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# OUR SHEPHERD



*When has a guide made an experience more memorable?*

**QUESTION #1**

*God guides us as He walks with us.*



## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Maps are good to direct you from one place to another, but you need to study them before leaving on a trip. If you don't know the route well, you will need to stop periodically and double-check the map.

GPS is better, but you still have to pay attention. You must glance continually at the screen to get a visual on how soon a turn is coming or listen intently to the verbal instructions.

The best way to travel is with someone who knows the route well. A guide can anticipate things and remind you to “get in the left lane” or “be prepared for a sharp turn.” They often know shortcuts that the GPS is not clever enough to know. A guide can also provide “color commentary” as you travel, telling you interesting tidbits about places along the route.

Let's admit, we all need a guide to get through life. Even when we think we have things figured out, life inserts a roadblock and the journey changes. But God does for us just as a shepherd does for his flock. God is our Good Shepherd who guides us on the right path and in the right direction.

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ***Psalm 23:1-3***

**<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.**

David very well may have written Psalm 23 during the latter years of his reign as Israel's king. It clearly has the ring of personal experience. It testifies to a faith tested by trials and a life mellowed and matured by the passing of years.

David had experienced conflict—both internal and external—including wars, family division, personal disappointments, discouragement, and despair. His hands were soiled by the murder of Uriah. His adulterous relationship with Bathsheba had ignited family fighting that led to ongoing conflict among family members. David experienced sin and the deep sorrow of its consequences; he knew the pain of one son's death and the rebellion of another who tried to take his kingdom.

Yet this psalm affirms that, through it all, David knew God as his tender Shepherd. The imagery in this psalm may go back to David's childhood experiences. As a shepherd boy, David was deemed an unlikely candidate to become the king of Israel. It is significant that David, the great warrior, was drawn to a simple but assuring depiction of God as a gentle Shepherd caring for the needs of His flock.

The profound impact of Psalm 23 is not discovering that God cares like a Shepherd, but the intimacy of the truth that God is *my* Shepherd. He is *the* Shepherd who "makes me lie down in green pastures"; who "leads me beside quiet waters." David knew he belonged to the Lord and that gave him calm assurance in the midst of trials.

***In what ways have you experienced  
God's guidance in life?***

**QUESTION #2**

David's expression of absolute trust was stated in profound simplicity: "I have what I need." He mentioned the green pastures and quiet waters first because they are fundamental needs of the sheep if they are to survive and grow. Sheep cannot continue to follow the shepherd without sufficient rest and adequate food. The shepherd must put himself at risk and often travel great distances to meet these basic needs, but he does so because his care and focus are on the sheep. Our satisfaction level is directly related to our proximity to the Good Shepherd.

The phrase "he refreshes my soul" can convey two ideas. Refresh can refer to a straying sheep that has been brought back to the fold; it also may point to the deep refresh available to all sheep that remain in relationship with the shepherd. The two pictures are intertwined. God desires abundance for all His sheep, even the straying ones.

"He guides me along the right paths" simply means that we will be safe and productive because of the Shepherd's presence. This does not mean we will not face danger and difficulty as we follow the Shepherd. Verse 4 reminds us the sheep may travel through dark valleys, yet they can have courage in knowing they need not fear the danger as long as they remain near the shepherd.

The final phrase of verse 3—"for his name's sake"—serves as a refrain. The Good Shepherd would never lead His sheep in paths that would prove harmful or destructive because it is contrary to His character. God gives the guidance we need "for his name's sake."

## ***Psalm 23:4-5***

**<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**



## GOD OUR SHEPHERD

*Choose one of the following scenarios and explain how God might act as a Shepherd in each case.*

1. A man who has served the Lord for many years now finds himself out of work through no fault of his own.
2. A teenager at your church has made a series of poor choices and is now in trouble with the authorities.
3. A couple in your neighborhood is considering moving to a new city to help with a church plant.

*How could God use you to work alongside Him as He leads each of these individuals on their journey?*

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

—JOHN 10:11

In verses 1-3, the shepherd is pictured as a guide who scouts the landscape to lead his flock to food, water, and rest. Now he is seen as coming alongside the sheep to personally escort the flock. When the sheep face the testing of a dark valley, he is by their side.

The rod and staff were the tools the shepherd used to protect and guide his sheep. The rod was a short, club-like stick worn on the belt and used against animals and thieves. The staff could serve as a walking stick, but when necessary, the shepherd employed it to keep the sheep from straying off the path.

When we feel the pressure of the staff, we might be tempted to react in anger. But we can trust our Shepherd is concerned for our care and protection. God's discipline is always motivated by His unchanging love. He guides us back onto the right path so that we will know His presence and experience His protection, even in the "darkest valley" (v. 4).

In verse 5, the imagery of the sheep and shepherd is exchanged for an even more intimate picture. David now pictured himself as a guest in the Lord's house.

Jesus the Good Shepherd reclined at a table with His disciples. Indeed, His last gathering with them before His crucifixion was when He kept the Passover with them. Jesus promised His disciples that He would one day eat and drink with them in His kingdom.

When we are walking through dark valleys of doubt, discouragement, and difficulty, how good it is to know God is and will be with us!

*When have you experienced God's presence in a dark valley?*

**QUESTION #3**

*Which of the images in this passage is most meaningful to you right now?*

**QUESTION #4**

## ***Psalm 23:6***

**6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

The promises of this psalm continue to heap one upon the other. We are not simply promised a celebratory meal which will soon be over. We are not simply guests; we are residents. We will live with God as long as we live—which is forever!

“Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.” *Faithful love* refers to God’s covenant love promised to His own people. Throughout Scripture, we see the people of God continually relying on the bedrock truth that God is faithful; He exhibits His goodness and faithful love to His people.

David concluded that he would live in the presence of God with His unending goodness and faithful love “forever.” This phrase is literally “a length of days,” which is not explicitly an expression for eternity. However, since God’s covenant love has no end, the logic of the statement implies an eternal dwelling with God.

Jesus used the image of “the good shepherd” in John 10 to describe His own ministry. He contrasted the good shepherd to the stranger, the thief, the robber, and the hired hand. A thief and a robber desire only to steal and kill the sheep, and a hired hand flees when the sheep are threatened. In contrast, the Good Shepherd is willing to lay down His life for the sheep.

Jesus, God in human flesh, fully revealed what it means to address God as *Jehovah Rohi*. The Book of Revelation offers one final picture of Jesus, our Good Shepherd: “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; ‘he will lead them to springs of living water.’ ‘And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes’” (Rev. 7:17). The Good Shepherd is the Lamb of God who lays down His life for His sheep and the Lamb of God who is eternally our Good Shepherd.

***How can our actions and attitudes demonstrate that we follow God as our Shepherd?***

**QUESTION #5**

## LIVE IT OUT

How will a relationship with the Good Shepherd make a difference in your life? Choose one of the following applications.

- ▶ **Rest and trust.** When God doesn't provide what you think you need, trust His goodness. Spend some time this week thanking Him for His protection.
- ▶ **Stay close.** Sin will keep you from experiencing all the good the Shepherd desires for you. Acknowledge and confess any sin that keeps you separated from the One who desires to lead you to still waters.
- ▶ **Slow down.** If you are rushed and harried, it may be that you aren't taking time for the Shepherd to feed you and restore your soul. Make changes to your schedule to ensure more quality time in God's Word.

We all need help with directions from time to time, whether we like to admit it or not. Thankfully we have the truest guide for life in *Jehovah Rohi*, God Our Shepherd.

My thoughts

