

# Shepherding Love

Ps 23:1-6

SS Lesson for 04/02/2017

**Devotional Scripture:** John 10:11-18

## OUTLINE

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## Introduction

### Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson reveals a cleaner picture of God as our Shepherd and His **Shepherding Love**. The **study's aim** is to note the ways God demonstrates His loving care for us in life and in death. The **study's application** is to relate Psalm 23 to a current challenge or difficulty in life.

*(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)*

### Key Verse: Ps 23:1

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*

### Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

Using the images of a shepherd and a gracious host, David reflected on the many benefits the Lord gave him in the dangers of life, and concluded that God's persistent, loving protection would restore him to full communion.

**23:1.** The psalmist employed the figure of a **shepherd** to recall the blessings he enjoyed from **the LORD** (cf. God as Shepherd in 28:9; 80:1). The metaphor was a natural one for David, the shepherd-king. It was also a common metaphor in the ancient Near East, as many kings compared themselves to shepherds in their leadership capacity. The prophecy of the coming Messiah incorporated the same (Isa. 40:11), and Jesus identified Himself as that expected "Good Shepherd" (John 10:14). He is also called the "Great Shepherd" (Heb. 13:20) and "the Chief Shepherd" (1 Peter 5:4). Because the Lord was David's Shepherd, his needs were met.

**23:2a.** The first blessing David experienced was spiritual nourishment. As a shepherd leads sheep to fresh grass for feeding, so the Lord leads His people. One who follows the Lord does not lack any spiritual nourishment. Under-shepherds (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2) are expected to feed the flock (Ezek. 34:1-10; John 21:15-17) as well. Food for the soul is the Word of God (Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:2).

**23:2b-3a.** A second blessing that comes from the Lord's leading is spiritual restoration. As a shepherd leads his sheep to placid **waters** for rest and cleansing, so the Lord **restores** or refreshes the **soul**. Here the spiritual lesson is clear: the Lord provides forgiveness and peace for those who follow Him.

**23:3b.** The third blessing that comes from the Lord's leading is guidance **in** the right way (**paths of righteousness**). A good shepherd knows the right paths on which to bring the sheep home safely. So too the Lord loses none of His sheep, but guides them in the right way. He does so partly because of His reputation (**for His name's sake**).

**23:4.** The fourth blessing from the Lord's leading is protection. If one finds himself in a **valley of** deep darkness (or **shadow of death**), he need not **fear**. The Lord is **with** him and will protect him. The **rod** and **staff** are the shepherd's equipment to protect the sheep in such situations. David was comforted by the Lord's presence and protection. Believers are never in situations the Lord is not aware of, for He never leaves or forsakes His people (cf. Heb. 13:5).

**23:5.** In this verse the scene changes to a banquet hall where a gracious host provides lavish hospitality. Under this imagery the psalmist rejoiced in the Lord's provision. What was comforting to David was that this was **in the presence of his enemies**. Despite impending danger, the Lord spread out a **table** for him, that is, God provided for him. The image of anointing the **head with oil**, which was refreshing and soothing, harmonizes with the concept of a gracious host welcoming someone into his home. In view of the table and the oil David knew that his lot in life (his **cup**) was abundant blessing from the Lord.

**23:6.** David realized that the Lord's good loyal *love* (*hesed*) would go with him everywhere through **all his life**. God's blessings on His people remain with them no matter what their circumstance may be. (Cf. God's **goodness** in 27:13; 31:19; 69:16; 86:17; 109:21; 116:12; 142:7; 145:7.) So he concluded **I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever**. The house of the Lord referred to the sanctuary (tabernacle). For the rest of his life (lit., "length of days") he would enjoy full communion with the Lord. In fact the Hebrew verb translated "I will dwell" conveys the idea of returning; the same verb is translated "He restores" in 23:3. Perhaps the psalmist was in some way separated from the sanctuary and full enjoyment of its spiritual benefits. His meditation on the Lord's leading and provisions prompted him to recall his communion with the Lord in His presence, in the sanctuary.

### **Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

As a child, one of my favorite games was follow-the-leader. Whenever someone suggested playing it, I was ready to participate. I enjoyed the challenge of doing whatever the leader asked of the others playing the game. However, I learned that there were certain times I did not enjoy playing as much. Why? It was because of who the leader was. Some of my friends asked us to do things that were difficult, while others were easy to follow. I soon realized that I did not want to play when certain children were appointed the leader for the game. In our passage David was talking about God as a leader. However, David was not just calling Him any leader; he was putting God into the role of shepherd, one whose leadership is unquestioned by those following him. Take a look at the opening lines of Psalm 23. All of us have no doubt read this before, and probably most of us have it memorized. Look at what David was saying, though. What did he mean when he said, "I shall not want"? Our first thought might be that David meant he had every physical provision that he needed. But is that really what he was saying in the passage? Keep in mind that David may have written this passage sometime before he became king. He had not yet been blessed with the wealth and power that would come in his later years. I propose a different interpretation. I believe that David was not making a statement about material desires here. Instead, he was boldly stating who he chose to follow. He is saying to us, "God is my Shepherd, my Leader. I do not want any other leader. I am giving Him my unflinching loyalty and devotion." When interpreted that way, the words become a daring and forthright statement of faith. David had many influences around him. He could have chosen to follow so many different people or ideals. He could have chosen to curry favor with King Saul or even gain favor with his father over his older brothers. Instead, David tells us that he served God alone. There are so many people or things to follow these days. People chase after money, power, or prestige. Some people hang on every word of their favorite celebrity, taking it as absolute truth. Like David, we are surrounded by countless influences. Who or what we follow is a choice. Christ tells us that we can have only one master (Luke 16:13). If we choose the wrong leader, we will be led astray (cf. Jer. 50:6) and beguiled into sinful actions. When we do this, we place ourselves outside of God's protection. False shepherds lead us into places of barrenness. We find ourselves desperately trying to do what we cannot, just like playing follow-the-leader with someone doing things too difficult to mimic. We are content and happy only when we allow Christ to be our Shepherd. He is the only one who knows every minute thing about each of us. He leads us down the right path, satisfying every need. Under His graceful guidance, our souls can find rest (cf. Matt. 11:28). Who is your Shepherd today? Before you give an automatic response, stop and ponder the question. Can you, like David, honestly say that you are not following anyone or anything else? Or has a false shepherd edged its way into His place? If so, is it not time to return to His flock?

### **Lesson Introduction and Background**

#### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

William L. Holladay states that Psalm 23 became an American secular icon in the two decades after the American Civil War (1861-1865). Movement toward this status was sparked by Henry Ward Beecher's tribute to the psalm in the years just prior. The tragic loss of life in that war plus the economic panics of 1873 and 1893 bolstered the popularity of Psalm 23. The general public gravitated toward the lines "the shadow of death" (KJV) and "dwell in the house of the Lord forever" for comfort. The psalm's position as secular icon was finalized when funeral homes began to print it on the back of obituary handouts.

Shepherding was a common occupation in ancient Israel through the centuries (Genesis 12:16; 26:14; 29:9; 30:31, 32; Jeremiah 33:12; Luke 2:8; etc.). It should not surprise us, then, that the Bible has scores of references to sheep and shepherds. Sheep were completely dependent on shepherds, making the job of shepherding what we would call 24/7 (note Luke 2:8, which has shepherds "keeping watch over their flock at night"). Since all

this was so familiar to the ancient Israelites, the words shepherd and sheep became metaphors. Moses and David, two of Israel's greatest leaders, had been shepherds in the normal sense (Exodus 3:1; 1 Samuel 16:11) before they became figurative shepherds of God's people (compare Psalm 77:20; Isaiah 63:11; Ezekiel 34:23; etc.). The Old Testament describes God himself with the metaphor of shepherd (Psalm 78:52; 80:1; Isaiah 40:11). In the New Testament, it is Jesus who is "that great Shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews 13:20; compare John 10:1-16; 1 Peter 5:4). The psalms are traditionally seen as five books, and Psalm 23 is in Book I. This psalm is part of an early collection of Davidic psalms, namely Psalms 3-41. A later Davidic collection, namely Psalms 51-65 and 68-70, is found in Book II. Our approach to Psalm 23 is in terms of two metaphors: shepherd (vv. 1-4) and host (vv. 5, 6).

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### ***The Shepherd Satisfies (Ps 23:1-2)***

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

### **Satisfied by being our Shepherd (Ps 23:1)**

*A Shepherd that is the great Shepherd (Heb 13:20)*

20 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,

*A Shepherd that is the Overseer of our souls (1 Peter 2:25)*

25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

*A Shepherd that we belong to (John 10:14-16)*

14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

*A Shepherd whose sheep are of His pasture (Ps 100:3)*

3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

### **Satisfied by meeting needs (Ps 23:2)**

*God meets both physical and spiritual needs (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

Our God is a shepherd to us in all those ways and more. Human needs are more complex, since we are spiritual beings as well as physical, but God supplies all our needs "by Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19).

*God meets needs by providing sustenance (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

He guides us to quiet places where spiritual sustenance is most readily available. As the old hymn says, "There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God." Perhaps Jesus thought of this Psalm when He spoke of "living water" (John 4:10). This kind of water is that by which God quenches the thirst of our souls; it becomes in us "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:14, *New International Version*). The deepest yearning of our hearts is completely satisfied when it is the Lord who gives us drink.

*God meets needs according to His riches (Phil 4:19)*

19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

*God meets needs because He knows them better than I do (Luke 12:29-31)*

29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

*God meets needs because He is able (2 Cor 9:8)*

8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

*God meets needs through spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3)*

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

*God meets needs through the power of Grace (Titus 2:11-12)*

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

### ***The Shepherd Comforts (Ps 23:3-4)***

3 He restores my soul; He leads 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 You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

### **Comforts by restoring (Ps 23:3)**

*God revives through rest and therapy (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

Sheep need to lie down and rest as they eat, for proper digestion and revival of energy. A good shepherd insists on it; he makes the animals lie down. This "siesta" restores their strength, providing relief from the heat and hurts of travel over desert-like terrain. David experienced this rest-and-restoration therapy in his own soul. When spiritually fatigued, God restores passion to his faith and energy to his zeal. Sheep need a shepherd not only to provide suitable times and places for rest, but to provide guidance along the paths. Sheep will stray without a shepherd (cf. Mark 6:34). Without God's restoring guidance, David (and we) could not stay on the "straight and narrow" path of righteousness that leads to life.

*God restores the soul (Ps 19:7)*

7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

*God restores faith (Luke 22:32)*

32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

*God restores from suffering (1 Peter 5:10)*

10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

*God restores into righteousness (Job 33:26)*

He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God's face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state.

*God restores the joy of His salvation (Psalm 51:12)*

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

*God restores from backsliding (Jeremiah 3:22)*

"Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding." "Yes, we will come to you, for you are the Lord our God.

### **Comforts by protecting (Ps 23:4)**

*Flying Blind (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

During the cold war, the United States Air Force's Strategic Air Command kept loaded B-52 bombers continuously "on alert," and an airborne command post flying every day, seven days per week, twenty-four hours per day. The necessity of flying every day, in any weather, required the ability to land the airborne command post in any weather. In dense fog, Air Force flight controllers had to talk this large jet all the way down to the runway. The pilots had to listen carefully to the controllers, follow their directions exactly, and trust the controllers implicitly. Flying blind like that was not for the fainthearted. In a very real sense, though, every person alive is flying blind. No one can see into the next year, the next week, even the next hour. People hurtle blindly into the future, hoping they can negotiate whatever obstacles or difficulties present themselves. In Psalm 23, David assures us that the Lord, our Shepherd, is willing to serve as our air traffic controller. He will guide us in the paths of righteousness. Like a controller with a radar screen, He can see where we are headed and what lies ahead even though we cannot. Like a pilot flying in fog, every person needs to listen carefully to this Controller, follow His directions exactly, and trust Him implicitly. Those who do this will find that the Lord will guide them to a safe landing. Those who do not will crash and burn.

*Foxhole Reality (from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary)*

A foxhole conversion can be nothing more than bargaining with God. "If You will get me out of this, Lord, I will be committed to You for the rest of my life." A promise like this is not likely to be kept. However, a face to face encounter with one's own death can change a person's sense of values. "I realized there were things more important than \_\_\_\_\_" (fill in the blank). An encounter with death takes us to the core of our being. Amidst the darkness of this valley, David's core being felt comforted. Even at the threshold of the grave, David sensed God's reassuring presence. A public television documentary several years ago followed two terminally ill hospital patients. Both patients' families were grief-stricken by the news that death was imminent. However, over the ensuing weeks, one family pulled together and found peace. The other family pulled apart and found nothing but pain. The first family had a living relationship with Christ; the second family did not. You are terminal. Beyond insurance policies and a will, what are you doing to prepare yourself? David recommends you walk through this dark valley with the Lord. Then, you need fear no evil.

*God protects from perishing (Luke 21:18-19)*

18 But not a hair of your head will perish. 19 By standing firm you will gain life.

*God protects like a shield (Ps 84:11)*

11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.

*God protects through His word (Prov 30:5)*

5 "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

*God protects if we listen to Him (Prov 1:33)*

33 but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm."

*God protects if we trust in Him (Prov 29:25)*

25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.

## ***The Shepherd Protects (Ps 23:5-6)***

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs 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 Forever.

### **Protects by anointing (Ps 23:5)**

*God anoints with oil of joy (Ps 45:7)*

7 You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

*God anoints as part of His ownership (2 Cor 1:21-22)*

21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

*God anoints through the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20)*

20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.

*God anoints so He can teach us (1 John 2:27)*

27 As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

*Anointing to achieve abundant prosperity and rejoicing (from Barnes' Notes)*

[Thou anointest my head with oil] As in Hebrew, "makest fat." That is, thou dost pour oil on my head so abundantly that it seems to be made fat with it. The expression indicates abundance. The allusion is to the custom of anointing the head on festival occasions, as an indication of prosperity and rejoicing, and the whole is indicative of the divine favor, of prosperity, and of joy. [My cup runneth over] It is not merely "full;" it runs over. This, too, indicates abundance; and from the abundance of the favors thus bestowed, the psalmist infers that God would always provide for him, and that He would never leave him to want.

*Anointing to achieve complete satisfaction (from The Wycliffe Bible Commentary)*

His head is anointed with perfumed oil. His every need is completely satisfied. On the basis of this trust, every moment of his life will be filled with God's richest blessings. The greatest blessing will be an intimate fellowship with God through continued worship of Him.

*Anointing to achieve spiritual and physical blessings (from Keil & Delitzsch Commentary)*

What is meant thereby, is not necessarily only blessings of a spiritual kind. The king fleeing before Absalom and forsaken by the mass of his people was, with his army, even outwardly in danger of being destroyed by want; it is, therefore, even an abundance of daily bread streaming in upon them, as in 2 Sam 17:27-29, that is meant; but even this, spiritually regarded, as a gift from heaven, and so that the satisfying, refreshing and quickening is only the outside phase of simultaneous inward experiences.

### **Protects by providing a safe refuge (Ps 23:6)**

*God is a refuge for the oppressed and those in trouble (Ps 9:9)*

9 The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

*God is a refuge because He is our fortress and shield (Ps 18:2)*

2 The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

*God is a refuge because He is all powerful (Ps 46:1)*

46 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

*God is a refuge for the righteous (Prov 10:29)*

29 The way of the Lord is a refuge for the righteous, but it is the ruin of those who do evil.

*God is a refuge through His word (Prov 30:5)*

5 "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### Commentary Thoughts from Alan Carr

#### WHAT THE SHEEP EXPERIENCES

A. v. 1 **He Experiences A Personal Relationship** – When this Psalm begins, David is writing in the first person. It seems as though he is talking to us about the Shepherd. In doing so, he uses the possessive personal pronoun “*my*” to talk about his relationship to the Shepherd. He did not say “*the LORD is a Shepherd.*” He did not say “*the LORD is our Shepherd.*” He did not say “*the LORD is your Shepherd.*” Instead, David tells us that he has a personal relationship with the Shepherd! He says “*the LORD is my Shepherd!*” Can you say that today? You need to be able to!

B. v. 2 **He Experiences A Precious Relationship** – David tells us that as a result of this personal relationship, he is confident that the Shepherd will take care of all his needs. He says, “*I shall not want.*” In fact, the rest of this Psalm is the development of that thought. David, the Lord’s little sheep, tells us all the things the Great Shepherd provides for him.)

1. **The Tenderness Of The Shepherd** – David tells us his Shepherd “*makes him to lie down in green pastures.*” The Shepherd knows that, unlike goats which will eat weeds and the other trash of this world, the sheep prefer the tender, green grasses. The Shepherd leads them to the places where He knows they will be fed. He makes them lie down because he knows that they cannot properly digest their food unless they lie down. He also knows that sheep will not lie down unless they feel perfectly safe from enemy attack. He knows they need to lie down because their wool grows in thickness and richness in direct proportion to the time they spend resting and ruminating on the green grasses they ingest. With all this in mind, the Shepherd tenderly leads His sheep to the places of greatest safety and nutrition.

What a picture of what the Lord Jesus does for His children! He knows we must feed, He provides the best food for us. He knows we must rest and allows what we have ingested from Him digest properly, if we are to produce the maximum fruit for His glory. Therefore, He leads us into the green pastures of His Word, allows us to graze on the riches contained therein, and shelters us while we rest in the riches of His grace. What a tender Shepherd! He fights off the world so we have time to rest in Him! He tenderly meets our needs! Do you take advantage of that privilege and provision?

2. **The Thoughtfulness Of The Shepherd** – The shepherd leads his sheep beside the still waters because he knows the sheep will not drink from a running stream. You see, sheep have a morbid fear of the water! Why? They are not designed for swimming! With their heavy coats of wool and their little spindly legs, sheep are extremely top heavy. In the water, their wool fills with water and they easily flip over and drown. The sheep know this and shy away from running water. The shepherd knows this and searches out placid pools for them to drink from. If necessary, he will dam up a place in a stream to make them a calm pool of water.

The Great Shepherd also knows that His sheep need the cool waters of His grace to make it through this world. He knows that they need places of stillness where they can rest and reflect



upon Him and His blessings. He cares about the things you are facing in life today, **Heb. 4:15, 1 Pet. 5:7**. And, He provides a place of rest, peace and safety from them today, **Heb. 4:16; Matt. 11:28**. Therefore, He provides those places of escape for you and me!

C. v. 3 **He Experiences A Profound Relationship**

1. **The Good Shepherd Provides Life** – Here is where the relationship between a human shepherd and his sheep, and the Heavenly Shepherd and His sheep move in different directions. The Good Shepherd gives His sheep something no human shepherd could ever provide for his flock: Life!

While the human shepherd provides everything needed by his sheep to maintain life, the fact remain that he receives his sheep after they have life. Jesus, on the other hand, finds His sheep “*dead in trespasses and sins*,” **Eph. 2:1**. You see, the phrase, “*restoreth my soul*,” literally means, “*to bring back*.” The good Shepherd brings back the wayward soul from death into life, **John 5:24; Luke 15:4-7**. Just a reminder, if you know Jesus, then you have eternal life right now! If you do not know Him, then you are dead in your sins where you sit, **1 John 5:12**.

2. **The Good Shepherd Provides Leadership** - The Good Shepherd always leads His sheep in the right way. Whether His path leads us through the glen, as in **verse 2**, or into the gorge as in **verse 4**, He always leads us in the best path of all: His path!

(**Note:** No one always likes where the path of life leads them, but if they are following the Good Shepherd, they can be assured that He will always lead them in the right path, **Psa. 37:23**.)

(**Note:** The word “*paths*” comes from a word that means “*circuit or orbit*”. The Lord’s leadership always leads us in a path that causes us to “*orbit*” Him. Just as the bodies in Heaven are subject to the gravitational pull of the sun, those who are in His orbit are kept in a right path about Him at all times!)

v. 4-6 **WHAT THE SHEEP EXPRESSES**

(III. In the first three verses, David talks to us about Him. Now, beginning in verse four, David begins to talk to Him about Him. When He considers what he had and Who he is talking about, David cannot refrain from praising the Lord!)

A. v. 4 **There Is Praise For The Shepherd’s Power**

1. **In His Power He Provides Peace** – Even though the sheep must at times pass through the most frightening and dangerous of places, they travel in peace knowing that their shepherd has everything under his control! That same confidence should dwell in the hearts of each of God’s sheep today! Yes, the path leads through difficult and dangerous places at times. Yes, there are occurrences and events in life that are frightening to our hearts. But, if we know that Jesus, the Great Shepherd is leading us; if we know that He is in absolute control of all of the paths of life, then we can pass through the shadows in peace and security, **Psa. 37:23**.

By the way, a shadow cannot harm you anyway! What can the shadow of an angry dog do? It cannot bite! What can the shadow of a poisonous snake do? It cannot strike! Shadows cannot harm you and if you walk with Jesus, you are walking in the light, and in the light, there are no shadows! You have His promise of peace as you travel, **Phil. 4:7; John 14:27**.

2. **In His Power He Provides His Presence** – The presence of the Good Shepherd with His sheep is a theme which permeates the very fabric of this Psalm. From the idea of His leadership in **verses 2-3** to His presence in the darkest of times in **verse 4**, to His intimate activity in **verse 5**, the Lord is seen in close proximity to His sheep. He is always there to lead them, feed them, protect them and to watch over them at all times. This is the blessed truth that God’s children should rejoice in today, **Heb. 13:5; Matt. 28:20**.
3. **In His Power He Provides His Protection** – David mentions the implements of the shepherd’s protection: the rod and the staff. Each of these tools had a very specific purpose in the life of the sheep. The staff was a long pole with a crook near the end. With this implement, the shepherd would correct the sheep, draw them close when they began to wander and lift them out of the crevices into which they might fall.

The rod was much shorter than the staff and was used by the shepherd to protect the sheep from anything that might try to attack the flock. So too are the born again sheep of the Lord protected by Him both night and day! We enjoy a place of absolute protection with Him, **Col. 3:3**.

(Note: Our enemy may walk about as a roaring lion looking for victims to devour, **1 Pet. 5:8**, but he has been chained and our Father holds the leash!)

#### B. v. 5 **There Is Praise For The Shepherd’s Provisions** –

1. **He Provides Rest** – Usually a soldier in enemy territory would be forced to gulp down a hasty meal as best he could while he cowered in fear of being discovered, captured or killed. However, the Lord spreads the table for His children right in the middle of the enemy’s territory and all the enemy can do is watch us as we feast on the blessings of the Lord.

(Note: I do not think that we will ever fully grasp this, but there are times in life that seem almost unbearable to us as humans. It is those times when the enemy comes to us and mocks us and to question our determination to follow the Lord. But, through the ministry of the Lord, He is able to turn the worst of times into the greatest of blessings. He leaves us feasting on His grace while the enemy sulks, unable to hinder us, harm us or even touch us! That is how the Lord arranges life for His glory and our good, **Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 4:17**.)

2. **He Provides Remedies** – When guests visited in a home, they were often anointed with oil to show them how much they meant to their host. It was considered an insult not to wash the feet and anoint the head of your guests. As we move through this life, the Lord takes many opportunities to anoint us with the oil of His grace. His goodness and blessings are all reminders that we are precious in His sight!

(Note: I don’t care what the devil may have told you, you are precious to the Lord! So precious, in fact, that He sent His Son to die for you on the cross, **John 3:16; Rom. 5:8**. So precious that He gave His all so that you might be saved! If you are saved, then you are His child! Adopted in His family and His heir! You are precious in His sight today! No one is more loved than you are!)

(Note: The idea of anointing oil also brings to mind the image of a wounded sheep being tenderly mended by a caring shepherd. How many times have you been bruised and battered by the knocks, falls and scrapes of life? Hasn’t the Good Shepherd come by with His healing touch and met you need? Every time! Ill. **Psa. 103:3**)

3. **He Provides Rejoicing** – David tells us that the Lord’s blessings in is life are so great that he has more than he can handle! His cup has passed full and has run over into the saucer!

(Note: That is exactly how the Lord treats His precious children. If you are in a place where He can bless you, then look out, because He certainly will! If some of you were to testify this morning, you could tell us that there have been times when the Lord filled your cup to the

overflowing! There have been times when His presence and the reality of His glory was almost more than you could bear! Those are the real blessings of the Lord! Thank God for the times when He fills our cup!)

**(Note:** Another reason for rejoicing lies in the picture of a cup that has been made to overflow. In those days, when a guest was sitting with his host in the evening drinking, the host would often rise and refill the glasses. If the host came and only filled the glass half full, it was the host's way of saying, "*The evening is over, it is time for you to leave.*" If, however, the host came by and filled your cup full, he was saying, "*I am enjoying your company and I would like for you to stay with me for a while longer.*" Well, when the Lord filled David's cup, He caused it to overflow. The Lord was saying, "*David, I sure do enjoy your company and I hope you will continue to abide with Me!*"

Does the Lord ever fill your cup? When He does, He is telling you that He enjoys your company and He is reminding you that He loves you greatly!)

### C. v. 6 **There Is Praise For The Shepherd's Promises** –

1. **He Promises Help For Today** – The pilgrim is assured that goodness and mercy will be his constant companions along the way home. These are the components of grace and remind us that as we travel we will always be blessed with grace sufficient to the need, **2 Cor. 12:9**. We need to know that there is nothing in life that we can face that will be greater than His ability to see us through. You see, we are following One Who plans and knows the way we take, **Psa. 37:23; Job 23:10**. He also goes with us along the way to assure us of safe passage through this violent and harsh land. With Him near, there is nothing to fear!
2. **He Promises Hope For Tomorrow** – David concludes this Psalm with a precious reminder that this life down here will end some day, but that those who know the Lord will move to a new realm to live for eternity. Some people believe that David is referring to the Tabernacle in this verse. I like to think that he is looking a little farther away than that! I think he is looking forward to a time when he will be in the presence of the Lord in Heaven. That is the destiny of every child of God today! (Ill. **John 14:1-3; Rev. 21:4; Rev. 22:3-4!**)

**(Note:** If the thought of His grace here and His glory there don't light your fire, then your wood must be wet! There is something about knowing that He is going to see me through this life and usher me into that glorious, eternal, sinless life in Heaven that just stirs my heart! Thank God our Shepherd knows how to thrill His sheep!)

(Adapted from URL:[http://www.sermonnotebook.org/old%20testament/Psalms%2023\\_1-6.htm](http://www.sermonnotebook.org/old%20testament/Psalms%2023_1-6.htm))

### **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

The metaphors of shepherd and host remind us that God is our trustworthy provider. For all physical and spiritual needs, he is the source. The ultimate question, then, does not concern God's trustworthiness, but ours. Do we yield to his shepherding leadership, or do we rebel? Do we accept his provisions with a sense of accountability, or with a sense of entitlement? Do we walk only in his paths of righteousness, or do we take little "side trips" occasionally? Think carefully—living eternally in his presence is at stake!

### **Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

1. Trust God completely. Follow His lead, and depend on Him to provide (Ps. 23:1)
2. Following our own ideas in opposition to God's will puts us in harm's way (vs. 2)
3. God strengthens and restores His people as they obey Him (vs. 3)
4. There is no time or place in life where God's love cannot reach us in order to encourage and protect (vs. 4)
5. God's love both defends and disciplines us
6. God will bless us in the midst of enemies and opposition (vs. 5)
7. God actively pursues a relationship with His people, and His love never fails (vs. 6)