

Shepherd or Sheepdog

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A 40-Day Journey toward Rediscovering Faith in God

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Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved passages of Scripture. We see the Lord as a loving and gentle Shepherd caring for His sheep—meeting all of their needs. Although the Amplified Version of this passage isn't as poetic as my favored NKJV, it brings out the meaning in a beautiful way.

Psalm 23 AMP

The Lord is my Shepherd [to feed, guide, and shield me], I shall not lack.

²He makes me lie down in [fresh, tender] green pastures; He leads me beside the still and restful waters.

³He refreshes and restores my life (my self); He leads me in the paths of righteousness [uprightness and right standing with Him—not for my earning it, but] for His name's sake.

⁴Yes, though I walk through the [deep, sunless] valley of the shadow of death, I will fear or dread no evil, for You are with me; Your rod [to protect] and Your staff [to guide], they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my [brimming] cup runs over.

⁶Surely or only goodness, mercy, and unfailing love shall follow me all the days of my life, and through the length of my days the house of the Lord [and His presence] shall be my dwelling place.

Do we see God this way, as someone who is always ministering to us? Or might we sometimes (or even often) think of Him more like a sheepdog than a shepherd, distressing us by

always nipping at our heels to keep us on the right path, barking out our shortcomings day and night so we'll repent and improve? Do you catch yourself feeling a sort of hopelessness because you don't measure up to some standard that someone else set? Do your thoughts sometimes sound more like this?

The Lord is my Sheepdog; He doesn't care that I lack. He just cares that I obey Him and produce more sheep.

²He leads me into uncomfortable situations. He wants to keep me hungry, thirsty, and broken.

³He wants me to be desperate, so He allows me to suffer. He lets me know that I am still unrighteous, but leaves making myself righteous up to me.

⁴When I go through dark times, He lets me sink or swim. With His rod, He beats me. He grabs me by the neck with His staff to keep me in line.

⁵He allows my enemies to devastate me and watches me suffer instead of helping me. He leaves me for dead, and He makes sure that my cup is never quite full so I will keep seeking after Him.

⁶All the days of my life, I will seek after His goodness, mercy, and unfailing love, but without completely finding them. I will seek to be close to Him and to enter His presence all the days of my life, but I'll never know the joy of actually being as close as I can be.

Or perhaps, like many Christians today, do we live with mixed messages—good Shepherd, mean Sheepdog? Do we believe on one hand that Jesus paid it all and yet feel we will never ever be good enough to “pay the debt of love we owe” even though we are doing everything that we think we should? Do we know theologically that God can be pleased, but have no idea *how*? Does it seem God is always demanding more from us—never satisfied with us at all ever?

These mixed messages, Beloved, are not from God. He is our gentle, loving Shepherd. Don't allow these lying thoughts to infiltrate your heart. Reject them! May the Lord set us free to see Him as He truly is, our loving Shepherd who loves us and is gently leading us by His love.

I love the gospel of Mark. It seems that he noticed details that some of the other gospel writers didn't record. See in this account its similarities with Psalm 23 and witness the acts of a loving Shepherd for His sheep who were in need.

Mark 6:34, 39-42

*Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was **moved with compassion** for them, because they were like **sheep not having a shepherd**. So He began to teach them many things.*

³⁹*Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the **green grass**. ⁴⁰So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. ⁴¹And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all.*

⁴²***So they all ate and were filled.***

