

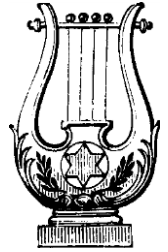


# Meeting God in the Psalms

Summer 2017

## Psalm 23 Led by the Shepherd

(sermons: Aug 13)



### Introduction

*King David, who wrote this psalm, knew all about the challenges of the life of a shepherd. As a young man, he made this clear to King Saul, when he volunteered to fight against Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:34-37. There are several passages in the Old Testament where political or religious rulers are compared to shepherds: shepherds are leaders and protectors of their sheep in a potentially hostile environment, going ahead of their sheep and calling them to follow, rather than driving them from behind.*

### Psalm 23:1-4 Led by the Shepherd

*v.2 quiet waters – where the sheep can drink safely, without the danger of being overwhelmed*

*v.3 he restores my soul – as a straying sheep is restored to the flock, or revived and refreshed*

*v.3 paths of righteousness – following the morally right path*

*v.3 for his name's sake – the shepherd's reputation depends on his sheep: they show his care for them*

*v.4 the valley of the shadow of death – this may be picture-language for a really dark place, or difficult circumstances, but these include death itself.*

*v.4 you are with me – in great danger the shepherd becomes more personal: 'you' rather than 'he'.*

*v.4 your rod and your staff – the rod is a cudgel to defend the sheep; the staff is the crook to gather them together, lift them out when they have fallen into a gap, and direct them along the right path*

1. How do the actions of the shepherd in *verses 1 to 3* illustrate God's care for us?  
How do they show how God wants the best for us, rather than just to give us comfortable lives?
2. What sort of circumstances are like the '*valley of the shadow of death*' in *verse 4*?  
Have we found that our relationship with God is deepened at those times?

### Psalm 23:5-6 Welcomed by a Friend

*v.5 you prepare a table – the picture turns from a shepherd to a host at a celebration*

*v.5 in the presence of my enemies – perhaps the captives at a victory celebration*

*v.6 goodness and love – the 'love' is 'mercy' or 'covenant love', the love God has promised to show us*

3. What does the picture of a celebration in *verses 5 & 6* refer to? Is it only in the next life or do we have any foretastes of the feast here and now?  
How can we encourage each other to be confident of God's eternal care for us?

### Psalm 23 as a Whole

4. The shepherd was a familiar figure in David's time. How might we rewrite this psalm using a more familiar comparison for today?  
*The Lord is my personal trainer.... The Lord is my life-coach..... The Lord is my sat nav....*
5. Choose one phrase from this psalm to turn over in your mind and heart this week.  
You could share your choice with the group.... or use it as a refrain in prayer .....