

Lesson 3

He Leadeth Me

Today's verses focus on the Shepherd as a leader.

Psalm 23:2b *He leads me beside the still waters...*

Psalm 23:3b *He leads me in the paths of righteousness, For His name's sake...*

As we've mentioned before, sheep do not like to be driven, they like to be led. The shepherd was a guide. The sheep didn't need to know where the green pastures or still waters were; all they had to know was where the shepherd was and they would follow.

"Still waters" are waters that flow very slowly and calmly; they bring peace and rest to one's spirit. One of the most relaxing things in life is to listen to the sound of a bubbling brook. The shepherd sought still waters for his flock because sheep are afraid of moving waters. Even if they are extremely thirsty and in need of water, they will not drink if the water is moving. Sheep are unable to swim with their heavy wool coats, so the shepherd guides them to waters that are still and safe. If he is unable to find still waters, he will gather up stones and build a makeshift dam to form a pool of water for his sheep.

Our Shepherd desires to lead us to still waters: a place of rest, a place of trust, a place of confidence, and a place where we can focus on Him without distractions. He wants to take our heavy load and replace it with His peace and rest. *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.* (Matt. 11:28-30) The Lord knows where the still, pure water is found that can alone satisfy the thirst of His sheep. He always knows what you need and when you need it. If you are willing to follow Him, He will lead you there.

As God's sheep, one major hindrance to having these times of refreshing is finding the time. We live our lives at a hectic pace already and are told we need to multi-task! God doesn't want us to multi-task with Him - He wants our undivided attention. It's truly hard to deepen a relationship when you are in a hurry or distracted. In this frantic, busy, noisy world we need to find a calm, quiet place to spend time alone with the Lord. As Psalm 46:10a tells us, *"Be still, and know that I am God."* There at the feet of Jesus, by the tail waters, we will find peace and restoration from our Shepherd. Keep in mind the shepherd does not give rest to the sheep by riding the world of danger. The wolves are still out there. But the sheep can lie down because they have the shepherd in view and His presence gives them rest.

When the sheep are put into a field of lush grass, they enjoy the feast. The problem is that they don't know when to stop. Left in a field for too long, they will eat not only the grass but the roots as well, leaving the field completely barren. Before a field gets over-grazed he will move the sheep on so they can find nourishment somewhere else. The same thing can happen to

us. God puts us in a place where the grass is green and we are content. When He wants to move us on, we don't want to go. "Why do I have to move? I don't like change! I want to stay here! I'm happy where I am."

When the Shepherd moves you on, He is saying to you "This is no longer the place you will find nourishment. I have another place that will provide just what you need. Don't be afraid, just follow Me." God doesn't want us to become complacent and settle for less than He has planned for us. So trust the Shepherd when He moves you on.

Once our soul has been restored the Lord takes us on a different path ... *He leads me in the paths of righteousness, For His name's sake...* God leads us into work. There are times for lying down and times for moving forward. The worldly order would be that you walk the right path and then you rest. You take credit for the works you have done and then deserve a rest because of your accomplishments. God's plan is exactly opposite: He gives us rest and prepares us in the meadow so we will be able to walk the right path, accomplish the work He has for us and then give the glory to Him.

According to the Word, works do not precede rest. The restoration of the soul comes first; then the works of righteousness. We are not saved by our works, but we work because we are saved. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.* (Ephesians 2:10)

The word "paths" in 23:3 refers to our conduct, how we live our lives. We are directed to seek the "paths of righteousness" - to live in a way that reflects the character of the Good Shepherd. Jesus talked about two roads: "*the broad road that leads to destruction and the narrow road that leads to life.*" The broad road is one of bad choices characterized by foolishness. A sheep who fails to follow the shepherd may fall off a cliff, drink bad water, or wander away leading to its destruction. The sheep who faithfully follows the shepherd is provided for and protected because it remains on the narrow path. A good shepherd makes sure the path he takes his flock on will lead them to where they need to go. Our Shepherd has promised to bring us safely to our final destination: eternity with Him.

God's Word guides us toward the path of righteousness but it is the Good Shepherd who leads and guides us to walk in His ways, to live our lives in a way that brings honor to Him. He doesn't just point out the path and tell us "good luck." He is our constant companion, watching over every step we take. Even though there are times we may not feel His presence, He is there; He will never leave us or forsake us.

Verse 3 says, "*He leads me in the paths of righteousness, For His name's sake...*" For those who claim to be His flock and represent Him, we put His reputation on the line. It is important for us, as His flock, to remember that many times we are the only representation of Him to the world. Do we bring disgrace or glory to His name?

Repeatedly we are instructed to live for God's name sake:

- God guides us for His name's sake (Psalm 23:3)
- God forgives our sins for His name's sake (Psalm 25:11)

- God leads us for the sake of His name (Psalm 31:3)
- God delivers us from sin for His name's sake (Psalm 79:9)
- God deals with us out of His goodness for His name's sake (Psalm 109:21)
- God lets us live for His name's sake (Psalm 143:11)

God does what He does for His sake, not ours. The way He deals with us reveals His true character. His reputation is at stake by the way his followers live. We are His hands and feet in this world. We are His ambassadors and we represent God to a watching world. When we fail to live righteously we are hurt, but the name of God is hurt more.

Have you ever bragged on your children's accomplishments? Of course, we have, because it makes us look good. God wants to brag on His children, too. He wants to say of each of us, "These are my sheep, my children, my followers. I'm proud of them and the honor they bring to my name." The Good Shepherd has staked His name and reputation on leading you safely home. He has said, "My sheep ...will never perish." (John 10:28) He has said "I will lose none of them." (John 16:39, 7:12) God has given His word. Every sheep bought and born into His flock will be brought safely home. Not one will be missing. Despite our many sins and wanderings, despite the enemies we face and the doubts that assail us, we will arrive safely home.

It is a marvelous thing to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd" and to know He leads you. And when you safely arrive in His presence, He will still be your shepherd, and He will lead you forever."

*"...for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them
and lead them to living fountains of waters.
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
(Revelation 7:17)*

