



**Sermon Based Small Group
Leader Discussion Guide**

Sermon Title: "A Bridge Over Troubled Water"

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Week of April 3, 2011**

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Session Objectives (Group Leader)	<p>By the end of the session, group members should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize that the rest God can give is the only truly sustainable source of renewal we can realize in this life. • Trust that God knows what we need to right our situation. Whether the "staff" or the "rod," he wields the tools to bring genuine growth and lasting comfort.
Personal Connection (Group Leader)	<p>How does my story connect to the reading? To prepare to lead this Bible study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recall the last time you experienced revival of body, mind and soul. • Consider what might be hindering you from seeking out a time of renewal with the Lord. • Pray for each member of your group by name.
Icebreaker	<p>Do you find yourself living for vacations? What is your ideal way to get some relief from the daily grind?</p> <p>Alternate Icebreaker - Where were you when you last felt really afraid? What was the source of your fear?</p>
Big Idea	<p>God's goodness and mercy protect and direct us, both in this life and beyond.</p>

<p>Sermon Text</p>	<p>Psalm 23: 1-6 New International Version</p> <p>A psalm of David.</p> <p>1 The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will 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 anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.</p> <p>Footnotes: Psalm 23:4 <i>Or the valley of the shadow of death</i></p>
<p>Digging Deeper</p>	<p>Learning more about the lesson</p> <p>Psalm 23 is undoubtedly one of the best-known passages in all the Bible. Most of us learned these verses as children and they continue to be a source of comfort to those who are dying or to those who have lost loved ones. Maybe it’s so well-loved because it feels so personal, so individually written. When we read it, we don’t think of David shepherding his sheep 3,000 years ago. It applies to us. "The Lord is <u>my</u> shepherd".</p> <p>Unfortunately, we live in a society where tending sheep is a common occupation. In fact, most of us don’t even know a shepherd, much less are we familiar with what a shepherd’s life is really like. Thus, we lose some of the meaning that David intended when he wrote the words of this psalm, words that point to a path of true rest. King David likely wrote Psalm 23 when fleeing from his son, Absalom (2 Samuel 15:23). On his escape from the palace, he passed through the Kidron Valley, a despicable place associated with burial grounds and burning trash heaps. This is the valley David referenced in Psalm 23: 4. During this time of turmoil and fear, David found great comfort in understanding his relationship to God as vassal king to heavenly Shepherd-King.</p> <p><u>Word Study: Vassal (noun) –</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person granted the use of land, in return for rendering homage, fealty, and usually military service or its equivalent to a lord or other superior; feudal tenant. • A person holding some similar relation to a superior; a subject, subordinate, follower, or retainer.

1. This psalm begins, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.” (v.1) Of course, we all (literally) lack many things in this life. With that understanding, what does this verse mean to you?

2. Reread vv. 1-3, noting the progression of events. Do you see any significance in this sequence of events? What does this communicate to those whose souls are weary? To those whose feet have not been traveling on right paths?

Leader: First, the Christian comes to recognize that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the One on whom we can depend to watch over and care for us, to lead and feed us. Next comes lying in green pastures and beside still waters – a picture of quiet rest, repose, trusting relaxation. Next comes the refreshing or restoring of the soul. The soul is the essence of the personality, the “you” of you. Broken, fragmented, disjointed souls must be healed, and only God can do this. Finally comes the walking in right paths as the Lord leads.

3. Since we are spiritual beings, spiritual distress disturbs all other areas of our life. Are you able to identify when you are in spiritual turmoil? If so, what are the signs?

4. Think about a recent time when you experienced the Lord’s “refreshment” of soul, a time when you sensed him “leading you beside quiet waters” (v.2). Is there anything in your life that is hindering you from relying on the One who wants to and is able to lead you to rest?

5. Reread v. 4. Have you ever felt like you were going through great fear and doubt, what David calls a “valley of the shadow of death”?

Leader - (Optional follow up question): What kind of protection did you most need at that time? Were you able to find it?

Leader: At the center of this psalm is the concept of God’s care for us. David declares that he will not fear evil, that it is the heavenly Shepherd-King’s rod and staff that give him comfort. Consider the use of staff and rod imagery from biblical times.

	<p><u>Word Study:</u></p> <p>Staff – an instrument used by shepherds for support, to pull sheep off ledges, out of harm’s way, and back into the fold.</p> <p>Rod – and instrument of authority, also used by shepherds for counting, rescuing and protecting sheep. In Job 9:34, Job asks is anyone might be able to save him from God’s rod. Here, it is symbolic of divine judgment and wrath.</p> <p>6. How is it possible to find comfort in both the power portrayed by God’s staff and his rod? How can you experience this more often?</p> <p>7. Have you ever realized your need of God’s rod to change your situation and entrusted his wise use of it in your life?</p> <p>Leader: The Psalm ends on a high note with David confidently extolling the benefits, both for now and eternity, of a covenant relationship with his heavenly Shepherd-King. In the midst of David’s exhaustion, fears and doubts, he paints a picture of the joy surrounding total security.</p> <p>Reread verses 5 – 6. Examine each image, discussing how each benefit could be understood as a present assurance and a future promise:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) You prepare a table before me 2) You anoint my head with oil 3) My cup runs overflows 4) Goodness and love/mercy will follow me 5) I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever <p>Leader: How can the insights of this psalm help you right now to encourage someone else in your life?</p>
<p>Taking it Home</p>	<p>How will I live it? Apply it?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you need a time out, a time of renewal? If your first thought was “That would be great, but _____,” think about your excuse for a few moments. What practical measure could you take to overcome that obstacle? 2. Are you committed enough to Christ-likeness that you trust God to use his rod in your life to help you grow past harmful patterns and moral failings? Take a few moments to entrust him to help you through the growth

	<p>process. (Remember, he is the Good Shepherd and also uses his staff in our lives.)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. If you are waiting for heaven to realize all God’s promises to you, then ask him to help you identify his assurances to you, now. Then, thank him. 4. Think about our small group for a minute. Where do you believe Jesus is leading us as a small group? 5. How can we, together, encourage each other to follow Him more faithfully?
<p>Looking Ahead</p>	<p>How can I prepare for the next Small Group meeting?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite your group members to attend “Community,” 9:00-10:00 Sundays in the fellowship hall. • Next Sunday, April 10th, is the fifth Sunday in Lent Sermon Text: James 2:14-26 Sermon Title: “Having a ‘Do-Something’ Faith”
<p>Prayer Focus</p>	<p>How can I connect with God and others through prayer?</p> <p>Confess areas where you have not recently trusted God to be your shepherd. Recommit your way to him!</p> <p>Record requests and praises, here:</p>
<p>Updates</p>	<p>Announcements from: Care Coordinator Outreach Coordinator, Social Coordinator</p>