

Bible Study on Psalm 23

“When You Feel Lost”

Opening Prayer

Good Shepherd, you take care of us as your sheep and for that we say thank you! We do come to you as sheep who have wandered by choice and as sheep who have been chased by fear, by loss, or by circumstances that chose us. Search out the valleys of our lives today, and remind us that you have already walked into them ahead of us and you are with us. Give us the courage to name what makes us feel lost, the faith to trust your rod and staff (word and Spirit), and the patience to let your goodness and mercy catch us. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

HISTORICAL & THEOLOGICAL SUMMARY

Psalm 23 is a psalm of David, written by a man old enough to have been through some things—chased by Saul through caves and wilderness, chased out of the city by his own son Absalom when he tried to take the throne from David. It is worth noting that David himself had been a shepherd before he was ever a soldier or a king, which makes his choice of image for God very personal rather than generic. And where your Bible places this psalm matters because it comes right after Psalm 22, the cry from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” You don’t arrive at the shepherd of Psalm 23 without first walking through the forsakenness of Psalm 22. And after learning that the Lord is his shepherd, David celebrates the power and victory of the Lord in Psalm 24. It is a perfect trio of life’s ups and downs, and a great reminder of the presence of the Lord through all the shadow of death valleys and the glorious mountaintops of life. Unlike neighboring nations, who used shepherd language mainly as royal propaganda for their kings, Israel applied it directly and personally to YHWH (the LORD), and tied it not to political power but to *hesed*—God’s blessing of covenant loyalty and steadfast love with his children.

SERMON SUMMARY

The sermon, “When You Feel Lost,” opens with a simple but honest premise: everyone feels lost sometime. Sometimes it looks like not knowing which direction to take, or what to do next. The other times, it looks like life no longer feeling safe after an unpredictable loss. Sometimes it looks like losing sense of who we are once a role, title, or ability is gone. And sometimes it feels like you’ve wandered too far from God to be found. Whether we wander into these places and feel lost or get chased into them by circumstances of life we didn’t choose, the sermon locates Psalm 23 as the helpful Scripture for exactly this condition. It is not only a psalm for funerals, but a psalm for anyone in the valley who feels lost and needs rescuing.

Pastor's sermon has four movements from Psalm 23. First, David's confession that the LORD is "my" shepherd is possessive and personal, not a general claim available to everyone. It is an invitation to stop being self-sufficient and let God provide only as God can. Second, the valley of the shadow of death reveals that God doesn't remove our journey through the darkest and hardest places or conditions of life, but that the Lord God moves through them with us with rod and staff in hand, to redirect, rescue and to defend. Third, God prepares a table in the presence of our enemies, which is God's blessing to us while the opposition is still watching and we're still walking in the dark valleys of life. The sermon ends on verse 6, where the Hebrew word "follow" actually means to *hunt* or *pursue*, which is the same word used for enemies chasing someone down. Whatever has been chasing us, the good news is that God's goodness and mercy are chasing us harder, all the days of our life. And because God prepares a table before us, walks with us through the darkest valleys, and his goodness and mercy follows us, that means that the Good Shepherd our Lord has got us covered on every side. Hallelujah! We are never really lost!

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

INSTRUCTION: *Choose one or two questions to answer*

- What is your first memory of hearing Psalm 23? What did it mean to you then, and what does it mean to you now?
- Have you ever felt physically lost—lost your car, lost your way, etc.—in a way that mirrors how you sometimes feel lost spiritually or emotionally? What happened?

INTO THE BIBLE

INSTRUCTIONS: *You do not need to cover every question. If in a group, read the passage together, then select the questions that best fit you or your group. The goal is depth, not speed.*

Read Psalm 23:1

1. In what areas of your life have you tried to be your own shepherd instead of letting the Lord lead?
2. "I shall not want." What is the difference between "I have everything I want" and "I do not lack what I need," as David describes here?
3. Why do you think so many of us, even in the church, act so self-sufficient? What could or should you hand over to the Lord as your Shepherd?

4. Which is harder for you to receive: God's provision when things are going well, or God's presence when things are falling apart?
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Read Psalm 23:2-3

1. David describes green pastures, still waters, a restored soul, and right paths. Which of these four do you need most right now?
 2. Where have you "normalized chaos" — turbulent waters, worn paths — instead of trusting God's provision?
 3. Why do you think God has to make us lie down and lead us to rest, rather than us choosing rest on our own?
 4. Where do you most need the Shepherd to lead you into a "right path" today?
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Read Psalm 23:4

1. Notice the verse says "I walk through the valley," not "God leads me through the valley." What does it mean to you that David takes responsibility for walking into some of his own valleys?
2. Do you tend to wander into your valleys through small, cumulative compromises, or do you tend to get chased into them by circumstances you didn't choose? What does that pattern look like in your life? And what might it look like to stop it?
3. Does it comfort you or unsettle you to know that God does not remove the valley but moves into it with you? Why?

4. The shepherd's staff had a hook on one end, used to pull a wandering sheep back by the neck, and a crook on the other, used to fight off what threatens the sheep. Which do you need more of right now from God, the hook's redirection, or the crook's defense? And how does it come to you: through an unexpected person, Bible reading, a sermon,, a prompting in your spirit, or something else? Describe it.
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Read Psalm 23:5

1. God prepares a table "in the presence of" David's enemies. What do you think is significant about being blessed by God while your opposition is still watching?
 2. What enemies or turbulent circumstances are in your life right now as the real and/or metaphorical enemy? Maybe a diagnosis, a financial hardship, a broken relationship, an old unhealthy habit or something else? How might God be inviting you to let your blessing from him testify in front of it? What does that do to your spirit?
 3. Continuing to give thanks in hardship has been called by some as "defiance dressed up as gratitude." Have you ever seen someone practice this kind of gratitude? What did it do for them and what could it teach you?
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Read Psalm 23:6

1. The Hebrew word translated "follow" (*yirdefuni*) actually means to hunt or pursue. How does it change the verse to hear that God's "goodness and mercy" are hunting you down?
2. What would change in you if you believed goodness and mercy were pursuing you with the same intensity that your fears, shame, or circumstances have pursued you?
3. David ends by looking forward to dwelling "in the house of the LORD forever." How does trusting the ending of your story change how you walk through the valley today or will in the future?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What is one relationship or situation where you need to let the Lord God be your shepherd instead of trying to lead yourself? Will you let the Lord lead you? How?
2. What current practice—prayer, sabbath rest, serving, scripture reading—helps you receive rest and confidence instead of striving for it or creating it? If you have none, which one might you begin?

GOING DEEPER

(For those ready to push a bit further)

- Where do you most need the Shepherd to lead you into a “right path” today?
- Every person feels lost in one of a few ways: not knowing which direction to take, life no longer feeling safe, forgetting who we are apart from our roles, or wandering far from God. Which feels most true for you right now, and why?

FOR SPECIFIC SEASONS OF LIFE

The questions below are written for specific life experiences and stages. These questions may open doors that general questions do not. Choose to use them for group discussion or for personal reflection.

For Young Adults (roughly 18–35)

- You are making foundational decisions in a season when the right direction rarely feels obvious. Psalm 23 says the Lord “leads me in paths of righteousness.” What would it look like to let God set your direction before you feel certain, rather than waiting for certainty first?
- Many young adults are still discovering who they are outside of a parent’s expectations, a degree, or a first job. What would it mean to let your identity rest in belonging to “my shepherd” rather than in what you’ve achieved or are still trying to prove?

For Married Couples

- Is your marriage a green pasture where both of you can rest, or has it become one more valley you're each wandering through separately? What would it look like to let the Lord be shepherd over your home together rather than each of you white-knuckling it alone?
- David says God "prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies." What or who are the "enemies" watching your marriage right now—financial strain, family conflict, past wounds—and what would it look and sound like to let your marriage testify to God's goodness in front of them?

For Parents

- Children learn what it looks like to trust The Lord by watching how their parents respond when they feel lost or afraid. What is your response to hardship currently teaching your children about who God is?
- David confesses that he wandered into some of his own valleys through his own choices in verse 5. How do you talk to your children about the difference between the valleys they wander into and the ones they get chased into, and about The Lord as Shepherd who meets them in both?

For Those in Midlife (roughly 40–60ish)

- Midlife often brings the kind of lostness where we may have "forgotten who we are", such as: empty nests, career changes, aging parents, a body that no longer does what it used to, etc. Which of those losses has most unsettled your sense of identity, and where might The Shepherd be inviting you to rest instead of striving to reclaim what's gone?
- You have likely walked through at least one valley of the shadow of death by now, literally or figuratively. Looking back, where can you now see the rod and staff of God's presence that you may not have recognized while you were in it?

For Seniors (60ish +)

- You have lived long enough to know both kinds of loss: wandering by your own choices and being chased by circumstances you didn't choose. Looking back over your life, what is your clearest story of God's goodness and mercy catching up to you?
- Psalm 23 ends with the hope of dwelling in the house of the Lord forever. How does that hope shape the way you are living, praying, or preparing today? What would you want to pass on to someone younger about the benefits of trusting the Shepherd in their younger years and maybe in ways you wish you'd done?

Closing Prayer

Lord, you are our shepherd; we shall not want. Meet us in the valleys we wandered into and the ones we get chased into at times. Set your table before us even while our enemies watch, and let your goodness and mercy hunt us down all the days of our lives, until we dwell in your house forever. Amen.