen, it's recorded how David's son, Absalom, rebelled against him, and toppled him from the throne. David was forced to flee into the Judean wilderness ("toward the way of the wilderness" – 2 Samuel 15:23) with his family and servants, and for a period of time he was unable to reclaim his throne. His life was in jeopardy and he was hunted and hounded for a number of months by his enemies. Since so much of David's early life had been spent as a shepherd in this same wilderness and countryside, he may have begun to reflect upon his earlier days, as a young boy in this countryside. Almost every man can remember something from his boyhood which has been a great influence on the rest of his life. The images in this Psalm could be drawn from David's experience as a young shepherd, even as he faced difficult times with His son Absalom and his enemies.

David may have written this Psalm to reassure himself that God was still his Shepherd, in the midst of the perplexing circumstance, and the rebellion of his own household and nation. Fleeing into the wilderness may have reminded him of his earlier years, as a little shepherd boy, who cared for the sheep. As he looked back upon his own shepherding ministry, as a little boy, he reassures himself that God would be faithful to him as one of His

sheep. David looked back to his childhood, became as a child (Matt. 18:2-3), and reassured himself that God would care for him, as his own personal Shepherd, in the midst of the wilderness. Perhaps he thought of these words:

“Shepherd boy, I’m just a little shepherd boy;
With my flute, I give the hills and valleys joy.
I love my little lamb; We lie down in pastures green –
Thinking now of all we have seen.”

This was David’s experience and he was reliving it once again in the wilderness as his enemies were threatening him. David experienced what he wrote. He experienced the shepherding care of God over his life. Dear friend, we too, must experience Psalm 23 in our personal daily lives. Every child of God can experience the same loving provision and care that David found from the hand of the Shepherd. God is with us and goes before us, as our wonderful Shepherd. He is all we need. In this Psalm, David explains that if we follow the Lord and trust Him, He will meet our every need, no matter what circumstances we might face in life. The Shepherd will never leave his sheep alone. Never!

The great Scottish preacher John McNeill told that during his childhood he had to walk a long distance home every evening, and his route led through a forest with a large ravine. Reports said that wild animals and gangs of robbers were often seen in that area. Great fear would seize his heart as he made his way past the spooky-looking trees. He recalled, "One night it was especially dark, but I was aware that something or someone was moving slowly and quietly toward me. I was sure it was a robber. When a voice called out, its eerie tone struck my heart with fear. I thought I was finished. Then came a second call. This time I could hear the voice saying, 'John, is that you?' It was my father. He had known of my fear and had come out to meet me."

Dear friend, if God is your personal Shepherd, you can be sure that He will never leave you (Heb. 13:5). God will always be there to calm your fears and comfort you in the midst of the changing seasons of your life.

The Savior

The question I must ask you is this: Do you know the Shepherd of Psalm twenty-three? The Psalmist said, "The LORD is my Shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). Despite its worldwide popularity, the Psalm is not for everyone. It is applicable only to those who are entitled to say, "The LORD is my Shepherd." Dear friend, you cannot personally know and experience the shepherding care of God, as outlined in Psalm 23, until you first know the suffering of Christ in Psalm 22. We must first believe in the Christ who died in Psalm 22 before we can know the Shepherd of Psalm 23.

Jesus cried in Psalm 22:1, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?"

Psalm 22:15

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death."

These verses speak prophetically of Christ's death upon the cross for you. Did you know that Jesus Christ died on the cross bearing the penalty for your sins, which was the wrath of God? Dear friend, you can't get to the Psalm 23 without Psalm 22, where you see the Savior dying on the cross, in order to save you from hell. God must first become your Savior before He can become your Shepherd (Isa. 45:22).

The plan of salvation is beautifully portrayed by the imagery of the Shepherd and sheep.

1. Christ seeks the sheep.

Luke 15:4-7 portrays how Christ seeks the sheep: "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. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

The Bible teaches that Christ seeks out sheep in order to save them. The sheep do not seek Christ; Christ seeks the sheep. If you are saved today it's because the Shepherd has sought you out and come to your rescue.

Isaiah 53:6 declares that sheep are lost: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Christ died for people who are comparable to lost sheep. We were sheep headed toward an eternity in hell, but Christ died on the cross, taking our iniquity upon Himself, experiencing God's wrath on our behalf. Jesus died for sheep, who were wandering aimlessly, without any hope of salvation from hell, or any true satisfaction and fulfillment in life.

"Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wand'ring from the fold of God;
He, to rescue me from danger,
Interposed His precious blood."

Jesus Christ died for wandering and lost sheep, so we might become His own personal sheep, which He can save, guide, sustain, and comfort in life. The truth is this; if you are a lost sheep, you can become God's own personal sheep, through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Before the Shepherd of Psalm 23 can care for the sheep, He must possess the sheep.

2. Christ saves the sheep.

John 10:11

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

The sheep are a corporate company of people for whom Christ died, so He might save them from the judgment of hell. Jesus died to save a group of sheep which He can call His own personal sheep.

John 10:16

"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

Are you part of the fold? Are you one of the Lord's sheep? Everyone can enter the sheepfold (John 3:16) and become part of the vast and growing company of sheep that Christ's died to save. Christ's death is *sufficient* (adequate) to save all mankind (Heb. 2:9) but His death only becomes *efficient* (effective) to those who place their faith in His death and resurrection for salvation.

Acts 16:31

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Have you believed in the death and resurrection of Christ for your salvation, so you can become one of God's precious sheep? Have you committed your personal faith to Christ alone for salvation, so you can be saved from hell? If not, you can do so right now.

3. Christ keeps the sheep.

John 10:27-28 promises that Christ keeps the sheep:

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Christ promised that when we become one of His sheep, we will never perish, or suffer the wrath and judgment of God in hell. Becoming a sheep involves a step of faith, whereby a person is ready and willing to place their faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son, for their salvation from hell. Christ died on the cross to save you from hell, paying the necessary penalty of judgment, which God required for your sin. If you will place your faith in Christ, who died in your place, you can be saved through His sacrifice.

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Dear friend, it is absolutely impossible to receive and experience the promises of Psalm 23, until you first believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which is portrayed in Psalm 22. The Christ of Psalm 22 died for helpless sheep who were living hopeless and meaningless lives. Jesus Christ died to bring us into a new relationship with God (Eph. 1:6; 2:13; Heb. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:18), so we can experience His own personal shepherding ministry

over our lives. We must remember that Christ's saving work is *sufficient* to save everybody, but it becomes *effective* only for those who actually believe on Him.

John 6:47

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

When I believe on the Son of God, I am immediately brought into a new living relationship with God. I am born again as God's child and experience a new relationship with God which I never had before.

John 1:12

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

When I place faith in Christ's sacrifice for salvation, explained here as receiving Christ as Savior, I become God's child and develop a new relationship with Him. God becomes my Shepherd as the Psalmist declared, where I can begin to experience His loving care and provision over my life. If you need to become one of God's sheep today, place your faith in Christ right now, so the Lord can be your own personal Shepherd, as outlined in Psalm 23. Below is a prayer that may help you express faith in Christ. Will you take a step of faith today and believe in Jesus Christ? You can transfer all of your faith to Christ and what He did for you, so you can be saved.

<p>"Dear God, I know Jesus Christ has died on the cross in my place. Right now I express faith in Christ to save me from hell and give me everlasting life. In Jesus' name, Amen."</p>
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Christianity is not just a religion; it's a relationship. So here is the real soul-searching question. Is God your shepherd? Do you have a personal relationship with Him through belief in Jesus Christ? Everything, therefore, hinges on the personal pronoun "my" – "The LORD is my shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). Unless He is "my shepherd," then the rest of the Psalm does not belong to me. On the other hand, if He is really mine, through faith in Jesus Christ, then I have everything I will ever need to face life and death. Everything! The answer to everything is God! So here is the point. We must have a personal relationship with God, who is our shepherd, and this becomes the secret to a fulfilling and sustaining life. J. Allen Blair called

Psalm 23 by the title “Living Reliantly.” Dearly beloved, we must learn the secret of translating these great promises of Psalm 23 into our everyday lives. As we do, we will learn to live in total reliance upon God, for everything that we need in life, and everything we must pass through in life.

Phillip Keller wrote:

“I am thrilled to belong to Him, for it is thus that I shall flourish and thrive, no matter what life may bring to me.”

The Self-Existent God

The Psalm begins by saying, “The LORD is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1). The term “LORD” is the personal name that God gave to Himself (Gen. 2:4). The name in the Hebrew is Jehovah (“the self-existent One”). It’s also pronounced Yahweh. God never had a beginning; He has existed from eternity past. The Bible presents God as the only eternal being, who has created everything and sustains everything, by His own sovereign hand.

Psalm 90:2

“Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”

David recognized that it was the eternal God who was his Shepherd. The God of eternity was interested in taking care of David’s life. The same is true regarding our own personal lives as Christians. The great eternal God is interested in shepherding our daily lives and caring for us as His children. He wants to meet all of our needs and give us rest for our weary souls.

One writer brings out how the compound names of Jehovah in the Old Testament reflect the remaining contents of Psalm 23.

- “I shall not want” - Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide (Gen. 22:14)
- “still waters” - Jehovah-Shalom, “the Lord our peace” (Judg. 6:24)
- “restores my soul” - Jehovah-Rophe, “the Lord who heals” (Ex. 15:26)
- “paths of righteousness” - Jehovah-Tsidkenu, “the Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 33:16)

- “thou art with me” - Jehovah-Shammah, “the Lord is there”
(Ezek. 48:35)
- “presence of my enemies” - Jehovah-Nissi, “the Lord our banner”
(Ex. 17:15)
- “anoint my head” - Jehovah-M’Kaddesh, “the Lord who sanctifies”
(Lev. 20:8)

The answer to life’s problems is God. We often look for solutions elsewhere, but God, who is “from everlasting to everlasting” (Ps. 90:2) is the only “LORD” and Shepherd, who can provide us with His peace, provision, and personal blessings, which will sustain us and fulfill us in life. If we begin to look for help and satisfaction outside of God (Gen. 3:6-7), we will find ourselves chasing after satanic substitutes and empty promises. David knew that it was the everlasting LORD who would keep him steady and secure in life.

“Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting thou art God,
To endless years the same.”

The Shepherd

The Psalm conveys the glorious truth that the eternal God is our “shepherd” (Ps. 23:1). This is one of the most precious descriptions of God found in the Bible. God is compared to a shepherd who takes care of his sheep. Of course, the sheep are His saints, and God is their Shepherd, who provides their needs, by leading them to the right water holes and pastures. If you need security, or a sense of belonging, then remember that the Great Shepherd has promised to be your personal caretaker in life.

Psalm 27:10

“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.”

God has a three-fold shepherding ministry over our lives.

1. God is a caring Shepherd.

The metaphor of a shepherd carries with it thoughts of tenderness, love, care, security, and provision. God is all these things to His children.

Warren Wiersbe wrote:

“Eastern shepherds guarded their sheep, led them, provided food and water for them, took care of them when they were weary, bruised, cut or sick, rescued them when they strayed, knew their names, assisted in delivering the lambs, and in every way simply loved them.”

In this Psalm David was using the picture of a shepherd’s provision for his sheep, in order to reflect upon the many spiritual benefits the Lord gave to him, through difficult times, dangers, and even the threat of death and dying. The loving and caring relationship that God has with His saints is depicted in this Psalm. God is pictured as the Shepherd, while His saints are portrayed as His sheep, which He loves, cares, and provides for on a daily basis.

God wants to become very close to our lives today. He wants to reveal His loving care and provision to our lives in a new and wonderful way. James 4:8 says, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” If we will just open our hearts to Him, we will begin to experience God’s nearness, dearness, and caring provision over our lives. We need God’s special touch today in order to make it through the storms and tests of life. Beloved, we need a Shepherd. Sometimes our Shepherd needs to pick us up in His arms, hold us close to His bosom, and carry us through the difficult storms of life. When we feel lost and all alone, our Shepherd will find us, and reassure us that He is there to care for us and sustain us along the journey.

“Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth and song;
As the burdens press, and the cares distress,
And the way grows weary and long?

Does Jesus care when my way is dark
With nameless dread and fear?
As the daylight fades into deep night shades,
Does He care enough to be near?

Does Jesus care when I've said "goodbye"
To the dearest on earth to me,
And my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks
Is it aught to Him? Does He see?

O yes, He cares; I know He cares,
His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares."

Beloved, our Shepherd does care! When we experience God's shepherding ministry over our lives, we can sense His love, peace, and strength that He supplies to us on a daily, hourly, and moment-by-moment basis. This is because God cares for us and wants to calm our fears, increase our faith, provide hope for the future, and give us peace for the present trials we face. Moment by moment, I'm kept in His love! God's loving care over our lives will supply us with everything we need, so we can go on in life.

1 Peter 5:7

"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."

"Never a trial that He is not there,
Never a burden that He doth not bear,
Never a sorrow that He doth not share,
Moment by moment, I'm under His care."

God is a caring Shepherd. This means He longs to come to our rescue and fill the void and emptiness that is in our souls. He wants to hold us in His arms and carry us when necessary. His desire is to supply us with the peace and rest we need during our days of weariness and stress. Dear Christian friend, we cannot make it without God's shepherding ministry.

Using the shepherd metaphor, David concludes that God's loving provision and protection would restore him, and give him the rest he needed, as he faced the difficult experiences related to both life and death. The Shepherd will meet all of our needs throughout life's journey and when we pass through death's valley. The Lord truly is our Shepherd. Have we been experiencing the presence of the Shepherd in our daily lives? Are we relying upon Him, relaxing in Him, and are we being rejuvenated by His

help and presence? Only when we practice the presence of God can we expect to experience the personal shepherding ministry of God in our daily lives and in the time of death.

Let's be honest with ourselves. How much have we really been experiencing God's shepherding ministry in our own personal Christian lives? Have we been relying on God's love, assistance, and security to get us through life? Many Christians are allowing other things to shepherd their lives instead of God. They look for spiritual assistance in the false shepherds of alcohol, antidepressants, and the anti-God secular viewpoints of psychology and psychotherapy, believing these things will somehow provide them with assistance for the journey. They think that money and material things can provide them with the spiritual help they need to go through life. How foolish!

The Christian's Shepherd is found in a person - "The LORD" (Ps. 23:1). We need a Shepherd, who is a real person, which can identify with the trials we are facing ("touched with the feeling of our infirmities" – Heb. 4:15) and come to our rescue with His loving provision and protection. Nothing else in this world can provide us with the true satisfaction and strength that we need to go through life and go on in life. Everything else is a false shepherd when compared to the true Shepherd of our souls.

1 Peter 2:25

"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

Jesus Christ, who is God, fulfills the metaphor of the "Shepherd" and "Bishop" (overseer) of our souls. These two words stress God's guidance, management, care, and provision which is experienced on a daily basis by those believers who commit themselves to His care.

Ezekiel 34:11-16 brings out this beautiful picture, which is reminiscent of Psalm 23: "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out. 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. ... I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of

Israel. I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.”

“And although there were times,
I’ve been out of His will,
“I’ve never been out of His care.”

Isaiah 40:11

“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

The Shepherd cares for His sheep. He does not give up on His sheep. He patiently provides them with the daily healing, care, and food they need, so they can go on in life. God is my Shepherd who will love me, embrace me, carry me, heal my wounds, lead me, calm me, satisfy me, sustain me, and finally take me to Heaven to be with Himself. Our wonderful Shepherd provides everything we need for both life and death. Now let’s get more specific.

How does the Shepherd care for us?

a. The Shepherd meets our daily needs.

Philippians 4:19

“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

b. The Shepherd provides us with daily strength.

Deuteronomy 33:27

“The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

c. The Shepherd gives us daily joy and fulfillment.

Psalms 16:11

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

Many years ago, Dr. Joseph Parker announced his Scripture reading as the Twenty-Third Psalm. Slowly and distinctly he read, "The LORD is my shepherd." There was a long pause. Then, closing his Bible he said, "That is enough!" This brief phrase so gripped his heart, that he could read no further. God is our Shepherd. The ever-present reality of God's shepherding ministry over our lives should cause each one of us, who are Christians, to be moved and totally reliant upon God's loving care and provision for our lives. One Christian, after passing through a heart wrenching experience, said, "I always knew that Jesus was necessary, but I never knew, until yesterday, that He was enough!"

2. God is a personal Shepherd.

"The LORD is my shepherd" is a personal statement. Let's not miss this important point. The pronoun, "my" indicates that David viewed God as his own personal Shepherd. How precious it is to contemplate that the Lord is a God that we can each individually identify and fellowship with on a personal basis. Each of us can have a very intimate and personal relationship with Him ("That I may know him" – Phil. 3:10).

A good Shepherd will give personal attention to each sheep, knowing each one by name, knowing the particular things that each one needs, but at the same time serve as a shepherd to the entire flock. How wonderful to realize that God has His own personal relationship with each one of His sheep. In other words, we can relate to God on an individual basis and experience His own personal care and provision for our lives. He is "my Shepherd" who sees the personal needs of my own life, and who wants to care for me and fellowship with me, on an individual basis. Nobody can take away the personal relationship we have with our Shepherd.

It's interesting that the individual sheep in a flock all look alike to the untrained eye. A good shepherd, however, can tell them apart, often because of their defects and peculiar traits. A man who was tending a large flock explained this to a Christian friend who expressed surprise at his familiarity with each animal. "See that sheep over there?" he asked. "Notice how it toes in a little. The one behind it has a squint; the next one has a patch of wool off its back; ahead is one with a distinguishing black mark, while the one closest to us has a small piece torn out of its ear." After individually observing all of his sheep, David then thought about the LORD, who was his own personal and caring Shepherd in life (Ps. 23:1). God is

the One who also knows the individual traits, weaknesses, and failings of each sheep, and watches over all of them with His discerning love and sympathetic understanding.

Psalm 40:5

“Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.”

What a loving Shepherd! With infinite concern God notes the individual doubts, fears, trials, conflicts, and defeats that disturb the sheep’s peace, and then He moves to come to their personal aid.

3. God is a sovereign Shepherd.

The term “shepherd” implies that God is the leader of His sheep and therefore has the right to make decisions for the flock. Shepherds didn’t drive their sheep; the sheep were led. As a result of the shepherd’s morning call, which was a distinct sound, the sheep would begin to follow their shepherd to the grazing lands and water holes. God, as our Shepherd, is our leader. This means He is in charge of the sheep, goes before them, and provides for their needs.

There are two ways God demonstrated His leadership.

a. He decides to bless the sheep.

It’s the Shepherd who decides to bless His sheep. The flock does not decide where to graze, where to drink, and where to walk. In this Psalm we see that God does the leading and initiating by the statements “He maketh me” (vs. 2); “he leadeth me” (vs. 2); “He restoreth me” (vs. 3); “Thou preparest a table before me” (vs. 5); “thou anointest my head with oil” (vs. 5). God initiates His loving provision and brings the resultant blessings into the lives of His sheep. If a shepherd would not choose to bless the flock they would starve and die of thirst. How true this is in relationship to our own Christian living. Without God’s sovereign blessings upon our lives, whether they are His physical or spiritual blessings, we would have nothing, no help, and no hope.

James 1:17

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

“Praise God, from whom all blessings flow!
Praise him, all creatures here below!
Praise him above, ye heavenly host!
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!”

b. He decides the path for the sheep.

It's equally true that only the sovereign Shepherd has the authority to inspect the pathway and make His own decisions and plans for His sheep. God, as our Shepherd, walks ahead of us, leading us in the path that He has ordained for our lives. We may not see the path ahead, but God does, since He has chosen the path for us to walk. In fact, we must remember that when we finally get to a particular destination in our journey, God will already be there for us, since He has gone ahead and surveyed the path.

So what must the sheep do? Each sheep must submit his own individual rights to the Shepherd and allow the Shepherd to make the necessary decisions for his life (“Submit yourselves therefore to God” - James 4:7). Here are some valid questions that must be answered by every believer. Do I recognize the right of the Shepherd to rule my life? Do I respond to His authority and acknowledge His ownership? Do I find freedom and fulfillment in following Him? Do I have contentment and a sense of purpose because I am under His direction?

“My Lord knows the way through the wilderness
All I have to do is follow.
My Lord knows the way through the wilderness
All I have to do is follow.
Strength for today, is mine all the way
And all I need for tomorrow.
My Lord knows the way through the wilderness
All I have to do is follow.”

The sheep must learn to trust the Shepherd's judgment and be willing and ready to follow and adjust to the path of His choosing. Let us remember that even when the path is difficult (“though I walk through the valley of the

shadow of death” - Ps. 23:4), the Shepherd has ordained or chosen the path, which He wants His sheep to walk, even when it’s a difficult or hard path, such as sickness, persecution, and the loss of a loved one. The path may sometimes be dark, deep, dangerous, and even somewhat disagreeable. God has not always promised an easy path but He has promised green pastures and still waters along the way (Ps. 23:1).

Romans 8:28

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

Do we really believe and live this truth out in our daily lives? The path by which God takes us often seems to lead away from what we might think is good. Sometimes we may think that we’ve missed a turn and taken the wrong road. However, we must remember that everything that God allows to come into our lives is working together for our good, causing us to become more like Christ (Rom. 8:39), and growing more fruit in our lives (John 15:2). Let us remember during our times of difficulty and suffering that the Shepherd is sovereign over the events of our lives. Things just don’t happen. God is behind the changing seasons of our lives. The sooner we learn this, the closer we will become to the Lord. We won’t blame Him; we will praise Him! We will submit to the providential plan and purpose that the Shepherd has for our personal lives. God’s providence speaks of His continuous activity and control, in guiding and directing the events and affairs of our personal lives, to their intended goal or purpose (Ps. 115:3; 135:6; Dan. 4:35).

As Pastor John Aker boarded a DC-10 at Newark Airport, the plane was nearly empty. The computer, however, had assigned him a seat next to a man named Richard. Once airborne, the two began talking. Richard had come from the Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research. His condition: skin cancer. Doctors gave him 10 months at best. He was going home to Nebraska. "May I tell you about something that changed my life?" asked John. Richard nodded. John explained the way of salvation. "Will you trust Jesus for your future - for what lies beyond the grave for you?" Richard clutched his hand and said, "Pray with me." Right there, 10,000 feet over Chicago, he gave his heart to Christ.

Months later, John again boarded a plane at Newark. This time he sat next to an elderly woman who was on her way to Beatrice, Nebraska. As they

talked, John was amazed to learn that this was Richard's mother. She told him that her son was growing in the Lord, and that she had known Christ a long time. "I'm so encouraged," said Richard's mother. "Yes, and I'm inspired," said John, "that Richard has followed through and that God arranged for us to sit together." The woman replied, "You know, this wasn't my seat. Just before you came on the plane a woman asked me to change seats with her."

Psalm 37:23

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way."

God does direct our steps! If we are yielded to Him, He will use us. As we enter each new day, let's trust God to "arrange the seating" in our lives. After all, He is our Shepherd. In both the "ups" and "downs" of life the sovereign Shepherd continues to lead us in the pathway that He has ordained for our lives. When we say, "Why did God bring this upon me?," or "Why did God allow this to happen to me?," we are not trusting the Shepherd. To accept our path, even in times of difficulty, will cause us to grow spiritually, and also draw us closer to the Shepherd.

"Thou my everlasting portion,
More than friend or life to me;
All along my pilgrim journey,
Saviour, let me walk with Thee.
Close to Thee, Close to Thee,
Close to Thee, Close to Thee,
Gladly will I toil and suffer,
Only let me walk with Thee."

The Sheep

Now think of this. If God is our Shepherd, then we must recognize that we are His sheep. This is the analogy being brought out in the Psalm 23. I don't personally like being called a sheep because sheep, beyond question, are the most stupid animals on the face of the earth. They are dumb, dirty and defenseless. However, God tells me, I am a sheep, and I must accept this fact. Actually, if I am really honest with myself, I know it is true. I'm just a dumb, dirty, and defenseless sheep, who needs God's help in every way. I have to admit that I need Him. It is difficult, but that this is

where we must start. Once we admit who we are, it's then we will begin to discover the truth of what David is saying in Psalm 23.

Jesus also called us sheep in John 10:27:

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

What works when life doesn't? Psalm twenty three works, for it reminds us of God's constant source of supply, strength, and spiritual direction He gives for His sheep. What makes life worth living when we are confused and when our heart is broken and aching? Psalm 23 works. This is a psalm for people who are experiencing a major upheaval in life. This Psalm reminds us that God can meet all of our needs in life.

If we are worried about the future we can remember that He is our Shepherd that has promised to guide and direct us, inspecting the pathway that goes before us, and ordaining what comes into our lives (Ps. 23:1). If we are spiritually distraught, depressed, and discouraged, we can take to heart that God is great in His provision and supply, and will undertake or undergird for us (Ps. 23:2). The Lord provides rest and refreshing nourishment for His weary sheep even when they are under attack from the enemy (Ps. 23:5). If we have sinned we can be sure of His forgiveness. Only God can restore our souls to the place of fellowship and communion with Himself and provide us with the spiritual reviving we need to go on in life (Ps. 23:3). If we need spiritual guidance, we can be assured that the Shepherd will lead and direct us in the path of righteousness, so we do not aimlessly wander outside God's will for our lives (Ps. 23:3). If we are fearful of death, only the Shepherd can assure us of His presence, through the valley, which leads to God and the glories of everlasting life in Heaven (Ps. 23:4).

Yes, the Shepherd of this Psalm can meet all of our needs and bring us complete and lasting fulfillment. J. R. Littleproud's outline is hard to improve upon:

- The secret of a happy life - every need supplied. “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1).
- The secret of a happy death - every fear removed. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me” (Psalm 23:4).

- The secret of a happy eternity - every desire fulfilled. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

The Supply

In her beautiful poem, "The Parable of Tomorrow," Ruth Gibbs Zwall offers this description of the Savior's precious shepherding ministry:

I looked at the mountain.
"It is too hard, Lord," I said;
"I cannot climb."
"Take My hand," He whispered;
"I will be your strength."

I saw the road.
"It is too long, Lord," I said;
"So rough and long."
"Take My love," He answered;
"I will guard your feet."

I looked at the sky.
"The sun is gone," I said;
"Already the way grows dark."
"Take the lantern of My Word," He whispered;
"That will be light enough."

We climbed.
The road was narrow and steep,
But the way was bright.
And when the thorns reached out,
They found His hand before they touched my own.

And when my path grew rough,
I knew it was His love
That kept my feet from stumbling.
Then I grew very tired.
"I can go no farther, Lord," I said.

He answered, "Night is gone.
Look up, My child."

I looked and it was dawn.
Green valleys stretched below.
"I can go on alone now," I said,
And then I saw the marks.
"Lord, Thou art wounded.
Thy hands are bleeding.
Thy feet are bruised. Was it for me?"
He whispered, "I did it gladly."

Then I fell at His feet.
"Lord, lead me on," I cried.
"No road too long, no valley too deep,
If Thou art with me."
We walk together now and shall forever!

We now come to the main body of our text and study in Psalm 23. What does God provide for His children? How does God supply the needs of His people? Let's put the question in the context of this study. What does the Shepherd do for His sheep?

He Satisfies Me

Psalm 23:1

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

This statement has two applications.

1. I don't need anything else.

How wonderful! "I shall not want," which means, we won't have any spiritual needs that God cannot meet. God's well never runs dry. We will never lack the spiritual provisions of God for daily living. God meets all of our deep-seated spiritual needs, by providing us with His care, contentment, and comfort, so we can truly say, "I'm satisfied." As sheep that are fed, watered, and well-satisfied by the provision of their shepherd, so we, as God's sheep, find our complete provision and satisfaction from His personal shepherding ministry over our lives. As a result, we can conclude that we

have need of nothing, since God meets all of our inner needs for refreshment and restoration of soul. The sheep are satisfied when the shepherd leads them into the green pastures and by the still waters (Ps. 23:2). The picture is one of calm and tranquility because the basic needs of the sheep are met. This analogy is similar to God's shepherding ministry over our lives. He leads us to the place of spiritual rest and peace and this satisfies our souls. In other words, the wonderful spiritual resources that God provides for His sheep bring spiritual satisfaction into their lives.

Why don't we find ourselves in want or in need? The rest of the Psalm gives us the answer. It's because God satisfies our souls by meeting all of our truest needs in life. He gives us peace, satisfaction, provision, restoration, protection, strength, direction, goodness, and mercy. God is our Provider, Preserver, Director, and indeed, He is everything we will ever need in life. Since God is my shepherd, I will have all my spiritual needs met, and find satisfaction through God's provision and person - "I shall not want."

This statement means I can find everything that I need in God! God supplies my genuine spiritual needs and this allows me to experience refreshment and satisfaction in life. I may not have health, but I can still say, "I shall not want," since my true inner spiritual needs are met in life. I may not have wealth, but since God satisfies the inner man ("the hidden man of the heart" - 1 Pet. 3:4), I can say with confidence, "I shall not want" (I will lack nothing). If our true spiritual needs are met in life, as Psalm 23 portrays, then we can always say, "I shall not want," meaning we will never want anything that God does not want for our lives. We will simply be satisfied with His spiritual resources and thank the Lord for satisfying our lives.

Psalm 36:7-8

"How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures."

"I shall not want" or "I won't lack anything I truly need." This is a general statement. Just as the shepherd makes total provision for the sheep, so the Lord makes total provision for His people. However, just as sheep must remain close to their shepherd, if they are to benefit from his provision,

even so must Christians remain close to the Lord, if they are to benefit from God's bountiful provision.

Psalm 42:1

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."

If we don't desire to live close to the Lord, then we will miss out on His wonderful shepherding ministry. Rebellious sheep keep God from pouring out His full blessings upon their lives. If you possess emptiness, or a void in your heart and life, and lack God's provisions of peace, joy, and satisfaction as a Christian, it's because you are not allowing God to be your Shepherd. You have not been enjoying the shepherding care that God wants to provide for you on a daily basis. The Shepherd has always been there. You simply have not been allowing the Lord to lead you into the green pastures and still waters. Instead of the green pastures and still waters you have chosen the **dead pastures and **turbulent waters of the world which provide only emptiness and fear. There is no true and lasting satisfaction that comes from the world. Hebrews 11:25 declares "the pleasures of sin for a season."

These four little words ("I shall not want"), which follow the statement, "The Lord is my Shepherd" are very important. These precious words mean God promises to meet the spiritual needs of His children so they can say, "I don't need anything else in life." God's children will lack nothing that is necessary to bring satisfaction and fulfillment into their lives because of the sufficiency of God's daily provision. God provides us with His abundant resources ("as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" – 2 Cor. 6:10).

Psalm 84:11

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."

James Montgomery Boice remarked:

"Left to themselves, sheep lack everything. They are the most helpless animals. But if we belong to the one who is self-sufficient, inexhaustible, and utterly unchanged by time, we will lack nothing."

Since God meets all of my inner spiritual longings and needs, "I shall not want." I will never lack God's spiritual provision of inner contentment and satisfaction. This means I won't need to play the lottery, drink alcohol, seek a higher job position, become successful in the world's eyes, or try and out due someone else, hoping to receive some better way of life. There is no better way of life. The only life that counts is our personal relationship with God and experiencing His satisfaction and fulfillment. If God satisfies my inner being, I won't have to seek worldly artificial fillers, outside my relationship with Him. If we have discovered the way of gladness, then why seek some other way? Every other path will lead to emptiness and frustration.

The Devil is always whispering in your ear, "You deserve more. The way that life treats you isn't fair." You may want to give in to this temptation. However, if we truly are connected to the Shepherd of our soul, we will not think this way. This is because we will experience the Lord's abundant blessings and provision in life. We will be able to say, "I shall not want" or "I shall never lack what I need in life." Do we really believe this? Dearly beloved, it's enough to have the Lord, as my personal Shepherd, and experience His loving care and provision. He truly is enough. What else could I possibly want in life, if God, as my Shepherd, provides all my deepest spiritual needs? Since God is our gentle Shepherd, who meets our needs and satisfies us in life, we will no longer want to experiment with the things of the world, which do not satisfy.

In writing Ecclesiastes chapter two, Solomon explained how he tried to find satisfaction in the things of this world. He tried wine (Eccl. 2:3), wisdom (Eccl. 2:3), women (Eccl. 2:7) and wealth (Eccl. 2:7-8). After trying to find satisfaction in all these worldly and earthly things Solomon concluded in Ecclesiastes 2:11: "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

Man's earthly pleasures and pursuits always lead to emptiness, futility, and despair. When we live life without the spiritual blessings of the Shepherd we become disoriented and lack God's true blessings. We miss the green pastures and still waters that He is offering to us. Life outside the sheepfold is meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 concludes:

“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”

When life is lived outside the parameters of the Shepherd’s guidance and blessing it becomes meaningless. Life becomes miserably empty and barren. This is why God’s people need a Shepherd that will provide them with the true satisfaction and fulfillment they need in life. You will have no “wants” when you find your complete resource, provision, and satisfaction from God, who wants to be the Shepherd of your soul. “I shall not want.” God and His spiritual provisions do satisfy our lives. God’s shepherding ministry over our lives results in a new beginning and place of spiritual refreshment that we have never experienced before.

“All my life I had panted,
For a drink from some cool spring,
That I hoped would quench the burning
Of the thirst I felt within.

Well of water, ever springing,
Bread of life so rich and free,
Untold wealth that never faileth,
My redeemer is to me.

Hallelujah!
I have found Him my soul so long has craved!
Jesus satisfies my longings,
Thro’ His blood I now am saved.”

2. I don’t want anything else.

“I shall not want.” As we’ve previously stated, this means God will certainly meet our inner spiritual needs of contentment and peace in life, so we will never lack anything, which is needed to sustain us during the storms and changing seasons of our lives. When we come to the place and say, “I shall not want,” we are really saying, “I don’t need anything else,” since God has supplied all of our spiritual needs, such as peace, joy, restoration, comfort, and direction. This is a wonderful truth to live by and experience on a daily basis.

In another sense, we can understand these words (“I shall not want”) to mean – “I don’t want anything else!” In other words, God is all that we should want in life, even when other things are taken away from us, such as our job, position, friends, money, and health. Knowing God, and experiencing His shepherding love and companionship in life, should be all that we really desire in life. When everything seems to be going wrong, when we lose a loved one, when the bottom drops out of our lives, when our ship is sinking, it’s then we come to realize that God is all we need, but also God should be all that we really want in life. His companionship is what we should desire and long for more than anything else.

Charles Spurgeon said it best:

“It is not only, ‘I do not want,’ but ‘I *shall* not want.’ Come what may, if famine should devastate the land, or calamity destroy the city, ‘I shall not want.’ Old age with its feebleness will not bring me any lack, and even death with its gloom will not find me destitute. I have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have skill and wit with which to win my bread, but because The LORD is my Shepherd. The wicked always want, but the righteous never; a sinner’s heart is far from satisfaction, but a gracious spirit dwells in the palace of content.”

Everything we need in life can be summed up in God Himself, His personal presence and fellowship; therefore, He is all that we really need in life. When we lack funds, family, friends, fame, and fortune, we can still say, God is enough. God is all I really want in life. I don’t want anything else. “I shall not want.” Why? It’s because God’s own personal life and presence is all that should really matter to us in both life and death. Everything else is secondary when it comes to our relationship and fellowship with God. I shall not want. I will not desire anything else but God’s presence and fellowship since He is all that I need in life. God is enough. What else could I possibly want in life, if I have God, as my Shepherd? God’s own personal presence is all that I really need to get me through life and death.

Through our personal relationship with God, we find companionship and new satisfaction and fulfillment in life, so we can truly say, “I shall not want” or “I don’t want anything else in life.” This means we will not desire anything else in life, since God meets all of our deepest and truest needs, and since God’s personal presence and fellowship is enough. The little girl began to quote Psalm 23 and said, “The LORD is my shepherd, that’s all I want.”

She was right in her understanding of this Psalm. God is more than enough. He is all that we should want in life.

So as we close this first point, we have seen that God satisfies our lives, by supplying our deepest spiritual needs and longings in life. Since God is our personal Shepherd, supplying our every spiritual need, we can confidently say, "I shall not want." "I don't need or want anything else in life."

Psalm 34:9

"O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him."

Matthew Henry remarked:

"I shall be supplied with whatever I need; and, if I have not every thing I desire, I may conclude it is either not fit for me or not good for me or I shall have it in due time."

As sheep rely totally upon the shepherd, so believers, as God's sheep, are to rely confidently upon Him. We need a realistic and revitalizing relationship with God today. We are to come to the realization that God is all we need in life. He will supply all of our needs and we will lack nothing.

"You're all I need; You're the Lord of everything!
All I need, this is why I humbly sing.
Your strength is sustaining
And Your grace has made me free.
You're my heart's lone desire, You're all I need."

Are you ready to totally rely on God? Are you willing to trust Him right now to get you through your time of deep distress and sorrow? Many believers talk about trusting the Lord, but few really practice it. Worry results in unbelief. Many times we hurry along in life and then we begin to worry in life because we are not trusting in the Lord's daily provision. Are you ready to depend upon Him as sheep would solely depend upon their Shepherd? Do you want to deepen your relationship with God and your trust and dependence upon Him? As we live from day to day God can meet our deepest needs and longings. He can lead us through the deepest valleys and lowest points of our lives. When times become filled with distress and disappointments, God is ready to come to our rescue and supply us with His abundant spiritual provisions, so we can truly say, "I shall not want" - "I don't need anything else or want anything else in life."

Several young boys were selling papers, for a few quarters, to the motorists who would stop at a particular red light in Wheeling, West Virginia. On one occasion a luxurious car stopped. A chauffeur got out, and opened the door for an aristocratic looking gentleman, who went to the corner and bought several papers. The owner returned to the car and it sped off with all of its fancy chrome and trimmings. Then one little fellow turned to the other as they watched the car disappear: "Say," he said, "did you see that guy? Boy, I bet he's rich." "Yeah," said the other boy, "if he was your pa, you'd never need nothin."

Dear friend, if God is our Shepherd, we need nothing. This is because He meets all of our needs in life. "I shall not want."

"The King of Love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His,
And He is mine forever."

He Rests Me

Psalm 23:2

"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."

This concept of lying down in green pastures speaks of the quiet inner contentment, rest, and peace that comes from God after being nourished or spiritually fed by Him. One of the basic needs of a flock of sheep is good grazing grass, so they can be well fed, and afterward, life down to rest in the green pastures. Of course, one of the ways the shepherd makes his sheep to lie down is to fill their stomachs. Here is a very picturesque scene of sheep bedded down in grassy meadows, or those places in fields or meadows where the grass is abundant, and they are pictured as having eaten their fill. After sheep fill their stomachs, they enjoy a nice rest in the rich grass, where they were grazing. The picture is of a flock of sheep that is fully nourished, totally satisfied, at peace, and resting in the plush meadows. How wonderful that our Shepherd promises to give us the inner spiritual nourishment we need, so we too, can find rest for our weary souls.

John 6:35

"And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."

“Savior like a Shepherd lead us,
Much we need Thy tender care.
To Thy pleasant pastures feed us.
For our use, Thy folds prepare.”

There is a hunger in the human heart which nothing but God can satisfy. The truth is this, God feeds us, and then He rests us. Dear friend, we know that life's storms can suddenly come upon us without warning, but God promises to nourish us with His presence, supplying our every spiritual need, so we can experience His calming peace and rest. We are fully nourished in life through God's personal presence. When appropriating His provisions of grace, strength, peace, rest, joy, satisfaction, contentment, and comfort, we can be fed and fully nourished in life, so we can lie down in the green pastures. All of us need to lie down and experience God's inner rest.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:29:

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”

Exodus 33:14

“And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”

God provides us with the nourishment of the green pastures so we might lie down and find rest for our weary souls. It's sad when Christians live such anemic and inept lives when God is offering them the rich green pastures to feed upon. They try to get through life without God's daily feeding of manna (Ps. 78:24) and move into the barren lands of sin and shame, instead of feeding on the green pastures, which bring rest and peace into their lives.

My family was driving to the west coast of California. As we drove through the state of Nevada, I was amazed at the vastness of the rocks and desert. Nevada is nothing but a wasteland of arid desert and dry ground. Sadly, Christians sometimes choose the desert regions to live, when they could have the luscious green pastures that God offers to them. Dear friend, the world is a barren place that provides no solid spiritual food and enrichment for the child of God.

Haggai 1:6 describes it well:

“Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.”

The principle is clear. When you don't eat the right food you will never be rested or satisfied. You will never have enough. Never! There are no substitute pastures that will satisfy the soul.

It's interesting that sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free from hunger. The analogy is simple to see. God supplies our inner spiritual needs, as our caring and loving Shepherd, which allows us to then experience His spiritual rest. We can lie down and experience rest instead of allowing the rigorous demands, changes, and schedules of life to disturb us. Dear friend, instead of lying down on the couch of the psychologist, why don't you try lying down in God's green pastures? The picture of sheep grazing in green pastures, and afterward lying down in the meadow, beautifully portrays how God feeds and then sustains His beloved saints with blessed rest.

We are told in God's Word to “rest in the Lord” (Psalm 37:7). Like foolish sheep, many times we are too busy to rest. Jesus said, “Come ye yourselves apart And rest a while” (Mark 6:31). The soul is crying out for spiritual rest. Instead of running, we should be feeding and resting. Instead of being overcome by our schedules we should be overcome by our Shepherd's care and provision of rest.

F. B. Meyer wrote:

“There must be pauses and parentheses in our lives.”

The terrific grind and pressure upon the child of God is by no means lessening. Therefore, I need the green pastures. I need to experience God's inner nourishment within my soul, so I can lie down and rest, when the storms of life are raging all around me. We often become tired in our souls, spirits, and minds and need rest. God feeds us with His personal meal of contentment, peace, and satisfaction so we can in return lie down and find rest for our weary souls.

The question is this: where have you been grazing? If you graze in the wrong places, in the wrong books, on false teaching, and on wrong

entertainments, you will find no rest and satisfaction. If you don't graze in the right places and the right things, you won't find true peace in life. Be sure of this one thing, the Shepherd will never lead us into those places, where there is a lack of good spiritual food. We must find our nourishment from God's personal life and presence. Only when we rely upon God's supply, can we discover the true meaning and existence in life, and God's wonderful spiritual provision of rest or peace, which is explained as lying down in green pastures.

Of course, it's difficult to lie down with turmoil and unrest going on all around us. However, this is what makes God's inner peace so wonderful. God's peace is not dependent upon circumstances. No matter what we are facing in life, or what is going on around, we can lie down in the green pastures. We might be facing sickness, suffering, or some other trial, but in the midst of our difficulties, God has promised to feed us, and then rest us in the green pastures.

“In God's green pastures feeding by His cool waters lie,
Soft in the evening walk my Lord and I.
All the sheep of His pastures fare so wondrously fine,
His sheep am I.”

John 10:9

“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.”

Have you been grazing in the pasture? Have you been experiencing God's provision, fellowship, and calm in the green pastures? As God's sheep, we are to possess a sense of fulfillment and nearness to God, when we are out in the fields. The Shepherd of our soul invites us to meet Him in the fields and fellowship with Him.

Song of Solomon 7:11

“Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.”

“The little cares that fretted me
I lost them yesterday
Among the fields, above the sea,
Among the winds at play,

Among the lowing of the herds,
The rustling of the trees,
Among the singing of the birds,
The humming of the bees.

The foolish fears of what might happen,
I cast them all away,
Among the clover-scented grass,
Among the new-mown hay,
Among the husking of the corn,
Where drowsy poppies nod,
Where ill thoughts die and good are born--
Out in the fields with God."

Please note that it's the Lord who initiates the blessings. He brings His sheep to the place where they can lie down and rest ("He maketh me to lie down"). The verbs "maketh" and "leadeth" in Psalm 23:2 suggest gentle persuasion – a shepherd patiently, persistently, encouraging his sheep to the place where their hunger and thirst will be relieved. How does a shepherd make the sheep to lie down? First, he feeds the sheep, supplying their needs. This enables them to rest. The Psalm surely indicates this since it depicts sheep resting after they have been fed. Second, he persuades the sheep. Sometimes the shepherd would gently tap the sheep with his rod to persuade them to lie down.

We often become too busy to lie down and rest. Our bodies get ahead of our souls. As a result, God must gently remind us once again to be still and know that He is God (Psalm 46:10). God must move in our hearts again, so we might experience His inner peace, as we dwell in the green pastures. The Shepherd is the Lover of my soul, so much so, He takes the initiative to move in my heart and life once again, producing His blessed rest and peace.

Song of Solomon 5:4-5

"My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock."

In the Song of Solomon Christ is seen in typology. The Shepherd and saint relationship is beautifully portrayed, as it is in Psalm 23. The Shepherd loves His children or sheep. He comes to initiate His love and blessing upon our lives once again. How often have we heard Him at the door?

Revelation 3:20

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him (in to his home), and will sup with him, and he with me.”

The loving Shepherd seeks out our companionship so we can lie down in the green pastures. Lying down in the green pastures portrays how God gives to us a sense of well-being, rest, and security, which makes life peaceful and satisfying. One thing is certain, God’s green pastures of spiritual nourishment are always fresh, always rich, and they are never exhausted! Only God’s green pastures will provide the rich nutrition we need to go on in life. Nothing else will get us through life. God feeds us and then He rests us. He provides us with the spiritual food of inner contentment and peace so we can find rest in a weary land.

Matthew 11:28

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

What do we need when our world caves in and nothing seems to be going right? What do we need when life becomes filled with busy schedules or when we are faced hard times? We need rest. In the hour of trial we must learn to “lie down in green pastures.” Beloved, God will feed us and rest us along the way. Instead of running we need to be feeding and resting. We can experience the nourishment of God’s unchanging grace and peace, so we can lie down in the green pastures, and find the rest or calmness of soul we need, as we face the demands and detours of life.

“In shady, green pastures, so rich and so sweet.
God leads His dear children along;
Where the water’s cool flow bathes the weary one’s feet,
God leads His dear children along.”

He Refreshes Me

Psalm 23:2

“He leadeth me beside the still waters.”

The “still waters” provide a picturesque scene of spiritual refreshment and calmness in life. Water speaks of refreshment while still waters depict a tranquil and peaceful scene. Psalm 46:10 declares, “Be still, and know that I am God.” God wants us to “be still” or relax in life, since He provides us with the necessary spiritual refreshment that we need on a daily basis. Sheep would be led by the shepherd to the waters so they could drink and be refreshed from their journey. Sheep become tired and weary in their journey. They need to be led to those refreshing still waters so they might drink and be revitalized once again. Beloved, I need the spiritual refreshment of God’s sustaining grace and peace today, if I’m going to effectively live the Christian life. I need to drink by the still waters and be refreshed by the Lord’s presence, power, and peace.

Isaiah 26:3

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”

God promises to provide us with the spiritual refreshment we need to go on in life. What happens when I come to a bend in the road and my circumstances change? How can I cope with the difficulties of life? I must experience the still waters of God’s refreshment, so I can find the strength to go on. God will refresh us with His abundant supply of peace and grace, so we can go on in life, in spite of our surmounting problems, momentous changes, and heartbreaking setbacks. The serene scene of sheep drinking at still waters reminds us of the ****inner refreshment**** we receive from God’s abundant and constant supply of strength, peace, and contentment.

Psalm 34:18-19

“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.”

With God’s continued supply of inner refreshment, we can experience His sustaining grace and peace, so we might victoriously pass through the difficult times of life. We truly can find God’s deliverance when we are

spiritually refreshed in the inner man and experience the Lord's never-ending resource of contentment and peace.

Ephesians 3:16

"That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."

It's interesting that sheep are always led to drink by the still waters as depicted in this Psalm. This is because they are afraid of fast running water. As a result, they will only drink from a quiet pool of water. A good shepherd, particularly in a semi-arid region such as Palestine, knows where the still watering holes are located. Sometimes the shepherd would temporarily dam up a stream so the sheep can quench their thirst from the still waters. The peaceful picture of "still waters" portrays one of supply and refreshment, as the basic needs of the sheep are met. God refreshes and satisfies His sheep, by surrounding their lives with His peace, as they drink from the spring that shall never run dry.

This parallels to what Jesus said in John 4:13-14:

"Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

When we try and drink from the world's water supplies we will be continually thirsty. Our thirst will never truly be quenched or satisfied. If you think you can find satisfaction at the world's water holes, then you are fooled.

Jeremiah 2:13

"For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water."

You may be spiritually thirsty today and in a pathetic condition. Your soul may be famished. If so, you must remember that only the Shepherd can provide the satisfying water of life, which will quench your spiritual thirst. If you have been drinking at the water holes of the world, you know nothing of the refreshing drink that you can enjoy by the "still waters" of God's peace, contentment, and satisfaction. Many today are depressed,

discouraged, nervous, frustrated, and fearful because they have been drinking from the broken cisterns instead of the still waters.

John 7:37

“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”

Cool, clear, and calm waters are promised to the sheep. God’s spring never dries up. He has an ever-abundant supply of strength and peace to refresh our souls.

Galatians 1:3

“Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2 Peter 1:2

“Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.”

The scene of sheep drinking by still waters once again suggests refreshment and peace. The Shepherd provides our needs by the still waters and produces the much-needed effect in our lives – refreshment and calmness of soul.

Philippians 4:7

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Refreshment and peace! This is what we need today in the midst of our fast-paced lives. What God is to me, right here and now, is extremely important. What does the life of the Shepherd mean to you, today? We need the still waters of God’s refreshment and tranquility. There is no other way to face the demands of the day and the difficult challenges ahead which we must cope with as God’s children. We must find refreshment and rest from the Shepherd by drinking from the “still waters.”

Picture a peaceful scene of sheep drinking at still waters. Then place yourself in this tranquil scene. As God’s children, we are to experience His refreshment by the still waters. We must come to the still waters and draw from the source that never shall run dry. There is refreshment and peace

beside the still waters. Have you been to the pleasant places and still waters lately?

“In pleasant places Jesus leads me,
Like a Shepherd so gentle and kind.
In pleasant places, by still waters,
O what pleasure and blessing I find.”

He Restores Me

Psalm 23:3

“He restoreth my soul.”

No doubt David was reflecting back to the years of his youth, when he restored many wandering sheep to the fold. Sheep are notoriously stupid and wander away from where they should be. There were times when the shepherd would lead the sheep through the narrow paths, with fields of grain on both sides, and sometimes the sheep would begin to nibble on the grain. After a while the sheep would disappear into the grain and soon became completely lost from the rest of the flock. Worst of all, he was lost from the shepherd’s care. Usually, it was not long until the shepherd missed his sheep and hastily darted back looking and searching for him. Eventually the shepherd would find the wandering sheep and restore him to the fold.

On other occasions a sheep might get its head down into a juicy tuft of grass and from there move to another, and yet another, while never looking up to see where the shepherd and the flock might be. Suddenly it raises its head only to discover that the shepherd and the she flock are nowhere in sight. The sheep stands alone and afraid. However, over the knoll comes the faithful shepherd and leads the sheep back the flock. The sheep is restored.

“He restoreth my soul.” God’s provision in Psalm 23 has to do specifically with the soul. The Psalm is depicting the spiritual blessings and provisions that God gives to the inner man in order to bring him to a place of rest, peace, and satisfaction. What provisions does the Shepherd have for my soul? We’ve addressed them already throughout this study. God provides us with inner contentment, peace, satisfaction, joy, and strength so we can go on in life. God uses these spiritual provisions to restore my soul.

The word “restoreth” means “to turn back” or bring something back to its original condition. The soul of God’s sheep need to be refreshed, restored, and repaired at times. Our soul needs maintenance. It wanders away into sin, it becomes sorrowful, it becomes sickly or spiritually weak. Therefore, we need to have our soul restored or brought back to a place of fellowship with God, freedom from worry and sorrow, and restored after falling and failing in the Christian life.

Charles Spurgeon put it best:

“When the soul grows sorrowful he revives it; when it is sinful he sanctifies it; when it is weak he strengthens it.”

God restores us in every way. God brings us back to the place where He wants us to be in relationship to Christian living and communion with Himself. How often have we cried out to God for forgiveness, help, peace, and strength and found a loving Shepherd coming to our rescue? The Shepherd wants to restore our soul when we experience fear, frustration, and failure. The Shepherd wants to pick us up in His arms, carry us, and once again restore us or bring us back to the place of spiritual stability, vitality, blessing, usefulness, and fellowship with Himself.

I think we must be realistic about life and face the facts the way they really are. There are times we sin. There are times we get tired and discouraged and become “weary, worn, and sad.” There are even times when the roof of the sheep pen will cave in and you might come apart at the seams! However, when this happens, we don’t have to stay this way. The Shepherd can restore our souls and revive us again!

“Revive us again;
fill each heart with Thy love;
May each soul be rekindled
with fire from above.

Hallelujah! Thine the glory.
Hallelujah! Amen.
Hallelujah! Thine thee glory.
Revive us again.”

Sometimes we must have our fellowship restored with God. When we sin, we must confess our sins before God (1 John 1:9), and have our souls

restored to a right relationship with the Lord. Many times our soul must be brought back to a place of fellowship and joyous communion with the Lord. David knew this better than anyone else. After committing sin with Bathsheba and having her husband murdered, he cried out in Psalm 51:10-12: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

J. Allen Blair said:

“When we are out of touch with God anything can happen. The bars will be lowered. Sin will find its way into our heart. Spiritual things will become less and less interesting. Worldliness will be most appealing.”

Are you out of fellowship with God? If so, the Shepherd desires that you come back to the fold. Beloved, we can become unstable and changeable and therefore need to be restored by our loving Shepherd. Our communion and fellowship with God must be restored.

What should we do when we get down in the dumps? We must have our downcast soul restored to a place of renewal. When our soul is discouraged, distraught, and disappointed (Psalm 42:5,11), we also must once again be restored to the place of spiritual rest, refreshment, and renewal. In fact, we must in some sense be restored on a daily basis.

2 Corinthians 4:16

“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”

“Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here;
Trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment,
I’ve no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what he deems best—
Lovingly, it’s part of pain and pleasure,
Mingling toil with peace and rest.”

Renewing! Restoration! This is what we need on a daily basis. When we draw upon God our inner man is sustained and satisfied. Our souls are restored as we experience the Shepherd’s love, care, and provision.

Beloved, we sometimes lose the sweet touch of the Shepherd's presence in our lives and need to once again be restored to a place of peaceful rest, joyous communion, revival and refreshment, inner healing, purposeful existence, and spiritual renewal. There are times when God must give us a fresh start and create a spiritual springtime in our hearts once again.

“When in the spring, the flowers
are blooming bright and fair,
After the grey of winter's gone.
Once again the lark begins his tuning,
Back in the meadows of my heart.
Lord, to my heart bring back the springtime.
Take away the cold and dark of sin.
Oh refill me now, sweet Holy Spirit:
May I warm and tender be again.”

He Directs Me

Psalm 23:3

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”

This expression speaks of guidance. We are lonely travelers across the great expanse of wilderness called life. We could walk in many different directions in life but we quickly discover that many paths end up in rocks and thorns. I remember walking down a path in order to get to a fishing hole by the stream. It started out good but the further down I went it became full of briars, brush, and nettles. I chose the wrong path!

How can we find our way through the crisscross highways of life? The answer is simple; we need a Shepherd to guide and lead us. The Shepherd of our soul gives us the promise of His spiritual direction or guidance. As God's sheep, we should never lack moral direction, since He leads us in the paths of righteousness, instead of the paths of sin and uncleanness. Since God is righteous (Ps. 116:5) and holy (Lev. 11:44) He will only lead us into the paths which reflect His character.

John 10:4 -5

“And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”

The shepherd always went before the sheep directing and leading them through paths that were safe. He kept them away from the paths that would lead to dangerous cliffs and dead ends. The shepherd would never lead his flock through unsure and untried paths but keep them on the sure paths or tracks that are safe and clearly defined. Because of the inherent weakness of sheep, it is essential that the shepherd provide complete leadership for them. Sheep are just not capable of distinguishing between trails that lead to safety and those that end in danger and death.

Who are you listening to today? The sheep could decipher the voice of the shepherd from other voices. They would not follow the voice of a stranger. How often have we followed the voice of a stranger instead of the voice of our Shepherd? God wants to lead us into the paths of right living but instead, we listen to another voice that says, "Go this way, try this path, you'll be okay." We can get into a heap of trouble when we follow the voices of other people which are seeking to direct us down the paths of worldliness instead of the paths of holiness and righteousness. When we are pressured to listen to others, instead of allowing the Shepherd to lead us, we will embark on paths that will lead us to lust, licentious living, and a life of spiritual apathy.

We must also remember that God does not guide His sheep into carnality, compromise, and careless living. God gets credit for many things He does not do! God is often given credit for leading people to places where they should never go and into things which they should not do or participate with. The "paths of righteousness" are not paths of gossip, backbiting, promiscuity, and rebellion. The Lord keeps us on the paths that are morally correct; He does not lead us on paths that are morally questionable and which will contaminate our spiritual lives. God leads us on the right paths, the sanctified paths, and the straight paths ("make straight paths for your feet" – Heb. 12:13). The Shepherd never directs people into unrighteous and worldliness (Rom. 12:1-2). God directs His sheep through the paths or tracts that glorify Him and accurately reflect His holy character.

Proverbs 4:11

"I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths."

As a parent leads a child in the proper paths, so our Shepherd leads His children into the "right paths" and "every good path" (Prov. 2:9). Proverbs

14:12 reminds us that “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man.” Proverbs 21:2 adds that “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes.” Your own personal path may seem to be right in your own eyes; however, it cannot be right and acceptable before God.

A famous movie star once said:

“And now the end is near and so I face the final curtain. My friend I’ll say it clear, I’ll state my case of which I’m certain; I’ve lived a life that’s full, I’ve traveled each and every highway and more, much more than this, I did it my way.”

Yes, you can do it your way, but you will reap what you sow in the end (Gal. 6:7-8). Isaiah 26:7 declares: “The way of the just is uprightness: thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.” Let us remember that divine guidance is one of the surest and sweetest realities in our Christian experience. The Shepherd wants to guide us in the paths of right living. Will you allow the Shepherd to guide you into a new path and way of life? God wants to do something wonderful for your life. Don’t follow the voices of hirelings and strangers. Study the “word of righteousness” (Ps. 119:123; Heb. 5:13), listen to God, and allow the Great Shepherd to lead, guide, and direct your life by His Word and providence. Many times we are pulling strings and trying to create our own path to walk instead of seeking God’s true leading and direction. We can walk down a pathway that is filled with our own selfish plans and one that will end at some dangerous cliff or drop off. The greatest mistake in life is to say “No” to God. Isaiah 30:21 declares: “This is the way, walk ye in it.” Are you willing to do it God’s way? Are you ready to agree with God walk in the path He has for your life?

The text also states that God leads us in the paths of right living “for his name’s sake” (Ps. 23:3). A name stands for who a person is and what they represent as an individual. God’s name represents that which is holy, righteous, just, and perfect (Ps. 103:1; 145:21). We have forgotten that God’s name is to be hallowed (Matt. 6:9). Our holy and righteous lives glorify God and properly represent His name (1 Cor. 10:31).

Leviticus 22:32

“Neither shall ye profane my holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the Lord which hallow you.”

We profane or defile and desecrate God's name when we choose to take the carnal and worldly paths in life. There are certain places I cannot go, particular things I cannot watch, read, or listen to, and specific things I cannot do in life for the sake of God's holy name! We have forgotten about His name! There is a certain type of music I cannot listen to and endorse for "his name's sake." There are certain churches I can't attend for "his name's sake." There are certain pictures I do not deliberately watch on TV and allow in my home for "his name's sake." There are certain ringtones I do not play on my cell phone for "his name's sake." I don't allow tobacco and nicotine to control my life "for his name's sake." I should want to uphold and promote the holiness of God's name in everything I do. What I do, where I go, and who my closest friends are should bring honor to God's holy name. We should stop and think before we act. Is my deed, decision, and direction properly representing God's holy name? We must remember that we are representing the name of the most high God!

I should want God to lead me in the paths of righteousness so I can magnify His holy name. One thing is certain, God only directs His sheep in the right paths so His character and reputation can be upheld. There is great joy and fulfillment when I allow God to lead me in the "paths of righteousness." Nothing can replace the right paths.

Jeremiah 6:16

"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

If I want God's true blessing, I must stay on the right paths, and remember the "old paths" of holiness, dedication, and commitment to the Lord. The "old paths" are the tested, tried and true paths.

"The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,
He leadeth me night and day.
In pastures of green, by waters so sweet,
He guides me in wisdom's way."

May this be true in our lives today!

He Comforts Me

Psalm 23:4

“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.”

In the teaching of this Psalm we see different paths and places where the sheep are led and directed by the shepherd. The different settings are intended to convey how God’s children can experience His loving care and comfort no matter what situations they face in life.

“Sometimes on the mount where the sun shines so bright,
God leads His dear children along;
Sometimes in the valley, in darkest of night,
God leads His dear children along.
Some thro’ the water, some thro’ the flood,
Some thro’ the fire, but all thro’ the blood;
Some thro’ great sorrow, but God gives a song,
In the night season and all the day long.”

There is green grass and plentiful water in the lowland valleys to enjoy and experience; however, there are also dangers and darkness that one must encounter along the way. In the course of the late afternoon, the shepherd may find himself walking through deep ravines overhung with high cliffs, which cause intermittent shadows. The shadows and darkness could alarm to the sheep, since wild animals might lurk in the hidden shadows, waiting for an easy meal. However, the sheep trust in the shepherd and do not become alarmed when walking through the valley. In this well-known and beloved Bible verse we see the comfort and consolation that the Shepherd provides for His sheep as they face dark trials and difficult times in life.

There are two questions related to God’s comfort.

1. How can we experience comfort from God?

God’s comfort can be experienced in two ways.

a. By His protection (“thy rod”)

The shepherd's armor consisted of his "rod." It was the shepherd's rod that protected the sheep from the attack of wild animals. The rod was a club about two feet long, made from a small tree, with the root end rounded off into a ball about the size of a man's fist. The shepherd drove a number of spikes about two inches long into the rod. It was a formidable weapon. As the shepherd led his sheep through the tall grass, he would swing the rod back and forth, left and right, to frighten away his enemies, preparing the path for his sheep. David, as a young shepherd, rescued his sheep on many occasions.

1 Samuel 17:34-35

"And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him."

David knew all about protecting the sheep as he led through the dark valleys. He now applies this to the way God comforts us today as His sheep. The rod of the shepherd teaches the truth that God does protect His own children when they face dangers in life and even when they face their last enemy - death. The rod or club is a symbol of God's protective care over our lives from the many dangerous spiritual pitfalls that we face in life. Of course, the Lord may not always keep us out of the danger; however, He will protect us from worry, anxiety, distress, and failure, when we pass through the danger. God is with us to provide us with the courage and comfort we need when we dwell in His presence and depend upon Him never-ending strength.

Psalm 91:1-2

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust."

The fact that God promises to protect us, through the storms that we face in life, should bring comfort to our hearts ("thy rod and thy staff they comfort me").

b. By His prodding ("thy staff")

The rod was never used on the sheep but only on the enemy. However, the staff was used more directly in relationship to the sheep. The staff was a slender stick bend or hooked on one end. It was used for prodding or poking the sheep and provided several uses. First, the shepherd would use his staff to tap on the ground to find the most solid ground. He wanted to be sure that the path was solid and safe for the sheep to walk upon. Second, if the sheep would fall into a ravine, beyond the shepherd's reach, he would use this staff, twisting the hook into the wool of the sheep and lifting enough to enable it to climb out. Third, the shepherd would at time correct the sheep with the staff. A tap on a back leg would usually bring the sheep back into position. Fourth, he would also use the staff to number the sheep at night as they entered the sheepfold.

The staff portrayed the shepherd's desire to provide the sheep with comfort and well-being. It was the symbol used by David to teach that God, as our loving Shepherd, wants to comfort us. The fact that God is concerned about the well-being of His children should produce comfort in our hearts. God is concerned about my living, losses, loneliness, and longings in life. The Lord really does care about me. He is my Shepherd.

“He careth for you, He careth for you
Through sunshine or shadow
He careth for you.”

2. When does God comfort me?

God comforts me during two phases of my life.

A. He comforts me during the time of danger.

Psalm 23:4

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.”

In a general way, this verse speaks of the shepherd's ability to protect his sheep in those times of danger which is depicted as “the valley of the shadow of death” (a deep shadow or darkness). Dear friend, there is safety for the sheep, even when they face the various dangers, which can undermine their faith in the Shepherd and upset their spiritual lives. The “valley of the shadow of death” is compared to the darkness before daybreak (Amos 5:8) and to the thick darkness of a shaft in the earth (Job

28:2-3). This valley of darkness is usually just associated with the end of life. However, David seems to suggest that this is a valley that is open to various types of dangers, which can be faced during any phase of our lives.

Barnes says:

“The word is applicable to any path of gloom or sadness; any scene of trouble or sorrow; any dark and dangerous way.”

The phraseology is used to convey a perilously threatening environment. The picture is of the seasonal passage from the lowlands, where sheep spend the winter, through the valleys to the high pastures, where they go in summer. The valleys are places of rich pasture and much water, but they are also places of danger. Wild animals hide in the broken canyon walls. Sudden storms may sweep along the valley floors. There may be floods. Since the sun does not shine into the valley very well, shadows are created, which at any moment may become shadows of danger and even death to the sheep. A wild animal might pounce on a sheep that is roaming in the darkness.

David was referring to the extreme dangers the sheep would be exposed to in the valleys. As shadows and darkness fell upon them they were easier prey for the wild animals. What dangers are you facing today? What ominous shadow is casting itself over your life? The valleys and dangers that we face in life are many. What happens when the boss says, “Clean out your desk, you’re finished.” You immediately enter a valley. What happens when the doctor comes back with a bad report and says, “It’s cancer?” You immediately enter a valley. What happens when we become broken and filled with despair over the loss of a loved one? We enter a valley. What happens when we are in an automobile accident? What happens when we are in a financial crisis? What happens when we are afflicted with some unexpected illness or when we are wronged by someone else and deeply hurt? We enter the valley. What happens when we pass through sickness, sorrow, and suffering? We enter the valley. What happens when we are tempted by the devil to sin and lose faith in the Shepherd’s provision? We enter a valley. There are many valleys and times of darkness that we face throughout our lives, which can become potentially dangerous to us, since the darkness of the valleys can eat away at our spiritual lives and relationship with the Lord.

In Psalm 124:4, David spoke of the valley, in this way: “Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul.” We have all felt this way at times in life. Let’s be honest. Life can sometimes be overwhelming.

The valleys symbolize those dreary days of deep trial and loneliness that can befall us and overtake our spiritual lives. They remind us of those days when we are hammered and hurt. How often have we been in the valley and failed to trust the Lord? What our Shepherd wants to teach us is that He will care for us, and provide us with the comfort we need, during our personal trials and tribulations. Cannot the Shepherd safely lead you through your personal valley of darkness and danger? Certainly God is able to provide you with the leadership and comfort you need so you can pass through your dark valley victoriously.

“It's dark as a dungeon and the sun seldom shines
And I question Lord why must this be.
Then He tells me there's strength in my sorrow
And there's victory in trials for me.
Then He leads me beside still waters
Down in the valley He restoreth my soul.”

The Shepherd does not forget His sheep when they are in the valley. The Shepherd is there with His sheep to provide them with the refuge and courage they need while facing life’s trials.

Psalm 46:1

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Some of the sweetest and most precious realities of the Lord’s presence and comfort can be only found in the shadows. If we don’t pass through the shadows we will miss something that God wants to teach us. I really believe the Lord takes us through the valleys, at certain times of our lives, so we can be reminded of His nearness, learn to depend upon Him more, and experience His comforting provision for our lives. Valleys and shadows are necessary for our spiritual growth and dependence upon the Lord.

Job said in Job 42:5:

“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.”

We see God more clearly and experience His presence in a new and wonderful way as we pass through trials and troubles. God's presence and promises become experientially lived out when we pass through the valley of darkness and uncertainty.

A pastor often prayed this way when entering a home where there was sorrow and sadness: "Precious, Lord, Help these dear ones to find out something about Thyself which they never could have known apart from this experience." Dear friend, unless we pass through the shadows and dangers of life we will not experience God's sufficiency and solace, or comfort in life, in a deeper and more intimate way. There are some things we can only learn when we pass through the dark valleys of life.

Psalm 119:71

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."

Isaiah 43:2 promises: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

In regard to the general dangers and difficulties we face in life, we must remember that trials take us to a new spiritual level, since we can experience God's presence and comforting provision for our lives in a new and fresh way. In the time of danger, when trying circumstances and tough times cast their ominous shadows over us, we can conclude as David did: "I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." The true believer has nothing to fear in the gloomiest scenes of life, since the Shepherd will take care of him and provide his every need. Our difficult circumstances should not paralyze us with fear, but provide us with the opportunity to grow in faith (James 1:3) and experience God's loving shepherding care, personal presence, and provision over our lives in a new and intimate way (Phil. 3:10). The dangers and lurking shadows should bring us closer to God and become more reliant on Him.

"I've been through a fire,
That has deepened my desire
To know the living God more and more.

It hasn't been much fun,
But the work that is has done
In my life has made it worth the hurt.

You see, sometimes we need the hard times,
To bring us to our knees
Otherwise we do as we please
And never heed Him.

But He always knows what's best
And it's when we are depressed
That we really come to know God as He is."

B. He comforts me during the time of death.

David also uses this shepherd imagery to portray how God comforts His sheep when they pass through the darkest valley of their lives – death itself. When David mentions the word “death” he was most certainly including the final struggle we must face in life, as God’s children, which is death itself. It’s called “the valley of the shadow of death.” God will give us the courage and strength we need when we pass through death’s door into the next life. Sometimes a sheep would move into the shadows and suddenly a wild animal would pounce on them and they would lose their life. David is suggesting that when we come to the end of life’s journey, we can experience God’s wondrous comfort and courage. As we pass through the veil into the next life God will also be there to comfort us and give us the courage we need (“thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”). When a person is born, he starts down a great canyon, and that canyon eventually leads into the valley of the shadow of death. The shadow of death is on us but how can we find comfort when we must take that final walk through the valley which leads into the next life?

There are three ways we can find comfort in our time of death.

1. By understanding God’s portrayal of death (vs. 4a)

The child of God can calmly walk through what is called “the valley of the shadow of death” (Ps. 23:4). A shadow cannot harm us. Death cannot harm the true child of God. Death will not bring God’s child into condemnation or hell.

John 3:36

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

God’s sheep are protected even when they pass through the door of death into the next life. When we believe in Jesus Christ’s provision of salvation we receive the free gift of eternal life. It’s called, “everlasting life.” If we are God’s child, who has received His gift of eternal life, we not need fear the time of death, when our spirit leaves our body. We can be assured that death cannot harm us for we will not pass into God’s judgment.

Death is portrayed in two ways.

a. Death is portrayed as a walk.

Psalm 23:4

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.”

Death is also comparable to a “walk” through a valley. We are not running though the valley, afraid of the shadows, darkness, and dangers, but peaceably walking, step by step, on to that great eternal day. When we pass through the valley we are not running away from the devil, damnation, and judgment; rather, we are walking toward the palace of the King and the glories that await us in Heaven.

Matthew Henry said it best:

“It is but a walk in this valley, a gentle pleasant walk. The wicked are chased out of the world, and their souls are required; but the saints take a walk to another world as cheerfully as they take their leave of this. ... It is a walk through it; they shall not be lost in this valley, but get safely to the mountain of spices on the other side of it.”

Beloved, we will one day walk to the other side peacefully and confidently as the Shepherd goes before us. We will know that He is leading us to a better place, a better day, and better land.

“We shall walk through the valley in peace,
We shall walk through the valley in peace;
If Jesus Himself will be our leader,
We shall walk through the valley in peace.”

b. Death is portrayed as a shadow.

To reinforce the truth about our safety, in the time of death, God portrays death as only a “shadow,” to those who are His children. A shadow cannot harm anyone. A shadow in and of itself cannot harm a sheep.

A dog may bite but its shadow cannot harm us. The shadow of a venomous snake cannot harm us. Donald Grey Barnhouse was driving his children to the funeral of their mother. A semi tractor trailer truck crossed in front of them at an intersection, momentarily casting a shadow on the car, and Barnhouse asked his children, "Would you rather be struck by the semi or the shadow?" "The shadow, of course," they replied. "That's what has happened to us," said Barnhouse. "Mother's dying is only the shadow of death. The lost sinner is struck by the semi of death."

My friend, when God's saints die they do not experience the judgment and wrath of God. They are given the promise that they will open their eyes in the presence of God and Heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:8

“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”

Do you have this confidence? Are you prepared to die and enter Heaven? Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. If you have placed your faith alone in Jesus Christ, then you are prepared to meet the Lord, when you die.

Philippians 1:21

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

The shadow of death cannot harm the true child of God. Death is not judgment but a gain to God's sheep since they enter God's blessed celestial city forever and experience His personal presence (Rev. 21:3). “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord” (Rev. 14:13). Bliss and blessing follow those who die with their sins forgiven and whose souls are saved from hell. However, the opposite is true for the person who does not possess God's salvation through faith in the finished work of His Son (John 3:16). The unsaved sinner, who does not possess the forgiveness of sins, must face God's wrath and judgment in the next life. Hebrews 9:27

declares: "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."

Walter B. Knight tells of an Indian chief, who heard the Gospel, but would not accept Christ as His personal Savior "This Jesus road is good," he said to the missionary, "but I have followed the Indian road all my life. I will follow it to the end." Later when the chief lay dying, he sought a way through the darkness. He asked the missionary, "Can I turn to the Jesus road now? My Indian road stops here. It's dark. There's no path through the valley?"

Friend, there is only one path that leads through the valley of death inside the gates of glory; it's the path that God has made available through His Son Jesus Christ.

John 14:6

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Will you bow your head right now, and trust Christ to be your Savior, if you have not put your faith in Jesus Christ? Christ's death and resurrection from the grave (1 Cor. 15:3-4) can give you eternal life (John 6:47), if you will just place your faith in His saving provision. Death is a passable valley. Do you want to pass through the valley and enter Heaven? If so, place your faith in the death and resurrection of Christ right now, so you can be saved from hell. Christ died on the cross to pay sin's penalty (hell and judgment) and He rose again to grant you eternal life in Heaven (Rom. 6:23).

I want to once again provide a prayer that may help direct your thoughts and heart to God, so you can know that you are going to Heaven when you die.

"Dear God, I want to pass through the valley of death safely, and go to Heaven when I die. I place my faith in Jesus Christ right now, who died on the cross, bearing my sins and penalty of judgment, so I can be saved from hell. I believe that Christ's death and resurrection can save me from hell and give me eternal life. In Jesus' name, Amen."

God portrays death as a shadow which cannot harm His true children or sheep. If you are one of God's children, you can sing:

“Lead me through the vale of shadows,
Bear me o’er life’s fitful sea;
Then the gate of life eternal,
May I enter, Lord, with Thee.

2. By experiencing God’s presence in death (vs. 4b)

At the time of our death, we can find blessed comfort, by experiencing God’s presence in a wonderfully refreshing way. David said, “for thou art with me” (Ps. 23:4). What reassurance! God is with us!

Psalm 46:11

“The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.”

The saints have God's gracious presence with them in their dying moments. We will not walk through the valley alone.

Psalm 116:15

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”

When we walk through the valley, God reassures the saints of His presence, and impresses upon their hearts that they are very precious to Him. As a pastor, I have had the opportunity to witness many people die, which were God’s children or sheep. I have seen them as they passed through the valley into the next life. Their spirit is ready to be released and enter the blessed land. On one occasion a dear dying saint was reciting Psalm 23. She recited, “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.” After a bit she could no longer recall the entire verse so she shortened it to “thou art with me.” As she came closer to the time of her departure she shortened it one more time to “thou.” Dearly beloved, in the valley of death, God’s presence is all that matters and all that we need – Thou! God never fails us and never forsakes us (Heb. 13:5). He is always there. Therefore, we have no reason to fear. This is a great comfort.

“While treading the valley, The shadow of death
This watchword shall rally My faltering breath;
For when from life’s fever My God sets me free
‘Jehovah Tsidkenu’ My death song shall be.”

1 Corinthians 15:55

“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

1 Corinthians 15:57

“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

David declares, “I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

God’s presence in the time of death brings two results:

a. Freedom from fear (“I will fear no evil” – vs. 4)

God’s sheep need not fear as they pass through the valley. Why? It’s because the Shepherd has promised to be by their side each step of the way. There is light at the end of a shadow. Dearly beloved, God has promised to lead His sheep through the shadows and darkness into the glorious light of the heavenly city.

Revelation 21:23

“And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.”

God promises that we will walk out of the shadows and into the glorious light of Heaven. One thing is certain, when we pass through the experience of death, we will know of God’s abiding presence, so fear will not overtake our soul. As we walk through the valley, we will not fear what lies beyond the grave, since the Shepherd has promised to hold our hand and lead us to Heaven.

“When I walk through the dark, lonesome valley,
My Savior will walk with me there;
And safely His great hand will lead me
To the mansions He’s gone to prepare.”

Friend, as God’s children, we need not fear the dark valley that we must pass through, since God is by our side. We will not fear what the Evil One tries to do between our earthly exit and heavenly entrance. As we hover between death and our departure to Heaven, we have a closer connection

with the unseen world. On one occasion I have heard a dying brother declaring his victory over the devil. Oh friend, as we pass through the valley, we will not fear any evil or harm, knowing that our Shepherd is with us. No foe can daunt us, no fear can haunt us!

Romans 8:38-39

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

The loving Shepherd is with us and He will keep us safe, as we pass to the other side, into the land of fadeless day and endless delight. Since God gives us this promise, we not fear when passing through the dark valley.

Jesus said in John 6:20, “It is I; be not afraid.” In Luke 12:32 He calmed the sheep when saying: “Fear not, little flock.” Yes, it’s true. We can experience freedom from fear as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death. It’s not a lonesome valley for God is with us and it’s not a fearful valley for God calms our fears.

“How can I fear? Jesus is near.
He ever watches over me.
Worries all cease; He gives me peace.
How can I fear with Jesus?”

b. Finding comfort (“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” – vs. 4)

We’ve already talked about the rod (God’s protection) and staff (God’s prodding) and how the symbolism of these shepherding instruments speak of God’s blessed comfort which He provides for His sheep on a daily basis. However, there is a supernatural comfort that is extended to us, when we are about to pass through death, into the land beyond the grave. The Lord protects His children from danger during their time of death (“Thy rod”) and demonstrates His loving care and provision over their lives when they are dying (“thy staff”).

Beloved, it’s in the valley where fear is exchanged for comfort and dying grace gives way to consolation. We do not get dying grace until we need it. But the fact still remains that death has lost its terror and fear for us, since

we know the Shepherd will safely lead us to the other side, and since the final frontier of Heaven awaits God's children or sheep. If God is truly your Shepherd, then you have the promise He will provide you with His comfort, in your time of death, and departure into the next life. What a wonderful Shepherd we have. He promises to give us the comfort and courage we need when we are traveling the last mile of the way.

One old saint was overheard while speaking these words: "I don't mind the Lord taking down my tent, but I hope He takes it down gently!" Comfort in death! Yes, this is the promise of the Shepherd.

2 Corinthians 1:3, "Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort."

Spurgeon remarked:

"The valley is rich with golden sheaves, and many a saint has reaped more joy and knowledge when he came to die than he ever knew while he lived."

In the time of our death, God reveals Himself to us in a new and precious way, unlike we have previously experienced, during our lifetime. We have a new awareness of His shepherding ministry over our lives. In the valley we can reap God's comfort, courage, and constant supply of grace.

Psalm 147:3-4

"He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names."

You can be sure that the One who has named the stars will visit your little home, or wherever you are at the present time, and provide you with the comfort you need, as you face death. It may be the death of a loved one or it might be the time when God is calling you home to Glory. Dear friend, God as your Shepherd, will be with you. Take His hand and walk with Him through the valley.

"Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light:
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home."

3. By believing God's promise for death (vs. 6).

Another way we can find comfort in our time of death is to remember that death is what takes the saints into the very presence of God. Heaven is the final grazing ground for God's sheep. David knew this for he looked ahead through the corridors of time and said, "I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Ps. 23:6). Do you believe this promise? Death is the doorway to Heaven (2 Cor. 5:8 - "absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord"). We need not fear death for it takes us into the presence of the Lord forever. Death is our graduation day. It is our coronation day, as D. L. Moody so wonderfully stated:

"Someday you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now; I shall have gone up higher, that is all, out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal – a body that death cannot touch, that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever."

"I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

These words have comforted many of God's dying saints through the years. Will you allow them to comfort you at this time? Are you passing through a very difficult time in life? Are you nearing the end of your journey? If so, remember this: The *worst* thing that death can do to us is really the *best* thing that can happen to us! Death takes the child of God into the presence of the Lord. When we are God's sheep we can be sure that we will dwell in God's presence forever in that eternal heavenly dwelling place.

"If I walk in the pathway of duty,
If I work till the close of the day,
I shall see the great King in His beauty,
When I've gone the last mile of the way.

When I've gone the last mile of the way,
I will rest at the close of the day;
And I know there are joys that await me,
When I've gone the last mile of the way."

He Sustains Me

Psalm 23:5

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.”

This speaks of God’s spiritual nourishment that God provides in order to spiritually sustain us in life. In this verse we see that the Good Shepherd is also a gracious host to His sheep. I believe David is still teaching the Shepherd and sheep motif or metaphor in the remaining verses of this Psalm and now explains how the Great Shepherd provides the nourishment His sheep, or children need, while facing their enemies. The word “table” doesn’t necessarily refer to a piece of furniture made used by humans, since the word simply means “something spread out.” Flat places in the hilly country were called “tables” and sometimes the shepherd stopped the flock at these “tables” and allowed them to eat and rest as they headed for the fold.

The truth is this. The sheep are incapable of finding pasture for themselves. Therefore, the pasture must be found and prepared by the shepherd for his sheep. The imagery of a table for sheep may suggest that the shepherd is leading his sheep to the higher elevations, a plateau where grazing is much better in the latter part of the summer. In some instances, the shepherd would scan the pasture and rid it of wild animals and poisonous plants. This would result in a banquet of fresh grass prepared for the sheep along with a safe haven or environment for them to eat. The shepherd would provide the sustenance and security that the sheep need while they grazed. However, it was never possible for the Shepherd to provide a landscape that was completely absent of danger, from every venomous snake or wild beast. This is why David said the Lord sustains us “in the presence of mine enemies.”

The Psalm is therefore teaching that the sheep could safely graze while wild jackals, wolves, foxes, and lions watched the sheep from adjacent caves and rocks, waiting for their chance to attack. Of course, there were other dangers. Little brown adders, living underground, could also come up to nip the noses of the sheep, as they grazed. Along with the wild animals and snakes there were also thieves and robbers, which were a constant menace to the shepherd and his flock. However, in the midst of their enemies, the sheep could place their confidence in the shepherd to provide for them and protect them. The sheep could safely and confidently graze in

the pasture feasting on the table or banquet of fresh grass the shepherd had provided and prepared for them.

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” David was probably reflecting on the time he was running from his rebellious son and soldiers. The Bible records how God wonderfully provided his needs in the wilderness. The Lord provided a bountiful provision for David while he was on the run from his enemies.

In 2 Samuel 17:28-29, we read about three men, who were not even Israelites, that “Brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.”

God had provided a table in the wilderness for David. A banquet was provided for him while his enemies tried to surround and hurt him. In a similar way, God has prepared a table for us in the presence of our enemies. God has promised to meet all of our needs and nourish our souls, while the enemy is all around us, seeking to destroy us, and overtake our lives. The table or resources of God’s peace (John 14:27 – “My peace I give unto you”), strengthening grace (2 Cor. 12:8-9 – “My grace is sufficient for thee”), and joy (1 John 1:4 – “that your joy may be full”) can be ours even when the enemy surrounds us.

Charles Spurgeon remarks:

“Nothing is hurried, the enemy is at the door, and yet God prepares a table, and the Christian sits down and eats as if everything were in perfect peace.”

Who or what are you enemies today? Certainly the world (1 John 2:15-17), the flesh (Matt. 26:41), and the devil (1 Pet. 5:8) are the three archenemies of every Christian. They are the three foes that are pitted against every true child of God. However, there are other enemies that we meet in life, such as those who are opposed to what we stand for and represent as Christians. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:32 that he “fought with beasts at Ephesus” and in 2 Timothy 4:14 he remarked how “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil.” All of us can relate to what Paul experienced. We have enemies that have tried to defeat our spiritual lives and ministry for the Lord.

In 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 Paul declares:

“We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

We are surrounded by enemies and those people who are seeking to destroy us, deter us, and discourage us from serving God faithfully. Sometimes God chooses to deliver us from their physical persecution while at other times we must suffer for Christ and His cause (2 Tim. 3:12). God does not always deliver us from the physical hurt and harm of our enemies or the “perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (2 Cor. 11:26).

God has not promised immunity from the physical attacks of our foes but He does promise to deliver us from the spiritual harm they can do to our lives. Our enemies cannot harm the inner man. They cannot touch our soul (Matt. 10:28 – “fear not them ... which are not able to kill the soul”). Our enemies cannot rob us of our table in the wilderness! God promises to meet all of our spiritual needs and restore our soul, as we do battle with those who are against us, and those who want to oppose God’s work in our lives.

David was given the promise that God would deliver him from the enemies’ attacks upon his life. He would not be overcome and defeated by those who were against him and sought to destroy him.

In Psalm 27:1-2 David triumphantly declares:

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.”

God has prepared a place for us in the wilderness to nourish our lives and on the table is the spiritual food of God’s peace, strength, rest, and refreshment, even while the enemies surround and taunt us. The wolves may be licking their chops, growling, and howling, but God’s sheep can safely graze, knowing that our enemies can never reach our soul and hinder our spiritual lives. God is our strength. Whom shall we fear? He

provides us with everything we need so we can face those who are against us in life and despitefully use us (Matt. 5:44). We are on the winning side!

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” There is another picture that may be presented by this statement. After each day’s work, the shepherd would bring the flock safely back to the sheepfold, where the weary sheep could safely rest for the night. Sometimes at the fold, the shepherd would spread out food in a trough, because sheep lie down and rest after they have eaten. As they slept, they would be protected by a stone wall that surrounded them, and the shepherd himself would sleep across the opening and be the door.

John 10:7-8

“Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.”

During the night, thieves and dangerous animals might approach the fold, but there was no way they could reach the sheep. This is because the shepherd spread his own body across the entrance to the fold. What a beautiful picture this is of God, our Great Shepherd, providing a table in the presence of our enemies, which can be enjoyed and satisfying, in spite of the many dangers on the outside.

Psalm 27:5

“For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock.”

Psalm 32:7

“Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.”

“I have found a Hiding Place when sore distressed,
Jesus, Rock of Ages, strong and true;
In a weary land I in His shadow rest,
He is my strength in all that I do.
Jesus, Rock of Ages, let me hide in Thee,
Jesus, Rose of Sharon, sweet Thou art to me,
Lily of the Valley, Bright and Morning Star,
Fairest of ten thousand to my soul.”

The lesson is this. The Lord doesn't always remove the dangers from our lives, but He does help us to overcome them and not become paralyzed by them. The dangers on the outside cannot get inside the sheepfold, where the sheep safely graze, after eating their evening meal. We are guarded by the Shepherd. He lies at the door. We are safe in the hiding place. Beloved, we are "more than conquerors" through Him (Rom. 8:31–39).

Psalms 78:19 asks: "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" The answer is yes! God knows how to provide for His sheep as they face their foes in the wilderness. God meets our needs when the arrows are flying over our head and when we are being bombarded by the enemy. We will never lack God's provision in the times of attack and persecution, if we will learn to eat of the table that He has prepared for us in the wilderness. There is a banquet in the wilderness that the loving Shepherd has prepared for us to enjoy, to sustain and satisfy us in every way.

Song of Solomon 2:4

"He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."

There is a lot of love and security in the banquet room. There is a feast to enjoy. Why don't you sit down, eat, and receive the spiritual nourishment you need from God, so you can face life's demands and not allow "unreasonable and wicked men" (2 Thess. 3:2) to keep you from living a life that is full and free?

If we come to the Lord's table, we will find all the resources we need to go on in life. If we eat from God's table our souls will be sustained and we will be able to go on in spite of the circumstances that surround us. David declared elsewhere, "Who satisfieth my mouth with good things" (Ps. 107:5). The Lord's table is complete. It lacks nothing that we need to live the Christian life. It provides us with the spiritual boost we need to go on, and satisfies our hungry souls, as we travel through our wilderness journey.

"In this barren wilderness
Thou hast a table spread,
Furnished out with richest grace,
Whate'er our souls can need;
Still sustain us by thy love,

Still thy servants' strength repair,
Till we reach the courts above,
And feast for ever there."

He Heals Me

Psalm 23:5

"Thou anointest my head with oil."

David is once again drawing from the shepherd and sheep motif. The oriental shepherd would pour or anoint the heads of the sheep with oil in order to soothe and heal the scratches or wounds received during the day. They would also apply the oil to the heads and horns of the sheep to help keep the flies and other insects away. After a long day the sheep would return to the fold. As they entered the door, single file, the shepherd would quickly examine each sheep for briars in his wool and scratches and bruises on his body and head. The shepherd would give attention and care to the needy sheep. One of the touching and loving gestures performed by the shepherd, applying oil to the heads of his sheep, would provide them with refreshment, soothing, and healing. The Shepherd would seek out the sheep and apply his soothing and healing balm (olive oil) to their scratched and wounded heads.

In a similar way, God, who is our loving and caring Shepherd, brings soothing and healing into our personal lives. Beloved, we need God's anointing or healing today. We cannot face life alone. Life brings many blows and wounds that need to be healed by our gracious Shepherd. We need a loving Shepherd that will tend and care for us (1 Thess. 2:7). Are you wounded today? Some Christians will not allow God to heal the wounds which they have received from their past lives. They would rather live in constant defeat and disarray always looking back and wishing things would have been different.

Maybe you are living with open wounds that were created in the past. Perhaps you are living with fresh wounds recently received in a marital or family conflict. Perhaps you are suffering the infected oozing wounds which are the direct result of your own sinful and selfish living. If this is the case, ask God for forgiveness, and allow Him to start the healing process right now.

Psalm 109:21-22

“But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake: because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me. For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me.”

Psalm 31:10

“For my life is spent with grief, and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.”

Psalm 6:2

“Have mercy upon me, O Lord; for I am weak: O Lord, heal me; for my bones are vexed.”

Whatever your wound might be, God can heal it. It does not matter how old or recent the wound might be. Allow the Shepherd to place His healing balm upon your soul today. Let the Shepherd take you in His arms, anoint your head with oil, and heal your emotional, spiritual, and sinful wounds that have been plaguing and defeating your life. Our Shepherd is a great healer. He has a balm that heals the sin-sick soul and the emotional wounds of our past and present lives.

God said in Exodus 15:26, “for I am the Lord that healeth thee” (Jehovah rapha). This is one of the compound names for God. For the children of Israel, it meant physical healing. God certainly can heal us physically, if He so chooses. It's not wrong to pray for God's physical healing (2 Cor. 12:8; Phil. 2:27). However, there is another type of healing that David was reflecting upon, which is even greater than physical healing; it's spiritually healing from the wounds received from sin, sorrow, and selfish living. If you would go to the Shepherd who dispenses the healing oil, and spend some quiet time with Him in prayer, you would save yourself from many wasted hours of worry and limitless hours on the couch with the psychiatrist.

Psalm 147:3

“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”

This is what the loving Shepherd wants to do for you today. God touches us and makes us whole again. If you are one of God's sheep, then let the Lord apply His healing ointment to your distressed soul and life. You don't have to keep licking your own wounds; the Lord will heal them for you.

“How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrow, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.”

He Blesses Me

Psalm 23:5

“My cup runneth over.”

This part of the shepherd and sheep analogy speaks of the tremendous blessings that God's children (sheep) receive from the Good Shepherd. After completing the evening task of caring for the wounds of the sheep and anointing them with the healing oil, the shepherd would then take a large two-handled cup, dip it into a larger container of water, and allow the sheep to drink from the cup. David, as a young shepherd boy, can remember many times, when the sheep would stick their nose into the cup of overflowing and dripping water, which was just drawn from the water container. He held the cup in his hand and the sheep would come and drink from the cup. This cup reminded David of the overflowing blessings which God bestows upon his own life on a daily basis. God has a cup that never will run dry. His blessings are limitless. His love, grace, and mercy have no measure. We actually have more than we need by way of blessing!

The unsaved drink from “the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath” (Rev. 16:19), while God's sheep, or children, drink from the cup of His multitudes of blessings. God's cup of blessing is overflowing with His pardon, peace, mercy, joy, and satisfaction. We are never in want when it comes to God's spiritual blessings. There is no end to what the Lord provides for His sheep. God does not fill my cup to the top and then stop. He keeps it running over the top. This speaks of abundance.

Jesus said in John 10:10:

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

Someone paraphrased the words of Jesus in this way: “I came to bring them life, and far more life than they had before.” Yes, God wants to provide us with a better way of life, a life filled with the abundant blessings of His spiritual resources, which bring purpose and meaning to our life. God

has a cup that is running over. If we will take time to drink from His cup, we will experience the abundant and never-ending supply of God's spiritual blessings.

“Running over, running over
My cup is full and running over.
Since the Lord saved me,
I am happy as can be,
My cup is full and running over.”

Is it true in your life today? Have you been drinking from the cup that never shall run dry? The overflowing cup reminds us of the abundance of God's spiritual provisions and blessings for our soul. When the cup is running over we have “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). An overflowing cup produces joy in our hearts. The Lord wants our joy to be full (1 John 1:4). When the cup is running over we possess a peace “that passeth all understanding” (Phil. 4:7). The world does not know about the spiritual blessings that come from the Lord's cup. The unsaved do not have the privilege to drink from the overflowing cup that the Lord is holding in His hand. However, God's saints can discover the secret of drinking from the ceaseless flow of His abundant blessings and experience the spiritual graces of the Lord's joy, peace, and strength.

2 Corinthians 9:8

“And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”

God gives us all that we need to live for Him and serve Him. This complete resource is portrayed as a cup that continues to overflow with God's provisional blessings. If you are lacking in life, it's not because God has shortchanged you. God wants to lavish His blessings upon your life. He is a loving Shepherd.

Philippians 4:19, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

What do you need today? Perhaps you are in need of God's inner joy and peace as you pass through the dark valley of some trying experience. Maybe you need a fresh dose of God's strength and remember that “as thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deut. 33:25). If your soul is downcast you need the Lord's comfort and encouragement (“Thou shalt...comfort me on

every side” – Ps. 71:21). God’s overflowing cup has all the spiritual blessings we need to meet life’s challenges. It contains all the spiritual resources we need to once again be made whole.

“Fill my cup Lord, I lift it up, Lord!
Come and quench this thirsting of my soul;
Bread of heaven, Feed me till I want no more
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole!”

He Reassures Me

Psalm 23:6

“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.”

God’s children can have the reassurance of His shepherding care throughout their entire lives on earth, but they can also have the reassurance of their eternal dwelling place in Heaven. In this verse we have a picture of security and reassurance extended to the sheep as they move throughout their daily journeys and also when they bed down during the evening in the safety of the sheepfold, where they are free from all dangers. David takes these illustrations and applies them to his own life. He reassures himself that God’s goodness and mercy will be extended to him “all the day of his life.” This refers to his earthly journey. However, David also finds reassurance that at the close of life’s journey he will “dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” Heaven is the final sheepfold and dwelling place as God’s children.

The word “follow” literally means “pursue.” David is saying that God's goodness and mercy will pursue him, in contrast to the pursuit of his enemies, who were out to dethrone and destroy him. This brought reassurance to his heart. Do you need some reassurance?

1. There is reassurance for today.

Psalm 23:6

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.”

Sheep need to be reassured often. They need to sense that the shepherd is still leading them, providing for them, and meeting their needs. The

shepherd would normally have two sheep dogs that would watch the flock from behind and provide the constant care and protection that the sheep needed. They dogs would follow after the sheep and provide the needed protection during their daily journeys. Then too, sometimes a sheep would stray and the shepherd would have to retrace his steps, follow after the lost sheep, find him, and then restore him to the fold. The sheep were cared for and protected by the goodness and mercy of the shepherd. David recalls these shepherding scenes of his childhood days when he says, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." As the dogs followed the sheep and the shepherd sought after the sheep, David was reminded of how God would seek after him, care for him, and bestow upon his life goodness and mercy. David knew that he would be cared for by God every day and all the days that he lived out his life on earth. This brought reassurance to his heart as he faced trials and troubles along life's pathway.

There are two ways to experience God's reassurance in this life.

a. God's goodness reassures our heart.

Don't look now, but you are being followed! Yes, it's true. As God's sheep, or children, we are being followed by His goodness and mercy ("goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"). Reassurance was extended to David's heart when he contemplated how God's "goodness" would pursue him all the days of his earthly life. The Lord is good, tell it wherever you go! The goodness of God refers to the general spiritual welfare, favor, blessing, prosperity, and happiness that God's children experience, as they depend upon the Lord's shepherding ministry, throughout their days on earth.

Psalm 27:13

"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living."

If it were not for God's goodness or blessing, in providing us with salvation, sanctification, and multitudes of spiritual blessings, we would be in a terrible plight. We would be living in the land of the lost and roaming about as sheep without a Shepherd (Matt. 9:36). We would still be in the horrible pit in need of deliverance (Ps. 40:3). Dear friend, if you want to experience God's goodness (favor or blessing) and discover the truly happy,

meaningful, purposeful, and fulfilling side of life, then you must allow God to be your Shepherd. The Lord, as your Shepherd, will supply you with everything that you need in life.

Psalm 34:8

“O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

The Lord is good and He showers His daily benefits upon our lives (Ps. 103:2). Have you thanked God lately for His showers of blessings which he bestows upon your life?

“God is so good, God is so good
God is so good; He’s so good to me.”

Psalm 107:21

“Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”

Right now, in the quietness of this moment, you should spend some time praising God for His goodness, which has pursued you, and brought such tremendous spiritual blessings into your life. What are the good things that God has blessed your life with over the years and even today? Name them before God right now and give Him thanks for His goodness or the multitudes of His favors and blessings extended to you.

b. God’s mercy reassures our heart.

Reassurance was also extended to David’s heart when he contemplated how God’s “mercy” would pursue him all the days of his earthly existence (“mercy shall follow me all the days of my life”). The word mercy speaks of God’s pity, compassion, and kindness that He showers upon our lives. It is a word that points to the faithful and loving kindness that God extends to His children throughout their days upon earth.

Psalm 25:6-7

“Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O Lord.”

Psalm 86:5

“For thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.”

Psalm 103:8

“The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.”

God’s extends His mercy to us when He repeatedly forgives our sins. Like David, how often have we needed His forgiveness? The faithful Shepherd is always willing to extend His mercy to us and grant us forgiveness. God pities us and wants us to be restored to the place of fellowship and communion with Him.

God also extends His mercy to us during times of suffering (Ps. 69:16-17; 86:13) and rewards us with His gracious gifts and provisions. This was true in Job’s life.

James 5:11

“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”

How often have we sensed God’s hand of mercy, kindness, and compassion being showered upon our lives, as we passed through the deep valley and dark night?

Psalm 31:16

“Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake.”

Psalm 33:22

“Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee.”

How often have we cried out to our merciful Shepherd so we could be rescued, restored, refreshed, and revived? How often have we felt His tender and merciful touch upon our souls when we passed through the deep waters of sorrow and emptiness? God’s mercy, or His loving kindness, pity, and compassion, continue to pursue us throughout our earthly days. The Shepherd lovingly and lavishly supplies us with His daily mercies or acts of kindness and compassion.

Lamentations 3:22-23

“It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.”

We would be a spiritual wreck, a sunken ship, and a sorry case, if it were not for the Lord's mercies! The trials and tests of life would consume, overtake, and defeat our lives. We would be a causality of the cares of this world (Mark 4:19). We need the Lord's mercies on a daily basis – the tender mercies of His forgiveness, compassion, help, consolation, and generous acts of kindness directed toward our life. God's mercies are new every day. The Lord extends His mercy to us every morning. When we awake, God is there, waiting to bestow His mercies upon our lives. The “Father of mercies” (2 Cor. 1:3) is ready and waiting to supply us with His loving compassion to get us through another day. The hymn writer said this about God's mercies:

“They greet me at morn when I waken from sleep,
And they gladden my heart at the noon;
They follow me on into shades of the night,
When the day with its labor is done.”

Psalm 89:1

“I will sing of the mercies of the Lord for ever: with my mouth will I make known thy faithfulness to all generations.”

“The mercies of God! What a theme for my song,
Oh! I never could number them o'er;
They're more than the stars in the heavenly dome,
Or the sands of the wave-beaten shore.”

We may wander from God but He will put “goodness and mercy” on our trail. These two divine watch dogs will continue to follow us so the Lord can express His goodness and loving compassion to our lives.

“O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee.”

This is why David adds the word “Surely” (Ps. 23:6) – not possibly or maybe. There is not the slightest doubt in his mind that both God's

goodness and mercies will follow or pursue him all of his days on earth. Psalm 52:1 says, “the goodness of God endureth continually.” Psalm 136:1 declares: “O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.” Do you really believe the goodness and merciful God will forsake you, as His child? Do you think God has turned His back on you, or given up on you? Not a chance!

Psalm 139:17-18

“How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.”

God is waiting to shower His goodness and mercies upon your life once again, as His child. He has not forsaken you. He was there all the time! The Shepherd was following after you, waiting patiently, to once again shower His blessing and loving compassion upon your life.

“He was there all the time
Waiting patiently in line
He was there all the time.”

2. There is reassurance for eternity.

Psalm 23:6

“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

The sheep would also find reassurance in the evening when the shepherd would enclose them in the sheepfold. In Psalm twenty-three David has been leading us through the daily path of the shepherd and his sheep. We have now come to the end of the day’s journey. After preparing the table and providing drink for the sheep they are ready to lie down and retire for the evening. They are safely resting in the haven of the sheepfold.

David made an obvious comparison of the sheepfold to the house of God where he will one day safely dwell. We are followed and escorted through all of life by the goodness and mercy of God and then we reach the Father’s house at last, our eternal dwelling place. How wonderful are the Shepherd’s blessings! We possess goodness and mercy in this life and God’s very own presence in the next life.

Someone put it like this:

“With what I have I am pleased much; with what I hope for I am pleased more.” All this, and heaven too!”

The word “dwell” means to “sit down” and remain in the Lord’s house. The expression “for ever” literally means “length of days” and metaphorically “for all time to come.” We can be sure that David’s passionate earthly desire was to enjoy the localized presence of God in the earthly tabernacle or sanctuary for the rest of his life on earth (Ps. 27:4 – “I may dwell in the house of the LORD ... and behold the beauty of the LORD ... and enquire in his temple”). However, we can also be sure that David possessed a prospect of heavenly hope and desired to someday dwell in the actual presence of God

Since David has already made reference to “the shadow of death” (the prospect of sheep losing their lives) he is likely referring to the uninterrupted opportunities of intimate fellowship with God in the eternal dwelling place of Heaven. David’s eternal hope was to be where God was - Heaven. Looking ahead through the corridors of time, David longed for the day, when he would dwell with His Shepherd in Heaven. Like Abraham, David “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). Even the Old Testament saints had the hope of entering the heavenly city someday.

Hebrews 12:22-23

“But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect” (Old Testament saints).

When the eternal state commences, David knew that he would be in God’s presence forever. The saints of the Old Testament looked forward to entering the blessed heavenly city following Christ’s death and triumphant resurrection (Eph. 4:8). Today, God’s saints can anticipate immediate entrance into the heavenly city, or the house of the Lord, after they die. Paul knew that being “absent from the body” would result in being “present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8) in Heaven. He had no doubt about his immediate entrance into the heavenly city. Elsewhere Paul taught that that his desire was to “depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). When

one of God's children die, they are immediately transported into Heaven, which is God's house.

Jesus gave a wonderful promise in John 14:1-2 about the place called Heaven. He said: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Someone wrote:

"I've got a mansion just over the hilltop
In that bright land where we'll never grow old
And some day yonder we will never more wander
But walk on the streets that are purest gold."

"I go to prepare a place for you." Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. Someday we will meet our Shepherd in Heaven in the person of Jesus Christ! What a glorious day this will be when our Shepherd feeds, leads, and consoles us in Heaven.

Revelation 7:16-17 gives this promise:

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

In Heaven, we will experience the personal presence of the Lord's shepherding ministry in an intimate and fulfilling way, which will last for eternity. As David said, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." This was David's assurance. Do you have this same confidence? What if you were to die today? Do you know for sure that you would enter into the house of the Lord? If not, make sure right now.

If you will place your faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to save you from hell, then you can be assured of dwelling in the presence of the Shepherd someday. Jesus paid the necessary price for sin. Jesus Christ suffered God's wrath and judgment in your place, bearing the penalty for your own sins (Gal. 3:10), so you can be spared from God's eternal judgment in hell. If you express faith in what Christ has done for you, then you can be saved, and someday go to Heaven. Transferring your faith to Christ's death, which paid the penalty for your sins, and Christ's resurrection, which promises the gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23), assures you of a place in Heaven.

Romans 10:13 declares: "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." If you express personal faith in Christ for your salvation, then you can be reassured with David and say, "I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

"The sands of time are sinking,
The dawn of heaven breaks;
The summer morn I've sighed for,
The fair, sweet morn awakes;
Dark, dark hath been the midnight,
But dayspring is at hand,
And glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land."

When John Knox was dying in 1572 his friends gathered around him. One of them begged him, if all was well as he crossed the river of death, he would give them a sign. The poet tells us what happened.

Grim in his deep death anguish the stern old champion lay,
And the locks upon his pillow were floating thin and gray:
And visionless and voiceless, with quick and labored breath,
He waited for his exit through life's dark portal death.

"Hast thou the hope of glory?" They bow to catch the thrill,
That through some languid token might be responsive still;
Nor watched they long nor waited for some obscure reply,
He raised a clay-cold finger and pointed to the sky."

John Knox died with his finger pointing to Heaven. Dear friend, are you going to Heaven? You can have the assurance that you will enter Heaven someday.

Jesus said in John 6:47:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life."

There are really only two things that we must learn – how to live and how to die. This Psalm provides the answer for both. When we have a relationship with God, who is our caring Shepherd, we will find everything we need for life, death, and eternity! We have the provision, protection, and then the glorious prospect of eternity with God in Heaven. Since God feeds, the way

is sweet, since God's leads, the way is sure, and since God cares, the way is safe. We will pass through the dark valley, and reach our final frontier, which is Heaven at last.

"Toiling will all be ended,
Shadows will flee away;
Sorrows will be forgotten,
Oh, what a wonderful day!
Over the sunset mountains
Heaven awaits for me,
Over the sunset mountains,
Jesus my Savior I'll see."

Among the guests present at a house party were an actor and saintly old minister. The actor was requested to give a recitation. He consented, and asked what the guest would like. The Twenty Third Psalm was suggested. With perfect diction and clear voice, the actor recited the Psalm. The people applauded loudly. Afterward the minister was asked to recite the Psalm. At first he refused, but upon being urged, he closed the Bible, and in reverent voice with deep feeling, he began to slowly repeat the familiar verses. The audience realized he was not reciting something just memorized, but he was telling of his own experience with the Shepherd that he loved. There was no applause after he finished. A solemn hush fell upon the audience. After a few moments of silence, the actor went to the minister, took his hand and said, "Sir, I know only the Psalm; you know the Shepherd."

If we know the Shepherd of this Psalm, we will experience God's special touch upon our lives. We will possess all that we need, so we can truly say, "I shall not want." Then, some glorious day in the future, we will enter into His presence, and we "shall see his face" (Rev. 22:3) and "dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Ps. 23:6).

"Someday the silver cord will break,
And I no more as now shall sing;
But O the joy when I shall wake
Within the palace of the King!"