



"REASONS TO REJOICE"

"Your Words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." Jeremiah 15:16

"All About Praise" Series of Six Psalms

First Day

Welcome to another six-week study of selected Psalms. It was such a blessing last year to do a short series like this, but we were only able to scratch the surface. After much prayer, we decided to begin our year the same way. I've chosen Psalms 23, 39, 49, 77, 119, and 147 for us to dig into. The Psalms are the largest and most widely used book in the Bible. They have been a blessing to God's people through many generations, beginning in the Old Testament period when they were sung by the Israelites at their worship services in the temple, and they continue to be sung and cherished by Christians today. They have been used in the worship of God more frequently than any other book of the Bible. There are 150 Psalms in all. They are full of emotion, making them very personal, yet just as practical in their application. The Open Bible says, "The Psalms were set to the accompaniment of stringed instruments and served as the temple hymnbook and devotional guide for the Jewish people. The Book of Psalms was gradually collected and originally unnamed, perhaps due to the great variety of material. It came to be known as the "**Book of Praise**" because almost every psalm contained some note of praise to God. The Septuagint uses the Greek word *Psalmos* as its title for this book, meaning poems sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. It also calls it the *Psalterium* (a collection of songs), and this word is the basis for the term *Psalter*."

The Book of Psalms is, without a doubt, my favorite book of the Bible. Every emotion I can possibly feel is found in the Psalms. When I'm excited, I can soar through the Heavens with David, the gifted musician. When I'm crushed, I can cry and find solace in the words of a lonely shepherd. When I am afraid, I can relate to David as the hunted man, hiding in a cave, pouring his heart out to the Lord. When facing a giant, I can rise to the occasion through the power of God! The Psalmists experienced every high and every low that I have in my life. But after identifying the emotions, the Psalmists

seek to encourage us how to live through our experiences. Ray Stedman wrote, "The Psalms are intended to instruct the mind as well as to encourage the heart. They are designed not only to reflect a mood, but also to show us how to handle that mood, how to escape from depression, or how to balance exaltation with wisdom. This quality is the mark of their divine character. They are not merely human folksongs, reflecting the common experience of men, but they relate also the wisdom and release that ensues when a hurt or joy is laid at the feet of God."

The Psalms are written by various authors. David wrote the majority of them, totaling 75. Some of the other authors include Asaph, a priest who headed the service of music; the 10 sons of Korah, who were a guild of singers and composers; Ethan; Solomon; and even Moses.

The Psalms were written over a large span of time, somewhere between the time of Moses (1440 B.C.) and the Babylon Captivity (430 B.C.). The audiences and the conditions of the times varied. The Psalms can be divided, grouped, and studied in several different ways. Most scholars break them up into five "books," which have been compiled over several centuries. Although I will bring out the "type" of Psalm we are studying, I chose not to take one specifically from each of the five books. I asked the Holy Spirit to impress certain Psalms on my heart that He wanted us to study and meditate on, according more to topic and subject matter than anything else. Some of the topics we will be looking at are: Our relationship with the divine Shepherd, knowing the measure of our days, the reminder that riches can't redeem, what to do when we are overwhelmed, taking time to praise God for His Word, and the encouraging fact that God heals the broken-hearted.

Many of the Psalms are also difficult to interpret because they are complicated structurally. Due to their poetic phrasing at times, they can be hard to analyze. Many can be handled in different ways, sometimes looking at them historically, while at other times discussing them in a prophetic sense. Each of the Psalms we will be looking at will be very different and unique, but similar as well.

Commentators also disagree on what they would consider the "key Psalm and verse" of the Book. Some argue that psalm 150 says it all ("Let everything that has breath praise the Lord"), while others claim that Psalm 100 sums up the theme of the book because of its focus on praise and worship.

You'll find many themes and subjects discussed in the psalms, from war to peace, famine to abundance, lamentation to praise. There are some musical terms repeated in some of the Psalms in the superscriptions. For instance, the phrase "To the Chief Musician" appears in 55 Psalms, showing us that there is a collection of psalms used in the temple by the conductor of music. "Selah" is used 71 times and can mean a musical interlude, a pause, or a crescendo.

My Open Bible gives four things to remember when we study the Psalms that I found helpful. Hopefully, they will help guide you through them as well.

1. When the superscription gives the historical event, the psalm should be interpreted in that light. When it is not given, there is little hope in reconstructing the historical occasion; assuming occasions will probably hurt more than help the interpretive process.
2. Some of the Psalms are associated with definite aspects of Israel's worship, and this can help in understanding those psalms.
3. Many of the Psalms use definite structure and motifs.
4. Many Psalms anticipate Israel's Messiah and are fulfilled in Christ. However, care must be taken not to allegorize them and forget the grammatical-historical method of interpretation.

As far as our study goes, each week is broken down into five days of homework, with both commentary and application questions. It is written simply as a tool to help you in your study of God's Word. In no way is it meant to replace the Word, nor does it claim to be an exhaustive study of each Psalm. The goal is to help us discipline ourselves to get into the Word, and think and study "inductively." Our desire is to gain knowledge of the Scripture and the wisdom to apply to our lives. We do this by asking ourselves some simple questions as we study: What does the text say? What does it mean? What does it mean to me? This is called the "Inductive Method" of Bible study. The steps are often called Observation, Interpretation, and Application.

Observation: In this step, you are looking for as many details as you can find. Read the text like a detective, asking yourself questions like: Who is speaking? Why is this happening? Who are the main characters? When is this happening? Are there any repeated words or phrases? Bottom line: **What does the passage say?**

Interpretation: After gathering our facts, it's time to find out what they all mean. You now begin defining words and terms, cross-referencing other passages and identifying themes. Your goal is to be able to answer the question: **What does the passage mean?**

Application: Now it's time to see how the text applies to your life. Ask yourself questions such as: What difference should this truth make in my life? Do I need to make any changes? Is there a warning for me? A challenge? A rebuke? **What exactly does this passage mean to me?**

As we study Scripture with these questions in mind, it helps us to get a fuller grasp of the content and meaning of the text. Ultimately, we want God's Word to change us, making us more like Him (Romans 8:29).

Well, we had a lot to read today. Tomorrow we'll jump right into our first Psalm and see what the Lord has for us. For now, begin memorizing our verse for the week. It's so simple, yet so powerful!

Memory Verse of the Week: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."
Psalm 23:1

Second Day

Review your memory verse. It should be an easy one to remember.

This week we are going to be looking at what some consider the most popular chapter in the entire Bible. Charles Spurgeon called Psalm 23 the "pearl of the psalms." Alexander Maclaren said that "The world could spare many a large book better than this sunny little psalm. It has dried many tears and supplied the mold into which many hearts have poured their peaceful faith." Warren Wiersbe calls Psalm 23 a "summary of the Christian life." The author is David, who was very familiar with the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. He was a shepherd himself, son of a shepherd, and later to be known as the "Shepherd King of Israel."

This Psalm has been used to comfort people in times of trial, suffering, and death. It has been quoted for encouragement in times of trouble and as an exhortation when there is a need to be challenged. Let's see what God has for us today!

1. Read Psalm 23:1-6. Observe the facts in this chapter. Are there any repeated words or phrases? Who is (are) the main character(s)?

2. What would you say is the "theme" of this chapter? What is the main point?

3. What would you choose as the key verse? Why?

David chooses to use a much more intimate metaphor to describe the Lord that had been used so far in the Psalms, such as King, Rock, or Shield. The word "Shepherd" is a much more personal name, showing the intimacy of the relationship we can have with our God.

"The word "Lord" is the English translation of the great Old Testament personal name for God, first disclosed to Moses at the burning bush, as told in Exodus 3, and then repeated more than 4,000 times in the pages of the Old Testament. The name literally means "I Am who I Am." It is an inexhaustible name, like its bearer. Chiefly, it refers to God's timelessness, on the one hand, and to His self-sufficiency, on the other." (James Montgomery Boice) Jesus also used this metaphor in the New Testament to apply to Himself, identifying Himself with Jehovah, while assuming the role of being the shepherd of His people (John 10).

It has also been pointed out that in ancient times, a shepherd was considered to be one of the lowest types of work, usually passed off to the youngest sibling (Like David). It was a never-ending job. They worked around the clock to care for the sheep, despite the weather, the time of day, or the conditions. How amazing it is that God Himself wants to be our Shepherd, promising to nourish, care, guide, protect, and love us, non-stop, 24/7. He loves us that much!

4. David's statement in verse 1 implies a profound relationship between himself and his Creator. We are the object of His intimate love and affection. How does that give your life purpose and meaning?

5. From what you know about the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep, how does it parallel with our relationship with the Lord? How does a shepherd take care of his sheep? How does God take care of us?

6. What do you know about sheep? Why do you think God chose that animal to compare us to? ☺

Having the Lord as our Shepherd implies ownership. We belong to Him; He chose to create us as the object of His affection. A shepherd buys the sheep with his own money, and then he brands them, or puts his "mark" on them to differentiate them from the rest. He makes it easy to determine, even from a distance, whom the sheep belong to.

We were paid for with a price, the precious blood of Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11, 17-18) Phillip Keller wrote, "Jesus never hesitated to make it clear that when an individual once came under His management and control, there would be a certain and unique relationship between Him and them. There would be something very special about belonging to this particular Shepherd. There would be a distinct mark upon the man or woman that differentiated them from the rest of the crowd. The mark of the cross is that which should identify us with Him at all times. The question is, does it?"

7. Have you placed yourself under the Good Shepherd's management and control? Are you expecting the benefits of that relationship without surrendering yourself to His direction? Can you say you "belong" to Him? Does your life reflect that?

8. How does David's statement in verse 1 reveal a sense of confidence, contentment, and satisfaction?

9. Do you think David means that we will get everything we ever want?

The welfare of the flock depends on how well the shepherd cares for them. Our Good Shepherd never neglects us, is indifferent to us, or ignores us. We can experience a deep, quiet peace, because we know that our Owner has our best interest at heart. We are under His control, and we can put our trust in that. We can be content and satisfied because we know He loves us and finds pleasure in taking care of us. We are His delight. We shall not want, or "we shall lack nothing." He wants us to be completely dependent on Him, and Him alone.

10. Are you completely dependent on God alone? Are you content in Him, knowing that you truly will lack nothing when you are under His care? Are there any areas that you need to bring under His authority?

11. Read John 10:1-18. Write your thoughts.

We'll end here for today. I can't believe it ... we are only on verse 1! We could spend weeks digging deeper and deeper into this verse alone. If you have time, do it! God bless you, ladies. See you tomorrow! And remember, your Shepherd "shall never slumber or sleep. The Lord is your Keeper." Psalm 121:4-5

Third Day

Meditate on your memory verse. Let the truth of this verse saturate your heart and mind.

1. Read Psalm 23:1-6 again. Verse 1 tells us we will lack nothing. According to verse 2, what two things does the Shepherd make sure the sheep has?

It's really amazing that David begins the Psalm with the aspect of "rest." Before we "do" anything for Christ, we must learn how to "rest" in Christ, which reminds us once again that God is the Shepherd that takes care of our needs. Can you rest in Him, knowing that your owner has it all under control?

Phillip Keller, author of the book, *A Shepherd Look at Psalm 23*, was a shepherd himself. He wrote, "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 from all fear**. Because of the social behavior within a flock, sheep will not lie down unless they are **free from friction with others of their kind**. If tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. Only when **free of these pests** can they relax. Lastly, sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be **free from hunger**." He goes on to say that "it is only the shepherd himself who can provide release from these anxieties. It all depends on the diligence of the owner."

2. Are you struggling with any of the four anxieties listed in the paragraph above? How can the presence of our Shepherd dispel those anxieties? (Sheep are quieted and reassured by the presence of the shepherd in the field.)

The basic needs of sheep are grass and water. The shepherd knows where the grassy meadows are, as well as the watering holes. He leads them to a place where they can rest, feed, and drink.

3. We have the same needs. Read the following verses and explain how Christ meets those needs.
 - a. John 6:35
 - b. Matthew 11:28
 - c. John 14:27

4. If sheep are not led to a good, clean water supply, they will drink from whatever water hole they find, regardless of the parasites or pollution that live in it. As believers, if we are not quenching our thirst in the Living Water of Christ, we can find ourselves drinking from polluted pools and rivers of the world. What can happen to our spiritual health if we graze and drink from sources other than Christ?

5. Read Psalm 23:3. Can you summarize this verse?

The term "restores my soul" is an expression open to more than one interpretation. It could be like the straying sheep in Isaiah 49:5, or more of a "conversion or repentance," or a spiritual renewal of some kind. He can "restore" us, or make us right, when we've fallen away. Restore means "to bring back." Philip Keller again gives us an amazing picture of what is known as a "cast" sheep. Listen to this: "A heavy, fat, or long-fleeced sheep will lie down comfortably in some little hollow or depression in the ground. It may roll on its side slightly to stretch out or relax. Suddenly, the center of gravity in the body shifts so that it turns on its back far enough that the feet no longer touch the ground. It may feel a sense of panic and start to paw frantically. Frequently this only makes things worse. It rolls over even further. Now it is quite impossible for it to regain its feet. In this position, gas builds up in the body, cutting off circulation to the legs, and often it is only a matter of a few hours before the sheep dies. The only one who can restore the sheep to health is the shepherd. He comes to the rescue, rolling the sheep over, rubbing its legs until the circulation returns, then picking it up and setting it on its feet again."

6. How do we sometimes find ourselves as "cast" sheep? How does this happen? What are some factors that may lead up to us "falling"? (Are you "cast" right now?)

7. How does the Good Shepherd restore us? Can you find an example from Scripture of someone being "restored"?

David tells us that the Good Shepherd "leads us in the path of righteousness." (vs 3) When left on their own, sheep will follow their own destructive behaviors and habits. They are not bright animals and tend to get lost easily. A good shepherd will have a deliberate, pre-determined plan to rotate the flock from one grazing ground to another. They are not left to make their own decisions or look for their own food. If they follow the shepherd, he will take them exactly where they should go. He knows the needs they have, and he wants to meet those needs. The Hebrew word for "path" means "a well-defined, well-worn trail." The sheep are always inclined to wander away, no matter how clear the trail may be.

Although this verse brings comfort to those who are dying, we need to remember that death, for the child of God, is not an end, but merely the door to higher ground and access to a more intimate union with Christ. Spurgeon said, "We go through the dark tunnel of death and merge into the light of immortality. We do not die; we do but sleep to wake in glory. Death is not the house but the porch, not the goal but the passage to it."

8. Are you following the Good Shepherd down the "road of righteousness"? Are you allowing Him to guide you, or are you trying to "blaze your own trail?"

Daily we make decisions that affect the lives of those we love. We need wisdom; we need to follow someone who knows the trails. It's crucial that we submit completely to the leadership of the Shepherd, even when we don't understand or can't see where He's taking us.

9. How is **His** reputation, **His** character, and **His** Name at stake?

10. In these first three verses, what spoke to you the most?

That's it for today. Make sure you are praying and asking for wisdom as you follow the trail. Look closely for His steps; listen closely for His voice. He wants to lead you down the path of righteousness!

Fourth Day

Spend some time on your memory verse. Can you call Him "Your" Shepherd?

1. Read Psalm 23:4-6. What is the main thought of verse 4?

For sheep to get to the higher ground, they must walk through the valleys. Boice writes, "This verse is used often to comfort those who are dying, and it is not used wrongly. However, this verse primarily speaks of the shepherd's ability to protect his sheep in moments of danger. The picture that David paints here is one of the seasonal passage from the lowlands, where sheep spend the winter, through the valleys to the high pastures, where they go in the summer. The valleys are places of rich pasture and much water, but they are also places of danger. Wild animals lurk in the broken canyon walls. Sudden storms may sweep along the valley floors. There may be floods. Since the sun does not shine into the valley very well, there really are shadows which at any moment may become shadows of death."

2. Notice that David says "walk through." What does that tell us?

Every mountain has its valleys. And the Shepherd knows exactly where He's taking his flock. He's already been there; He knows where to stop for water, for grass, for protection, and for rest. It's in the valleys that our character and our faith are often tested. It's where we learn and grow. We would much rather just stay on the mountaintop and forget about the scary valleys, but that's the place that we can be even closer to the Shepherd, as we trust His gentle leading. There is fruit in the valleys!

3. Why don't we have to be afraid? (Notice the change of pronouns from verse 3 to verse 4.) (Read Hebrews 13:5)

4. Are you in a valley right now? What would you call your "valley"? (Does knowing He will walk you "through" bring you comfort?)

5. How do you react to the valleys? How do you go through them? How do you cope with the trials that come your way?

According to Dave Roper, the rod is "A club which was used to drive off wild animals. It was never used on the sheep but was a heavy instrument used to protect the sheep from various predators. The rod became his main weapon of defense, for both himself and the sheep. It was, in fact, an extension of his own right arm. Ezekiel 20:37 refers to "passing under the rod." This was done to examine and count the sheep. It 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 had "passed under the rod" was one which had been counted and looked over with great care to make sure all was well with it. The staff was a slender pole with a little crook on the end. It was used to aid and guide the sheep gently into a new path or through some gate, etc. The crook could be hooked around the leg of a sheep to pull him from harm. Or it could be used as an instrument to direct, and occasionally to discipline the sheep, with taps on the side of the body."

6. After reading the above paragraph, how does this analogy bring you comfort and encouragement? How is discipline also able to bring us comfort?

7. Have you ever seen or experienced God's protection in your life? Have you felt Him guide you with His staff, or fight off the enemy with His rod?

8. Is there someone in your life that is walking through "a valley" right now? How can you specifically help them go through this?

We'll finish off our chapter tomorrow. This Psalm is so full of hope. Hope for now, hope for tomorrow, hope for the future. What confidence we can have in Christ if we truly allow Him to lead and guide us. Lord, please, use your staff on me today!

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

It has been said that verses 1-4 talk about our life here on earth, and 5-6 talk about our life in Heaven.

1. Read Psalm 23:1-6, focusing on verses 5-6. What is the main point of this section?

There are some who believe that David changes the metaphor in these verses from Shepherd to gracious host, from a shepherd guiding his sheep to a host welcoming a guest into his home. He prepares a great feast for us; He feeds, provides, leads, and protects, which is all the responsibility of a host.

Phillip Keller, on the other hand, sees this section as a continuation of the sheep analogy. He believes David is referring to a shepherd's preparation of the "mesa" or "high tablelands", which is the entire high summer range. It's where the sheep travel for the summer, but are sometimes difficult to reach. The shepherd goes beforehand to check it out, and then prepares it for his flock. He will sometimes go to survey the land even before the winter snow melts so he can be familiar with the area and find the best pasture to meet the needs of his flock. He takes salt, minerals, and other items that the sheep will need. He checks for weeds, predators, poisonous plants, etc. So in verse 5 when David speaks about "preparing the table," Keller believes He is still using the same metaphor. There are always enemies around the sheep. We are also under constant attack. The enemy

rages like a "roaring lion" (1 Peter 5:8). But the Shepherd is right there with us, always looking out for us. The closer we stay to our Shepherd, the safer we will be.

David says the Shepherd **"anoints his head with oil."** This statement can also fit in to both metaphors. It is an oriental custom to anoint guests with perfumed oil (Amos 6:6; Luke 7:46), and in our text, the host anoints with a very generous supply.

Keller points out that summer time is "fly time" for sheep. Summer tends to bring hoards of flies and other insects that present a serious problem. They nest in their noses and burrow into their flesh, causing the sheep to rub their heads against trees, rocks, or whatever else they can find. The insects throw the sheep into a fearful frenzy. A shepherd will apply an antidote to their heads and nose composed of oil, sulphur, and tar. He said that once the oil is applied, the sheep's behavior drastically changes. They calm down, begin to eat peacefully again, and lie down in the green pastures.

Okay, so isn't that one of the most interesting things you've ever heard? That makes these verses come alive! As believers, the Holy Spirit anoints us and gives us power for service! It is the Spirit alone who can give us the power to overcome the daily agitations and troubles in our lives. He is the one that changes our attitudes and brings us to a place of rest. And just as the shepherd had to continually apply the oil, we need a continual anointing of the Holy Spirit to live victoriously! (Ephesians 5:18) Wow ... what a great picture! May the Spirit cause our cups to runneth over!

2. Sheep are always surrounded by predators. Sometimes it's big ones, like wolves, other times they are bothered by the smaller things, such as flies. What kind of "predators" are you and I threatened by? What can we also be assured of?

3. According to verse 6, what will follow us forever?

Harry Ironside said, "Goodness and mercy are the two sheepdogs that help keep the sheep where they belong." Spurgeon used to call them "God's footmen," because in his day, when a wealthy man traveled, he was followed by two footmen on his coach. Their job was to smooth and prepare the way for him. When they stopped, they jumped out and opened the door for him.

They would go before him into the inn to make sure his room and dinner was ready. Goodness and mercy follow us just like these two footmen to smooth our journey home!

The word "**follow**" in verse 6 means to "pursue with the intention of overtaking."

4. How does this verse bring us comfort in times of trials or despair?
(How can this change our perspective?)

5. How does Psalm 23:6 relate to John 10:10?

6. Look at your life for a moment. Are you leaving behind "goodness and mercy"? Are you personally leaving behind great blessings?

7. According to the second part of verse 6, are the sheep happy with the quality of the Shepherd's care? How do we know that?

God's gracious care will continue forever, and I plan to remain "under His care." I can trust His leading and guiding; I can trust that He is in control and knows about every circumstance of my life. I have been "under the rod," and He has examined me. I am blessed to be able to dwell in His flock forever!

8. As we come to the end of this Psalm, why do you think it is so well-loved?

9. David had a lot of rough times in his life. He was on the run from Saul for a very long time. He was a hunted man. His son tried to overtake his throne. He had many enemies. But a phrase in verse 4 kept him going. What truth did he hold on to that caused him to hold fast to his faith in times of trouble?

10. "You are with me." How does this encourage you, today, in the situations you are facing? How does this Psalm encourage YOU, specifically?

Verses 4-5 remind us of God's presence, protection, and provision. This Psalm also shows us that the Shepherd takes care of our frailties, fears, and our future!

11. Read Isaiah 53:6 and Matthew 18:11-14. Do you feel like a "lost sheep" or have you "strayed away"? The Good Shepherd is looking to bring you back... Will you return to the flock today? He loves you and is grieving that you've been lost. Realize your sin, repent and turn from it, and return to Him.

If you have never been part of "God's flock," make today the day of your salvation! He wants to be YOUR Good Shepherd. He wants you to be part of His family and dwell in His house forever. Would you consider that? Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6) The only way to come into the fold is through faith in Jesus Christ. We are dying of sin (Romans 6:23). 1 John 1:9 tells us that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." After we confess our sins and ask for His forgiveness, He makes us "white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18). Paul said, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13)! If you have never accepted Christ, and can't say "The Lord is MY Shepherd", please talk to your leader. She'd love to explain the relationship you can have with the Shepherd in more detail!

Is the Lord YOUR Shepherd?

