

The Glory of Jehovah  
as the only  
Good Shepherd



An outlined study of  
**PSALM 23**

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**Barry E. Horner**

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Barry E. Horner

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CHURCH,  
North Brunswick, New Jersey

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# THE GLORY OF JEHOVAH AS THE ONLY GOOD SHEPHERD

## PSALM 23

### I INTRODUCTION

#### A. The biblical pursuit of God as a priority over sentiment.

In approaching one of the most familiar chapters in all of the Bible, great caution must be exercised lest we fall victims to deadening familiarity and vague sentimentality.

1. How often at funerals of the godless, Psalm 23 is read and sung, and even at formal and civil religious services. Yet this passage of the Word of God is distinctly a testimony of a genuine child of God; rather than being evangelistic, it is consolatory for other lambs within the fold of the Good Shepherd. C. H. Spurgeon appropriately comments here:

The position of this psalm is worthy of notice. It follows the twenty-second, which is peculiarly the Psalm of the Cross. There are no green pastures, no still waters on the other side of the twenty-second psalm. It is only after we have read, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' that we come to 'The Lord is my Shepherd.' We must by experience know the value of the blood-shedding, and see the sword awakened against the Shepherd, before we shall be able truly to know the sweetness of the good Shepherd's care.<sup>1</sup>

2. It is so easy to buy a wall plaque of Psalm 23. In the Holy Land, olive wood figurines of a shepherd with a lamb or his sheep are marketed in the thousands. It is also easy to find people in western society who can recite portions of this, perhaps, the famous passage in the Old Testament if not the whole Bible. However, amongst those who can easily make such a recitation, it is not so easy to find someone who authentically knows Jesus Christ according to the lines of Charles Wesley:

Thou Shepherd of Israel, and mine,  
The joy and desire of my heart.

3. Hence, familiarity breeds numbing insularity, a presumptive ignorance that must be peeled away if we are to discover here what God really mean by what He says. And such an unveiling can be humiliating in the extreme. When undressed of our sham religious veneer, there is revealed the ugliness of our vain profession. For this reason, one of the key marks of a sheep that belongs to its shepherd is that of humble submission, a yielding that is both self-renouncing and boastful of its faithful Guardian.
4. But we must nevertheless acknowledge that the universal popularity of Psalm 23 is due to the prospective comfort it offers to wandering, bleating, hungry souls. They sense the obvious hope and confidence that David describes, while they themselves are lacking any personal knowledge of this Good Shepherd. They observe from a safe, non-threatening distance, but choose to remain outside the fold. Although confronted, in a manner of

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<sup>1</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury Of David*, I, p. 398.

speaking, with “a table spread before them,” v. 5, yet, to use the words of Isaac Watts, they would “rather starve than come.”

## B. The biblical picture of God as a shepherd originates in the Old Testament.

1. In Genesis 48:15-16; 49:22-24 we have the first mention of this concept in which Jacob confesses that God, the same God of Abraham and Isaac, has shepherded him throughout his whole tempestuous life. Consequently he prays that Joseph, along with his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, will likewise be shepherded
2. The subsequent pictures, especially God’s shepherding of Israel in Ezekiel 34:11-16 and Zechariah 11:4-14, culminate in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ taking the same shepherding title as that of his heavenly Father (Ps. 80:1-3; Isa. 40:10-11; John 10:1-18; Heb. 13:20; I Pet. 2:25).
3. David was a shepherd boy (I Sam. 16:11; 17:12-20), though this psalm was composed after he had reached adulthood and left his father Jesse’s flocks. He recalls those earlier days as he now contemplates blessing, prosperity, and benevolence from God, while at the same time the terrors of death and enemies; and all of this seems to be mused upon in worship within the environs of the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem.
4. J. J. Stewart Perowne rightly concludes: “This Psalm breathes throughout a spirit of the calmest and most assured trust in God: it speaks of a peace so deep, a serenity so profound, that even the thought of the shadow of death cannot trouble it. Perhaps there is no Psalm in which the absence of all doubt, misgiving, fear, anxiety, is so remarkable; and certainly no image could have been devised more beautifully descriptive of rest in the deep, rich meadow-grass, beside the living stream, under the care of a tender and watchful shepherd.”<sup>2</sup>

## C. The biblical picture of God as a shepherd in outline, vs. 1-3, 4-6.

1. One outline is based upon the fact that here we see David able to delight in God, in both prosperity and adversity. Hence:
  - a. God is David’s shepherd and refuge in prosperity, vs. 1-3.
  - b. God is David’s shepherd and refuge in adversity, vs. 4-6.
2. However, notice the different pronouns used in vs. 1-3 when compared with vs. 4-6. “He/His” (5 times) in vs. 1-3 indicates a testimony *about* God. “You/Your” (5 times) in vs. 4-6 indicates a testimony addressed *to* God. Hence:
  - a. David testifies of (*or about*) the Good Shepherd, vs. 1-3.
  - b. David testifies to (*or in worship of*) the Good Shepherd, vs. 4-6.

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<sup>2</sup> J. J. Stewart Perowne, *Commentary on the Psalms*, I, p. 248.

## II DAVID TESTIFIES OF (ABOUT) THE GOOD SHEPHERD, VS. 1-3

### A. The identification of the Good Shepherd, v. 1.

It seems implicit that David is confronted with a religious pluralism which he feels should be informed of the distinctive, shepherding character of the only true and living God. He has probably heard many a glib testimony, whether orthodox or pagan, that has, in a broad religious sense, confessed some allegiance toward an abstract deity. Consequently he feels compelled to testify, definitively and experientially, of the pastoral blessings that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has showered upon him. At the same time it is not difficult to imagine David, along with godly associates, singing this psalm with confident praise; over the centuries since its composition, true believers have eagerly and repeatedly sought to provide similar musical accompaniment.

#### 1. He is the LORD, v. 1a.

- a. Men have shepherds in general of all types, even godless guides, false, foolish, worthless, self-serving shepherds (Ezek. 34:1-6; Zech. 11:15-17; John 5:43). This writer recalls reading an article, in Australia, in which a liberal Baptist minister confessed that one of his two pastoral guides was a Roman Catholic priest! In John 10:12-13 Jesus describes the professional, mercenary shepherd, as one who treats his flock as disposable merchandise. But for David, he confesses himself to be a sheep owned exclusively by the God of Israel, even as that God designates Himself to be the Shepherd of Israel (Ps. 80:1, 4; Isa. 40:11).
- b. The “LORD” here in capital letters distinguishes David’s God from all others as He who has revealed Himself by an immutable covenant to a people who He has redeemed for Himself. This name, “Jehovah/Yahweh [יהוה]”, its root meaning “I am,” (Ex. 3:13-15), and secondarily “I will be” (Ex. 6:2-8), exclusively specifies who David is talking about, and absolutely none other.
  - (1) This “LORD” is the unique God of Israel, which nation has taken for its distinguishing creedal confession the “Shema,” meaning “Hear,” of Deuteronomy 6:3: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, the LORD is one!” Hence this LORD is singular, the ground of exclusive monotheism; all other gods are false.
  - (2) This “LORD” is the God who has redeemed His sheep by the shedding of blood (Ex. 12:12-13; cf. John 10:11), and consequently is for David his “Shepherd,” רֹעֵה, *rō’ēh*, or Pastor, cf. 28:9; 77:20; 78:52, but particularly Ezekiel 34:11-24 and Zechariah 11:1-14.
  - (3) This “LORD” is the Shepherd who owns His sheep; they are not strays in the wilderness like wolves or goats; He has rightful and total dominion over them. As Spurgeon declares: “A sheep is an object of property, not a wild animal; its owner sets great store by it, and frequently it is bought with a great price.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, I, p. 399.

(4) This “LORD” is He who the sheep fondly designates as “my Shepherd.” This is the same language of Genesis 49:24 where Jacob speaks of, “the God which feeds me.” So here there is the same distinguishing confession of loving intimacy that is enhanced by David’s implicit recollection of a surrounding wilderness world. Doubtless the Lord Jesus expounded on this relationship when he declared: “I know My own and My own know me” (John 10:14). For the sheep, there is an inherent understanding about the Shepherd that is overwhelming; the grandeur of His being is awesome. The God of Israel is not your average god! Rather He is distinguished by holiness, covenant faithfulness, lovingkindness, and particularly here, benevolence toward body and soul. To designate God as a “Shepherd” is correct; but to address Him as “my Shepherd” is to boastfully confess an intimacy in union that is profoundly soul-satisfying.

c. As earlier introduced, Charles Wesley has wonderfully written of this relationship:

Thou Shepherd of Israel, and mine,  
 The joy and desire of my heart,  
 For closer communion I pine,  
 I long to reside where Thou art:  
 The pasture I languish to find  
 Where all, who their Shepherd obey,  
 Are fed on Thy bosom reclined,  
 And screened from the heat of the day.  
 ’Tis there, with the lambs of Thy flock,  
 There only I covet to rest,  
 To lie at the foot of the rock,  
 Or rise to be hid in Thy breast;  
 ’Tis there I would always abide,  
 And never a moment depart,  
 Concealed in the cleft of Thy side,  
 Eternally held in Thy heart.

d. So David humbly confesses himself to be a sheep; he knows his Shepherd by name, just as he is likewise known by name (John 10:3, 14). It might seem contemporary or modern to confess that, “The Lord is my C.E.O. or Director or Commander.” But these titles fail to convey the helplessness and weakness of the sheep or the tender regard of the Shepherd for such foolish creatures. Besides this there is the barrenness of the wilderness in which environment the sheep is so incapable of self-preservation (Luke 15:1-7).

e. Hengstenberg cites Luther: “A sheep can only live through the help, protection, and care of its shepherd. As soon as it loses him, it is exposed to dangers of every kind, and must perish, for it cannot help itself. The reason is, it is a poor, weak, silly creature. But, weak creature though it be, it has the habit of keeping diligently near its shepherd, of depending upon his help and protection; it follows wherever he leads, and, if it can only be near him, it cares for nothing, is afraid of no one, but feels secure and happy, for it wants for nothing.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *Works*, V, p. 400.

- f. Consider then the force of Jesus' declaration in John 10:14: "I am the good [ὁ κάλος, ho kalos] shepherd," especially in contrast with the Pharisees (John 9:40-41). Jesus Christ boldly takes for himself a title of Jehovah, which the Jews immediately recognize (John 10:19-21), and then reveal their wayward nature (John 10:31-33). The "good shepherd" here, in contrast with the character of the "hired hand [shepherd]" (John 10:12), suggests that he is distinguished as the "attractively authentic/genuine [ὁ κάλος] shepherd." Certainly David has this thought in mind when he immediately proves his trusting boast by testifying: "I shall not want [lack for my safe and healthy provision]."

2. He is the Provider, v. 1b.

Here sanctified logic arrives at an inevitable conclusion. If David's shepherd is the LORD, about whom we are told: "The LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11), then divine providence is a blessed inevitability for the children of God such as he.

- a. A more correct translation here is, "I want [lack] nothing," and it is this thought that results in the description of God's providence in vs. 2-6.
- (1) But how do we explain the fact that the believer often does lack, even as David did. Sometimes we despair, groan, hunger, near to death. Furthermore, sheep *who stray*, lack and suffer (Matt. 18:12) until rescued, or they return.
  - (2) In Psalm 34:9-10, it is the person who "fears" the LORD, who "seeks" the LORD, who "shall not be in want of any good thing." Matthew Henry adds: "I shall be supplied with whatever I need; and, if I have not everything I desire, I may conclude it is either not fit for me or not good for me, or I shall have it in due time."<sup>5</sup>
- b. Paul tells us that the authentic believer has been made, "alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). David here well illustrates what this liveliness is like. Every verse of this Psalm describes the author as being heartily alive unto God's provision for his child in every circumstance of life.
- (1) He is *alive* in bold acknowledgment, concerning who his LORD really is, namely the Shepherd whose care is un failing and comprehensive, v. 1.
  - (2) He is *alive* in delight, for this Shepherd gives satisfaction through agreeable and health giving sustenance, by means of "green pastures; . . . quiet waters," v. 2.
  - (3) He is *alive* in godliness, for his heart is cleansed and directed along "paths of righteousness," v. 3.
  - (4) He is *alive* in trust, since, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me" v. 4.

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<sup>5</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, III, p. 317.

- (5) He is *alive* in confidence since, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows” v. 5.
- (6) He is *alive* in hope since, “Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (v. 6).

## B. The provision of rest by the Good Shepherd, v. 2.

David is now intent on proving to his audience just how lavishly and appropriately this LORD provides for his needs, as God defines them. These are not trivial matters, but the largest issues of life, the first mentioned being that of rest, soul rest, in a world of soul turbulence. As an agitated executive recently stated: “I am a human doing, not a human being!” The synonymous parallelism first describes the lush divine smorgasbord of “green pastures” and thirst quenching “waters” that is inevitably followed by blissful repose, contentment, and rest.

- 1. He nourishes my soul with the refreshment of “green pastures,” and “waters,” v. 2a.

Generally speaking, humans, as well as animals, proceed from eating to sleeping, and not the opposite. We like to snooze after a good meal rather than before. This is the order here, and it is especially significant in the spiritual sphere. First comes feasting that satisfies hunger and thirst; there is the best of bread and wine!

- a. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian’s visit at the Palace Beautiful finds him first feasting, which representation speaks of the Lord’s Table, and then resting in the bedroom called “Peace.”<sup>6</sup> Likewise Ezekiel 34:14-15 describes such a provision, a repast that causes the sheep to salivate, imbibe, and then rest. This Shepherd’s menu includes milk for the young, meat for the strong, and desert for those longing for sweetness.
- b. The Good Shepherd is the one who provides “green pastures,” or “feeding grounds.” He has declared that, “I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18). It is the environment of a faithful local church, the Shepherd’s feeding agency, that should provide both food and resultant rest (Eph. 4:11). Thus the sheep feed on Him in their hearts by faith, they partake of Him as bread (John 6:53-58), they “thirst” for Him (John 7:37). Jesus Christ is both the banquet head and the banquet itself.
- c. John Monsell was an Anglican minister and composer of 300 hymns. He wrote: “[W]e are too distant and reserved in our praises, we sing not as we should sing to Him and of Him who is chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely. . . . His Guildford Rectory was ‘an ideal household, full of the beauty of holiness, with genial brightness and gaiety playing like sunshine over all the troubles of life.’” On feasting on and by Christ he wrote:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> John Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> John Telford, *Methodist Hymn Book Illustrated*, p. 11.



I hunger and I thirst;  
 Jesus, my manna be:  
 Ye living waters, burst  
 Out of the rock for me.

Thou bruised and broken Bread,  
 My life-long wants supply;  
 As living souls are fed,  
 O feed me, or I die.

Thou true life-giving Vine,  
 Let me Thy sweetness prove;  
 Renew my life with Thine,  
 Refresh my soul with love.

Rough paths my feet have trod,  
 Since first their course began;  
 Feed me, Thou Bread of God;  
 Help me, Thou Son of Man.

For still the desert lies  
 My thirsting soul before;  
 O living waters rise  
 Within me evermore.

2. He satisfies my soul with resultant “repose,” “contentment and rest,” v. 2b.

Food and sustenance are but means to an end, and that being the stimulation of life, growth, and strength. Once fed, especially in the morning, we are ready to follow and work. But here perhaps an early afternoon repast is more in mind, after which we rest.

- a. Good rest is the result of good feeding since, as a consequence of “green pastures,” “He makes me lie down” (Ezek. 34:15; S. of S. 1:7).
- b. Again in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian and Hopeful arrive at the Delectable Mountains where they are nurtured by the shepherds Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere. First they beheld “the gardens, and orchards, the vineyards, and fountains of water, where also they drank, and washed themselves, and did freely eat of the vineyards.” They are invited “to solace themselves with the good of these delectable mountains.” Then, “they went to rest that night, because it was very late.” Later, at Beulah Land, “the gardener had them into the vineyards, and bid them refresh themselves with the dainties (Deut. 23:24). He also showed them there the King’s walks and arbours, where he delighted to be; and here they tarried and slept.”<sup>8</sup>
- c. Hence, the proof of a local church being faithful is its ability to not only feed the sheep, but also provide that diet of gospel truth which stimulates rest in the soul. Specifically this is, “the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32; cf. Rom. 5:1-2; Heb. 13:9).

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<sup>8</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 143-4, 162.

- d. Further proof of this “rest” that results from right shepherding is the fact that, “He [the Lord Jesus Christ] leads me beside quiet waters,” or literally “waters of rest.” The “waters” here may obliquely refer to the accessibility of that life giving water which he provides for quenching thirst (Ps. 36:7-8), but the primary thrust is that of “rest” that is parallel to “lying down” as in the previous line.
- (1) “Waters of rest” here mean water that is not agitated, not dreaded and suspect and troubled and restless. When a flock of sheep senses danger is near, it becomes unnerved, unsettled. But when the shepherd provides full protection, which the sheep sense, then they are calm, unperturbed.
  - (2) There is a contrast here with the desert and arid regions, the wilderness of this world, which only the Good Shepherd can safely guide through. The picture here is not of the Christian life being unending “green pastures,” but rather the guidance of the Good Shepherd to them, especially Sunday after Sunday. Unless the sheep obtain these periodic times of feasting, they will perish through lack of living water, become distressed and thus candidates for being devoured by preying wolves, hirelings, who, on account of dereliction of duty, cause the flock to scatter (John 10:12).
- e. Recall Jesus Christ addressing Israel: “Come unto Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). So to those who come, this same Shepherd declares: “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful” (John 14:28).
- f. In summary, what then is this rest which David’s LORD provides? It is rest in a restless world; it is calm in a turbulent world; it is contentment in a disturbed world; it is peace in a warring world; it is bliss in a world of discontent.

- (1) It is rest in David’s soul that was made for God.

He has known the attempt to live apart from God, to live independently, autonomously, humanistically, proudly, selfishly, indulgently, reaping what he has sown in the far country (Luke 15:13). But now he knows this rebellion can never bring rest. He understands Peter when he writes, “you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” I Pet. 2:25).

- (2) It is rest with David’s God.

He has known what it is to return with repentance to his Father’s house, and hear the welcome cry, “Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found” (Luke 15:22-24). How differently he regards his Father when compared with his previous departure. But now God is his Savior and friend rather than an enemy, his Father rather than a judge and harsh taskmaster.

- (3) It is rest in the righteousness of God.

The following context of v. 3 indicates the importance of being in moral harmony with God, that is His righteousness and holiness.. Man is a moral being gone wrong. His frustration concerns an intrinsic, condemning moral sensitivity which he can never fully escape from, in spite of the most feverish attempts (Ps. 2:3; Rom. 1:25). He may attempt to erase feelings of guilt from his memory; but then, twenty years later, it all gushes forth with surprising and disturbing clarity! But now the righteous God has reconciled me, the chief of sinners, to Himself; now I love the only righteous God and His holiness, who declares and makes me righteous. Thus I love to follow along His “paths of righteousness.”

- (4) It is rest in a raging world that opposes God.

Clearly David is surrounded by a turbulent world, and though not isolated from it, yet his Shepherd provides insulation. There is the valley of the shadow of death, and evil, and enemies, yet he knows that, “the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

### C. The provision of righteousness by the Good Shepherd, v. 3a.

Up to this point, the care of the Good Shepherd has focused on the external circumstances of life, his provision of nourishment and protection from enemies that result in rest. But now more internal matters are dealt with, that of the moral condition of the redeemed soul. Let us remember here that David is a child of God; we are dealing with sanctification rather than conversion. He realizes that traversing this world is to pass through a moral quagmire. He does not want to, “walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers” (Ps. 1:1). He has occasionally slipped and reaped bitter results. However, the Good Shepherd has preserved him (Ps. 94:17-19):

If the LORD had not been my help,  
My soul would soon have dwelt in the abode of silence.  
If I should say, “My foot has slipped,”  
Your lovingkindness, O LORD, will hold me up.  
When my anxious thoughts multiply within me,  
Your consolations delight my soul.

1. He satisfies my soul with restoration from unrighteousness.
  - a. Literally we read, “He brings my soul back,” that is causes it to return, שׁוּב, shûwb, and be restored, revived, refreshed, especially by means of the agency of God’s Word (Ps. 19:7). Implicit is a parched condition of the soul, perhaps due to wandering in spiritually arid regions away from the Shepherd.
  - b. Sheep, in their frailty, in their lack of a sense of direction, have a tendency to roam. But this Shepherd restores the wayward of his flock. He tells us himself: “[D]oes he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying?” (Matt. 18:12). As Spurgeon comments: “When the soul grows sorrowful

he revives it; when it is sinful he sanctifies it; when it is weak he strengthens it. . . . Are any of us low in grace? Do we feel that our spirituality is at its lowest ebb? He who turns the ebb [tide] into the flood can soon restore the soul.”<sup>9</sup> So we should sing:

O to grace how great a debtor  
Daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter,  
Bind my wandering heart to Thee:  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;  
Take my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it from Thy courts above!

- c. Hence a local church is to reclaim the backslidden by taking an interest in the capacity of sheep to wander. This does not simply refer to those who no longer attend church, but rather those who, while participating in church fellowship, yet stray on thousands of seductive hills and valleys, and like Israel in the wilderness, long for the fish, cucumbers, melons, onions, leeks and garlics that represent the spicy life of Egypt (Num. 11:1-6). On the other hand this going astray may result from “growing weary in doing good” (Gal. 6:9; II Thess. 3:13). Whatever the cause, often our bodies may be present in a church building while at the same time our minds are trading at Vanity Fair!
2. He satisfies my soul with direction in righteousness.
    - a. Literally we read: “He leads me in the strait tracks,” that is “the morally right paths,” the implication being that, left to ourselves, we would easily be detoured.
    - b. In the wilderness and desert regions there are many tracks for sheep to follow, some being more dangerous than others. But which is the right way for the sheep to travel? They desire the *right* way, but which way is *right*? The Good Shepherd knows, and thus he leads in that direction.
    - c. The child of God has a basic heart desire, affections, for the righteousness of God and an aversion for unrighteousness, otherwise he certainly is not a Christian. But often in himself he is unsure which way to go. However God sovereignly leads and provides means by which the sheep may follow the right path (Ps. 25:8-10; 85:9-13; Prov. 4:10-15; Isa. 30:20-22). Certainly these means involve fellowship in *His Body*, the local church, and thus feasting at *His table* upon *His food* with *His people*.
    - d. In *The Pilgrim's Progress* Christian arrives at the foot of the Hill Difficulty with a strait path directly up the Hill directly before him as well as alternative paths on either side. So he drinks at the spring nearby and heads up the Hill while Formalist and Hypocrisy take the easier paths that lead to their destruction.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Spurgeon, *Treasury Of David*, I, p. 400.

<sup>10</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, III, p. 104.

## D. The glorification of the name of the Good Shepherd, v. 3b.

In today's man-centered world, we could easily be led to expect to read here, "He guides me in the paths of righteousness for the sake of my benefit and sanctification and blessing"! But this is not the God-centered reality of Scripture; in fact the opposite emphasis is apparent. In particular, because, "holy and awesome (reverend) is His name" (Ps. 111:9), this Good Shepherd will "guide me in paths of holiness." It is His unfailing manner with His sheep that they be led for the cause of His holy name (cf. 25:11; 31:3; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11). It is the Good Shepherd's righteous agenda that governs his shepherding, not our own!

"For His name's sake," includes the four declarations of vs. 2-3. The name of David's Shepherd has already been declared in v. 1 as the "LORD," or "Jehovah/Yahweh." So He does all of these things for His sheep as proof of what His name stands for (Ex. 34:5-7). What He is according to His name is reflected in what He does, and what He does is indicative of who He is. As we commonly speak today of a person being "true to his name," so it is the case with God. He is consistent in His holy being and consequent holy doing. Because of God's name, and all of the glory of its meaning, like David we can expect His leading of us to be consistent with the honor of His name.

1. Hence, God's dealings with Israel were ultimately for the display of His glory (Isa. 63:12-14).
2. Further, God's dealings with Israel resulted in His glory and saving power influencing pagan nations (Josh. 9:3-11).
3. But for David, God preserves His sheep on account of the integrity of His covenant name.
  - a. He is the "Good Shepherd," and His reputation as such will be maintained.
  - b. The glory here in this whole psalm is that of the Shepherd, not the sheep. As Anne Cousin has written:
 

The Lamb is all the glory  
Of Immanuel's land.
  - c. So God *forgives* and *saves*, "for His name's sake" (Ps. 25:11; 106:6-8); He *leads* and *guides*, "for His name's sake" (Ps. 31:3); He *revives*, "for His name's sake" (Ps. 143:11). So here, he "leads . . . restores . . . guides . . . for His name's sake."
4. In other words, the true lambs who belong to Christ glory in the character of their Shepherd, and the consistency between who He declares himself to be and what He does. He declares Himself to be "the Good Shepherd," and by experience his sheep know that this is so since His care and keeping are matchless!

### III DAVID TESTIFIES TO (*IN WORSHIP OF*) THE GOOD SHEPHERD, VS. 4-6

We remind ourselves of the change of emphasis by David at this point. Whereas in vs. 1-3 the addressees are being spoken to using the pronouns “He” or “His” (4 times), now God is addressed using the pronouns “You” or “Your” (4 times). In other words, declaration or testimony about God now becomes more direct worship of God.

#### A. Concerning the valley of deep darkness, v. 4.

The confident assertion that the Lord “guides me in the paths of righteousness,” v. 3, now raises the question as to whether such leading includes “walking through the valley of the shadow of death”? A positive response is based upon the further confidence that in such trying circumstances, “You are with me.” Thus the Good Shepherd directs us through all of the twistings and turnings of life; it is the fact that He guides us through these experiences that designates this journeying as in fact participation in “paths of righteousness.”

##### 1. The “valley of the shadow of death” encountered.

The context seems to introduce us to seeming negative aspects of our pilgrimage as a child of God, namely darkness, evil, enemies, that contrast with the preceding protective benevolence of green pastures, quiet waters, soul health, and righteousness.

- a. It is the “valley of dark [death?] shadow,”<sup>11</sup> that probably intimates our close proximity to death, its agents, its unholy environment and influence, which cause the child of God to come under its chilling shroud. In encountering such intensely dark experiences of human life, an unforgettable near death encounter, perhaps a friend with a mortal illness, the suffering of a loved one, exposure to a dead body such as at a funeral, despair that tempts to commit suicide, loss during war and a sense of the carnage, etc., we draw near to sheol (the abode of the dead) and its black abyss. Here men quake with fear and are frozen with terror as death’s talons snatch around them.
- b. What David envisages is not so much the actual experience of death, but the threat and theater of death in this life, its hovering influence or breath. Consider this montage from the Psalter: “To You, O LORD, I call; my rock, do not be deaf to me, for if you are silent to me, I will become like those who go down to the pit” (28:1). “O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol; You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit. . . . What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise You? Will it declare Your faithfulness?” (30:3, 9). “Let those be ashamed and dishonored who seek my life; let those be turned back and humiliated who devise evil against me. . . . For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my soul” (35:4, 7). “Deliver me from the mire and do not let me sink; may I be delivered from my foes and from the deep waters. May the flood of water not overflow me nor the deep swallow me up, nor the pit shut its mouth on me” (69:14-15). “For my soul has had enough troubles, and my life has drawn near to Sheol. I am reckoned among those who go down to the pit; I have become like a man without strength, forsaken among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more, and they are cut off from Your hand.

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<sup>11</sup> Perowne, *Psalms*, pp. 251-3. Similarly, refer to Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 212-3.

You have put me in the lowest pit, in dark places, in the depths. Your wrath has rested upon me, and you have afflicted me with all Your waves. Selah. You have removed my acquaintances far from me; You have made me an object of loathing to them; I am shut up and cannot get out” (88:3-8).

2. The “valley of the shadow of death” illustrated.

In John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* we have a most graphic portrayal of this scene.<sup>12</sup> It should also be noted that here Bunyan draws from his own experience so graphically portrayed in his spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding To The Chirf Of Sinners*. For instance, although a member of a baptistic church in Bedford, he confesses:

At another time, though just before I was pretty well and savory in my spirit, yet suddenly there fell upon me a great cloud of darkness, which did so hide from me the things of God and Christ, that I was if I had never seen or known them in my life; I was also so overrun in my soul, with a senseless, heartless frame of spirit, that I could not feel my soul to move or stir after grace and life by Christ; I was if my loins were broken, or as if my hands and feet had been tied or bound with chains.<sup>13</sup>

- a. Christian having rested and been equipped at the Palace Beautiful (representing a faithful local church), he then has a fierce encounter with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation. Wounded yet victorious, he recuperates only to descend into the Valley of the Shadow of Death. It is a solitary wilderness, full of pits, droughts, devilish assaults. It is mandatory that pilgrim’s pass through on their way to the Celestial City.
- b. In this Valley doubt is encouraged, and the call to forsake the way ahead is loudly heard. Two frightened pilgrim’s returning back describe what is ahead. “Why the valley . . . is as dark as pitch; we also saw there hobgoblins, satyrs, and dragons of the pit; we heard also in that Valley a continual howling and yelling, as of a people under unutterable misery who there sat bound in affliction and irons: and over the Valley hangs the discouraging clouds of confusion; death also doth always spread his wings over it: in a word, it is every whit dreadful, being utterly without order.”
- c. Then Christian finds himself assaulted on every side.
  - (1) There are ditches and mire on every side, as the path seems a razor’s edge.
  - (2) Fiends attempt to grasp at him so as to drag him into the surrounding morass.
  - (3) He is even tempted to blaspheme; wicked suggestions are whispered in his ear.
  - (4) But then ahead of him he hears a distant voice calling out; it is Faithful in like circumstances who confidently declares: “Though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.” Now Christian is aware that another pilgrim is near.
  - (5) He passes the yawning mouth of hell itself, belching forth flames and smoke, accompanied with hideous noises.

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<sup>12</sup> Bunyan, *Works*, III, pp. 114-6.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I, § 261, p. 40.

- (6) He also sees a great pile of human remains that two giants, Pope and Pagan, watch over.
- (7) Yet at the end of the Valley, Christian emerges rejoicing and singing in spite of his trial. Listen as he sings like David:

O world of wonders. (I can say no less)  
 That I should be preserved in that distress  
 That I have met with here. O blessed be  
 The hand that from it hath delivered me.  
 Dangers in darkness, devils, Hell, and sin,  
 Did compass me, while I this vale was in.  
 Yea, snares, and pits, and traps, and nets did lie  
 My path about, that worthless silly I  
 Might have been caught, entangled, and cast down:  
 But since I live let JESUS wear the crown.

3. The “valley of the shadow of death” traversed.

a. With a future perspective.

But someone might respond that Bunyan is drawing on medieval and seventeenth century imagery that is extra biblical. Then consider further biblical revelation from Psalms where present darkness in the soul is endured on account of the vision of a blessed future. Together they indicate that this travail may be due to the environment of death, misery, wicked enemies, rebellion against God, affliction from lying men. But in all of these situations, there is light at the end of the Valley, even “goodness and lovingkindness,” v. 6.

- (1) In Psalm 55:4-5 there is confrontation with “anguish, . . . the terrors of death, . . . trembling, . . . horror.” But further in vs. 16-18 we read: “As for me, I shall call upon God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon, I will complain and murmur. And He will hear my voice. He will redeem my soul in peace from the battle which is against me.”
- (2) In Psalm 107:10-12 there is confrontation with “darkness, . . . the shadow of death, . . . misery and chains.” But further in vs. 13-14 we read: “Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble. He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bands apart.”
- (3) In Psalm 116:3-4 there is confrontation with “the cords of death, . . . terrors, . . . distress and sorrow.” But further in vs. 5-6 we read: “Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yes our God is compassionate. The Lord preserves the simple; I was brought low and He saved me.”

b. With a courageous perspective.

What is it then that causes David, as well as Christian, to sustain such an onslaught? How can he say, “I fear no evil”?



- (1) It is not a modern day course on “thanatology” (death studies) where godless “grief therapy” is taught, where all the emphasis is upon dealing with present feelings rather than a certain future hope.
  - (2) It is not by means of a concentrated injection of pleasure therapy that the world administers, whether Disney World or Florida, or a “celebration of life” which is the latest fad in secular funerals!
  - (3) It is not a humanistic confidence in which David is supremely self-reliant and even boastful in his own militant prowess. Rather it is steadfast trust in the fact that, “You [the LORD of Israel] are with me.”
  - (4) It is not the elimination of evil in this present pilgrimage, but its conquest by gospel grace mediated through “You [who] are with me,” that is the Good Shepherd “ who “lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).
- c. With an objective perspective.
- (1) In contrast with a subjective, internal confidence in self, David has an objective, external confidence in, “Thou [the LORD alone who] art with me.” But who is this “Thou”? Does specific identification at this point matter, or is it more helpful to be abstract, vague, merely sentimental, and ambiguous? In reality, it is the exact identification of “Thou” here that establishes the validity of this Psalm.
  - (2) Imagine you have a serious illness, a hopeless condition, and the local medical fraternity offer no help. Then I come along and say: “Don’t worry. I know of a doctor who really can help.” You respond: “Tell me who he is.” I reply: “Don’t worry too much about who he is: but he will help.” Eventually I am forced to explain: “Actually he lives in Africa, he has a bone through his nose, and recommends his own brew made out of bat’s wings, snails, and worms!” Of course it *is* vital concerning the God we look to for help as we traverse “the valley of the shadow of death.”
  - (3) David here has only one God in mind, not a vague “god-in-my-pocket” type of God, but the living LORD God of Israel, of sovereign, saving, keeping grace.
    - (a) In the frequent use of this Psalm at funerals, this is the verse that is most commonly stressed. Yet how many of the deceased know this “Thou” through faith in His saving Son? Here vain repetition reaches the heights of purest foolishness.
    - (b) The “Thou” here is specifically described as the One who comforts with a rod and staff, Jehovah/Yahweh, the Good Shepherd.
- d. With a trustworthy perspective.
- (1) “Rod and staff” speak of one instrument that has many functions, namely ruling, guiding, chastening, guarding. But the emphasis here in context is comfort and protection (Isa. 43:1-3).

- (2) The thought here is not that when darkness approaches I then look for the Good Shepherd – at such a time it is too late! Rather I am to belong to the Shepherd before darkness overtakes.
- (3) This God *alone* has conquered the darkness of death, as Job understood when he faced this valley: “As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last He will make His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God” (Job 19:25-26; cf. 13:15).
- (4) This “valley of the shadow of death” is not an optional route in the journey of life. Hence the vital question is as to how I will ultimately pass through.
  - (a) There are those who attempt to travel solo, and soon find out they have underestimated the chill and terror of such a passage. Their shallow confidence soon gives way to a sense of fear and foreboding, of an awakening to the poverty of their earlier boasted offerings.
  - (b) There are those who look to false shepherds, and soon find out that they have been abandoned by such hirelings. At the hour of need for the trembling sheep, these religious mercenaries run for their lives. These hucksters are as much in the dark as the flock they pretend to lead.
  - (c) There are those who look to the Good Shepherd as the only one validated since he has gone this route before, and that triumphantly. He is the only qualified and experienced Shepherd, who guarantees safe passage to those who submit by faith to his call and care.

## B. Concerning his enemies, v. 5.

In II Kings 6-7 we are told that the Arameans, or Syrians, are warring against Israel, about 800 B.C. However Elisha the prophet frustrates their plans by advising their movements to the king of Israel. Eventually, Benhadad the Aramean king besieges Samaria, in which Elisha is living, so that food prices escalate (6:25). Even cannibalism breaks out! As a result the king of Israel believes that Elisha is ultimately the cause of this terrible condition, so that he sends a man to kill him! But Elisha orders the elders who are visiting in his house to bolt the door and wait until the next day. Why? Because God “will prepare a table for them in the presence of their enemies,” the very next morning (7:1-2)!

At the same time, four lepers are starving just outside the city gate. They reason, if we enter Samaria we will certainly die; if we go to the besieging Arameans we might die, though perhaps we might live. At the same time God causes the Arameans to flee at the sound of a great army. When the lepers arrive at the Aramean camp, they find it deserted, though full of good food and riches. So 7:8 describes, “the table spread before them in the presence of their enemies.” Surely it could also be said that for these lepers, “their cup runneth over!”

But that is not all. The lepers then reason, “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but we are keeping silent; if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore, come, let us go and tell the king’s household [at Samaria]” (7:9). So the result is as Elisha prophesied so that, “a measure of fine flower was sold for a shekel and two measures of barley for a shekel (7:16). Hence for the nation of Israel as well there was a, “table spread

before them in the presence of their enemies.” Here David is also making the same witness in Psalm 23, especially in v. 5, so that for like reason this passage of the Word of God has been faithfully passed on, by spiritual lepers who have embraced the good news, to a spiritually starving generation.

The imagery of the Psalm now appears to change. In the place of a pastoral setting is the lavish and secure hospitality of a generous host, that is within “the house of the LORD,” v. 6. External to this safe haven is the close proximity of “enemies.” These are the ungodly, enemies of God, otherwise they would partake of the hospitality that is now described. David frequently refers to his enemies who are many (Ps. 25:19; 38:19; 69:4). They threaten violence and death; they gloat, mock, slander, hate, and blaspheme (Ps. 42:10). Likewise in the Bible the most renowned for godliness also had enemies, even in their own household, Joseph, Elijah, Daniel, Paul, the Lord Jesus. Shall we expect any less today? The idea that the godly will be loved and respected by all is a myth.

1. Yet the LORD banquets me as enemies look on, v. 5a.

The child of God is like Esther safely feasting with her devoted king and husband in the presence of wicked Haman (Esther 7:1-10).

- a. God turns a famine situation into a feast so that the mouth of the enemy is stopped with amazement, (Ps. 31:19; 78:18-20).
- b. When Balak, king of Moab, seeks Balaam so that he might as a prophet effectively curse the enemy nation of Israel, yet Balaam is sovereignly directed by God to bless Israel, which action causes Balak to be frustrated (Num. 24:8-10).
- c. For the sake of His own people, God causes the “desert to blossom like the rose,” and makes “streams in the desert” (Isa. 35:1, 6). He turns the “bitter waters into sweet” (Ex. 15:22-25).
- d. Spurgeon comments: “See the quietude of the godly man in spite of, and in the sight of his enemies [like Elisha]. How refreshing is his calm bravery. . . . Nothing is hurried, there is no confusion, no disturbance, the enemy is at the door, and yet God prepares a table, and the Christian sits down and eats as if everything were in perfect peace. Oh! The peace which Jehovah gives to his people, even in the midst of the most trying circumstances.”<sup>14</sup>
- e. Such a turning of circumstances is yet to come at the end of this age when the apostates and religious charlatans will, in their frustration, observe, yet not be able to partake of, the Lord’s banquet with the redeemed (Luke 13:22-30). In contrast with the squalor that unbelief inherits will be the declaration of Jesus Christ concerning those who recline with him: “Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God” (Luke 14:15-24).

2. Yet the LORD anoints me as enemies look on, v. 5b.

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<sup>14</sup> Spurgeon, *Treasury Of David*, I, p. 401.

- a. In an eastern setting, to anoint a guest's head with perfumed oil was an act of great respect for and loving interest in an honored guest (Luke 7:36-46; John 12:3). In a less antiseptic generation, the application of a fragrant oil was the hospitable, acknowledgment of honor and high esteem.
  - b. Accompanying this anointing was resultant joy and bliss at the fragrance of such friendship. Here the soul of David is refreshed because the Spirit of God is poured out upon the believer (Ps. 45:7; Rom. 5:5), even in a hostile environment.
  - c. Spurgeon comments: "Every Christian is a priest, but he cannot execute the priestly office without unction, and hence we must go day by day to God the Holy Ghost, that we may have our heads anointed with oil. A priest without oil misses the chief qualification for his office, and the Christian priest lacks his chief fitness for service when he is devoid of new grace from on high."<sup>15</sup>
3. Yet the LORD quenches me as enemies look on, v. 5c.
- a. Likewise in an eastern setting, a host would be careful to give his guest an overflowing cup as a mark of generous love and respect, "good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over" (Luke 6:38). This would contrast with the parched environment of the world that the visitor has recently passed through. Hence David has known thirst in his soul, but the overflowing abundance and refreshment of God's saving and sustaining grace has been more than he can drink in (Ps. 42:1-2; 63:1-5; John 1:16; Rom. 5:17, 20).
  - b. However David probably has something more specific in mind here. He has known the anointing of God through the prophet Samuel, an appointment to be the king of Israel, at which time we read: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (I Sam. 16:13). David was overwhelmed at such exaltation, from shepherd boy to king. "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that You have brought me thus far?" (II Sam. 7:18). Now he reflects upon his life subsequent to that event, and he concludes, "My cup runneth over."
  - c. Have you known the anointing of this same Lord? If He has called you out of darkness into the marvelous light of His grace, then, upon reflection, you can certainly declare, "My cup runneth over." Why every day you become aware: "The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul. 'Therefore I have hope in Him'" (Lam. 3:22-24). In the Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, "My cup runneth over."
  - d. As Horatius Bonar has written:
 

I heard the voice of Jesus say: Behold, I freely give  
 The living water; thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live!  
 I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;  
 My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in Him.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 402.

### C. Concerning his future destiny, v. 6.

What is faith? Several common misunderstandings about faith are as follows. (1) Faith is a mindless leap in the dark that avoids truth. (2) Faith is a trust in the unknown. (3) Faith is a belief in the apparently unbelievable. Yet the very opposite of all of these definitions is in fact the case. In this regard, also consider the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. (1) Faith is a mind focused on the light of truth that responds in agreement with and obedience to that truth, namely the attested accounts in Scripture that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead. (2) Faith is a confidence in the known that makes it reasonable to act in the light of such knowledge. Hence a knowledge of Christ's own resurrection, his power to raise from the dead such as with Lazarus, makes it reasonable to trust in his promises about future resurrection. (3) Faith is a belief in what is demonstrably now believable, a strong conviction that the biblical account of Christ's resurrection is true, so that a previous improbability has become a reality, with the result that faith concerning the future has a solid basis.

So here in v. 6, David declares his faith, though it is likewise a trust based upon his understanding of and experience with the LORD as described in vs. 1-5. David's faith has a solid basis, for this shepherding LORD has proved to be trustworthy up to the present. Hence, the future is undoubtedly secure.

1. This verse is a conclusion based upon the whole previous argument.
  - a. *Proposition* – v. 1. The God of Israel is a beneficent Shepherd who is worthy of trust no matter what the earthly future holds.
  - b. *Proof* – vs. 2-5. The God of Israel has been beneficent in all situations.
    - (1) As David witnesses, in prosperity (*refreshment, rest, righteousness*), vs. 2-3.
    - (2) As David worships, in adversity (*death, discipline, deliverance*), vs. 4-5.
  - c. *Prospects* – v. 6. The God of Israel's reputation, based upon knowledge and experience, results in an assured hope of present and eternal life.
2. Goodness from the Lord is mine, "all the days of my life," v. 6a.

Here is an earthly perspective of that security which the genuine sheep possesses. It is an inviolate relationship that knows no possibility of severance. Its only limitation is indicated when there is translation into the eternal realm of "forever," v. 26b.

- a. "Surely" can be translated "Only," which stresses the unqualified and unending goodness of God (cf. 25:7). Doubtless "badness" and "trial" come our way, but, "If I should say, 'My foot has slipped,' Your lovingkindness, O LORD, will hold me up" (Ps. 94:18).
  - (1) What is the "goodness" of the LORD? It is תֹּב, *tôb*, meaning "pleasant to behold, delightful," hence His "admirable moral beauty," (Gen. 1:4; Ps. 16:2; 68:10), the "beauty and majesty of His holiness" (Ps. 29:2), hence His "moral attractiveness" which shepherds the sheep in an immoral and unholy world. For this reason Jesus Christ is the "good [morally attractive] shepherd" (John 10:11).

- (2) What is the “mercy” of the LORD? It is  $\text{חֶסֶד}$ , *hesed*, His “reliable, loyal lovingkindness,” that which delivers in and from trial, as when David was hounded by Saul (Ps. 33:18-19; 59:16-17). Such steadfast love is based upon covenant faithfulness. It is also His relieving love, that which rescues the sheep that becomes embroiled in some distressing situation.
- b. We might ask the question, “Why does the goodness and mercy of God follow me all the days of my life”? Our answer will indicate if we are true sheep of the Shepherd. A true sheep boasts in the Shepherd, not himself, in His very glorious being, His sovereign mercy, which is reflected in His *name*, *nature*, and *nurture*, overall His covenant faithfulness.
3. Fellowship with the Lord is mine “forever,” v. 6b.

We can translate here, “And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for length of days,” as the margin of the NASB indicates as a literal alternative, but most modern versions correctly translate “forever,” which transcends “all the days of my life,” in v. 6a.<sup>16</sup> The emphasis here is upon intimate union with this shepherding LORD, not geographic location. Especially note the parallel with Psalm 27:4. “One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple.”

- a. David has an assurance concerning *close fellowship* with the LORD.

In absolute contrast with the unbeliever, David expresses the thought of Asaph: “Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You I desire nothing on earth. . . . But as for me, the nearness of God is my good” (Ps. 73:25, 28).

- (1) David has a passion for the house of the LORD because of the LORD of the house, not religious sentiment. It is not the eerie cathedral type atmosphere, the architecture, but “the beauty/delightfulness of the LORD” Himself, His glory and grace and righteousness!
- (2) David has a passion for the closest communion with God, and his hopes transcend mere material worship (Ps. 42:1-2). So the Christian has a similar spiritual interest in local church fellowship (John 4:23-24; Eph. 2:19-22). Such are “the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3).
- (3) David has a passion for God’s dwelling place, where holiness and righteousness are unclouded, and these attributes characterize His citizens there (cf. Ps. 15).
- (4) The true Christian loves Christian fellowship on earth insofar as it reflects that more perfect heavenly environment yet to come. His ultimate hope is not simply fellowship with the saints in glory, but delight in the glory of the LORD in all of His gracious and holy attractiveness.

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<sup>16</sup> The thought of perpetual residence in “the house of the LORD” is surely a picture of the desire of David’s heart, of anticipation of ultimate intimate union with God. To live “in the house of the Lord for length of days” is beyond “goodness and lovingkindness following me all the days of my life,” v. 6a; it is eternal life with God, securely living in His house “forever.” See Hengstenberg, *Works*, V, p. 409-11; Leupold, *Psalms*, p. 214.

- b. David has an assurance concerning *secure fellowship* with the LORD.

He appreciates that nothing is able “to separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39). This is due to the very character of God, His covenant keeping quality, His sovereignty in being able to keep His covenant, to keep His sheep against all enemies.

- (1) For David, there is security in “*the house of the LORD*” (Ps. 27:4-6), just as for the sheep there is security in the shepherd’s fold since “he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out” (John 10:3).
- (2) For David, there is security in “the house of the LORD *all the days of my life.*” There is present security in this earthly sojourn because “no one will snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28; cf. Phil. 1:6).
- (3) For David, there is security in “the house of the LORD *forever.*” David is a man of faith (Rom. 4:6-8), but he is also a man of many sins and weaknesses. He knows that it is ultimately the object of his faith that is his only hope, not his own maintenance of faith, his striving to keep the faith, so to speak. It is God alone who will keep him, who “will not abandon my soul to Sheol; nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. You will make known to me the path of life; in your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever” (Ps. 16:10-11). This is what David means when he confidently declares: “And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”
- (4) In simple terms, David knows: “The LORD is my Shepherd.” He knows this fact with biblical certainty; but much more, he knows this truth with experiential certainty. That is why he and true sheep of this Shepherd’s pasture can sing:

Loved with everlasting love,  
 Led by grace that love to know;  
 Spirit breathing from above,  
 Thou has taught me it is so!  
 Oh, this full and perfect peace!  
 Oh, this transport all divine!  
 In a love which cannot cease,  
 I am His, and He is mine,  
 His forever, only His;  
 Who the Lord and me shall part?  
 Ah, with what a rest of bliss,  
 Christ can fill the loving heart!  
 Heaven and earth may fade and flee,  
 First-born light in gloom decline;  
 But while God and I shall be,  
 I am His, and He is mine.

*George Wade Robinson*