



LESSON 4: FOR YOU ARE WITH ME . . .

PSALM 23

BACKGROUND

Psalm 23 is, without doubt, the most familiar, best loved, and probably the most memorized of all the Psalms. It has given God's people comfort and assurance for thousands of years. We can assume that even Jesus, while living life on this earth, also loved and was reassured by this Psalm. The images in Psalm 23 (sometimes called The Shepherd Psalm) are timeless and speak right to the heart.

This Psalm expresses confidence in God's goodness – in this life and the life to come. We love the personal way David (who was once a shepherd) speaks of God as well as the word pictures he uses for God's calming and comforting guidance. Many, many people over the years have been comforted by this Psalm during difficult circumstances and dark periods in their lives.

Psalm 23 is a *Song of Trust*. Trust is believing God's promises *before* you see them fulfilled. The Psalms of Trust are something to hold on to during our hard times while we are *waiting* for God to act. These Psalms convey the assurance that, "No matter what, God, I believe in who You are and what You have done. Nothing will shake my confidence in You!"

Many Bible scholars see two metaphors for God in this Psalm: *The Lord is my Shepherd* (v. 1-4) and *The Lord is my Host* (v. 5-6). Whether you see the whole Psalm as a picture of a shepherd with his sheep or whether you see the second image of God as an extravagant host to his guests, the message is the same; we are invited into an intimate relationship with our Creator who promises to lovingly care for us and abundantly meet our every need.

DISCUSSION STARTER

- What is the best party/celebration you have ever attended where the host/hostess went all out to make the guests welcome? What made it a great party? How did it make you feel as a guest?

PREPARATION

1. Before you read **Psalm 23**, ask the **Holy Spirit to teach you and guide you into all truth** (John 16:13). You may want to use the prayer of the well-known 19th century missionary, Amy Carmichael, as your prayer throughout this course: *Holy Spirit, think through me until your ideas become my ideas*. Or, you could use King David's prayer from Psalm 119:18: *Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law*.
2. Read **Psalm 23** slowly and thoughtfully in at least two translations. As you read and reread, mark any words or phrases that you like.
3. **Write out** at least one verse from **Psalm 23** that you like OR write down one of the word pictures or images from the Psalm that you like and explain why it speaks to you.

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

QUESTIONS

4. Even if you don't know a thing about sheep and shepherds, what does **23:1** reveal about the role of a shepherd?

Translate the truth of **23:1** to your relationship with God. What is God's promise to you?

♥ Does this mean God will give you all that you desire? Why or why not?

This Psalm opens with the words, "**The LORD.**" English versions of the Bible capitalize all the letters in *LORD* to depict the Hebrew word *Yahweh*, a personal name for God that means *I AM WHO I AM* or *I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS EXISTS* (Exodus 3:14). The name *Yahweh* implies that God is absolutely self-existent and conveys the idea that God *was, is, and always will be*. *Yahweh* is a covenant-making God. He makes promises and keeps them!

5. How does the name *Yahweh* impact the statement, "The **LORD** (*Yahweh*) is my Shepherd?"

6. God proclaimed himself as *Yahweh* to Moses and then gave a description of himself. Read **Exodus 34:5-7**. What does God's description add to the meaning of *Yahweh is my Shepherd*.

7. God is portrayed as a shepherd all through the Bible. Read **Isaiah 40:11**. What words would you use to describe the kind of relationship God has with his "sheep."

♥ Do these images and descriptions of God as shepherd match your personal concept and experience of God? If not, what image or word picture does fit your personal experience?

8. In the following verses, what specific acts does the Shepherd perform for the sheep and what words describe what God promises us.

Psalm 23	What the Shepherd does:	God's Promises
Verse 2	<i>He makes me lie down in green pastures</i>	<i>Rest, nourishment, security</i>
Verse 2		
Verse 3		
Verse 3		
Verse 4		
Verse 4		

9. From the list of images and promises in **Question 8**, what do you need most from God right now and why?

How would you like God to provide for this need?

Will you ask him to do this for you?

Do you expect him to answer?

- ♥ Who and what, besides God, do you sometimes depend on to fulfill the needs listed in Question 8?
 - ♥ What motivates God to guide us? Does it depend on you? **23:3** (especially NIV and Amplified)
 - ♥ What does "for his name's sake" mean? (**23:3**)
10. *Restore* means to *give or receive something back that was taken or lost* or to *give somebody new strength or vigor*. Why do our souls need to be **restored**? (**23:3**)

What are some situations or circumstances, wounds, sin or brokenness that you are forced to deal with right now? How do these things chip away at your soul and deplete your inner strength?

What are some ways that God restores us? **Psalm 19:7; 80:3; 85:2-4; 1 Peter 5:8-10**

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."

11. Why is it that we *fear no evil* even when we are in a *valley of deep darkness*? **Psalm 23:4; 73:23-24**

What difference does this make? **Exodus 33:14-16; Deuteronomy 20:4; Joshua 1:5,9; Isaiah 43:2**

- ♥ Is this enough for you? Why or why not?

12. Why do sheep need a shepherd and why do we need God as our Shepherd? **Isaiah 53:6; Matthew 9:36; 26:31.**

- ♥ What would be your condition or where would you be right now if God was **not** your shepherd?
- ♥ Cattle and goats are *driven* but sheep are *led*. How do we benefit by being led by our Shepherd instead of being guided or driven from behind?

Rod and staff – The rod was a club worn at the shepherd’s belt and used to ward off predators. The staff was a walking stick with the familiar crook that was used to keep the sheep in control by guiding wandering sheep or encircling and rescuing sheep who had fallen off the path into a gully.

- ♥ How can God’s rod and staff be a comfort to us when we are in a dark valley?
- ♥ Jesus and his contemporaries knew the Psalms well; they heard them read in the synagogue and committed many of them to memory. They knew that *Yahweh* was their **Shepherd**. What was Jesus indirectly telling his disciples in **John 10: 11, 14**?

THE LORD IS MY HOST

Hospitality was very important and greatly valued in the ancient Middle East. The host’s generosity often centered around a celebration feast or banquet given in honor of the guests. In **Psalm 23:5-6**, we have the image of God inviting us into his house as an honored guest!

13. How does *Yahweh* the Host welcome his guests (or sheep)? **23:5**

14. God nourishes us both physically and spiritually. What do you think are some things that are on his spiritual table that he has prepared for you?
 - ♥ What is the significance of a lavish table prepared in the presence of one’s enemies? What message does this send the enemy and how does it make him feel? How does it make the guest feel?
 - ♥ How is the image of God’s public provision in the presence of enemies prophetic? **Luke 22:20-22; Col. 2:15**
15. In the hot climate of the Middle East, honored guests were often anointed with oil (**Luke 7:44-46**). With what “oil” does our Host anoint us? **Psalm 45:7; 133:1-2**
 - ♥ What are some other things that *anointing* and *oil* symbolize in Scripture?
 - ♥ The cup is a symbol of the host’s bountiful provision. What does our Host make our cups overflow with? **23:6**
16. What is the significance of our Shepherd *leading* us (v.2) and goodness and love *following* (v.6) us?
 - ♥ How long will we be guests at God’s table and house? **23:6**

RESPONSE

17. What is the last great act of care, protection and hospitality given by our *Shepherd* and *Host*? **Revelation 7:11-17; 21:3-7**
 - ♥ Considering all that your *Great Shepherd and Host* promises you, can you trust and believe him? Reflect on what you have learned in this lesson. What is an appropriate response on your part?