

CALL OUT

A STUDY OF THE PSALMS

BE YOUR BEST

One of my favorite Tom Landry quotes is, “A coach is someone who tells you what you don’t want to hear, who has you see what you don’t want to see, so you can be who you have always known you could be.”

Today’s passage might be the single most famous passage in Scripture. While our study of *Psalms* focuses on many passages that aren’t as well known, how can we not look at Psalm 23?

Psalm 23 famously opens, “**The Lord is my shepherd.**” This statement alone, acknowledges a reality about who we are and who God is.

Like the Landry quote, we may not want to hear that we are like sheep—sheep aren’t bright. In fact, without a shepherd, they’d die. However, if we are to be our best, who we’ve always known we could be, we must admit our own sheep-ness, and submit to our Shepherd.

Following our Shepherd has great and eternal rewards. However, many people around you graze without a shepherd (see Matthew 9:36). Not only must we follow the Good Shepherd, but we must introduce those people to him as well.

God’s Covenants often get “sealed” around the dinner table. And this ain’t your granny’s potluck casserole.

PSALM 23:1–6

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

⁴Even 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.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

"Surely goodness, surely mercy, right beside me all my days. And I will dwell in Your house forever. And bless Your Holy Name." Psalm 23 runs the risk of becoming a passage we have memorized, without causing us to worship the Shepherd it describes. Familiarity can become accustomed to great beauty such that we lose the awe and wonder of it.

Scan the QR code to worship using Psalm 23. Let the beautiful truths of the lyrics refresh your soul.



DISCUSSION

If you could be any animal (apart from a sheep) what would you be?

1. What is the Lord compared to and what results from it? (1)

2. How do the tools of the shepherd impact the sheep? (4)

3. Where will this “sheep” live and for how long? (6c)

4. Apart from the similarities listed in this passage, how is God like a shepherd and people like sheep? (1a)

5. how does this passage change the way you see yourself...

- as one of God’s *sheep*?

- as one of God’s *shepherds*? (as an influencer)

Do you see God as a Good Shepherd or as someone who is always disappointed, angry, or distant from you? How we view God shapes how we interact. Talk to your Coach today.

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

CALL OUT

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STUDY NOTES

HARD COACHING=LOVE

Check out the QR code for a team sign reminding us that “hard coaching=love.”



True love, biblical love, isn't at all like what the world calls “love.” Worldly love often depends on acceptance, agreement, and quid pro quos. Say the words, “I disagree,” and you're branded as “hateful.”

True love shares hard truth. It pushes you to achieve your potential. It warns of hazards. It won't let you just “follow your heart,” or “you do you.” By yourself, you won't achieve much compared to what those who love you will help you achieve. And the best part is, you can do this for others too.

Last Week, we saw how much the Good Shepherd loved his sheep as he suffered and died for them (John 10:11). This Week, Psalm 23—the single most familiar Psalm—pictures the Great Shepherd *caring* for his sheep. While we will see the Lord's tender affection, we'll also see the “tough love” needed for foolish sheep.

Additionally, while we often read this passage as sheep, I would challenge you to consider the role of the shepherd. “Leadership” is defined in a single word, “influence.” All of you have influence somewhere: on your team, at school, at church, at work. As such, as we study the “Good Shepherd,” learn to lead.

GOD'S SHEPHERDING PROVIDES SPECIAL CARE

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. Primarily, a shepherd must provide for his sheep. He must meet the sheep's needs. “Not wanting” in this verse isn't about God as magic genie that gives you everything you want. It's about having your needs met. In a world where so many people take anxiety medication, God says, “Don't worry. I got you.”

So what does the Lord do? **He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.** The first three verbs—“makes,” “leads,” and “restores”—require no explanation because their blessing is self-evident. However, this fourth and final shepherding activity also explains why.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. You have freedom to make many choices, including sport, school, spouse, even hobbies. However, our Shepherd leads us to make our choices within the “in-bounds” area of his field as defined by God's Word.

Sometimes paths of righteousness aren't safe. This verse reminds us that just as Christ's righteous path led him to the cross, following our Shepherd can lead us into harsh, even life-threatening circumstances.

The path of righteousness sometimes leads **through the valley of the shadow of death.** Notice what brings David comfort. First, God's mere *presence* is enough. Secondly, he knows the Good Shepherd has his “tools of the trade.”

Shepherds carried a **rod**—more precisely, a club, like a small baseball bat—worn at the belt. The shepherd used the rod for protection, discipline, counting and examination. It symbolizes authority, strength, power, and discipline. The goal of the rod wasn't to hurt sheep, but it often prevented them from “following their heart.”

In addition to the rod, shepherds used the **staff**. It symbolizes all that is patient and kind. Personally chosen by the shepherd, this long, slender stick, had a crook or hook on one end, and served three purposes. *First*, the shepherd would lift a newborn lamb to reunite it with its mother. *Second*, the shepherd would draw a shy sheep near himself for closer examination. *Third*, the shepherd would guide his sheep with a gentle nudge to keep it on a new path.

CALL OUT TO GOD AS YOUR SHEPHERD

Not only does a shepherd protect and serve his sheep, but God as the Good Shepherd also leads those sheep into eternity. **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.** This ain't your granny's potluck casserole (as great as that is). This is a royal feast with the Creator that invented your taste buds.

Then with assurance, David proclaimed, **“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”** As an accomplished warrior, David knew what it meant to chase and to be chased. Interestingly, the word “follow” is usually negative, meaning to chase down—like a victorious army does to a fleeing army. Usually, the intent is to do harm, but David uses this word in a positive way to show how vigorously the Lord's goodness and mercy will be at our back. It is inescapable. And amazingly, eternal.

The Good Shepherd wants your best. We must realize this and obey his loving guidance. Likewise, we must turn and show others that following our Shepherd, may not be easy, but it's good. It may be frightening at times, but he is there.