

Psalm 23

Sheep and shepherds, leaders version

For a one hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – with the group sitting in a semi circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

This Psalm was written by King David, who lived about 1000 years before Jesus was born. Before he was a King, David was a shepherd (the one who killed Goliath with a sling-stone). This Psalm is all about trusting the Lord.

1. STICKERS Why do sheep need a shepherd?

Read the stickers and co-ordinate a discussion. Eg. because left on their own, sheep get lost, they fall off cliffs, they follow each other around, are in danger from wolves, will run out of good pasture etc.

What does the passage say and mean?

60 minutes

Read Psalm 23

***2.** What are followers of God likened to in Psalm 23?

Sheep

***3.** Who is our shepherd? (v1) (See also John 10:14 & 27)

David is referring to God the Father / Jesus is referring to himself

***4.** Sheep really do recognise their shepherd, and really don't respond to a stranger! What does John 10:3-4 tell us?

As Christians, because the Holy Spirit is in us, we can discern Jesus' voice i.e. recognise our shepherd.

*5. Why do you think we need a shepherd? (think back to the nature of sheep)

To rescue us, to watch over us, to take us to safe places, to protect us from wolves (spiritually). (note: this doesn't mean there aren't any wolves - they still come, but the shepherd chases them off).

6. With the Lord as his shepherd, David knows something very important. What is it? (v1)

That he shall not be in want.

7. What do you think this means?

That God will provide all that we need (not necessarily the same as 'all we want!'). The shepherd knows all that needs to be done for the sheep to be safe. David doesn't know Jesus, but for us, as our shepherd, Jesus has done all that needs to be done to save us, to keep us safe from the punishment that we deserve for our sin. We are not in want because there is no need for anything more to be done.

Questions 8-10 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. You need to write them on flip-chart sheets for the group to work on in pairs.

*8. **SDL** What does the psalmist mean in v2?

Sheep only lie down when they know they are safe – God will lead us to the place where we can rest in him (spiritually), and let him defend us, if we follow Him.

*9. **SDL** Read v3a. What is the result of what happens in v2?

God restores our souls. He heals us spiritually, by feeding, watering and resting us spiritually. This includes restoration of tired, injured, broken or back-slidden souls and involves repentance (turning away from our sins and our old life, and turning towards God).

*10. **SDL** Read Isaiah 40v30-31. What does it mean to have our strength renewed?

To be able to face the day in God's strength, to carry on, knowing that God is with us – link this back to God being our shepherd.

*11. What are 'paths of righteousness' (Psalm 23:3)?

Walking along 'paths of righteousness' means living God's way, and the Holy Spirit guides us in this. By following his leading, listening to his voice and obeying him, not our sinful nature, we become more like Jesus in character. This is revealed in wise decisions, choices, actions and attitudes – which come from obedience to God.

12. Why does God guide us on these paths?

For his name's sake – to bring glory to his name. Our salvation brings glory to God and we can bring glory to God by our behaviour, lifestyle and attitudes!

*13. Read v4. We have looked at the way that God protects us, leads us into safe places and helps us to live his way. But what happens in v4?

This probably refers to death. Being a Christian does not make us immune to suffering and death.

14. What does David know about his journey through the valley of the shadow of death?

He doesn't need to fear evil. He's not alone, God will be with him, comforting him.

15. What hope do Christians have in the face of death, and how does this give us confidence?

Jesus has died and risen again, and so we know that he has defeated death – 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' 1 Corinthians 15:55. The resurrection of Jesus means that believers will also rise to eternal life, 1 Corinthians 15:42-44. We may not enjoy the dying process but we know that, for the Christian, death is just the step into eternal life.

16. Read v5. What does David say that God does for him?

Gives a banquet for him – this symbolised God's protection of David. Anointing was the way that honoured guests were treated in David's day.

17. Read v6. What is David's conclusion about living in dependence on God?

God will never leave him and he will not leave God.

How can I live according to these truths in my life?

20 minutes

*1. Read v1-3 again. Can you see where in your journey with God these verses have been true for you?

2. If you are 'in the valley of the shadow of death' (i.e. suffering) at the moment, how does Psalm 23 help you or comfort you in your situation?

*3. Read v6 again. Nobody feels spiritual every day. But v6 is true every day, whatever is happening. Trust your faith, not your feelings. What do you need to remember when things get tough? Write it down, and keep it as a reminder for when you need it!

Check out – with the group sitting in a semi-circle go round and ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.



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1. Why do sheep need a shepherd?

What does the passage say and mean?

2. What are followers of God likened to in Psalm 23? (v1)

3. Who is our shepherd? (v1) (see also John 10v14&27)

4. Sheep really do recognise their shepherd, and really don't respond to a stranger! What is the significance of Jesus' words in John 10v3-4?

5. Why do you think we need a shepherd? (think back to the nature of sheep)

6. With the Lord as his shepherd, David knows something very important. What is it? (v1)

7. What do you think this means?

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- *9. **SDL** Read v3a. What is the result of what happens in v2?
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11. What are paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3)?
12. Why does God guide us on these paths?
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16. Read v5. What does David say that God does for him?
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