Psalm 23 – Follow the Shepherd
Dr. John Carmichael

[Psa 23:1-6 NASB95] – 1 A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. 3 He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

- Everybody wants green pastures. Nobody volunteers for the dark valley.
- Yet both appear in the same psalm, and the same Shepherd is present in both.
- Psalm 23 is more than a passage for funerals. It is a confession for living. It speaks to exhausted parents, anxious students, grieving families, struggling believers, and people facing battles they cannot explain.
- David knew life as a shepherd. Here, however, he places himself in the position of the sheep. His confidence rests in the One caring for him.
- The psalm moves from the Shepherd who leads us to the Host who welcomes us. Throughout, the emphasis is personal: my Shepherd, my soul, with me, my cup.
- The strength of the sheep is the faithfulness of the Shepherd.

What can we confidently expect when God is our Shepherd?

David gives us four reasons to trust Him: our Shepherd supplies our needs, directs our steps, stays in our valleys, and secures our future.

I. Trust His Provision: He Knows What You Need

a. **[Psa 23:1-3 NASB95] – 1 A Psalm of David. The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. 3 He restores my soul; . . .**
b. "The LORD is my shepherd" establishes everything that follows. David's confidence begins with a relationship.
c. "I shall not want" expresses confidence in the Shepherd's sufficient care. It does promise His constant supply.
d. The green pastures and quiet waters portray nourishment, rest, and safety.
e. "He restores my soul" describes the renewal of David's life and strength. God cares for the whole person.
f. Paul assures the Philippian believers that God will supply their needs in Christ. This assurance appears in a chapter where Paul also describes learning contentment in both abundance and need. **[Phl 4:19 NASB95] – 19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.**
g. Applications: Bring your actual need to God. Ask Him for financial breakthrough. Receive the rest He provides. Set aside time this week for Scripture, prayer, and physical rest. Constant activity is not proof of spiritual strength. Ask the Holy Spirit to renew you. Pray for fresh strength to obey, serve, and love. Receive prayer for emotional weariness and physical healing while trusting God's care.
h. Declare: "My Shepherd knows what I need!"

II. Follow His Direction: He Knows the Right Way

a. **[Psa 23:3 NASB95] – 3 . . . He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.**
b. The Shepherd leads in “paths of righteousness”; right paths consistent with His character and plan for my life.
c. God’s care includes moral direction. He restores us so we can walk faithfully.
d. “For His name’s sake” grounds His leadership in His own character and reputation. The Shepherd is faithful because He is faithful. To do Your will, not my will.
e. The promise of guidance carries a call to follow. Do not ask God to bless a road He did not direct you.
f. **[Rom 8:13-14 NASB95] – 13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.**
g. **[Col 1:9-10 NASB95] – 9 For this reason also, since the day we heard [of it,] we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please [Him] in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**
h. Applications: Obey what God has already made clear. Take the next faithful step. Test impressions by Scripture. The Holy Spirit’s guidance agrees with the Word He inspired. Seek mature counsel when a decision is unclear. Ask for power to obey. Pray specifically: “Holy Spirit, strengthen me to surrender this habit and follow Jesus today.”
i. Declaration: “Lead me, and I will follow!”

III. Rely on His Presence: He Stays in the Valley

a. **[Psa 23:4 NASB95] – 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**
b. The scene changes from green pastures to deep darkness. Following the Shepherd does not eliminate dangerous places.
c. David walks through the valley. The verse gives confidence in God’s presence without prescribing how quickly hardship will end.
d. Notice the change in address: David moves from speaking about God; “He leads me”; to speaking directly to Him; “You are with me.”
e. The rod and staff express the Shepherd’s protective, guiding care. David’s courage rests in the Shepherd’s nearness.
f. The valley changes the scenery. It does not change the Shepherd.
g. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit as the Helper who remains with His disciples. He assures them that they will not be abandoned as orphans**. [Jhn 14:16-18 NASB95] – 16 "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; 17 [that is] the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, [but] you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 18 "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.**
h. Applications: Turn fear into direct prayer. Say, “Lord, You are with me in this diagnosis, this grief, this uncertainty.” Let the church walk with you. Ask trusted believers to pray, help, and remain present. Receiving help is an act of faith. Pray with expectancy. Ask God for healing, deliverance, wisdom, and courage. Continue trusting His presence as you await His answer. Practice courage through obedience. Take the next faithful step even when fear has not completely disappeared.
i. Declaration: “I am not alone; You are with me!”

IV. Rest in His Faithfulness: His Goodness Will Follow

Psalm 23 – Follow the Shepherd
Dr. John Carmichael

a. **[Psa 23:5-6 NASB95] – 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**
b. The imagery changes: the Shepherd becomes a generous Host.
c. God prepares a table while enemies are still present. Their presence does not prevent provision or honor.
d. Anointing the guest's head with oil and filling the cup: a picture of God's Spirit being in you and on you.
e. Goodness and lovingkindness follow David throughout his life. God's faithful covenant love accompanies him beyond the immediate crisis.
f. Dwelling in God's house expresses lasting fellowship with God. Read within the whole Bible, this confidence opens toward the believer's eternal home with the Lord.
g. Your enemies do not get to decide whether God can set your table.
h. Trouble, persecution, danger, and even death cannot separate believers from God's love in Christ Jesus. **[Rom 8:35-39 NASB95] – 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**
i. Applications: Stop allowing opposition to define your future. Thank God for His faithfulness while the conflict is still unresolved. Live from belonging. Spend time in worship and fellowship with God. Ask the Holy Spirit to deepen your assurance that you belong to the Father. Carry hope into suffering. Your present circumstances do not exhaust what God has prepared for you in Christ. Seek for the Holy Spirit to be in you and on you. Know that the GOODNESS of God is following (chasing) you.
j. Declaration: "His goodness will follow me!"

- **When God is your Shepherd, you can trust His provision, follow His direction, face the valley, and rest in His faithful love.**
- Psalm 23 does not give us control over every circumstance. It gives us confidence in the Shepherd.
- In the pasture, He supplies. On the path, He leads. In the valley, He stays. At the table, He welcomes.