

## “PURSUED BY GOODNESS AND LOYAL LOVE”

### Psalm 23

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#### INTRODUCTION

David knew what it was like to be pursued by enemies.

- For years he had been pursued by the fanatical jealousy and hatred of King Saul.
- He often found himself and his people being pursued by enemy nations round-about—especially the Philistines.
- In his later kingdom he found himself being pursued even by his own son, Absalom, and by his own people who had betrayed him and become subject to Absalom. David fled into the wilderness of Judah toward the Jordan River, where faithful messengers warned him to cross the Jordan and continue his flight.
- David and his soldiers came to Mahanaim, east of the Jordan River, where faithful friends, especially Barzillai the Gileadite, came to him and his men with desperately needed food, drink, and supplies—“spreading a table before him in the presence of his enemies” (II S. 17:24-29).
- David was walking “through the valley of the shadow of death”; but the Lord was with him!
- But, oh, how he longed for the peaceful tranquility and beauty of the tabernacle of God’s divine presence in Jerusalem; how he longed for those courts.
- The Lord reminded him of all of his early years watching those sheep, guiding them, giving them rest, grassy pastures, restful watering places, restoring their lives, guiding them into the right paths of safety and protection—all because he so cared for these sheep. David remembered the times that he used both his rod of protection against predators and thieves and leaned on and guided the sheep with his staff.

Although we cannot be certain of it, it is likely that the scenario above may provide the background for this amazingly beautiful psalm. David was the pursued one, but throughout his life he found himself being pursued by Someone who would never leave him nor forsake him; Someone who would provide him an abundance of **goodness** and generous **loyal love**. This One was his **SHEPHERD OF LOVE**.

As David reflected back on his life, he realized that he was always pursued—but not by a multitude of enemies; *he was pursued by divine GOODNESS and LOVE*.

#### **YOU MUST KNOW THAT GOD, AS YOUR SHEPHERD, PURSUES YOU WITH GOODNESS AND LOYAL LOVE.**

This psalm breathes a peace “so deep, a serenity so profound, that even the thought of the shadow of death cannot trouble it”. There is no psalm quite like this with no “doubt, misgiving, fear, anxiety” present at all; this amazing little psalm has brought tons of comfort and peace to millions of hurting souls over the centuries.

In Psalm 23 we see **two** primary subjects:

- 1) What God the Shepherd Does; 2) What I the sheep do as the Result.

In the Orient there was a very close attachment between the shepherd and his sheep. At any moment there were potential dangers of *a mountain torrent of rain, robbers from the hills, attack from wolves, etc.* Of course the days of summer are long and intensely hot, the pasture land becomes scarce and the water at times difficult to find. “The shepherd’s care and skill must be taxed to provide for his flock.” “Alone in those vast solitudes, with no human being near, the shepherd and the sheep feel a life in common. Differences disappear, the vast interval between the man and the brute: the single point of union is felt strongly. One is the love of the protector; the other the love of the grateful life: and so ...there is woven by night and day, by summer suns and winter frosts, a living network of sympathy.”

#### I. WHAT OUR SHEPHERD DOES

##### A. He gives us a Personal Relationship (“**my Shepherd**”—v. 1)

**Yahweh** is first in this psalm, not only by its position as first in the clause but also by the focus of the content of the psalm on Him. Yet the psalmist has a relationship with Him to which he is committed. Yahweh is His name showing His “absolute faithfulness”

##### B. He gives us Rest (2)

- a. Secure and lush pastures—literally dwelling places of grass—cool to eyes and touch. Note that “he makes me lie down”—he cares for me!
- b. Restful places of cool and refreshing waters—not “**still waters.**” The rest is not of the waters, but of those reclining beside them. Note that God is the One leading us there.

##### C. He Restores my Soul (3a).

- a. My life and health and well-being—like the sheep when thirsty and hungry and tired.
- b. My Soul when tired and weary, and even when having wandered astray—he restores me!

##### D. He Guides me in “Paths” of Righteousness (v. 3b)

“Tracks”—from the Hebrew words for “calf” and then “cart” pulled by a calf; this word refers to the “entrenchments” or “ruts” left by the cart wheels after months and years of use. The idea here is that of “staying in the “tracks”!

1. Doing the **right things as determined by God.**
2. **God himself doing the “right” thing** as determined by His relationship and covenant promises with His people.
3. **All of this is for “the sake of His name—His revealed character.** He must display His righteous character, and have His people do so, so that His name will not find reproach.

##### E. He is present with me in “the valley of the shadow.” (4)

1. Severe trauma and trouble—a “deep, dark, valley”
2. Even death itself, or the danger of death is in view.

##### F. He Protects me and cares for me (4c)—“rod and staff”

##### G. He lavishly provides for me (5) (**He is not only my Shepherd, but also my generous Host**).

1. Food—“prepares” —spreads a table before me
2. Anointing—“makes fat my head” with oil
3. Drink—cup of “saturation”

**My enemies are helpless to prevent such abundant blessing!** They are defeated; this may well be a “victory celebration” or “inauguration festival”.

##### H. He pursues me with **Goodness and Loyal Love** (6)

1. All the days of my life
2. Into Eternity: “for length of days”

*What a Shepherd we have! How good it is to be under His care!*

**He does all of these things for His sheep. Now, what do the sheep do as a result?**

- II. WHAT THE SHEEP DO
  - A. We do not lack (want)—v. 1
  - B. We do not Fear Evil (v. 4)
  - C. We dwell in the House of the Lord forever (6).

## CONCLUSION

So being God’s guest is for more than a day! **“It is to live with Him.”** The picture in this verse is of a pilgrimage where “goodness and mercy follow” David all his days, and this terminates “at *the house of the Lord*; but it is also a journey home.” The OT Levites considered the temple courts to be their true home (cf. Pss. 42 and 84). So did David in his heart and mind (27:4; 65:4). Genuine fellowship in God’s presence is in view here—and in His literal presence in Heaven ultimately. Perowne agrees that we cannot limit “the house of the Lord” to his earthly sanctuary (tabernacle in David’s day), but that it also speaks of “a more perfect and abiding blessedness in the everlasting sanctuary above” (p. 252). David becomes a member of God’s household “and an inmate of his family, enjoying his protection, holding communion with him, and subsisting on his bounty” (p. 109).

## Oh what a Great and Wonderful Shepherd we have!

- He gives me a personal relationship.
- He gives me Rest.
- He restores my souls.
- He guides me in paths of righteousness.
- He is present with me in the valley of the shadow.
- He protects me and cares for me
- He pursues me with Goodness and Mercy

Therefore: I shall not want any good thing; I shall not fear evil; I will dwell in the Lord’s house forever.

**YOU MUST KNOW THAT GOD, AS YOUR SHEPHERD, PURSUES YOU WITH GOODNESS AND LOYAL LOVE.**