

# Finding Rest in God

The Twenty-third psalm provides us with a picture of true rest – the peace and security that come from knowing we are in the hands of the good shepherd.

One of man's most basic needs is the need for rest. Although physical rest is important, we possess a much greater need—a need for more than just a break from work or the refreshment of sleep. We search for true rest.

True rest refers to more than physical needs. It embodies a sense of being cared for, of knowing that all our needs will be met by loving hands, and of feeling protected and cherished. True rest involves all we are and all we do. One of the most comforting pictures of this true, total rest appears in Psalm 23, which begins, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want" (NKJV).

This song of David reveals the true Shepherd, who was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prefigured, proclaimed, promised and prophesied He would be. In the New Testament, we see Him manifested in person through the gospels in fulfillment of the Old Testament sacred covenant God made that He would send His own Shepherd (see Ezek. 34). Jesus declared, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11). Psalm 23 is a prophecy of the coming of this Good Shepherd.

*The Lord is my shepherd.* David expresses total security as he begins his song, "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." Everything that follows is true because of the fact that the Lord is the Shepherd.

So much of the pressure and despair of modern-day living comes from man's unending struggle to provide for his needs and those of his family. Our acceptance of what God's love has freely offered us brings peace and rest.

When He is watching over His sheep, we lack no good thing. As we commit to the loving care of the Shepherd, we can say, "I shall not want," for He is everything.

*He leads me beside the still waters.* This is more than merely an expression of quietly flowing streams and a peaceful sense of rest and calmness. Throughout the day, as the shepherd leads his flock, he keeps one thing in mind: He must take the sheep to a suitable place to drink. He must find still waters amid the rough, dry hills and plains.

In the region where David lived, living streams were scarce indeed, often far apart and separated by rugged country. Some are called wadis because they are ravines that run dry when the rainy season ends. Frequently the shepherd finds streams in gullies between broken hills where the banks are too dangerous for the sheep and the water flow is too strong.

Sheep are timid and fear a current of water. They might have a hard time finding a place to drink if it were not for the careful attendance of the shepherd to their needs.

There is yet a further picture of still waters. As the shepherd leads his sheep over the rough slopes of the mountainsides, many times he is able to find only streams that leap and flow noisily down crevices. The sheep need water, but they cannot drink from these streams.

The wise shepherd then finds a suitable nook or turn in the stream's course and walls it up, making a little dam and causing the water to form a quiet pool. Now he is able to lead the sheep beside the waters stilled by his own hand. There the sheep rest and their thirst is quenched.

In the gospel of John, Jesus says of the living water that He provides: "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14).

The shepherd brings the sheep beside the still waters, where they all lie down quietly while he fills the drinking troughs. In Hebrew, this passage says, "He leadeth beside the waters of quietness." In this place, the sheep can drink peacefully, undisturbed by troubling sounds.

*He restores my soul.* There are perilous places for the sheep on all sides. The shepherd must be ever alert, vigilant and watchful to see that the sheep do not leave the pathway and stray into dangerous places or tumble to their doom over a cliff in an unguarded moment.

The shepherd rescues straying sheep from forbidden, even fatal, places. In the same way, our Shepherd restores us when we wander from His side.

*He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.* Not only does David tell us that the Shepherd restores our souls, he goes on to say that He leads us in paths of righteousness. The shepherd goes ahead of his flock, choosing the right path for the sheep to take. He is always there to lead them, and they can trust him to lead them in the right way. The apostle Paul called Jesus "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2)—the one who has gone before us getting rid of danger and opening a clear way for us to walk in.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.* Some paths that are right paths still lead through places fraught with deadly peril. But our Lord and Shepherd has walked the valley before us, so when we reach it we will not be afraid. He will already be there, preventing the perilous from touching us.

Sheep do not care what their surroundings are or how great the perils and hardships are that they may face. As long as their shepherd is with them, they are content. There is no finer picture of peace and rest in all the world.

*Your rod and Your me.* There is great comfort indeed in the

protection and guidance of the Lord's rod and staff in our lives.

Shepherds carry a crook, or rod, for guiding the sheep and a weapon—a staff—suitable for defending them. One is an aid along peaceful ways; the other defends in times of peril. The crook gently but firmly corrects a sheep's course or brings him back when he strays or lifts him safely from a place of danger. The staff comes down against that which would harm him.

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.* This causes us to think again of Jesus' declaration that He came to give us abundant life (see John 10:10). For even as there is one whose purpose is to steal, kill and destroy, there is a Shepherd who spreads a table before us and invites us to partake of His life.

Just as he leads the sheep to still water, the shepherd must seek out a safe feeding place for his flock. He traverses each square yard of ground, carefully inspecting for hidden dangers. He searches for poisonous plants that an unsuspecting sheep might eat along with a mouthful of grass. If he finds any, he uproots and removes them from the feeding area before the sheep begin to graze.

To further insure the welfare of the sheep while they eat, the shepherd makes a point to inspect the ground as well as the vegetation, for in some places he finds holes where snakes may lie. He knows how to drive the snakes away as he goes along ahead of the sheep. He is also mindful of holes in the hillsides where jackals or wolves may be lurking, hoping to find a lone sheep upon which to pounce. The shepherd prevails over the enemies of the flock.

When all this has been done, and the shepherd has truly prepared a table (eating place) for the sheep in the presence of that which would do them harm, the flock is then led into

the pasture to safely eat their fill. In Revelation 5, John describes Jesus as the "Lion of Judah" who has conquered every enemy and crushed every foe that would maim or destroy the flock He loves. In the presence of our enemies, we partake of His precious life.

*You anoint my head with oil.* We have seen the whole realm of the day's wandering, all the needs of the sheep, all the care of the shepherd. Now at the door of the sheepfold, the flock is gathering for the night. Here the shepherd awaits them, rod in hand, standing with his body turned to let them enter the fold one by one.

As each sheep comes to the door, the shepherd holds him back with the rod while he inspects him, looking him over for any ill effects of the day. Close at hand is a horn filled with olive oil. When the shepherd notes an injury, no matter how slight, he gently anoints it with the soothing oil.

Even the sheep that bear no wounds but are simply worn out and exhausted from the long day's journey are cared for. Tenderly, the shepherd cleanses their faces with the oil and then gives them water so the weary sheep may drink.

God's care is not for the wounded only; it is offered equally to those who are simply worn and weary. We are soothed by the oil from His hand, and our thirst is satisfied.

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.* Now that the day is done and the sheep are snug within the fold, there is great contentment and true rest. Goodness and mercy have been with us through all the wanderings of the day, and they will stay with us during the days to come. As the song dies away, the heart that God has watched and tended breathes His thoughts of peace before the roaming of the day is forgotten in sleep.

*I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* This statement concludes the shepherd's song. The sheep are now at rest, safe

in the fold of the good shepherd. Since the beginning of time this same declaration has been made both in prophecy through the psalmist and in the person of Jesus Christ. "I am the good shepherd," Jesus told us (John 10:11)—and He is everything He promised He would be!

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." I have need of nothing, for He is everything. We follow Him on from victory to victory, from light to light, for the light shines "ever brighter unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

One day He will lead us to that perfect place where we will breathe new air and have a new pasture in which to graze and see Him face to face. Then we will know that our true Shepherd has brought us triumphantly through and that we are safe, secure and succored.

We will be at rest with our Lord throughout the ceaseless ages, safe from all harm, and never again will we fear the enemies who would seek to harm or destroy us. We will worship throughout all eternity the slain Lamb who is worthy to receive all glory, honor, and power, and the True Shepherd who led us safely home!

Read a companion devotional.

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