

*The Lord  
is  
Your Shepherd*



Ron Jones

# The Lord is Your Shepherd

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## Preface

Psalm 23 is a psalm of praise to the Lord for who he is and what he has done for David, which reflects the praise of every believer in every age, every place, and in every circumstance. The psalm has two major divisions as David refers to the shepherd's care for his sheep (v. 1-4) and the shepherd's care for his guests (v. 5-6). The main theme of this psalm is the great care and concern of the Lord for his people.

In this psalm, David answers some important questions that we can ask ourselves when we are suffering, "Does the Lord really care about me? Is he really concerned about my needs? Will he help me escape this trouble or endure it if I trust him?"

David answers these questions with a strong "yes, as the shepherd cares for his sheep and his guests so the Lord cares for us." Both the analogies of us as sheep and guests reflect our earthly lives as settlers and travelers on this planet and the Lord as the one who cares for us in the midst of it all.

This book is written to encourage you when you are facing difficult circumstances by helping you understand what Psalm 23 and other Scriptures reveal regarding God and how he works in the midst of the troubles and trials that come into our lives.

Ron Jones

## Introduction

He sat on the sofa a broken man, at the end of his rope. Although he had tried to honor and serve the Lord throughout his life, he had not expected the pain that would come with the trouble that he was now facing. Nor had he anticipated that it would go on this long. The days had become weeks and the weeks had become months. The months had now reached more than two years.

Throughout the pain and struggle he tried to trust and obey the Lord. He tried to avoid anger and rage. Many times he had asked, "Why? Why Lord has all this happened?" But more recently he had been asking, "Will it ever end, Lord?"

He sat there that night in the living room of a friend's house. Both were Christians. Both were close friends. Finally in desperation, he blurted out, "I'm done. I'm done with the Lord." He was emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausted. He felt like the Lord had given up on him. He knew in the depth of his heart that he didn't really mean it, but it is what he had been feeling for some time.

There was silence. Then his brother in Christ, his close friend, got up and quietly walked over to the calendar and marked a large "X" on that day's date. The distraught Christian man turned to him and asked, "Why did you do that?" His friend said, "I did it, so that, when the Lord works in your life and you turn to him again, you will remember this date and what a foolish statement that you made."

That one act snapped him out of the spiritual fog he was in and made him realize that he needed to keep on trusting the Lord no matter what happened or how long it took.

Over the days and weeks that followed, the Lord did work in his life. The Lord didn't bring quick solutions to solve all his problems, but the Lord gave him the strength to trust and endure and the wisdom to rebuild his life. The Lord again and again proved to him that he was a Lord that cares for his people.

Are you in need of encouragement? Are you going through circumstances that are burdening you? Do you want to have greater faith that the Lord is working in your life, right now?

In the Scriptures, there is a psalm written by a man who knew what it was to be in need of encouragement and greater trust in the Lord. People often think of David only as a king living in a luxurious palace. However, he also spent a large part of his life running from danger, hiding in the wilderness, barely escaping death, being betrayed by his own son, and many other trials and tribulations.

Yes, David knew much about suffering, but he also knew much about the Lord. Through all of his trials and tribulations, he always relied on the truth that the Lord was his shepherd and would take care of him in whatever circumstances he found himself. This is what caused him to write his most famous psalm. Psalm 23, "The Lord is My Shepherd" stands as a beacon of light for those who need hope. David wrote,

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.  
He restores my soul.  
He leads me in the paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.  
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.  
You prepare a table before me in  
the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil.  
My cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall  
follow me all the days of my life  
and I will dwell in the house of  
the Lord forever.*

This psalm is a song of praise to the Lord for who he is, what he has done, and what he will do for David and for us. It reflects the praise of every believer. In this comforting psalm, David shares one great characteristic of the Lord, he is a shepherd that cares for his people. This is the main theme of Psalm 23. The Lord God of the universe is deeply concerned about what happens to those whom he loves and who love him.

This book describes and explains this powerful Psalm of our shepherd's love and care for you and me.

## The Lord is Your Shepherd

*v. 1 The Lord is my shepherd.*

David begins his psalm by immediately focusing on God. He says in v.1, “The Lord is my shepherd.” The Lord is the supreme being of the universe and the center of all existence. That is what the title “Lord” means. David acknowledges the sovereign rule of God over all life and in particular, his life. Every blessing that David receives comes from the hand of the Lord Jehovah Himself.

The “shepherd” was well-known in Israel as well as in the rest of the ancient world. People not only understood what a shepherd was, but most knew something of the life of a shepherd and his sheep. It was a common sight for those who lived at that time.

The Bible describes many shepherds. They were a common sight in Israel. David certainly knew all about them, for he had been a shepherd when he was young. He had experienced all the joys and all the difficulties of a shepherd’s life. He had also come to understand what it meant to be a good shepherd who was genuinely committed to the safety and welfare of his sheep. When he called the Lord his shepherd, he was speaking of the relationship he had with the Lord. He had come under the watchful caring eye of the Lord.

The most important word for all believers is the word “my” as David proclaimed, “The Lord is my shepherd.” With that David tells us that he has a personal relationship with the Lord of the universe. This personal relationship is one of salvation in which David experiences the spiritual life and eternal loving kindness of the Lord.

The Lord is the supreme being of the universe full of infinite love, grace, and mercy. Yet, if we didn’t have a relationship with him, it wouldn’t matter how wonderful he is. It was because David was under the Lord’s care and the Lord was David’s shepherd that he could rejoice in the midst of all his difficult circumstances. It is the same for you.

If you are a Christian, then the Lord Jesus Christ is your shepherd and you are his sheep. In John 10, Jesus shared that he had a special relationship with all his disciples. He said,

*“I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me.(v.14) And I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall any one snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who gave them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand.” (v.28-29)*

He knew every one of them by name and they listened and followed him. He held them in his hand and no one could ever take them away from him. What a comforting thought! The Lord himself cares about you and me and all of his flock. That is what this psalm of praise is all about. Sometimes that is so hard for us to believe, but it is true. As your shepherd, the Lord is deeply concerned about you.

David recognizes his utter dependence on the Lord to take care of Him. Sheep are absolutely dependent on the shepherd. Sheep are weak, helpless, timid, defenseless, and in

desperate need of a shepherd's care. Danger from the forces of nature and other more powerful animals create a world for them that require help beyond their own abilities to prosper.

We are exactly like this. We live in bodies that are growing older and affected by disease and illness. We have to face a world that is full of selfishness and strife. We have within ourselves fleshly desires that cause all kinds of problems in our lives when we give into them. We need to realize that we need to depend on our shepherd to help us live wisely and to help us in every situation we face.

The more dependent we are on the Lord the more he will work in our lives. In 1 Peter 5, Peter says,

*Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time casting all your cares upon him for he cares for you.(v.6-7)*

If we humble ourselves before the Lord and cast all our cares upon him, he will raise us up at the proper time because he genuinely cares about us. Isn't that incredible? The supreme being of the universe has chosen to care about you and me. If we humble ourselves before him and bring all our concerns to him, he will take care of us as he promised. Do you believe this? Do you know that if you are a Christian, the Lord Jesus is your shepherd? Do you trust that your loving shepherd is watching over you? He is. Will you place all of your cares into his loving hands?

## The Provision of Your Shepherd

*v. 1 I shall not want.*

David now proclaims what the Lord has done in his life as his shepherd. He says, "I shall not want." In other words, "I will not have need." David says that he will have no need in his life that will not be met by his shepherd. This is what the shepherd does; he provides for the needs of his flock. If they are thirsty, he leads them to water. If they are hungry, he leads them to food. If they need safe shelter, he leads them to secure pastures.

A shepherd who neglects to provide for the needs of his sheep is not a good shepherd at all. As our good shepherd, Jesus is watching over us to make sure that our needs are met. In Philippians 4, Paul shares this same truth when he says,

*And my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (v.19)*

God the Father through his Son Jesus Christ has taken upon himself responsibility for our needs. We don't have to beg him to fulfill our needs. He has already chosen to do it. Jesus himself tells us how God the Father meets our daily physical needs so that we can focus on his kingdom and righteousness. He says in Matthew 6,

*"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or, 'What shall we drink?' or, 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans seek after all these things and your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (v.31-34)*

We do not need to focus all our attention on meeting our own physical needs of food, drink, and clothing. God knows we have these needs and will take care of them. He desires that we focus our attention on the kingdom of God and on living righteously before him. We should not worry about what will happen tomorrow, but be concerned only for the present day. We should live one day at a time and seek God's kingdom by trusting and obeying the Lord for that day.

Jesus will also meet our spiritual needs. We have many spiritual needs. If you think about it, they are all met as we live by the Spirit. Gal.5:21-22 tells us that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control can fill our hearts and minds even in the midst of difficulty. The Holy Spirit can and will produce his fruit in our lives as we trust and submit to the Lord. We can depend on it.

All our needs are under his care. We should still pray for our needs, but we do not pray as if we are asking someone who has no love or concern for us, but as one who deeply cares for us.

Several years ago, I found myself out of work, with no job and no prospects. Being in this situation was fearful. I had little money in the bank and a wife and two kids to house and feed. I

imagined myself standing before this great abyss, which I now had to cross, much like Moses. When Moses reached the Red Sea, there was no human help available and a giant obstacle in his way. Over a million people were depending on him. There was only him and the Lord his God.

The Lord told Moses not to fear, but to trust the Lord and he would see the glory of the Lord displayed before him. That is what Moses did. The Lord fulfilled his promise and performed one of the greatest miracles in the history of the world, the parting of the Red Sea.

During this time, the Lord provided for my needs and the needs of my family. The Lord provided me a job as a substitute teacher during the day and a part-time job during the night. He provided my wife a part-time job as well. We had just enough money to survive if we were very careful with our finances. That wasn't all. He provided funds through various people who loved us. It was two years before I was in a full-time position again. Throughout that time I often felt nervous and anxious as pending bills came due and I would have to place my trust in my shepherd again and again. The Lord always came through for us and he will for you.

I look back on that time, which I thought would be so devastating to us financially, and realize that our Good Shepherd gently led us down a path to greater faith. He met our every financial need during that time and blessed us beyond our needs in the days and months ahead.

However, that does not mean that the Lord did everything the way I wanted. I had to learn to accept what he gave me. When David proclaimed, "I shall not want," he was also demonstrating that he was content with the provision the Lord was giving him. He was not always looking for more or different provisions. He was not always thinking about what he didn't have and complaining about his circumstances. The Lord has promised to meet our needs, but we must trust Him and accept His provision.

Sometimes it may seem like we are in such great need and the Lord is not doing anything. In those times, we should focus on what he has already provided and we will be able to see that he has met our needs at that moment.

Are you trusting the Lord to provide for your needs? Are you accepting his provision as he gives it? If you hold fast to him, he will never disappoint you. In the end you will look back and see how he has met your every need.

## The Peace of Your Shepherd

*v.2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.*

There are three things that sheep crave, food to eat, water to drink, and rest. David says the Lord provides all three for them. In v.2 he writes, "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters." Land with an abundance of tender, green grass where sheep can lie down and rest peacefully beside clear waters is a great blessing. This is David's emphasis here, the peace and rest the shepherd brings to his flock.

As the shepherd leads his sheep to such a wonderful physical place, the Lord leads us to a place of spiritual rest. This spiritual rest is the peace of Christ filling our minds and hearts. Jesus talked of this peace when he said, "My peace I leave you; my peace I give you." When we experience the Lord's peace, it is wonderful!

When I was a young pastor, there was a Christian woman in my congregation who was in her eighties. She had gone into the hospital to have heart surgery so I went and visited her before heart surgery. When I arrived at her bedside and began to speak to her, I could see right away that she was filled with the peace of Christ. She shared with me how the Lord was with her and she knew she was in his hands. Her faith was strong in the Lord. She gave to me that day a testimony of what the Lord Jesus can do in a person's life. That was over twenty years ago and I still remember it. The Lord has used her testimony many times to encourage me in difficulty. I myself have experienced that very peace she did when I faced surgery.

If we are to experience his peace, we must trust our shepherd. We must realize that we will face circumstances in this fallen world that are so great that we cannot overcome them by our own power. We will face situations that are so difficult that we cannot endure them by our own strength. We need to turn to the Lord and trust him to give us the strength to endure and overcome obstacles by his infinite power.

Solomon, in Proverbs 3, shares the wisdom of placing our faith in the Lord. He says,

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths.(v.5-6)*

He says we are to acknowledge his authority over us and he will direct us. When we trust the Lord no matter what the circumstances and follow his ways no matter what the troubles, the Lord will direct our paths. He will guide us and lead us in all situations.

We must realize that our shepherd has everything under control. There is no circumstance that we face that is too big for God to handle. God may not always act in the way we desire, but he is always at work in our lives as his sheep. This is why Paul says in Philippians 4 that we are to be anxious for nothing when he writes,

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (v.6-7)*

The Lord does not want us to be anxious about the trials and troubles in our lives. He desires that we bring them to him in prayer and request him to work on our behalf. However, we need to bring them with a thankful heart. We should be thankful for all the blessings we have received from the hand of the Lord in the past and the blessings we are receiving right now in this difficulty. Look for his blessings and remember his blessings and then ask him for more of his blessings. This thankfulness will stimulate your faith as you consider what the Lord has already done for you.

Trusting the Lord with a thankful heart is what being a Christian is all about. Depending on the Lord and enduring through trials and troubles is what it means to be a Christian. We need to realize that the Lord will work in our lives in the midst of what we are suffering.

Paul knew what this meant in his life. Paul had many wonderful revelations from God in his life, yet his life was not perfect. He also had trouble as we all do. He had developed some kind of physical illness, probably some kind of eye disease. In 2 Corinthians 12, he writes that he asked the Lord to remove it, but the Lord wanted him to experience his grace through it. He writes,

*And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me. For this I sought the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Most gladly therefore will I rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (v.7-9)*

The Lord did not choose to answer his prayer by healing him. Instead the Lord answered his prayer in giving Paul the opportunity to experience the Lord's power in his weakness. God does not always answer our prayers as we desire, but he always answers our prayers by displaying his power in our lives even in the midst of our weakness.

Have you brought your concerns and troubles before the Lord your shepherd and sought his strength rather than depending on your own? You can't face your problems without his power and strength. As a human being, you do not have the ability to overcome every trial and trouble you will face. But the Lord does!

## The Restoration of Your Shepherd

*v. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*

The Lord also leads us to spiritual restoration. In v.3 David writes, "He restores my soul." The word "soul" is one's inner being, made up of the mind, will, and emotions. "Restore" means "bring back vigor, strength, encouragement, and motivation."

Sheep often become tired from the physical exertion of a long journey or troubled and anxious from all the obstacles encountered on the way. They face heat, insects, and many other discomforts, which make their lives so difficult. The sheep can become weary, exhausted, worn down, and unable to move any longer.

In those situations, the shepherd comes alongside of his sheep and gives them the nourishment of fresh food and water and brings them to rest. After a time, the sheep are restored and ready to make another journey.

People go through the same thing. Life in a fallen world is not easy. Pressures and stress from work, family, finances, and physical illness that arise in our lives can cause us to become weary and exhausted with a strong desire to give up. Added to those challenges are the spiritual realities of the temptations of the flesh, the world, and Satan and you can be assured that we all need spiritual restoration on a regular basis.

That restoration comes from hope, the hope that spiritually re-energizes us to keep on trusting the Lord. Hope is faith that the Lord will bless us in the future. That kind of hope causes us to be encouraged and motivated in the Lord. It encourages us not to give up even when today is a very difficult day.

What is our hope? Our hope is that the Lord will work all things that we are experiencing in our trials and troubles to our spiritual good. That he will bring blessing out of it. God does not always stop suffering, but he always turns it into an instrument of blessing for us, his children. This is why we need to hold onto Romans 8:28 so tightly which says,

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.*

Through these times, God works for our spiritual good, which is to conform us into the image of his Son so that we might become more loving, more peaceful, and more joyful people as we depend on him in deeper ways. In what you are experiencing, the Lord's purpose is not to make you happy, but a more godly person, one who reflects his character. The more godly you are the more you will experience the love, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Sometimes the Lord will allow things to happen in your life that are difficult, but he is still in control, and he uses these things to mature you in Christ. This should fill you with hope that whatever the future brings God will use it for your blessing. But if we are to have this hope we

must look to the Scriptures. The Word shows us over and over how God did this in the lives of his people throughout Biblical history. Paul writes of this process of strengthening our hope through the Scriptures in Romans 15 when he says,

*For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that through patience and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (v.4)*

Paul is saying that we can see and understand in the Scriptures the incredible things that the Lord has done for his people when they were struggling throughout the centuries. We can see his mercy, love, power, and sovereignty displayed in their lives. Then, we will be encouraged that God can demonstrate those attributes in our lives as well when we are struggling. When we read and trust what the Word says, we will experience God's hope in our lives.

Also, to experience the Lord's blessings as he has promised, we need to commit ourselves to living righteously. In Ps. 23 David moves from the Lord leading us into restoration to the Lord leading us into righteousness. He says in v.3, "He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." One of the responsibilities of a shepherd is to lead his flock down paths that are safe and secure. Only a foolish and unconcerned shepherd would lead his flock down dangerous paths where they could fall off cliffs or be the easy prey of wild animals.

The spiritually, mentally, and emotionally safe "path" for believers is the life of righteousness. The "paths of righteousness" refers to the "morally right way of life." God desires that we live in a way that reflects his righteousness, his way of living. God has a moral standard and every being that belongs to him must follow Jesus Christ in fulfilling that standard. That standard reflects his character and nature.

One of the things that I always do when I begin facing some difficulty that has come into my life is examine my life. I want to see if I have any unconfessed sin. If I do, I confess it and commit myself to living righteously during this time. If I don't, I still continue to focus on living righteously. If I want to see the Lord work in my life through this trial, I need to hold fast to the Lord by faith. I can't do that if I am turning away from him by holding onto my sin. This is why I make a fresh commitment to live righteously during this time.

This does not mean that I am not going to sin or that I am going to live perfectly before him. Rather it means that I am going to genuinely try to honor him through this time in every area of my life. When I do sin, I confess and turn from it immediately.

The Lord knows that this is not easy. So, as our good shepherd, he leads us to obey and gently convicts us to turn away from sin. When the Lord's people live righteous lives then they will be loving, joyful, and peaceful people even in the midst of the most difficult circumstances.

Do you need to strengthen your hope? Read the Scriptures. See the glory of God as he works in the lives of his people! Do you need to strengthen your righteousness? Read the Scriptures and see the godly lives of those who love the Lord!

## The Protection of Your Shepherd

*v.4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

Before sheep can lie down to rest and experience peace, they need to be free from fear. As long as there is even the slightest suspicion of danger from dogs, coyotes, cougars, bears, robbers or other enemies the sheep stand ready to flee for their lives. They have little or no means of self-defense. This was especially true when they had to travel through valleys where they are very vulnerable to attack by enemies hiding in the hills. It would be a frightening situation. They would have to face the possibility of death.

There is no way to eliminate these dangers that sheep will be facing, for they are a fact of life. What they need is protection. It is the protection of their shepherd that brings them peace and comfort. When David writes, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for you are with me" he is speaking of the presence of the shepherd who protects his sheep. His presence reassures them, as nothing else does. The Lord our shepherd is there with us and will protect us.

As human beings, our hearts are often filled with fear, anxiety, and worry. But David says, "I fear no evil for you are with me." David encountered many dangerous situations in his life. First, he faced the wrath of King Saul who was jealous of him. Then his very own son, Absalom, pursued him. They both had one desire, to murder him. David had to face the possibility of death, yet David did not fear because the Lord was with him. Notice, it is not because the danger has disappeared or been eliminated, but rather because of the presence of his Lord in his life.

If we want to overcome fear in our minds, we do not need to eliminate the cause of the fear, but our fearful reaction to it. Trusting in the power, presence, and protection of our good shepherd is the way we overcome our fear. We can be assured that wherever we are and whatever is happening to us, the Lord is with us. Jesus himself told us this was true. He declared in Matthew 28 that he was always with his disciples even to the very end of time. He said,

*"I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (v.20)*

Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, in whatever circumstances you find yourself, the Lord is there. You may be lying in the hospital struggling with a physical illness or sitting at home wondering how you are going to pay your bills or stressed out at work. The Lord is there with you. You need to trust these words. You need to hold fast to this promise of the Lord's presence with you. It doesn't matter whether you feel like he is there or not; if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, he is there with you right now!

And the Lord is not just standing around when he is with us. He is actively working on our behalf. David's lack of fear comes not only from the presence of the Lord, but also from the Lord's strength to deal with every attack of danger.

David writes in v. 4, "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." David mentions the rod and staff of the shepherd that would give the sheep comfort. The rod was carried for protection. It was an instrument of protection both for himself and his sheep when they were in danger.

The skilled shepherd used his rod to drive off predators like coyotes, wolves, cougars or stray dogs. Often it was used to beat the brush discouraging snakes and other creatures from disturbing the flock. The staff was a longer stick than the rod, up to six feet in length which had a crook or hook on one end. It was used to aid the shepherd in climbing and hiking. The rod and staff were the symbols of the strength and power of the shepherd to protect His sheep from danger. In the same way, the Lord is able to protect us from danger by His infinite power and strength. In Job 42, Job declares that he knew that the Lord has the power to do anything he chooses. He says,

*I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. (v.2)*

God is more powerful than all creation and has the power to do anything he decides to do. There is no purpose he has that can be stopped by anyone, not man, not angels, not Satan himself. God's power is supreme over all and everything he chooses to do is done. He has no obstacles in his way.

This is a great comfort to us as the Lord's sheep. When we are struggling, it is easy to feel that somehow the Lord's purposes for us have been thwarted. Everything seemed fine and we felt the Lord was graciously working in our lives, then in a moment all that seemed to vanish. We may now be in a different location than we are used to; everything familiar may be gone. Is the Lord still working in our lives? Yes. The Lord's power is still working on our behalf. There is no obstacle that we face that is too big for him.

The Lord's protection does not mean that nothing bad or hurtful will happen to us, but rather that nothing will happen to us that he has not allowed. Nothing will happen to us that he will not work through to bring spiritual good in our lives. Because the Lord himself has cursed mankind in judgment of our sin all men must feel the effects of sin in the world. That includes Christians. But he protects us so that only what he allows can get to us.

Every Christian can recount close calls they had with death. I remember a Christian in one of my congregations who was sailing a boat of food supplies from a Christian relief organization. He was off the coast of Africa and had unknowingly sailed through a coral reef, which could easily have ripped his boat apart. He didn't even know he had successfully navigated it until he had reached shore. When he arrived on land, he was told about this amazing circumstance. It made a deep impression on him that the Lord had protected him. He would joyfully tell that story over and over again. How many near misses have you had? I have had a few and I thank God for protecting me.

I believe that when we get to heaven, we are going to be amazed about how many times the Lord protected us when we didn't even know it and how many times the Lord healed us from an illness that could have turned into something far worse. You may be going through an illness and wondering if the Lord will heal you. That is up to him and his will for your life, but be assured that he is in control and is protecting you in ways you cannot see. He is your shepherd and is using the rod and staff of his power to allow only what he chooses to happen to you. With whatever he allows, he always surrounds it with his blessings.

Are you trusting him to be with you through your troubles? Do you really believe that the Lord has the power to protect you and accomplish his purposes through what you are going through? Pray and ask the Lord to help you trust him. He will. He has not forgotten you. He could never do that.

## The Blessings of Your Shepherd/Host

*v.5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over.*

David has shared some wonderful truths in this Psalm about our relationship with our Lord. But in saying all of this, David realized that the richness of the Lord's gracious blessings toward us couldn't be told in just comparing a shepherd and his sheep. David now chooses to picture the Lord as the shepherd turned gracious host. In the ancient world, every shepherd was not only required to take care of his sheep, but also to act as a gracious and concerned host when he had guests. David reveals that the Lord does more than just care for our needs, he also treats us with honor and respect graciously giving to us more blessing than we deserve even in the midst distressing circumstances.

In v.5 David says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." A traveler has come to the shepherd's tent possibly fleeing from enemies who are pursuing him. He is in need of the shepherd's sanctuary and help, his food and shelter. The shepherd would consider it a great honor to host a guest who has come on such a journey. "To prepare a table before me" is an expression that was used of a host preparing and presenting a meal to a guest. A shepherd, of course, would not have a table and chairs, but rather a rug and pillows.

He would provide for him a banquet of all kinds of food and drink. In v.1, David says the Lord meets our needs, both physical and spiritual. Here, he says that the Lord gives to us more than what we need, more than the minimum. He shares with us out of his abundant blessings. This is why David writes further in v. 5, "You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over."

To show honor and respect for a guest, the host would anoint the head of the guest with perfumed oils. This is a picture of the honor that the Lord bestows upon us as his children. John the apostle describes this in 1 John 3 where he marvels at the great love God the Father has given to us his children. He writes,

*Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God. (v.1)*

When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we become children of God. This brings many spiritual privileges and blessings. David has already shared some of these in this psalm, but he also wants to share that these blessings of God do not trickle out in our lives; they pour out. David declares, "my cup runs over."

This is the guest's drinking cup at the banquet. The word "runs over" or "overflows" means just that, to flow over the top. The cup represents the life of the believer. The liquid represents the blessings in the life of the believer. David proclaims that God's blessings in his life have overflowed. They have been abundant!

He is telling us that no matter what we are facing our lives are overflowing with God's blessings. How is this so? First and foremost, we have the blessings of salvation. The Lord has given us forgiveness of all our sins, the Holy Spirit living in us and working through us, the Lord watching over us, and the promise of an eternal inheritance. The value of these blessings cannot be measured. The Lord stands with us as our shepherd everyday of our lives.

We also have the blessings of experiencing the Lord's work in our lives as he displays his power and sovereignty and fulfills his purposes for us. This is how Joseph felt when he saw the Lord bring his brothers back into his life so he could save his family from certain death in the famine.

Joseph must have been devastated to realize he had been sold into slavery by his own brothers. Yet the Lord was leading and guiding him as his good shepherd. God led him to become the steward of Potiphar, an Egyptian officer of Pharaoh. The Lord blessed him by making him successful under Potiphar. Even when he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife and thrown into prison, the Lord was still guiding him by bringing him into contact with the King's cupbearer. The Lord put a disturbing dream into Pharaoh's mind. Then he brought the opportunity and ability to interpret the dream to Joseph. Until finally Joseph was where the Lord wanted him, second in command to the Pharaoh of Egypt.

Through difficult circumstances and a long period of years, Joseph finally saw his brothers standing before him in Egypt humbled and in great need of his help. How did Joseph react? Was he bitter and angry with them and the Lord? In Genesis 45 Joseph tells his brothers that God had used all that he had experienced to bring him to his high position in the land of Egypt so that he might save them from the famine that was ravaging their lands. He said,

*"I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Now therefore do not be grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For these two years the famine has been in the land, and yet there are five years, in which there will be neither ripening nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me here, but God; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt." (v.4-8)*

Joseph saw the tremendous blessing of being guided by the Lord to the right time and right place so that the Lord would work through him to preserve his family and their descendants, the people of Israel, from the famine. Joseph saw all his circumstances in this light. The joy of being used by God in such a way over-shadowed anything that he had suffered at the hands of his brothers.

It is easy to think that other believers have more of God's blessings available to them than you do. It is easy to think that other believers have an easier life, but all believers have highs and lows, trials and troubles just like Joseph and David. God uses suffering in our lives to take us places we would never have gone and to reach people we would never have met, to accomplish his purposes in our lives and the lives of others around us.

However, the Lord also blesses us in the non-spiritual realm. There is so many ways that the Lord does this. Each believer has stories to tell of the Lord's provision in his or her life when the Lord more than abundantly supplied his needs.

Think about what the Lord has done in your life. What stories do you have to tell of his provision and blessing? What about right now? Look around for his blessings. They are there. They are always there. We often are so focused on our problems or what we think is wrong with our lives that we miss what is right, what the Lord is doing in the midst of our situation.

## The Security of Your Shepherd/Host

*v.5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over.*

David also says that the Lord's blessings come even when we have people around us who are hostile and vindictive toward us. The table of his provisions and blessings is prepared in the "presence of his enemies." Can you imagine how a person would feel if he was being followed by thieves and suddenly he finds a huge shelter owned by a rich and well-protected shepherd? Soon, he is sitting around a meal full of the most luscious food. His enemies are still standing at the edge of the shelter held away by the power of his protective host.

David knew well what it was like to have enemies, those who wanted to destroy his life. David also knew what it was like to experience the Lord's blessing in their midst. Of all his brothers, God chose David to be the future king. What a blessing! But after his anointing, King Saul became jealous of David and tried to kill him. David had to run for his life. However, David trusted the Lord and he protected David and used those difficult circumstances in his life to mold David into a godly man. What a blessing!

Finally David ascended to the throne and enjoyed all the benefits of being king and he received the privilege of leading God's people. What a blessing! Later, David was betrayed by his own son, Absalom. He wanted to kill David even though he was his father. Again, David ran for his life. Again, David trusted the Lord and the Lord protected him and restored his kingdom. What a blessing!

We can experience some of what David experienced when people come into our lives who are hostile to us. Maybe they are jealous of our position or what we have or maybe we have had a personality conflict with them. For whatever reason, they don't like us and can create trouble in our lives. Yet, the Lord will bring blessing in the midst of these kinds of situations and he will even display our godliness in front of those hostile to us. David says in Psalm 37 that if we commit our way to the Lord and trust in him, he will bring our righteousness to be seen by everyone. He writes,

*Commit your way to the Lord. Trust also in him and he shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your judgment as the noonday. (v.5-6)*

Perhaps you are in a difficult situation because of the hostility of someone else even though you have acted in a godly manner toward him or her. Be assured. The Lord will bring your righteousness to the attention of everyone and expose the foolishness of one who has harmed you. It may take time, but it will happen by the hand of the Lord. As we have seen, this is what happened to Joseph. He had lived a righteous life throughout the period of his enslavement

even though his brothers and sold him into slavery. Eventually, the Lord revealed Joseph's righteousness and exposed their sin in front of his brothers.

The book of Daniel tells the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, three Jewish believers, who refused to worship pagan gods and bow down before King Nebuchadnezzar's statue even though they knew it meant certain death for them. They were brought before the King who demanded they worship his pagan gods and bow down before his statue or they would be thrown into a fiery furnace. The three men of God responded to this hostile king in Dan.3,

*"If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up." (v.17-18)*

They stood firm in their faith as Nebuchadnezzar threatened them with death. God did deliver them by sending his angel to protect them from the fire. Later in that chapter Daniel records how God displayed their righteousness in front of the whole pagan court. It says,

*And the satraps, governors, captains, and the king's counselors gathered together around them. They saw that their bodies were not affected by the fire, nor was a hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor was the smell of the fire on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar spoke, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants. They trusted in him and defied the king's word, and were willing to yield their lives so that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God." (3:27-28)*

That day the Lord displayed the righteousness of his servants before those who had been openly hostile toward them. Although we may not face a situation as dramatic as theirs, if God can work in such incredible ways in the midst of such powerful opposition as Nebuchadnezzar and his court, he can easily work in our lives when we face people hostile to us. This the way the Lord works in our lives as he prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies.

As believers, we also have a spiritual enemy who desires to turn us away from the Lord when we are in the midst of trouble and struggling. He wants us to doubt God's love and His power to deliver us. He wants us to seek solutions apart from dependence on our shepherd. We must not allow ourselves to fall into his snare.

When Job had lost most of his possessions and even his children and had little left, his wife fell into Satan's trap and despaired, but Job would not turn from the Lord. Job 2 says,

*Then his wife said to him, "Do you still retain your integrity? Curse God and die." But he said to her, "You speak as a foolish woman speaks. Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not receive adversity?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips. (v.9-10)*

She wanted Job to give up all hope in the Lord, but Job stood firm in his faith. We can resist Satan by standing firm in our faith in what we know is true about God and his love and power over our lives. This is trusting the Lord. When we do this, all Satan can do is watch the Lord

bless us. Satan and his demons have only one weapon - lies. They lie to entice us to doubt God's care for us and the provision of his blessings. If we continue to keep our focus on the Lord and the blessings we have in him, then we will have a much easier time trusting him. There is nothing Satan can do, but watch us glorify God. Our Shepherd/host will prepare blessings for us in the midst of even our spiritual enemies.

How is your faith? Are you standing firm in trusting the Lord? Do you feel like giving up on the Lord? Don't give up! Don't ever give up! The Lord will not disappoint you. He may not do things the way you desire, but He will bring you blessing in the midst of difficulty.

## The Goodness of Your Shepherd/Host

*v. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

David now ends his psalms of praise by answering the question, "How long will I experience God's blessings?" He says in v. 6 "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Have you ever gone somewhere or been with someone and had such a wonderful time that you never wanted it to end? My wife and I took our nephew and niece to an amusement park when they were five years old. We were there the whole day. It was getting late and the kids were obviously tired. I finally said that it was time to go. My nephew heard that, looked at me with his drooping eyes and blurted out, "one more minute, just one more minute."

We don't have to say "One more minute of blessings Lord, please. Don't withdraw your blessings from us." God's blessings are not withdrawn, they "follow" us. This means God's goodness and kindness will pursue us. The goodness and kindness that we experience in life as believers is one that will continue our whole lives and reach into eternity. The goodness and kindness of the Lord will pursue us wherever we go and whatever we do. When you come under God's care He takes care of us forever. David says the Lord's blessing goes on and on and on. In fact he will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

"Dwelling in the house of the Lord," means that we shall be with the Lord as a part of his household forever. Even the honor and blessing of the shepherd/host and guest analogy isn't enough to describe the blessings that are ours in Christ. So great does the Lord love us he has made provision for us to experience his goodness and kindness in his very presence forever in his family.

Who can measure the greatness of our future life with Jesus Christ forever? Sometimes we wonder how God can stand to watch his children suffer. He does not desire that any of us suffer, but when we do, he sees it in relation to eternity. He knows that when we are in eternity, our joy and happiness and gratefulness will be so great, that we will wonder why we suffered so little in comparison to what we have received.

What an incredible experience heaven will be. It will be a life without pain or suffering, only joy and happiness. In the presence of Christ, we will leave all the difficulties, trials, and hardships of this physical existence. The book of Revelation reveals to us that God is bringing an incredible pain-free existence to us that will last forever. Revelation 21 unveils this to us. It says,

*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*  
(v.4)

David himself held tightly to this hope of a joyful and happy future with God in eternity. He describes it in Ps.16 when he says,

*In your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand there are pleasures forever. (v.11)*

This is God's perspective and will be ours one day. We will finally be with him enjoying a life that far surpasses the most extreme moments of happiness that we can experience in our earthly physical existence. Everything that we have endured for Christ in this life will be overshadowed by the blessings we will be experiencing.

It is so important to remember this especially if you have been afflicted with some crippling illness or someone you love has been. This physical life is full of physical weakness in our bodies no matter how much we try to keep them healthy. It is part of our fallen world. Physical disease and death are a reality and they are never pleasant, but harsh and painful. It is during these times, that we must hold tightly to our hope for a joyful and glorious life with Jesus when we get to heaven. Sometimes we want to grasp our physical existence so tightly as if no heavenly future existed, but we don't have to. Our future hope is what it means to be a Christian.

Jesus Himself will bring us into the Father's presence and we shall be with them forever! Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to bring us into his sheepfold and be our shepherd, and to bring us into his tent to be our host is the basis of our lives as Christians.

You need only one response. Trust him with all of your heart! He will work to bring you into a bright and glorious future!

## Essential Truths From Psalm 23

We have seen many wonderful truths revealed in Psalm 23 about the Lord's care and protection over us who are his children. These truths form a solid foundation for our faith in the midst of the difficulties we have to face in a fallen world. In this chapter, I would like to share with you four essential truths that are touched on in Psalm 23 and revealed more fully in other Scriptures.

God is always in control  
of our lives

When David declares that the Lord was his shepherd and that he is able to protect and care for us, he is proclaiming that the Lord is always in control of his life. In 1 Chron.29 David declares a great truth. He says,

*"Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head over all. Both riches and honor come from you and you rule over all."*  
(v.11-12)

Everything in heaven and earth belongs to the Lord. God owns everything. That includes, human beings, angels, Satan and demons, animals, the physical universe, everything. There is nothing that God does not own. God owns them because he has created them. As creator and owner they are under His control.

God rules all things. God rules all that he owns. This means that everything that happens in the universe and in our lives and the lives of our loved ones is under his control. He either does it or allows it. This truth cannot be overemphasized.

When a trial comes into our lives no matter what its source, it is within the will of God. That doesn't mean God wants someone to sin against us or hurt us, but it does mean that God has allowed that within His sovereign will. God has allowed human beings to sin against each other and has allowed Satan to tempt us and has allowed earthquakes as part of his penalty for the fall, but as we shall see God has chosen to use all of these things for our good.

Nothing that happens to us or to someone we love has happened outside the rule of God. This is important to remember because we tend to feel that as long as everything is going smoothly in our lives, we feel good about God being in control of our lives. But when our employer calls us into his office to let us know that we are being laid off, it is hard for us not to feel that our lives have suddenly spun out of control. We can feel that somehow God has wandered off and forgotten about us. We can feel abandoned by God and can't seem to "get connected to him again." In reality, nothing has changed in regards to God. God is still in control and is using this circumstance in our lives for His purposes. Truth, not our feelings, is our guide in these times.

God never wanders off. God never loses control. God has a plan for our lives and within that plan are trials which he will use for our spiritual good. As we have seen, Rom.8:28 is all about the sovereignty of God. It says,

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

To cope with suffering God's way you must trust that God is in control. He has never lost control even when you are in distress. You can rest in the knowledge that the God who sent His Son to die for you because of his love is still in control of your life. He will work all things together for your good!

God doesn't always do what  
makes sense to us

In Psalm 23, David places his faith in the Lord. But other psalms of David show the struggle David went through as he sought God for answers and eventually came to full trust in the Lord. In Psalm 8, David cries out the Lord, "Why O Lord have you done this to me?" This is a question all believers can ask. Sometimes troubles come upon us that just don't make sense. The timing is bad and happy circumstances quickly become troubled ones. We want God to instantly rescue us and make everything better. But that is not always how God works. We need to realize that God ways are not our ways. In Isaiah 55 God says,

*"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." (v.8-9)*

The first thing that we need to understand is that God does not think like we do; God does not act like we do; God's methods and plans are not like ours.

God is an infinite being far above us in intellect, wisdom and knowledge. Ps.147:5 simply states it this way, "his understanding has no limit." God knows everything about the universe, about human beings, about his plan for the universe and human beings, about how one thing affects another. God knows everything about our lives, the most intimate details. He knows everything about the ones we love and everyone else on this planet. He knows what he wants to accomplish in our lives and the lives of everyone else. God is able to figure it all out and devise the wisest plan to accomplish his will.

We need to remember that God's plan for us originates out of the mind of a being that is so far above us in understanding, knowledge and wisdom that if he were to explain all the details of his plan to us we wouldn't be able to understand them anyway. God's plan for our lives is incredibly complex. We will not always understand why God seems to allow trials to pile up on us all at one time, why God allows one person to go through one kind of trial and another person another kind, why God keeps us from harm in one circumstance and not in another.

This is so important to remember when we are suffering, because this means that we will never fully understand why God does what he does. We desperately want to know why. "Why

did God do this?" "Why did God allow this?" We think that the solution for coping is in the explanation, but it is not. It is trusting God without explanation. Rather than search for the answer to the "why", God asks us to take another path, the path of humility and casting our cares upon Him. As we have already seen in 1 Pet.4, Peter says,

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast your cares on him because he cares for you." (v. 6-7)*

To humble ourselves before him means to give him the "why." It means not to demand an explanation from God as if he owes us one for doing this to us. It means to acknowledge that God's will is best and that God's mighty hand can meet our every need in the midst of this trial and when He is ready He will lift us up.

Will you humble yourself before him and cast your anxiety on Him? Will you lay this whole trial in His lap and trust Him to provide the solution?

God is always with us in the  
midst of suffering

Over and over in Psalm 23, David proclaims that the Lord is with him as a shepherd is to his sheep. Jesus told his disciples that they would always be with him forever. Paul continues that theme and reveals the all-encompassing nature of God's love for us. In Rom.8 he writes,

*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (v.38-39)*

Everything that exists including ourselves is in this list. We as believers cannot be separated from God's love. Sometimes our feelings make it seem that God has stopped loving us. We feel that God has abandoned us. After all, if God loves us, how could God let us hurt so badly? Those feelings should not be trusted. Feelings must be anchored in the Scriptures. They must not be allowed to change our perception of God. God has not and cannot change.

You must hold to this truth with all your heart. The God who has loved you and worked in your life when times were peaceful is the same God that is loving you and working in your life in the midst of these difficult circumstances. This will help you to turn toward God for help rather than away from God because you may feel he doesn't care. Psalm 100 says,

*For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; his faithfulness endures to all generations. (v.5)*

When the Lord loves, he loves forever; when the Lord is faithful, he is faithful forever! Trust that love everyday of your life!

God uses suffering to draw us  
closer to him

David wrote Psalm 23 as a result of what the Lord had taught him about his faithfulness. As you read the psalm, you might find yourself asking, "What is the Lord trying to teach me?" After I preached a sermon on coping with suffering God's way, a member of my congregation was sawing some wood in his garage when he accidentally sawed off a small part of his finger. When I got to the hospital to visit him, he was calm and we chatted about the incident. He asked me what the Lord might be teaching him through this circumstance. Gently, I said, "Maybe, he is trying to teach you that you need to be more careful with a saw." I then went on to explain that there is often not a specific hidden lesson that God is trying to get across to us when we suffer, but rather He is first and foremost trying to draw us closer to him.

As Christians, when we are in trials and tribulations, we can spend too much time looking for the "lesson" we think God is trying to teach. We can try to pinpoint some message that God is trying to tell us, a message that is specific and will help bring meaning and purpose to what we are experiencing. In reality, the Scriptures tell us that God always has one major purpose in allowing suffering to come into our lives. It is to bring us face to face with him. God knows that when an obstacle in our lives is so big that we simply cannot overcome it in our own power, then we will be forced to turn to him.

David saw this so many times in his life. David wrote many of his psalms to God when he was running from his enemies who wanted to kill him. In those times, David in desperation turned toward the Lord for help.

In Psalm 54, David cries out to the Lord to help him,

*Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might. Hear my prayer O God; listen to the words of my mouth. Strangers are attacking me; ruthless men seek my life, men without regard for God. (v.1-3)*

In his fear and anguish, David turns all his attention to the Lord and prays for help. When he does that, he is exactly where the Lord wants him to be. He is doing exactly what the Lord desires for him to do. The answer to his problems does not lie in finding the "lesson", but in turning to the Lord for help.

To the Lord, working in our lives and delivering us is no problem. He is omnipotent (infinitely powerful) and sovereign (in absolute control of all things). Helping us escape trials is never the focus for God; it is working in our hearts to draw us closer to Him. The Lord will use obstacles and troubles to draw our attention to Him. There is nothing like suffering to accomplish this in our lives.

When we are afflicted, it always comes down to us and the Lord. Our family and friends, our pastor can only comfort us so much, they can only help us so much. They cannot be with us for twenty-four hours a day. They cannot give us peace in our hearts, only the Lord can. Only the Lord Jesus can comfort us at all times, day or night. And he will, if we will turn to him. This is what he wants.

After David cried out to the Lord in the beginning of Psalm 54, David then placed his trust in the Lord and focused his heart and mind on God's faithfulness. He said,

*Behold, God is my helper. The Lord is the one who upholds my soul. He shall return evil to my enemies and cut them off in his faithfulness. I will freely sacrifice to you. I will praise your name, O Lord, for it is good. (v.4-6)*

This is a common pattern in the psalms. David turns to the Lord, cries out for help, and then places his trust in the Lord to deliver him.

This is one truth we can know for sure. When affliction comes upon us, God's first and foremost purpose is to bring us face to face with him, to drive us to him to seek his help so that we might experience his love and grace. We need to go before our heavenly Father and pray for his help. That's what David did throughout the Psalms and that's what we need to do.

When we do we can be assured that our Lord Jesus will respond when we come because he understands our pain. Hebrews 4 says,

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (v.15-16)*

This must be our confidence while we are in the midst of our trials. Jesus was a human being. He knew what it was like to be hungry, thirsty, and tired. He knew what it was like to be betrayed by someone close to him. He was tempted. He suffered in many ways. He understands what it is like to be a human being. He is sympathetic to our weaknesses and struggles. We must always remember this. As the psalmist proclaims in Psalm 33,

*Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who reverence him, upon those who hope in his mercy, to deliver their soul from death and to keep them alive in famine. We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. For our hearts shall rejoice in him, because we have trusted in his holy name. (v.18-21)*

Will you draw close to the Lord in your pain? Will you turn your attention and heart toward Him? He won't disappoint you; he is faithful!

## An Invitation from Your Shepherd

Maybe you have been reading this book and have been encouraged by the words of God given in Psalm 23, but there is a doubt in your mind whether you truly are a Christian, a child of God. You want to experience all of the blessings that the Lord offers, but you are not sure that you are experiencing them. Maybe you have even gone to church your whole life, but never made a personal commitment to Jesus or you are not sure you have. I invite you to read this chapter and make sure of your salvation by turning to Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Maybe you know that you are not a Christian and have thought about Jesus, but have never really done anything about it. You have never made a personal commitment to him. In this chapter, I would like to share with you what the Gospels say about how you can come to know the Good Shepherd, Jesus, and become a child of God.

Jesus came to give people the opportunity to enter into a personal relationship with him. Jesus said that he was the good shepherd who cared deeply about his sheep, so much so that he was willing to lay down his life for them. When Jesus laid down his life at the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of people, he gave them the opportunity to come to him and receive forgiveness and become a part of his spiritual flock. Jesus said,

*“I am the good shepherd and I know my sheep and my sheep know me. As the Father knows me, even so I know the Father. I lay down my life for the sheep. Therefore, my Father loves me because I lay down my life that I might take it again.” (John 10:14-15, 17)*

*“My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give to them eternal life and they shall never perish.”(John 10:27-28)*

Jesus invited people to come  
to him for salvation

Jesus knew that the trials and tribulations of life bring spiritual weariness and burden to the hearts of people. He invited people to come to him for spiritual rest and peace. Jesus said,

*“Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)*

To come to Jesus involves  
trusting in Jesus

Jesus said that people “come” to him by believing in him, that is, by trusting that he is the Son of God who died on the cross for the sins of people, and that he will give them eternal life if they trust in Him. Jesus said,

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. The one who believes in him is not condemned. But the one who does not believe is condemned already, because he [or she] has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)*

To come to Jesus involves  
turning away from sin

Jesus was very specific about the issue of sin in people’s lives. Sin is turning away from following God’s moral standards. Jesus offered forgiveness for sins if people would turn to him and accept his payment on the cross. Jesus preached a simple message of “repentance,” which means “turn away from sin and turn to God.”

*From that time Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matthew 4:17)*

Jesus said that if people did not turn to him and believe in him, they would die in their sins. Dying in their sins meant divine judgment. Divine judgment meant punishment forever away from the presence of God. Jesus said,

*“For if you do not believe that I am he [the messiah, the Son of God], you shall die in your sins.” (John 8:24)*

*Jesus cried out with a loud voice and said, “He who believes in me, does not believe in me, but in him [the Father] who sent me. The one who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as a light into the world that whoever believes in me should not remain in [spiritual] darkness. If any man hears my words, and does not believe, I do not judge him. For I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.*

*The one, who rejects me and does not receive my words, has one who judges him. It is the word that I have spoken that shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken from myself, but the Father who sent me gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. ” (John 12:44-49)*

Trusting in God is not enough,  
you must trust in Jesus

Many people assume that it doesn’t matter what they believe about Jesus. As long as they “believe in God and love him” they will go to heaven. But Jesus did not teach that belief. Jesus taught that God the Father desired that he, God the Son, also be honored and glorified. Anyone that does not honor the Son cannot honor the Father who sent him. Jesus said,

*“For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son that all should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in him who sent me has eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life.” (John 5:22-24)*

Jesus clearly said that he was the only way to salvation and receiving eternal life. There are no other ways to heaven or living with God forever.

*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father, but through me.” (John 14:6)*

To come to Jesus involves  
asking him to save you

The Gospels record that the people that came to Jesus all did the same thing. They believed that he was who he claimed to be; they turned from their sins; they trusted him to save them; and they asked him to save them.

An example of this is the last person Jesus saved before he died. He was a criminal on a cross hanging next to Jesus. He had sinned against God and man and had received the just penalty of his crimes. Yet God in his mercy gave him the opportunity while facing death to hang on a cross next to God’s own Son. This man realized who Jesus was and humbled himself before the Son of God. He turned from his sin, trusted Jesus, and asked Jesus to save him. Jesus responded to the man’s faith as he always did, promising him that he would receive eternal life with the Son of God forever. This is what Luke records,

*And also two others who were criminals were led away with him to be put to death. And when they came to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on the right, and the other on the left. (Luke 23:32-33)*

*And one of the criminals who hung there was insulting him, saying, “If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.” But the other one rebuked him, saying, “Don’t you fear God since you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed suffer justly, for we receive what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:39-43)*

Will you come to Jesus and  
receive eternal life?

The words of Jesus that you have just read are not only for those who lived at the time of Jesus, but also for you. Jesus is speaking these words to you and inviting you to come to him for salvation and to receive from him eternal life. He desires that you come into his kingdom.

How do you do it? By coming to him in prayer and asking him to save you. You must turn from your sin and acknowledge to God that you are a sinner and no longer want to live according to your own will but you want to follow Jesus' will. You must believe that Jesus is exactly who He claimed to be, the Son of God, God become a man and that he died on the cross for your sins.

Ask the Lord Jesus to save you from the penalty of your sin and accept His payment for your sins on the cross. Ask Him to be your Savior. Trust Him to save you; trust that he will save you if you turn from your sin and ask him. If you are not sure what words to use to speak to Jesus, below is a prayer that you could use. It is not the words; it is the desire of your heart.

“Lord Jesus, I admit to you that I am a sinner and have sinned against you. Please be my Savior. I accept your payment on the cross for my sins. I trust that you are the Son of God and will save me now that I am asking you. Thank you, Lord. Amen.”

If you are not sure that in the past you have asked Jesus to be your Savior, you can ask him today. In fact, you may have gone to church most of your life, and yet have never turned to Jesus and asked him to save you, you can make that commitment right now. Turn from your sin and ask him. Once you have asked him, trust that Jesus has fulfilled his word and is now your Savior.

You may not “feel” like a change has taken place in your life, but it has. You must believe by faith that Jesus is now your shepherd and you have eternal life in him. May the Lord bless you as you enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!