

Psalm 23.

Title: The Psalm for all of our life.

The LORD *is* my shepherd;

I shall not want.

² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.

³ He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

⁴ Yea, 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.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup runs over.

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.

Introduction

Psalm 23 is the most popular of all the 150 Psalms.

This Psalm is very popular at funerals and thanksgiving services all over the world.

However, it is not just to comfort people at a funeral, it is a Psalm for **all of our lives.**

At every point of our lives, whatever our need might be, this Psalm has something to say to us for **our encouragement.**

Although this Psalm was written by a shepherd who understood the behaviour of sheep, it was overshadowed by the **"Great Shepherd"** (Jesus Christ) who cares for His sheep and equips them for ministry.

(Hebrews 13: v. 20-21)

²⁰ Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, ²¹ make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Psalm 23 focuses on what Jesus does for us, **"all the days of our life"**.

David probably wrote this Psalm late in his life. Bible Scholars believe that it was written during the rebellion of his son Absalom. (2 Samuel 13-19)

In the Psalm David deals with some of the difficult things he experienced during his life and ministry.

This Psalm is best understood and appreciated by Christians who have fought the battles and carried the burdens of life with Jesus as their Lord and provider.

Sheep and shepherds are a continuous theme throughout the Old Testament.

The image of God as Israel's shepherd begins in Genesis and continues throughout scripture.

The promised Messiah Jesus was seen as a Shepherd.

(Ezekiel 34: v. 11-16 in N.K.J.)

¹¹ 'For thus says the Lord GOD: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will

feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.”

Before we start this Psalm there are 5 things that we need to know about sheep.

(Slide of a Sheep here)

1. Sheep are defenseless animals.
2. Sheep are prone to getting lost.
3. Sheep need constant care.
4. Sheep have to be led; you can't push them along like other animals.
5. Sheep in Bible times had Shepherds that had a very close relationship with each Sheep.

(John 10: v. 1-6 in N.K.J.)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” ⁶ Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them.

There have been many books written about Psalm 23 by Christian Shepherds who have done wonderful expositions of this Psalm. I have used their material in the past.

Because I have preached on this Psalm many times, this time I will be looking at Psalm 23 in a different way. I will still expose the truth of the Psalm but highlight the **Hebrew names of God** as they are reflected in the Psalm.

This will help us to focus more upon God and His provisions for us.

1. The God who provides what we need. – v. 1.

In v. 1 David is declaring that God is his **“Jehovah Jireh”**. This Hebrew word comes from Genesis Chapter 22: v. 14 and it means **“The Lord will provide”**.

Gen. 22: v. 1-14 in N.K.J.

Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!”
And he said, “Here I am.”

² Then He said, “Take now your son, your only *son* Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.”

³ So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴ Then on the third day Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place afar off. ⁵ And Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.”

⁶ So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid *it* on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together. ⁷ But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!”

And he said, “Here I am, my son.”

Then he said, “Look, the fire and the wood, but where *is* the lamb for a burnt offering?”

⁸ And Abraham said, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” So the two of them went together.

⁹ Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. ¹⁰ And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.

¹¹ But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!"

So he said, "Here I am."

¹² And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me."

¹³ Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind *him* was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said *to this day*, "In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

In this passage God was **testing Abraham** to discover if he really trusted God for **everything in his life**. It is one thing to say that we are a Christian and that we trust in the work of Jesus Christ to save our souls, but it is another thing to actually trust God **for all the provisions of our lives**.

David here is saying that actually he doesn't want anything, because he knows that God will provide everything he needs.

I have discovered over the years that many Christians **want things that they don't need and need things that they don't want**.

What do I mean by that?

Well, none of us want suffering or hard times in our lives, that is true.

However, God allows these things so that we can deepen our relationship with Him. Then we become more dependent upon His provisions, rather than doing things for ourselves without consulting Him. Sometimes we pray for things that we think that we need, but these things can often take us away from God and His will. The new job or position that we want, might just consume our time so that we have **no time for God's work**.

Quite often we can **try and answer our own prayers** and that can lead us away from God's will.

David had surrendered his life to God and had discovered that he didn't need anything. God would meet all of David's needs.

I have discovered over the last 34 years that God is much more generous in providing for our needs than we are in providing for the needs of others.

May God help us to be **his provision for others**, His channel of blessing for the needs of other people, especially those serving in Gospel ministries.

When the Lord is our Shepherd we can trust Him to provide for all of our needs.

2. **The God who provides "Peace" – v. 2.**

It is a known fact that sheep will not lie down unless they are stress free, and also that they will not drink water from fast flowing rivers.

(slide of sheep lying down)

If sheep drink water from fast flowing rivers, then they will get very sick.

Here in this verse David is declaring that God is his **"Jehovah – Shalom"** which in Hebrew means that **God is our peace**. However, in Hebrew the word doesn't just cover a one-off peace situation after a problem, it means that we can have a **"Peace" all of our lives**, if we follow God and desire His will for our lives.

Peace as a Christian believer is **NOT** absence from problems. It is a **"Peace"** in spite of all the problems.

Judges 6: v. 11-24 in N.K.J.

¹¹ Now the Angel of the LORD came and sat under the terebinth tree which *was* in Ophrah, which *belonged* to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon threshed wheat in the winepress, in order to hide *it* from the Midianites. ¹² And the Angel of the LORD appeared to him, and said to him, "The LORD *is* with you, you mighty man of valor!"

¹³ Gideon said to Him, "O my lord, if the LORD *is* with us, why then has all this happened to us?

And where *are* all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."

¹⁴ Then the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours, and you shall save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent you?"

¹⁵ So he said to Him, "O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan *is* the weakest in Manasseh, and I *am* the least in my father's house."

¹⁶ And the LORD said to him, "Surely I will be with you, and you shall defeat the Midianites as one man."

¹⁷ Then he said to Him, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, then show me a sign that it is You who talk with me. ¹⁸ Do not depart from here, I pray, until I come to You and bring out my offering and set *it* before You."

And He said, "I will wait until you come back."

¹⁹ So Gideon went in and prepared a young goat, and unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. The meat he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot; and he brought *them* out to Him under the terebinth tree and presented *them*. ²⁰ The Angel of God said to him, "Take the meat and the unleavened bread and lay *them* on this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so.

²¹ Then the Angel of the LORD put out the end of the staff that *was* in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the LORD departed out of his sight.

²² Now Gideon perceived that He *was* the Angel of the LORD. So Gideon said, "Alas, O Lord GOD! For I have seen the Angel of the LORD face to face."

²³ Then the LORD said to him, "Peace *be* with you; do not fear, you shall not die." ²⁴ So Gideon built an altar there to the LORD, and called it The-LORD-*Is*-Peace. To this day it *is* still in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

The story of Gideon is an example of how God through His Holy Spirit can give "Peace" in spite of very difficult and challenging situations.

It is easy to lose your peace in life if you focus upon your problems rather than focus upon the God who is able to give you peace in spite of your problems.

When I was a Pastor in my last Church in England there was a man who was sick and confined to bed. It was clear that he would not get well. He was getting depressed.

I said to him, "I have a cure for your depression." He said "what is that?" I said "serve Jesus in a ministry for the rest of your life." He was puzzled about how to do this from his bed.

I suggested that he start a prayer ministry from his bed side.

I told him to get a book and start recording all of his prayers.

I used to visit him once a week to encourage him. Eventually he got out of his depression and God used him in a wonderful way to pray for people.

However, one day I called on him and he was very concerned.

It was coming up to the anniversary of his Father's death.

He was worried that he was going to die on the same day of the month that his father died.

I said to him that I was 100% sure that he was not going to die on that date.

He then had a real peace in his heart and he trusted me with that advice.

However, I was only trusting God who says in the Bible that he will decide when we die. (Psalm 31: v. 15)

If we think that we know the date, then we are sure to be wrong because we are not God. In the end the man died 6 months later, peacefully in his sleep.

Whatever your problem might be today, focus upon God, He will give you His peace.

1 Peter 5: v. 6-7 in N.K.J.

⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

3. The God who heals and restores our life – v. 3.

It is clear from this verse that David is looking back over his life with thanksgiving.

David was thanking God for healing and restoring in his life.

For David, God was "**Jehovah-Rophe**". The Hebrew word means, "The Lord who heals".

The word first appears in the Bible in Exodus 15: v. 26.

(in N.K.J.)

²⁶ and said, "If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I *am* the LORD who heals you."

Here it refers to physical healing, which is dependent upon obedience to God's commandments. Disobedience in the Christian life can often lead to physical and emotional pain.

However, as we return to the Lord He is able to restore our lives.

Even though David had a heart after God and his plans, David made mistakes and paid severely for those mistakes.

Psalms 51 is worth reading here because it is David's prayer of repentance, after which he knew God's healing and restoration.

Psalms 51 here in N.K.J.

Have mercy upon me, O God, According to Your lovingkindness; According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, Blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, And cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin *is* always before me.

⁴ Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done *this* evil in Your sight— That You may be found just when You speak, *And* blameless when You judge.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

⁶ Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, And in the hidden *part* You will make me to know wisdom.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Make me hear joy and gladness, *That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.

⁹ Hide Your face from my sins, And blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me *by* Your generous Spirit.

¹³ *Then* I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You.

¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, The God of my salvation, *And* my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

¹⁶ For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give *it*; You do not delight in burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart— These, O God, You will not despise.

¹⁸ Do good in Your good pleasure to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Then You shall be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, With burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then they shall offer bulls on Your altar.

God is in the restoration business. He longs to bring emotional healing into our confused and broken lives.

Today if you are hurting in your heart about something in your past, or have an unresolved problem, God is willing to heal your heart.

Like David you may have sins to confess and forsake, but after your confession, God is willing to bring healing into your life.

4. The God who leads us in paths of Righteousness – v.3.

The Hebrew word here is "Jehovah -Tsidkenu".

Jeremiah 33: v. 15-16. In N.K.J.

¹⁵ 'In those days and at that time

I will cause to grow up to David

A Branch of righteousness;

He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

¹⁶ In those days Judah will be saved,
And Jerusalem will dwell safely.
And this *is the name* by which she will be called:
THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.’

The word righteousness is a very important word in the Bible.
Almost 25% of its use is in the book of Psalms. Sometimes the word is used of God, sometimes of the believer and sometimes, as it is here, simply about what is right.
Paths of righteousness are right paths.
God leads His people along right paths.
Left to themselves sheep always seem to wander on to wrong paths.
This is why sheep always need a Shepherd.
So the question is, what specifically the paths of righteousness are.
There are three things that will help us to understand how God will guide us in these paths of righteousness.
Firstly, paths of righteousness are paths that are according to God’s will for our lives.
God leads us **individually** according to His will for our lives.
Sometimes these paths can be very challenging and difficult.
Not even the disciples of Jesus understood everything that was happening when he was with them.

John 13: v. 7.

⁷ Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”

It was a very strange thing for Jesus, the creator of the world to wash the feet of the disciples.
However, there was a spiritual purpose behind His actions.
It was only later on that the disciples understood the things that Jesus was trying to teach them.
When we surrender our lives to Jesus and trust Him to guide us, our paths are not always smooth and without problems.
Jesus is **preparing us** for what He is **preparing for us.**
It might be a future ministry. It might be something for our personal growth.
Jesus never allows things to happen in our lives without purpose, if we are seeking to follow Him. So don’t get depressed if things are not quite working out for you in the way you expected.
God didn’t take His chosen people from Egypt to the promise land by the direct route. The reason for this is that they had many lessons to learn on the way.
It is sometimes **only as we look back on our lives** that we can see that God has led us in paths of righteousness.
Secondly, paths of righteousness are always in line with the perfect word of God.
As we read the Psalms we will see very often that our Christian journey can be best guided by God’s word.

Psalm 119: v. 59-64. In the N.L.T.

⁵⁹ I pondered the direction of my life, and I turned to follow your laws.

⁶⁰ I will hurry, without delay, to obey your commands.

⁶¹ Evil people try to drag me into sin, but I am firmly anchored to your instructions.

⁶² I rise at midnight to thank you for your just regulations.

⁶³ I am a friend to anyone who fears you— anyone who obeys your commandments.

⁶⁴ O LORD, your unfailing love fills the earth; teach me your decrees.

As we read God’s word, and study God’s word, both individually and corporately as a fellowship of God’s people, we will be led in paths of righteousness **if we obey God’s word.**
Thirdly, paths of righteousness are paths that are according to the **Shepherds own example.** If we want to walk in paths of righteousness then we need to follow the righteous one, **Jesus Christ.**

1 Peter 2: v. 21 in N.K.J.

²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

Following in the footsteps of Jesus is never going to be easy, but it is the way that God will always lead us. It will always be the right thing for us.

God knows us intimately, and He knows what is best for us and how best He can use us for His will.

Matthew 7: v. 13-14 in N.K.J.

¹³ "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide *is* the gate and broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.¹⁴ Because narrow *is* the gate and difficult *is* the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

5. The God who is there. – v. 4.

The next Hebrew word is "Jehovah -Shammah".

The word that is translated from Hebrew into English is "**The Lord is there**".

The word comes from **Ezekiel 48: v. 35.**

(in N.K.J.)

³⁵ All the way around *shall be* eighteen thousand *cubits*; and the name of the city from *that day shall be*: THE LORD IS THERE."

At some time in the future there will be a city whose name will be called, "**The Lord is there**". This is a promise of God's presence dwelling in that city.

Some Bible scholars believe that it is a prophecy about God's presence in Jerusalem during the 1,000 year reign of Jesus Christ in the future.

However, the promise of God's presence is for us NOW!

David may have been reflecting on his past life as a Shepherd when he had to take the sheep through dark valleys up on to the high mountains in the Spring.

There were thunderstorms and wild animals. It may have seemed that he was in danger of death.

David did not fear in these situations because he had the assurance of God's presence.

Today if you are a believer in Jesus, you also have the promise of God's presence in your life too.

John 14: v. 15-18. & v.25-28 in N.K.J.

¹⁵ "If you love Me, keep My commandments. ¹⁶ And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you.²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. ²⁸ You have heard Me say to you, 'I am going away and coming *back* to you.' If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, 'I am going to the Father,' for My Father is greater than I.

Isaiah 43: v. 1-2

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob,

And He who formed you, O Israel:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you;

I have called *you* by your name;

You *are* Mine.

² When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you;

And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to every believer. I know that we can't see the Holy Spirit, but we can feel His presence in a tangible way sometimes, and that is encouraging.

John 14: v. 21 in N.K.J.

²¹ He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."

David also had his rod and staff to comfort him.

These were David's weapons of protection for himself and his sheep.

The Rod was a strong stick with a knob on the end of it.

(Picture here of a Rod)

The Shepherd would use the Rod to both protect the sheep and to discipline the sheep.

Today our Rod and staff is God's word, the Bible. It can be used to protect us from danger and to discipline us when we are going in the wrong direction.

As we read our Bibles every day, we are protected by the chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

We are protected from error, especially from false teaching. I have discovered that false teachers are much more effective with people who don't read their Bibles every day. Human persuasion is very powerful, but God's word is much more powerful. We need to be always reading the Bible, it is for our protection and safety and discipline.

6. The God who sanctifies – v. 5-6.

The last Hebrew word is "**Jehovah M'Kaddesh**". This Hebrew word means "**The Lord who Sanctifies**".

Lev. 20: v. 7-8 in N.K.J.

⁷ Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I *am* the LORD your God. ⁸ And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you.

If you came on the retreat last year when we went to Mima City on Shikoku Island, then you will be familiar with the word "Sanctification". The word basically means being set apart for God's use. When Jesus saves us, God sets us apart for His use.

We are God's instruments here on this earth.

In v. 5 David had the assurance of God's anointing upon his life.

If we will co-operate with the Holy Spirit in our lives, then God is able to make us like Jesus. We may never be 100% perfect, but God can make us much more like Jesus if **we work in partnership with Him.**

Being filled with the Holy Spirit is much more about **God's control of our lives** than it is about gifts, experiences and material blessing.

We need God's sanctification to continue for all of our lives.

So Psalm 23 is definitely a Psalm for every believer for all of our lives.

May God's Holy Spirit encourage you with His presence today.

In the presence of God is fullness of joy. (Psalm 16: v. 11)