

**Sermon Series On
Twenty-Third Psalm
“THE LORD Is My Shepherd”
Psalms 23:1-4a**

Introduction**A. The CONFUSION Of Believers**

1. Some believers believe that God is some kind of “Divine Referee” in their lives. This would be their 23rd Psalm. “The **Lord** is my **Referee**, I shall **not** get away with any infraction. He maketh me to sit in the **penalty box**; he sendeth me to the **bench** if I get too many fouls. He restoreth me to the team **after** I have **paid my fine** and served out my suspension . . . Surely **flags** and **penalties** shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the **doghouse** of the Coach forever.”
2. I want you to listen very carefully about who God really is and what He thinks of his children. (read Psalm 23)
3. **NOTICE THAT WE, AS BELIEVERS NEED HELP!**
 - a. God does not see us as being perfect.
 - b. That is why we need His help.

B. The CLARIFICATION Of Believers.**1. In actuality, GOD CALLS US SHEEP!**

- a. a Pastor, **James Botts**, who grew up on a farm with sheep, made the following observations about sheep. Sheep are:
 1. **Directionless** – Cats and dogs can find their way home instinctively, but sheep are directionally confused.
 2. **Defenseless** – Most animals have defense mechanisms – sharp teeth or claws, speed, illusive sense of smell, sight or hearing, strength, ferocity or a growl, but not sheep. Sheep are totally vulnerable to attack from predators.
 3. **Fearful** – Sheep are easily spooked. They are emotionally reactive animals, often driven by fear.
 4. **Filthy** – Other animals lick, scrape or roll themselves in the grass to get clean, but not sheep. Sheep will carry parasites and remain filthy unless their shepherd cleans them.
 5. **Dependent** – Other animals can find food and water on their own, but sheep will be happy to eat poisonous weeds and die.
- b. Pastor **David Roper** says: “It occurs to me that if Jehovah is to be our shepherd, then we have to begin by recognizing that we are sheep. I don’t like that analogy, frankly, because I don’t like sheep. I come by my dislike honestly. **I used to raise sheep**. In high school I was in the 4-H club, and I had a herd of sheep and goats. Now goats I can abide, because they may be obnoxious, **but at least they’re smart**. Sheep are, **dirty, timid, defenseless and helpless**. My sheep were always **getting lost and hurt and snake-bitten**. **They literally do not know enough to come in out of the rain**. I look back on my shepherding days with a **great deal of disgust**. **Sheep are miserable creatures.**”

2. So, basically, we are kidding ourselves:
 - a. we are not perfect
 - b. we are sheep
 - c. AND WE NEED A SHEPHERD!

I. The POWER Of The Shepherd.

A. The IDENTITY Of The Shepherd.

1. We have a **POWERFUL SHEPHERD**

Vs. 1 - “**THE LORD** is my shepherd,”

 - a. how **vast** is our universe?
 1. **Our universe** is so vast that it takes a beam of light which, travels **700 million miles per hour**, over **100,000 years** just to cover our galaxy, the Milky Way. Our galaxy is only **one among billions** in the known universe.
 2. **Hollow sun illustration:**
 - a. If the **sun were hollow**, **one million, three hundred thousand** earths could fit inside of it.
 - b. A star named **Antares** (if hollow) could hold **sixty-four million** of our suns.
 - c. In the constellation of **Hercules**, there is a star which could contain **100 million of Antares**.
 - d. The largest known star, **Epsilon**, could easily swallow up **several million stars** the size of the one in Hercules!
 - b. how **minute** is our universe?
 1. The **smallest insect** on this earth is made up of **millions of living cells**. There are some **seventy-five trillion** such cells in the body of an average man.
 2. **Each cell** is a world brimming with as many as **200 trillion tiny groups of atoms** called protein molecules. It is a micro-universe in itself.
 3. The total length of the **DNA strand** in one cell is **six feet**. If all the DNA strands in the body were bunched up, they could fit into a box the size of an ice cube. But if unwound and joined together, the string could stretch from the earth to the sun and back more than **400 times**.
 - c. how **much energy** exists in our universe?
 1. On the **tip of a ball point pen** are so many atoms that if they were carried by an army, marching four abreast, an atom to a man, it would take over **20,000 years for the Army to march past**.
 2. It would take **25 trillion protons** laid side by side to **span a linear inch**.
 - d. **THIS IS THE LORD THAT IS OUR SHEPHERD.**
 1. I think that our Shepherd can “handle anything” that we may throw at Him.
 2. However, do we really believe that He is **THE LORD**?
2. We have a **PERSONAL SHEPHERD**

Vs. 1 - “The Lord is **MY** Shepherd,”

- a. notice the pronouns that David did **NOT** use:
 - 1. **“a”** shepherd – one of many shepherds
 - 2. **“the”** shepherd – the absolute one, but not personal
 - 3. **“our”** – not as personal
 - b. as hard as it is to believe, God the Almighty, Creator God is **MY** Shepherd
 - c. The Psalmist continues throughout the Psalm to **use personal pronouns.**
 - 1. **“He** makes me lie down in green pastures”
 - 2. **“He** restores my soul.”
 - 3. **“He** guides me in paths of righteousness
 - 4. **You** prepare a table before me
 - 5. **You** anoint my head with “oil”.
 - d. **Martin Luther – “Faith is a matter of personal pronouns.”**
3. We have a **PROVIDING SHEPHERD**
Vs. 1 - “I shall not want.”

- a. our shepherd is not only mighty and personal, He also takes care of our every need
- b. the sense here is that the good shepherd of the sheep makes sure His sheep **have everything that they NEED**
- c. I like what a little girl in Sunday School said, in attempting to memorize the 23rd Psalm – “The Lord is my shepherd, **that’s all I want.**”
 - 1. the little girl was absolutely right
 - 2. if the Lord is all that I need, He is all that I will want
- d. When someone says, "I shall not want," we need to sit up and take notice because this is an age of discontent. Listen to these words by **Jason Lehman:**

It was spring. But it was summer I wanted - The warm days, and the great outdoors.

It was summer. But it was fall I wanted - The colorful leaves, and the cool, dry air.

It was fall. But it was winter I wanted - The beautiful snow, and the joy of the holiday season.

It was winter. But it was spring I wanted - The warmth, and the blossoming of nature.

I was a child. But it was adulthood I wanted - The freedom, and the respect.

I was 20. But it was 30 I wanted - To be mature, and sophisticated.

I was middle-aged. But it was 20 I wanted - The youth, and the free spirit.

I was retired. But it was middle-age I wanted - The presence of mind, without limitations.

Then my life was over, and I never got what I wanted.

B. The INFLUENCE Of The Shepherd.

- 1. The shepherd **CALMS FEARFUL SHEEP** –
Vs. 2 - “He makes me lie down in green pastures.”

a. the **physical**

1. there are **four things** that must be dealt with if sheep are to be a healthy flock and are able “to lie down without worry”
 - a. sheep must be free from **fear**
 1. sheep are very, very fearful
 2. shepherds will tell you that ANYTHING, even a jack rabbit jumping out of a bush, can startle an entire flock
 - b. sheep must be free from **friction** within the flock
 1. one disobedient sheep can confuse and wreck havoc in a flock
 2. sometimes, shepherds will literally kill a sheep that causes such friction in his flock
 - c. sheep must be free from **parasites, flies and bugs**
 - d. sheep must be free from **hunger**
2. the **ONLY** solution for the sheep is that the shepherd is **VISIBLY seen** by the sheep to rest all of their fears

b. the **spiritual**

1. **financials:**

- a. since the recent fall of the stock market, some two trillion dollars have been lost in American’s retirement funds.
- b. 40% of all Americans are not saving for retirement
- c. 25% have no savings at all – retirement or otherwise
- d. the current (and even expanding) national debt in America is 11 trillion dollars; each American’s share of this debt is \$30,000.00 (man, woman and child)

2. **lifespan**

- a. American men can expect to live to the age of 78 years; women, 82 years (that means, I have 20 more years to live).
- b. more than likely, you will die from one of these diseases:
 1. heart disease
 2. cancer
 3. stroke

3. **SO, DO YOU SEE IT? WE ARE JUST LIKE SHEEP – FEARFUL.**

- a. **EVERYONE IS PRONE TO WORRY –**
 1. how much time do you spend worrying?
 2. how much time do you spend worrying about the future? **80%; 90%?**
- b. **AND YOU CAN’T STOP WORRYING JUST BY TELLING YOURSELF NOT TO WORRY – TRY IT!**
- c. **THE SOLUTION** for the Christian “to be able to lie down” – to absolutely believe that the Good Shepherd is there and will take care of you.

1. that only comes through faith
 2. **II Timothy 1:7** – “For God did **not** give us a spirit of **timidity**, but a spirit of **power**, of love and of self-discipline.”
2. The shepherd **QUENCHES THIRSTY SHEEP** –
Vs. 2 - “He leads me beside **still waters**.”
- a. the **physical**
 1. **70%** of a sheep’s body is made up of water
 2. sheep **MUST** have water to live
 - a. sheep will not drink fresh water from a rushing stream
 1. they know that their wool is heavy and will absorb water
 2. so, they could be dying of thirst but will not go to a stream
 3. the shepherd must lead them to a safe water hole
 - b. **BUT . . .** sheep will drink water from a parasite infested pothole
 In his book, **A Shepherd Looks At The 23rd Psalm**, **Philip Keller**, once a shepherd himself, said: “There was a bunch of sheep that I watched one day which were being led down to a **magnificent mountain stream**. The **snow-fed waters** were flowing pure and clear and crystal clean between lovely banks of trees. **But on the way**, several stubborn ewes and their lambs stopped, instead, to drink from **small, dirty, muddy pools beside the trail**. The water was filthy and polluted, not only with the churned up mud from the passing sheep but even with the manure and urine of previous flocks that had passed that way. **Still these stubborn sheep were quite sure it was the best drink obtainable.**
 - c. much of the water that is found is found in the early morning grass – in the **dew** – this is one of the chief sources of water for the sheep.
 - b. the **spiritual**
 1. we, as people, have a huge vacuum in our souls that must be filled. **WE ARE “THIRSTY” PEOPLE!**
 - a. **St. Augustine** – “**O God! Thou hast made us for Thyself and our souls are restless, searching, till they find their rest in thee.**”
 - b. **BUT . . .** it is very, very interesting where we go to “quench our thirst”
 1. money
 2. houses
 3. work
 4. children
 5. relationships

- c. at a wedding that I performed last week, I shared my mistake of putting my wife on a pedestal when I fell in love in college
 - 1. my attitude in college
 - 2. "I thought the solution to my deepest need was her!"
 - 2. our "vacuum" can only be filled by Jesus
 - a. **John 14:6** - Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
 - b. **John 7:37** - On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is **thirsty**, let him **come to me and drink.**"
- 3. The shepherd **RESTORES THE FALLEN SHEEP**
Vs. 3 - "He restores my soul."
 - a. the **physical**
 - 1. there is a word used by English shepherds that describe a sheep that loses its balance and falls over – **to be "cast"**
 - a. there are several reasons that a sheep could fall over and be "cast"
 - 1. the sheep is **overweight** – eating too much food and not getting any exercise
 - 2. the sheep has **too much wool** – and needs to be sheared
 - 3. the wool of the sheep has been **burdened down** by mud, sticks and trash
 - b. once the sheep is "cast", the sheep cannot get up in its own power
 - 1. it is somewhat like a turtle
 - 2. if the weather is hot, sheep can die very quickly when "cast"
 - 2. the only solution for a cast sheep is for the shepherd to put it back on its feet
 - b. the **spiritual**
 - 1. like sheep, sometimes believers become "cast"
 - a. while we ARE sheep in the flock of the good shepherd, we sometimes "fall over"
 - b. the reasons that we "become cast" :
 - 1. we get **too spiritually fat**
 - a. all that we do is to take in spiritual food and never give out to others
 - b. we become self-absorbed, out of balance
 - c. B's comments about church
 - 2. we get too "**full of ourselves**" and our wool needs to be sheared
 - a. we need the Word of God to cut us down to size

- b. you show me an arrogant Christian, and I will show you someone who has not spent any personal time with Jesus!
 - 3. **our soul gets burdened down with sins** and the things of the world
 - a. as a Christian, you are not immune to sin
 - b. I once heard someone say, “I am not a sinner, but a saint who sins” – **BALONEY!**
 - c. sin can make the same impact on the believer that it has on a non-believer
 - 2. and like sheep, the **ONLY** solution is to be put back on our feet by the Good Shepherd
 - a. **LOOK AT THE MINISTRY OF JESUS ON THIS EARTH!**
What did He spend His time doing while on this earth?
 - 1. the man at the pool
 - 2. the woman at the well
 - 3. Zacchaeus
 - 4. the twelve disciples
 - 5. Mary, Martha, Lazarus
 - b. Jesus greatly desires to pick you back up when you fall.
 - 1. **DON’T LIVE YOUR LIFE ALONE!**
 - 2. call out to the Good Shepherd
 - a. not only are you one of His sheep
 - b. He is your shepherd. **IT IS HIS DUTY AS YOUR SHEPHERD TO PICK YOU BACK UP WHEN YOU FALL.**
 - 3. **John 13:10** – “Jesus answered, “A person who has had a bath needs only to **wash his feet**; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.”
 - a. Jesus made this statement to His disciples in the upper room, the night that most of them would abandon Him.
 - b. Jesus knows that we will sin. We only need to wash our feet, when we do . . .
 - c. Notice “who” washed the disciples feet!
4. The shepherd **GUIDES THE LOST** –
Vs. 3 - “He **guides me in the paths of righteousness** for His name’s sake.”
 - a. the **physical**
 - 1. Sheep are the worst animals in the world about needing to be led. They are notorious creatures of habit.
 - a. if left to themselves, sheep will follow the same trail until they become **ruts** – grazing the hills until they become bare ground

- b. sheep will literally **wander off of a cliff** while eating grass if the shepherd doesn't guide them
- c. sheep will eat grass until all of the **roots are eaten** and there is no grass left to eat at all
- d. sheep will follow other sheep just because they are "**in front**" of them
- 2. **Keller – "No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detail than do sheep."**
- b. the **spiritual**
 - 1. spiritual sheep, likewise, cannot guide themselves
 - a. if we do, we may destroy ourselves in the process
 - 1. **Keller – "The stubborn, self-willed, proud, self-sufficient sheep that persists in pursuing its old path and grazing its old polluted ground will end up a bag of bones."**
 - 2. I often like to ask people who think that they are "the captain of their fate," the shepherd of their soul – "**how have you done, managing your own life?**"
 - b. **AM I WILLING FOR THE GOOD SHEPHERD TO BE MY GUIDE?**
 - 1. you can't have it both ways
 - a. either you will be a lost, confused, aimless sheep
 - b. or you will allow yourself to be guided by the Good Shepherd
 - 2. just as the shepherd is always looking for greener pastures, always making sure that the sheep aren't eating the roots of the grass – the Good Shepherd knows what is best for you
 - 2. be honest, **WHO IS GUIDING YOUR LIFE?** The answer lies in . . . **WHAT DOES YOUR LIFE LOOK LIKE?**

II. The PROBLEMS Of The Sheep.

A. The SHEEP EXPERIENCE THE VALLEY.

Vs. 4 – "Even 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."

1. The **physical**.

- a. each year, the shepherd moves his flock so that he can find the best grazing fields
 - 1. he will take his flock from the valley to the mountains during the summer to avoid the heat and to find some fresh grass
 - 2. he will, in turn, take the flock off of the mountain and return to the valley when winter returns
- b. it would be during these treks up and down the mountain that the sheep would often go through "the valley of the shadow of death"
 - 1. this valley could simply be any area that they would encounter on the way up and down the mountain

2. this valley could also be small and narrow trail that led up and down the mountain – in which the sheep may have to go in single file – all the while looking down a steep cliff
2. The **spiritual**.
- a. our Christian life is a journey – a journey that WILL OFTEN take us through some serious valleys
 1. **WHERE DO WE GET THE IDEA THAT THERE WILL BE NO STRUGGLES OR PROBLEMS IN OUR LIFE AS CHRISTIANS?**
 - a. notice that the Psalmist – “Even, **THOUGH** I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.”
 - b. The Psalm does not say “Even if” . . . I go through the valley, but **EVEN THOUGH** I go through the valley.”
 2. **THE JOURNEY IS AS IMPORTANT AS THE DESTINATION!**
 - b. and very, very, often, this journey will at times be hard.
 1. I like what **Chuck Swindoll** says about hard times or valleys: **“This is a good time to correct faulty thinking. It is not always God’s will that you be healed. It is not always the Father’s plan to relieve the pressure. Our happiness is not God’s chief aim. He doesn’t have a wonderful (meaning “comfortable”) plan for everybody’s life – not from a human perspective. Often His plan is nowhere near wonderful.**

We’ve been taught all our lives that it is achievement that makes us strong. No. A thousand times, no! Those things make us proud and self-sufficient and independent. **Painful thorns make us weak.** But the good news is this: when we are weak, He pours His strength into us, which gives an entirely new perspective on pain and suffering, hardship and pressure. **Those stresses and strains drive us to our knees. It’s at that point our God comes through, takes us by the hand, and by His grace lifts us up.**

2. God uses these valleys in our lives –
 - a. a Christian asked another Christian an interesting question: **“How did you like your heart attack? What a foolish question:**
 - “But I understand you **gained a new appreciation for life.**” “Yes, that’s **true.**”
 - “And I understand you’re in **better health now than you’ve been before.**” “Yes.”
 - “And I hear that your **family ties are stronger than ever.**” “Yes.”
 - “And you’ve gained a **deeper love for your little granddaughter.**” “Yes.”
 - “And you are **learning to live with less stress better than before.**” “Yes.”

- “And the **Lord is more precious than you have ever known Him to be**. Valleys are like heart attacks. The gain far exceeds the pain.” “**Yes, all those things are true.**”
- **So . . . “let me ask you again, how did you like your heart attack?”**
- “**The only response was silence.**”

B. The SHEPHERD EXPECTS THE VALLEY.

1. If the sheep are going to enjoy the green grass in the mountain:
 - a. they **must go through** the valley of the shadow of death to get there
 - b. dangerous animals will be “part of the journey”
2. If we, as believers, want to “climb” to the green pastures of Godliness and holiness, we will have to go “through” the spiritual valleys to get there.
3. I love what **Pastor Adrian Rodgers** said about “the valley of the shadow of death”
 - a. “There are no valleys without mountains.”
 - b. “There is no shadow without light.”

C. The SHEPHERD EXPRESSES IN THE VALLEY

Vs. 4 – “Even 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.”

1. The overall goal of the shepherd is to take his sheep to the green pastures in the higher mountains so that his sheep can graze on fresh, lush grass.
 - a. **IT IS INCONCEIVABLE THAT THE SHEPHERD HAS ANY GOAL BUT BLESSINGS FOR THE SHEEP**
 - a. even though he must take them through the “valley of the shadow of death” to get them there
2. Our spiritual shepherd has no goal but the “green grass of spiritual maturity.”
3. **SO WHAT DO WE HAVE TO FEAR?**
 - a. Look at **verse 4** – “Even 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.”
 - b. evil defined:
 1. not the evil of sin
 2. but the evil of misfortune, sickness and death
 - c. **So . . .WHAT IS THERE TO FEAR?**
 1. If we die . . . we will be in heaven and He is there
 2. If we don’t die, we sense His presence, for He is there.

Conclusion:

1. As believers, **WE ARE NOT ALONE ON THIS PLANET!**
“**THE LORD** Is My Shepherd.”
2. Some Christian men were hiking in the mountains of Wales when they met a young shepherd boy. They spent some time talking with the boy and shared with him the concept that God is his heavenly shepherd. The men challenged the shepherd boy to memorize the opening words of the 23rd Psalm, instructing him to allow each of his five fingers to represent each of the five words – The Lord Is My Shepherd. Five years later, the men returned to the Welsh mountains and because of the high altitude, got thirsty. They spotted a cottage nearby and stopped for something to drink. **As they entered the cottage, they noticed a picture of a boy over the mantel.** They thought the boy looked familiar and asked the lady about her son. She explained that her son had been killed while tending sheep the previous winter. He had slipped and fallen over a cliff while attempting to rescue one of his sheep. She explained that when they found him he **was strangely grasping the ring finger on his left hand.** The men shared with the woman how they had met her son and had taught him about the 23rd Psalm, and how they had taught the shepherd boy to say on his fingers, “The Lord is my shepherd.” **The men realized that the shepherd boy had grasped the fourth finger, the finger that represented the word “my.”**