



## Sermon Title: Psalm 23 (Part 5) 'He Prepares a Table'

### **IN Opportunities to connect and pray as a group**

1. What is your favourite food?
2. What is a memorable dinner event that you have attended?
3. What event have you ever been involved in 'preparing'? How did it go?

### **UP Time that is devoted to the Word of God**

1. Reading Psalm 23:1-4, review how David gives testimony to how good the Lord His shepherd is. Take a few minutes to have your group members give specific testimony to how good the Lord has been to them using David's phrasing. For example, 'My Shepherd restored my soul when....' or 'My Shepherd made me lie down in green pastures when...'
2. In verses 1-3, David uses the pronoun 'He' and then in verses 4-5, he switches to the pronouns 'you/your.' Why do you think he changed his wording with regards to his Shepherd?
- 3 a) Go over the cultural background of the words: 'prepare a table before me,' 'anoint my head with oil,' 'my cup overflows' and 'house of the Lord.'  
b) Look at Pastor Henry's outline headers in the summary (back of page). How do the cultural meanings enhance our understanding of the outline?
4. What significance is it that the table is prepared 'in the presence of my enemies'?
5. What does it mean that "your goodness and love will follow me"? Balance this with the words: 'He makes me lie down...he leads me...he guides me...' What more does this say about the Shepherd?
6. List all the locations mentioned in this Psalm. What perspective does the location of v.6 offer?

### **OUT Seek to be the Community of God's people in your community**

1. The verses of Psalm 23 are full of symbolism.  
(ie. Green pastures, valley of the shadow of death, rod / staff, table, etc)  
Which symbol has been most important for you? Why?
2. Is there a situation in your life that you need to 'accept' rather than be 'resigned to'? How can the group pray for you in working through this?
3. Don't forget to memorize this passage!

**UP – IN – OUT reflect a balanced life including a focus on our personal relationship with the Father (UP), staying connected to the Body (IN), and reaching our world (OUT).**

(This week's writers: Gene and Karen Gibbs, Jem Ong, Georgia Harrison.)

### **THE WORD (NIV)**

**Psalm 23** The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,<sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.<sup>4</sup> 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.<sup>6</sup> 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.

**Psalm 34:8** Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

**Psalm 46:1-10** God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.<sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells.<sup>5</sup> God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.<sup>6</sup> Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.<sup>7</sup> The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.<sup>8</sup> Come and see what the LORD has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth.<sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.<sup>10</sup> He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

**Psalm 62:8** Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

**John 19:10-11** "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"<sup>11</sup> Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

**Acts 1:8** <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

**Romans 8:18; 8:28** I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us... And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

**1 Corinthians 2:9** However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"—the things God has prepared for those who love him—

**Philippians 4:13** I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

**1 Thessalonians 5:24** The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

**1 Peter 5:8** Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.



In Psalm 23, David is writing about the goodness of God. It is relatively easy to celebrate God's goodness when things are going well. But what if things are not going well? These times test our confidence in the love and goodness of God. They may see us take matters into our own hands or throw our faith overboard. King David went through those hard times. He would say that the worst thing we could do is to go through life and the dark valleys without God. The valley is not the destination. The destination is a more intimate relationship with the Lord. This Psalm is his testimony to how good his Shepherd was to him. How does God lead us and help us as we walk through the dark valleys in a life-giving and redemptive way?

1. **He invites us into a deeper relationship with Himself.** He does this by 'preparing a table before us'. After the sheep winter close to home, the fields are exhausted and other grazing lands need to be sought out. The shepherd would make trips ahead of time to deal with anything that might hurt or endanger the sheep (poisonous plants, plug up holes occupied by poisonous snakes, etc.). These valleys above the timberline were referred to as a 'mesa' or 'tableland'. God cares for us in the same way. Preparing a table symbolizes His loving care and friendship. In doing this God communicates:
  - a. **You are my friend.** Through Christ's death and resurrection, He has made a way for us to become His friend. When we accept His invitation of grace by faith and sit at His table He assures us that we are His. Because of this we can approach Him in freedom and confidence knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God.
  - b. **I will care for you, protect you and provide for your needs.**
  - c. **I delight in you and want to spend time with you.** In this communion with God we are encouraged, strengthened and guided so as to not lose heart as we walk through the dark valleys. David's use of the term 'my cup overflows' (vs 5) has cultural connotations as well. When you were a guest of someone you were welcome there if the host kept filling your cup. It meant that the host was enjoying your company and didn't want you to leave. If the cup went empty, then it was the host's way of saying to call it a night. For David's cup to 'overflow' meant that He could come to the table at any time and be welcome and that the Lord never tired of his company. Similarly, when David said 'in the presence of my enemies' this was an invitation to sit at God's table while you are in that dark valley. An enemy is anything that would cause fear, discouragement or heartbreak and prevent you from being who God made you to be or do what He called you to do. Let Him shelter you and strengthen you for a time (Psalm 46) and gain His perspective and peace (Psalm 62:8) by telling Him your burdens. In this instance Satan may be your enemy. He often operates unseen by many yet the havoc in our lives which he causes is great. He may join you at God's table and speak lies about you or about God. He may strive to discourage you about the path you are on or divert your attention elsewhere or minimize your importance to God or of His love for you (1 Peter 5:8). Feast, rather, on God's truth and perspective.
2. **He empowers us to do what we can't do.** David wrote, 'You anoint my head with oil.' Insects could irritate sheep so much that they could cause the sheep to beat their heads against objects and sometimes kill themselves. The shepherd would anoint the sheep with a mixture of oil, spices and sulfur to keep the insects at bay and free from infection. Additionally, oil was used to heal wounds, and to indicate God's approval, presence and protection. This means that God will not ask us to do anything without anointing you with the strength, power and resources you need to do it. He will give you what you need to walk through that dark valley (1 Thess 5:24; Acts 1:8); you can't make it alone. Christ, the 'anointed one', gives you the anointing. Trust Him and submit to Him and He will give you the anointing and power you need to do what He calls you to do (Phil 4:13). We can lose the anointing many ways (pride, greed, gossip, slander, unforgiveness, setting up idols, etc.). Therefore, surrender to Him daily and ask for a fresh anointing to do what He calls us to and to walk through the dark valleys.
3. **He pursues us with His goodness and love.** David affirms that the Lord is always good, loving and kind (Psalm 34:8) even if He feels far away while we are walking a dark valley. Embrace His goodness by faith. Know that He sees and feels our pain, but that He sees these moments with a different perspective. He is not the author of evil or suffering but will allow it to accomplish good (John 19:10-11; Rom 8:28). Life is not always good. But God is always good. His purposes are that we would have a better life, where 'better' is defined by God and which reflects the character and life of Christ. He promises us a life of joy, peace, humility, integrity, nobility and eternal impact for God. It is a life that doesn't just soak in the goodness and blessings but that passes it on to others.
4. **He reminds us that this life is not all there is.** Life goes beyond our few years here. It goes on forever. David wrote, 'And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.' Like David, we will live in God's presence in this life and forever in the next. Consider that when you are planning just how opulent your earthly home will be. It is short-term housing. It is not your permanent home. What David is saying is that life consists of more than the years we live here on earth. Heaven is forever, and forever is a long time. And that changes everything when you have eternity in mind. When you are in the dark valley and life seems hopeless, or when you see all that is dark and broken in this world, you can be reminded that this is not your permanent and final home. Paul suffered much in his life and ministry though he considered it as 'not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us' (Rom 8:18; 1 Cor 2:9).

David never came to a place of resignation to circumstances but to a place of acceptance in God's sovereignty, goodness and of His purpose in David's life. The calling is to surrender to Him and to His purposes in all that happens to us. Resignation would have us lie down and think of how senseless it all is. Acceptance rises up to meet God and say 'In what redemptive way can you use this mess, Lord? And, what do you want to accomplish through this in me and through me? How do you want to use me and my circumstances to bring Your goodness and light into a dark and evil world? How do you want to use this dark valley I'm facing to make you visible through me to those around me?'