

The Steps of the Shepherd

Psalm 23:1-6

Intro: Psalm 23 is one of the most recognizable portions of Scripture. Chances are, a lot of you have probably read the 23rd psalm. More so, you have probably learned it backwards and forwards, memorizing it at some point in your Christian life. This psalm is often recited at funerals, spoken at weddings, and used as a reference in counseling. And rightly so. When we take into consideration the truth that Jesus Christ is our Shepherd, everything changes about our lives. Yet, this psalm shouldn't be designated for certain events. It should be a guide for our daily living.

Transition: Speaking of daily living, this is what we will be showing the kids this week in our annual VBS. VBS starts tomorrow. The theme is Emerald Crossing: An Irish Adventure Through Psalm 23. This short psalm is the primary Scripture that the children will be taught this week. But how can we present what we ourselves don't understand? Have you considered the truths of Psalm 23?

I believe as we look at this well-known Psalm, we find three incredible truths that we must acknowledge as we walk in the steps of our Shepherd.

1. A Submissive Position (v. 1-2)

- (v. 1) - The first line of the psalm reads, "The Lord is my shepherd:" There's an implication that if there is a shepherd, there must also be sheep. If Christ is the Shepherd, that makes us the sheep.
- Scripture uses the comparison of sheep several times (**Isaiah 53:6**) (**1 Peter 2:25** – "For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.")
- (**John 10** – **Twice, Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd**) (v. 11, 14). Scripture makes clear the distinction between who the Shepherd is and who the sheep are.
- But often, in our lives, that line is blurred. We seem to have a hard time remembering that we are sheep. We tend to live our lives as if we are our

- own shepherd. We tend to stop submitting to the Shepherd and we start doing things our own way.
- (v. 1b) - No wonder David wrote “I shall not want.” David wasn’t going to live his life under his own control. He knew Who his Shepherd was.
 - (v. 2) - He knew God would supply from His bountiful resources. He knew God would lead and provide for Him. He knew the Lord was looking out for Him. He knew without doubt the Lord was his Shepherd, and no matter the pasture or body of water that came his way, God was watching over him.
 - (v. 2) – God doesn’t run out of resources. And we can never exhaust His supply. He is the Shepherd. You are a sheep.
 - Do you know the Shepherd? Do you recognize His voice (**John 10:4**)?
 - Could it be that you have forgotten that you are a sheep because you have stopped listening to the Shepherd’s voice?
 - This week in VBS, we want the children to learn Who their Shepherd is. We want them to know that God can lead and provide for them.

2. A Sustained Presence (v. 3-4)

- (v. 3) - The sheep hear the voice of their Shepherd and follow Him. Should a sheep go astray, and they do, the Shepherd will leave the flock to His helpers and go look for the lost sheep (**Luke 15:3-7**). He restores the sheep, if you will.
- The word “restore” in verse 3, in the Hebrew means, “to bring back.” God doesn’t let the sheep stay lost. He loves the sheep and cares for them because He is the Good Shepherd.
- Up to verse 3, David had been using the third person singular in describing the actions of the Shepherd (He). In verse 4, the second person singular is introduced (Thou). He stops talking ABOUT the Shepherd and starts talking TO the Shepherd.
- (v. 4b) - This change in pronouns implies a relationship. Even when David was facing difficulties and death, He knew He had the presence of God. Even when everything around him was chaos, David had the Lord in his life. He had peace that passed all understanding because he had a relationship with God.

- If you have a relationship with God, you must recognize the presence of God.
- How often do we forget about the presence of God (**Psalm 139:1-18**)? We live our lives as if God isn't even there (**Proverbs 15:3**). It seems we forget to observe the omnipresence of God. We forget He is watching over us. We forget about the relationship we have with Him.
- (v. 4c) – “Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.” This sounds like a strange thought. How could a rod and staff comfort the sheep?
- The rod was a weapon. The shepherd would use this heavy thing to attack and even kill predators looking for a feast.
- The staff was a crook which was used in chastising and correcting the sheep. Each evening in Bible times, the sheep would pass under the staff and the shepherd would count them.
- The sheep had a basic understanding that the Shepherd was equipped for emergencies and surprises (**Job 23:10- “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold**).
- Nothing catches the Good Shepherd off guard. The psalmist was indeed comforted by the rod and staff. We should be too.
- Once introduced to the Shepherd, we want our children to know He watches out for them. His presence is a permanent thing in the life of a believer.

3. A Secure Preservation (v. 5-6)

- (v. 5) – The word “table” doesn't refer to a physical table. The word David uses refers to a place that is spread out. These places were where the sheep would graze and rest as they prepared to return to the shepherd's fold.
- Once the sheep returned to the fold, the shepherd would pour food into the trough. The sheep would eat and then lay down to rest.
- Once the sheep laid down in the area surrounded by a stone wall, he applied a soothing oil to the hurt sheep. The oil was also applied to the head and horns of the sheep to keep away bugs. To the thirsty, he would give them a basin of water to drink from.
- The imagery is a picture of the Christian life. We are secure because of our Shepherd. We are preserved because of Him. He knows when we

- hurt. He knows when we are thirsty. He knows everything there is to know about us, the sheep.
- **(Example: George Mueller’s orphanage. “The children are dressed and ready for school. But there is no food for them to eat...” They all gathered in the orphanage dining room and prayed. A baker knocked on the door with some freshly baked bread. Soon after, there was a loud crack outside. The milk man came up the steps with fresh milk, after his wagon had broken a wheel. And that morning, the children were fed).**
 - **(Example: George Mueller developed a tradition when one of his orphanage children grew into adulthood. As they departed their home, he would give them a Bible in their right hand and a coin in their left. As long as they held onto the Bible, God would make sure there was always something in their left hand).**
 - Today, God wants us to simply follow Him. And He will provide.
 - (v. 6) – As an old man, David could look back at his life and dwell upon the fact that God’s goodness and mercy were defining attributes of his life. Even though he had moments of difficulty, God was still good and merciful. Goodness and Mercy would follow him because he was following his Shepherd.
 - Can you look at your life and trace the hand of God? Can you say today that the Lord is good and merciful? We want the kids this week at VBS to say the same **(Psalm 86:5)**