

Bible Study on Psalm 23

Individual Praise – The Privilege of Giving Thanks

The psalms of thanks and praise can seem out of place in the world in which we live. People seldom say thanks today. The newspapers are filled with angry voices demanding that their needs be met, while few sing the praise of a stranger who helps others. We ourselves often cry out to the Lord for help, yet forget to recognize His kindness and mercy with thanks. Pain drives us to raise our voices to God, yet relief from misery sometimes fails to evoke the same response. (LL)

Prayers of thanks retell the great deeds of God so that we will not be afraid to ask in faith for even greater miracles in the future. When we forget to give thanks, we cut ourselves off from this encouragement. (LL)

The psalms of individual praise often follow a simple pattern that we could use in our prayers:

1. An invitation or summons
2. A call to praise
3. An account of the Lord's help
4. A chorus of praise or vow to praise

A few psalms that fit into this category are Psalms 23, 30, 32, 118, and 121.

The 23rd psalm is a psalm of thanks in which a Christian heart praises and thanks God for teaching him and keeping him on the right way, comforting and protecting him in every danger through His Holy Word. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

Questions will be posed and space will be allowed for a written response. Make every effort to answer the questions before looking below for the answer. **The answers will be in bold print.**

1. *V. 1 "The Lord"* is the great name of God, Yahweh/Jehovah. The Israelites considered the name too holy to be spoken by human lips. Whenever they needed to say Yahweh, they substituted the word Adonai, which means "Lord," If the name needed to be written, the scribes would take a bath before they wrote it and destroy the pen afterward. It always means God's absolute faithfulness to his people.
2. The "Lord" is the covenant/promise keeper. What are promises God has kept since the time of the Fall of Adam and Eve? What are some promises He has kept in your life?
3. *V. 1 "my shepherd."* In the ancient Near East and in Israel, the word *shepherd* was widely used as a synonym for the word *king*. In what ways is the work of a shepherd similar to that of an effective ruler or king?
4. Martin Luther says: "A sheep must live entirely with its shepherd's help, protection, and care." What are some weaknesses sheep have?

5. In John 10, Jesus calls Himself “the Good Shepherd.” Reflect on each verse of Psalm 23. Where – specifically – do you see Jesus in this psalm? Give as many points of comparison as you can.
6. *V. 1 “shall not want.”* Being human and sinful we will exhibit any number of needs and wants. To illustrate this, John D. Rockefeller (one of the richest people in the world) was once ask “how much money was enough.” His reply was “a little more.”

However, here in this phrase “I shall not be in want,” David is not referring to material or physical poverty. He is speaking to the spiritual care that Jesus “The Good Shepherd” gives us His children. The Lord will take care of all our spiritual needs. That means?

7. *V. 2 “makes me lie down.”* The time of this verse actually starts with noonday. This is when the flock has already covered quite a bit of ground. All this moving about is causing them to be tired and needing rest lest they be overdriven.

The emphasis here is now placed upon the rest which the shepherd knows how to provide for his sheep at proper times. The word “makes” means “causes.” It has the suggestion that the shepherd provides a setting where sheep can lie down and rest. When does this happen in our lives? How does Matthew 11:28 speak to the issue of “rest?”

8. *V. “in green pastures.”* Green is a symbol for life. It carries the idea of growth and prosperity. It is brought about by light. In surveys made in Europe and the United States, green is the color most commonly associated with life, health, youth, and hope. The Hebrew word rendered “pastures” means usually “dwellings,” or habitations.” It is applied here properly to “pastures,” as places where flocks and herds lie down for rest. How does green pastures apply to our lives?
9. *V. 2 “leads beside still water.”* What different styles of leadership are there out in out world? What style does Jesus use?
10. *V. 3 “restores my soul.”* “He restores my soul,” literally means “He causes my life to return.” It can also mean “to renovate with new life.” By this remark the Psalmist refers back to what has just been said. The Lord nourishes His own, gives them drink, bestows upon them His peace, and so revitalizes their soul with confidence and hope. How does Jesus restore us?
11. Psalm 23 gives the reader a picture of being enveloped in God’s protection, love, and care. We sometimes take God’s love for granted. While we may often cry out to God for help in trouble, we may forget to praise Him for His goodness toward us. What evidence do you see in Psalm 23 that the good things that happen to you are not merely chance

or coincidence, but are instead blessings given to you by God? What light do Psalm 50:15 and Luke 17:11-19 shed on this topic?

12. V. 3 *“paths of righteousness.”* The dictionary says that “path” is “A trodden track or way.” It often becomes that when many people walk on a certain route which then mats down the undergrowth. It isn’t always the best or right way. Hebrew for “righteousness” means “proved right” or “in good order.” How does Matthew 7:13-14 apply here?
13. V. 3 *“names sake.”* “Name” is the equivalent of “character” or “reputation,” it is the person him/herself. Here is the Hebrew name Yahweh or Lord. It represents every attribute of the Lord’s. Why does the Shepherd do it for the Lord’s name sake?
14. V. 4 *“the valley of the shadow of death.”* Why is this valley, “the shadow of death” rather than simply “the valley of death”? In other words, what makes death only a shadow for true believers?
15. V. 4 *“fear no evil.”* What are some things that bring about “fear”? How can we have peace in the midst of these fears?
16. V. 4 *“rod and staff.”* These two items were indispensable tools for the shepherd. The shepherd’s rod looks like a club. It was used by the shepherd to defend himself and his sheep. The rod could be thrown at animals that attacked. It could also be thrown ahead of a wandering sheep to startle it back from the brink of danger. Read Ezekiel 20:37-38. What other use of the shepherd’s rod is mentioned in this verse?
17. Sheep passed under the rod so that the shepherd could examine each one as it went into the sheepfold each night. The shepherd would then separate his own sheep from those that belonged to other shepherds. According to Matthew 25:31-33, when will Jesus separate His flock?
18. Why can you be confident, even when you “pass beneath the Shepherds’ rod on that day?
19. The shepherd’s staff also was used for the benefit of the sheep. A shepherd used his staff to draw his sheep back together (e.g., to put a lamb back with its mother, to return a wandering sheep to the flock). By laying the tip of his staff gently on the sheep’s side, the shepherd could guide his animal where it needed to go. Sometimes a shepherd even laid his staff gently on the side of a sheep to keep in touch with the animal, like walking hand-in-hand with a friend. When does Jesus use His “shepherd’s staff” for your benefit? (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17 or Psalm 119:11.)

20. V. 5 *“prepare a table.”* At verse 5 the word picture changes from the sheepfold to a banquet hall. At first glance, verse 5-6 may seem like a word picture of our heavenly home. But note that enemies are still present here. That won’t be true of heaven! What “table” does Jesus prepare for you right now even in the presence of your enemies?
21. Guests in oriental countries receive fragrant oil as a token of welcome, of the host’s hospitality. How do you know you’re welcome in the Lord’s presence?
22. V. 6 *“Goodness and mercy”* God’s goodness to us never ends (v. 6). It runs after us, as if chasing us down, as this verse pictures it. This security is ours as we “dwell in the house of the Lord”, stay near our Good Shepherd – all our life long. Tell about a time it has seemed that God’s love and goodness followed you, a time when everywhere you turned you saw evidence of His love and care.
23. V. 6 *Dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*” It is said that when we are in worship we are as close to heaven as we can get here on earth. BUT, this phrase of the psalm speaks of living with God here on earth and also in heaven forever. How is this comforting to us?

In faith, David declares that since Yahweh is his shepherd, he “shall not want” (v 1). Our Good Shepherd lovingly provides everything that we need in this life, but we often fail to recognize that these gifts come from Him. Instead, we focus on things that we want, but do not need. How wonderful that our Shepherd does not withhold His blessings from us, but still cares for these needs and more: He gives us His own Son! • Good Shepherd, open our eyes to see Your blessing. Open our ears to hear Your voice. Open our hearts that we may love You. Amen. (TLSB)

Some Answers to the above Questions:

1. Both shepherds and kings led flocks/people. Those “sheep” looked to them for guidance, protection, and provision.

2. The answers will vary.

3. The psalm makes it clear that our Good Shepherd is always thinking about us, always looking for ways to show His care. Anything that happens to us must first pass His scrutiny, and His eyes are eyes of purest love.

4. Ezekiel 20:37 tells us that as the sheep “pass(ed) under (the) rod,” the shepherd separated and counted them. As the shepherd did this he carefully examined each sheep.

5. Jesus will separate those who belong to Him from those who do not when He returns to earth on Judgment Day.

6. In Christ, we have already been examined and found righteous. We share Christ’s own righteousness and need not fear the judgment. We know the verdict – “Not Guilty!”

7. The Holy Scriptures clearly point to the way of salvation just as a shepherd’s staff guides the sheep down the correct path. The truths in God’s Word also give us guidance as we make life’s decisions. They warn us when we stray. As we meditate on the Word, God walks with us, talks to us, and comforts us with His presence.

8. Jesus received the punishment of death we deserved because of our sin. We in turn receive life. By God's grace, Jesus has turned death from something too frightening to contemplate into a mere "shadow." It still looks frightening at times, but it has no power to harm those who are Christ's.

9. Some have taken the table Jesus has prepared (v. 5) for us as the heavenly banquet table where we will feast with Jesus forever. This hope is ours right now, even "in the presence of (our) enemies." Right now we begin the feast of joy and confidence that our Savior has prepared in love for us. In Holy Communion, we enjoy a foretaste of that eternal "banquet" of God's goodness.

10. God invites us in Jesus to come to Him, to enjoy all His many blessings. He forgives our sins in Jesus and receives us with open arms as His righteous children.

11. Answers will vary.