

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need.

² He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

³ He renews my strength.

He guides me along right paths, bringing honour to his name.

⁴ Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honour me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.

⁶ Surely ***your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me*** all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

The picture of the shepherd is so familiar to us and probably brings back pastoral scenes you have enjoyed around this country of ours, but I'm guessing that this over familiarity, or our poor understanding of what it means to be a shepherd, leaves us lacking in the nature of the shepherd as a metaphor for God.

Prayer:

Awesome and holy God, present with us now, may the eyes of our hearts be open to your love, the graciousness of your compassion transform our understanding of your love, and the closeness of your Spirit touch our lives with your peace so that we may be more confident as your dearly loved children.

Shepherds have sheep; I don't not mean to be patronising. Those who believe in Jesus become part of the folk of Christ, sheep of the Good Shepherd – as those who believe we can say, "The LORD is my shepherd".

So, who is the LORD mentioned here in Psalm 23?

Notice the small capitals in the printed text . . .

Whenever we see this we know it represents God whose name was so holy that the children of Israel would not pronounce it. In Hebrew it sounds like 'Ya-who-ah'. This came to be written as LORD by the Jews or Jehovah by Christians.

So the psalmist declares that God, whose name is not to be spoken, the one who created him, is like his shepherd.

The second thing to note is that, as shepherd, he provides *all* that a sheep needs. If he is to be our shepherd then we must acknowledge that he provides all that we need too.

This need is not about material possessions; it has a far more expansive dimension. Its spiritual significance transcends the bounds of the temporarily of life on this earth. It encompasses new creation and the eternal purposes of God. God, who, out of love, has made us in his image, breathed his life into us and in love will provide all that is necessary to live life in its fullness, both now as the reality of the kingdom of God breaks into time, and when that kingdom will be established in all its splendour when Christ returns.

Wherever we find LORD written with capitals in the OT we see a prefiguring of Jesus, so it comes as no surprise in the gospels to find that Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11).

This declaration of the psalmist in psalm 23, *the LORD is my shepherd*, can be our declaration too. But it is only through a personal relationship with God as our Father, made possible through the cross of Jesus, that we can begin to comprehend this.

Shepherds know their sheep intimately, every detail about their lives. In the biblical picture of the Middle Eastern shepherd the sheep return every night to the safety of the fold. It is there that the intimacy of relationship is expressed. If we are to know the LORD as shepherd we must find time simply to *be* in his presence. I know that many demands are made on us but, because God make no demands, we need to pay special attention to finding space for intimacy with him.

This relationship is one of love, the nature of which is something our human experience finds hard to grasp. We assume that that which we enjoy is conditional. But listen again to verses 2 and 3.

² He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

³ He renews my strength.

He lets me —no demands, simple freedom to rest and provision for restorative rest. There are pleasures in *being* that we should enjoy without feeling of guilt or making comparison with others. This is not an invitation to indulgence but a pattern for life that fits us to be servants of God in the world.

³ He renews my strength.

He guides me along right paths, bringing honour to his name.

Can you imagine that just *being* in peaceful rest, regaining your strength and being guided to take the right path would bring would bring God honour?

What does this tell us about God? He delights in us. In fact he delights in us so much that he pursues us —*v6 your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me.*

Let's remind ourselves of the last words of Jesus on the cross. "*It is finished.*" Notice that God's action towards us is not dependent on anything about us. There is nothing more that is necessary to accomplish the restoration of our relationship with the Good Shepherd, other than having the humility to receive it.

So God provides and pursues. If this is so then it tells me we are OK with God. That doesn't mean that we are perfect, we all know that, but God has taken the initiative out of love for us.

For many there is an inner struggle because we have heard in different ways from others, or our own inner voice of comparison, that we are not OK.

Psalm 23 teaches us that God is so delighted with us that he pursues us with goodness and unfailing love.

Awesome and holy God, present with us now, may your love compel us, your grace transform us, and your Spirit inspire us to live as your dearly loved children