

**Sermon Title:**  
**“A Bridge Over Troubled Water”**  
**Sermon by Bill Gaethke**  
**Week of April 3, 2011**

**Sermon Based Small Group Discussion Guide**

***Icebreaker***

***Big Idea:***

God’s goodness and mercy protect and direct us, both in this life and beyond.

**Study Background**

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 my shepherd".

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.

***Sermon Text:*** Psalm 23: 1-6 New International Version

**A psalm of David.**

**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.

**Footnotes:**

[Psalm 23:4](#) Or the valley of the shadow of death

**Learning more about the lesson**

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? What does this communicate to those whose souls are weary? To those whose feet have not been traveling on right paths?
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”?
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?
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?

Reread verses 5 – 6. Examine each image, discussing how each benefit could be understood as a present assurance and a future promise:

- 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

## **Taking it Home**

### **How will I live it? Apply it?**

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 process. (Remember, he is the Good Shepherd and also uses his staff in our lives.)
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?

### **Prayer Requests and Praises:**

Confess areas where you have not recently trusted God to be your shepherd.  
Recommit your way to him!

Record requests and praises, here:

### **Announcements from:**

Care Coordinator

Outreach Coordinator

Social Coordinator