

## “THE COMPLETENESS OF THE DIVINE SHEPHERD’S CARE”

TEXT: **Psalms 23:1-6 A Psalm of David.** The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (2) He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. (3) He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (4) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (5) Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. (6) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

INTRODUCTION: The image of the LORD as our shepherd brings to mind the care and compassion of God toward His creation. The Word of God uses the shepherd theme in several passages. Christ descends to mankind and demonstrates a shepherd’s heart in three ways:

✚ The Good Shepherd – **His Admiration** – (John 10:11, 14) – “good” meaning that which is morally beautiful and noble; giving admiration, respect and affection . . . *Giving his life for the sheep.*

**Six marks of Christ’s sheep** in John 10 –

- 1) They know their Shepherd;
- 2) They know His voice;
- 3) They hear him calling them each by their name;
- 4) They love Him;
- 5) They trust Him;
- 6) They follow Him

(Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David, Volume One* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company), page 362.)<sup>1</sup>

✚ The Great Shepherd – **His Attention** – (Hebrews 13:20): “great” meaning to give attentively, to look after their souls – (1 Peter 2:25). *The God of Peace who resurrected Christ from death.*

✚ The Chief Shepherd – **His Abundance** – (1 Peter 5:4): “Chief” not to be confused with the position given to men. His is the first in preeminence (i.e. Ezekiel 34:15): where he will feed the flock and cause them to lie down. Upon appearing some shall receive a crown of glory.

“It has been said that what the nightingale is among birds, that is this divine ode among the Psalms, for it has sung sweetly in the ear of many a mourner in his night of weeping, and has bidden him hope for a morning of joy . . . . Note the last words of the Psalm – ‘I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever;’ these are celestial notes, more fitted for the eternal mansions than for these dwelling places below the clouds. Oh that we may enter into the spirit of the Psalm as we read it, and then we shall experience the days of heaven upon the earth!” (Spurgeon, *Treasury of David, Volume One*, page 353)

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<sup>1</sup> A Note regarding no visible copyright for the Treasury of David; this seven volume "magnum opus", by Charles H. Spurgeon, was first published in weekly installments over a twenty-year span in the London Metropolitan Tabernacle's periodical, *The Sword and the Trowel*. As each section was completed it was published as a volume until the seventh and final volume was released in 1885. MacLean Publishing obtained permission to reprint.

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# The Book of Psalms

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## I. THE PERSONAL ATTENTION OF GOD.

*“The Lord is my Shepherd” (23:1a)*

The writer of the Psalm compares himself to the creature (Sheep) that is weak, defenseless, and sometimes foolish. The unregenerate must come to Christ before they can claim the Lord as their shepherd. The Child of God must maintain a place of submission and obedience to the Shepherd of our souls.

**A. The Glorious Character of God: “THE LORD . . .”**

1. Jehovah – self-existent, eternal God, Creator of the universe: (yeh-ho-vaw')
2. THE God of heaven takes a personal interest in me.
3. The ONLY wise and real God – “no other gods before Him.” Alpha and Omega.
4. Salvation comes “through Jesus Christ” – God incarnate.

**B. The Great Confidence in God: “IS . . .”** This states a definite fact. There is no maybe or hope so.

**C. The Grand Comparison of God: “MY SHEPHERD . . .”** [Career, Craft] – God being my Shepherd shows his great love and personal care for his own people as a keeper of sheep who knows and understands the needs of the flock.

## II. THE PROVISIONAL ASSURANCE OF GOD.

**A. My Contented Disposition – “I shall not want” (23:1b):** *I shall not lack for any good thing.* From Israel’s experience of God’s care in the wilderness, note [Nehemiah 9:21](#) *Yea, forty years didst thou sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing. . . .”* Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied (Proverbs 27:20). The greedy spirit of the wicked is never at ease and always wants for more, but the gracious spirit of the righteous dwells in **the palace of contentment.**

1. CONTENTMENT is a detachment from anxious concern about the outward features of your life (1 Timothy 6:6-8/ *godliness with contentment is great gain*; Proverbs 16:8/ *the proper view of unjust gain . . . better is little with righteousness than great revenues without right*; Matthew 6:25-34/*take no thought for your life . . . seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.*
2. CONTENTMENT is a power from on High to resist the distress of current circumstances (Philippians 4:11-13): Adjusting to circumstances means I can do all things (abound or be abased – handle victory or defeat) through Christ who is my strength.

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3. CONTENTMENT is being secure in the presence and control of God (Hebrews 13:5): As God's child, He will never leave us or forsake us. He is there when we are sailing through rough waters. He knows of our storm (Mark 4:35-41).
4. CONTENTMENT is mentally accepting God's provision with a proper attitude. James said to "count (consider, think) it all joy when you are surrounded with divers temptations," (Ecclesiastes 2:24).
5. CONTENTMENT is that which causes us to desire a proper relationship with our fellow Christians (Galatians 5:26): provoking and envying are not right actions here. We are not to be combative with others.
6. CONTENTMENT is that which looks above the circumstances and meditates on God's love (Psalm 119:22-23). Appendix B

**B. My Comforting Deliverance** – "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (23:4): *The valley of deep darkness or death's dark vale.*

1. "Walking" speaks of the steady advance of the soul that moves along with God. The Christian walk may lead through various types of experiences but He will never leave nor forsake us.
2. "Shadow of death" – there is no fear in death for the righteous. One can walk right through a shadow with no hindrance. The Christian should be at peace regarding the passing from this life to the next. Paul remarked, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord," (2 Corinthians 5:1-10). Death, for the Child of God is a passage from mortal life into immortality with God. (*Above*)
3. "Fear no evil." **Fear is "a distressing emotion aroused by impending danger, evil, pain, competition, etc., whether the threat is real or imagined; the [agitated] feeling or condition of being afraid."**<sup>2</sup> *Fear associates with the intimidation of an adversary causing us to freeze up, hesitate or retreat.*<sup>3</sup>

Strong's Hebrew Dictionary has יָרֵא (H3372) pronounced yaw-ray'—in Psalm 23:4. *Yārē'* means to be afraid or to be frightened. The corresponding Greek word is φόβος (G5401) pronounced fob'-os—along with its derivatives—the most commonly used word for fear in the NT (47 times); used both for **good and bad kinds of fear**; From a primary φόβομαι *phebomai* (to be put in fear). Its derivative φοβέω – *phobeō* (G5399) Pronounced *fob-eh'-o* (occurs 93 times) is the word from which we transliterate as "phobia." From (G5401); to frighten, that is, (passively) to be alarmed; by analogy to be in awe of, that is, revere: - be (+ sore) afraid, fear (exceedingly), reverence.

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<sup>2</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary on dictionary.com.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Kohlenberger, editor, *The Expanded Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words; a Special Edition* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), page 414.

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## **What kind of fear is a good fear that comes from God?**

Paul told Timothy, “God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). This verse turns our head in curiosity remembering what the Scriptures say about fear. Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Exodus 23:27 says, “I will send my fear before thee, and will destroy all the people to whom thou shalt come, and I will make all thine enemies turn their backs unto thee.”

With verses such as these, which clearly indicate that fear can have its origin in God, how does one explain 2 Timothy 1:7 – “God hath not given us the spirit of fear?” The answer is found in an understanding of the Greek word that is translated “fear.”

When Paul assures Timothy that his attitude of fear did not originate with God, he used the Greek word **δειλία**—*deilia* (da-lee'-ah): timidity, faithless. In this exact form, this is the only time *deilia* occurs in the NT. However, other closely related words appear in the Greek NT. The related words are *deiliao* (John 14:27) and *deilos* (Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:40; and Revelation 21:8).

*Deiliao* is translated “let it be afraid” in John 14:27, records the words of Jesus: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” The Lord didn’t want His followers to be cowards as they contemplated what it would be like without Him on earth. They had no need to be timid or cowardly, because He promised to be with them always, even though he would be personally absent. Each of us has the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit.

None of these Greek words in this family are used in a positive way in the NT. All of them denote the sense of cowardice. Therefore, Paul was able to assure Timothy that this kind of fear does not come from the Lord. It is one thing to be afraid when there is a justifiable cause, but it is quite another thing to let fear control one’s entire life. This is cowardice and does not originate with God. Some more modern translations use the word “timidity” to render the Greek word *deilia* in 2 Timothy 1:7. Our English word “timid” is derived from a Latin word which means “to fear.”

Above all, the Christian should not be afraid of new circumstances, for he serves “the Christ of every crisis.” Certainly, the child of God will not be without fear when there is reason to fear; but he [should] not let fear dominate his life. His confidence will be in God.

Note the OT example of the Children of Israel at Kadesh Barnea, where the 12 spies were deployed by Moses to spy out the land of Canaan. When they returned, 10 spies gave a negative report reflecting a fear that would cause them not to advance into the region. These spies said, “We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we” (Numbers 13:31). Those ten spies were concentrating on the circumstances of the opposing enemy rather than the greatness of their God. Joshua and Caleb trusted God and His ability to fulfill His promises. They concentrated more on God than on the circumstances. In verse 30, Caleb responded, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.” By the way, 45 years later, Caleb had not changed his mind regarding the situation (Joshua 14:6-13). Joshua divided the land and he got his mountain and was able to possess the land.

The attitude of the 10 spies did not originate with God, because He does not give us a spirit of such cowardice. Their fear hampered their belief in the power and protection of God.

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Often the reason for our reluctance about doing God's will is that we think more about the circumstances or possible reaction of others than about God. When this happens, we are yielding to an unholy spirit of skepticism which evidences our weakness as did those ten spies. This kind of fear does not come from above.

- Adapted from Harold J. Berry's book, *Gems from the Original*, Chapter 34, (Good News Broadcasting, 1972), pp 132-135.

## **Fearing no evil . . . .**

- a. Overriding the distress signal in your brain in anticipation of danger; taking your refuge in God; a calm and confidence in the spiritual truth that God is with me.
- b. Not fearing the Evil One (Galatians 1:4; James 4:7). Matthew 6:13 in the AMP (cf. GW, ISV, RV, NIV, NLT, HCSB, NET, ASV) translate this phrase to include being delivered from **"the evil one."**<sup>4</sup>
- c. Death is the last defeated foe (1 Corinthians 15:55): O death, where is thy sting.
- d. The fear of being left alone. Jesus promised his abiding presence. We are to be secure in life and in death. Hebrews 13:5 says that He will not leave us or forsake us.

## **C. My Continual Dwelling – "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (23:6)**

1. This expresses the longing of the soul for a sense of the continual presence of God and the realization of constant communion with Him.
2. "Forever" – is the status of a son relationship. When we are adopted into the family of God, we enter into the rights and privileges of SONSHIP.
3. Dwelling in the LORD's "house" (i.e., the sanctuary in Jerusalem) was a picture of enjoying full communion and fellowship with the Lord. The Amplified Old Testament translates this clause: *"I will dwell in the 'presence' of the LORD forever."*

"I will dwell in the house," **ושבתי** veshabti, "and I shall Return to the house

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<sup>4</sup> **Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers:** *Deliver us from evil.*—The Greek may grammatically be either neuter or masculine, "evil" in the abstract, or the "evil one" as equivalent to the "devil." The whole weight of the usage of New Testament language is in favor of the latter meaning. In our Lord's own teaching we have the "evil one" in [Matthew 13:19](#); [Matthew 13:38](#); [John 17:15](#) (probably); in St. Paul's ([Ephesians 6:16](#); [2Thessalonians 3:3](#)), in St. John's ([1John 2:13-14](#); [1John 3:12](#); [1John 5:18-19](#)) this is obviously the only possible interpretation. [Romans 12:9](#), and possibly [John 17:15](#), are the only instances of the other. Added to this, **there is the thought just adverted to, which leads us to connect our Lord's words with His own experience.** The prayer against temptation would not have been complete without reference to the Tempter whose presence was felt in it. We may lawfully pray to be spared the trial. If it comes, there is yet room for the prayer, "Deliver us from the power of him who is our enemy and Thine." **JFB commented** - As the expression "from evil" may be equally well rendered "from the evil one," a number or superior critics think the devil is intended, especially from its following close upon the subject of "temptation."

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of the Lord,” forever, ימים לארך leorech yamim, “for length of days.” During the rest of my life, I shall not be separated from God’s house, nor from God’s ordinances; and shall at last dwell with him in glory. These two last verses seem to be the language of a priest returned from captivity to live in the temple, and to serve God the rest of his life; [presented as a future condition].  
– Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible

## III. THE PROVIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE OF GOD.

The Psalmist, David begins by speaking about God (e.g. He makes, He leads, He renews, He guides), then transitions to speaking to God (e.g. You protect, You prepare, You anoint).

**Seven times** in this psalm God gives his divine assistance to man. The 7 expressions are broken up into four and three – **Four** is the number signifying God’s creative works on earth; the number of *material completeness*. **Three** is the number of testimony and witness. It stands for that which is solid, real, substantial, and complete; synonymous with the resurrection of Christ, and divine perfection.

### SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS . . .

We have seen that where there are **two**, though there is still **difference**, this difference may be in a good sense. **It may be for oppression or hindrance, or it may be for association and mutual help** (Ruth 4:11): Regarding Rachel and Leah, “two did build up the house of Israel.” (E.g. First Adam, Second Adam; Esau and Jacob; Cain and Abel; Earth marred by sin, a new heaven and a new earth will be created.<sup>5</sup>

The number **six** has to do with man destitute of God, without Him and without Christ; the number of labor and secular completeness.<sup>6</sup>

**Four statements in Psalm 23 address how God supplies the needs of His children and three regard how God demonstrates a testimony of His protection. Seven is spiritual perfection.**

### A. THE STRENGTH OF THE SHEPHERD.

- HIS AMPLE PROVISION** – “He maketh me lie down in green pastures” (23:2a): Our minds being stayed on God and His word will be green pastures of **rest** and **refreshment**. (He makes, He leads, He renews, He guides)

**Psalms 100:3** Know ye that the LORD he *is* God: *it is* he *that* hath made us, and not we ourselves; *we are* his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

<sup>5</sup> E. W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture, Its Supernatural Design and Spiritual Significance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1984 reprinted from the original date of 1894), pages 92, 104-105, 107, and 123. The number **two** is the number of *division*; “offering another choice or option,” (Jeremiah 18:1-4); illustrating *difference*. **One** is a word for beginning, unity and sufficiency. With reference to God it excludes all idolatry.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., page 150.



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\* The meditation and contemplation of the truth of God's word can never be exhausted. He gives food for the soul.

**Phillip Keller**<sup>7</sup> in his book, "*A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*," observes, "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 fear.
- Because of the social behavior within the flock, sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind.
- If tormented by flies and parasites, sheep will not lie down. Only when free from 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.

2. **HIS ABIDING PRESENCE** – "*He leadeth me beside the still waters*" (23:2b): The waters of a restful place which also has an adequate water supply.

- a. *Waters* reflect the influence and grace of His Spirit. The influence of the Holy Spirit should be seen in the life of every believer. (Isaiah 26:3) Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose* mind *is* stayed on *thee*: because he trusteth in thee.
- b. The Psalmist moves from quiet contemplation to action . . . The powerful presence of the Spirit creates a thirst and drawing – "He leads." (Cf. Philippians 4:6-7; Romans 15:13).

3. **HIS ABSOLUTE PRESERVATION** – "*He restoreth my soul*" (23:3a)

- a. The Holy Spirit works in *renewing* and inwardly *renovating* the soul. In the NT, the Greek word ἀνακαίνωσις (*anakainōsis*) occurs only twice . . .
  - Romans 12:1-2 – "renewing of the mind"
  - Titus 3:5 – "renewing of the Holy Ghost"
- b. The Holy Spirit revives, sanctifies and *strengthens* the soul.
  - He revives the sorrowful (Cf. Eph. 6:10-11; Isa. 40:31)
  - He sanctifies the sinful
- c. The Holy Spirit restores and causes one to return to a former condition (Psalm 28:7): "*My heart trusted in Him and I am helped:*"

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<sup>7</sup> Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23: An Inspiring and Insightful Guide to one of the Best-Loved Bible Passages* (NYC: New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 1970), page 23. (1) Keller lives in East Africa, surrounded with native herders much like their counterpart in the Middle East. (2) For 8 years, Keller made his living as a sheep owner and sheep rancher having first-hand experience in every aspect of sheep management. (introduction, x-xi)

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## 4. HIS ALMIGHTY PATTERN – “He leadeth me in paths of righteousness” (23:3b):

♪ Guide me O, Thou Great Jehovah (Appendix D, page 25 for words).

a. When we walk with the Lord, we must be in complete agreement with Him. “How can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3)

b. God will not tempt or lead us into paths of sin. (James 1:13):

*God cannot be tempted with evil neither tempteth he any man. Let us follow after His holiness, (Psa. 37:23; 32:8; John 8:12; Isa. 30:21).*

*Deuteronomy 32:4 He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

c. We do not pick and choose commands we wish to follow while disregarding those commands which may seem more restrictive. Following His pattern is not an unfair or unrealistic comparison but requires from us absolute surrender. “Be ye holy as I am holy.”

## B. THE SECURITY OF THE SHEPHERD.

At this point in the Psalm, David breaks into a prayerful conversation as he possibly reflects upon God’s provision and mercy. As stated above, he moves from speaking about God into speaking to God (recording part of his prayer).

1. **You protect** us from our adversaries (23:4b): **Thou art with me . . .**

“Thy rod and staff . . . comfort me” (A strong impulse of the mind): to pity or console another. So in the midst of dangers these symbols of the shepherd’s might and affection banish fear: “they are my [our] consolation.”<sup>8</sup>

The shepherd’s **rod** (a cudgel<sup>9</sup> worn at the belt) to beat off attacking animals, and his **staff** (walking stick) kept the sheep away from physical dangers such as precipices.<sup>10</sup> It may be that the Palestinian shepherd carried only one crook, which he used as both a rod and a staff.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, God comes to the defense of His people when our spiritual enemies attack us. He also prevents us from getting into spiritually dangerous situations that would result in our destruction. (cf. Matt. 6:13) – Dr. Thomas Constable

<sup>8</sup> George A. Buttrick, General Editor, *The Interpreter’s Bible, Volume IV: Psalms and Proverbs* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1955), page 127.

<sup>9</sup> **A Cudgel** is a short thick club used as a weapon; similar to a night stick.

<sup>10</sup> See Thomas A. Golding, “The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible, Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:650 (April-June 2006):158-75.

<sup>11</sup> Leupold, p. 213.



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"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."<sup>12</sup>

"Just as the rod of God is emblematic of the Word of God, so that staff of God is symbolic of the Spirit of God."<sup>13</sup> *It was the rod of God's Word that Christ, our Good Shepherd, used in his own encounter with that serpent – Satan* (Phillip Keller, 91). The staff is used for the care and management of sheep.

- a. These instruments speak of the **government and regulation** of God.
- b. His is our shield and defender: a wall of protection. He is still in control and will supply; **comfort and protection** for his children.
- c. God provides leadership (His will) for all of his children. He gives **guidance and direction**.

- 2. **You prepare** a table of blessing in the face of our enemies. The hand of God protects us so that nothing can touch us unless God allows it. **Thou** *preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies* (23:5a). The main thought of verse 5 is the welcome and the provision at the end of the day. "The enemies are outside glaring at the sheep but helpless: the sheep are within and safe."<sup>14</sup> They are safe in the fold with the shepherd as the guardian.

**ILLUSTRATION:** This verse was declared to have been a favorite text and recitation in London at Communion services during WW II, when bombing was at its peak; even in one instance when a part of the church was hit, while the service continued. In normal times it conveys the living thought of the table of strengthening set for our partaking at times when our private spiritual war is at this most bitter, suggesting that when we are finding the going hardest, we should at that very time repair to the [Shepherd's] table and receive at his hands. Our enemies slink away and become poor things when we resolutely sit down with our host.

— The Interpreter's Bible, Volume 4, page 128

- 3. **You place** oil upon us; [An old version translation] *thou hast my head with balm refreshed*. The Shepherd cares for the sheep by attending to their wounds and healing oils applied. **Thou** *anointest my head with oil* (23:5b)

## IV. THE PUBLIC ACCLAIM OF GOD

"For His name sake"

- A. We walk in paths of **righteousness** to be holy. This is done for His name sake. Holiness is not selfish.
- B. We are the **reflection** of God to the world. Let your light so shine before men . . . that they glorify God in heaven (**Matthew 5:16**)

<sup>12</sup> Keller, p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Buttrick, page 128.

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- C. The name of God encapsulates the **reputation** of God. He leads, restores, and makes his sheep to lie down for His name's sake. God has a reputation of faithfulness and righteousness dealings with His people. "Both the act and its purpose as described in v. 3b are important to the image of the divine shepherd (Cf. walking in the "good paths" of justice and righteousness [Proverbs 2:9; 4:11])."<sup>15</sup>

## V. THE POWERFUL APPLICATION OF GOD.

*"My cup runneth over."*

A life of walking with God will manifest blessings and joy that are flowing over the brim of the vessel. This will be seen by others. (**2 Peter 1:5-9**): *"If these things be in you and abound." So satisfied with the thought of eternity in God's presence one can only say, my heart overflows.*

## VI. THE PROMISED ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

*"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow men all the days of my life." (This speaks of God's Character which we see as communicable attributes to mankind.)*

- A. **His Care** – Goodness – the attribute of God whereby He manifests his care and concern for the Christian. "The goodness of God means that God is the final standard of good, and that all that God is and does is worthy of approval."<sup>16</sup>

**Romans 8:31-32** What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? (**32**) He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

**John 16:27** For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

- B. **His Compassion** – Mercy – The moral attribute of God whereby he manifests compassion for the sinner. "God's mercy means God's goodness toward those in misery and distress. God's grace means God's goodness toward those who deserve only punishment. God's patience means God's goodness in withholding of punishment toward those who sin over a period of time."<sup>17</sup> We should imitate God's mercy when having to deal with others.

**Exodus 34:5-8** And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. (**6**) And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,** (**7**) Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), page 114-115.

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), page 197.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

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third and to the fourth *generation*. (8) And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.

**Psalms 103:8** The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

**Ephesians 2:4-7** But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (6) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: (7) That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

**Romans 5:8** But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

**2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

## VII. THE PRESENCE AFFIRMED WITH GOD ETERNALLY.

Repeat from previous point: II, C, 3, page 5.

“I will dwell in the house,” ושבתי veshabti, “and I shall Return to the house of the Lord,” forever, ימים לארך leorech yamim, “for length of days.” During the rest of my life, I shall not be separated from God’s house, nor from God’s ordinances; and shall at last dwell with him in glory. *These two last verses seem to be the language of a priest returned from captivity to live in the temple, and to serve God the rest of his life – Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible.*

**CONCLUSION:** The completeness of our divine Shepherd’s care will sustain us until we are eternally in His presence. Psalm 23 states the relationship between God and His children temporally when the writer reminds us “good and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,” and then gives the security of the eternal blessedness of stating, “and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

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*“Be content with what you have, never with what you are.”*

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# The Book of Psalms

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**ILLUSTRATION (Sheep):** Dr. Andrew Bonar (Scottish minister, 1810-1892), told how, in the Highlands of Scotland, a sheep would often wander off into the rocks and get into places that they couldn't get out of. The grass on these mountains is very sweet and the sheep like it, and they will jump down ten or twelve feet, and then they can't jump back again, and the shepherd hears them bleating in distress. They may be there for days, until they have eaten all the grass. The shepherd will wait until they are so faint they cannot stand, and then they will put a rope around him, and he will go over and pull that sheep up out of the jaws of death. "Why don't they go down there when the sheep first gets there?" I asked. "Ah!" He said, "they are so very foolish they would dash right over the precipice and be killed if they did!" And that is the way with men; they won't go back to God till they have no friends and have lost everything. If you are a wanderer I tell you that the Good Shepherd will bring you back the moment you have given up trying to save yourself and are willing to let Him save you His own way.

*Moody's Anecdotes*, pp. 70-71.

**ILLUSTRATION:** (Contentment): Philip Parham tells the story of a rich industrialist who was disturbed to find a fisherman sitting lazily beside his boat. "Why aren't you out there fishing?" he asked.

"Because I've caught enough fish for today," said the fisherman.

"Why don't you catch more fish than you need?" the rich man asked.

"What would I do with them?"

"You could earn more money," came the impatient reply, "and buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could purchase nylon nets, catch even more fish, and make more money. Soon you'd have a fleet of boats and be rich like me."

The fisherman asked, "Then what would I do?"

"You could sit down and enjoy life," said the industrialist.

"What do you think I'm doing now?" the fisherman replied as he looked placidly out to sea.

*Our Daily Bread*, May 18, 1994.

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## DR. THOMAS CONSTABLE'S NOTE'S ON PSALM 23

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### PSALM 23

David reflected on God's many blessings to him and concluded that God would continue to be faithful to him and grant him fellowship in the future. This is a psalm of trust and confidence in God's goodness in the present and in the future. It is a good one to read when we are afraid.

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*"Depth and strength underlie the simplicity of this psalm. Its peace is not escape; its contentment is not complacency: there is readiness to face deep darkness and imminent attack, and the climax reveals a love which homes towards no material goal but to the Lord Himself."<sup>18</sup>*

Delitzsch believed that he found reasons in this psalm to believe that David wrote it during the period of Absalom's rebellion.<sup>19</sup> Expositors have proposed theories of two, three, or four persons in the psalm, but most, including myself, hold to only one: the shepherd.<sup>20</sup> Leupold outlined the psalm as the Lord (Shepherd) providing rest and guidance (vv. 2-3), protection (v. 4), food (v. 5), and fellowship with God (v. 6b).<sup>21</sup>

Is this psalm messianic? Jesus claimed to be the "Good Shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). Perhaps He was alluding to the Good Shepherd (God) in this psalm. On the other hand, there are no direct quotations of this psalm in the New Testament that link Jesus with the shepherd in this psalm. Leupold concluded:

"The psalm is not Messianic, but it suggests thoughts that point in the direction of the Messiah."<sup>22</sup>

Several expositors have compared Jesus to the Good Shepherd in Psalm 22 (cf. John 10:11), the Great Shepherd in Psalm 23 (cf. Heb. 13:20), and the Chief Shepherd in Psalm 24 (cf. 1 Pet. 5:4).

"To put it succinctly, in Psalm 22 we see the cross, in Psalm 23 the crook (the Shepherd's crook), and in Psalm 24 the crown (the King's crown). In Psalm 22 Christ is the Savior; in Psalm 23 He is the Satisfier; in Psalm 24 He is the Sovereign. In Psalm 22 He is the foundation; in Psalm 23 He is the manifestation; in Psalm 24 He is the expectation. In Psalm 22 He dies; in Psalm 23 He is living; in Psalm 24 He is coming. Psalm 22 speaks of the past; Psalm 23 speaks of the present; and Psalm 24 speaks of the future. In Psalm 22 He gives His life for the sheep; in Psalm 23 He gives His love to the sheep; in Psalm 24 He gives us light when He shall appear. What a wonderful picture we have of Christ in these three psalms!"<sup>23</sup>

## **1. God as leader 23:1-4**

23:1 David compared Yahweh to a shepherd as he reviewed His blessings on his life (cf. 28:9; 80:1). This was a familiar role for David who had been a shepherd of sheep as a youth and who later became a shepherd of God's people as their king. Other ancient Near Eastern kings also described themselves as the shepherds of their nations.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kidner, p. 109.

<sup>19</sup> Delitzsch, 1:329.

<sup>20</sup> See Leupold, pp. 208-9, for discussion.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>23</sup> McGee, 2:711.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., King Hammurabi. See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, p. 164.

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Even some pagan gods were spoken of as shepherds.<sup>25</sup> Isaiah later referred to Messiah as a shepherd (Isa. 40:11). This title was one that Jesus Christ claimed for Himself (John 10:14) and that the New Testament writers used for Him (Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4).

"Whatever be the believer's position, he is even now under the pastoral care of Jehovah ["The LORD is my shepherd"]."<sup>26</sup>

"The sweetest word of the whole is that monosyllable, My."<sup>27</sup>

"Sheep do not 'just take care of themselves' as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care."<sup>28</sup>

". . . the lot in life of any particular sheep depended on the type of man who owned it."<sup>29</sup>

As David's shepherd, the Lord provided all David needed.<sup>30</sup>

"More is implied than is expressed, not only, I shall not want, but, 'I shall be supplied with whatever I need; and, if I have not everything I desire, I may conclude it is either not fit for me or not good for me, or I shall have it in due time.'"<sup>31</sup>

23:2a As his shepherd, God provided David with spiritual rest and nourishment. Food for the soul is the Word of God (Heb. 5:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:2) that the Lord's under-shepherds are responsible to give His people (Ezek. 34:1-10; John 21:15-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2).

"It is significant that to be at rest there must be a definite sense of freedom from fear, tension, aggravations and hunger."<sup>32</sup>

". . . whenever I came into view and my presence attracted their attention, the sheep quickly forgot their foolish rivalries and stopped their fighting. The shepherd's presence made all the difference in their behavior."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 388

<sup>26</sup> Spurgeon, 1:107.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Phillip Keller, A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, pp. 20-21.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>30</sup> See Thomas A. Golding, "The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible, Part 1," Bibliotheca Sacra 163:649 (January-March 2006):18-28.

<sup>31</sup> Henry, p. 600.

<sup>32</sup> Keller, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 40.



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"Green pastures did not just happen by chance. Green pastures were the product of tremendous labor, time, and skill in land use. Green pastures were the result of clearing rough, rocky land; of tearing out brush and roots and stumps; of deep plowing and careful soil preparation; of seeding and planting special grains and legumes; of irrigating with water and husbanding with care the crops of forage that would feed the flocks." <sup>34</sup>

All this the Good Shepherd does for His sheep.

23:2b-3a The Lord also provides spiritual refreshment and restoration. These benefits come to us as we take advantage of God's provision of the water of life, which is the living and written Word of God (John 4:10-14; Eph. 5:26). God renews our strength and cleanses us through these instruments.

"A 'cast' sheep is a very pathetic sight. Lying on its back, its feet in the air, it flays away frantically struggling to stand up, without success. Sometimes it will bleat a little for help, but generally it lies there lashing about in frightened frustration." <sup>35</sup>

"During my own years as a keeper of sheep, perhaps some of the most poignant memories are wrapped around the commingled anxiety of keeping a count of my flock and repeatedly saving and restoring cast sheep." <sup>36</sup>

"Many people have the idea that when a child of God falls, when he is frustrated and helpless in a spiritual dilemma, God becomes disgusted, fed-up and even furious with him. This simply is not so. One of the great revelations of the heart of God given to us by Christ is that of Himself as our Shepherd. He has the same identical sensations of anxiety, concern and compassion for cast men and women as I had for cast sheep." <sup>37</sup>

23:3b God also gives His sheep guidance in the proper path of life so we do not wander aimlessly. He does so in part for the sake of His own reputation, as One who has promised to direct His people.

"A commonly held, but serious misconception about sheep is that they can just 'get along anywhere.' The truth is quite the reverse. No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detailed direction, than do sheep." <sup>38</sup>

"The greatest single safeguard which a shepherd has in handling his flock is to keep them on the move." <sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 64. Paragraph divisions omitted.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 72.

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"As soon as the point was reached where I felt the maximum benefit for both sheep and land was not being met, the sheep were moved to a fresh field. On the average this meant they were put onto new ground almost every week."<sup>40</sup>

23:4 Protection is the fourth blessing for which David gave God praise. The promises of the Lord's presence assure us of His protection in times of danger when we fear (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

"Observe that it is not walking in the valley, but through the valley. We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. . . . And then, it is not 'the valley of death,' but 'the valley of the shadow of death,' for death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Someone has said that when there is a shadow there must be light somewhere, and so there is. Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path; let us then rejoice that there is light beyond.

"Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not, therefore, be afraid."<sup>41</sup>

"It is said, when a bee has left its sting in anyone, it has no more power to hurt. Death has left its sting in the humanity of Christ and has no more power to harm His child."<sup>42</sup>

"Most of us do not want valleys in our lives. We shrink from them with a sense of fear and foreboding. Yet in spite of our worst misgivings God can bring great benefit and lasting benediction to others through those valleys. Let us not always try to avoid the dark things, the distressing days. They may well prove to be the way of greatest refreshment to ourselves and those around us."<sup>43</sup>

"Let come what may. Storms may break about me, predators may attack, and the rivers of reverses may threaten to inundate me. But because He is in the situation with me, I shall not fear."<sup>44</sup>

The shepherd's **rod** (a cudgel worn at the belt) beat off attacking animals, and his **staff** (walking stick) kept the sheep away from physical dangers such

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>41</sup> Spurgeon, 1:110.

<sup>42</sup> Viscount Powers court, quoted in *ibid.*, 1:112.

<sup>43</sup> Keller, p. 87.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

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as precipices.<sup>45</sup> It may be that the Palestinian shepherd carried only one crook, which he used as both a rod and a staff.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, God comes to the defense of His people when our spiritual enemies attack us. He also prevents us from getting into spiritually dangerous situations that would result in our destruction (cf. Matt. 6:13).

"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."<sup>47</sup>

"Just as the rod of God is emblematic of the Word of God, so that staff of God is symbolic of the Spirit of God."<sup>48</sup>

## 2. **God as provider 23:5**

In this verse, David described the Shepherd (God) in the role of a host. As a gracious host, God provides hospitality for His people. He supplies us with what we need and desire lavishly, and He does so, not by removing us from the presence of our spiritual enemies, but in their presence.

". . . 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."<sup>49</sup>

". . . just before the sheep arrive [on the mesa] 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."<sup>50</sup>

"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."<sup>51</sup>

In the ancient East, a thoughtful host would welcome an honored guest into the protection of his home by pouring some oil on his head (cf. 45:7; 92:10; 133:2; Amos 6:6; Luke 7:46). This refreshed and soothed a weary traveler. Anointing with oil in Scripture pictured God's

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<sup>45</sup> See Thomas A. Golding, "The Imagery of Shepherding in the Bible, Part 2," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163:650 (April-June 2006):158-75.

<sup>46</sup> Leupold, p. 213.

<sup>47</sup> Keller, p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

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bestowal of His Holy Spirit on the believer (Exod. 40:9-16; Lev. 8:10-12; 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13; 1 Kings 1:39; et al.).<sup>52</sup>

"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 take us with him from the home ranch 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."<sup>53</sup>

"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, sulphur 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."<sup>54</sup>

"Only one application of oil, sulphur 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."<sup>55</sup>

"Perhaps it should be mentioned that in Palestine the old remedy for this disease was olive oil mixed with sulphur and spices."<sup>56</sup>

David's "cup" symbolized his lot in life that overflowed with abundant blessings. A "cup" is often a metonymy for what is in it (cf. Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).

### 3. *The believer's response 23:6*

David realized that God's good loyal love (Heb. *hesed*) would pursue him throughout his life. To follow here does not mean to bring up the rear but to pursue vigorously (cf. 83:15).<sup>57</sup> The phrase "goodness and lovingkindness" (NASB) or "goodness and love" (NIV) is a figure of speech (*hendiadys*) that we could render "good lovingkindness."

"Just as God's goodness and mercy flow to me all the days of my life, so goodness and mercy should follow me, should be left behind me, as a legacy to others, wherever I may go."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>53</sup> Keller, p. 114.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>57</sup> Kidner, p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> Keller, pp. 130-31.

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Dwelling in the LORD's "house" (i.e., the sanctuary in Jerusalem) was a picture of enjoying full communion and fellowship with the Lord. The Amplified Old Testament translates this clause: "I will dwell in the 'presence' of the LORD forever."

"Yet it is not the place but the vitality of the relationship which transforms."<sup>59</sup>

The word translated "dwell" in the Hebrew text implies dwelling after returning there, rather than dwelling already being there. Evidently, David was not in the sanctuary when he composed this psalm, but looked forward to returning to it again and often.

"It is . . . unlikely that Psalm 23 refers to an afterlife in God's presence, though verses 4 and 6 in particular have sometimes been so understood. Verse 4 refers to the divine shepherd guiding his lamb (the psalmist) through a dangerous dark valley (a symbol for the danger posed by his enemies, cf. v. 5). In verse 6 the psalmist expressed his confidence that he would have access to God's presence (the 'house of the Lord' refers to the earthly Tabernacle or Temple; cf. Judg. 19:18; 1 Sam. 1:7, 24; 2 Sam. 12:20; 1 Kings 7:12, 40, 45, 51) throughout his lifetime. NIV's 'forever' translates a Hebrew phrase ('orek yamim, lit. 'length of days'), which, when used elsewhere of men, usually refers to a lengthy period of time (such as one's lifetime), not eternity (cf. Deut. 30:20; Job 12:12; Ps. 91:16; Prov. 3:2, 16; Lam. 5:20). . . .

"While the psalmist may not have been speaking specifically of an afterlife in God's presence, in the progress of revelation his words come to express such a hope for God's people, who now understand the full ramifications of the psalm's affirmation that God protects His own. In the same way the statements in Psalms 17:15; 49:15; and 73:24 become, on the lips of a Christian, a testimony of faith in God's final vindication of the righteous, even beyond the grave."<sup>60</sup>

The Lord's goodness to His people, as seen in His leading and providing for us, should motivate us to appreciate our security in Him and to abide in fellowship with Him.<sup>61</sup>

If you anticipate or are presently doing pastoral ministry, try putting your name in the place of the shepherd as you read this psalm. This exercise will help you evaluate your effectiveness.

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## APPENDIX B

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<sup>59</sup> Brueggemann, p. 156.

<sup>60</sup> Chisholm, "A Theology . . .," pp. 287, 288.

<sup>61</sup> An excellent brief booklet (61 pages) to give someone in need of the comfort spoken of in this psalm is Haddon Robinson's, Psalm Twenty-Three. See also Swindoll, pp. 67-82; and Allen, Lord of . . ., pp. 71-86.

## God's plan for contentment

Although many Scriptures teach about the dangers of material riches, God's Word does not teach that poverty is God's alternative. God wants us to understand that money is a tool to use in accomplishing His plan through us. If we are to find true contentment we must establish some basic guidelines.

1. **Establish a reasonable standard of living.** It is important to develop a lifestyle based on conviction, not circumstances. God will assign Christians at every economic level. On whatever level He has placed you, live within the economic parameters established and supplied by Him. Just having abundance is not a sign of God's blessings. Satan can easily duplicate any worldly riches. God's abundance is without sorrow and is for the purpose of bringing others to Christ.
2. **Establish a habit of giving.** Along with the tithe, God desires that every Christian provide for the needs of others through the giving of offerings, gifts, and personal involvement.
3. **Establish priorities.** Many Christians are discontented—not because they aren't doing well but because others are doing better. Too often Christians look at what they don't have and become dissatisfied and discontented, rather than thanking God for what they do have and being content with what He has supplied.
4. **Develop a thankful attitude.** It is remarkable that in America we could ever think that God has failed us materially. That attitude is possible only when we allow Satan to convince us to compare ourselves to others. The primary defense against this attitude is praise to God. Satan uses lavishness and waste to create discontent and selfish ambition. Thankfulness is a state of mind, not an accumulation of assets. Until Christians can truly thank God for what they have and be willing to accept God's provision, contentment will never be possible.
5. **Reject a fearful spirit.** One of the most effective tools used by Satan against Christians is the question, "What if?" Dedicated Christians get trapped into hoarding because they fear the "What if?" of retirement, disability, unemployment, economic collapse, and so on. Although God wants us to be concerned about these things, when fears dictate to the point that giving to God is hindered, foolish risks are assumed, and worry seems to control every decision, contentment is impossible.
6. **Seek God's will.** "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8).
7. **Stand up to fear.** "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).
8. **Trust God's promise.** "The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7).

Contentment is so far removed from many Christians that it seems that they will never be able to find it or be at peace. However, contentment is not something that must be



searched for and found. It is an attitude of the heart. Once the attitude has been modified and all has been transferred to God, contentment will be evident.

(This article was adapted from Larry Burkett via Crown Financial Services and Focus on the Family)

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## APPENDIX C

### THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ANXIETY AND FEAR

**By: Young Diggers, an Australian Forces support group for those who struggle with stresses and PTSD.**

#### **What is fight or flight response?**

This is the body's response to perceived threat or danger. During this reaction, certain hormones like adrenalin and cortisol are released, speeding the heart rate, slowing digestion, shunting blood flow to major muscle groups, and changing various other autonomic nervous functions, giving the body a burst of energy and strength. Originally named for its ability to enable us to physically fight or run away when faced with danger, it's now activated in situations where neither response is appropriate, like in traffic or during a stressful day at work. When the perceived threat is gone, systems are designed to return to normal function via the relaxation response, but in our times of chronic stress, this often doesn't happen enough, causing damage to the body.

The fight-or-flight response, also known as the acute stress response, refers to a psychological reaction that occurs in the presence of something that is terrifying, either mentally or physically. The fight-or-flight response was first described in the 1920s by American physiologist Walter Cannon. Cannon realised that a chain of rapidly occurring reactions inside the body help mobilise the body's resources to deal with threatening circumstances.

In response to acute stress, the body's sympathetic nervous system is activated due to the sudden release of hormones. The sympathetic nervous system stimulates the adrenal glands triggering the release of catecholamines, which include adrenaline and noradrenaline. This results in an increase in heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate. After the threat is gone, it takes between 20 to 60 minutes for the body to return to its pre-arousal levels.

The fight-or-flight response is also known as the acute stress response. Essentially, the response prepares the body to either fight or flee the threat. It is also important to note that the response can be triggered due to both real and imaginary threats.

#### **The difference between anxiety and fear**

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Before we discuss what happens in the fight or flight syndrome, it is important to first discuss the difference between fear and anxiety. Fear is the emotion you experience when you are actually in a dangerous situation. Anxiety is what you experience leading up to a dangerous, stressful, or threatening situation. You may also experience anxiety when you think about something stressful or dangerous that could happen to you. Other words for anxiety may be 'dread' or 'apprehensiveness'.

The difference between anxiety and fear can be illustrated nicely this way. Think about the last time you went on a roller coaster. Anxiety is what you felt when you were in line looking at the hills, steep drops, and loops, as well as hearing the screams of other riders. You also likely felt anxiety when on the roller coaster as you got closer to the top of the first hill. Fear is what you experienced as you went over the peak of the hill and started your fall down the first hill.

## Anxiety and fear are helpful

Anxiety and fear are very helpful responses. The human race may not even exist if it were not for these hard-wired responses to danger and threat. Anxiety and fear provides us with information. That is, they tell us when danger is present and they prepare us to act.

When you are in a stressful or dangerous situation and experience fear and anxiety, your body goes through a number of changes:

- Your heart rate may increase.
- Your vision may narrow (sometimes called 'tunnel vision').
- You may notice that your muscles become tense.
- You may begin to sweat.
- Your hearing may become more sensitive.

All of these changes are part of the fight or flight syndrome. As the name implies, these changes are preparing you for immediate action. They are preparing you to flee, freeze (kind of like a kangaroo does when caught in someone's headlights), or to fight.

All of these are adaptive bodily responses essentially designed to keep us alive, and because these responses are important to our survival, they occur quickly and without thought. They are automatic.

## A downside to this response

It would be great if anxiety and fear only occurred in situations where we were in immediate danger. Unfortunately, it does not always work this way. For example, many people have fear and anxiety when speaking in front of other people. You may also have fear and anxiety when meeting someone new. A person with PTSD may experience fear and anxiety when they go out into crowded or cramped places, such as a

grocery store or a subway. These situations are not dangerous in the sense that they don't threaten our survival. So, why might we have fear and anxiety in these situations?

We have fear and anxiety in these situations because of the way we evaluate these situations. Our body cannot always tell the difference between real and imagined threat. Therefore, when we interpret a situation as threatening, our body is going to respond as though that situation is dangerous and threatening, even if it really isn't in actuality.

## The fight or flight response and PTSD

When people experience something traumatic and/or have PTSD, they may no longer feel as though the world is a safe place. It may feel as though danger is everywhere. As a result, a person may constantly be in a state of fear and anxiety. For this reason, cognitive behavioural treatments for PTSD often focus a lot of attention on altering the ways in which people interpret their environment. Mindfulness may be another way of 'taking a step back' from thoughts, reducing their power to activate the fight or flight response.

## Common signs

The fight or flight response is a catch-all phrase describing the body's response to stress. Fight or flight refers to the two choices our ancestors had when facing a dangerous animal or enemy. In that moment of stress (fear) the body prepares itself to be injured and to expend energy in the large muscle groups of the arms, legs and shoulders that we use to either fight or run (flight).

A fight or flight response causes a few common signs:

- **Cool, pale skin:** Blood flow to the surface of the body is reduced so that the blood flow to the arms, legs, shoulders, brain, eyes, ears and nose can be increased. Besides getting ready to run and fight, the body is preparing to think quickly and be aware of threats by hearing, seeing and smelling things better. Pulling blood away from the skin also helps decrease bleeding from cuts and scrapes.
- **Sweating:** Running or wrestling with bears will certainly cause an increase in body heat. To prepare for that, the body starts to sweat as soon as it feels stressed. So not only is our sense of smell heightened, but so is how we smell to others (body odour). In medical terms, this kind of sweating is also known as diaphoresis.
- **Dilated pupils:** To let more light in and improve sight, the pupils dilate.
- **Dry mouth:** Gastric juices and saliva production decreases because blood flow to the digestive system is decreased. The body can interrupt digestion of that hamburger until after the threat has been eliminated. Think of it as a priority system: It's more important to live now than to digest food. This same reaction can also cause an upset stomach.

The fight or flight response is a direct result of adrenaline being released into the bloodstream. Anything that causes stress to the body will trigger a fight or flight response - angry boss, deadlines, family fight, illness, car accident, heart attack, etc.

The fight or flight response prepares the body for fast-paced action. Whether you choose to flee or fight, your body will need all of its resources. This is believed to be an evolutionary development and can only be suppressed through intense work and training.

If you have a phobia, the fight or flight response may be activated whenever you are confronted with the object of your fear. This is why you may shake, cry, become hostile or even run from the situation.

A phobia can have a long-term effect on your physical health. Frequent or chronic activation of the fight or flight response, particularly in situations in which neither outcome is practical, can lead to digestive problems, increased risk of heart disease and the other known effects of chronic stress. With treatment, however, you can learn to overcome your fear.

## **Taming the flight or flight response**

What do you feel in your body when you feel anxious? Usually, you may notice a rapid heartbeat, shallow, rapid breathing and tense muscles.

These physical reactions are the result of the 'fight or flight' response system, an ingenious mechanism. When a person senses something perceived as potentially threatening, a number of physiological changes take place in the body. The brain sends warning signals through the central nervous system. The adrenal glands begin producing hormones (adrenalin and noradrenalin) which cause the heart to beat faster and breathing to become more rapid. Muscles tense and pupils dilate. The person's body is getting ready to do one of two things:

- Confront the threat and deal with it, or
- Get as far away from the threat as quickly as possible.

This fight or flight response is appropriate and can actually be life saving when there is an actual and imminent physical threat. For example, when the driver in front of you suddenly slams on the brakes, you need to react quickly (and without a lot of thought) in order to prevent an accident.

However, some people have an early warning system that's a little too sensitive. For these people, the fight or flight responses are triggered by events that would be ignored by many others. This hypersensitivity can be caused by a number of factors, including:

- An inherited imbalance in brain hormones, as in anxiety and bipolar disorders
- A history of verbal or physical abuse in childhood
- Other post-traumatic stress disorders

It's exhausting and uncomfortable to spend so much time in a state of high alert. In addition, there are possible physical consequences to feeling stressed all the time, including high blood pressure, tension or migraine headaches, fibromyalgia, and TMJ (temporomandibular joint) syndrome.

# The Book of Psalms

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What can we do? How do we discharge all that energy when we realise there really is no danger? After all, the fight or flight reaction is an involuntary physical response to a situation. It might not be possible to issue a mental directive to our adrenal glands to tell them to stop producing adrenalin and noradrenalin.

However, breathing exercises provide a relatively easy tool for coming down from this heightened state of alert. Some of the relief comes just from taking a moment to pause and notice what's going on in our bodies.

***NOTE:** You might find it helpful to discharge some physical energy to relieve muscular tension before beginning a breathing exercise. After you've released some muscular tension, try the following breath exercise.*

## Three-part breath

- Find a place where it's quiet.
- Sit in a straight back chair with both feet on the floor or lie on the floor with a straight spine.
- Begin inhaling by expanding the abdomen (let it inflate like a balloon), then move the breath into your rib cage and, finally, all the way into your upper chest.
- Exhale by reversing this action; begin at your collarbones and exhale down through your rib cage and into your abdomen. Contract your abdominal muscles as you finish exhaling.
- You might find it helpful to lightly place your right hand on your abdomen and your left hand on your rib cage to help direct the breath on its journey.
- Begin by practicing for one minute and then gradually lengthen the practice to five minutes.

This technique helps to eliminate shallow chest breathing and encourages full exhalation and inhalation.

Once again, there's no need to push yourself or judge yourself for being anxious. The idea is simply to be quiet for a short time and notice your breath.

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## APPENDIX D

### **Guide me, O Thou great JEHOVAH**

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land.  
I am weak, but Thou art mighty;  
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.  
Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,  
Feed me till I want no more;  
Feed me till I want no more.

### **Verse Two**

Open now the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream doth  
flow;

Let the fire and cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through.  
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,  
Be Thou still my strength and shield;  
Be Thou still my strength and shield.

### **Verse Three**

Lord, I trust Thy mighty power,  
Wondrous are Thy works of old;  
Thou deliver'st Thine from thralldom,  
Who for naught themselves had sold:  
Thou didst conquer, Thou didst  
conquer,

Sin, and Satan and the grave,  
Sin, and Satan and the grave.

### **Verse Four**

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of deaths, and hell's  
destruction,  
Land me safe on Canaan's side.  
Songs of praises, songs of praises,  
I will ever give to Thee;  
I will ever give to Thee.

### **Verse Five**

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Musing on my habitation,  
Musing on my heav'nly home,  
Fills my soul with holy longings:  
Come, my Jesus, quickly come;

Vanity is all I see;  
Lord, I long to be with Thee!  
Lord, I long to be with Thee!

Words by: William Williams 1745  
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