

**TITLE: A PEACE THAT ELUDES MANY CHRISTIANS**

**TEXT: PSALM 23**

**INTRO:** David was a shepherd, even at a young age (1 Sam 16:11,19). He knew the commitment that was necessary on the part of the shepherd *and* the sheep in order for this to be a successful relationship. In Psalm 23, he uses this relationship as an example of his relationship with God, his shepherd, and the total trust he, like a sheep, put in God.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs sets forth levels of needs each human has: physiological (food, clothing, shelter); safety; love/belonging, esteem, etc. In Psalm 23, David demonstrates that all these needs are fulfilled in a submissive relationship to God as a sheep to the shepherd, totally trusting in Him.

(Many details of the sheep/shepherd relationship in this lesson come from "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23" by Phillip Keller)

(v. 1–The Relationship; v. 2–Physical needs met; v. 3–Spiritual needs met; v. 4–Safety provided; v. 5–Chosen & esteemed; v. 6–Future secure)

➤ (v. 1) *The Lord is my shepherd* – (Relationship)

1. I've chosen to submit to him (to his auth & leadership). I have determined that He is the only appropriate one to fill this role. Why?
  - a. He created this world (and everything in it, including me), so He ought to know what's best for me.
  - b. He loves me, and *always* has my best interest in mind. Therefore I choose to put myself in this subordinate role. But how?
2. I must agree to and obey *His* rules. You can't come to God with your own terms for His leadership over you (although many try)! The sheep humbly and lovingly submits to the leadership of its shepherd – the one whose voice he knows (**John 10:4,27**).

➤ *I shall not want* – (Supply)

"I shall not want (lack; fail)." David shows his trust in God. He *knows* God will always take care of him, because He always has.

**Phil 4:19** – "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

The rest of this psalm demonstrates this statement.

➤ (v. 2) *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures* – (Physical needs: Food & Rest)

Sheep will not lie down if they **1**) are not free of all fear (predators & parasites), & **2**) are hungry. They must be fed by the shepherd. In a sense, we're the same way. Can you rest if you fear something (predator, lack of food, etc.)? Trust in God to fulfill these physical needs. But most importantly, God fulfills our need for *spiritual* sustenance & rest. His Word is available to all.

➤ *He leadeth me beside the still waters* – (Physical needs: Refreshing)

1. Sheep require the shepherd to *lead* them to the water. He knows where good water is. Often, if not lead to good water, a sheep will drink from polluted potholes (full of parasites). Spiritually, this is what so many do today who refuse to be lead by the Spirit (Word).
2. Also, they will not drink from moving water (it must be *still* water). They also get water from the early morning dew on the green grass they eat. They go out early, eat & drink, and are filled. Christians find nourishment & peace when reading the Word early!

**Mt 5:6** – "Blessed are they that hunger & thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

**Jn 7:37** – "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." This was a feast that celebrated God as the giver of water (**Zech 14:17**).

➤ (v. 3) *He restoreth my soul* – (Spiritual needs met: Forgiveness)

He restores (bring back; allow to return) my soul. A sheep sometimes gets itself turned over on its back & is stuck like this. If not corrected by the shepherd, it will die. As Christians, we get ourselves into situations where, if not corrected, we too will eventually die (spiritually). God, as our Shepherd, gently restores us when we repent. He *never* gives up on us if we don't give up on ourselves!

➤ *He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness* – (Spiritual needs met: Guidance)

- He leads me (guides, governs). A shepherd directs the sheep along different paths into different fields. If left alone, sheep, not being the brightest creatures, will go along the same paths through the same fields repeatedly until they destroy them (even eating the roots out of the ground)! The shepherd must lead them to different fields (cf. Jacob's sons feeding the flocks in Hebron, Shechem, Dothan–**Gen 37**).
- What do you know about righteousness? ONLY what God tells you in His Word. We *cannot* lead ourselves. We often pray for God to "guide, guard, & direct us." As sheep, we must then accept the guidance He gives by **1**) praying, and **2**) studying & **obeying** His Word.

➤ *For his name's sake* – (Purpose)

For his name's (honor, authority, character) sake (purpose).

If a shepherd ignores the sheep & allows them to destroy his field, this damages his own **reputation**.

God leads His people in righteousness, not only for our benefit, but for His own name/reputation. How many non-Christians have no interest in Christianity, not because of God or His Word, but because of His people?!

**1 Peter 4:11**– "...that God in all things may be glorified" – this happens when we speak what He speaks, and serve w/the ability He gives.

➤ (v. 4) *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death* – (Safety Provided: Trial & Persistence)

Notice the change in person being addressed in this verse ("he" is now "thou"). This "walk" is in connection with the Shepherd's leading. In their travels looking for pasture, they travel up & down mtns, w/dark valleys between. David says I walk *through* them (he doesn't die here). Too many Christians are the "stony" soil – they have no root and allow the darkness of persecution to cause them to fall away.

➤ *I will fear no evil* – (Peace)

But David says, "*I will fear no evil!*" In the midst of the valley (looking for pasture), the sheep don't give up; they trust the shepherd.

➤ *For thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me* – (Safety Provided: Protection)

1. The rod and staff are very unique to a shepherd.
  - a. The rod is the shepherd's main (if only) source of protection for his sheep. Shepherds in the Middle East are very skilled at using these sticks as weapons (**1 Sam 17:36** -David killed lion & bear to protect the sheep).
  - b. The staff is used to gently guide the sheep back to the path. The shepherd will also rest it upon a sheep to show affection.
2. So, we can see that the "rod and staff" of God reference his love for us shown by **1**) protecting us, and **2**) his affection for us.

- **(v. 5) *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies* – (Chosen & esteemed)**
  1. Verse 5 may be a change from the “sheep/shepherd” analogy, to seeing God as a Host, taking care of His guest.
  2. If not, “table” may refer to a “mesa” (which means “table”). The picture is one of provision. The shepherd leads his sheep to the flat “tabletop,” where predators (“enemies”) can be seen and stopped.
  3. Regardless of the specific meaning of this phrase, we know David is saying that God always took care of him, even in the midst of his enemies (**1 Sam 29-30** – God took care of David when he fled from Saul & was dwelling among the Philistines).
- ***Thou anointest my head with oil* – (Chosen & esteemed: Divine selection and approval)**
  1. The shepherd anoints the sheep’s head with a special oil that keeps flies away. Otherwise some of these insects (e.g., nasal bot fly) can lay eggs inside the nose, the larvae of which can move into the head, torturing the sheep. This anointing must be done **regularly**.
  2. In the Scripture, “anointing” has the idea of Divine selection and approval. “**Christ**” means “**anointed**.” David himself was anointed as king by Samuel (**1 Sam 16**). It also shows favorable treatment of a guest. The woman anointed Jesus w/oil when his host failed to.
  3. The point in this verse is that, as a Shepherd or Host, God has given David everything he needed, *and more!*
- ***My cup runneth over* – (Chosen & esteemed: Abundance)**

“Cup” refers to what has been given to someone to drink. More than once Jesus referred to the “cup” He had to drink (death). However in this context, this is a good cup to drink, and should be seen in the same context as the “meal” in this verse. When God provides, it truly runneth over (exceeds even our own needs & expectations). **Lk 6:38** – “...*a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over.*”
- **(v. 6) *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life* – (Future secure: Blessings in this life)**

The analogy is complete, the point has been made regarding God’s provisions for him as a Shepherd to His sheep, and now David makes this conclusion. He shows his trust in God – that God will be with him for the rest of his life!
- ***And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever* – (Future secure: Eternal reward)**

He continues to show his trust in God – that God will be with him for eternity, because David will be with God for eternity.  
**Psalm 27:4** - One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.

**CONCLUSION:** “*I shall not want!*” This psalm is about the peace of **submitting** to a knowledge, loving superior. In any phase of life, whether we admit it or not, we feel most comfortable in this setting (there’s less pressure on us). When people cannot accept this role of submission, they are not ready for Christianity. Everyone will submit either to God or Satan. Those who claim neither are already obeying Satan, whether they acknowledge it or not. (Unlike God, Satan does not require a public confession that he is Lord...as long as you don’t confess Christ as Lord, you’re already submitting to Satan.)

The peace David speaks of in Psalm 23 affects every bit of your life; every need of Maslow’s hierarchy is fulfilled! Unfortunately, this peace eludes many Christians. This is because they are only *partially* submissive. God requires *total* submission. His sheep cannot go wandering from Him and expect His protection and provision. If you follow Him (through whole-hearted obedience), life is peaceful, regardless of what may come.