

20:20 Vision Ministries – Devotions by Roger Browning
Week 21 (May 17-23, 2015)

Everything I know about sheep and shepherds, I learned from my favorite author, Phillip Keller, in his classic book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. With his help, we will study this marvelous psalm for the next two weeks. (Reprinted from week 34, 2012 with some changes)

Sunday, May 17 (read Psalm 23)

The Lord is my shepherd (Psalm 23:1a)

This verse is perhaps the greatest description of our security in Jesus Christ found in the Bible. In Scripture, God uses two word pictures to describe our relationship with Him: 1) a father and his child, and 2) a shepherd and his sheep. The latter is the subject of this beautiful psalm. A sheep needs more care than any other farm animal. Left to itself, it will devour the green grass down to the roots. That is why God uses this picture of our need for Him. Without Him, we can do nothing (John 15:5). Most folks refuse to come under His ownership and management. They think they know how to run their own lives. Phillip Keller gives three reasons why Jesus is our rightful owner: 1) He created us, 2) He purchased us on Calvary, and 3) He intercedes for us as He provides our daily bread. Have you come under his ownership and care? If so, you have nothing to fear (see 1 John 4:18).

Monday, May 18 (Psalm 23:1)

I shall not want (Psalm 23:1b)

The *Living Bible* captures this verse in a beautiful way: “Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need!” God promises to supply all your needs “according to the riches of His glory” (Philippians 4:19). Can you trust Him to fulfill His promise? Many prefer to serve **Satan** and **sin** and **self**. They may ask Jesus to be their **Savior**, but they have no desire to live under His management. Some tell me, “I want Him to forgive my sins, but **nobody** is going to tell me how to live my life!” In other words, they accept Him as Savior, but deny Him as Lord. He does not offer Himself in those terms! Some day every knee will bow before Him and proclaim Him Lord (Philippians 2:9-11). You and I have the privilege of doing that right now of our own free will. Have you asked Him to be in total control of your life? If so, you will never have a need that He will not supply.

Tuesday, May 19 (Psalm 23:2)

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures (Psalm 23:2a)

Phillip Keller teaches that four requirements have to be met if a sheep is to lie down and rest: 1) freedom from fear, 2) freedom from rivalry and friction, 3) freedom from flies and parasites, and 4) freedom from hunger. The presence of the shepherd can calm any of these anxieties. In the Bible, we are called sheep because the same four requirements must be met before we can find true rest. The Presence of the Great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, can meet all these needs for us. His word tells us 365 times not to fear. He determines our personal gifts as His followers (see 1 Corinthians 12:4-11), so we should not be so competitive with our brothers/sisters in Christ. He can remove all our annoyances, but He often chooses to keep us humble through them. He is the Bread of Life (John 6:35) who will satisfy every need when we “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). Let us “lie down in green pastures” under our Shepherd’s care

Wednesday, May 20 (Psalm 23:2)

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

A sheep's body consists of 70% water, so a healthy supply of it is more important than food. The flock cannot drink, however, from a swift flowing stream. The shepherd must find a location where the water is clear and still enough for them to satisfy their thirst. In the Bible, God uses water to symbolize His Holy Spirit. Jesus teaches this concept to the woman at the well in John 4:10-14 calling it "living water." His Spirit could not abide within us until He paid the price for our sins on Calvary (see John 7:37-39). Today's verse teaches us that Jesus, the Great Shepherd, leads us to a place where we can quench our thirst from the well that never runs dry. His Spirit is always available to the believer! A flock left without care will drink from stagnant rainwater polluted by urine from other sheep, and they will become diseased. Likewise, a "Christian" who has no confidence in the Shepherd will drink from the waters of this polluted world. He will not trust His Shepherd to lead him beside the still waters.

Thursday, May 21 (Psalm 23:3)

He restoreth my soul (Psalm 23:3a)

The little phrase, "he restores my soul," is my personal favorite. A sheep is like a turtle in that he cannot get back on his feet if he rolls over onto his back. This often happens when a sheep that is too fat, too relaxed, or too wooly wanders away from the flock and lies down. This "cast" sheep is helpless unless the shepherd finds him before the vultures do. A good shepherd will always be on the lookout for these helpless "cast" sheep. When he finds one, he picks him up and massages his legs until the blood flows back into them. Most Christians can remember a time when they were too self-confident in their spiritual journey and also wandered away from the flock. They stopped attending church, praying, giving and fellowshiping with God's people. It wasn't long before they stopped growing and learning about the Shepherd. They lost their usefulness to God's work and His kingdom. Likewise, when our Good Shepherd finds His spiritual strays, He puts him/her on His shoulders until His blood is made evident in their life again (see Luke 15:3-7). Thank God for His constant care for us, His sheep!

Friday, May 22 (Psalm 23:3)

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake (Psalm 23b)

A sheep is a creature of habit. If left to himself, he will follow the same path every day until he has destroyed the pastureland. That is why a good shepherd will keep his sheep on the move so that they can lie down in green pastures and drink from still waters (v. 2). His reputation as a shepherd is at stake in the health of his sheep. Likewise, our Shepherd keeps us on the move spiritually because His reputation is at stake in the way we live our lives. We are creatures of habit, too, so we must be **led** and **guided** into a deeper spiritual life by our Good Shepherd. Others may not **hear** our message, but they will definitely **see** our actions. Salvation is only the beginning for a Christian. He/she will be forever molded into the image of Christ (see Philippians 3:20-21). Pledge, today, to bring your life totally under the control of Jesus Who died for your sins and lives forever to intercede for you!

Saturday, May 23 (Psalm 23:4)

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

The shepherd often leads his sheep through dark valleys on the way to new grazing fields. Predators lurk on both sides waiting for a chance to attack. The shepherd must always be alert to this danger. Only he can protect these helpless sheep! I have not met too many people in good health who are looking forward to death. This verse teaches two points that will assist us when our time comes. First, because Jesus suffered the real death for sin on the cross, we will see only a "**shadow** of death." John 11:25-26 and John 8:51 assure us that we will never taste the real thing! The second truth evaded me for many years. When we walk through that valley, we are no longer talking **about** Him (v. 1-3). We will be talking **to** Him as indicated by the personal pronoun, "you" (or "thou"). I have seen this reality many times in my ministry as fear gives way to joy. His loving arms are waiting for you! Trust Him to be your Shepherd!