



# Heart to Heart with the Living God

## Psalm 23


*"The LORD is my shepherd..."* Psalm 23:1a


**Days 1 and 2: Read Psalm 23.**

1. God is referred to as Israel's shepherd in other places in the Old Testament, but the comparison is especially fitting coming from David. Why? (Ps. 78:70-72;  1 Sam. 16:1, 11-13; 1 Sam. 17:34-35)
2. Look at the second part of verse 1.
  - a. What does the Psalmist David confidently assert here?
  - b. What needs does God the shepherd meet in the verses that follow?
  - c. What do you sometimes rely on to meet your needs, rather than turning to your Shepherd?
3. In the book of Ezekiel, written long after David's reign, God says that one day he will deliver his people from the evil, self-serving "shepherds of Israel" (Ezk. 34:1-10).
  - a. What does the Lord promise he will do? (Ezk. 34:11-16)
  - b. What else does God promise his people? (Ezk. 34:23-27)
  - c. Who is the promised one referred to as "my servant David" (Ez. 34:23, 24) and how will he fulfill the promises of God? (Jn. 10:1-4, 14-16; Rev. 7:13-17;  Lk. 15:1-7)

**Day 3: Read Psalm 23.**

4. Focus on verses 1 through 3.
  - a. What feeling do these verses convey?
  - b. How well do you feel these verses describe your everyday life?
  - c. Despite appearances, and despite your feelings, how do these verses in fact describe what God does for us, his sheep? (Mt. 6:25-33; 11:28-30; Jn. 14:26-27; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; 1 Pet. 5:7)


\*The  symbol indicates verses for further study.

5. Verse 3 says that God guides his sheep by right paths “for his name’s sake.” The name “the LORD,” used in verse one, is God’s covenant name, Yahweh.
  - a. What qualities are bound up with that holy name? (Ex. 34:5-7)
  - b. Why is the reputation of that name at stake in the way God leads his sheep? (Num. 14:11-16)
6. In verse 4 the Psalmist switches from “he” to “you.” Why is this shift to the more intimate second person especially appropriate here?
7. The phrase traditionally translated “the valley of the shadow of death” (v. 4) can also mean something like the valley of the deepest shadows or darkness. Thus it can mean facing not only death but also other difficult and frightening things in life. What reason does the Psalmist give for fearing no evil?
8. How is Jesus, “that great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb. 13:20), uniquely qualified to lead us safely through the valley of the shadow of death? (Rev. 1:17b-18; \* Rom. 6:8-10; Heb. 2:14)

#### Day 4: Read Psalm 23.

9. The picture changes in verse 5 from God as shepherd to God as gracious host. What details in this verse show us how lavish a host God is toward his guest?
10. In the culture of ancient Israel, what does anointing a guest’s head with oil demonstrate? (Ps. 45:7; Lk. 7:44-47)
11. Who is unexpectedly present at this feast but not permitted to share in it? (v. 5a) How might their presence be a picture of how God has answered David’s prayers? (Ps. 26:1; 31:11-16; 35:22-26)

#### Day 5: Read Psalm 23.

12. Come what may, what blessings can you expect from the Lord “all the days of [your] life” (v. 6)? (v. 6a; Also remember Yahweh’s self-description in Ex. 34:6-7a.)
13. How can you develop eyes to see the way your shepherd is caring for you each day.
14. Look at Psalms 27:4-5 and 65:4. (Ps. 84:10-11)
  - a. To what place is the psalmist David referring when he writes of “the house of the LORD” (v. 6b)?
  - b. What does he desire to do there? (Ps. 27:4b)
15. Like other images in this psalm, “the house of the LORD” also points forward, suggesting our heavenly home at the end of a lifelong pilgrimage of faith (\* Heb. 11:13-16).
  - a. What does Jesus promise his followers? (Jn. 14:2-3)
  - b. Read Revelation 21:1-7 and 21:22–22:5, and take a moment to contemplate what lies at journey’s end.