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God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.

Psalm 23.

(2015)

Teach it, don't demand it.

Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man. As to such I neither claim special knowledge or perfect understanding.

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Psalm 23.

Topics.

- The Lord is my Shepherd.
- He makes me lie down in green pastures.
- He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness.
- Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.
- You prepare a table before me.
- Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me.

INTRODUCTION: Psalms are songs and prayers offered to God by the nation Israel, they cover the range of human emotion, expressing praise, faith, victory, sorrow, despair, depression, frustration and the troubled heart of a mourner. They contrast the righteous with the wicked, and include the wisdom and the treasure of God's word. Psalms were written at the beginning of the 15th century BC and probably collected in their final form in the 3rd century.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

Book One (Psalm 1-41)

A Psalm of David.

The LORD is my Shepherd.

Psalm 23:1 ----- ¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Upon the quiet fields and hills David in his younger years had been the shepherd boy of the sheep and was later appointed to rule as king over Israel. He sings this little Psalm of the true Shepherd and King of men. Though we do not know at what stage of David's life it was written it is almost certain it was in his later years. Though the same general thought of the Shepherds care is presented throughout the Psalm it can be divided into the following two halves -

1. The first four verses of the psalm are focused upon the Shepherd and us as the sheep. It pictures the divine Shepherd leading his flock and is written from memories of past experience and upon the present care of the Shepherd, to hope for the future. It progresses from what was and is, to what will be.
2. The last two verses present the Shepherd as the host, and us as the guests at his table and dwellers in his house. In these verses the Psalm goes on beyond the earthly end; and the hope comes brightly out, that all the weary wanderings will end in the Father's house where there is peace and joy and fear and sorrow is changed to triumphant, faith, peace and happiness forever more

Since David himself had been a shepherd he would: -

- Have clearly understood the advantage it was to the sheep to have a shepherd that was skilful and faithful.
- Have carefully performed his duty of protecting and guiding his flock.
- Have shown tender cares and affection toward his sheep when injured.
- Have been always mindful of their need and what could injure them.

- Have been fully aware of dogs and wolves that feed off the flock.
- Have been prepared to leave to flock to find and bring back one that went astray.

From his knowledge and experience as a shepherd David illustrates God's care of his people and by his words shows that even the most damaged is not below the understanding of the divine Shepherd. The great prophet Isaiah wrote: -

- He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 40:11).

The divinely appointed Shepherd of God's people protects and provides for his sheep with more care than any human shepherd is able. He saves to the uttermost and keeps and lifts them from the darkness of death to rise and dwell in the House of his heavenly Father for evermore. A shepherd to David was one who watches over, protects and feeds his flock. The word shepherd comes from the Hebrew word (ra'ah) and means to tend and rule a flock, (i.e. to graze and pasture it), by extension it carries the idea of associating and keeping company with a companion and friend.

The words, "The Lord is my shepherd," shine a spotlight on the truth that though the Shepherd is the great Redeemer of all the flock every individual believer should have their own personal relationship with him. The Lord belongs to all, but in relationship he is mine. To the heart and mind of the wicked whose only joy is in that which pleases their senses the Shepherds great abundance is dry and tasteless food, but to the faithful even though they may have little of this world the abundance of the Shepherd is food that delights every corner of their heart and the mind so that whatever their lot in life is the Shepherd is able to give contentment and peace to the mind and fill the heart with love and joy.

It is only natural that David would refer to the Lord as his Shepherd since he had been a shepherd himself. David, in advanced years, would naturally remember the blessings of his early life and the care of God over him. The idea expressed in his words is that of tender care and protection, particularly to the young and the feeble.

David's words, "The Lord is my shepherd," are spoken in the present tense, they express a spirit of assured confidence and dependence there is no "if" nor "but," nor even "I hope so." David knew he belonged to the heavenly Shepherd and that he cared for him, watched over him, and kept him. It mattered, not what David's circumstances where he was fully aware that in the present moment he was always under the care of the Shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd can be applied to God the Father caring for and feeding the people of Israel and caring for David and to the promised Messiah the Christ who David being a king and prophet not only knew by faith, but by faith also had Christ's Spirit dwelling within.

The following Scriptures show God is referred to as a Shepherd.

- He (Israel/Jacob) blessed Joseph and said, "The God before whom my father's Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day (Genesis 48:15).
- Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth. (Psalm 80:1).
- He (the Lord GOD) will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 40:11).
- You (God) led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. (Psalm 77:20).

The following Scriptures show Jesus is referred to as a Shepherd.

- His (Joseph) bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel) (Gen. 49:24). Prophetic of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” (John 10:14).
- Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant (Heb. 13:20).
- For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:25).
- When the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:4).

Christ the great Shepherd knows the maladies of his sheep and where to find them, when they are in danger and what is to be done for them and will do all that is needed to guide, protect and save them and his sheep willingly yield to his voice and follow him wherever he leads as obediently as natural sheep of the fields follow their shepherd.

I shall not want: I shall not want either for this life, or for the next. Those who set their minds and hearts upon the temporal things of this world may think many things to be necessary for them, but those whose mind and heart is set upon Christ will not be tempted to spend their life chasing the unnecessary things of this world.

The underlying thought in these words are, “I shall not lack for temporal things nor shall I lack for all that is needed for righteousness that leads to eternal life, His grace will be sufficient for me. I may not possess all that I wish for, but “I shall not want.” Others, far wealthier and wiser than I, may want, but I shall not.” Paul in the New Testament expressed this same idea in the following verse: -

- Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹²I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philip. 4:11-13).

Paul is saying that he has learnt to cope with whatever his lot in life might be, it matters not whether he is dwelling in houses of the rich or lacking he has learned as David also had that with the right attitude he can handle all situation because Christ strengthens him.

The author of Hebrews wrote: -

- Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you. (Heb. 13:5).

I shall not want, means that come what may, if famine should devastate the land, or calamity destroy the city, old age come with its feebleness they shall not bring me any lack, and even death with its gloom shall not find me destitute. I have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have skill and wisdom to achieve great wealth and riches, but because the Lord is my Shepherd. The wicked always want and their heart is far from being satisfied and content, but, a heart and mind that is filled with the Spirit of God dwells in the palace of contentment.

Paul wrote to Timothy: -

- People who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagine that godliness is a means of gain. ⁶Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment (1 Tim. 6:5-6).

The words, “I shall not want” as applied to David, would embrace everything that would be a proper object of desire, whether temporal or spiritual; whether pertaining to the body or the heart or the mind and whether applying to time or to eternity. David’s words, could be interpreted, “I shall not fail” or “come short,” of eternal glory and happiness for Christ’s sheep are in his hands out of which no-one can pluck them, as the following words of Jesus show: -

- My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. (John 10:27-28)

It is interesting to notice that the Scriptural description of the unconverted is of goats and wolves that have no shepherd and are untamed and have no boundaries, while the Scriptural description of the converted is of sheep which is an animal the shepherd has guided and tamed and keeps within certain boundaries. It is in his care that the flock finds rest for their hearts and minds and not in the riches and wealth of this world.

He clothes those who follow him with his robe of his righteousness and in him they find a resting place for their hearts and minds and the fullness of their lives out of which all their joy and spiritual wants and needs are supplied

He makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures.

Psalm 23:2 ----- ²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

David describes himself as one of the Shepherds flock, safe under his care, free from all anxieties by the awareness of his protection, and from this confidence he has a sense of rest, enjoyment, tranquillity, peace, and safety. The green freshness of the meadow and pastures of tender grass with streams of calm cool water flowing through them is the most complete picture of: -

- Happiness and contentment.
- Calmness, restfulness, tranquillity, and peacefulness.
- Needs being fully satisfied and completely supplied.

The picture is that of a flock in fresh grass, surrounded by abundance, and, having satisfied their wants, lying down in the meadow with calm contentment. It is not merely a flock enjoying rest, but also of a flock whose wants are supplied, lying down in the midst of abundance. Applied to David himself, or to the men and women of God the idea is, that the wants of the heart and mind are met and satisfied with peace, contentment, love and joy and in the full enjoyment of these, there is the sense of abundance and rest for the mind and the confidence that such abundance will always be freely available.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures soft fresh and pleasant smelling grass that brings comfort and life to the sheep that eat it in contrast to hard dry and dusty ground that has no nourishment and no comfort. He guides and leads the flock to pastures that are safe and provide abundantly for their well-being is one part of the shepherd's work. The prophet Ezekiel wrote: -

- I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. (Ezek. 34:14-15).

By these "green pastures" may be meant the covenant of grace, its blessings and God's promises, where there is food for all that leads to eternal life in everlasting glory and to the gift of righteousness that comes to all who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel in which there is spiritual delights for the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor the noble and the lowly.

The expression, "In green pastures and still waters presents the most beautiful image to the mind of a flock feeding in lush green fertile meadows, and resting in quietness by the cool of waters of the streams running gently through them. There is no other view the natural world offers to the imagination that so beautifully conveys the idea of peace and abundant provision made for the heart and mind as well as body by the goodness of the Shepherd.

The green pastures can be seen as symbols of: -

- The Scriptures of truth, always fresh, always rich, and never exhausted.
- The Gospel which is pure and natural nutriment for the mind and heart.
- Faith and the promises of God that give hope to the life of the believer.
- Peace, rest, serenity, contentment and satisfaction that comes to those who follow the Shepherd.

NOTICE: "He makes me to lie down." It is the Shepherd who enables us to perceive the preciousness of his word, and to feed upon it. We should be enormously thankful for his promises, his forgiveness and his grace especially when it is considered there are some believers who are so distracted they cannot say that this blessedness is theirs. They see others dwelling in the green pastures, but they are not able to lie down in them. Those who enjoy the full joy of their salvation and Christ's love and God's grace and the full assurance of their faith should greatly bless their eternal Shepherd.

He leads me beside still waters: the Shepherd leads me sweetly and gently, accommodating himself to my infirmities as shepherds do to their sheep lest they should wander and perish. He does this by his word and by the example of his life and the influence of his Spirit upon our hearts and minds. An unsteady walk is the consequence of unbelief, discontent and distrust. Trust in the Shepherd's care and his word is the path to faithfully following him. Isaiah wrote: -

- He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. (Isaiah 40:11).
- They shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them, for he who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them. (Isaiah 49:10)

He leads me beside the still waters, not stagnant waters, but waters of quietness not tempestuous and stormy, but waters that are calm and gentle. It is a picture that prompts the mind to relax in calmness and peace. The still waters can be seen as a symbol of: -

- The Holy Spirit by which the faithful are led by the streams which flow from the word of God as a fountain of living waters.
- The still waters of the Lord's comfort and his paths of righteousness and the way of peace
- Pure, clear and still waters of rest and quietness, in contrast to the business and rush of life.
- The everlasting love of God, which is like the streams of a river that make the heart of the Shepherds people glad.
- The waters to which those who are athirst and invited to come.
- The immortal state of eternal life and everlasting glory and happiness.
- The living waters of life that Christ will lead his people to.
- The fountains of living water that bring vitality to the Spirit of those in Christ.
- The cleansing waters of God's word that washes away sin and refreshes the Spirit.
- The still waters of love and peace that flow from being in union with Christ.
- The pure river of water of life that the Lord gives to drink freely from.

- The waters of the sanctuary, which rise to the ankles, knees, and loins, and are as a broad river to swim in.
- The ankle-deep, the knee deep and the waist-deep river that flowed from the Sanctuary that could not be passed through, because it had risen so deep that wherever its fresh water flowed it brought life to everything wherever it goes. (Ezekiel 47:3-23)
- The water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the Holy City the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-2).

David in this Psalm is no doubt comparing how beautiful his inner peace is to the moments he relished as a young boy when he enjoyed the times he was able to lie on the green grass as a shepherd of Jesse his father's sheep. The Spirit of God may flow into our heart, but not into our neighbour's and therefore they do not perceive the divine presence dwelling within, though the Spirit may be pouring into one heart, yet those that sit next to the favoured one may know nothing of it.

The great prophet Isaiah wrote: -

- Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. (Isaiah 55:1).

And in the book of Revelation it is written: -

- The Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Rev. 7:17).

He Restores my Soul. He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness.

Psalm 23:3 ----- ³He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

The word, soul comes from the Hebrew word (nephesh) and carries the idea of vitality, breath, spirit, heart, mind in the context of this verse it means life or spirit.

He restores my soul can apply to the following two scenarios: -

1. He restores my soul to revive or quicken it or bring it back, from its errors or wanderings. No creature is more prone to go astray than a sheep and more at a loss to find its way back, but when God shows us our errors, gives us repentance, and brings us back to the right path, he restores us to intimate fellowship with him and the Father. David wrote: -
 - The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. (Psalm 19:7).
2. He restores my soul, when exhausted, weary, or sad and quickens the spirit when it is exhausted and energizes the spirit when wearied, troubled, anxious and worn down with care and toil so the heart and life being exhausted is brought back to its original state of vigour and vitality, its enthusiasm and passion and encouraged with new excitements and new efforts and filled with new joy.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness refers to the following: -

- Paths that neither hurt, nor weary and are free of all dangers.
- Paths that led to the right ways of salvation and right living.
- Paths that are straight and lead to God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Paths of justice and righteousness (doing what is good and right).

- Paths that are paved with love, grace, mercy, faith and eternal life.
- Paths that do not led to ruin and away from God's love and grace.
- Paths that led to justification, righteousness and holiness.
- Paths that lead in the way of truth, salvation and eternal life.
- Paths that honour God and bring a good testimony to the name to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Paths of honest duty and faithful service and ministry.
- Paths that are lined with the commandments of God and the fruits of the Spirit (i.e., love, mercy, grace, kindness, patience, compassion, honesty and forgiveness etc.).

Some may wonder how God led David in these paths of righteousness, David give us the answer to this question in Psalm one hundred and nineteen. He wrote: "The only way for a young man to keep his heart pure is by guarding it with God's word then proclaims how he loves and meditates on God's law and His commandments, because they make him wise and give him more understanding than all his teachers and even the aged. The LORD through His word guided him in life and because of this David loved God's word more than fine gold. Following are just a few verses from Psalm 119 that express David's heart.

- How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. (Psalm 119:9).
- Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day. (Psalm 119:97).
- How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psalm 119:103).
- Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105).
- I love your commandments above gold, above fine gold. (Psalm 119:127).

It is interesting to notice as much as David loves God's word and it is perfect, David says, he has seen a limit to all its perfection (Psalm 119:96). The limit is not in the law it is perfect, the limit is in us because of sin. Christ did not surrender his life to the bloodstained cross of Calvary so that we could attain to the perfect standard of the law and God's perfect Holiness, but because we couldn't. If any of us could attain to the glorious state of living a lifestyle free of sin Christ died for no reason. God keeps all the faithful in Christ by his word, his Spirit and his love and grace.

For his name's sake: the purpose God leads David in the paths of righteousness is for his name's sake, meaning not to glorify David, but to glorify His Holy name. The highest worship a believer can offer God is not songs of worship and praise, but living a lifestyle that brings honour to His Holy name and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. When the life of those who confess to believe in God evidences justice, integrity and honesty in their dealings and they show, grace, mercy, kindness toward others and treat people with decency and respect, they are by their lifestyle worshipping God in the highest way possible. When God's people live in this way God's name and His goodness shines amongst the world.

David wrote: -

- He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. (Psalm 25:9).

This God will always do if people will follow the directions of his word, the teachings of the apostles the message of the Gospel, and the guidance of His Spirit and walk in His love and grace. No one who submits to Him in this way will ever go astray!

Though I Walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

Psalm 23:4 ----- ⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

The valleys in focus are not lush green valleys, but dark and sunless gorges, valleys and ravines overhung by high precipitous cliffs, filled with wild and dense forests and many dangers which bring dread and terror to the mind should one get lost in such a gloomy valley. It is almost certain David during his many years as a shepherd had on various occasions entered such valleys to rescue wandering sheep.

The valley of the shadow of death can refer to the following two things: -

1. The grave and the gloomy horrors of the darkness of death. Death, is called, "The land of darkness and deep shadow." (Job 10:21). It would be right and proper to suppose that David's life is drawing near to the grave, and the sorrows of death are compassing him about, and though he is about to enter the borders of eternity he fears no evil. The Psalms show us David at various times suffered extremely painful sickness which he thought would take his life and history shows he fought many wars in which twenty-thousand men would be slaughtered on the battled field.

Many times in his Psalms he says, God has brought him near to the grave, so when David says the LORD is with him in those moments of dread and that he does not fear death he is not simply talking from intellectual knowledge but from the reality of his life experiences. David is basically saying even though he has every reason to look upon himself as a dying man he will fear no evil, he will not give way to his fears, but will confidently rely upon the word and promise of God, fully confident that His grace will cover his lack. David saw death like a dark valley that must be passed through while going from this world to the next. The following prophetic words of David show that he knew he would be resurrected: -

- I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken. ⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. ¹⁰For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption. ¹¹You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:8-11)

David trusted in God's word that he would be resurrected and this promise removed the fear and dread of death. He knew the love and grace of God in his life and was fully confident God would not forsake him in his darkest hour. Death is the king of terrors, but not to the sheep of Christ he will guide them and meet them with his love. Every faithful believer may say: -

- Death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? (1 Cor. 15:55).

Death is robbed of its sting it cannot hold the sheep of the Shepherd in its dark, deep and murky valley. For the Shepherds sheep it is a fruitful valley filled with the presence and love and the grace and comforts of the great Shepherd who will not allow them to be lost in its darkness as they walk through it, but take their hand and bring them safe to the mountain of everlasting glory on the other side. This is the ground of a true Christian's confidence when in the valley of the shadow of death, God is with them and his presence inspires them with confidence and comfort, hope and joy.

It gives them light amidst the darkness of the valley, and like a caterpillar transforms through metamorphose into a most beautiful butterfly; death is transformed into eternal life and everlasting happiness in glory. There is enough in the Gospel to comfort every faithful man and woman when dying and underneath them are the everlasting arms of God. The Lord's people feast at his banquet table of grace and love. Neither the powers of darkness nor the wicked are able to destroy the comforts of the Shepherds flock while they remain faithful to him who ascended from the bloodstained cross of Calvary.

2. David's words, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," can also be applied to any of the following: -

- To the most severe afflictions terrors and dangers that we may encounter.
- To all the dark vales of heartache, sadness, solitude and sorrow.
- To any path of gloom, hardships and trouble and any dark and dangerous way.
- To a state of spiritual darkness, confusion and bewilderment.
- To the distresses and anxiety people feel under apprehensions of the future.
- To any and every gloomy valley of weeping through which we may have to pass.

These can all be embraced in the words, "The valley of the shadow of death," since they all rob of joy, peace and happiness and leave those experiencing them in a dark place of despair, depression and for some even suicidal. Whether David had death or afflictions in mind matters little since both can be applied because God leads us through afflictions, temptations, trials, sorrows, hardships and troubles by His word, His love and His grace and leads us through the valley of the shadow of death in the same way.

However bright the future may appear nothing is certain there is always a shadow of darkness lurking. The mind can never meditate upon the future without some foreboding. There is always the thought that something awful could happen so the mind never has absolute peace when it honestly considers the future. But to the Christian mind there is the conviction, that no matter what sorrow may come God's love and grace will carry us through and at the end of death is eternal life and everlasting happiness in glory.

NOTE: nowhere in this Psalm does it indicate that David was fully removed from God, by any of these dark valleys of afflictions. There are times when a faithful believer can feel that God has lifted His Spirit and love from them, but this does not mean that they have forsaken God or that they have departed from their faith.

Many times David was overwhelmed with anxiety and felt depressed and that God had lifted his hand from him, but in all these times he prayed to God and sought His love mercy and grace showing that David's faith was not based upon his feelings and emotions, but upon God's word and His promises. We know that the words, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," do not imply David is separated from the LORD, because he says, the LORD was with him (v4) and the Lord is my Shepherd through all the darkness he is experiencing.

I will fear no evil: the true friend of God has nothing to fear in the dark valley of any cheerless and dismal event. Their great Shepherd will accompany them there, and can lead them safely out of the darkness no matter how dark it may appear. The faithful believer has nothing to fear in the most-gloomy scenes of life or in the dark valley of death or in the world beyond.

David is saying, "I will not give way to my fears, but confidently rely upon God." Neither the wolf that comes to the flock to kill and to destroy, or the roaring lion that seeks whom he may devour nor evil men, who kill the body and can do no more will he fear, because the Lord is his Shepherd, and on his side.

As one reads David's Psalm it becomes very clear that his faith was such that even if the worst calamity should befall him he would not fear, because he considered even things of this kind to be determined by God and do not come without His knowledge and will, and after patiently enduring works for good, and cannot separate him from the love of God. David sums up his faith with the following words: -

- The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1).

You are with me: David's faith was such that God though invisible would always be with him, he would not be alone or go alone. David felt assured that if God was with him he had nothing to dread. No matter what the darkness God would be his companion, his comforter, his protector, his guide. Even in death he would not die alone as many do.

The loved ones and friends of a dying man or woman accompany them as far as they can, and then they must give them the parting hand. They cheer them with fond embrace and their voice until, the dying becomes deaf to all sounds and their eyes become dim and they can see no more and then they seem to be alone. But the dying believer is not alone.

Their Shepherd and Saviour is with them in that valley and his comfort will never leave them so that even in their darkest hour they are able to say, "Thou art with me." Sheep are timid creatures, and so are Christ's people; but when the shepherd is with them, to sympathize with them under all their afflictions, to revive and comfort them with his love and promises of his grace, to bear them up and support them with his mighty arm of power, to teach and instruct them by his word their fears are driven away, and they pass through the dark valley, the deep waters, and fiery trials, with courage and cheerfulness.

The LORD through the prophet Isaiah said: -

- Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10).

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me: the shepherd carries a rod or staff with him when he goes to feed his flock. It is often bent or hooked at one end. When I was a child my father used the crook of the staff to seize the neck of the sheep when they tried to enter a different paddock to the one he was guiding them into. It is certain David in his early years as a shepherd not only used the crook of the staff in the same manner to guide his flock and bring back wandering sheep, but also used it as a support on the rocky hills and to guard the flock and drive away wild dogs and wolves that sought to devour the sheep and feed their own bellies.

The Shepherds rod and staff is for: -

- Guiding the sheep and defending the flock.
- Pushing forward those that are behind and fetching back those that go astray.
- Driving away dogs, wolves and bears etc. that seek out prey amongst the flock.

The Shepherds rod and staff can be seen symbolically as: -

- God's word, His law, His Spirit, His comfort and His power and strength.
- The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the office and ministry of a shepherd.
- The pastoral care and teachings of a faithful minister over the Lord's flock.
- Christ's love and God's support and upholding grace and love.

All of these can be seen as signifying the Shepherds rod and staff because they all have the power to reclaim the lost and the fallen back into the fold of the faithful flock and preserve and protect the flock from false teachers who are as ravenous wolves amongst the flock of God.

The rod and staff of Moses: the rod maybe an allusion to the rod of Moses as an emblem of power, especially as the word rod and staff comes from the Hebrew word (*matteh*). Figuratively it refers to a tribe or a rod for chastising and correcting, or to a sceptre for ruling and carries the idea of supporting life. In this light David's words, "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me," would carry the idea that the sceptre of the great Shepherds Kingdom and his power protects David, and supports and upholds him both to minister and to comfort.

The following verses show that the staff was also used for numbering the sheep: -

- Every tithe of herds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the LORD. (Lev. 27:32).

It should be of great comfort to Christ's sheep that they have passed under his staff and not only been individually numbered by him, but even the very hairs of their head are all numbered because they are of far more value than many sparrows (offered for a sacrifice offering) (Matt.10:30) (Luke 12:7). When the shepherd with his staff is seen as a symbol of Christ it embraces his Spirit and his love and power influencing, directing, disciplining, guiding, and protecting those walking by faith and his Gospel and the power of God to save by faith and grace to the uttermost.

NOTE: the rod in this context refers to God's discipline and correction by His law, His word and His love they do not refer to God's wrath and anger. These words are spoken in the context of a man in love with the LORD and who the LORDS presence and comfort is with.

You Prepare a Table Before Me.

Psalms 23:5 ----- ⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

The word table comes from the Hebrew word (*shalach*) literally it means a table as spread out and by implication it carries the idea of a meal spread out for a feast.

There may be an allusion here to some particular period of the life of David, when feasted at a banquet table while being surrounded by his enemies, especially since he has just said he does not fear death, because he knows the LORD is with him and there were occasions when David's enemies were forced to see how God acted on his behalf giving him great victories in battle against his enemies.

Though it is impossible now to determine to what occasion in his history he might be referring to, his final triumph will be in the Day of Judgment when His enemies will be assembled together in the very presence of God to be judged and sentenced. These words of David not only apply to his life, but also to the life of every faithful believer in the Lord Jesus Christ in the following two ways,

1. At this present time a table is spread with amazing grace, the love and forgiveness of God, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and his cleansing blood and salvation. The Lord's comfort, provisions and everlasting peace and happiness in glory with the great Shepherd of the sheep. All who come by faith to Christ are invited to freely eat from this table.

2. In a future time when the Jesus says to the faithful: -

- You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, ²⁹and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, ³⁰that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Luke 22:28-30).

In this present age God is preparing an eternal banquet table for everyone who belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ as they dwell as foreigners and strangers in this fallen and corrupt world amongst many temptations, dangers and enemies.

You anoint my head with oil: the word oil comes from the Hebrew word (*shemen*) and refers to a liquid from the olive which is often perfumed. Figuratively it carries the idea of richness fatness, fruitfulness and healing (i.e., as an ointment). It is often used as a symbol of gladness and the overflowing of happiness and joy that comforts and delights the heart and mind of those who faithfully follow Christ.

This anointing is not referring to the type of anointing Samuel anointed David with when he became king or to the anointing of oil those appointed to ministry are anointed with. The allusion is to the custom of eastern countries, at feasts, to anoint the heads of the guests with oil spoken of in the following verse.

- Go, eat your bread in joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. (Eccles. 9:7).

It is an indication of abundance, prosperity and rejoicing and carries the sense of, divine favour, comfort and joy, as the sons of Korah expressed in the following verse: -

- You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions (Psalm 45:7).

It means God has given David an abundance of good things, not only for necessity, but for pleasure and delight especially pouring out upon him gladness and the Spirit of God's love and his grace. It refers to the anointing that teaches all things and fills those who have such an anointing with spiritual joy and comfort.

My cup runs over: the words cup comes from the Hebrew word (kowc) and means to hold together, figuratively it carries the idea of a portion. The expression, "My cup runs over," means David's portion of God's abundance, love, grace and provisions is greater than he could ever imagine. It indicates the abundance of God's divine favours and blessings given to David and infers that God would always provide for him, and never leave him to want.

This is another set of images, borrowed from a feast and introduced to give us ideas of the comforts prepared to cheer and energize those who feel faint while surrounded by enemies and foes so they are able to joyfully endure times of sorrow and affliction as they make their spiritual pilgrimage through a fallen and corrupt world that they do not belong to.

The expression "My cup runs over," embraces a very plentiful portion of the following things: -

- An affluence God's love, joy, grace, mercy, peace and the comforts of the Lord.
- An affluence of temporal good things and of spiritual and eternal things

These blessings all signified by the overflowing cup given to the guests by the master of the feast and come to who endeavour to live a lifestyle that brings honour to God and a good testimony to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and who walk with the great Shepherd of the flock and with a good conscience.

The faithful are pictured as citizens of heaven living in a foreign land amongst many enemies, but those who know the love of Christ and the grace of God are spoken of as being so exceedingly and abundantly blessed that their cup of joy can be said to be running over. Those who are guided by the great Shepherd of the flock can be confident that God's favour will forever be with them, not only in this world, but also in the next.

David's beautiful heartfelt attitude and faith is summed up in the following words: -

- The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. (Psalm 16:5).

Surely Goodness and Mercy shall follow Me.

Psalm 23:6 ----- ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

In this context goodness embraces: -

- All good things (material and spiritual) that arise from the love, grace, mercy and favour and kindness of God.
- God's constant care and the comfort of the Holy Spirit and full assurance of salvation.

- The blessings of the covenant of grace and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- The promises of God, the joyful kingdom of God and the righteousness and love of Christ.

This is the joyful result of what David has said in the previous verses and the effect that God's merciful dealings had upon him. They lead his heart and mind to the full assurance that God would always be his Shepherd and friend and never leave him to want. David did not set his happiness in the riches and pleasures of this world, but in the love and grace of God. God is forever willing and ready to do-good to His people who seek their happiness in the service of God and endeavour to live a lifestyle that honours God and brings a good testimony to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The expression, "All the days of my life," carries the idea that God's favour will be with David through all the changes of his life until he reached its end. The language is the utterance of a heart overflowing with joy and gratitude in the recollection of the past, and full of glad anticipation in regard to the future. David rightly concludes that God would continue to show him favour for nothing can separate us from the love of God, if we do not separate ourselves from it.

I will Dwell in the House of the Lord Forever.

It is not to be thought that David anticipated such a permanent residence in the House of God, but that he desired to dwell there and anticipated a day in which he would dwell there all the days of his life which he prized more than anything this world has to offer. The implication is that his life, faith and joy would be complete if he should be employed in the constant service of God and always dwelling in the dwelling-place of the Most High. It is the expression of the heartfelt desire of a true child of God.

They wish to live as if they were always engaged in acts of worship and praise and always in the service of the Lord and in the place where God makes His abode, and allowed to partake of his love and friendship there forever. The word forever shows that these words of David transcend beyond this temporal world to a perfection of bliss in a future state of immortality and to the spiritual Temple God is building at this present time in Christ made up of Old and New Testament Jews and Gentiles.

David's words could be stated, "The divine goodness and mercy has followed me all the days of my life and when that is ended, I will be removed to a better world, to dwell in the House of the LORD made without hands, the eternal House of my heavenly Father, in which there are many mansions where the global body of Christ dwells under one Shepherd. A heavenly place without end where only joy and praise is heard and the faithful of God rest from all their labours and behold the face of Jesus where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, or any heat. But the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and lead them to living fountains of waters (Rev. 7:16-17).

The following verses not only express the deep heartfelt desire of David, but also of all the faithful who belong to God's Kingdom: -

- One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)
- LORD, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells. (Psalm 26:8)
- Blessed is the one you choose and bring near, to dwell in your courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple! (Psalm 65:4)
- Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise! *Selah* (Psalm 84:4)

This most heart-warming Psalm beautifully sets before us, in the most glorious fashion, that of a Shepherd who is gentle and kind and rules and feeds his flock with loving care. It is man's privilege to live on earth and it will be their eternal privilege to live in eternity with God Himself in grateful exultation and joy. Every faithful brother and sister of Christ may adopt the language of this Psalm as their own and confidently say, "Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever, because eternity where God dwells will be their eternal home.

End.