



THE GOOD
SHEPHERD

PSALM 23

Life Group
Material

Bracken Ridge
BAPTIST CHURCH

PSALM 23

MATT CHANDLER



Many people are familiar with Psalm 23. But because we all know it, we often breeze through the psalm without slowing down long enough to rest in the assurance it offers. In this 6-part series on Psalm 23, pastor Matt Chandler introduces us to the great shepherd, the Lord, who promises to provide for every need of his flock. Though only six verses long, this psalm teaches us profound truths about our loving and protective God. By studying Psalm 23, we'll encounter a life-transforming question: Do you trust the Lord to care for your needs?

Accessing The Material

On the following pages you will find all of the information needed to go through The Good Shepherd Life Group Material. There are corresponding videos that can be accessed through our "RightNow Media" account with the church. If you don't have an account, simply go to rightnowmedia.org/Account/Invite/BrackenRidgeBaptistChurch. After creating an account simply search "Psalm 23" to access the 6 weeks or click [HERE](#) if viewing on your computer.

rightnow MEDIA

If you are unable for some reason to access the material through these different means, please simply email office@brbc.org.au or call 07 3261 5045.

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Read John 10:1–18.

What characteristics of Jesus stand out to you the most based on how John describes him in this passage? How do those characteristics compare to the way David describes the Lord in Psalm 23?

One of the characteristics Matt pointed out is that the sheep that belong to Jesus hear his voice and follow wherever he leads. But Jesus is not the only voice we hear in our world today. There are many different things vying for our attention. Matt specifically mentioned three examples: our personal desires, culture, and relationships.

What are some examples of ways your personal desires have led you astray from following Jesus? What about culture? Relationships?

As Matt said in the session, regardless of how enticing they may seem, these other shepherds are little more than thieves and robbers. **What kept you from remaining focused on Jesus in the times when you were led astray? What did you desire from those other “shepherds” that you did not think Jesus could supply?**

David begins Psalm 23 with a profound statement describing the effect of having the Lord as his shepherd: “I shall not want.” Other translations render it even more explicit, reading, “I lack nothing” or “I will not lack for anything.” Either way, the point is simple—when the Lord is our shepherd we find everything we need in him.

Think back to the times when you’ve followed shepherds other than Jesus. **Were you ever able to say to them, “I shall not want”? How did they fail to supply your needs?**

Where do you find yourself lacking today? What can you do to pursue Jesus as your provider rather than following another false shepherd?

DUST OFF THE HEBREW

Most English translations render the beginning of verse 3 either “He restores” or “He refreshes” when describing the impact the Lord’s rest has on the soul. While neither of these is incorrect, they don’t quite convey the gravity of the work God does within us by providing the rest we need. The Hebrew term *shub* in this context carries the literal meaning “to bring back liveliness” or “vitality.” The prophet Isaiah uses it in this sense to describe the restoration of a demolished house (Is. 58:12). David uses the term to paint an astounding picture of God’s restorative work. When he is our shepherd, he leads us to spaces that can revitalize the areas of our lives that have ceased to flourish. He can inject life where death has reigned. He can rebuild what has been torn down. His rest is the peace our hearts most desperately crave.

What do you need to surrender to the Lord today?

What is keeping you from following his voice to green pastures, still waters, and the restoration of your soul?

LAST WORD

Everyone needs rest. The world offers us many places to look for it, but it can never deliver on the rest our souls long for. When the Lord is our shepherd, he leads us to the places of peace we need, though they may not always look like the ones we want. But he does so in order to restore us.

Whether you find yourself in a time of rest or in need of an elusive state of peace, look to the Lord. Allow him to lead you into green pastures and guide you alongside still waters. Trust him to take you where you need to go for the restoration of your soul.

LIVE IT OUT

Memorize: Continue working on memorizing Psalm 23. This week, focus on verse two reciting it to yourself over the next few days.

Pray: Spend at least five minutes in prayer each day this week specifically confessing to the Lord the places where you have found yourself in need of rest as a result of this session.

Encourage: If you are currently in a season of enjoying rest in the Lord, look for someone in your life who is struggling and make an intentional effort to encourage them with the truths you learned from this session.

DISCUSS

So far, we've studied some pretty spectacular truths about God as well as what we receive by following him. When the Lord is our shepherd, we lack nothing. He leads us into green pastures, beside still waters, and restores our souls. But why? What is the grand goal behind the kindness he extends to us? That's the topic of our session today.

Read Psalm 23:3.

The final half of verse 3 introduces us to one additional benefit of knowing him that we haven't talked about before—he leads us in paths of righteousness. **What is righteousness? How would you define it according to your understanding of Scripture?**

DUST OFF THE HEBREW

The Hebrew term David uses to describe righteousness is *zedek*. In its most basic sense, the word refers to that which is right or upright. But in the context of Psalm 23, it carries a deeper sense. Certainly, God cares for our physical well-being and often leads us along such paths, but he is far more concerned with the makeup of our hearts. The *zedek* David has in mind here concerns external health, but also internal salvation. So not only does he provide us a place among his flock and grant us the peace we need, but he also extends to us salvation for the sake of his name, which is further made clear through the example of Jesus Christ who laid down his life for his sheep. Psalm 23 may be short, but it overflows with the generosity of our God in heaven.

We have all faced times of difficulty in our lives. Like Matt said in the session, David assumes that all of us will at some point or another walk through the valley of the shadow of death. So our approach should not be one of figuring out how to avoid it, but understanding what we need to do to remain faithful along the way.

Think back to some of the times when you have faced a “dark night of the soul,” as Matt described. **How did you respond to your circumstances?**

Dark nights of the soul are painful. There’s no getting around that. And God does not expect us to enjoy our suffering, but he does have expectations for our focus in the midst of it. In verse 4, David proclaims that he will “fear no evil” while facing the valley of the shadow of death. **Based on your answer above, did your response reflect David’s confidence? Why or why not?**

More than likely, you did not respond to your own suffering with the perfection of Christ. Join the club. We have all fallen short in this area and desperately need help because fearing no evil requires more than simply our own human strength.

According to verse 4, what is the reason for why David fears no evil?

How does God’s presence remove our fear of evil? In what ways would a deeper focus on God’s presence have changed the way you responded to difficulty in the past?

While suffering is never enjoyable, one of its benefits is that it shows us when we are following false shepherds. Matt specifically mentioned the “shepherds” of health and wealth. When we place our confidence in our bank accounts, what happens when we come up short one month on our mortgage? Or can’t afford groceries? When we place our confidence in our health, what happens when we get sick? Or find ourselves on the other end of a freak car accident? These are false shepherds and cannot provide for us the way Jesus can.

Continue to reflect on the suffering you have faced in the past or may be facing presently. **How has it revealed to you the ways in which you might have followed false shepherds? Where did you place your confidence?**

What were you looking for in that false shepherd that it could not provide?

DISCUSS

Let's start this session by reviewing what we've covered so far. Digging in to Psalm 23 has meant slowing down and revisiting a portion of the Bible that has become overly familiar for many. We've refreshed ourselves in the truth that with the Lord as our shepherd we lack nothing. He provides us with rest, righteousness, guidance, and protection. But before we go any further, we need a reminder from session three.

Take a look back at your notes. **What did Matt refer to as the "gravitational pull" of Psalm 23?**

Read Psalm 23:5.

Don't forget this important point. God doesn't provide us with all of these gifts out of a sense of obligation. He does it "for his name's sake." In other words, he does it because it further displays his glory to the world when we find all of our needs met in him. God provides for us by drawing near out of a sense of deep love for all of his sheep.

How do you tend to think about God? Is he more of a distant king in your mind? Or do you picture him as a caring shepherd?

Throughout this session, Matt emphasized the point that God genuinely loves you right here, right now. **How does that truth sit with you? What feelings come to the surface when you reflect on the idea that God actually likes having you near to him?**

That's where we're going to focus most of our attention in this session, on the truth that God delights in those who belong to him.

Read Psalm 23:5.

How does the picture of God throwing a feast fit into your typical view of God?

Even more, David writes that God does this "in the presence of my enemies." **How does a very public display of God's affection for his people fit into your typical view of God?**

As if this weren't already enough, God continues his display of extravagant care by anointing David with oil and filling his cup to the point that it overflows.

DISCUSS

We have spent the last six weeks slowing down and working through a very familiar psalm in the hopes of seeing it anew. As Matt said in session one, when biblical truth becomes commonplace, it can be easy for us to overlook its significance—even taking it for granted at times. But despite its brevity, Psalm 23 delivers some astounding truths about our God and what it means to belong to him. So let’s start off this week by reflecting on where we have come. In week one, you listed two or three ways you hoped the Lord would help you grow as you worked through this series. **How has God answered your prayers for growth? In what ways has he met you as you have studied Psalm 23?**

How has your understanding of God grown throughout this study?

How has your understanding of yourself grown over the last few sessions?

Matt has challenged each week our tendency to view God incorrectly. All too often, we fall into the trap of believing that he is a distant God, constantly observing our moral efforts and ready to punish us when we go wrong. But that simply is not the image of God we receive in the Bible and we are going to close out our study by challenging that misunderstanding one last time.

Read Psalm 23:6

Matt said that if we could distill all sixty-six books of the Bible in to a single phrase, it would be “God with us.” **When you think of that phrase, what are some examples that come to mind of God being present with his people?**

We have wrestled with this question previously, but what makes it difficult to believe that God desires to be with you? How has your perspective on God’s presence changed as you have worked through this study?

This final verse of Psalm 23 presents us with two ideas, the first being that goodness and mercy follow those who call the Lord their shepherd. The Bible contains plenty of commands that we are expected to incorporate into our lives for the sake of obedience.

How do you tend to respond to being told what to do? Specifically, when it comes to the commands of the Bible, how do you respond to the ways in which it calls you to obedience?

As Matt pointed out, part of misunderstanding the character of God is also misunderstanding his intention for our obedience. He is not looking for begrudging submission. Rather, his commands are intended to bring us joy because they bring him glory and help us live in the way he designed the world to function.

When you think about obedience, is “goodness” something that you imagine it leading you toward? What situations make it difficult to believe that God wants good things for you?

Inevitably, no matter how faithfully we pursue obedience, there will be times in which we fail. That’s true in every area of life. We will come up short before God, in our marriages, in our jobs, in our friendships, and so on. That’s why the second characteristic that chases after those who follow the Lord is so significant.

What is mercy? How would you define it?

How do you tend to respond to your own failures? In what ways do you find it difficult to believe that God would respond to them with mercy rather than punishment?

Matt argued that we misunderstand mercy “following” us because we don’t truly understand the righteousness of God given to us through faith in Christ. **Where are you in need of mercy today? How should the truth that God’s mercy follows you through faith in Christ meet you in that need?**

If you belong to Christ, it does not matter where you find yourself today—if you have given in to temptation, missed a deadline at work, spoken careless words to your spouse, or failed in any other way, goodness and mercy still follow you. Even more, God has extended to you the invitation to dwell with him forever, which is the ultimate hope of our faith.

GO DEEPER

Read more about dwelling with God in the following verses:

Ps. 27:3–4; 42:1–2; 63:1–7

What is David’s consistent request in each of these passages?

What does it say about his perspective in difficult times?

How should David’s example in these verses change the way you pray when facing suffering?

Clearly, David longs to dwell in the presence of God. More than deliverance from his temporary circumstances, David pleads to be with God. **In what ways do you crave to be near God like David? How is that craving reflected in your prayer life?**

Based on what you have learned from this study, what could you do to be more intentional about pursuing God’s presence in the days ahead?

As we draw this series to a close, we’ll do so by considering the two questions Matt ended the session with. Throughout these past six weeks, we’ve seen that when the Lord is our shepherd we lack nothing. He provides us with rest, righteousness, protection, comfort, feasting, goodness, mercy, and an eternal dwelling in his presence. All other shepherds are little more than thieves seeking to kill and destroy (John 10:10).

Which shepherd are you following? Are you listening to the voice of the good shepherd? Or are you being drawn astray by another?

How are you orienting your life around the presence of God? What can you do to find spaces throughout your day to make yourself aware of his presence? To soak up his Word and spend time in prayer with him?

NOTES:

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