



YEAR 3—The God Who Pursues Relationship: A Story of God's People

Module 4: God Leads His People

Lesson 5: God is the Shepherd, We are the Lambs—Psalm 23

BIBLICAL REFLECTION

(A theological and biblical reflection on today's Scripture passage.)

GOD'S STORY

David wrote down many observations God inspired him to have, including this Psalm that speaks directly to the role of a shepherd who watches over lambs and sheep. This certainly was familiar to David since he'd spent many years keeping watch over flocks of his own as a young boy. It was during such a job that the prophet Samuel had him summoned so he could be anointed the future king of Israel.

Psalm 23 has two parts to it, and both address the issues of wanting and worry. We're first reminded that God is a faithful Shepherd who is trustworthy, personal and provides for His lambs. David also points out that like a good shepherd God leads His flock to green pastures with soft shoots that spring up at the start of each day or large fields rich with vegetation ripe for eating. The Shepherd offers us the best, even if He has to make us lie down when we would rather roam.

This is the other function of a shepherd, for lambs need protection from wolves or confusing landscape that they might wander off into. David wants everyone to know that the Lord will pull us toward life and away from death because He sees what we don't. Lambs aren't necessarily smart animals and need to be grabbed or disciplined lest they in ignorance make choices that lead to death. Although God provides green pastures and still waters, it is "he (who) restores my soul."

One other sobering reminder in this Psalm is that the Lord doesn't merely do this for us but "for his name's sake." We are not the highest value in the universe, so we should not presume that God humbles himself for us because He has to. God remains the highest among all others, not because He is egotistical but because His character allows it without corruption. Thankfully, His character also allows Him to love us and care for us like a shepherd does for His lambs.

OUR STORY

When God is our Shepherd, we don't have to know what's ahead. Even when we make intentional choices about education, family, career, and more we still can't guarantee how it all will end up. He does and has promised to show us the way if we agree to follow Him.

Responding to Lord in this way doesn't guarantee a problem-free life. What we do gain is a greater confidence through the relationship He shares with us. Simply resting in His care makes it possible to have a peace beyond understanding, for we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.

Psalm 23 offers this model in specific language that can be used to help us cope with what we face today. Because of who God is, He enables us to become who we really are and were created to be. He is our Shepherd and can literally restore and preserve our eternal lives under His care. Even further, He does it so that we feel our cup “overflow” with abundance and excellence.

The Lord’s grace and provision is tremendously rich. Like David, we can live a story with our Shepherd that is confident in the relationship and guidance. We can appreciate what it means to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, for it gives us a caretaker to follow even now.

OTHERS’ STORY

One of the hardest things to respond to others about is great loss or trials that have devastated them. As we struggle for words, we may offer them clichés like “Everything happens for a reason” or “God has a plan for this.” We’d be wise to shy away from such half-truths because while the Lord does reign over everything, His ultimate will for us is life and not death. He can use what He doesn’t choose, including the broken state of this world, to draw straight using crooked lines; however, His main goal is a relationship with us.

There is a clear statement in this psalm that people we care about need to hear when they are going through horrific trials: “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.” David offers us the insight that shepherds walk their lambs through deep valleys with dangerous terrain and cliffs, likely full of predators seeking to pounce on the flock. It wasn’t random exercise, but to get the lambs to a place of safety or food that was otherwise unobtainable. If a lamb could think like a person, it would likely take great comfort that the shepherd has a rod and staff to ward off death.

People need to know that following God will not protect us from every danger, for even Christ himself lived a perfect life and ended up on a cross. What we are promised is that whatever we endure, whether good or bad, the Lord will journey with anyone who would receive Him relationally. When the problems are unsolvable, we get to hang out with someone whose power makes all things possible and whose perspective makes all things useful.

THE WORLD’S STORY

We live in a world that seems to cause many to fear or worry about something that stalls them. They may feel victimized by their past, anxious about the present or terrified of the future. Those who take on a bold spirit may overcome the moment, but another moment may be the wall to paralyze them.

The great tragedy is that the world rejects its Chief Shepherd. Millions of people wake up each day ignorant of something that has been made clear to them – they can’t do this on their own. Financial portfolios can disintegrate in an instant, as can entire households from one selfish choice. The world seems to want us to be blind to the option every person has to let the Lord shepherd us through it all.

Christ came to offer us a much better alternative. Matthew 9:36 shares His heart, for “when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”