



## SESSION 5

# OUR SHEPHERD

### ***The Point***

God guides us as He walks with us.

### ***The Passage***

Psalm 23:1-6

### ***The Bible Meets Life***

The Bible often depicts us as sheep. Left to ourselves, we wander off and place ourselves in harm's way. We can't find our way back. The Bible also depicts God as the Shepherd over us. He is the One who gently guides us, protects us, and comforts us. Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved psalms in Scripture, and it succinctly captures this picture of God as our loving Shepherd.

### ***The Setting***

Psalm 23 is attributed as "A psalm of David." From his experiences as a shepherd when he was a young boy, David was able to take the imagery of shepherding and apply it to God as the Shepherd of his life. The psalm is a powerful testimony of David's trust in God's guidance and care in times of both peace and trial.

## *What does the Bible say?*

**Shepherd** (v. 1)—A shepherd was responsible for guiding his flock to sources of food and water while protecting his sheep from danger.

### ***Psalm 23:1-6 (CSB)***

**<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need.**

**<sup>2</sup> He lets me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside quiet waters.**

**<sup>3</sup> He renews my life; he leads me along the right paths for his name's sake.**

**<sup>4</sup> Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.**

**<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

**<sup>6</sup> Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live.**

# GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes

Notes



**DISCUSS:** Invite your group members to discuss **Question #1** on page 59 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): **“When has a guide made an experience memorable?”** Allow time for each person to respond.

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** Display a few of the following items: a map, a compass, a cell phone with a GPS app, and hand-written directions. Ask: “In what kind of scenario is each item most useful for

directions? When is it least useful?” Explain that different scenarios call for different types of guidance. However, when it comes to navigating life as a young adult, we have the ultimate guide in Christ and the Holy Spirit.

**SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 60):** Maps are good to direct you from one place to another, but you need to study them before leaving on a trip. If you don’t know the route well, you will need to stop periodically and double-check the map. GPS is better, but you still have to pay attention. You must glance continually at the screen to get a visual on how soon a turn is coming or listen intently to the verbal instructions. The best way to travel is with someone who knows the route well. A guide can anticipate things and remind you to “get in the left lane” or “be prepared for a sharp turn.” They often know shortcuts that the GPS is not clever enough to know.

**SAY:** “Let’s admit it: we all need a guide to get through life. Even when we think we have things figured out, life inserts a roadblock and the journey changes. God is our Good Shepherd who guides us on the right path and in the right direction.”

**GUIDE:** Call attention to **The Point** on page 60 of the PSG: **“God guides us as He walks with us.”**

**PRAY:** Transition into the discussion with prayer.

**TIP:** Gather prayer requests at the end of the Bible study time; you will still get the same requests but with more urgency.

**PACK ITEM:**

Pack Item #5  
“Tasks of a Shepherd” poster

**PLAYLIST PICK:**

“My Anchor”  
By Christy Nockels



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## ***Psalm 23:1-3 Commentary***

**Verse 1:** Psalm 23 is attributed to King David, who knew God, his Shepherd, gave him the guidance he needed. Of course, David himself was a shepherd (1 Samuel 16:10-13; 17:34-37) and so he would have had firsthand knowledge of the images he wrote of in this psalm. The shepherd's primary responsibility was to ensure his flock of sheep was fed, watered, and kept safe from wild animals and robbers. David used God's covenant name, "the LORD" (*Yahweh*), emphasizing his Shepherd was the only true God (Deuteronomy 6:4), who had revealed Himself and His name (Exodus 3:13-14) and established His covenant with the Israelites (19:3-6). Also, David described the Lord as *my* shepherd (emphasis added). David was confident that the true God knew him personally and was always near.

David then offered a sweeping testimony of the results of his relationship with the Lord as his Shepherd. David could confidently say, "I have what I need." The Hebrew verb form indicates David was giving a testimony of his past personal experience. As David looked back over his life and wrote this psalm, he could see how as he had trusted and obeyed God he truly did not lack for anything.

**Verse 2:** Pastures for grazing were not abundant in the arid land of Israel, so a shepherd had to lead his flock to wherever such pastures were available. "Green pastures" emphasizes an abundance of food. The sheep under the great Shepherd's care are provided with more than they need and are satisfied.

The great Shepherd's flock grazes under the protection of His omnipotent power, allowing those under His watchful care to lie down in restful peace. "Beside quiet waters" echoes the first line of this verse. Like sheep beside a peaceful, refreshing source of water, those who follow the great Shepherd find contentment and rest.

**Verse 3:** As the shepherd ensured that the sheep were refreshed, so David could say of the Lord that "He renews my life." David knew from his own experience how God had restored and refreshed his life after difficult and exhausting situations. Additionally, the wise shepherd knew the safest and easiest routes to lead his flock to new pastures. Because sheep lack a sense of direction and are prone to becoming lost, they are in constant need of a shepherd. The wise and caring shepherd always led his flock in the right paths. For those under the Lord's care, "right paths" indicate living in the right or wise way instead of the wrong or foolish way.

David also knew that God would be his faithful Shepherd for His name's sake. *Yahweh*, God's covenant name, emphasized His faithfulness. Because God, by His very nature, is characterized by faithfulness, He can be depended upon in all things. God is always faithful to those who come under His authority and protection.

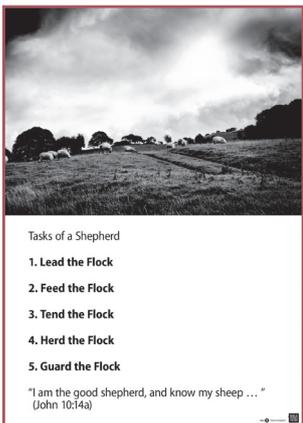


# STUDY THE BIBLE

## Notes

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**ALTERNATE QUESTION:**  
*When have you experienced your cup running over?*



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## Psalm 23:4-5 (CSB)

**4** *Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.* **5** *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Psalm 23:4-5.

**SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 62):** The rod and staff were the tools the shepherd used to protect and guide his sheep. The rod was a short, club-like stick worn on the belt for use against animals and thieves. The staff could serve as a walking stick, but when necessary, the shepherd employed it to keep the sheep from straying off the path. The staff of guidance may sometimes seem like a painful form of discipline until we remember that the shepherd’s singular desire is to protect his sheep.

**DISCUSS: Question #3** on page 62 of the PSG: **“When have you experienced God’s presence in a dark valley?”**

**LEADER PACK:** Divide your group into subgroups of three to four people each. Use **Pack Item #5**, “Tasks of a Shepherd” poster, to discuss the ways a shepherd cares for his sheep. Ask: “How has God proven Himself to be the Good Shepherd in your life?” Allow participants to respond within each subgroup.

**SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 63):** In verse 5, the imagery of the sheep and shepherd is exchanged for an even more intimate picture. David now pictured himself as a guest in the Lord’s house.

- » In the world of the Old Testament, to be invited to someone’s table created a bond of friendship and mutual loyalty. The host didn’t simply invite the guest to share his table and his home; he made him the honored guest at the feast.
- » The picture of a well-set table, the festive oil, and the brimming cup moves us beyond surviving trials as in verse 4; it gives us an image of joy, victory, and abundance.

**TRANSITION:** In the next verses we find one more reason to trust God’s care.

## ***Psalm 23:4-5 Commentary***

**Verse 4:** The task of the shepherd included guiding the sheep through any difficulties they encountered. In the process of leading his sheep to new pastures or safe places to drink, the shepherd sometimes had to take his sheep through valleys or dry stream beds with high rock walls where the sun could not reach. Dark places suggest danger, either from thieves or predators. However, David wrote that he would not be afraid when God led him along dark or frightening paths because he knew God his Shepherd was always with him. The shepherd carried a rod, a thick piece of wood usually about two feet long, that he used as a weapon against predators such as lions or bears. The shepherd used his staff to guide the sheep along the right paths. He would simply press the staff against their sides to assure them of his presence and to push them in the right direction. The staff was also used to free sheep caught in thickets and pull out sheep who had fallen into ditches or holes.

David knew firsthand what a protecting, guiding, and comforting Shepherd God had been to him. Over and over God had protected David from wild animals (1 Samuel 17:34-37), from the enemies of Israel (vv. 36-51), and had established him as king of Israel (2 Samuel 7:8-11).

**Verse 5:** At this point David shifted his thoughts of God from the image of a shepherd to that of a generous host. One of the normal acts of hospitality in the Middle East was to invite a traveler into your home for a meal. The meal provided was the freshest and best the host could offer. David described God as his Host at a lavish feast: "You prepare a table before me."

One of the responsibilities of a host was also to provide protection for his guest. In the same way a host would prepare a feast for a guest and provide for his protection, David spoke of God as his Host who had prepared a table for him, and even though his enemies were near, David knew he was under God's constant and all-sufficient protection.

Another act of a good host was to pour olive oil mixed with some type of perfume over the head of his guest. This was also known as anointing the guest. Anointing someone with oil was a symbolic gesture of honor (Luke 7:44-46) and rejoicing (Psalm 45:7; 92:10). David felt so blessed by being in God's presence that he was overwhelmed by God's favor toward him. That's why he could say that his "cup overflows." God had lavished His goodness on David. Paul expressed the same attitude in describing how God has lavished on us "the riches of his grace" by sending Jesus to die for us (Ephesians 1:5-8).



## ***Psalm 23:6 Commentary***

**Verse 6:** God not only makes covenants; He faithfully keeps them. He provides us with security. God had been faithful in making David king over Israel and enabling him to defeat Israel's enemies. "The LORD had given [David] rest on every side from all his enemies" (2 Samuel 7:1). God's goodness and faithful love would constantly pursue David for the rest of his life.

When David wanted to build a house for God (the temple), God told him that building Him a house could wait. Instead, He would build David a house, a kingdom that would last forever (vv. 11-16). David went on to say that he was confident that he would be able to "dwell in the house of the LORD" throughout his life. How could David dwell in the Lord's house if there was no house or temple during his lifetime? The temple in Jerusalem would not be built until the reign of David's son Solomon (1 Kings 5-7). What did David mean?

After David became king over all of Israel, he moved the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and set up a tent to house it (2 Samuel 6:12-17). Though David knew that God was not limited to any one location, even a holy place where God had promised to meet with His people Israel and where they were to worship Him, possibly David felt the presence of God most strongly in that dedicated space. Perhaps David was reflecting on the great privilege of going into this holy place so that he could worship God and seek His guidance (see Psalm 27:4-6).

However, in the context of Psalm 23 with its emphasis on God's constant presence even in the dark valleys, dwelling in the house of the Lord may mean more than dwelling in a physical structure. Look back at Psalm 19:1-6. David had seen the glory of God's creation as he tended his sheep. David had experienced God's powerful presence/deliverance when he had fought Goliath. David had known God's guidance when he went into battle against Israel's enemies. David had learned that God's people, those who seek, trust, and obey Him, are always in His presence. That's how David knew that he would always be near to the Lord who was his Shepherd.

Centuries after David wrote Psalm 23, one of David's descendants stood in Jerusalem and declared that He was "the good shepherd" (John 10:11,14). Like any good shepherd, He was willing to lay down his life for the sheep (v. 11). Not only was He willing, He promised that He would do just that (v. 15). Jesus kept His promise when He died on a cross outside the city as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (1:29). However, that was not the end. He arose from the dead on the third day and continues to be the Good Shepherd for everyone who listens to His voice calling them and decides to follow Him. To those who follow Him, He gives eternal life, and they will never perish (10:27-28).



5 minutes

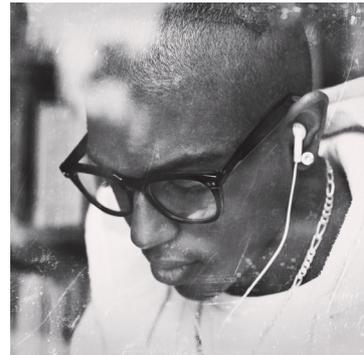
# LIVE IT OUT

## Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

**SAY:** “How will a relationship with the Good Shepherd make a difference in your life?”

**GUIDE:** Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 66 of the PSG.



- » **Rest and trust.** As the Good Shepherd, God provides everything you need. Identify one need or decision you’re currently facing and take it to Him in prayer each day for the next two weeks. Watch closely for His answer and choose to trust Him to provide exactly what’s needed.
- » **Stay close.** Sin will keep you from experiencing all the good the Shepherd desires for you. Acknowledge and confess any sin that keeps you separated from the One who desires to lead you to still waters.
- » **Slow down.** If you are rushed and harried, it may be that you aren’t taking time for the Shepherd to feed you and restore your soul. Slow down and spend time in His Word. Make changes to your schedule if necessary to ensure more quality time in God’s Word.

## Wrap It Up

**SAY:** “Life is full of twists and turns—a reliable guide makes all the difference. **God is our Good Shepherd who guides us, protects us, and comforts us. He is our Jehovah-Rohi.**”

**GROUPS  
MATTER.**

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