



Lesson 14 ~ Yahweh Rohi

The LORD is My Shepherd

Psalms 23

♥ Heart Talk

When you meet with your small group, share something about 1) your experience of **being silent for 5 minutes with God**, or 2) something about praying the *Daily Prayer* from **Lesson 11**, or 3) something about the exercise of *Lectio Divina* from **Lesson 12**. Have any of these exercises enriched your relationship with God or helped you face difficult circumstances? The exercise of *Lectio Divina* can be used with any Scripture. It is a wonderful way to hear God speak to you personally through his Word.

Introduction

The Hebrew word for *shepherd* is *rohi* (RO-ee). The primary meaning of *rohi* is *to feed, to tend, to lead to pasture* – as a shepherd does his flock. Besides *shepherd*, the word *rohi* is also translated as *feeder, keeper, companion, friend* and *pastor* in the Old Testament. This name for God – *The LORD is my Shepherd* – comes from the opening line of **Psalms 23**, but the imagery of God as a shepherd and his people as sheep runs throughout the whole Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. *Yahweh* is depicted as the *Shepherd* in the Old Testament and Jesus is portrayed as *The Good Shepherd* in the New Testament.

Sheep are portrayed in the Old Testament as helpless, dependent animals. Sheep tend to go astray and get lost and they need to be led and guided to places where they can pasture and rest. They are also defenseless animals and require someone stronger than themselves to guard them from adversaries. But, for all their weaknesses, sheep were the wealth of Israel, providing food to eat, wool to be woven into clothing, and hides that were tanned and sewn together for tents. Sheep were precious and shepherds dedicated a lifetime to their care; the relationship of sheep to shepherd was personal and intimate.

♥ Heart Preparation

Jesus' Encouraging Words to You . . .

When anxiety attempts to wedge its way into your thoughts, remind yourself that I Am your Shepherd. The bottom line is that I am taking care of you; therefore, you needn't be afraid of anything. Rather than trying to maintain control over your life, abandon yourself to My will. Though this may feel scary and dangerous, the safest place to be is in My will . . . Lie down in green pastures of Peace. Learn to unwind whenever possible, resting in the Presence of your Shepherd. This electronic age keeps My children "wired" much of the time, too tense to find Me in the midst of their moments. I built into your very being the need for rest. How twisted the world has become when people feel guilty about meeting this basic need! How much time and energy they waste by being always on the go, rather than taking time to seek My direction for their lives . . .

Jesus Calling (February 15; October 24) by Sarah Young

The Lord is my Shepherd . . . He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength . . . Continue to practice the discipline of **sitting quietly before God, in silence, for 5 minutes** in order to prepare your heart to receive from God. In this time of quietness, don't try to *do* anything – just *be*. Even though it may seem that nothing is happening, God uses your silence before him to work his purposes deep in your heart and to *renew* and *restore* your soul.

A Prayer to Help Prepare Your Heart

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:

Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,

That we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life,

Which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ;

Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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	
Psalm 100:3	
Jeremiah 50:6	
Matthew 9:36	

- ♥ 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	
Isaiah 40:11	
John 10:2-4, 14-15	

- ♥ 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**)? Why is this important? 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?

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

- ♥ 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?

- ♥ 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 _____ (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	
Deuteronomy 20:4	
Joshua 1:5	
Isaiah 43:2	
Psalm 118:6	

- ♥ 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 **Psalm 119** and note some ways that **God's Word** can *correct, guide* and *comfort* us.

119:11	119:28
119:67	119:101
119:105	119:133

- ♥ 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?
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?

- ♥ 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?
 - ♥ In the Old Testament, oil was often a sign of God's provision and blessing. With what "oil" does the Shepherd anoint his sheep (**Psalm 45:7; Isaiah 61:3 [NIV]**)? 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 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.