

**KEYS TO PEACE AND HAPPINESS
STUDIES IN PSALM 23**

**STUDY 1: IS HE YOUR SHEPHERD? – Part 1
"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).**

Many years ago in Manila I had the privilege of officiating at the wedding of a "balikbayan" friend of our family and her American Jewish groom. During the ceremony I wanted to make a connection between the Jewish and Christian heritage, so I read the Shepherd passages from Psalm 23 and John 10. After the ceremony the mother of the groom asked me: "Do you use Psalm 23 for happy occasions?"

Suddenly I realized that for most Americans, Psalm 23 was usually read (like in movies) at funerals. I assured the mother: "Yes, I read Psalm 23 for all kinds of occasions, including happy ones."

Psalm 23 is a psalm for all seasons. From it we will discover keys to peace and happiness to help us in our journey through life.

- 1 The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.
- 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside still waters.
- 3 He restores my soul; He leads me
in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
- 4 Yea, 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.
- 5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil,
my cup runs over.
- 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life; and I will dwell
in the house of the Lord forever.

1. One Bible expositor wrote: "The twenty-third psalm is the most beloved of the 150 psalms in the Psalter and possibly the best-loved (and best known) chapter in the entire Bible. The great Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon called it 'the pearl of psalms.' Nineteenth-century preacher and commentator J. J. Stewart Perowne observed that 'there is no psalm in which the absence of all doubt, misgiving, fear [and] anxiety is so remarkable.' Alexander Maclaren said that 'the world could spare many a large book better than this sunny little psalm. It has dried many tears and supplied the mould into which many hearts have poured their peaceful faith.'" (James Montgomery Boice).

2. "Psalm" means song or poem of worship. Our objective is to discover from Psalm 23 keys to a life of peace and happiness, which can withstand the tests and troubles and crises that come to us sooner or later.

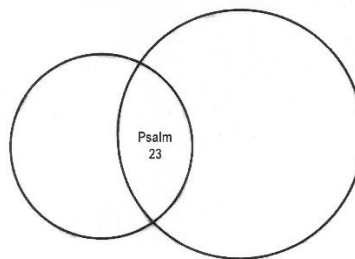
TWO WORLDS

3. To understand and apply Psalm 23, we must take its perspective. I like to think that the Psalmist speaks to us from the place where two worlds meet. Verse 6 gives the perspective. (Please study Fig. 1, below.)

(a) The PRESENT World: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life". The present world is indicated by the words "all the days of my life" (i. e., in this present world). I'd like us to picture the PRESENT WORLD as the small circle in Fig. 1.

(b) The ETERNAL World: The Eternal World is indicated by the words "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." (represented by the big circle in Fig. 1, below.)

Psalm 23 – Fig. 1



(To be continued)

STUDY 1: IS HE YOUR SHEPHERD? – Part 2 **"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).**

4. In the area where the two worlds overlap (see Fig.1), Psalm 23 finds complete fulfillment.

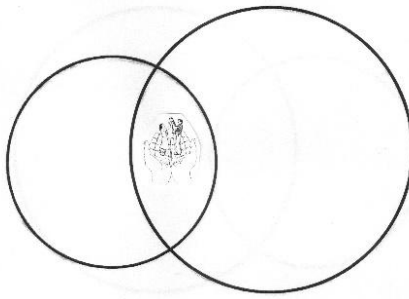
(a) True peace and happiness are rooted in the eternal world, and they are blessings of the eternal world that are given to us in advance during our journey in the present world. These blessings are called "firstfruits" (Romans 8:23); or "foretaste" of the blessings (Eph. 1:3) and powers of the world to come (Heb. 6:5).

(b) "The good things of life" which are rooted in the present world may give temporary pleasure; but these "good things" will all pass away and will like a flood carry away those who give their lifetime in obtaining them (Heb. 11:25; 1 John 5:15-17).

THE PROMISE

5. Psalm 23 gives us a promise. Verse one states the promise: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." (Let's add FIG. 2, below.) These are the hands of God the Father and the Son, holding us safe, secure and sufficient. With Fig. 2 in mind, we may paraphrase the promise: "The Lord holds me in His hands, and I will always have abundant, all-sufficient supply."

Psalm 23 – Fig. 2



a. The picture of being held in God's hands is a favorite of God: Deut. 33:27; Isaiah 49:16; John 10:27-29

b. Let's recite the promise to ourselves: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT - THE LORD HOLDS ME IN HIS HANDS, AND I HAVE ABUNDANT, ALL-SUFFICIENT SUPPLY.

6. As we recite this promise, let's imagine ourselves inside that overlap, securely held in God's hands. We may think of that overlap as our "protective bubble".

(a) Illustration: Scientists are experimenting with self-contained bubbles, for survival in case of a nuclear holocaust.

(b) The eternal world has invaded the present world, and God has scooped us out of the present world and placed us in the safe refuge of this "bubble". Meditate on Colossians 1:13. This does not mean that the trials and stresses and crises of the present world do not touch us anymore. They will touch us, but before they do, they have first to "penetrate the bubble". And guess what? God has designed the "bubble" in such a way that it transforms the deadly rays of trials into life-giving and life-changing forces for our good and for God's glory. This is what Romans 8:28 means: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

STUDY 1: IS HE YOUR SHEPHERD? – Part 3 **"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1).**

THREE REASONS

7. The Lord is my Shepherd for three reasons:

(a) Reason #1: Creation:

When God created everything, He obligated Himself to take care of His creation. This is true whether you recognize it or not. Proofs:

(1) He shepherds the stars, how much more me (Job 38:31-33; Isa. 40:26-29).

(2) He feeds all His creatures, how much more me (Psalm 104:24-30; Matt. 6:26,30).

(b) Reason #2: Redemption:

Through Christ, God bought back (redeemed) all his creation. This is true whether you recognize it or not. He redeemed all creation for the purpose of salvation (1 Peter 18,19). Unfortunately, those who refuse salvation will suffer being discarded and thrown away as trash in God's garbage dump (2 Peter 3:9:10). This is similar to what people do at estate sales auctions. A person bids on a pile of stuff without previously sorting through them; after he wins the bid, he will go through the pile and keep what he wants and discard what he doesn't want.

This is what happened at the cross. Christ redeemed (bought back) the whole creation with His blood; every person was redeemed, but now Christ is sorting out what He has bought through the proclamation of the Gospel. Those who receive Him as Lord and Savior will be kept; those who reject Him will be discarded.

(c) Reason #3: Adoption:

Through Christ, God adopts us back into His family. However, unlike creation and redemption, this is not automatic; you have to receive Christ in order to be adopted (John 1:12). This is the meaning of that little word "MY" before "SHEPHERD" in Psalm 23.

CONCLUSION

8. Illustration: The story is told of two persons who recited Psalm 23, an accomplished orator and an uneducated elderly Christian man. The orator received tremendous applause from the audience for his performance. After the elderly Christian finished reciting the psalm a hushed silence fell on the whole place and there were tears of joy in the eyes of everyone. What made the difference? The orator knew the psalm; the elderly Christian knew the Shepherd.

9. Are you sure that you know the Lord as YOUR Shepherd? If not, you may make it sure today by praying a simple prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, I believe in You and I receive You as my Savior and Lord and Shepherd". If you pray this prayer sincerely, then you can confidently say beginning today, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want."

(Acknowledgement: W. Phillip Keller's "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23" served as a reference in the preparation of these studies.)

STUDY 2: MY SHEPHERD FREES ME FROM MY FEARS – Part 1 **"He makes me to lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:2a).**

1. People, like sheep, need a shepherd. The greatest blessing you can have in life is to have the Lord as your shepherd, because one of the things He will do for you is "He makes you to lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:2a).

2. Sheep are very interesting animals. Before you can make them to lie down, one requirement must be met: They must be free from fear of enemies.

DELIVERED FROM YOUR FEARS

3. Like sheep we, God's people, need to be delivered from fear. And the Lord, our Good Shepherd, makes sure that this need, this requirement is met. The Lord delivers you from your fears.

(a) Illustration: The author W. Phillip Keller, who used to be a shepherd, wrote a book, recounting his experiences with sheep. He says, sheep can easily become "panicked that even a stray jackrabbit suddenly bounding from behind a bush can stampede a whole flock. When one startled sheep runs in fright a dozen others will bolt with it in blind fear, not waiting to see what frightened them." But this former shepherd testifies that his sheep knew when he was present among them, keeping watch over them at night; his very presence gave his sheep the sense of peace and security to sleep.

(b) Often, we are like sheep, who are easily frightened and panicked by bad reports about the economy, about deadly diseases, about terrorist threats, about the insecure future. But if we know the Lord our Shepherd is near we will not panic or fear, even when danger is staring us in the face. The Bible tells us that the Lord, our Shepherd, is always present among us, watching over us. We can afford to take our time to refresh ourselves, to eat or sleep; to enjoy the peace of Christ.

4. Let's look at some Scriptures that assure us of the protective presence of the Lord:

(a) Psalm 121 is very precious to me personally, specially verses 3 and 4: "He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

As a boy, I grew up very fearful, because I listened to many stories about ghosts and "kapre" and "aswang" who went "kek-kek-kek" at night. Nothing was more terrifying to me than waking up at night and hearing the dreadful "kek-kek-kek", and nothing more frustrating than hearing my dad loudly snoring away in deep sleep.

But the Lord, our Shepherd, assures us that He does not slumber or sleep. Even when you're not awake and on guard, or even when you're totally unaware of what the enemy is plotting against you, God is always awake and He is always acting as your Shepherd to deliver you from your enemies.

b. Psalm 91 is even more detailed in its assurance. The psalm doesn't need comment; we just need to read through it and claim God's promises in it. Here are some of its powerful promises:

Verses 5-7: You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand my fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you.

Verses 11-12: For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone.

STUDY 2: MY SHEPHERD FREES ME FROM MY FEARS – Part 2
"He makes me to lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:2a).

DON'T PANIC

5. Because the Lord is our Shepherd, He wants us to act and react differently from the way other people do.

a. Isaiah 8:11-14: "The Lord spoke to me with His strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people. He said: Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy and do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, He is the one you are to fear, He is the one you are to dread, and He will be a sanctuary...." We are not to fear people or things or circumstances that threaten us; we must fear -- reverence, consider, pay attention to -- God alone. Don't look at the danger; keep looking to the Deliverer!

b. Why did God tell Isaiah (and why is He telling us today) not to panic like other people? Because to the enemies God says (Isaiah 8:10): "Devise your strategy, but it will be thwarted; propose your plan, but it will not stand, for God is with us." The last part of the verse literally says "... but it will not stand, for IMMANUEL!" The name IMMANUEL is made up of the Hebrew words IM (with) ANU (us) EL (God) and it means "God is with us" – and that God is with us in the person of His Son JESUS!

CONCLUSION

6. The ONE TRUTH that the Lord wants us to learn is the truth that someone put succinctly in these words: "Safety is not the absence of danger, but the presence of the Lord."

7. Another way to put this truth: Look to your Shepherd, not to the danger. When danger or need threatens you, your first reaction must be: "The Lord is my Shepherd" -- "The Lord holds me in his hands" -- "IMMANUEL IS MY SHEPHERD!" "The Lord is with me!"

STUDY 3: MY SHEPHERD GIVES ME PEACE – Part 1 "He leads me beside still waters" (Psalm 23:2b).

1. "Waters" are a common symbol in the Bible – beginning with the river in the Garden of Eden; the living water of Christ; the river of life in Revelation.

2. The Lord LEADS us by still waters.

STILL WATERS

3. When we trust and follow the Shepherd's leadership, we will find still waters -- calm waters, peaceful waters.

4. If we don't trust and follow the Shepherd's leadership, the prophet Jonah's troubled waters will become our experience (Jonah 1:1-17). Remember how Jonah received a commission from God to preach to the people of Niniveh, and he refused to fulfill his commission? Instead, he took a ship to escape his God-given task. Then what happened? The ship carrying Jonah ran into a violent storm.

(a) The tempest that threatened to sink the ship that Jonah was in was sent by God Himself (verse 4). Even the pagan captain and his crew had enough spiritual discernment to suspect that something supernatural was behind such a mighty tempest, and that salvation lay in every person's calling on his god (verses 6-7). When Jonah admitted his sin, and, following Jonah's

own instructions, when the captain and his crew threw the runaway prophet overboard, the deadly hurricane died down and the ship was saved.

(b) There are no still waters for us if we are running away from the will of God. But if we are obedient to the Lord our Shepherd, He will make the most stormy ocean as still waters.

PEACE IN THE MIDST OF STORM

5. Does this mean that if we follow God's will, we will not ever experience storms in our life? No; storms are a part of life. But with the Lord as our Shepherd we will experience peace and security in the midst of the deadliest hurricane.

6. The experience of Christ and the disciples in the midst of a storm illustrates what we mean (Mark 4:35-40). One day they were crossing the lake and a sudden storm arose and put their tiny boat in mortal peril.

(a) The disciples were all panicking.

(b) But Christ was sound asleep in the boat in the middle of the storm.

(b) When the disciples woke Him up, He rebuked them for their fear and unbelief, because they had forgotten who was with them in the boat, the Lord of the storm Himself.

STUDY 3: MY SHEPHERD GIVES ME PEACE – Part 2 **"He leads me beside still waters" (Psalm 23:2b).**

7. Let's remember God's Promises in the midst of storm:

a. In the Old Testament there is a promise of peace even in the midst of cosmic upheaval:

Psalm 46:1-2, 7, 10: 1 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. 2 Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea... 7 The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.... [And He says to us] 10 Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!

b. In the New Testament Paul experienced peace when the ship he was traveling in was all but swallowed up by the storm-vexed sea.

Acts 27:21-25: 21 But after long abstinence from food, Paul stood up in the midst of them and said, "Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete and incurred this disaster and loss. 22 And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. 23 For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, 24 saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' 25 Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me."

Someone said: "We are immortal, until God's work in our life is done."

c. And from the disciples' experience, referred to earlier, we receive our Shepherd's abiding assurance: No storm can sink us when Christ is in our boat.

CONCLUSION

8. With terrorist attacks a common occurrence, we see that the world is becoming more and more a turbulent ocean. We have always said that life is fragile, but random terrorism will make life's fragility and vulnerability truly real to us. The wars and plagues of the centuries before the advent of modern medicine and before modern peace movements also gave these sobering effects. With death lurking just around the corner (whether by pestilence or violence), we will then finally listen to the Bible's loving but stern admonition in James 4:13-16:

¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will^[g] go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; ¹⁴ whereas you do not know what *will happen* tomorrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead you *ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." ¹⁶ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

9. Faced with the reality of sudden death, we will also then realize our need of the one almighty Shepherd, who alone has power over life and death and who alone has the omnipotence and omniscience and omnipresence to protect us.

10. The hymn, PEACE! BE STILL! dramatically presents the disciples' terrifying experience and proclaims the Shepherds powerful promise. Please note: Stanza 1 describes the disciples' hopeless condition; Stanza 2 describes our helpless situation today; the Chorus gives the Shepherd's assurance.

PEACE! BE STILL!

Words: Mary A. Baker; Music: H. R. Palmer

Master, the tempest is raging!
The billows are tossing high!
The sky is o'ershadowed with blackness,
No shelter or help is nigh:
"Carest Thou not that we perish?"
How canst Thou lie asleep,
When each moment so madly is threat'ning
A grave in the angry deep?

Master, with anguish of spirit,
I bow in my grief today;
The depths of my sad heart are troubled;
O waken and save, I pray!
Torrents of sin and of anguish
Sweep o'er my sinking soul!
And I perish! I perish, dear Master;
O hasten, and take control!

CHORUS:

"The winds and the waves shall obey My will,
Peace, be still!"
Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea,
Or demons, or men, or whatever it be,
No water can swallow the ship where lies

The Master of ocean and earth and skies;
They all shall sweetly obey My will;
Peace, be still! Peace, be still!
They all shall sweetly obey My will:
Peace, peace, be still!

11. Oh let us run to the safety of our loving Sheperd's arms. And let us run to Him NOW!
Then we can declare with full confidence: My Shepherd gives me peace in the midst of the storm. Nothing and no one can sink my boat because my Shepherd, the Master of ocean and earth and skies, is with me in my boat!"

STUDY 4: MY SHEPHERD RESTORES ME – Part 1

**"He restores my soul: he leads me in paths of righteousness
for His name's sake" - Psalm 23:3**

WHY SHEEP NEED RESTORATION

As mentioned at the beginning of these studies, W. Phillip Keller's "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23" served as inspiration for this series of studies. In his book Keller gives us the following information about sheep:

1. A sheep always tends to wander; it will keep going after the next grass and the next and the next until it has become separated from the flock and the shepherd.
2. A sick sheep cannot distinguish the shepherd's voice and will soon follow a stranger.
3. Even a well-fed, healthy sheep sometimes becomes so heavy, that when it lies down on the ground with a hollow spot on it, it will roll over to its back, feet up in the air, and without the shepherd's help it will be left in that position until it dies of exhaustion or an enemy animal preys on it.

WHO NEEDS RESTORATION?

4. Backsliding Christians need restoration
 - a. Reminder: Backsliders not the same as unconverted, false Christians. 1 John 2:19. Examples of false Christians were Judas Iscariot (John 17:12), and Demas (2 Tim. 4:10)
 - b. Backsliding Christians need to be restored to fellowship with God and fellowship with other believers. Famous backsliders in the Bible:
 - c. An example of a backslider was Peter, who denied the Lord Jesus three times in one night, but the Lord made provision for his restoration (Luke 22:31-34).
 - d. The Gospel writer Mark is traditionally known as having been a close companion of Peter and wrote his Gospel based primarily on eye-witness accounts given by Peter. Isn't it interesting that Mark also backslid like his mentor; but he was restored and went on to write the

second Gospel. What a loss for all Christians had this backslider not been restored! (Acts 13:5,13; 2 Tim. 4:11);

c. Backsliding is a very gradual process.

Illustration: The process of backsliding is similar to the experience of a frog that ends up being cooked in water that's heated slowly. You see, the frog adjusts to the gradual rise of temperature even up to boiling point.

- 1) Backsliding starts with entertaining sinful thoughts.
 - 2) Backsliding progresses into isolated actions that result from sinful thoughts.
 - 3) Then isolated sinful acts become habitual sinful acts
 - 4) The end result: Backslider
5. Backsliding Christian are restored:
- a. By loving exhortation and confrontation: Galatians 6:1
 - b. In order that they may be restored to fruitful service. 1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:11-15
6. Strong Christians need continual restoration as well.
- a. They need constant warning: 1 Cor. 10:12: "Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."
 - b. All Christians -- backsliding or strong -- need restoration to the paths of righteousness. "He leadeth me in paths of righteousness"

STUDY 4: MY SHEPHERD RESTORES ME – Part 2

**"He restores my soul: he leads me in paths of righteousness
for His name's sake" - Psalm 23:3**

WHAT ARE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS?

7. Illustration: Keller says, left to themselves, sheep will follow the same path until the path becomes a deep rut, and graze in the same area until the pasture becomes completely bald.

8. Our Shepherd leads us in the paths of righteousness, in the right path. Our shepherd himself does the LEADING. What is the right path?

a. The path of faith - The Christian life is a life of faith; without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6).

- Faith's OPPOSITE is the path of confidence in people and things; Christ will always lead us in the path where we will learn to trust Him more and more fully; and where he demonstrates his faithfulness more and more abundantly.

b. The path of love - The Christian life is a life of love; without love, everything else that we do will mean nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3);

- Love's OPPOSITE is the path of routine and habit. First love for Christ and for his appearing (Rev. 2:4; 2 Tim. 8); love for other Christians (1 John 4:19-21)

c. The path of perfection - The Christian life is a life of continued, upward progress to the high calling of God in Christ, to become exactly like Christ, and to walk in his steps (Phil. 3:12-14; Eph. 4:13; 1 Pet. 2:21).

- Perfection's OPPOSITE is the path of self-satisfaction and mediocrity.

9. Our Shepherd leads us through these stages of growth toward perfection, described beautifully by one author as follows:

STAGE ONE. "All of self and none of Christ."

STAGE TWO. "More of self and some of Christ."

STAGE THREE. "Some of self and more of Christ."

STAGE FOUR. "None of self and all of Christ."

CONCLUSION

"For his name's sake."

10. In our growth toward perfection, we have a part; but it is not by our efforts that we are able to stay in the path of faith and love and perfection.

11. Our shepherd will lead us there FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE -- because...

- a. This is His plan; He will not stop until it is accomplished (Heb. 2:10).
- b. This is His love (John 15:9; 16:27; 17:23-24; Luke 12:32)
- c. This is His glory; His glory is at stake in our lives. Moses fully understood this (Numbers 14:13-21); and Paul (Eph. 3:10,11).

12. Let us declare together: "My shepherd will restore me. When I'm backsliding, when I'm spiritually sick, even when I become self-confident because I feel I am strong -- my shepherd will restore me and lead me in the path of faith, love, and perfection... for his name's sake, for his own sake alone!"

STUDY 5: MY SHEPHERD WALKS WITH ME IN "THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW" – Part 1

**"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." - Psalm 23:4**

1. Our Good Shepherd wants us to know the places He will lead us through... not only green pastures, still waters, and paths of righteousness, but also the valley. Our Good Shepherd wants us to know that every sheep of His must travel in the valley of the shadow of death. It is not a matter of "if"; rather it's a matter of "when" will I walk through the valley.

2. Human life consists of both mountains and valleys. This is a fact of human experience. We need to emphasize this fact because...

- a. Some people are surprised when they find themselves in the valley. They end up blaming God; they become bitter against Him. Did not anybody tell them that they will pass through the valley sometime? Are you passing through such a valley at this time?
- b. Some people do not prepare for the valley. The best preparation anyone can have is a prayerful study of Psalm 23.

WHAT IS THE VALLEY?

3. The valley of deep darkness. This is the valley where the "shadow" of death casts its darkness around you; it is not the same as going through death, but the experience is something very close. This could be the valley of chronic pain; chronic illness which renders a person handicapped and disabled. This could be the valley of material and financial loss and unemployment and hard economic times in the whole society in general. Or the valley of shattered, dying and decaying relationships (a wife who went through a difficult divorce said, "Losing him to death would have been better for me and my children than losing him to another woman"). Or the valley of loneliness, of being forsaken by friends and loved ones, which leads to profound depression.
4. The valley of death-related experiences: bereavement; a personal close shave with death through a serious illness or accident (2 Cor. 1:8-10); the valley of old age and approaching death; the valley of terminal illness.

THE PROMISES OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD FOR THE VALLEY

5. The Good Shepherd assures us that we should fear no evil; that nothing can or will really hurt us. The pain, grief, and loss will be real; we will shed real tears; but the journey through the valley itself will result only in what is good for us. Genesis 50:20 and Romans 8:28 say the same thing: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." "All things work together for good."
6. The Good Shepherd assures us of His presence. "Thou art with me": The Christian could no longer be alone, even if he wanted to. The Good Shepherd always leads and walks with His sheep. Jesus said, "He who follows me will not walk in darkness." You may feel like you are walking in the blackest valley of darkness all alone by yourself; but Jesus the light of the world is with you in the darkest valley -- you are not alone and He is your light. The light He gives may only help you to see one step at a time, but that light is sufficient. The strength He gives may be enough only for one day or even just one step, but you need to walk with Him only one day at a time, one step at a time. You may only have your bread for today, but that daily bread is the only thing you need for today.

STUDY 5: MY SHEPHERD WALKS WITH ME IN "THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW" – Part 2

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:

7. The Good Shepherd assures us that His rod and staff will comfort us.
 - (a) The rod and staff are one and the same instrument. The Good Shepherd uses the staff to keep His sheep in line and to hook them back to Himself when they wander away or fall into a ravine they cannot climb out of. Christ leads us through the valley for further purification and

perfection. He may allow sicknesses and accidents to touch us in order to make us see eternal values.

(b) The Shepherd's rod and staff are also our protection. He will smite all our enemies with His rod. That rod is the rod of the King of kings and Lord of lords. All things and all persons must bow the knee to Him. The hymn says, "The winds and the waves shall obey Your will", and so will every individual and nation submit to His authority. "If God the Almighty is for us, who can be against us?"

(c) And then when the time comes to go through death, Christ's rod and staff will go with us. The rod of His victory over death gives us peace and victory in death. Because of the cross of Christ, death means...

- According to Peter, death is the putting off of the body like some worn-out clothing in order to put on another, more glorious clothing (2 Peter 1:13,14).
- According to Paul, death is sailing out from the earthly harbor to the heavenly shores where you will be with the Good Shepherd forever (2 Tim. 4:6; Phil. 1:23).

CONCLUSION

8. We know the valley of the shadow of death will come; but we do not look at the shadow but we look to our Shepherd. And we do not only look forward to the end of the journey. Our Good Shepherd wants us to enjoy the journey -- even through the valley.

9. Psalm 23:4 does not tell us of David's death experience. In fact, he had a lot of living and serving and working still to do for the Lord.

10. The best attitude is always that exemplified by the apostle Paul. Even when he was traveling in the valley of deep darkness, he still testified, "For me to live is Christ." Let's concentrate on living for Christ, and letting the life and love and power of Christ flow through us. And whatever happens, we can say "To die is gain."

11. Our Lord said the same thing: "We must work the works of Him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no man can work." (John 9:4). "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to finish His work." (John 4:34).

12. The words of a Gospel song may help us to have the right attitude when going through our valley:

God has not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through;
God has not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.
But God has promised strength for the day,
Rest for the labor, light for the way;
Grace for the trial, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.

STUDY 6: MY SHEPHERD PREPARES A FEAST FOR ME IN THE MIDST OF ENEMIES – Part 1

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." (Psalm 23:5)

1. As we have pointed out in our study of Psalm 23:4, our Good Shepherd wants us to know what to expect in the journey through which He will lead us -- not only green pastures and still waters, but also the valley of the shadow of death. According to Psalm 23:5, our Good Shepherd also wants us to expect... enemies.
2. How many of us are aware that we have enemies, persons who are plotting to harm to us?
3. As a peace-loving citizen, I feel and believe that I have no enemies. If I am told that an evil person is actually plotting to harm me, I will immediately protest: Why should somebody want to harm me, when I'm not bothering him at all?
4. But this is a fact our Good Shepherd wants us to realize, that we have enemies. This is the assumption and implication of Psalm 23:5: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

THE CHRISTIAN HAS ENEMIES

5. The Christian has at least four enemies.

6. THE ENEMY INSIDE OURSELVES

a. The flesh vs. the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:17)

b. Means of victory:

1) To overcome the enemy inside, feast with Christ at His table; abide in Christ (John 15:5); "not I but Christ" (Gal. 2:20)

2) Anointing oil of the Holy Spirit: Live and walk in constant fellowship with the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:16, 22-25)

7. THE ENEMY INSIDE THE CHURCH

a. Sometimes, fellow Christians can become instruments of Satan; like Peter (Matt. 16:23)

b. Means of victory:

1) Don't seek to retaliate against this Christian brother/sister. Rather, go, eat and feast with Christ, savoring the things of God and not of men -- set your mind on things of God and things above, not on the things of men and things on the earth (Col. 3:1,2)

2) Anointing oil of the Holy Spirit: And as for that Christian brother/sister, show love and truth toward the brethren -- speak the truth in love, rebuke with love, not to put him/her down but to restore him/her to the Lord (Eph. 4:15).

8. THE ENEMY IN THE WORLD

a. Non-Christians are usually used by Satan as his instruments (John 15:18-20).

b. Means of victory:

1) Again, the key to victory is to feast with Christ, enjoy the privilege of being persecuted for the sake of His name; thank Him for the opportunity of experiencing what He Himself experienced (Matt. 5:10-12)

2) Anointing of the Holy Spirit: We wrestle not against flesh and blood; keep fighting the real enemy (Eph. 6:12). Keep loving your human enemies, while fighting the spiritual war against the devil who is using them.

STUDY 6: MY SHEPHERD PREPARES A FEAST FOR ME IN THE MIDST OF ENEMIES – Part 2

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." (Psalm 23:5)

9. THE REAL ENEMY BEHIND ALL THESE

a. His names Satan and Devil really mean adversary (one whose sole business is to oppose and accuse). Revelation 12 paints in highly symbolic language the hatred and MO of Satan against God and his people.

Illustration: In some countries, they are kidnapping, torturing or killing Christians.

Satan has succeeded in varying and limited degrees in using nations to persecute Christians: ancient Rome; the former Soviet Union; the People's Republic of China; the nations of Islam. But a time is coming when Satan will succeed in turning the whole world (the U. S. A. included) against Christians.

b. Means of victory:

1) When that time of united global persecution comes, continue to feast with Christ: enjoy the victory Christ (1) by faith in the blood of the Lamb, and (2) by the word of your testimony, and (3) by not loving your life but willingly offering it as a sacrifice for the Lord unto death. (Rev. 12:11)

2) Anointing of the Holy Spirit: The Spirit of Glory rests upon you (1 Peter 4:12-14)

CONCLUSION

10. You will always have these enemies in varying forms and degrees.

11. But the means of victory is the same in every case: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil."

Fellowship with Christ at his table -- "eat" with thankfulness everything that he sets before you, knowing that the anointing power of the Holy Spirit will always be there to enable you to gain the victory.

12. And the result will be the same: "My cup runneth over."

- a. You will be blessed
- b. You will be a blessing

(1) Like Corrie Ten Boom, the Dutch Christian lady who went through the German concentration camp in WW2, your life may be spared to tell the whole world of God's power and goodness.

(2) Like the 5 Missionary Martyrs killed by the Auca Indians in the 1950s, their life and death challenged Christians to respond to the call of missionary service, so that in place of the five martyrs, God raised up hundreds, maybe thousands to become missionaries and dedicated workers for Christ.

(3) Whatever happens, your cup will overflow in eternal love and service to the Lord here and in heaven.

STUDY 7: WITH THE LORD FOREVER – Part 1

**"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."
– Psalm 23:6**

1. We come now to the final verse of this short but very profound psalm. We began with the wonderful truth: "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want." Whatever may be my condition or situation, my Shepherd will fully and completely care for me in all the following situations:

- a. In green pastures;
- b. Beside still waters;
- c. When my soul needs restoration;
- d. In paths of righteousness;
- e. Even in the valley of the shadow of death;
- f. And in the presence of mine enemies.

2. Journeying with my Shepherd, every place and every situation is a feast, in which He spreads out ample provisions; He anoints my head with oil; and He fills my cup to overflowing.

3. The final verse of Psalm 23 is the lifetime testimony of someone who has had the Lord as his Good Shepherd.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

BEING PURSUED – BY WHOM?

4. The believer in God is a “fugitive” being pursued all his/her life – but by whom? He/she is being pursued, someone said, by two sisters named Goodness and Mercy!

(a) First of all, let's look at the verb "shall follow me". This verb is usually used to describe the action of pursuing or persecuting enemies.

This gives us a very beautiful picture. In verse 5 we see the psalmist surrounded by his enemies. But in the presence of his enemies, his Good Shepherd prepares for him a feast in which the psalmist is the honored guest, who receives the anointing oil on his head and whose cup is filled to overflowing by the host.

Now, as the psalmist looks at his enemies, the question naturally arises: Who among these enemies have enough power to pursue the psalmist to conquer him and take him captive and make him their slave?

The answer is in verse 6: Literally translated, it reads: "Only goodness and mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life!"

(b) In spite of all their roarings and threatenings and posturings, none of his enemies will succeed in going after him. In fact, only two forces have sufficient power to pursue him -- they are goodness and mercy... and these two forces will never stop pursuing him all the days of his life.

When the Lord is our Shepherd, we do not need to run after goodness and mercy; they run after us.

When the Lord is our Shepherd, even when we are seemingly running away from goodness and mercy -- that is, in the eyes of the world we are doing things that will not bring us prosperity and happiness -- still, goodness and mercy will be running after us.

(c) This is the truth, which the Lord heavily emphasized in Matthew 6:31-33: "Do not be anxious then, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'With what shall we clothe ourselves?' For all these things the Gentiles eagerly seek (pursue!); for your heavenly Fathers knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you."

STUDY 7: WITH THE LORD FOREVER – Part 2

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

– Psalm 23:6

IMAGINE YOURSELF AT 100

5. Imagine yourself now as a 100-year old person, looking back at your life. Your grandchildren and great grandchildren are asking, "Grandpa/Grandma, did you ever have enemies who went after you?" And you will smile and say, "No, not enemies; but, yes, I've had two very persistent friends who were always running after me every day -- wherever I went, they followed me; whatever I did, they always made sure they were beside me -- their names are Goodness and Mercy!"

6. Now, let's look at these two persistent friends.

a. Goodness includes all the material and spiritual benefits that God promised to give his children. All the good things that God can and wants to give.

Psalm 103:1-5 is a summary: Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things, so that thy youth is renewed like the eagles."

b. Mercy is from the Hebrew word CHESED; so hard to translate, because it is so full of meaning. But it is equivalent in the New Testament to the word love in the statement "God is love." God's love will pursue you all the days of your life, and when it catches up with you, it will throw open the floodgates of God's treasure house bearing all the goodness and good things that God enjoys so much giving out to those whom he loves.

BUT WHERE IS DEATH?

7. And now, since this psalm is most often used in funerals, where is death actually mentioned in this psalm? Nowhere. The closest mention we can find is in verse four when the psalmist talks about the valley of the shadow of death; but you see, he emerges from that valley very much alive and we find him feasting with the Shepherd in verse 5. And here in verse 6 we find him talking about his whole life in terms of being pursued relentlessly by two friends, goodness and mercy.

Do you know where death is mentioned in verse 6; it is there in your English Bible, if you have eyes to see it.

No, it is not "and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever" -- this is what you do and where you go after death. So, death must be found between these two statements: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (comma) "and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Death is merely a comma, a temporary pause, a short rest between this life and the coming life, and does not even deserve to be mentioned.

8. Here is the Christian attitude toward death: When Christ is your Good Shepherd...

a. Death is merely a door between this wonderful life filled with abundant goodness and mercy and the next life in the very presence of God filled with perfect goodness and mercy.

b. The Christian does not look forward to death... he looks forward to going home to be with his Good Shepherd, and fellowshiping with Him face to face. In this life, fellowship with the Good Shepherd is by faith and from faith to faith; in the next life, it is face to face.

CONCLUSION

9. What then is the conclusion of our wonderful study of Psalm 23? One thing: God wants us to enjoy Him and to enjoy this life He has given to us. Let us so trust and obey and love our

Good Shepherd so that, no matter what happens, no matter what the conditions and situations that meet us, we are always experiencing being pursued by God's goodness and mercy.

10. Let us then declare this as our statement of faith: THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT WANT OR LACK ANYTHING. THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, ONLY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL SURELY PURSUE ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, UNTIL THE LORD SHALL TAKE ME HOME TO BE WITH HIM FOR EVER MORE!