

Supporting Christian Unity in the Alfred Community



Psalm 23 Broken Down (first published September 2001, republished when Patricia met Jesus in March 2002)

Please allow me to share something that was passed along to me regarding that piece of scripture:

Some perspective on sheep ~ paraphrased from Chip Ingram in his book "I am with you always".

Sheep are some of the densest creatures God created. They cannot find a food source on their own unlike deer and many other animals God created. In fact, they will stay on the same food plot and eat the green grasses down to the roots thus killing the food source. They are timid creatures with few survival skills and if it were put into a simple equation it would look like this ~ Danger + Sheep = Death. The mere sound of running, life giving, water is frightening to them so a good shepherd must dam up a small section of the stream to create standing or "still" water for the sheep to be able to approach the stream and drink.

Some perspective on shepherds ~

The Hebrew shepherd was one of the least of the various positions to be held in society. Yet the shepherd cared for his flock with love and recognized the value of each ewe and ram. The shepherd would watch over the flock by day and night and even went so far as to position himself at the entry of the "corral" at night so that predators would have to get by him first before harming the flock. That means he put his own safety at risk for the safety of the flock.

The shepherd's tools were his rod and staff. The rod was a straight wooden stick with a knob at the end and was carried in the shepherd's belt. Used as a weapon to protect the flock from predators the rod was a lethal weapon and skilled shepherds could even fling the rod short distances to strike down predators that threatened the flock. The staff was also wooden and had that familiar hook like crook at the top. Sheep would quite often wander off the path of safety and become entangled in dense brush or slip into small gulleys and the crook enabled the shepherd to reach out for the sheep and draw it out of harm and back to the safety of the flock.

David wrote the 23rd Psalm using a metaphor that was easily understood in his time. Everyone could relate to the relationship between a shepherd and his flock so David used this metaphor to describe the personal relationship between God (the shepherd) and all of us (the sheep) as members of His flock.

THE 23RD PSALM BROKEN DOWN

The Lord is my Shepherd ~ **Relationship**

I shall not want ~ **Provision**

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ~ **Comfort**

He leadeth me beside still waters ~ **Peace**

He restoreth my soul ~ **Healing**

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness ~ **Guidance**

For His name sake ~ **Purpose**

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ~ **Trials & Testing**

I will fear no evil ~ **Protection**

For thou art with me ~ **Faithfulness**

Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me ~ **Assurance**

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies ~ **Deliverance**

Thou anointest my head with oil ~ **Consecration**

My cup runneth over ~ **Abundance**

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life ~ **Grace**

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord ~ **Security**

Forever ~ **Eternity**

Take notice of the use of pronouns referring to self in the Psalm. While this may not seem noteworthy it has significance for two reasons:

1. During the time this Psalm was written it was unusual to speak of relationship with the Almighty on such a personal level ~ in fact rarely was this so in the Old Testament. The Hebrew mind at that time was almost "trained" to resist such casual mention of the name of God. They didn't even write the name of God because they didn't want to appear disrespectful. I can't help but wonder how this writing was first received.

2. Secondly, as the recorded and divinely inspired word of God ~ it still speaks to us today calling us to have a personal relationship with Abba father as our shepherd.

While none of us would likely jump at the chance to be compared as sheep or as "dense" it does require one simple act to truly step into the relationship that David painted for us

in his words ~ We must humble ourselves and be willing to recognize our limitations as humans to enter into this most personal relationship to our Father in all our circumstances.

May God bless you all and direct your paths.

Originally published shortly after September 11, 2001. The President as a reminder of God's Sovereign power over all we encounter made reference to this psalm. When the congress sang God Bless America on the steps of the capital building there wasn't a dry in the house. And when the President of these United States quoted scripture the result was the same.