

# Experiencing the Heavenly Shepherd

Psalm 23

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Yesterday morning for four hours about 150 people prayed, confessed sin, forgave each other, loved each other and prayed for each other. As a group, many of them leaders from this church, surrendered anew their personal life and this church to God for Him to take it, shake it, break it, heal it, lead it, empower it, and strengthened it as He sees fit. I wish each one of you could have been there. God's Spirit was strong and it was good. I believe that in the coming weeks, months, and years we will look back on yesterday and today and say that was a spiritual marker and a breakthrough for Southside Baptist Church.

But it is time to turn the page. Write a new chapter. Begin a new story. In **Isaiah 43:18** God says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. (19) See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland... I provide water in the desert and streams in the wasteland, to give drink to My people, my chosen, (21) the people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise.... Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" This weekend, in a normal but unusual way God shared with me this thought I need to pass on to you. Our dreams of the future need to be bigger than our memories of the past. God says, "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" Our dreams of the future need to be bigger than our memories of the past. May your thoughts be so consumed and excited about where God is leading you that you don't have time to dwell on the bad things that has happened to you. "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" Our dreams of the future need to be bigger than our memories of the past.

## [Pray]

Take your Bible and open it to Psalm 23. Let me remind you that this is the Word of God. You are what it says you are. You have what it says you have. And you can do what it says you can do. And we are to live by faith and not by sight. With that said...

Every one of us needs God's guidance. You need His leadership when it comes to being a dad or a mom. You need His direction on how to love your wife or husband. You need His help when it comes to managing your emotions, your thoughts, your relationships, your money and everything else in your life.

One of the reasons people are not satisfied in life is because they are looking for satisfaction in the wrong places. The reason they are not experiencing peace is because they are following the wrong advice. The reason they don't have strength to get through the tough times is because they are relying on the wrong source. God addresses all of this and more in Psalm 23. God is calling out to you, asking you to allow Him to be your Heavenly Shepherd who can guide, lead and direct you to be who He wants you to be and to do what He wants you to do. He wants you to be one of His sheep. He wants to be your Shepherd. He wants you to follow Him and His ways.

Here's the thing. **When you follow the Shepherd, you experience His blessings.** If you want to receive God's promised blessings then you need to follow Him. If you want your family to receive God's promised blessings then your family needs to follow Him. If you want this church to receive God's promised blessings then this church needs to follow Him.

If God is your Shepherd you will experience several wonderful things. Psalm 23 gives us at least six things we can expect to experience as we are following our Heavenly Shepherd. We are going to examine each verse in detail over the next few weeks, but today let's get a bird's eye view of Psalm 23 by looking briefly at six benefits of having God as your Shepherd.

### **1. I can experience satisfaction.**

**Number one, I can experience satisfaction.** Verse 1 says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want."

I read about a pastor who stood before a Sunday School class of young children and asked, "How many of you can quote Psalm 23?" Several of them raised their hands including a little girl who was about five years old. The pastor was surprised that such a young child would know Psalm 23. So he asked her to come to the front of the room to recite it for the class. Standing before the class with hands clasped behind her back, the young girl smiled, and the minister smiled back. Then, with great confidence, she said only this: "The Lord is my shepherd. That's all I want."

When you have the Lord as your Shepherd, you really have all you need because all you really need flows from Him. The important thing to understand about Psalm 23 is the importance of having a relationship with the Shepherd. Psalm 23 is less about *where* we go (like beside still waters or through the valley of the shadow of death), than it is about *whom* we go with. Without the presence of the Heavenly Shepherd it doesn't matter where you are or where you are headed you are not going to be satisfied. Satisfaction and contentment comes from having the Lord as your Shepherd. As you get closer to God you will discover yourself saying and experiencing the I shall not want principle more and more. You begin to find your satisfaction in Him.

Here's where the rubber meets the road. If you have a problem with contentment and satisfaction in life then you have a problem in your relationship with God. If the Lord is really your Shepherd and leader in life then your "wanter" is not going to want as much. "The Lord is my Shepherd and I shall not want." When God is your Shepherd your going to experience satisfaction. **When you follow the Shepherd, you experience His blessings.**

## **2. I can experience serenity.**

When you have the Lord as your Shepherd you experience satisfaction and **number two, you can experience serenity**. You will have an inner peace and calmness about you. Look at **verse 2**, "He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul." Your Heavenly Shepherd knows when you are spiritually, mentally, and emotionally worn out. He will lead you to where you can rest and recharge your batteries.

Now notice that God is "leading" you to "green pastures" and "quiet waters." He is not leading you to a play ground so you can play your life away. He is not leading you to a porch to watch life drive by. He is leading you to "green pastures" and "quiet waters." For a sheep, that means food and nourishment. There will be times in your life that it will be all peace and quiet and God is teaching you great things from His Word and you are a sponge. Soak it up, drink it up, feed on His Word. Let it develop in you a strong heart, godly mind, and holy endurance. He will lead you to these spiritual moments and places in your life because He knows that ahead of you are also difficult times and valleys called the shadows of death. Before the valley God always makes sure you have a green pasture to grow in, develop in, and rest in.

So when God is your Shepherd He will take you to places that develop and strengthen you in order for you to become the godly man or woman He created you to be. It will be those places of peace and calmness where you feed on His Word and digest His truth in order to help you grow. **When you follow the Shepherd, you will experience His blessings.**

### **3. I can experience strength.**

When you have the Lord as your Shepherd you will experience an inner satisfaction and an inner peace and calmness that produces growth, **but now look at number three, you will also experience strength. Verse 3** says, “He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”

God will lead you in the path of righteousness. He will give you the strength to make the right decision and to do the right things. There are all kinds of paths you can take in life. You can take the path of money, path of indulgence, path of greed, path of laziness, path of a workaholic, path of selfish, path of drugs, or path of selfish pleasure.

But God says He wants to lead you in the paths of righteousness. He wants to lead you in making right decisions that lead to a life of righteousness. Right decisions about who to date. Right decisions about who to marry. Right decisions about training your children. Right decisions about managing your money. Right decisions about your health, emotions, actions and reactions to people and problems. He wants to be your Shepherd who leads you down the right path, not the wrong path.

But I want you to see why your Heavenly Shepherd is going to lead you in paths of righteousness. **Verse 3** says the Lord is going to help you make right decisions and lead you down the right path “for His name’s sake.” That means for His glory. Here’s the catch. Anything done for God’s glory is not only good for God’s best interest, but also your best interest. When you are walking on God’s path you are walking in strength, victory, success, and experiencing what it means to be an overcomer. God, as your Shepherd, wants to guide you into that life. The Lord is my Shepherd and I will experience strength. **When you follow the Shepherd, you will experience His blessings.**

#### 4. I can experience safety.

When God is your Shepherd you experience contentment, peace, and guidance.

**Fourth, you experience safety.** Look at **verse 4**, “Even 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.” When Psalm 23 was written shepherds used a rod that was about 2-3 feet long with a hard knob on the end to protect the sheep from wild animals and they would use a long staff with a crook at the end to reach the sheep that fell into ditches or crevices.

God is telling us that He is going to protect us and that He will rescue us when we fall. Verse 4 is not a promise that nothing bad or difficult will happen. It is a promise that when bad or hurtful things happen God will be there to get you through it or out of it. This does not protect you from Satan’s *attacks* but it does protect you from Satan’s *destruction*. When things look bad, you don’t need to be afraid. Your God is with you. He will comfort you and He will protect you. He is your Shepherd. He loves you and cares about you. Follow His lead. Trust what He says and you will get through this valley. The Lord is my Shepherd and I shall experience divine safety. **When you follow the Shepherd, you will experience His blessings.**

#### 5. I can experience sustenance.

**Now number five, when you have God as your Shepherd you can experience sustenance.** Notice **verse 5**, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” There are three things you need to see here. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies...” that speaks of your victory and the filling of your soul. “You anoint my head with oil...” that speaks of your joy and freshening of your spirit. “My cup overflows” speaks of your blessings and your freedom for service and ministry. God is going to make sure you have everything you need in order for you to do everything He has created you to be and do. He is your Heavenly Shepherd. He loves you. He cares about you. God is going to work in your life in such a way that not only will you feast in victory, but you will be a blessing to others. The Lord is my Shepherd and I will experience His divine sustenance of victory in order to be a blessing to others. **When you follow the Shepherd, you will experience His blessings.**

## 6. I can experience security.

**Finally, you and I can experience security... eternal security. Verse 6** says, “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Throughout our lives we will travel many miles. Sometimes we are in the valley where we lose someone we love or fighting a battle against an illness. Sometimes we find ourselves in a time of enjoying life and relationships. Other times you may look at your marriage and wonder what went wrong. But then there are those times of quiet waters and green fields and then we go through another dark valley to enter another green field. The older I get and the more years I have behind me the more I realize, regardless of how difficult or wonderful life has been, I have discovered that God’s “goodness and love followed me all the days of my life” without exception. That word “follow” means to “pursue” and “hunt down” to over take.

God’s goodness and love followed me from the moment I was born. Like some of you, I’ve gone through a lot. I’ve seen my parents fight. I’ve seen my parents drunk and my dad in jail many times. I had a high school buddy kill himself. I’ve had scary times with removal of lumps that I thought might be cancer. I’ve sat around a table with my new bride as a young man having to eat watered down tomato soup. I’ve had ups and I’ve had downs. I’ve been on the mountain and I’ve been in the valley. But I can stand here and testify to you that God’s goodness and love followed me all the days of my life. The good days, bad days, and ugly days God’s goodness was pursuing me. Whether I was running to God or away from God, God was always hunting me down to bless me.

But the greatest day of my life was when God’s goodness and love caught me and saved me from my sin. From that moment on I’ve been able to say, as David said in **verse 6**, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” That is a secure statement. Because God’s goodness and love pursued me, caught me and engulfed me with His salvation my eternal future is completely secure. **When you follow the Shepherd, you experience His blessings.**

## Conclusion

When the Lord is your Shepherd you get a satisfaction the world cannot take away, you get a peace that cannot be explained, you get strength that cannot be measured, you get safety that cannot be replaced, you get a sustenance that leads to victory, and you get security that last forever. When the Lord is your Shepherd you shall not want.

But let me ask the obvious question. Have you made the Lord your Shepherd? Would you like to have confidence to be able to say, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever?" You can have that kind of confidence. You can have that kind of security.

**Romans 10:9** says, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." [Lead in a prayer of salvation].

Maybe you are already a Christian. You are already one of God's sheep. Maybe **Isaiah 53:6** describes you today which says, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." You are a Christian but you have slipped back into the old ways you used to live. You started doing things you told God you would once never do again. God still loves you. He never stopped. You are still His child. Come back to Him. Confess what you have done. Make it right.