



Prayer Coordinator Facilitator Guide (Participants have booklets)

The Introduction to Psalm 23

It is always the highest honor to be allowed to publicly affirm our faith in our Risen Lord by sharing with you all today an insight into the favored 23rd Psalm we all so dearly love to recite, hear, and read as many of us have had to learn to recite it, or have heard it read at funerals where King David's words soothe us.

In front of you, You will find a Sheep, A 23rd Psalm Booklet and a Pen. It's a gift to you. The 23rd Psalm Booklet and pen are to take notes, but for the sake of time, we encourage you to follow along, and take the booklet home to jot down any thoughts you have.

If you are like us and have questioned? What does a roaming shepherd in the Holy Land know about preparing a table? And why does preparing a table in the presence of my enemies make sense? Also, why does the Shepherd's rod and staff give me comfort... and what is that "rod and staff" anyway? And why does He have to "make" me lie down in green pastures? And what's so important about being led to "still waters"?

In pondering these questions, we heard it shared in a reading by Rev. Charles L. Allen in his book *God's Psychiatry* first published in 1953.

Charles L. Allen shares that our Modern word Psychiatry comes from two Greek words that mean 1. soul or mind, and 2. treatment or healing. Together they mean the healing of the mind or as the Psalmist David said "the restoring of the soul". And only God can heal the soul. Rev. Charles L. Allen suggest that in our pursuit of happiness found in the secular world, we've come up wanting, with a purposeless sense of being. He suggest that we read Psalm 23 where we will find our souls and fears healed.

"Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "A man is what he thinks about all day long." Marcus Aurelius said, "A man's life is what his thoughts make it." Norman Vincent Peale says, "Change your thoughts and you change your world." The Bible says, in Proverbs 23:7 "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he".

The Twenty-third Psalm is a pattern of thinking, and when a mind becomes saturated with it, a new way of thinking and a new life are the result. It contains only 118 words. One could memorize it in a short time. In fact, most of us already know it. But it's power is not in memorizing the words but rather in thinking the thoughts.

The power of this Psalm lies in the fact that it represents a positive, hopeful, faith approach to life. Written by the David who slayed Goliath, the same David who had a black chapter of sin and failure in his life. But he spends no time in useless regret and morbid looking back. David possesses the same spirit that St. Paul expresses in Philippians 3:13 "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark"

Now, let us share with you a glimpse through David's eyes and understand the depth of care and guidance that he felt the God of Abraham delivered to him. It is an ancient map, if you will, that directs you to the treasure of God's promise to deliver His Son Jesus a thousand years later who will become a Personal Shepherd to each and everyone of us.

23RD PSALM / AUGUST 2016

1. The Lord Is My Shepherd; I Shall Not Want. The first thing you should notice are the personal pronouns of "my" and "I" which reveals the intimacy, privacy, and personal, tender love of the God of Abraham that David felt and worshipped. The words don't say God is some object in space or one that controls earthquakes and forces of nature with no regard for the individual. He is a doting, caring God like the Shepherd who has planned the sheep's grazing for tomorrow so the sheep can rest in the fold each night, knowing they will be fed on the morrow.

Rev. Charles Allen told this story: "Immediately after WWII, the Allied Armies gathered up many hungry, homeless children and placed them in large camps. There the children were abundantly fed and cared for. However, at night, they did not sleep well. They seemed restless and afraid. Finally, a psychologist hit on a solution. After the children were put to bed, they each received a slice of bread to hold. If they wanted more to eat, more was provided, but this particular slice was not to be eaten-- **It was just to hold.** The slice of bread produced marvelous results. The child would go to sleep, subconsciously feeling it would have something to eat tomorrow. That assurance gave the child a calm and peaceful rest... The Psalm does not begin with a petition asking God for something; rather it is a calm statement of fact---

"The Lord is my Shepherd" I shall not want

The greatest source of worry is about tomorrow, as it was with the women going to the tomb of Jesus Easter morning. They missed the beauty of the early morning sun, worrying about who would roll away the stone. And when they got there it was already rolled away. David said in Psalm 37:25 "Through my whole life young or old, I have never witnessed God forsaking those who do right, nor have I seen their children begging for crumbs.

1. **He Maketh Me To Lie Down In Green Pastures.** And what are the shepherd's plans for tomorrow's sustenance? **Green Pastures!**

The sheep graze from early morning, constantly moving until about 10:00 when the heat of the day kicks in. The Shepherd starts them on the rougher herbage when they are hungry, then moves them to the richer, sweeter grass in a shady place for the afternoon rest so that they can contently chew their cud made of the most nutritious grass, thus gaining weight and becoming content and prosperous.

The Lord wants us to prosper, and by that, He gains also in the bargain, for you return the gains to him. Rev. Allen explained further that when the sheep are hot, tired, and thirsty, the wise Shepherd knows that the sheep must not drink when it is hot, neither when it's stomach is filled with undigested grass. That's why the Shepherd "MAKES" the sheep to lie down to rest and "chew the fat" so to speak, to be forced to look up to the Master and give thanks for his knowledge and care. Rev. Allen recalls a restless time in the hospital with back problems when he felt he had no time to waste in bed. His wise doctor told him one thing, "He makes you lie down." Sometimes God puts us on our backs in order to give us a chance to look up. Study the lives of great people, and you will find every one of them drew apart from the hurry of life for rest and reflection. Great poems are not written on crowded streets.. Our visions come when we stop.

1. **He Leadeth Me Beside The Still Waters.** Every Shepherd knows that sheep **Will Not** drink from gurgling, gushing water, and their fears are well founded, for they are poor swimmers because their heavy coat of wool soaks up the water and pulls them down. Thus, they instinctively know the fast moving stream could kill them. So what does the good Shepherd do? Laugh at their fears? **No, God does not chide us** for our mortality and weaknesses; He

simply gathers up stones to form a pool while we are resting on the green pastures to fashion a dam across a small stream from which even the tiniest lamb may drink of the stilled waters. To relieve a tension in your life, **picture the Shepherd who has cupped his palms for still water with a tiny lamb drinking his fill.**

(PAUSE HERE..... HAVE THEM TAKE A FEW SECONDS TO PICTURE THIS)

Such an image “should produce a marvelous surrender and trust that enables one to face the heat of the day confidently, **knowing there is a refreshing and relaxed power awaiting under the leadership of ONE WISER THAN WE.**

1. **He Restoreth My Soul.** In the Holy Land the shepherd explained, each sheep takes his place in the grazing line in the morning and keeps the same position throughout the day. Once during the day, however, each sheep leaves it's place and goes to the shepherd... Who rubs the animal's nose and ears, scratches it's chin and whispers affectionately into it's ear. The sheep, meanwhile, rubs against the shepherd's leg... nibbles at his ear and rubs it's cheek against his face. After this communion with the Master, the sheep returns to it's place in the feeding line. At this explanation, we have to give credit to the sheep that are willing to break the “Mold” of their peer pressure standings and status to come away into the loving communion with their Lord.

Our souls are so in need of cuddling!

What an amazing God we worship! He wants us to get those gentle rubs behind the ears, the petting and nibbling exchanges as we playfully interact with Him personally. In fact, He **begs** us to feel his healing touch and to hear His quiet whisperings in our ears that **HE LOVES US!**

After this Close Encounter of the God Kind, we can reenter the drill of the day. Rev. Allen wrote, The human mind is like the human body. It can be wounded. He list several wounds like sorrow,,, bitterness,,, self-pity,,, and resentment; even a wrong that violates one's standards is a wound that could lead to a sense of guilt that can destroy life. Theologian James Moffatt translates it “He Revives Life In Me” Yet sometimes life has a way of squeezing the spirit out of a person. And only God has the power and willingness and **gentleness** to breathe a new breath of life into one who is hopeless. Take a breath... Say the 23rd Psalm in the morning and in the evening... Think of the reviving and restoring and healing and cuddling... Come away a new creature.

1. **He Leadeth Me In The Paths Of Righteousness For His Name's Sake.** Rev. Allen wrote that David knew that sheep have no sense of direction. A dog, a cat or horse, if lost, can find it's way back. They seem to have a compass within them. **Not so with sheep.** They also have very poor eyes and cannot see ten or fifteen yards ahead. Palestinian fields were covered with narrow paths over which the shepherds led their sheep to pasture, some which lead to a precipice, others up a blind alley, but some to green pastures and still waters. The near-blind sheep realized they had to follow their master to be led in the right paths toward righteousness. We have forks in our lives' roads that determine our destiny. Robert Frost's poem, The Road Not Taken illustrates in a simple way that a seemingly minor decision at a fork in the road can lead to a life-choice, both bad & good. I believe God laid out very clear guidepost along our paths to lead us to a contented, fulfilled life, and they were chipped in stone tablets on a mountain experience with Moses. God doesn't drive us like a herd of cattle. He is climbing the same hill that we climb--- man is not alone. As we take life one-step at a time, we can walk with Him the right paths.
1. **Yea, Though I Walk Through The Valley Of The Shadow Of Death, I Will Fear No Evil; For Thou Art With Me.** There is an actual Valley of the Shadow of Death in Palestine, and every Shepherder from Spain to Dalmatia knows of it. It is south of the Jericho Road leading from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, and it is a narrow defile through a mountain range. Climatic and grazing conditions make it necessary for the sheep to be moved through this valley for seasonal feeding each year. the valley is 4-1/2 miles long. It's sidewalls are over 1,500 feet high in places, and it is only 10-12 feet wide at the bottom. Travel through here is

dangerous because it's floor has gullies 7-8 feet deep. Actual footing on solid rock in some places is so narrow that a sheep cannot turn around, and it is an unwritten law of Shepherds that flocks must go up the valley in the morning and down toward the evening, lest flocks meet in the defile. About halfway through the valley, the walk crosses from one side to the other at a place where the path is cut in two by an 8-foot gully. One side of the gully is about 18 inches higher than the other and the sheep must jump across it. The shepherd stands at this break and coaxes or forces the sheep to make the leap.

We can picture Jesus standing with us as “we take the leap of faith” into the unknown realms of death, and as Rev. Allen suggests that this valley or “glen of gloom” could refer to more than the actual experiences of physical death; it might refer to every hard and terrifying experience of life such as disappointment and loneliness. God counsels people in the midst of the valleys, inviting us to just stop, become still and quiet, and feel His strange and marvelous Presence more powerfully than they have ever felt before.

1. **Thy Rod And Thy Staff, They Comfort Me.** It's further explained that if sheep slipped into that 8-foot precipice in the Valley of the Shadow of Death and landed in the gully, the shepherd would use his staff to retrieve the lost sheep. The old style staff or crook as shown in so many paintings was the size to hook the neck of a sheep, but other sizes large enough to encircle the sheep's chest or small enough to hook his feet were used to lift the sheep to safety. Many wild dogs lurked in the shadows of the valley, looking for prey. Then the shepherd would sharpen his 8-foot long staff like a spear as a weapon. David probably was remembering that in 1 Samuel 17, he told Saul how he slew a lion and a bear in protecting his sheep with his rod. It is comforting to know that the Shepherd is able to meet any emergencies that could threaten our lives at any given moment, yet is overwhelming present when our time has run its clock, and He helps us tread the narrowest of paths with grace and acceptance. Seemingly there is overwhelming evil in the world. We are a scared people. Many times we feel helpless; then we find comfort in realizing the power of God... whose rod and staff take the dread and fear of the future out of our hearts.
1. **Thou Prepest A Table Before Me In The Presence Of Mine Enemies.** David's meaning is a simple one when conditions on the Holy Land sheep range are known. The pastures grew poisonous plants which were fatal to the sheep if eaten and thorny plants that would penetrate the soft noses of sheep and cause ugly sores. The Shepherd had to be constantly alert in the spring when he would go ahead of the flock, and using his mattock, which is like a hoe, he would grub out every stalk and root he could see. Then he would stack them on a little “TABLE”, a stone pyre (some built by Shepherds in Old Testament Days) to dry or burn them. After he had dug out these “enemies” of the sheep, the pastures were safe for the sheep to graze and become the “Table Prepared” We must constantly “Weed Out” societal enemies, we must be alert to weeding out things that destroy life by sharing the Gospel of Jesus. We do this so that all good life may be safely nourished around God's table. But the Shepherd of Men is out ahead, and we can be assured of the protection of His Strength. 1 John 5:4 There is “victory that overcometh the world, even our faith”
1. **Thou Anointest My Head With Oil; My Cup Runneth Over.** At every sheepfold there is a big earthen bowl of olive oil and a large jar of water. As the sheep come in for the night, they are led to a gate. The Shepherd lays his rod across the top of the gateway just above the backs of the sheep. As each sheep passes, he quickly examines it for briars in the ears, snags in the cheek or weeping of the eyes from dust or scratches. When such conditions are found, he drops the rod across the sheep's back and it steps out of line. Each sheep's wounds are carefully cleaned. Then the Shepherd dips his hand into the olive oil and anoints the injury for healing. A large cup is dipped into the jar of water kept cool by evaporation in the unglazed pottery and is brought out--- never half full but always overflowing. The sheep

will sink its nose into the water to clear its eyes if fevered, and then drinks until fully refreshed. When all the sheep are at rest the Shepherd places his staff within reach in case it is needed during the night. Then he wraps himself in his woolen robe and lies down across the gateway, facing the sheep for his night's repose.

2.

What a tender image to hold in your heart.....

This is the God we worship. Notice David used again the singular, personal pronouns: He anoints **my** head, it is **my** cup, not ours, but **mine**. **Just think how this tender God helps heal my** broken heart, **my** aching conscience, **my** feelings hurt from a cruel and harsh world. Think how He anoints **my** discouragements and weariness when the burdens of life become unbearable. And like the Shepherd who studies **my** wounds and picks **me** from the crowded lineup with His rod dropped on **my** back, so does Jesus who said in John 10:3 He calleth his own sheep by name. Yes, God knows **my** name and He knew David's name 3,000 years ago, only David never heard the good news: John 11:25 says, "I am the resurrection and the life" With God's love, we are linked to the ages and to the stars for the Psalmist said, "He healeth the broken in heart..."

1. **Surely Goodness And Mercy Shall Follow Me All the Days Of My Life.** The key word to focus on here is "SURELY" say it over in your mind--- surely, surely, surely. After all the care and protection the Shepherd has given, the sheep is assured all things good and merciful SURELY WILL follow them until they die. The blind sheep are used to **following**, that's what they do. That's how they survive. They really can't help themselves in believing in a Merciful Good God, for without His loving Shepherding, they would perish. And how they know that for **SURE** is remembering their Shepherd's past care. David picked the best model in the world to reveal his love and faith in his God, **A Shepherd.**

2.

David was an old man when he wrote the Twenty-Third Psalm. He had seen tragedies and disappointments, but he had also come to know God-- a God who knows the needs of His children and who abundantly provided for those needs, a God who can restore life and take away fear. In spite of dark clouds on the horizon, with a God like Him, David was **SURE** the sun would shine tomorrow. We hear a lot about the wickedness of men and the destruction of the world, but somehow, after our minds are filled with the picture of the loving Shepherd leading His Sheep, we feel confident that He will lead us through the dark valleys. Professor Endicott Peabody, a great teacher, told his students at chapel one day "Remember, things in life will not always run smoothly... The great fact to remember is that the trend of civilization is forever upward... Those words stuck in the mind of one of his students, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who forty years later told a fearful, hopeless nation. "The only thing to fear is fear itself" So, be assured, goodness and mercy will follow after us,,, if we but follow him.

1. **And I Will Dwell In The House Of The Lord Forever.** Now comes the icing on the Psalm's cake. David gave us this simple pattern of thought, condensed and compacted into poetry so it could be loved down through the centuries. It is a pattern, a map, in how to journey through this earthly experience with ease, confidence and happiness, but that map also finally leads us to the top prize---The Forever Place, God's House, Home, Heaven.

Rev. Allen was always thrilled to be in downtown Atlanta about 5 O'Clock to watch people **going home** with an extra lift in their step. Yet he also felt a sadness knowing some who had no home to which to go. Some wandered around seeking a cheap bed for the night, others could afford the nicest hotel suite in the city--- but it still wasn't home. More pathetic than seeing a homeless person at the end of the day,,, was to find a person who was not sure of God,,,and had no hope of an eternal home, who, at the close of life's day, could look forward only to some dark grave oblivion. We can call David's closing of the Twenty-Third Psalm an icing on the cake, but Rev. Allen calls it a mighty crescendo of faith... and so it is. Say it with gusto!

I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever!