

Facing Life's Biggest Challenges

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep." John 10:11 NLT



- What are the biggest challenges you are facing in life?

Of all the psalms in the Bible, none have been read, quoted, become the text for a sermon, or made the lyrics of a worship song, more than the 23rd Psalm. Of the 150 psalms in the Bible, Psalm 23 has been the favorite for bringing comfort to people when they faced their darkest days.

Psalm 23 is Hebrew poetry. It is filled with symbolic expressions. Verse 4 has a key expression that is the basis for the theme of this Bible study. The metaphoric expression is *"walk through the darkest valley."* Life is filled with dark valleys. But the good news is, we do not have to walk through the dark valleys of life alone. There is a Shepherd that is willing to walk with us. Christ is the **Great Shepherd** (Hebrews 13:20), the **Good Shepherd** (John 10:11), and the **Head Shepherd** (1 Peter 5:4). And he wants to be your shepherd—if you will apologize for your sins, accept Christ as your Savior, and place your faith and trust in him, he will be your Savior and Shepherd.

David is the human author of Psalm 23. He understood first hand what it means to be a shepherd. He had been a shepherd what he was a boy. He refers to those days in 1 Samuel 16:11-13; 17:32-37.

Psalm 23 shows us several ways that Christ, our Great Shepherd (John 10:11), will help us as we walk through life's dark valleys.

Central Lesson:

Christ, our Great Shepherd, will lead us through life's dark valleys.

1. Sufficiency of **NEEDS** - Psalm 23:1

"The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need." NLT

For whatever needs we have, our Great Shepherd is able to provide for us. Paul wrote, *"And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus."* Philippians 4:19 NLT

2. Rest and **PEACE** - Psalm 23:2

"He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams."

Warren Wiersbe, explains, "The word translated 'leads' in verse 2 means 'to lead gently.' You cannot drive sheep. The sheep hear the shepherd's voice and follow him, just as we listen to Christ and his word and obey him (John 10:3-5, 16, 27)." *(The Transformation Study Bible, 23:2)*

The Life Application Study Bible states, "... Our Shepherd knows the 'green meadows' and 'peaceful streams' that will restore us. We will reach these places only by following him obediently. Rebelling against the shepherds leading is actually rebelling against our own best interest...." (23:2, 3). Will you obediently follow our Great Shepherd?

3. Strength & **GUIDANCE** - Psalm 23:3

"He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name."

Christ, the Great Shepherd, loves His sheep and takes good care of them. He renews their strength and guides them down the best path.

4. Protection & **COMFORT** - Psalm 23:4

"4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me."

Verse 4 is a key verse of this psalm. The dark valley represents any difficult situation in life that makes us fearful and stressed. Yet, Christ, our Great Shepherd, provides us a staff, a stick that the Shepherd uses to protect his sheep and comfort. The staff comes in many different varieties. What kind of staff has God placed in your hand? Also, Christ never leaves us by ourselves when we are in dark valleys. He is with us and walks alongside us.

Again, Warren Wiersbe writes, "Sheep lack good vision and are easily frightened in new circumstances, especially where it's dark. The presence of the shepherd calms them." *(The Transformation Study Bible, 23:4b)*

5. **HONOR** & Blessing - Psalm 23:5

"5 You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings."

Notice the great honor the Great Shepherd extends to His sheep. Not only does He prepare a feast for them (metaphoric for God's honor), but He does so before their enemies. They witness that the sheep has the presence of the Shepherd and his blessing and favor upon their lives.

6. God's **FAVOR** - Psalm 23:6

"6 Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever."

Warren Wiersbe writes, "As the Shepherd lay each night at the door of the sheepfold, he looked back over the day and gave thanks that the Lord had blessed them with goodness and unfailing love. As an old man, David looks back over his long life and came to the same conclusion. In spite of his sins and failures, he had been followed by goodness and unfailing love, which is the Old Testament equivalent of Romans 8:28." *(The Transformation Study Bible, 23:6)*

Central Lesson: Christ, our Great Shepherd, will help us when we walk through life's dark valleys.

- ▶ Accept Christ as your Savior. ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ.
- ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ▶ Attend a small group. ▶ Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses. ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.