

Psalm 23 from the Sheep's Perspective

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Psalm 23

A Psalm of David.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever." (Psalm 23:1-6)

This Psalm is often used at funerals, but if we think of it only as something we read at funerals we miss out on its marvelous treasures.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary puts it this way: "As a song of trust, this psalm has no peer. It is impossible to estimate its effect upon man through the centuries. Grief, sadness, and doubt have been driven away by this strong affirmation of faith.

"Peace, contentment, and trust have been the blessings upon those who have come to share the psalmist's sublime confidence. While the language is simple and the meaning clear, no one has been able to exhaust the message of the poem or improve upon its quiet beauty."

As we are studying this Psalm I would like to use the book *A shepherd looks at PSALM 23* by Phillip Keller. When our family lived in Three Hills Alberta Canada and went to Prairie Bible Institute, Phillip Keller lived close to us.

His son Rod Keller was in my same class. When Phillip Keller lost his first wife from cancer, I saw what a man of God he was even though I was only a young person. Phillip Keller is now with the Lord, but he wrote many books before he passed away and I would highly recommend them for your reading and especially his work on Psalm 23.

I will refer to this book of his often because he was a shepherd and had a lot of experience with sheep, whereas I have only had a little experience with goats when our son Christopher was in 4-H.

David, the author of the poem, was a shepherd, and the son of a shepherd. Later he became known as the 'Shepherd King' of Israel. **'The Lord is my Shepherd.'** Who was he talking about?

He was speaking of Jehovah, the Lord God of Israel. Jesus makes it very clear who the good shepherd is, in John 10, where Jesus says,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep." (John 10:11)

As we look at verse one of Psalm 23, we can put emphasis on different words:

"The 'Lord' is 'my' shepherd; I shall not want." (Psalm23: 1)

Here let us emphasize -

The "**LORD**"

We are told in Colossians that Christ is responsible for the 'creation' of 'everything,' both natural and supernatural.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.

"All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." (Colossians 1:15-18)

"Men of science reveal that our galaxy contains more than 100 billion stars, and that our sun is 150 trillion miles from the center of our galaxy. Our galaxy is one of a small cluster of 19 galaxies, the nearest of which is 30 million light years from us (150 million trillion miles).

"Our research scientists, by using powerful telescopes, have made reasonably sure that there are more than a billion galaxies. They estimate the number of stars in these galaxies is close to 100 quintillion. The candle power of one of the galaxies is equal to that of 400 million suns." (Wycliffe Bible Commentary)

To think that [the One who made all this](#), is the one who is taking care of us! This puts a whole different perspective on our lives. So now we are the sheep in this Psalm, and the God of the Universe is taking care of us! Look at this Psalm now with me, from the sheep's perspective.

"To think that God in Christ is deeply concerned about me as a particular individual, immediately gives great purpose and enormous meaning to my life. We are just here upon this planet for a short stay.

"Obviously, David, in this Psalm, is speaking not as the shepherd, though he was one, but as a sheep; one of the flock.

[Phillip Keller says,] "He spoke with a strong sense of pride and devotion and admiration. It was as though he literally boasted aloud, 'Look at **Who** my shepherd is - my owner - my manager!' The **Lord** is!

"After all, he knew from firsthand experience that the lot in life of any particular sheep depended on the type of man who owned it. Some men were gentle, kind, intelligent, brave and selfless in their devotion to their stock. Under one man sheep would struggle, starve and suffer endless hardship. In another's care they would flourish and thrive contentedly." (*A shepherd looks at PSALM 23* by Phillip Keller)

"IS "my" Shepherd; I shall not want."

"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12

[I was saved at age nine](#) when I knelt beside my bed and asked Jesus to come into my heart and life. Now I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ! Every sheep belongs to someone, if you do not believe it, just try going out to the field and take one sometime. They have a law against that sort of thing!

Phillip Keller states, "The day I bought my first thirty ewes, my neighbor and I sat on the dusty corral rails that enclosed the sheep pens and admired the choice, strong, well-bred ewes that had become mine. Turning to me he handed me a large, sharp, killing knife and remarked tersely, 'Well, Phillip, they're yours. Now you'll have to put your mark on them.'

"I knew exactly what he meant. Each sheep-man has his own distinctive earmark which he cuts into one or (the) other of the ears of his sheep. In this way, even at a distance, it is easy to determine to whom the sheep belongs.

"It was not the most pleasant procedure to catch each ewe in turn and lay her ear on a wooden block then notch it deeply with the razor-sharp edge of the knife. There was pain for both of us. But from our mutual suffering an indelible lifelong mark of ownership was made that could never be erased. And from then on every sheep that came into my possession would bear my mark.

"There is an exciting parallel to this in the Old Testament. When a slave in any Hebrew household chose, of his own freewill, to become a lifetime member of that home, he was subjected to a certain ritual. His master and owner would take him to his door, put his ear lobe against the doorpost and with an awl puncture a hole through the ear.

["But if the servant plainly says, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free, then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the

doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever." (Exodus 21:5-6) From then on he was a man marked for life as belonging to that house." (A shepherd looks at Psalm 23 by Phillip Keller)

When we receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we give up ourselves and become totally His. He is our Owner, our Master! Paul loved to use the phrase of himself and the relationship he had with Jesus as 'bond slave.'

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Matthew 16:24)

So as a result of Christ being our owner the sheep can say, "I shall not want!" This is not speaking necessarily of physical things, but I believe he is speaking of the spiritual wealth we have in Christ. (Look at our [Ephesians study](#).)

Our Master is a loving Master who takes good care of us in contrast to the one who owns those in the world. There is a song that says, "Slave trade is gone." but in reality it is still going today spiritually. Satan is a terrible taskmaster, but if you are not saved that is whom you belong to.

"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly." (John 10:10)

Phillip Keller relates, "The tenant sheep man on the farm next to my first ranch was the most indifferent manager I had ever met. He was not concerned about the condition of his sheep. His land was neglected. He gave little or no time to his flock, letting them pretty well forage for themselves as best they could, both summer and winter. They fell prey to dogs, cougars and rustlers.

"Every year these poor creatures were forced to gnaw away at bare brown fields and impoverished pastures. Every winter there was a shortage of nourishing hay and wholesome grain to feed the hungry ewes. Shelter to safeguard and protect the suffering sheep from storms and blizzards was scanty and inadequate.

"They had only polluted, muddy water to drink. There had been a lack of salt and other trace minerals needed to offset their sickly pastures. In their thin, weak and diseased condition these poor sheep were a pathetic sight.

"In my mind's eye I can still see them standing at the fence, huddled sadly in little knots, staring wistfully through the wires at the rich pastures on the other side.

"To all their distress, the heartless, selfish owner seemed utterly callous and indifferent. He simply did not care. What if his sheep did want green grass; fresh water; shade; safety or shelter from the storms? What if they did want relief from wounds, bruises, disease and parasites?

"He ignored their needs - he couldn't care less. Why should he - they were just sheep - fit only for the slaughterhouse.

"I never looked at those poor sheep without an acute awareness that this was a precise picture of those wretched old taskmasters, Sin and Satan, on their derelict ranch - scoffing at the plight of those within their power." (*A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by Phillip Keller)

"He makes me to lie down in green pastures;" (Psalm 23:2a)

"The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very make-up it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met.

"Owing to their timidity they refuse to lie down unless they are free of all fear. (1)

"Because of the social behavior within a flock sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind. (2)

"If tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. Only when free of these pests can they relax. (3)

"Lastly, sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free from hunger. (4)

"It is significant that to be at rest there must be a definite sense of freedom from fear, tension, aggravations and hunger. The unique aspect of the picture is that it is only the sheepman himself who can provide release from these anxieties. It all depends upon the diligence of the owner whether or not his flock is free of disturbing influences.

"A flock that is restless, discontented, always agitated and disturbed never does well. And the same is true of people." (*A shepherd looks at Psalm 23*)

Keller speaks of dogs that would frighten or attack the sheep, but in Alberta, Canada I worked with turkeys in Willingdon, Alberta. One day a plane flew over and we had a pile up on our hands of hundreds of turkeys. It was a real mess and this seems to be similar to what shepherds experience with sheep that are frightened.

In the Christian's life it is wonderful to know our Good shepherd is with us at all times! When we know this we can settle down in the tall grass of His Word and feed on it.

"We live a most uncertain life. Any hour can bring disaster, danger and distress from unknown quarters. Life is full of hazards. No one can tell what a day will produce in new trouble. We live either in a sense of anxiety, fear and foreboding, or in a sense of quiet rest. Which is it?

"Generally it is the 'unknown,' the 'unexpected,' that produces the greatest panic. It is in the grip of fear that most of us are unable to cope with the cruel circumstances and harsh complexities of life. We feel they are foes which endanger our tranquility. Often our first impulse is simply to get up and run from them.

"Then in the midst of our misfortunes there suddenly comes the awareness that He, the Christ, the Good Shepherd is there. It makes all the difference. His presence in the picture throws a different light on the whole scene. Suddenly things are not half so black nor nearly so terrifying. The outlook changes and there is hope. I find myself delivered from fear. Rest returns and I can relax.

"This has come to me again and again as I grow older. It is the knowledge that my Master, my Friend, my Owner has things under control even when they may appear calamitous. This gives me great consolation, repose, and rest. " I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety." (Psalm 4:8)

"It is the special office work of God's gracious Spirit to convey this sense of the Christ to our fearful hearts. He comes quietly to reassure us that Christ Himself is aware of our dilemma and deeply involved in it with us. And it is in fact in this assurance that we rest and relax."

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7)

"[Also,] continuous conflict and jealousy within the flock can be a most detrimental thing. The sheep become edgy, tense, discontented and restless. They lose weight and become irritable.

"In any business firm, any office, any family, any community, any church, any human organization or group, be it large or small, the struggle for self-assertion and self-recognition goes on. Most of us fight to be 'top sheep.' We butt and quarrel and compete to 'get ahead.' And in the process people are hurt.

"In contrast to this, the picture in the Psalm shows us God's people lying down in quiet contentment. One of the outstanding marks of a Christian should be a serene sense of gentle contentment.

"Now godliness with contentment is great gain." (1 Timothy 6:6) Paul said: "Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound.

"Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:11-13)

"I would much rather have the affection of the Good Shepherd than occupy a place of prominence in society [or the church].

"As is the case with freedom from fear of predators or friction within the flock, the freedom of fear from the torment of parasites and insects is essential to the contentment of sheep.

"Sheep, especially in the summer, can be driven to absolute distraction by nasal flies, both flies, warble flies and ticks. When tormented by these pests it is literally impossible for them to lie down and rest.

"A good shepherd will apply various types of insect repellents to his sheep. He will see that they are dipped to clear their fleeces of ticks.

"In modern terminology we refer to these upsetting circumstance or people as 'being bugged.' Is there an antidote for them? Can one come to the place of quiet contentment despite them? The answer, for the one in Christ's care, is definitely 'Yes!'

"This is one of the main functions of the gracious Holy Spirit. The gracious Holy Spirit makes real in me the very presence of the Christ. He brings quietness, serenity, strength, and calmness in the face of frustrations and futility.

"Finally, to produce the conditions necessary for a sheep to lie down there must be freedom from the fear of hunger. This of course is clearly implied in the statement, 'He makes me to lie down in green pastures.' (*A shepherd looks at Psalm 23*)

As we feed on the Word of God we grow in Him: "...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 3:18) We need to [meditate on the Word](#) of God day and night. The sheep would lie down and chew their cud. This is like meditating on the Word of God.

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Joshua 1:8)

"Blessed *is* the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight *is* in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper." (Psalm 1:1-3)

"Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Mathew 5:6)

"He leads me beside the still waters." (Psalm 23:2b)

"On the last day, that great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:37-39)

"Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but 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 4:13-14)

"He restores my soul;" (Psalm 23:3a)

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

"Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

"And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost! I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:1-7)

Peter was told by Jesus, after he was restored, to 1) Feed My lambs, 2) Tend My sheep, 3) Feed My sheep (John 21:15-16)

In Galatians we are told, "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted." (Galatians 6:1)

"He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." (Ps.23:3b)

God loves us so He corrects us, but He also does this because of His name's sake. God's name is at stake when we sin. His reputation is tarnished by our disobedience and sin.

"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: *"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.*

"If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

"Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness.

"Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:5-11)

David prayed this prayer: "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin *is* always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in Your sight- That You may be found just when You speak, *and* blameless when You judge." (Psalm 51:3-4)

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy- meditate on these things." (Philippians 4:8)

We have to be careful what we watch today on T.V. and the Internet. I know of many Christians who are not watching any T.V. because of its negative effects on them. Personally my wife and I feel much the same, other than I do watch some news.

**"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;" (Psalm 23:4)**

This Psalm takes us through the seasons of the year and of our lives. At the beginning we are in the spring of life with the lush vegetation in the lower valleys.

Then we move to the summer, and the sheep are taken to the higher elevations to find that grazing grass. In order to do this we have to travel through the cliffs, and that is where we get to the valley of the shadow of death. On the way, there are the treacherous cliffs, which have the narrow paths and with just one misstep we could go over the edge.

This is where we need to remember these passages of Scripture: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose." (Romans 8:28)

"For You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4b)

Phillip Keller explained his job as shepherd this way: "When the shepherd is afield with his flock in the high country, it is customary for him to carry a minimum of equipment. This was especially true in olden times where the sheepman did not have the benefit of mechanized equipment to transport camp supplies across the rough country.

"Even today the so-called 'shepherd shacks' or 'cabooes' in which the herder spends his lonely summers with the sheep are equipped with only the barest essentials.

"But during the hours that he is actually in the field the sheepman carries only a rifle slung over his shoulder and a long slender staff in his hand. There will be a small knapsack in which are packed his lunch, a bottle of water and perhaps a few simple first aid remedies for his flock.

"In the Middle East the shepherd carries only a rod and staff. Some of my most vivid boyhood recollections are those of watching the African herdsmen shepherding their stock with only a long slender stick and a rough *knob-kerrie* in their hands. These are the common and universal equipment of the primitive sheepman.

"...[T]he shepherd boy spends hours practicing with this club [rod], learning how to throw it with amazing speed and accuracy. It becomes his main weapon of defense for both himself and his sheep.

"There is an interesting sidelight on the word, 'rod' which has crept into the colloquial language of the West. Here the slang term 'rod' has been applied to handguns such as pistols and revolvers which were carried by cowboys, and other western rangers.

"The sheep asserts that the owner's rod, his weapon of power, authority and defense, is a continuous comfort to him. For with it the manager is able to carry out effective control of his flock in every situation.

"It will be recalled how when God called Moses, the desert shepherd, and send him to deliver Israel out of Egypt from under Pharaoh's bondage, it was his rod that was to demonstrate the power vested in him. It was always through Moses' rod that miracles were made manifest not only to convince Pharaoh of Moses' divine commission, but also to reassure the people of Israel.

"The rod speaks, therefore, of the spoken Word, the expressed intent, the extended activity of God's mind and will in dealing with men. It implies the authority and divinity. It carries with it the convicting power and irrefutable impact of '*Thus saith the Lord.*'

"Just as for the sheep of David's day, there was comfort and consolation in seeing the rod in the shepherd's skillful hands, so in our day there is great assurance in our own hearts as we contemplate the power, veracity and potent authority vested in God's Word. For, in fact, the Scriptures are His rod. They are the extension of His mind and will and intentions to mortal man." (*A shepherd looks at Psalm 23* by Phillip Keller)

"For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12-13)

"And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:17a) 'Rehema' is a specific phrase or verse of the Word of God used especially for that particular situation.

For example, when Christ used a verse of Scripture against Satan when He was attacked. That is how we need to us the 'rod' of God. Use the Scripture verses that apply to our situation, against Satan when he attacks us!

Keller says, "There is a second dimension in which the rod is used by the shepherd for the welfare of his sheep - namely that of discipline. If anything, the club is used for this purpose perhaps more than any other.

"I could never get over how often, and with what accuracy, the African herders would hurl their knobkerries at some [stubborn] beast that misbehaved.

"If the shepherd saw a sheep wandering away on its own, or approaching poisonous weeds, or getting too close to danger of one sort or another, the club would go whistling through the air to send the wayward animal scurrying back to the bunch.

"As has been said of the Scripture so often, 'This Book will keep you from sin!' It is the Word of God that comes swiftly to our hearts, that comes with surprising suddenness to correct and reprove us when we go astray.

"It is the Spirit of the Living God, using the living Word, that convicts our conscience of right conduct. In this way we are kept under control by Christ who wants us to walk in the ways of righteousness.

"Another interesting use of the rod in the Shepherd's hand was to examine and count the sheep. In the terminology of the Old Testament this was referred to a passing 'under the rod.' ["I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.(Ezekiel 20:37)]

"This meant not only coming under the owner's control and authority, but also to be subject to His most careful, intimate and firsthand examination. A sheep that passed 'under the rod' was one which had been counted and looked over with great care to make sure all was well with it.

["What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

"And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost! I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." (Luke 15:4-7)]

"Because of their long wool it is not always easy to detect disease, wounds, or defects in sheep. For example at a sheep show an inferior animal can be clipped and shaped and shown so as to appear a perfect specimen.

"But the skilled judge will take his rod and part the sheep's wool to determine the condition of the skin, the cleanliness of the fleece and the conformation of the body. In plain language, 'One just does not pull the wool over his eyes.'

"This is what was meant in Psalm 139:23,24 ' Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'

"If we will allow it, if we will submit to it, God by His Word will search us. There will be no 'pulling the wool over His eyes.'"

"We turn now to discuss and consider the shepherd's staff. In a sense the staff, more than any other item of his personal equipment, identifies the shepherd as a shepherd. No one in any other profession carries a shepherd's staff.

"It is uniquely an instrument used for the care and management of sheep - and only sheep. It will not do for cattle, horses or hogs. It is designed for sheep and adapted especially to the needs of sheep. And it is used only for their benefit.

"The staff is essentially a symbol of the concern, the compassion that a shepherd has for his charges. No other single word can better describes its function on behalf of the flock than that it is for their *comfort*.

"Whereas the rod conveys the concept of authority, of power, of discipline, of defense against danger, the word 'staff' speaks of all that is longsuffering and kind.

"The shepherd's staff is normally a long, slender stick, often with a crook or hook on one end. It is selected with care by the owner; it is shaped, smoothed, and cut to best suit his own personal use.

"...Just as the rod of God is emblematic of the Word of God, so the staff of God is symbolic of the Spirit of God. In Christ's dealings with us as individuals there is the essence of the sweetness, the comfort and consolation, the gentle correction brought about by the work of His gracious Spirit.

"There are three areas of sheep management in which the staff plays a most significant role. The first of these lies in drawing sheep together into an intimate relationship. The shepherd will use his staff to gently lift a newborn lamb and bring it to its mother if they become separated.

"But in precisely the same way, the staff is used by the shepherd to reach out and catch individual sheep, young or old, and draw them close to himself for intimate examination. The staff is very useful this way for the shy and timid sheep that normally tend to keep at a distance from the shepherd.

"Similarly in the Christian life we find the gracious Holy Spirit, 'The Comforter,' drawing folks together into a warm, personal fellowship with one another. It is also He who draws us to Christ, for as we are told in Revelation, 'The Spirit and the bride say, Come.'

"The staff is also used for guiding sheep. Again and again I have seen a shepherd use his staff to guide his sheep gently into a new path or through some gate or along dangerous, difficult routes. He does not use it actually to beat the [sheep].

"Rather, the tip of the long slender stick is laid gently against the animal's side and the pressure applied guides the sheep in the way the owner wants it to go. Thus the sheep is reassured of its proper path.

"Sometimes I have been fascinated to see how a shepherd will actually hold his staff against the side of some sheep that is a special pet or favorite, simply so that they 'are in touch.'

"They will walk along this way almost as though it were 'hand-in-hand.' The sheep obviously enjoys this special attention from the shepherd and revels in the close, personal, intimate contact between them. To be treated in this special way by the shepherd is to know comfort in a deep dimension. It is a delightful and moving picture.

"...that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full." (1 John 1:3, 4)

"But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." (John 10:2-4)

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;" (Psalm 23:5a)

"And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice." (John 10:4)

"In thinking about this statement it is well to bear in mind that the sheep are approaching the high mountain country of the summer ranges. These are known as alplands or tablelands so much sought after by sheepmen.

"In some of the finest sheep country of the world, especially in the Western United States and Southern Europe, the high plateau of the sheep ranges are always referred to as 'mesas' - the Spanish word for 'tables.'

"Oddly enough the Kiswahili (African) word for a table is also 'mesa.' Presumably this had its origin with the first Portuguese explorers to touch the East African coast. In fact the use of this word is not uncommon in referring to the high, flat-topped plateau of the continent. The classic example, of course, is Table Mountain, near Cape Town, which is world-renowned. (*A shepherd looks PSALM 23* BY Phillip Keller)

I am glad that Mr. Keller cleared this up about the 'table', because as I was growing up, I would always get this picture in my mind of a bunch of sheep sitting around a table eating. I did not know exactly how sheep could eat at a table.

"So it may be seen that what David referred to as a table was actually the entire high summer range. Though these 'mesas' may have been remote and hard to reach, the energetic and aggressive sheep owner takes the time and trouble to ready them for the arrival of his flocks.

"Early in the season, even before all the snow has been melted by spring sunshine, he will go ahead and make preliminary survey trips into this rough, wild country. He will look it over with great care, keeping ever in mind its best use for his flock during the coming season.

"Then just before the sheep arrive he will make another expedition or two to prepare the tableland for them. He takes along a supply of salt and minerals to be distributed over the range at strategic spots for the benefit of the sheep during the summer. The intelligent, careful manager will also decide well ahead of time where his camps will be located so the sheep have the best bed grounds.

"He goes over the range carefully to determine how vigorous the grass and upland vegetation is. At this time he decides whether some glades and basins can be used only lightly whereas other slopes and meadows may be grazed more heavily.

"He will check to see if there are poisonous weeds appearing, and if so, he will plan his grazing program to avoid them, or take drastic steps to eradicate them.

"Unknown to me the first sheep ranch I owned had a rather prolific native stand of both blue and white cammas. The blue cammas were a delightful sight in the spring when they bloomed along the beaches. The white cammas, though a much less conspicuous flower, were also quite attractive but a deadly menace to sheep.

"If lambs, in particular, ate or even just nibbled a few of the lily-like leaves as they emerged in the grass sward during spring, it would spell certain death. The lambs would become paralyzed, stiffen up like blocks of wood and simply succumb to the toxic poisons from the plants.

"My youngsters and I spent days and days going over the ground plucking out these poisonous plants. It was a recurring task that was done every spring before the sheep went on these pastures.

"Though tedious and tiring with all of the bending, it was a case of 'preparing the table in the presence of mine enemies.' And if my sheep were to survive it simply had to be done.

"The parallel in the Christian life is clear. Like sheep, and especially lambs, we somehow feel that we have to try everything that comes our way. We have to taste this thing and that, sampling everything just to see what it's like. And we may very well know that some things are deadly. They can do us no good. They can be most destructive. Still somehow we give them a whirl anyway.

"To forestall our getting into grief of this sort, we need to remember our Master has been there ahead of us coping with every situation which would otherwise undo us.

"A classic example of this was the incident when Jesus warned Peter that Satan desired to tempt him and sift him like wheat. But Christ pointed out that He had prayed that Peter's faith might not fail during the desperate difficulty he would encounter.

"And so it is even today. Our great Good shepherd is going ahead of us in every situation, anticipating what danger we may encounter, and praying for us that in it we might not succumb.

"Another task the attentive shepherd takes on in the summer is to keep an eye out for predators. He will look for signs and spoor of wolves, coyotes, cougars and bears. If these raid or molest the sheep he will have to hunt them down or go to great pains to trap them so that his flock can rest in peace.

"Often what actually happens is that these crafty ones are up on the rim rock watching every movement the sheep make, hoping for a chance to make a swift, sneaking attack that will stampede the sheep. Then one or other of the flock is bound to fall easy prey to the attacker's fierce teeth and claws.

"The picture here is full of drama, action, suspense - and possible death. Only the alertness of the sheepman who tends his flock on the tableland in full view of possible enemies can prevent them from falling prey to attack. It is only his preparation for such an eventuality that can possibly save the sheep from being slaughtered and panicked by their predators.

"And again we are given a sublime picture of our Savior who knows every wile, every trick, every treachery of our enemy Satan and his companions. Always we are in danger of attack. Scripture sometimes refers to him as 'a roaring lion' that goes about seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

"It is rather fashionable in some contemporary Christian circles to discredit Satan. There is a tendency to try and write him off, or laugh him off, as though he was just a joke. Some deny that such a being as Satan even exists. Yet we see evidence of his merciless attacks and carnage in a society where men and women fall prey to his cunning tactics almost every day. We see lives torn and marred and seared by his assaults though we may never see him personally. (You might want to see our [Ephesians 6 study](#) on this.)

"It reminds me of my encounters with cougars. On several occasions these cunning creatures came in among my sheep at night working terrible havoc in the flock. Some ewes were killed outright, their blood drained and livers eaten. Others were torn open and badly clawed.

"Yet despite the damage, despite the dead sheep, despite the injuries and fear instilled in the flock, I never once actually saw a cougar on my range. So cunning and so skillful were their raids they defy description.

"At all times we would be wise to walk a little closer to Christ. This is one sure place of safety. It was always the distant sheep, the roamers, the wanderers, which were picked off by the predators in an unsuspecting moment.

"The same is true of Christians. Many of us get into deep difficulty beyond ourselves; we are stricken dumb with apprehension, unable even to call or cry out for help; we just crumple under our adversary's attack.

"But Christ is too concerned about us to allow this to happen. Our Shepherd wants to forestall such a calamity. He wants our summer sojourn to be in peace. Our Lord wants our mountaintop times to be tranquil interludes.

"And they will be if we just have the common sense to stay near Him where He can protect us. Read His Word each day. Spend some time talking to Him. (You might want to check out our [daily Bible reading chart](#).)

"We should give Him opportunity to converse with us by His Spirit as we contemplate His life and work for us as our Shepherd.

"There is another chore which the sheepman takes care of on the tableland. He clears out the water holes, springs and drinking places for his stock. He has to clean out the accumulated debris of leaves, twigs, stones and soil which may have fallen into the water source during the autumn and winter. He may need to repair small earth dams he has made to hold water.

"And he will open the springs that may have become overgrown with grass and brush and weeds. It is all his work, his preparation of the table for his own sheep in summer.

"...the parallel in the Christian life is that Christ, our great Good Shepherd, has Himself already gone before us into every situation and every extremity that we might encounter. We are told emphatically that He was tempted in all points like as we are. We know He entered fully and completely and very intimately into the life of men upon our planet. He has known our sufferings, experienced our sorrows and endured our struggles in this life; He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

"Too many people assume that once one becomes a Christian, automatically life becomes one glorious garden of delight. This is simply not the case. It may well become a garden of sorrow just as our Savior pointed out previously, you do not have mountains without valleys, and even on the mountaintop there can be some tough experience." (*A shepherd looks at PSALM 23* by Phillip Keller)

"For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." (Acts 20:28-30)

**"You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over."
(Psalm 23:5b)**

"As one meditates on this magnificent poem it is helpful to keep in mind that the poet is recounting the salient events of the full year in a sheep's life. He takes us with him from the

home reach where every need is so carefully supplied by the owner, out into the green pastures, along the still waters, up through the mountain valleys to the high tablelands of summer.

"Here, now where it would appear the sheep are in a sublime setting on the high meadows; where there are clear running springs; where the forage is fresh and tender; where there is the intimate close contact with the shepherd; suddenly we find 'a fly in the ointment,' so to speak.

"For in the terminology of the sheepman, 'summer time is fly time.' By this, reference is made to the hordes of insects that emerge with the advent of warm weather. Only those people who have kept livestock or studied wildlife habits are aware of the serious problems for animals presented by insects in the summer.

"To name just a few parasites that trouble stock and make their lives a misery: there are warble flies, bot flies, heel flies, nose (nasal) flies, deer flies, black flies, mosquitoes, gnats and other minute, winged parasites that proliferate at this time of year. Their attacks on animals can readily turn the golden summer months into a time of torture for sheep and drive them almost to distraction.

"Sheep are especially troubled by the nose fly, or nasal fly, as it is sometimes called. These little flies buzz about the sheep's head, attempting to deposit their eggs on the damp, mucous membranes of the sheep's nose.

"If they are successful the eggs will hatch in a few days to form small, slender, worm-like larvae. They work their way up the nasal passages into the sheep's head; they burrow into the flesh and there set up an intense irritation accompanied by severe inflammation.

"For relief from this agonizing annoyance sheep will deliberately beat their heads against trees, rock, posts, or brush. They will rub them in the soil and thrash around against woody growth. In extreme cases of intense infestation a sheep may even kill itself in a frenzied endeavor to gain respite from the aggravation. Often advanced stages of infection from these flies will lead to blindness.

"...Only the strictest attention to the behavior of the sheep by the shepherd can forestall the difficulties of 'fly time.' At the very first sign of flies among the flock he will apply an antidote to their heads.

"I always preferred to use a homemade remedy composed of linseed oil, sulfur and tar which was smeared over the sheep's nose and head as a protection against nose flies.

"What an incredible transformation this would make among the sheep. Once the oil had been applied to the sheep's head there was an immediate change in behavior. Gone was the aggravation; gone the frenzy; gone the irritability and the restlessness. Instead, the sheep would start to feed quietly again, then soon lie down in peaceful contentment.

"This, to me is the exact picture of irritation in my own life. How easy it is for there to be a fly in the ointment of even my most lofty spiritual experience! So often it is the small, petty annoyances that ruin my repose.

"Just as with the sheep there must be continuous and renewed application of oil to forestall the 'flies' in my life, there must be a continuous anointing of God's gracious Spirit to counteract the every-present aggravations of personality conflicts. Only one application of oil, sulfur and tar was not enough for the entire summer. It was a process that had to be repeated. The fresh application was the effective antidote.

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13)

["And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, 20 giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another in the fear of God." (Ephesians 5:18-21)]

"...But summertime for the sheep is more than just fly-time. It is also 'scab-time.' Scab is an irritating and highly contagious disease common among sheep the world over. Caused by a minute, microscopic parasite that proliferates in warm weather, 'scab' spreads throughout a flock by direct contact between infected and non-infected animals.

"Sheep love to rub heads in an affectionate and friendly manner. Scab is often found most commonly around the head. When two sheep rub together the infection spreads readily from one to the other.

"In the Old Testament when it was declared that the sacrificial lambs should be without blemish, the thought uppermost in the writer's mind was that the animal should be free of scab. In a very real and direct sense scab is significant of contamination, of sin, of evil.

"Again as with flies, the only effective antidote is to apply linseed oil, sulfur and other chemicals that can control this disease. In many sheep-rearing countries dips are built and the entire flock is put through the dip.

"Each animal is completely submerged in the solution until its entire body is soaked. The most difficult part to do is the head. The head has to be plunged under repeatedly to insure that scab there will be controlled. Some sheepmen take great care to treat the head by hand."

"...So I know precisely what David meant when he wrote, [**You anoint my head with oil.**] Again it was the only antidote for scab. Perhaps it should be mentioned that in [Israel] the old remedy for this disease was olive oil mixed with sulfur and spices. This home remedy served equally well in the case of flies that came to annoy the flocks.

"Our thoughts, our ideas, our emotions, our choices, our impulses, drives and desires are all shaped and molded through the exposure of our minds to other people's minds.

"In our modern era of mass communication, the danger of the 'mass mind' grows increasingly grave. Young people in particular, whose minds are so malleable find themselves being molded under the subtle pressures and impacts made on them by television, radio, magazines, newspapers, [Internet] and fellow classmates, to say nothing of their parents and teachers.

"Often the mass media which are largely responsible for shaping our minds are in the control of men whose characters are not Christ like: who in some cases are actually anti-Christian.

One cannot be exposed to such contacts without coming away contaminated. The thought patterns of people are becoming increasingly abhorrent. Today we find more tendency to violence, hatred, prejudice, greed, cynicism, and increasing disrespect for that which is noble, fine, pure or beautiful.

"This is precisely the opposite of what Scripture teaches us. In Philippians 4:8 we are instructed emphatically in this matter, 'Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy-meditate on these things.'"

"Here again, the only possible, practical path to attaining such a mind free of the world's contamination is to be conscious daily, hourly of the purging presence of God's Holy Spirit, applying Himself to my mind.

"Now as summer, in the high country, moves gradually into autumn, subtle changes occur both in the countryside and in the sheep. The nights become cooler; there are the first touches of frost; the insects begin to disappear and are less a pest; the foliage on the hills turns to crimson, gold and bronze; mist and rain begin to fall and the earth prepares for winter.

"In the flock there are also subtle changes. This is the season of the rut, of mating, of great battles between the rams for possession of the ewes. The necks of the monarchs swell and grow strong. They strut proudly across the pastures and fight furiously for the favors of the ewes. The crash of heads and thud of colliding bodies can be heard through the hours of day and night.

"The shepherd knows all about this. He knows that some of the sheep will and can actually kill, injure and maim each other in these deadly combats. So he decides on a very simple remedy. At this season of the year he will catch his rams and smear their heads with grease.

Mr. Keller says, "I used to apply generous quantities of axle grease to the head and nose of each ram. Then when they collided in their great crashing battles the lubricant would make them glance off each other in such a ludicrous way they stood there feeling rather stupid and frustrated. In this way much of the heat and tension was dissipated and little damage done.

"Among God's people there is a considerable amount of knocking each other. Somehow if we don't see eye to eye with the other person, we persist in trying to assert ourselves and become 'top sheep.' A good many become badly bruised and hurt this way.

"In fact I found as a pastor that much of the grief, the wounds, the hurts, the ill will, the unforgiven things in people's lives could usually be traced back to old rivalries or jealousies or battles that had broken out between believers. Scores of skeptical souls will never enter a church simply because away back in their experience someone had battered them badly. (*A shepherd looks at PSALM 23*)

I was told about a split that took place in a church that finally ended up in civil court. The judge wanting to get to the bottom of the problem and find out where it all started, asked the people to please admit what really caused the problem in the first place.

One of the leaders of the church admitted that at one of their 'pot luck' meals a Christian brother served a larger portion of meat to the one in front of him than he had gotten. He felt that being a leader in the church he should have gotten the larger portion. This led to bitterness and then to division in the church.

"To forestall and prevent this sort of thing from happening among His people our Shepherd loves to apply the precious ointment of the presence of His gracious Spirit to our lives." (*A shepherd looks at PSALM 23* by Phillip Keller)

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Colossians 3:16)

"For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not *use* liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law." (Galatians 5:13-18)

"It will be recalled that just before His crucifixion, our Lord in dealing with His twelve disciples, who even then, were caught up in jealous bickering and rivalry for prestige, told of the coming of the Comforter - the Spirit of Truth.

["And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever- (John 14:16)]

"Because of His being sent to them, He said, they would know peace. He went on to say that His people would be known everywhere for their love for one another. [Jesus said,

"I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no

longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as *We are*.

"While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.

"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

Christ Prays for All Believers

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:9-26)

[I believe personally this prayer of Jesus will be answered in these last days that we are living in. We do not see them fulfilled as I write this, but whether it takes persecution or revival, God will answer Jesus' prayer! (You might want to look at our [Ephesians study](#) of this.)]

"But too often this simply is not true among God's own people. They hammer and knock each other, stiff-necked with pride and self-assertion. They are intolerant, dogmatic and uncharitable with other Christians.

"Yet when the gracious Holy Spirit invades a man or woman, when He enters that life and is in control of the personality, the attributes of peace, joy longsuffering and generosity become apparent. It is then that suddenly one becomes aware of how ridiculous are all the petty jealousies, rivalries and animosities which formerly motivated their absurd assertions.

["Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have *the gift of prophecy*, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but

have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

"Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:1-8)]

"This is to come to a place of great contentment in the Shepherd's care. And it is then the cup of contentment become real in the life. As the children of God, the sheep in the Divine shepherd's care, we should be known as the most contented people on earth. A quiet, restful contentment should be the hallmark of those who call Christ their Master." (*A shepherd looks at PSALM 23* by Phillip Keller)

[I would like to add here, these are the very words I would say describe Phillip Keller. Every time I read one of his books this is the same feeling I get reading these. He was a very Christ like man!]

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;" (Psalm 23:6a)

"Not only is this a bold statement, but it is somewhat of a boast, an exclamation of implicit confidence in the One who controls his career and destiny.

"How many Christians actually feel this way about Christ? How many of us are truly concerned that no matter what occurs in our lives we are being followed by goodness and mercy?

"Of course it is very simple to speak this way when things are going well. If my health is excellent; my income is flourishing; my family is well; and my friends are fond of me it is not hard to say 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.'

"But what about when one's body breaks down? What do I say when I stand by helpless, as I have had to do, and watch a life partner die by degrees under appalling pain?

"What is my reaction when my job folds up and there is no money to meet bills? What happens if my children can't make their grades in school or get caught running with the wrong gang? What do I say when suddenly, without good grounds, friends prove false and turn against me?

"These are the sort of times that test a person's confidence in the care of Christ... When my little world is falling apart and the dream castles of my ambitions and hopes crumble into ruins can I honestly declare 'Surely -yes - goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life'?

"There were events which at the time seemed like utter calamities; there were paths down which He led me that appeared like blind allies; there were days He took me through blind allies; there were days He took me through which were well nigh black as night itself. But all in the end turned out for my benefit and my well-being." (*A shepherd looks at PSALM 23* by Phillip Keller)

["And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." (Romans 8:28-30)

[I am sure that Job felt much the same when he was going through his valley of the shadow of death. But now look all these years later, that man's life and his book has blessed millions, if not billions of lives as they have read it and seen the outcome. God is Sovereign!]

"With my limited understanding as a finite human being I could not always comprehend His management executed in infinite wisdom. With my natural tendencies to fear, worry and ask 'why', it was not always simple to assume that He really did know what He was doing with me.

"There were times I was tempted to panic, to bolt and to leave His care. Somehow I had the strange, stupid notion I could survive better on my own. Most men and women do.

"I love Him because He first loved me. His goodness and mercy and compassion to me are new every day. And my assurance is lodged in these aspects of His character. My trust is in His love for me as His own.

"This to me is the *supreme* portrait of my Shepherd. Continually there flows out to me His goodness and His mercy, which, even though I do not deserve them, come unremittingly from their source of supply - His own great heart of love.

"Herein is the essence of all that has gone before in this Psalm. All the care, all the work, all the alert watchfulness, all the skill, all the concern, all the self-sacrifice are born of His love - the love of One who loves His sheep, loves His work, loves His role as a Shepherd. 'I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.' (John 10:11)

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren." (1 John 3:16)

"and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Psalm 23:6)

"This psalm opened with the proud, joyous statement, 'The Lord is my Shepherd.' Now it closes with the equally positive, buoyant affirmation, 'And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.'

"Here is a sheep so utterly satisfied with its lot in life, so fully contented with the care it receives, so much 'at home' with the shepherd that there is not a shred of desire for a change.

"The word 'house' used here in the poem has a wider meaning than most people could attach to it. Normally we speak of the house of the Lord as the sanctuary or church or meeting place of God's people.

"In one sense David may have had this in mind. And, of course, it is pleasant to think that one would always delight to be found in the Lord's house.

"But it must be kept in mind always, that the Psalmist, writing from the standpoint of a sheep, is reflecting on and recounting the full round of the year's activities for the flock.

"He has taken us from the green pastures and still waters of the home ranch, up through the mountain passes onto the high tablelands of the summer range. Fall has come with its storms and rain and sleet that drives the sheep down the foothills and back to the home ranch for the long, quiet winter.

"In a sense this is coming home. It is a return to the fields and corrals and barns and shelters of the owner's home. During all seasons of the year, with their hazards, dangers and disturbances, it is the rancher's alertness, care and energetic management that has brought the sheep through satisfactorily.

"It is with a sublime feeling of both composure and contentment that this statement, 'I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever,' is made.

"Actually what is referred to by 'house' is the family or household or flock of the Good Shepherd. The sheep is so deeply satisfied with the flock to which it belongs, with the ownership of this particular shepherd that it has no wish to change whatever." (*A shepherd looks at PSALM 23* by Phillip Keller. I hope you will want to read the book.)

Where we were missionaries at in Trinidad and Tobago, people built their houses up on stilts or pillars. The animals often lived right there under the homes with their owner. I see us living with our wonderful Lord Jesus Christ throughout eternity.

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also." (John 14:1-3)

"And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God.

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.'

"Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

"And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.'" (Revelation 21:3-7)

Right was the pathway leading to this!
-by Frances R. Havergal

Light after darkness, gain after loss;
Strength after suffering, crown after cross.
Sweet after bitter, song after sigh;
Home after wandering; praise after cry.
Sheaves after sowing; sun after rain;
Sight after mystery, peace after pain.
Joy after sorrow, calm after blast;
Rest after weariness, sweet rest at last.
Love after loneliness, life after tomb.
After long agony, rapture of bliss;
Right was the pathway leading to this!

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