

**Psalm 23 — "Your LORD Is Your Shepherd & Host"**

"God will never lead you where he cannot care for you!" (Will Varner)

*Background to Psalm 23*

- Pss 22-24 is the **Messianic Trilogy**

| <i>Psalm 22</i>   | <i>Psalm 23</i>    | <i>Psalm 24</i>  |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| <i>Suffering</i>  | <b>Shepherding</b> | <i>Sovereign</i> |
| <i>Crucified!</i> | <b>Caring</b>      | <i>Crowned</i>   |

**THESIS — Ps 23 will show us 2 Comforting Pictures of your God:**

(1) your messiah is your SHEPHERD || (2) your messiah is your HOST

## **I. YOUR MESSIAH IS YOUR SHEPHERD (1-4)**

- As *Your Shepherd*, He...
  1. **provides** (I shall not want)
  2. **protects** (he makes me lie down)
  3. **guides** (he guides me)
  4. **comforts** (they comfort me)

**So we summarize & put it all together, in detail:**

What kind of shepherd is your GOD?

1. Personal shepherd (v1)
2. Providing shepherd (v1b)
3. Knowledgeable shepherd (v2)
4. Restoring shepherd (v3a)
5. Guiding shepherd (v3b)
6. Ever-Present shepherd (v4a)
7. Comforting shepherd (v4b)

## **II. YOUR MESSIAH IS YOUR HOST (5-6)**

This section is laden with eschatological (end-times) hope and imagery: Isaiah 25:6\* (cf. Rev 7:17)

1. v.5 - Your Host **prepares**
2. v.5 - Your Host **anoints**
3. v.5 - Your Host **lavishes** —

**v.6 - God’s *goodness* and *lovingkindness* (covenant-love)**

“We are well escorted, with a Shepherd in front and these twin angels of divine goodness & love behind!”  
(FB Meyer)

***Application for Pastors***

- pastors should care for sheep personally (1)
- pastors should feed the flock in the water & meat of the Word (v.2)
- pastors must guide in righteous paths for God’s glory (v.3)
- pastors must walk thru dark valleys with the sheep (v.4a)
- pastors must use the rod to ward off wolves boldly & unflinchingly (4b)
- pastors must use the staff to tenderly lead, bring back to the path (v.4c)
- pastors must host and serve the people in the banquet of the Word so God feeds them overwhelmingly (v.5)
- pastors must remind people of God’s glorious love and goodness that pursues them till heavenly glory (v.6)

***Application for Husbands & Fathers***

- In the context of their home as “*resident pastor/shepherds*”, Godly men must...
- protect
- provide
- nurture
- feed
- reside with
- discipline
- comfort
- guide

“It has been said that as goes the family, so goes the world. It can also be said that as goes the father, so goes the family. ... The greatest source of security our children have in this world is a God-honoring, Christ-centered marriage between their parents.” (Voddie Baucham)

**Jesus as your Shepherd:**

1. The *GOOD* shepherd (John 10:11)
2. The *GREAT* shepherd (Hebrews 13:20)
3. The *CHIEF* shepherd (1 Peter 5:4)

**Jesus as your Host:**

1. Jesus the host *PROVIDES* for you (John 6:10-14)
2. Jesus the host *SERVES* you (Luke 12:35-38)

## Some notes from W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*

(he was a shepherd in Africa & comments on Psalm 23 through the eyes of a shepherd caring for sheep in everyday life with application to Christ).

### **v.1 - THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD**

From early dawn until late at night this utterly self-less Shepherd is alert to the welfare of His flock. For the diligent sheepman rises early and goes out first thing every morning without fail to look over his flock. It is the initial, intimate contact of the day. With a practiced, searching, sympathetic eye he examines the sheep to see that they are fit and content and able to be on their feet. In an instant he can tell if they have been molested during the night -- whether any are ill or if there are some which require special attention. Repeatedly throughout the day he casts his eye over the flock to make sure that all is well. Nor even at night is he oblivious to their needs. He sleeps as it were 'with one eye and both ears open' ready at the least sign of trouble to leap up and protect his own. This is a sublime picture of the care given to those whose lives are under Christ's control. He knows all about their lives from morning to night.

### **v.2 - HE MAKES ME LIE DOWN**

As long as there is even the slightest suspicion of danger from dogs, coyotes, cougars, bears or other enemies, the sheep stand up ready to flee for their lives. They have little or no means of self-defense. They are helpless, timid, feeble creatures whose only recourse is to run. Two dogs have been known to kill as many as 292 sheep in a single night of unbridled slaughter. Ewes, heavy in lamb, when chased by dogs or other predators will slip their unborn lambs and lose them in abortions. A shepherd's loss from such forays can be appalling. One morning at dawn, I found nine of my choicest ewes, all soon to lamb, lying dead in the field where a cougar had harried the flock during the night. From then on, I slept with a .303 rifle and flashlight by my bed. At the least sound of the flock being disturbed, I would leap from bed and calling my faithful collie, dash out into the night, rifle in hand, ready to protect my sheep. In the course of time, I came to realize that nothing so quieted and reassured my sheep as to see me in the field. The presence of their master and owner and protector put them at ease as nothing else could do, and this applied day and night.

### **v.3 - HE RESTORES MY SOUL**

This is an old English shepherd's term for a sheep that has turned over on its back and cannot get up again by itself. A "cast" sheep is a very pathetic site. Lying on its back, its feet in the air, it flays away frantically struggling to stand up, without success. Sometimes it will bleat a little for help, but generally it lies there lashing about in frightened frustration. If the owner does not arrive on the scene within a reasonably short time, the sheep will die. This is but another reason why it is so essential for a careful sheepman to look over his flock every day, counting them to see if all are able to be up and on their feet. If one or two are missing, often the first thought to flash in his mind is, One of my sheep is cast somewhere. I must go in search and set it on its feet again. It is not only the shepherd who keeps a sharp eye for cast sheep, but also the predators. Buzzards, vultures, dogs, coyotes and cougars all know that a cast sheep is easy prey and death is not far off. This knowledge that any "cast" sheep is helpless, close to death and vulnerable to attack, makes the whole problem of cast sheep serious for the manager.

### **v.4 - HE GUIDES ME IN PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**

The greatest single safeguard which a shepherd has in handling his flock is to keep them on the move... they dare not be left on the same ground too long. They must be shifted from pasture to pasture periodically. This prevents over-grazing of the forage. It forestalls the re-infestation of the sheep with internal parasites or disease, since the sheep move off the infested ground before these organisms complete their life cycles. This is precisely the sort of action and the idea David had in mind when he spoke of being led in paths of righteousness. In this following of a precise plan of operation lies the secret for healthy flocks and healthy lands.

### **v.4 - YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF ... THEY COMFORT ME**

Each shepherd boy, from the time he first starts to tend his father's flock, takes special pride in the selection of a rod and staff exactly suited to his own size and strength. He goes into the bush and selects a young sapling which is dug from the ground. This is carved and whittled down with great care and patience. The enlarged base of the sapling where its trunk joins the roots is shaped into a smooth, rounded head of hard wood. The sapling itself is shaped to exactly fit the owner's hand. After he completes it, the shepherd boy spends hours practicing with this club, leaning how to throw it with amazing speed and accuracy. It becomes his main weapon of defense for both himself and his sheep. ...the rod, in fact, was an extension of the owner's own right arm. It stood as a symbol of his strength, his power, his authority in any serious situation.

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The **rod** was what he relied on to safeguard both himself and his flock in danger. And it was, furthermore, the instrument he used to discipline and correct any wayward sheep that insisted on wandering away. Finally the shepherd's rod is an instrument of protection both for himself and his sheep when they are in danger. It is used both as a defense and a deterrent against anything that would attack.

The **staff**, more than any other item of his personal equipment, identifies the shepherd as a shepherd. No one in any other profession carries a shepherd's staff. It is uniquely an instrument used for the care and management of sheep -- and only sheep. It will not do for cattle, horses or hogs. It is designed, shaped and adapted especially to the needs of sheep. The staff is essentially a symbol of the concern, the compassion that a shepherd has for his charges. No other single word can better describe its function on behalf of the flock than that it is for their "comfort."

Whereas the rod conveys the concept of authority, of power, of discipline, of defense against danger, the word "staff" speaks of all that is longsuffering and kind. The staff is also used for guiding sheep. Again and again I have seen a shepherd use his staff to guide his sheep gently into a new path or through some gate or along dangerous, difficult routes. He does not use it actually to beat the beast. Rather, the tip of the long slender stick is laid gently against the animal's side and the pressure applied guides the sheep in the way the owner wants it to go. Thus the sheep is reassured of its proper path.

**THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS**

The King of Love my Shepherd is,  
Whose goodness faileth never;  
I nothing lack if I am His  
And He is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow  
My ransomed soul He leadeth,  
And, where the verdant pastures grow,  
With food celestial feedeth.

Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed,  
But yet in love He sought me;  
And on His shoulder gently laid,  
And home, rejoicing brought me.

In death's dark vale, I fear no ill  
With Thee, dear Lord, beside me;  
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,  
Thy cross before to guide me.

Thou spreadst a table in my sight;  
Thine unction grace bestoweth;  
And O what transport of delight  
From Thy pure chalice floweth.

And so through all the length of days,  
Thy goodness faileth never;  
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise  
Within Thy house forever.

**PSALM 23: SCOTTISH PSALTER [1650]**

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want; He makes me down to lie  
in pastures green; He leadeth me the quiet waters by.

My soul He doth restore again; and me to walk doth make  
within the paths of righteousness, ev'n for His own name's  
sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale, yet will I fear no ill;  
For Thou art with me; and Thy rod and staff me comfort still.

My table Thou has furnish-ed in presence of my foes;  
My head Thou dost with oil anoint, and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life shall surely follow me;  
And in God's house forevermore my dwelling place shall be.