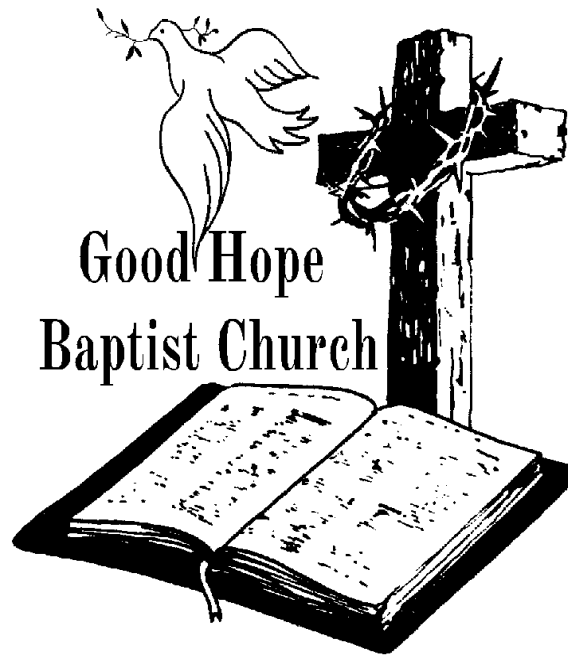


# The Lord Is My Shepherd

Psalm 23



Living Together In The Love Of God

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**FOCAL Read Together** Psalms 23:1-6 <sup>(KJV)</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. 5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

What is my portion in life? What brings me happiness and joy? If my portion is not God, and my satisfaction is not Christ, then I will never find contentment in this life.

Every year as Pastor I encounter people who either take their own lives purposely or accidentally. People go through horrible dark valleys, crying out to God "Why? Why me, Lord? Why my family?" I meet people who feel betrayed by life, and I have to admit that there have been times in my life where I've asked the Lord "Why?" Someone once told me "I never question God out loud". That's great, but the Lord says:

**Jeremiah 17:10 <sup>(HCSB)</sup> I ... examine the mind, I test the heart to give to each according to his way, according to what his actions deserve.**

My Father knows what I'm thinking, so I share my heart

with Him. **"Why have I been betrayed?"** or **"Why has life given me the short straw once more?"** I have laid at the altar of local Churches that I've pastored and wept for those who suffer, and wondered why it is that sometimes it seems as if God is silent.

The inherent danger in suffering is that we may try to treat the problem we encounter ourselves. Some turn to doctors, others to suicide. May I say that the "why" may never be answered. **We should be asking WHO - WHO is my God in the midst of this trial.**

Jud Wilhite wrote in his book *Torn*:

**"Does *why* bring healing? Does *why* bring closure? Rarely. *Why* keeps you in the past and blocks you from moving forward. *Why* keeps you stuck in the pain and chokes out the potential to heal. This is the reason that the better question - the question that Christians should move into sooner rather than later - is *who*. *Who* is in charge? *Who* is in control? *Who* has all things in His hand? *Who* will make all things right? *Who* is restoring all things?"**

The Bible says:

**Colossians 2:10 <sup>NIV</sup> ... you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.**

The King James says **"you are complete in Him"**. I was saved by grace the day that I called on the Lord Jesus

Christ. It is by **"by grace am I (and you) saved through faith; and that not of ourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works"** (Ephesians 2:8-9) Christ saves us - if we are saved. But once He saves us and **"gives us the adoption of sons"** (Galatians 4:5) He doesn't stop there. The Scripture says:

**Ephesians 2:10 <sup>(KJV)</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.**

You are God's poetry. You are God's Work in progress. You, dear Christians, are God's masterpiece. **You are the clay, and He is the Potter.**

**Philippians 2:13 <sup>(KJV)</sup> For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of [his] good pleasure.**

Everything that happens in the Christian's life happens according to God's oversight. You have a choice when a trial comes. You can groan and grumble through the trial, struggling against it with all your power, letting it drain the life out of you. Or you can look upward in the midst of the trial, trust the Lord Who saved you, and follow His Will and His Word, praising Him regardless as to whether you understand the "why" of it all or not.

**There Is No Growth On The Mountain Top**

**Psalm 23** was written by a man who was well acquainted with the valleys of life. The youngest son of Jesse, David was given the job of tending his father's sheep. Shepherding is a tiring job. Sheep are hard to

work with. They'll eat things they shouldn't eat, and go where they shouldn't go. The Shepherd doesn't carry a staff for show. The staff aids the shepherd as he walks into places that nothing with sense should ever walk. The crooked end of the staff helps the shepherd reach out and pull the sheep out of the predicament they've gotten themselves into. **David was given the tiring job of shepherding. His older brothers all got the better jobs, and some even went into the military to defend God's land and people. But David got the short straw of life.** He could have complained, grumbled, been insolent or miserable. But as David sat out with the sheep at night he looked around and looked up.

*The Lord* David didn't have a Bible like

you and I have. In David's day the Lord was still writing the Bible through His prophets.

Though David didn't have the Book of Scripture, he did have the Book of Nature. He saw God's design in creation. He saw the intricate detail that God took in making his body.

As he sat out at night watching the sheep, his eyes went upward to the Heavens. Seeing more stars than the sand of the sea David praised our God, saying ...

**Psalms 8:3-7 (HCSB) When I observe Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You set in place, 4 what is man that You remember him, the son of man that You look after him? 5 You made him little less than God and crowned him with**

**glory and honor. 6 You made him lord over the works of Your hands; You put everything under his feet: 7 all the sheep and oxen, as well as the animals in the wild,**

David didn't see shepherding as a miserable job. God made Him. **The Lord**, the Eternal and Infinite God created him. Such a God, magnificent and mighty, would not create him then abandon him.

David saw everything connected to God. David was watching the sheep not because Jesse put him there, not because he was the youngest child, not because it was a miserable job, but *because God wanted him there.*

**Illustrate** When I was preaching for the Lord in Tennessee someone told a Pastor friend of mine that he had a "**little preaching job**" because he had a little Church. My friend was livid! He told me, "**Any job that God gives us to do is no little job. If it's important to God, it ought to be important to us.**" Amen, Brother Jimmy! We serve an awesome God. God has given each of us something to do, a trial to live through, a commission - something. He is at work through us, and we are His workmanship and His masterpiece.

*is my Shepherd* David was a shepherd, but realized that God is his Shepherd. **The Lord is MY Shepherd.** He is watching over me. I may not understand what is going on around me, but God knows. Do I have a personal relationship with God? Is He *my*

*Shepherd?* Do I hear His voice and respond to Him?  
Jesus said:

**John 10:27** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **My sheep hear My voice, I know them, and they follow Me.**

**Illustrate** In the Holy Land several shepherds and several herds will come together for a time, joining together in one large bleating flock. When it is time for the shepherds to head toward home they will walk out and call to their sheep. The sheep will separate - and follow the shepherd that is theirs. **Christians hear and follow Jesus. They can say "The Lord is MY Shepherd"**.

My defense is my Shepherd. My provider is my Shepherd. My rest is my Shepherd. My hiding place is my Shepherd.

**Isaiah 40:10-11** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand.... 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.**

As a good shepherd looks after his flock, God looks after His people. He is not a Shepherd that sleeps on the job. He is the **Good Shepherd who has laid down His life for us on the Cross (John 10:11).**

### **Stop Complaining and Start Listening**

Rather than complain, David considered everything he

did, he did for the Lord. That's scriptural, by the way. The Bible says:

**Colossians 3:23-24** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **And whatsoever ye do, do [it] heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.**

Are you in a miserable job? **Do it as unto the Lord.**  
Are you in a valley of life? **Look up, and magnify the Lord.** When the Apostle Paul was imprisoned he never said he was a prisoner of Rome. He was **"a prisoner of Christ"** (Philemon 1; Ephesians 3:1)

*I shall not want* David was watching his sheep one evening when one of his brothers came up. **"Daddy wants you - though for the life of me, I don't know why"**. David leaves his sheep with his older brother and runs toward the house. There he sees an old man standing with his father. The old man - the **Prophet Samuel** - had been sent by God to anoint the next king of Israel. Jesse had brought each of his children before Samuel, and one by one the Lord refused them. God told Samuel ....

**1 Samuel 16:7** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **... man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.**

As David nears the old Prophet, he puts his hand on David's head and blesses him. The Bible says:

**1 Samuel 16:13** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **Then Samuel took the horn of oil,**

and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward. ...

Though anointed King, David was not sent to the palace. There were other lessons David had to learn before he could be King, and he would learn them in the pasture watching sheep. **Wait! Rest! Look! Do!**

David went back to his sheep. He waited, and watched.

**Psalms 27:14** <sup>(KJV)</sup> **Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD.**

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

David didn't see his time watching sheep to be a waste of time. Just as a good shepherd will lead his sheep to green and nourishing pastures, David knew that where ever God leads His children is **green pastures**. Think about those words: "**He MAKETH me to LIE DOWN in green pastures**". Rest, rest in the Lord. Wait on the Lord. Trust in Him. God does not abandon His children, but as a good Father watches over us. Don't worry. Don't fret. Rest! Rest in the Lord. Jesus said:

**Matthew 6:32-34** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> **... the idolaters eagerly seek all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. 34 Therefore don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself.**

**Each day has enough trouble of its own.**

God is in control. David rested in the Lord, and we need to rest, too. God has a plan for each and every one of us, and we need to worship Him and follow Him.

*He leadeth me beside the still waters.*

**Illustrate** The "**still waters**" is the part of a stream that is deep and inclined in such a way that it appears there is no current there. Where the still waters are there are often small river rock washed into the area. Sheep loved to drink from the still waters, for the water there was clean and pure. Shepherds often gathered small river rock from the edges of the still waters, rock they would use in their slings to drive away predators from the sheep. David gathered many rocks and shot many of them from his sling while he was a shepherd.

*He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*

David saw himself as a work in progress. Everything that happened happened for God's purpose. Everything that happened to David came to David because the loving hand of God brought it.

**Illustrate** In the movie *The Wizard of Oz* **Dorothy, the Scarecrow, and the Tin Man** are walking on the yellow brick road. As the road heads into the forest they begin to go through a list of fearful creatures they might meet. At one point Dorothy says, "**Lions and tigers and**

**bears! Oh, my!"** Not long after that out jumps the **Lion**, and, of course, he's the **Cowardly Lion**. What the trio feared ended up being nothing at all. And as they - now together - head toward Oz (**We're off to see the Wizard, the Wonderful Wizard of Oz**) they have no idea that the Wizard of Oz is no more than a charlatan.

David wasn't on a yellow brick road, but he was entrusted with watching sheep and guarding them from "**Lions and tigers and bears! Oh my!"** David didn't fear the night, but looked upward to the Lord Who saved him. He kept a supply of smooth stones he collected from the **still waters**, and even killed a **bear and a tiger** that tried to hurt his flock. He was about God's business, and David was going to do the best he could for the Lord.

God will not promote you to the next level until you honor Him where He has placed you. You never know how your promotion will come. David's promotion came by being a delivery boy.

Jesse told David:

**1 Samuel 17:17-19 (HCSB) ... "Take this half-bushel of roasted grain along with these 10 loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. 18 Also take these 10 portions of cheese to the field commander. Check on the welfare of your brothers and bring a confirmation from them. 19 They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah fighting with the Philistines."**

David had been anointed King of Israel by Samuel, but he was sent back to watch sheep. His brothers went off to war while he sat and watched sheep. Now his daddy calls him in and says, "**You have a reprieve from watching sheep. NOW I want you to be a waiter, carrying food to your brothers.**" Most of us, myself included, would be a little upset at this. Where's MY promotion? Where's the FAIR in all of this? But **David focused on not the task he had to do, but on the Lord Who saved him.** As David rode into the Israeli camp he saw that the **Army of Philistia** was on one hill, and the **Army of the Lord** was on the other. Between the two was the **Valley of Elah**, and standing in that Valley was one of the biggest men David had ever seen. The Bible says that this was ....

**1 Samuel 17:4-7 (HCSB) .... a champion named Goliath.... He was nine feet, nine inches tall 5 and wore a bronze helmet and bronze scale armor that weighed 125 pounds. 6 There was bronze armor on his shins, and a bronze sword was slung between his shoulders. 7 His spear shaft was like a weaver's beam, and the iron point of his spear weighed 15 pounds. In addition, a shield-bearer was walking in front of him.**

The man stood yelling, challenging the Army of Israel:

**1 Samuel 17:10-11 (HCSB) .... "I defy the ranks of Israel today. Send me a man so we can fight each other!" 11 When Saul and all Israel heard these words from the Philistine, they lost their courage and were terrified.**

The Bible no longer calls "Saul" as "King Saul". He's

just plain old "Saul". He turned away from God rather than follow God. He defied God rather than worship and obey Him. Those who follow God are **kings and priests unto Him. (Revelation 1:6)** Not Saul. He's a cast off!

As goes the leader, so goes the organization. Saul was faithless, and so was his army. But not David!

**Illustrate** David said "**Just who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?**" (1 Samuel 17:26 <sup>(HCSB)</sup>). The faithless brothers mocked him. "**You've just come to see the battle**". The faithless Saul belittled him. "**You're just a boy, and there's no way you'll defeat this monster of a man**". The faithless Goliath challenged him. "**Come near to me, boy, and I'll give your flesh to the birds and your bones to the wild beasts**". The faithful David looked up, not out, and let faith guide his hand.

*See, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.*

David knew that the Lord Who saved him was with him still. David walked into the valley of Elam, a place where death like a vulture flew overhead. The Bible says that David looked, and **found five smooth stones alongside the still water of a stream that ran nearby**. David said:

**1 Samuel 17:45-47** <sup>(HCSB)</sup> .... "**You come against me**

**with a dagger, spear, and sword, but I come against you in the name of Yahweh of Hosts, the God of Israel's armies — you have defied Him. 46 Today, the LORD will hand you over to me. .... Then all the world will know that Israel has a God, 47 and this whole assembly will know that it is not by sword or by spear that the LORD saves, for the battle is the LORD's. He will hand you over to us."**

*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*

The battle was already won before David threw the first stone. It was won before he cut Goliath's head off with the monster's own sword. It was won because **the battle was the Lord's**.

Killing Goliath, did David become King? No. Saul brought David into the palace, but the Lord would take David through many other tests before he would be King. Through it all David believed in and trusted in the Lord Who loved him.

### **God Calls Us To Live In Victory**

What can I do to live in victory, not in defeat?

**1** Realize that God is God and you are not. He knows what is best for us. When discouraging times come, remember that God is watching over all. He loves

you, and will use the trial to prepare you for something greater. Those who trust in the Lord can say:

**"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life"**

Do not chase after goodness and mercy. Chase after God, and goodness and mercy will chase you.

**2** Realize that what you are going through is but temporary. David said:

**"and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever"**

This life is not all that we have. We are not dying creatures headed toward death and the grave. We who have believed in Jesus are Children of God moving toward eternal life. We are Heaven bound. Let us take as many as we can to Heaven with us when we go. God is using us who believe to bring others into His Kingdom. An early preacher by the name of **Augustine** said:

**"Death is not to be regarded as a disaster, when it follows on a good life, for the only thing that makes death an evil is what comes after death. Those who must inevitably die ought not to worry overmuch about what accident will cause their death, but about their destination after dying. Christians know that the death of a poor religious man, licked by the tongues of dogs, is far better than the death of a godless rich man, dressed in purple and linen. Why then should those who have lived well be dismayed by the terror of death in any form?"**

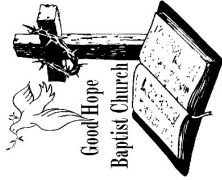
We who have believed are destined toward Heaven. That's where our home is. The security that the Christian has is the sure knowledge that God is in control, and that God loves us.

God has a purpose for our lives, and a destiny for our souls. But this is only true if you can say

**The Lord is MY Shepherd**

Have you given yourself to Christ today? May God touch your hearts to do so.





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