



| **SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES** |

WALKING
THE TEXT

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| PSALM 23 |

SERIES SUMMARY

There are moments in life when fear and sadness feel overwhelming. In those moments we look for comfort anywhere we can find it; a friend, a quote, anything that will reassure us things are going to work out in the end. And for thousands of years people have turned to Psalm 23 to help navigate seasons of uncertainty and distress. Despite being thousands of years old and from a culture so different from our own, Psalm 23 may be the most helpful tool for acquiring actual, tangible skills for living in the midst of uncertainty. This 10-part series will guide you deep into the wisdom of ancient shepherds. When you're finished with this study, you'll have a new perspective on trusting God in hard times and a greater capacity to practice hope when it feels like all hope is lost.

THIS CURRICULUM IS REALLY EASY TO USE

STEP 1: Click the link in each lesson to watch the video teaching.

STEP 2: Reflect on the discussion questions with your group.

STEP 3: Gain new perspective and fresh hope for trusting God in hard times!

PART 1 | **MY SAVVY SHEPHERD**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23:1

DESCRIPTION

Psalm 23 is one of the most well-known and beloved passages in the entire Bible. And over the next several weeks, we're going to tackle this culturally-rich psalm, unpacking all the ways it's as relevant today as it was when written three thousand years ago. In this particular teaching, we learn what it takes to be a great shepherd, and how astounding it is for David to proclaim, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What's your biggest takeaway from the teaching?
- How have you traditionally understood the shepherding profession?
- What surprised you most about the skills required to shepherd well?
- Do you find your deepest security in the good shepherd or do you place it in other things (position, wealth, reputation, accomplishments, other people, etc.)?
- In what ways have you been lured into the "wants of the world" and have lost sight of your need to rely on the good shepherd?
- What "needs" do you have that you haven't brought before God in a while or even at all? Take some time to do so.
- How will you begin relying anew on the good shepherd this week?

PART 2 | **GREEN PASTURES**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23:2; Philippians 4:10-13

DESCRIPTION

A flock thrives in the desert, so what could David possibly be talking about when he mentions “Green Pastures” in Psalm 23? The answer will likely shock you. I always thought it was a statement about God abundantly giving us what we need or want. And then I went to Israel, and everything changed. This teaching is geared towards doing the same for you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What’s your biggest takeaway from the teaching?
- How have you traditionally understood the “green pastures?”
- Were you surprised by the context of Philippians 4:13? How have you traditionally understood that passage?
- Where do you find yourself today? In the green? In the brown? In a combination of the two? What’s the biggest challenge you’re facing in your current reality?
- Where do you need strength and courage to live out contentment in your life right now?
- How has your understanding of God and how He provides for us changed as a result of what you learned in this teaching?
- How will you begin walking out your learnings this week?

PART 3 | **STILL WATERS OF REST**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23:2

DESCRIPTION

Were you aware that sheep won't drink water if it's moving? It freaks them out. Thus, when David mentions "still waters" in Psalm 23, it's intentional. Water is life. And sheep need to drink. But as David is doing throughout the psalm, this isn't about getting water; it's about getting something much deeper – something we desperately long for and need amidst the hectic nature of life. If you ever feel unsettled in all that needs to be done, this is a teaching you definitely need to hear.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What's your biggest takeaway from the teaching?
- Where are you feeling the most unsettled in the busyness of life right now?
- When it was said in the teaching, "We're not always supposed to be moving. We're not always supposed to be doing," what came to mind for you?
- Do you have anchoring points of rest in the midst of your day where you find that deep, soul-satisfying rest? If so, what are those anchoring points for you?
- If you don't have those moments, do you actually believe you need them? Why or why not?
- If you're not experiencing these moments of rest and you long to, what needs to happen to make this a part of your life?
- How will you begin implementing your desired changes this week?

PART 4 | **PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23:3

DESCRIPTION

When navigating a disorienting landscape, paths are essential. Sheep know this. Shepherds know this. And it's why David highlights God leading on "paths of righteousness for his name's sake." But what did David imply by this? What does righteousness even mean? Why is God's name at stake? And what happens if we stray from the path? All of this and more are discussed in this next episode on Psalm 23.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What's your biggest takeaway from the teaching?
- How have you traditionally understood the "paths of righteousness?" How did this teaching confirm, change, or deepen your understanding, particularly with respect to defining "righteousness" as "the standard of right relationship we have between God and other people?"
- When you've been off the path, how has God intentionally pursued you like a good shepherd pursuing a lost sheep? What did that teach you about God in those moments?
- Do you find yourself off the path in any way today? If so, how are you allowing God (and perhaps someone close to you) to help bring you back?
- How are you allowing God to lead you well on the "paths of righteousness?"
- Is there anything God is prodding at your heart?
- How will you begin implementing your desired changes this week?

PART 5 | **VALLEY OF DEEP DARKNESS**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23:4

DESCRIPTION

We all experience difficult times in our lives that cause fear, frustration, sadness and pain. In Psalm 23, these are the “valleys of deep darkness.” Once in, the only the way out is through. David understood this, and yet he boldly states, “Even though I walk through the valley of deep darkness (shadow of death), I will fear no evil for you are with me.” What exactly was David talking about? Once we grasp what David is saying, we’ll know how to navigate our valleys of deep darkness with hope and resilience and be able to say the same thing!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What’s your biggest takeaway from the teaching?
- Where are you experiencing a dark valley in your life? If you’re not, who in your circle is? How can you reach out to them to let you know you’re with them and that you care for them?
- If you’re in a dark valley, how are you doing? Are you denying your reality in any way? Are you stuck in the valley? Are you moving through it?
- Was the conversation on fear helpful to you? Why or why not? Where might fear be paralyzing your movement forward?
- How does the knowledge that God is intimately aware of you and with you as you walk through hard places change your perspective? Do you believe God is walking with you through your difficulties? Why or why not?
- Do you generally go through your difficulties alone or do you allow others to know and walk with you through them?
- In what ways have you seen God anew going through the deep valleys of your life?
- What is God asking you to do to walk out the truths of this teaching?

PART 6 | **ROD & STAFF (AND SLING)**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23:4

DESCRIPTION

The rod and the staff, they comfort David. And likely the sling too! These are what the shepherd carries for various situations. Learning about these alone is utterly fascinating, especially when you find out how David uses them against lions, bears, and Goliath (which we discuss). But how these translate into what God does for us in the midst of our deep valleys is where the power lies. And once we understand that, we'll find comfort, courage, and hope just like David did.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What's your biggest takeaway from the teaching?
- When you find yourself in difficult times, where do you turn for comfort?
- It was mentioned that one of the reasons a shepherd carries a crook is to help their sheep get back on the path. What came to your mind as you heard this? Have you experienced this in your life with God?
- In what area is God gently guiding you back to the path He's set before you?
- What are the differences between safety and being protected from evil? Have you ever considered this before? Does this change anything in your life or relationship with God?
- How does knowing that evil, pain, and brokenness have been defeated by Jesus change how you view difficult times?
- How can you be intentional this week in seeking your comfort in God, our great shepherd who can be trusted?

PART 7 | **A GENEROUS HOST**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23:5

DESCRIPTION

As soon as David mentions “preparing a table,” “anointing with oil,” and “cup overflowing,” we know he’s no longer communicating a shepherding imagery. You don’t do any of these with sheep. So why the shift? And what’s he conveying? This is one of the most fascinating cultural aspects of Psalm 23, and understanding the imagery shift and its implications will help you see your relationship with God and His world in a renewed, compelling, and gratitude-inducing way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What’s your biggest takeaway from the teaching?
- The same God who created the world has invited you into his tent and wants to share time with you. What comes to mind when you hear this? Do you believe this to be true? Why or why not?
- To share a meal was a sign of acceptance and love. Where do you need to be reminded today that God loves you and accepts you and wants your cup of joy to be overflowing?
- Are there “enemies” encircling your life right now, seeking to discourage you or perhaps hoping you fail in some way? What comfort do you find knowing God is aware of that and desires to encourage you in the midst of it?
- Does the way you live express that you trust God or yourself for your provision and protection?
- Is your walk with God marked with striving and guilt, or joy and celebration? In what areas do you feel like God is calling you to change? What will your first step be?
- How can you respond in gratitude this week to the astounding truth that God is a generous host?

PART 8 | **THEY'RE CHASING ME**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23:6

DESCRIPTION

Have you ever had that sense that someone was following you? It's a deeply unnerving feeling. As a shepherd, David would've experienced this on a regular basis. And yet, what's on his heels in the last verse of Psalm 23 isn't something threatening, but two of the most significant realities in the entire Bible. And when we understand what's chasing him, we'll have great confidence that they're chasing us as well!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What's your biggest takeaway from the teaching?
- Wolves (and other predators) seek to prey on tired sheep at dusk. Where are you feeling tired and weary in your faith (or in life in general)? Is there anything lurking in the shadows that's seeking to overtake you right now?
- David's analogy of God's "good" and "covenantal love" following us gives us an image of God standing between us and things that might be seeking to overpower us. How does this imagery give you and hope and courage?
- Despite any circumstances or struggles, how does knowing that good is on your heels change your current perspective?
- Do you trust that God's purposes and plans will never fail? Why or why not? What in your life indicates this?
- How are you inspired to live differently this week knowing God's love, grace and mercy will always be chasing you?

PART 9 | **PRACTICING GOD'S PRESENCE**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23:6

DESCRIPTION

David concludes Psalm 23 by proclaiming, “and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.” It’s a stunning ending to a stunning Psalm. But what’s David’s context? What’s he declaring? Is he talking about Heaven? Is he talking about the Tabernacle (often referred to as “the house of the LORD”). Is “forever” the best translation? As we seek to answer these questions, I believe we’ll be invited into one of the most significant practices that enables us to grow in our awareness of God, and approach life with a perspective and maturity that we all long to possess.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What’s your biggest takeaway from the teaching?
- Do you have some kind of grounding time to connect with God each day? What does this look like for you? How has this impacted your life?
- David desperately sought to dwell in the presence of God. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 – being that “you struggle to do so” and 10 being that “you can’t wait to”), how would you rate your desire to dwell in God’s presence?
- Have you ever considered the idea of recalibrating to the awareness of God in the midst of your day? What impact do you think this practice would have on your life?
- Despite all that may be going on in the world and in your life, do you trust that God hasn’t lost control, and that he’s working in the midst of it all? Why or why not?
- Do you find yourself holding onto to something in life with a tight grip? How is this affecting your work, relationships, and faith? Where is God asking you to loosen the grip?
- What is one change you will make this week as you seek to daily practice the presence of God?

PART 10 | **ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS**

VIDEO

Click to Watch

KEY PASSAGE(S)

Psalm 23

DESCRIPTION

Over the last nine episodes, we've been digging into Psalm 23 and I've been encouraging you to ask your questions. In this episode, I seek to answer those questions. The discussion entails everything from how we teach our kids to understand the Bible's context to leaders being intentional about setting aside times for rest and renewal to discussing whether Jesus was beaten with a shepherd's "staff," "rod," or something else, and much more. May this discussion help round out some additional aspects of Psalm 23 as we seek to live out the truths of this psalm in our lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Were there any "aha" moments for you in the answers given that helped you better understand a facet of Psalm or just life in general?
- It was mentioned that a good shepherd is not only aware of the environment, but how each sheep needs to be led uniquely in that environment. As a parent, leader, coach, and/or friend, etc., what stuck out to you about how to do the same?
- Where do we (as parents, teachers, churches, etc.) need to do a better job of training our children to understand the Bible so they won't have as much to "unlearn" in the future?
- Overall, what's been your biggest takeaway from this series on Psalm 23?
- Have you begun living out the most significant truths addressed in this series in your life? If so, how? If not, what's the next step you need to take in doing so?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

- *The Good Shepherd: A Thousand-Year Journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament* by Kenneth E. Bailey
- *Psalm 23: A Photo Commentary (book)* by Steven D. Anderson and Todd Bolen
- *Psalm 23: Photo Companion to the Bible (pictures)* by Todd Bolen (BiblePlaces.com)
- *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks* by Timothy Laniak
- *Becoming a Judean Shepherd* by Doug Greenwold

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