

## PSALMS OF PRAYER AND PRAISE

### Psalm 23:1-6 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

### Psalm 23: The Good Shepherd

The message of the whole psalm is, “*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*” The believer’s relationship to the Lord involves the full supply of all his wants. David said “*I shall not want*” out of his own experiences: tending his sheep, leading them to green pastures, finding water for them in a dry land, and protecting them against wild beasts by night. David knew that his God would provide for and watch over him. Want is the excess of desire beyond possession. When our hearts are right with God, as David’s was, we will not desire what is not in God’s providence to provide. **Our wants become what God wants for us.** We grow to be so in tune with God that we only want what He wants to give us and He lavishes gifts upon us.

“*He makes me,*” “*He leads me.*” In “**He—me,**” we see that a personal relationship is established between the Lord and those who love Him. You have a share in His love. God is personally and intimately interested in you. He wants to be part of every waking moment, not relegated to a few hours of formal worship on Sunday morning.

Green pastures (verse 2) represent the “**Scripture of truth**”—always fresh, rich, and never exhausted. “*He makes me to lie down in green pastures*” To have a healthy, godly life, one needs to have both an active life and a time for rest and meditation. The restful days are not lost days but a time for growing. God often has to teach the active person the much-needed lesson of rest and waiting patiently for Him. Many have had to thank God for some forced season of rest—a time in which one has learned the preciousness of meditation on the Word and waiting upon the Lord.

In verse 3, God’s desire is to restore your soul. The expression can be translated “**gives me back my life.**” Human nature is riddled with sin. Life is not as God intended when sin interrupts the relationship between the Creator and His beloved creature: you. So God restores your soul, brings you back into a right relationship with Him, one in

which your sin is forgiven and forgotten through the blood of Jesus. You have life “back” and can live the way God intended, depending on His love which is always for your highest good. What great security knowing that no matter what you might have done, God loves you and restores you to Himself.

Refreshed and restored by the Word, God continues to lead us in paths of righteousness and guides us into His divine will and purpose for our lives. Let us thank God for the opportunity we have in studying His Word. It leads us in paths of righteousness that we may serve Him well. His Word cannot be our guide if we are not knowledgeable about it. We can't live according to His Word if we don't know it. May we be diligent students.

It is good to remember that [Psalm 23:4](#) does not say “**the valley of death**” but “*the valley of the shadow of death.*” Death has been removed and only the shadow of it remains. Someone has said that when there is a shadow, there must be light somewhere, and this is true. We are all aware that death stands somewhere on the path we have to travel. How comforting for the believer that the light of heaven throws a shadow across our path, and we can rejoice in the light that reaches beyond death. It is different for those who do not know the Lord; the tunnel is dark and death is eternal.

There are many times when we experience shadows in life. Sometimes darkness comes as depression, serious illness, rejection by one's friends, or loss of a loved one through death. The powerful truth of [verse 4](#) is that though the circumstances are dark, we need not fear because One greater than the darkness is there. God is present. We do not need to despair. We are not alone. God sends tangible evidences of His presence to the shepherd, a rod and a staff. These are tools: the rod for defense and the staff for direction. God defends and directs even though the circumstances might seem dark. How important to know that Christians are not immune from life's troubles, but rather have an ever-present God of love and power in any situation. Under God's protection there is no fear for He is with us to give comfort.

In spite of difficulty, the Lord prepares a table of good things for those who follow Him that we may feast in the presence of those who would war against us. God invites even enemies to repent and join in the feast. This could be the pre-figuring of an event in [Revelation 19:9](#)—the marriage supper of the Lamb, in which all are invited to dine with the Lamb, Jesus, and His bride, the Church. “*Anoint my head with oil*” denotes consecration for special service, as vessels were anointed for sacred use in the tabernacle or temple. To be anointed signifies the presence of the Holy Spirit. Each believer has the Holy Spirit within ([Romans 8:9](#)) and has been sealed with the Holy Spirit ([Ephesians 1:13](#)). Each believer thus is set apart for service to God in every act each day. Full abundance is implied in the words “*my cup over flows.*” Enemies must look on unable to offer opposition and see how abundantly God provides for His own.

The last verse of this psalm combines the past with the future. David considers his whole life and says, “*Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life.*” This is an expression of triumphant faith. This assurance was not based on the

fact of experiencing green pastures, but in the fact that the Lord was his Shepherd. Goodness and mercy do not mean that there are no valleys, no rocky or rough paths, and no darkness or enemies. David certainly experienced such in his life, but goodness and mercy to him were bound to the words—“***The Lord is my shepherd.***” What a difference would be seen in our lives if we truly lived as if “***goodness and lovingkindness (mercy)***” were our constant companions. God’s goodness implies His favor, beauty and delight. Mercy is God’s lovingkindness toward us, not giving us what we deserve when we fail. If we would wake each morning and greet goodness and mercy as our traveling companions, think what a difference it would make in our day!

The crown of all our hope for the future should be “***and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.***” God is present with us through this life on earth and on into eternity. This is a concept almost too big to grasp. Yet David spoke with confidence and we can too, “***I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.***”