

Facilitator Notes for "Knowing God by Name"

Lesson 14 – Yahweh Rohi – The LORD is My Shepherd - Psalm 23

PLEASE DON'T READ THESE NOTES UNTIL YOU HAVE COMPLETED YOUR LESSON.

Questions

Read **Psalm 23** in several of the translations provided. Which is your favorite? Why?

Psalm 23 was probably written in the latter years of David's reign as king over Israel. David lived an incredibly full life, packed with some awesome moments of victory and success, but also some times of deep despair and failure. Starting with his victory over Goliath, David was a great warrior and had grand military success as he reigned over Israel for fifty "golden" years. He also experienced personal disappointments and discouragement – and, of course, his life was marked by an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, the murder of her husband, and the ensuing family fighting that led to several deaths and ongoing conflict among his own family members. Yet, through this all, David had a heart for God and experienced God in many personal and intimate ways, revealed in the many psalms that he wrote. Most tender and intimate of all – recalling David's childhood memories of tending sheep – is David's simple and assuring picture of *Yahweh* as a gentle Shepherd caring for the needs of his flock.

1. The very name, *The LORD is My Shepherd*, implies that *people* are like sheep since God is like a shepherd. Before we look specifically at the images of sheep and shepherd presented in **Psalm 23**, read the following verses note what you learn about *people* when compared to *sheep*.

Isaiah 53:6	like sheep, people tend to go astray, leaving God's path to follow their own.
Psalm 100:3	We are God's sheep or his people because he created us; every person belongs to God because God created every person
Jeremiah 50:6	people can become like lost sheep, losing their way; human shepherds or leaders can lead people astray; people can so lose their way that they need help getting back to the fold – the place they belong
Matthew 9:36	People without God are like sheep without a shepherd; they become harassed and helpless, not knowing where to go for help. Without God we are all "directionally challenged."

- ♥ At what times are you most apt to "go astray" and "turn to your own way?" What does this usually look like in your life? What usually brings you back to the fold?
- ♥ Instead of "going astray," when have you been "led astray?" *What* or *who* led you back to your "resting place" (fold)? Can you think of a time when you "led someone astray?" What happened?
- ♥ When have you felt "harassed and helpless" or what can make you feel "harassed and helpless?" How would a "shepherd" help during these times? Who, besides God, has been a shepherd to you?

2. According to the following verses, what kind of Shepherd is *Yahweh*? What does he do for his sheep?

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-16	God searches for his sheep – and finds them. He is like a shepherd searching for his scattered flock. God will rescue his sheep who have lost their way. God will tend his people, causing them to lie down in peace. After he finds the lost person, he will bring them safely home, binding up the injured and strengthening the weak. He shepherds his flock with justice.
Isaiah 40:11	God will feed and take care of his people like a shepherd takes care of his sheep. He is a tender, compassionate shepherd, carrying the weak and little ones close to his heart; gently leading those who are taking care of their young.
John 10:2-4, 14-15	The Good Shepherd knows the ones who belong to him by name – and calls them by name. Jesus leads us – going ahead of us so that he knows about and faces any danger or rough terrain before his sheep do. Jesus has an intimate relationship with his sheep; he knows his sheep and they know him. His sheep recognize his voice.

- ♥ What kind of sheep best describes you: Weak? Sick? Injured? Wandering? Lost? Headstrong? Cradled? Content? Caught? How so? Do you feel like God is taking care of you? Why or why not?
- ♥ How does the *Good Shepherd* call you by name? How do you best hear his voice? How might you be a better "listener?" Compared to how well your Shepherd knows you, how well do you know him?
- ♥ What does it mean that *Yahweh* will shepherd his flock with "justice" (**Ezekiel 34:16**)? **God is a "fair" shepherd who doesn't show partiality – giving the same care to all his sheep.** Why is this important? **Sheep (people) are less than perfect and don't always get along or sometimes take advantage of each other. God knows this and he is fair and just, always knowing the truth, even if other people are fooled.** From your own experiences, describe what kind of Shepherd *Yahweh* has been to you.

3. Read **Psalm 23** again and **mark** all the personal pronouns (*my, I, me*). What does their use mean to you? How would the meaning of this Psalm change if David had used the pronouns *our, we, and us* instead?

David wrote the Psalm saying the Lord is MY Shepherd, as if *Yahweh* were all his and his flock only had one sheep. God does not just love us "en mass" – but loves each one of us individually. This is what "he knows his sheep by name" implies. God is intensely personal. Everyone of his flock can say, "I am the Lord's and he is mine." He has each of his sheep in mind, knowing about each one individually. Each of his sheep are different from the other, so each hold a special place in his heart that no other sheep can fill. Each of the sheep has a different relationship with the Shepherd from the other sheep. This is a psalm of personal experience with a personal God to whom every sheep of the fold is precious and under his particular care.

- ♥ Read **Psalm 23:1** in several of the translations. Are the two statements in **23:1** true for you? Why or why not? Would you say these statements are conditional or unconditional? Does their truth depend on God or on us? **Even though each person who exists belongs to God because God is their Creator, saying God is MY Shepherd does imply relationship. Those who have no relationship with God probably would not say that he was their shepherd.** How so?

- ♥ For you, what is the difference between "I have everything I need" and "I have everything I want?"

- ♥ What connection do you see between the two statements in **23:1**? How does one impact the other?

We can read these statements in two ways: 1) **Because** the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need. In other words, he is a good Shepherd who makes sure the needs of his sheep are met. 2) We could read these statements to mean that with God as my Shepherd, I don't need anything else because he is enough. As someone has paraphrased: The Lord is my Shepherd, what more could I want? Of course, both statements are true.

4. What four specific actions does *Yahweh* perform for his sheep in **23:2-4**?

<p>He makes me to lie down in green pastures He lets me rest in green meadows In grassy meadows he lets me lie You have bedded me down in lush meadows</p>	<p>He leads me beside the quiet waters He leads me beside peaceful streams By tranquil streams he leads me You find me quiet pools to drink from</p>
<p>He restores my soul He renews my strength to restore my spirit You let me catch my breath</p>	<p>He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits his name You send me in the right direction</p>

- ♥ Choose a translation and read **23:2-4** again, very slowly. Close your eyes. Put yourself in these verses. What do you see? What do you feel? Why do you need these things?
- ♥ From all the provisions that the Shepherd gives in **23:2-4**, what do you need most right now and why? If this provision was given to you right now, what do you imagine it would look like in your life?
- ♥ What does "paths of righteousness" or "right paths" mean to you (**23:3**)? When the Shepherd is guiding you "along right paths," are you most likely to **follow him, lag behind, try to find your own way, or just run away?** Why?

5. **Restore, renew, and refresh (23:3)** means to repair or renovate, give something back that was taken or lost, or to give something new strength or vigor. **Soul** is a person's emotional nature or their sense of identity. It usually means each person's unique "I" or essential self. What are some reasons why our souls need to be restored?

Everyone's answer will be a little different, but generally, our living in a fallen creation with fallen human beings give ample opportunity for our souls to be beaten down or chipped away at. Difficult relationships, grief, sickness, exhaustion, emotional wounding, difficult circumstances, etc. are all things that can deplete our souls so that they need to be restored, renewed and refreshed.

- ♥ What are some situations or circumstances, wounds, sin or brokenness that you are forced to deal with right now? How do these chip away at your soul and deplete your inner strength?
- ♥ How do you know when you need your soul restored? What do you feel? In the past, what are some things your Shepherd has done to restore your soul? To what green meadows and peaceful streams has he led you for food, water and rest?
- ♥ **Who** or **what**, besides the Shepherd, do you sometimes turn to, for restoration of your soul? Does it work? Why or why not?

23:4 - *The valley of the shadow of death* doesn't always mean physical death. It can also be translated the *valley of deep shadow* or *the valley of deep darkness*. It can mean experiencing physical and/or emotional pain, suffering, disease or injury including times of fear, doubt or disappointment. This imagery is consistent with the shepherd metaphor because the shepherd leads the flock through ravines and gullies where the steep and narrow slopes keep out the light. The darkness of the ravines represents the uncertainties of life that cause heartache and sorrow.

6. We are neither **afraid** or **fear evil** when we are in the *valley of deep darkness* because *Yahweh our Shepherd* is **with us** (23:4). According to the following Scriptures, what specific difference does God's presence make when we are in the valley of deep darkness?

Exodus 33:14	His presence goes with us, giving us rest, even in the dark valley
Deuteronomy 20:4	His presence is with us fighting for us against our enemies
Joshua 1:5	Since his presence is with us, no one will be able to stand up against us; even in the dark valley, he will never leave us alone or abandon us
Isaiah 43:2	Even though we go through the dark valley (the deep waters of trouble, the rivers of adversity, the fire of oppression), these things will not harm us or destroy us for God is with us even IN our suffering. He is experiencing these things WITH us and he will protect us.
Psalms 118:6	Because His presence is with us, protecting us, we have no fear of what another person might be trying to do to us. Our Shepherd is stronger than a mere mortal.

- ♥ When you are in a dark valley, is it enough for you that God is *with you* and will never leave you or forsake you? Why or why not? Is there something you would rather have besides his presence?
- ♥ In what dark valleys do you walk now? How have you experienced God's presence? How, exactly, is God with you? What do you do when it doesn't *feel* like God is with you?

7. The Shepherd's **rod** and **staff** (23:4) is often seen as God's **discipline** (correction) and **guidance**, given through his **Word**. Read the following verses from **Psalms 119** and note some ways that **God's Word** can *correct, guide* and *comfort* us.

119:11 Hiding God's Word in our hearts (studying, memorizing and meditating on it) will keep us from sin and disobedience	119:28 When our souls are weary with grief and sorrow, God's Word will encourage and strengthen us
119:67 God's Word disciplines us (corrects and trains us) so that we don't wander off away from God and his paths.	119:101 Obedience to God's Word keeps us from the path of evil

119:105

God's Word guides us, showing us how to live, where to go, what to do

119:133

God's Word guides us so that we are not overcome by sin and evil

- ♥ What *do you do* to keep God's Word in your heart and mind? What *could you do*?
- ♥ Share a time when God's Word **corrected** you or a time when it gave you specific **guidance**.
- ♥ How can even God's discipline and correction be a comfort? When has his discipline comforted you? **Just as we discipline and train a child and they feel safe and secure knowing their boundaries, so God's correction and discipline can be to us.**

8. The Shepherd nourishes his sheep both physically and spiritually. Read **23:5** in several translations. What three symbols of nourishment are in this verse and what could they symbolize?

In this verse, the Shepherd is seen a good and gracious Host:

The Shepherd prepares a table or feast for us in the presence of our enemies – The Shepherd supplies our physical and spiritual needs even in the midst of adversity. He vindicates us in the presence of our enemies so that we can forget and lay aside our trouble and tears.

The Shepherd anoints our head with oil – In hot climates, oil was poured on a guest to keep them cool and refreshed. God renews and refreshes our body and soul with his abundant goodness.

Our brimming cup overflows – the cup is seen as a *cup of blessing* or a *cup of salvation*. The overflowing cup is seen as God's abundant goodness to us, giving us his very best as he lavishes blessing on us.

- ♥ What do you think is the significance of a lavish table prepared in the presence of one's enemies? What message would this send the "enemy?" What does it mean for the guest (sheep)?
 - ♥ What table does the Good Shepherd spread for us (**Luke 22:19-20**) and how does it nourish us? **Jesus, our Good Shepherd, gives his body and blood for us to feed on in the bread and wine of the Eucharist or the Communion Table. We feed on Christ's body and blood by faith which spiritually strengthens and nourishes us so that we can live for and follow Jesus. In Communion, we take in the Life and Light of Christ.**
 - ♥ In the Old Testament, oil was often a sign of God's provision and blessing. With what "oil" does the Shepherd anoint his sheep (**Psalms 45:7; Isaiah 61:3** [NIV])? **The oil of joy or gladness** When has this experience been yours?
9. The cup is a symbol of the Shepherd's bountiful provision. With what does our cup overflow (**23:6**)? **Goodness (kindness, beauty) and unfailing love (mercy)**
- ♥ **Goodness and love will follow me . . .** The Hebrew word for *love* in this verse is *hesed*, a love that never quits. It is a love that doesn't just follow us, but *pursues* us. What does it mean to you to be continually pursued by the Shepherd's love? When have you been most aware this pursuing love?

♥ Heart Therapy

Praying Psalm 23 – As you go about your days and weeks, carry this Psalm with you (if you do not have it memorized already) and recite it as often as you can. Even a slow recitation of the psalm will take under a minute. Try to recite this psalm before you fall asleep each night, and again when you wake up. Recite it so often that it becomes second nature to you, as natural as breathing. You can recite it at red lights, waiting in lines or anytime your mind is free. Over the next month or so (until Easter, for example), try to recite this psalm several times a day.

Psalm 23 contains the image of a generous, tender, loving God who shepherds us. By saying the words and letting the images fill your mind, you will embed these truths deep into your heart, and your mind and body will begin to be shaped by these words. God's Word is *living and active – full of living power that cuts deep into our innermost thoughts and desires* (Hebrews 4:12). Filling your heart and mind with the words of **Psalm 23** will assure you of **Yahweh Rohi's** love and care as you experience his very real presence.

BELOW IS THE SUPPLEMENTARY SCRIPTURE FOR THIS LESSON THAT CAN BE PRINTED OUT FOR SMALL GROUP TIME

NIV Isaiah 53:6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Psalms 100:3 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.

Jeremiah 50:6 “My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.

Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Ezekiel 34:11-12 “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them.

12 As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness.

15-16 I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. **16** I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

Isaiah 40:11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

John 10:2-4 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. **3** The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

14-15 “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.

Exodus 33:14 The LORD replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

Deuteronomy 20:4 For the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory.”

Joshua 1:5 No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.

Isaiah 43:2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Psalms 118:6 The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

Psalms 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

28 My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

101 I have kept my feet from every evil path so that I might obey your word.

105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

133 Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.

NLT Isaiah 53:6 All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God’s paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the guilt and sins of us all.

Psalms 100:3 Acknowledge that the LORD is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Jeremiah 50:6 “My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray and turned them loose in the mountains. They have lost their way and cannot remember how to get back to the fold.

Matthew 9:36 He felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn’t know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd.

Ezekiel 34:11-12 “For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search and find my sheep. **12** I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places to which they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day.

15-16 I myself will tend my sheep and cause them to lie down in peace, says the Sovereign LORD. **16** I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them, yes—feed them justice!

Isaiah 40:11 He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

John 10:2-4 For a shepherd enters through the gate. **3** The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. **4** After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they recognize his voice.

14-15 “I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, **15** just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep.

Exodus 33:14 And the LORD replied, “I will personally go with you, Moses. I will give you rest—everything will be fine for you.”

Deuteronomy 20:4 For the LORD your God is going with you! He will fight for you against your enemies, and he will give you victory!”

Joshua 1:5 No one will be able to stand their ground against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.

Isaiah 43:2 When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.

Psalms 118:6 The LORD is for me, so I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?

Psalms 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. **28** I weep with grief; encourage me by your word. **67** I used to wander off until you disciplined me; but now I closely follow your word.

101 I have refused to walk on any path of evil, that I may remain obedient to your word. **105** Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path. **133** Guide my steps by your word, so I will not be overcome by any evil.