

A few years ago, we were on holiday in Cornwall. As keen cyclists we were riding along a pretty walkway which happened to be next to a lot of fields. As we stopped to take a break I remember looking out across the field at the sheep and was suddenly struck by how like sheep we are as humans. I don't know if you have studied sheep in depth, but we have striking similarities. Our tendency to wander off in all directions and make foolish decisions at times echoes that of the humble sheep.

Out of all the Psalms, Psalm 23 must surely be one of the most comforting and joyful psalms written.

David, the writer of the Psalm had himself been the keeper of sheep and understood the needs and cares of the shepherd, he compares himself to the weak, defenceless foolish sheep and he takes God to be his carer and provider. As David declares "The Lord is my shepherd", there is no might, maybe or doubt, there is just confidence. He knows that God loves him, cares for him and protects him. How much do we need to hear that God is our shepherd in these testing times?

The shepherd (our Lord) leads us to the green pastures and still waters. Life will always throw us into turbulent waters. I think most of us are living through turbulent waters right at this moment. But leading us to those still waters and green pastures God restores our life balance, he encourages us to be still and to take refreshment for our weary hearts. He delights when we are refreshed and restored.

He restores our souls and guides us with righteousness. He sustains us and his hand will always be over us guiding us on the right paths so that we can have the Godly tools for living life.

When we become followers of Christ, we are not promised a life without difficulties but even when we face troubles and devastation in our lives God promises to walk with us, he will never leave us! With these words "Even though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" we can take comfort that God stands right with us, providing peace, comfort, and rest to life's troubles. By pressing into him, seeking his presence, and allowing him to love us we cast off worldly cares and bask in the peace that passes all understanding.

When we picture the shepherd, we might picture him with a staff or rod in his hand. This is used to gently guide the sheep onto the right paths or to block the paths which lead to trouble. God is our guiding hand, our rod, and staff, as long as we are walking in God's authority his protection will be over us. And as inevitably we all do, when we stray off the path, God gently but firmly guides us back onto the right path and we are drawn back to him.

The shepherd loves his sheep so much that he anoints our heads with oil, he sets us apart for his service. We are reminded of Jesus here as the oils used to anoint him at his burial. We become dead to our old lives when we give our lives to Christ. Our new lives are made alive by the anointing power of Jesus. This anointing enables our "cup to overflow." Even when we do not feel it, our cups are always overflowing with God's love for us. Sometimes

we do not always acknowledge the blessings that God gives us day after day. We have so much to be thankful for even in these difficult days.

The final verses remind us that God's love will always be with us and he will continually pursue us even when we don't feel like responding to him. The promise that we will live in eternity with him, that he prepares a place for us is very real. As disciples of Christ we will get to live with God forever, now that is a promise to hold onto.

So, in this difficult and uncertain time, how will you respond to this psalm? Talk to God about all the feelings you have, allow his comforting hand to restore joy to your soul. Bask in the still waters and allow Him to refresh your weary hearts. He is the good shepherd.