

INTERVARSITY BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

Psalm 23:1-6, A Thanksgiving Psalm (60 minutes)

WELCOME (7 minutes)

Icebreaker: Do you have a favorite poem or song that really speaks to you?

We are studying the Bible together because we want to grow in our love for Jesus through Scripture and because we want to grow in our witness to Jesus through Scripture.

Let's pray and ask God to help us as we study today's passage together...

GROUP NORMS (3 minutes)

Let's remember our group norms as we study together today:

1. Use "I" statements (speak for yourself, not for everyone)
2. Avoid judgmental statements (no shame or blame)
3. Allow space for everyone to share if they choose
4. Practice active listening and give advice only if invited to do so
5. What we share here stays here (confidentiality)

INTRODUCE the Scripture Text (3 minutes)

For the ancient Hebrew people, the Psalms were songs of worship that captured their reality and guided them to turn their will and their longings toward God.

Today we will study a psalm of individual thanksgiving.

Psalm 23 is attributed to David, who was ancient Israel's best king. He led through times of hardship, sacrifice, danger, honor, power, abuse, scandal, and even murder. He experienced amazing successes and terrible failures, but because he was present and attentive to God's voice, he repented and returned to the Lord when he sinned. He walked with God, and every other king was judged by the standard David set.

David worked as a shepherd in his youth. He would have had a rod on his belt, like a club, and a staff that doubled as a walking stick and a tool for rescuing and guiding the sheep.

Here are a few things that David would have known about sheep:

- Sheep are not dumb like many make them out to be. It's more complicated than that...
- Sheep can solve puzzles and mazes faster than monkeys, and they can find herbs for healing. Sheep have emotions, and they can communicate emotions through facial expressions. Sheep can remember faces and voices of other sheep and humans, and sheep have been known to have best friends.
- Sheep know the voice of the shepherd they can trust, and they respond to it. They do not respond to voices they don't know, except by maybe running away.

- Sheep are very smart, but they often do things that appear very dumb. Why? They act on instinct the moment they are frightened, and they become scared very easily. If the shepherd is not nearby to calm them when they are scared, they do ridiculous things.

SEE the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Let's read the passage and talk about what we see.

- Who are the characters? How are they connected?
- What is happening? When? Where?
- Which words are being repeated?
- Is the author comparing or contrasting anything?
- Would you like to point out anything else you notice?

Psalm 23:1-6 NIV –

A psalm of David.

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

3 he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

4 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.

5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

6 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.

DISCOVER the Scripture Text (25 minutes)

Let's discuss a few questions that will help us discover and understand the text.

1. Make a list of the benefits David seems to be experiencing in his life because the Lord is his shepherd. How would you describe these benefits in your own words?
2. Why does a psalm about lacking nothing include darkness, evil, and enemies?
3. Why do you think David uses the image of a sheep and a shepherd to explain his relationship with God? What understanding comes from this image?

4. How might this psalm have impacted the ancient Hebrews as they prayed and sang it in worship together?
5. If we could communicate the core message of this text in just one sentence, what would it be? What do we sense God is communicating through this passage?

RESPOND to the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

David's poem paints a picture of what it means to relate to God like a sheep who follows and relies on the power and defense of his shepherd, his close friend. David's poem expresses obedient trust and a deep relational connection to the Lord. David's deepest needs are being met by the Lord's deepest provision. David faces real threats, but somehow he is still at peace. How??? David dwells in the love and provision of the Lord. It's like David is saying, "The Lord himself is my peace, my safety, my home."

Security in the Lord is enough.

Let's discern together how we can respond to what God is saying. We will answer one option from below, whichever seems most relevant to our group's discussion of the text.

- A. In your personal life, what threatens to undo your security in the Lord? What are your deepest needs, and how is the Lord inviting you to trust him?
- B. Where do you usually place your security, instead of in God (competence, people pleasing, angst/judgement, relationships, something else)? Confess to God and ask God to help you place your security in him as your shepherd.
- C. How is this psalm speaking into your life right now? What invitation or challenge do you sense from God?

CLOSE (2 minutes)

Let's pray and thank God for our time in Scripture together...

Tips for leading the group discussion (and more tips are available at howto.bible):

- *Participate but keep your comments short to make space for others.*
- *Silence is okay. Encourage further discussion by saying "What else?" instead of commenting on every response.*



this material and more can be found at tiny.cc/biblestudyguides

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