

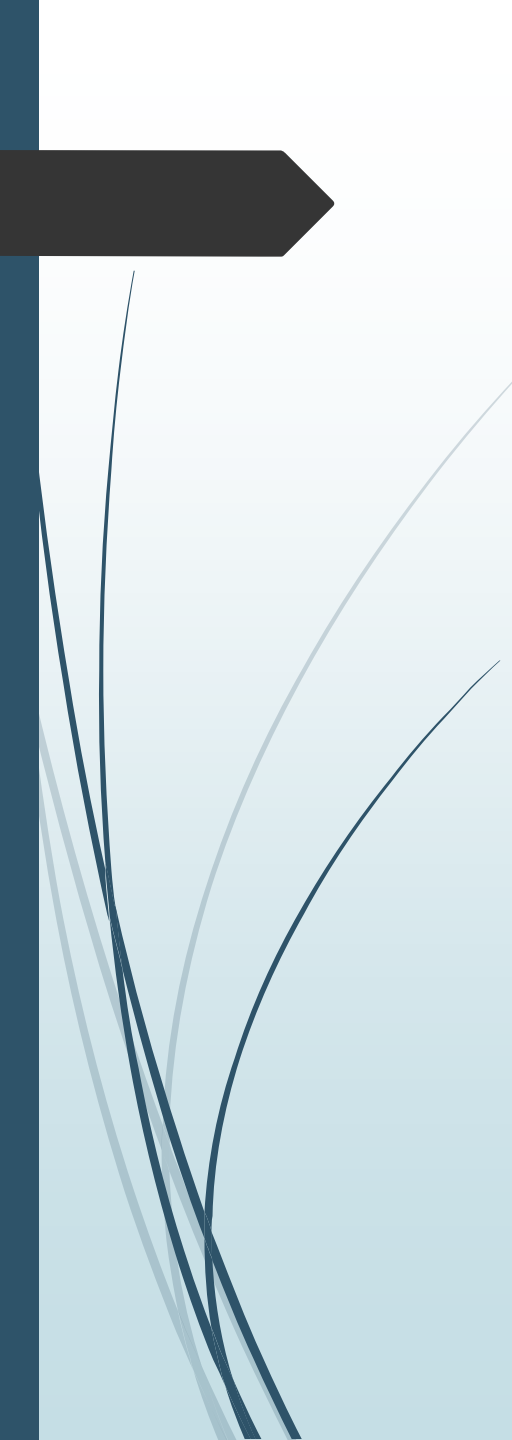


# The Good Shepherd

*June 22 & July 13, 2023*

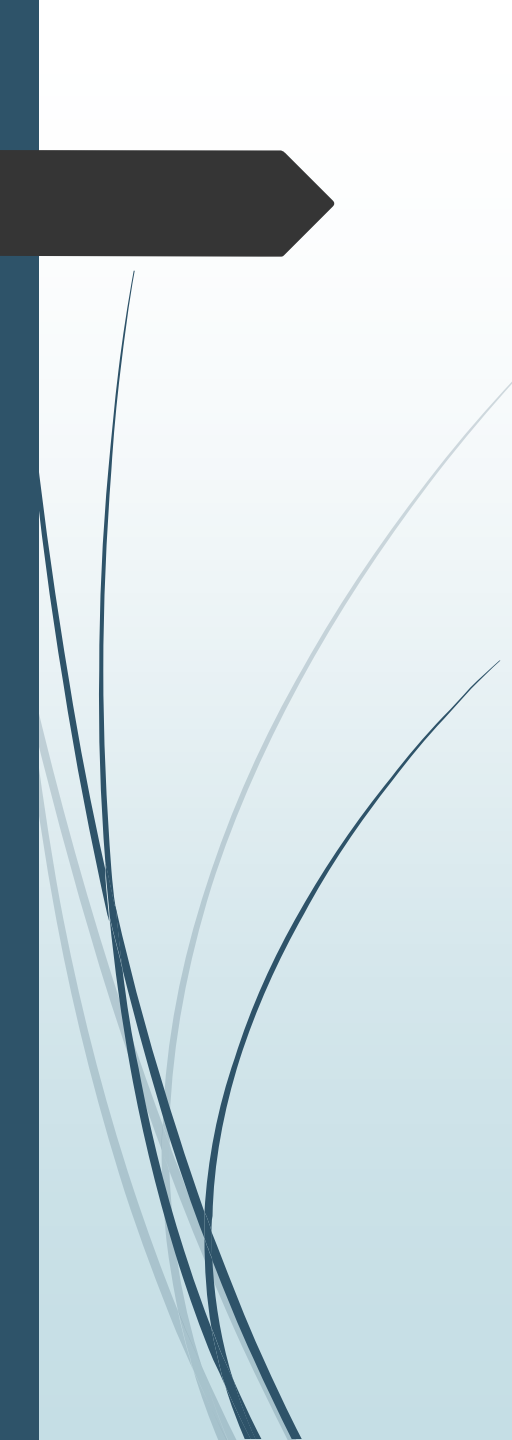
*Leader: Sarabeth Smith*

*Insights about sheep provided by W. Phillip Keller,  
author of "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23"*



## Psalm 23

- Written by King David, the Shepherd King, from the perspective of the sheep in the Shepherd's care
  - God called David to be King of Israel in 1Samuel 16:10-12:
    - “Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, The Lord has not chosen any of these. Then [Samuel] said to Jesse, Are all your sons here? [Jesse] said, There is yet the youngest; he is tending the sheep. Samuel said to Jesse, Send for him; for we will not sit down to eat until he is here. Jesse sent and brought him. David had a healthy reddish complexion and beautiful eyes and was fine-looking. The Lord said [to Samuel], Arise, anoint him; this is he.” *AMPC*
- King David – the original “redheaded stepchild;” He was rejected and not identified by his father as one of his sons until pressed to do so by Samuel.



# The Bible – 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm

- The Bible was written by:
  - Men of humble origin who penned under the guidance of God's Spirit
- God is:
  - Author and originator of the natural and supernatural (spiritual)
  - Same basic laws, principles, and procedures function in these two contiguous (touching, connecting without a break) realms
- Divine revelation through:
  - Basic subjects of the natural world
  - Jesus' parables used natural phenomena to explain supernatural truth
- Language of the Bible uses language common to the people who lived in rural environments with livestock, crops, land, fruit, or wildlife; sheep, wheat, soil, or grapes

# “A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23”

- Considered a Christian Classic
- Author: W. Phillip Keller
  - As the son of missionary parents in Kenya, he grew up herding sheep as a boy
  - As a young adult, he made his living for 8 years as a sheep owner and rancher
  - Later in life as a world citizen, he was a photographer, agronomist, and author (more than two million copies in print)
- Keller's opinion
  - *“The Psalm has had a lot of sentimental imagery wrapped around it with no sound basis in actual life”*
  - Daily restoration of the anxious, weary soul is a major human need



# Jehovah-Rohi – “The Lord is My Shepherd”

- John 10:11 – *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” Jesus went beyond the care for His sheep and gave His life for us. He cared more for us than for His own life.”*
- Isaiah 53:6 – *“All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, everyone, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”*
- John 10:14-18 – *“I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father, and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd. Therefore, My Father loves Me because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.”*
- Hebrews 13:20 – *“Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.”*
- Revelation 7:17 – *“for the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of water. A God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

# “The Lord is My Shepherd”

## ► The Lord:

- **God the Father** – God the author, originator of all that exists in the natural and supernatural
- **God the Son, our Savior** – God the artisan/artist – Creator of all that exists – He brought into being all that had been originally formulated in His Father’s mind
- **God the Holy Spirit** – God, the agent who presents these facts to both my mind and spiritual understanding – become both real and relative in a personal way

## ► This Lord - He is my Shepherd!

- A profound and practical **working relationship** between a **human being and his Maker**
- Nahum 1:7 *“The Lord is good, a Strength and Stronghold in the day of trouble; He knows (recognizes, has knowledge of, and understands) those who take refuge and trust in Him.”*

# Sheep Basics



- Live to be about **eight** years old.
- Very **gentle** animals, **easily frightened**, **flock** together for protection.
- Virtually **defenseless** - many natural predators - include **coyotes, wolves, dogs. Mules or llamas** are kept in the pastures to scare off possible predators.
- **Sheep dogs** are used to herd the sheep and round up **wandering** sheep.
- **See 270-degree radius of view**, almost **3/4 of a circle**. (Humans - 170 degrees) Difficult to sneak up on or surprise. **Poor eyesight** but **excellent hearing**.
- Each sheep has its own **flight zone** (distance the sheep feels it needs to get away from danger) and will not allow anything to come within flight zone.

## Sheep Basics (continued)

- Various **sounds** used to communicate emotions and messages among flock members; A farmer can easily tell when in pain or sick; Lambs recognize mother by her **bleat**.
- Each is **individual and unique** and can distinguish between all other sheep.
- They can recognize **fellow flock mates** even after **years of separation**.
- Would rather walk up-hill than down and would rather drink running water.
- No front teeth – roofs of their mouths are hard – allows **eating vegetation close to the ground, prevents pulling up plant roots**.
- Split in their upper lip allows them to **pick the preferred leaves** off the plant; **graze land that other livestock cannot; eat grass and hay**.



## Sheep Basics (continued)

- Usually give birth once a year, **1-3 lambs**, ewes typically give birth to twins
- Lambs to market at **90-120 lbs.**; meat from grown sheep – **mutton**; young sheep – **lamb**
- Fat from sheep's milk – known as **tallow** – used to make both candles and soap
- Small intestines from 11 sheep needed to make one **tennis racket**
- Usually **shorn** once a year – one sheep produces **8-10 lbs. of wool/yr** (enough to make a man's suit)
- 1 lb. of wool can make ten miles of yarn
- Only source of **lanolin** - grease that comes from wool before it has been washed – used in **lotions and cosmetics**



# “I Shall Not Be in Want”

- Utter **satisfaction** with the sheep owner
- “**Want**” – proper care, management, husbandry, not craving or desiring anything more – does not refer to material or physical poverty
- “It is the boss ... the manager ... the Master of people’s lives who makes the difference in their destiny...”
- Reality
  - Outward show of success – wealth, affluence, prestige
    - Does not mean a person will not be – poor in spirit, shriveled in soul, unhappy in life – “Joyless people held in the iron grip and heartless ownership of the wrong master.”
  - People who have known hardship, disaster, struggle to stay afloat financially
  - Belong to Christ – He is their Lord and Master of their lives their owner/manager
  - Permeated by deep, quiet, settled peace that is beautiful to behold
- “Mrs. Gad-about” – never satisfied
- Sheep in ditch - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLZW-kWr1F4>

## “He Makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures” – verse 2

- Sheep will not lie down unless they are FREE of:
  - Fear
  - Friction with others of their kind
  - Flies or parasites
  - Feel in need of finding food



# “He Makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures”

## Verse 2

- **Freedom** for sheep depends on the diligence of the sheep owner
- **His presence** in the field gives them peace. Without Him:
  - They **cannot** rest, relax, be content, quiet
  - They **do not flourish** – become under weight, run off and become lost, susceptible
- Sheep **will not lie down** unless they are **free** of:
  - **Fear** – In the grip of fear we are most unable to cope with cruel circumstances and harsh complexities of life
  - **Friction with other sheep** (“butting order”) – Humans struggle for status, self-assertion, self-recognition, fight to be top, get ahead – in the process people are hurt, jealousy/petty peaves/horrible hate arises
  - **Parasites/pests/predators** – Holy Spirit symbolized by oil – brings healing/comfort
  - **Feeling of need to find food** – Land flowing with milk and honey
- “Godliness with contentment is great gain”

# “He Leads Me Beside Still Waters”

## Verse 2

- **Sheep's body** composed of **70% water**
  - Water determines vitality, strength, vigor – essential to health and well-being
  - If sheep are **thirsty**, they become **restless and set out in search of water**
  - Will drink polluted water – leads to internal parasites
- Comparison –
  - **Matt 5:6** – “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (living water, never thirst again)
  - **Drink** – “to take in” or “to accept,” “to believe”
- **Arid Climates** – Water comes from:
  - Dew on the grass (still waters), deep wells, springs/streams
  - Sheep go for months on water from dew on the grass just before/after dawn
- Comparison –
  - People who are most serene, most confident, able to cope with life's complexities **rise early each day to feed on God's Word** in quiet early hours they are led beside quiet still water where they **imbibe the very life of Christ**

# “He Leads Me Beside Still Waters” (continued)

- **Not** being led by still waters can lead to:
  - **Broken** lives, shattered hopes
  - Barren souls are dried up and full of **dust of despair**
  - Drugs, alcohol, sexual adventures – **mad desire to assuage thirst** –
  - Classic proof that such sordid indulgences are **no substitute** for the **Spirit of the Living God**
  - Broken cisterns, lives of misery
- Amid chaos of confused, sick society, Christ comes quietly as of old and invites us to come to Him, to follow Him
- He knows best how we can be satisfied
- He knows the human heart personality and soul with its amazing capacity for God, which can never be satisfied with a substitute



# “He Restores My Soul” – Verse 3

## ➤ “Cast Down”

- Ps 42:11 – “Why are you cast down, Oh my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God...”
- A **cast down sheep** is one who is **turned over on its back** and **cannot get up** by itself
  - It lies in frightened frustration, feet in the air
- Even largest, fastest, healthiest sheep can become cast down and a casualty
- **Gases build up** in the rumen (first chamber of intestinal area)
  - Cutoff or retard **circulation** to extremities
  - **Sheep can expire** in a few hours if weather is hot, days if weather is cool
- Shepherd keep count of flock, **repeatedly** saving and restoring cast sheep – enormous, ever-present danger
- Keep eye on the sky for **vultures**
- Shepherd will leave the **99** to search for hours and hours for the one lost sheep who may be cast down
- Turns sheep over, rubs its extremities; **it takes a while for sheep to recover**
- How to help a sheep - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=guEyxTpevFo>

# “He Restores My Soul” (continued)



- When we feel **most sure** of ourselves, we stumble and fall – find ourselves cast down
- **Reasons** a sheep becomes cast down
  - Looking for the **soft ground, easy place** – looking for comfortable position, no need for endurance, no demand upon self-discipline – when we think we have “made it,” we are in mortal danger
  - Heavy fleece means **danger** for sheep – collects dirt/manure – not most healthy or productive
  - Too fat – too much weight makes them **less agile and nimble** on their feet
- Comparison –
  - People who have done well in business/career/homes – feel they are flourishing and have “**arrived**” – sense of well-being and self-assurance
  - When we are **most sure of ourselves, we are most prone to fall flat**



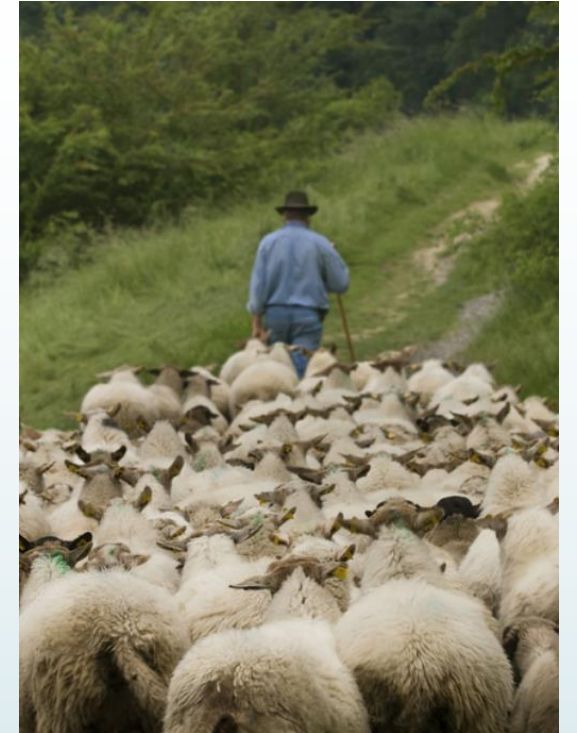
# “He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness for His Name’s Sake” – Verse 3

- Sheep are creatures of habit
  - Continual use of same trails until they become **ruts**, Graze hills until they become **desert**, Pollute ground until becomes **riddled** with disease and parasites
- No other class of livestock requires more care and handling
- Shepherd spends most of his time on planning a deliberate rotation program and moving the sheep from pasture to pasture for **healthy flocks and land**
- Shepherd **knows the land and prepares** it for these rotations
- **Comparison:** Humans are led in paths of righteousness
- Keller: “Our behavior patterns and life habits are so much like that of sheep it is well nigh embarrassing.”
  - We are a stiff-necked and stubborn lot – deliberate, repeatedly, even to our own disadvantage
  - Is 53:6 “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way.”
  - Ps 14:12 “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

# “He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness for His Name’s Sake”

## Verse 3

- Going our own way
  - Broken homes, broken hearts, derelict lives, twisted personalities
  - “A society struggling to survive on beleaguered land”
  - Greed and selfishness of mankind leaves behind a legacy of ruin and remorse
- Benefits of following Christ. Instead of:
  - Loving myself most, I am willing to love Christ best and others more than myself
  - Being one of the crowd, willing to be singled out, set apart from the gang
  - Insisting on my rights, I am willing to forego them in favor of others
  - Being “boss,” I am willing to be at the bottom of the heap
  - Finding fault with life and always asking “Why?” I am willing to accept every circumstance of life in an attitude of gratitude.
  - Exercising and asserting my will, I am willing to learn to cooperate with His wishes and comply with His will
  - Choosing my own way, I am willing to choose to follow in Christ’s way: simply to do what He asks me to



# “Even though I Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I Will Fear No Evil” Verse 4

- Mid-poem shift
  - From boasting about excellent care (better than sheep in nearby fields)
  - To address the Shepherd directly (intimate discourse of deep affection)
- Summer/Fall – Shepherd drives sheep to high range to graze
  - Sheep are entirely alone with the shepherd, intimate contact, under his **personal attention** day and night
  - Set against **dramatic background** of wild mountains, rushing rivers, alpine meadows, high rangelands
  - **Best route to high lands is through the valley** - richest food, clean water, easy path
    - Not an end, merely a door to higher and more exalted life of intimate contact with Christ
    - “Shadow of Death” – opening into eternity of delight with God
    - Road to higher ground – disappointment, frustration, discouragement, dilemmas, dark/difficult days
- **He is with me** in the valley and things are under His control
  - Quiet acceptance of every adversity
  - Moved on to higher ground with God
  - Knowing Him intimate way, under His constant, abiding care

# “Even though I Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I Will Fear No Evil” Verse 4

- Experience in the valley
  - Only those who have been through such dark valleys can console, comfort or encourage others in similar situations
  - Just as water can only flow in a ditch/channel/valley, so is the Christian's career in the life of God
  - Can only flow in blessing through the valleys – carved and cut into our lives by excruciating circumstances
  - Storms are a threat – soaked and chilled sheep are susceptible to colds, pneumonia and other respiratory complications
  - Faith is stimulated by looking back and reflecting on His faithfulness in every crisis, every chilling circumstance in life
  - Because He has led me through without fear before, He can do it again and again – fear fades and tranquility of heart and mind takes its place
- John 16:33 “In this world you will have trouble but take heart! I have overcome the world.”
  - The question is not how many valleys we have gone through or how dark or merely dim with shadows - but how we respond to them
  - With Christ – we can face them calmly
  - We can cope with calamities that come
  - His gracious Spirit guides us and we face them fearlessly
  - In this way, not only shall I be blessed but in thru I will become a benediction to others around me who may live in fear

# “Your Rod and Your Staff They Comfort Me”

## Verse 4

- Shepherd carries a minimum of equipment
- Rod: God’s Rod = Scriptures
  - An extension of His mind, will intention to mortal man
  - Rod is for discipline – keep sheep from danger
  - Sheep know that owner’s rod, his weapon of power, authority and defense is a continuous comfort to him
  - Manager able to carry out effective control of his flock in every situation – instrument of protection
  - Used to examine sheep – under owner’s careful care
- Staff: God’s Staff = His Holy Spirit
  - Comforter, guide (not used for beating), sheep reassured of proper path
  - John 16:13 – “This is the way – walk in it” – confidence in the Scriptures
  - Reality of experiencing and knowing firsthand of the feel of His touch – the sense of His Spirit upon my spirit
  - Conveys the mind of Christ to my mind with tenderness



# “You Prepare a Table Before Me in the Presence of My Enemies” Verse 5

- Sheep county – high plateaus are “mesas”/“tables”
- Table = entire summer range
  - Shepherd makes preliminary survey trips to tables before the season and then several times before the drives
  - Ensures rich food and good water - places salt and minerals
  - Pulls up poisonous plants
  - Clears out water holes of debris
  - Lays out a strategic plan for rotation of flock for best bed grounds and camps
  - Watches for signs of predators and plans for eventuality of attacks
- Christ similarly knows personally what we are going through – He was tempted and identifies with our humanity
- Christ prepares a table for His own; Do we fully appreciate what it has cost Him to prepare this table for us? The greatest and deepest demonstration of true love the world has ever known.
- At the Lord's Table
  - We partake of the feast of thanksgiving for His love and care.
  - We are honored dinner guests of a generous and capable host.



# “You Anoint my Head with Oil; my Cup Overflows” Verse 5

- **Flying Pests** - Sheep are susceptible to flying pests even in the high ground while grazing
  - Nose or nasal flies will buzz about their heads and **disturb** the sheep
  - If the flies lay eggs in the sheep's nose, the condition will worsen until the sheep are very irritated, suffer from inflammation and will beat their heads against trees, rocks, posts or brush
- **Advanced stages** can lead to blindness or sheep can kill themselves in a frenzy
- **Remedy** – at the first sign of “fly time,” the shepherd will apply an antidote to their heads
  - The author used a mixture of linseed oil, sulfur, tar smeared over the sheep's nose and head; applied repeatedly
  - Brought about an incredible, immediate transformation – aggravation, frenzy, irritability and restlessness gone



# “You Anoint my Head with Oil; my Cup Overflows” Verse 5

## ► **Flying Pests** (continued) - comparison

- **We can have irritations in our own lives**; small petty annoyances; our behavior degenerates to a most disgraceful sort of frustrated tirade
- “How easy it is for there to be a fly in the ointment of even my most lofty spiritual experience!”
- As with sheep, there must be **continuous and renewed application of oil** to forestall the “flies” in my life
- “It is both logical and legitimate desire for us to have the daily anointing of God’s gracious Spirit upon our minds. God alone can form in us the mind of Christ. The Holy Spirit alone can give to us the attitudes of Christ.”
- **Luke 11:13** “If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”
- **Daily anointing of Holy Spirit** on our minds produces joy, contentment, love, patience, gentleness, peace
- The author’s prayer: “O Lord, I can’t cope with these petty, annoying, peevish problems. Please apply the oil of Your Spirit to my mind. Both at the conscious and subconscious levels of my thought-life, enable me to act and react just You would.”

# “You Anoint my Head with Oil; my Cup Overflows” Verse 5

- **Scab Disease** – irritating, highly contagious disease common among sheep caused by a microscopic parasite, which proliferates in warm weather
  - Sheep love to rub heads in affectionate manner, spreading the disease through direct contact
  - In Old Testament – the “**sacrificial lamb without blemish**” would have been free of scab disease
  - **Remedy** – same as with flies – apply linseed oil, sulfur and other chemicals put sheep through a dip – it is particularly difficult to get the head treated (several applications, animals do not like this)
  - **Comparison** – In Christian life, most of our contamination by the world, by sin, by that which would defile and disease us spiritually comes through our minds.
    - Our thoughts, our ideas, our emotions, our choices, our impulses, drives and desires are all shaped and molded through the exposure of our minds to other people’s minds; through direct contact, media, Internet, etc
    - “It is a simple matter of faith and acceptance. Just as one asks Christ to come into the life initially to assure complete control of one’s conduct, so one invites the Holy Spirit to come into one’s conscious and subconscious mind to monitor one’s thought-life”
- **Autumn – Mating season**
  - Shepherd places grease on heads of rams to prevent them from killing one another when butting heads
  - Comparison – People are similar; in wanting to be “top sheep” or in dealing with one another
    - Stiff-necked with pride and self-assertion; intolerant, dogmatic, uncharitable; People become battered and hurt
    - Christ applies the ointment of His gracious Holy Spirit to our lives – peace, joy, longsuffering and generosity
- **My Cup Overflows**
  - Our Shepherd never sleeps or is lax or careless, always has our best interest at heart
  - With cold weather, shepherd will give the sheep wine to warm them – Christ shed his blood for us

# “Surely Goodness and Mercy will Follow Me all the Days of my Life” Verse 6

- **Sum of all of the benefits** enjoyed by a flock under skilled and loving management
- **Complete confidence**
  - A sheep has complete confidence **in the one who controls his career and destiny**
  - Do we feel like that whatever occurs in our lives we are being followed by goodness and mercy?
  - “With **my natural tendencies** to fear, worry and ask “why,” it was not always simple to assume that He really did know what He was doing with me. I was tempted to panic, to bolt, and to leave His care. Somehow, I had the strange, stupid notion I could survive better on my own. Most men and women do.”
  - “For the one who is in **Christ’s care**, no difficulty can arise, no dilemma emerge, no seeming disaster descend on the life without eventual good coming out of chaos.”
  - “**I love Him because He first loved me.**”
- **My reaction**
  - **The supreme portrait** of my Shepherd
    - Continually there flows out of me His goodness and His mercy, which even though I do not deserve them come unremittingly from their source of supply – His own great heart of love.

# “Surely Goodness and Mercy will Follow Me all the Days of my Life” Verse 6

| Sheep Under Poor Management           | Sheep Under Proper Management                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unsettled, desiring to wander off     | Can be most beneficial of all livestock to fields                                                               |
| Can destroy the land beyond remedy    | Best balanced manure of all animals has an enormous benefit to the soil                                         |
| Riddled with parasites and disease    | In seeking high ground to rest, fertility of rich lowland is redeposited on the less productive higher ground   |
| Underweight, offspring do not do well | No other livestock will consume the wide variety of foliage as sheep eat undesirable, invasive plants and weeds |
| Do not trust the shepherd or his care | Result = Fertility and weed-free land                                                                           |
| A danger to themselves                | Result = Beauty and abundance                                                                                   |

## ► Comparison –

- Is this true of my life? Do I leave a blessing and benediction behind me? Do I see sinners with the compassion of Christ or with the critical eye of censure?
- The Christian life is **a two-way proposition** as we bring blessing to God as well as receive them.
  - “He looks on my life in tenderness, for He loves me deeply. He sees the long years during which His goodness and mercy have followed me without slackening. He longs to see some measure of that same goodness and mercy not only passed on to others by me but also passed back to Him with joy.
  - He longs for love – my love. And I love Him – only and because He first loved me. Then He is satisfied.”

# “I Will Dwell in the House of the Lord Forever” – Verse 6

## ➤ Dwell

- In order to dwell, the sheep would be so satisfied that there would not be a shred of desire for a change
- Shepherd has great affection and devotion to his flock; healthy, contented, productive sheep are his delight and profit;
- Bonds between them are forever

## ➤ Presence (and care)

- Ever-present shepherd on the scene; sheep wants to be in full view of owner at all times
- Comparison:
  - “Live ever aware of God’s presence;” very distinct and real inner consciousness of Christ’s presence in my life, made evident by His gracious Holy Spirit within
  - Habitual awareness of Christ within me, empowering me to live a noble and richly rewarding life in cooperation with Him



# “I Will Dwell in the House of the Lord Forever” – Verse 6

## ► House

- From standpoint of the sheep – “house” reflects on and recounts the year-round activities – Rancher's alertness, care and energetic management bring sheep through satisfactorily
  - Spring/Summer – Home Ranch with green pastures/still waters
  - Summer/Fall – Drive through valley to high tablelands of mountain summer range
  - Fall/Winter – Drive back to Home Ranch with familiar fields, corrals, barns, shelters
- Comparison:
  - We think of the “House of the Lord” as the sanctuary of the Lord
  - It is also the family, household, flock of the Good Shepherd
  - We should be proud to belong to Christ; glad to look back and recall all the amazing ways He has provided for our welfare; tell of our confidence in Christ

