

PSALM 23

He Makes Me Lie Down

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Psalm 23.2 | June 21, 2020

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our summer series in Psalm 23. We have looked into the first two phrases, "The Lord is my shepherd" and "I lack nothing." These words set the stage for all that follows.

Throughout the remainder of Psalm 23, we can ask the question, "How can I know the Lord is my shepherd, in whom I lack nothing?" Then, before each of the remaining lines, insert the word "because."

Try it with me for this week's focus: "How can we know the Lord is our shepherd, in whom we lack nothing?" *Because*, he makes us lie down in green pastures.

II. Connecting with One Another

Think for a few moments about the words before us this week, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." What does that mean to you? What images does it conjure up in your mind? Have you ever experienced something like that?

III. Study the Text

- a. Lying down in a green pasture seems easy enough. Unless you are a sheep!

As Phillip Keller writes in *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, it is almost impossible for sheep to be made to lie down unless four conditions are met, as we will see below. And only their shepherd can free sheep from such things!

Before thinking about the four conditions sheep require, what do you need to experience true, replenishing rest? (Or, as the Hebrew word for *lie down* translates it, "to stretch out")

- b. Sheep must be free from fear, devoid the slightest suspicion of coyotes, cougars, or bears, which is why shepherds have to "keep watch over their flocks by night"! Only the presence of the shepherd allows sheep to relax and rest.

How do you best practice the presence of God?

- c. Sheep must also be free from friction with other sheep. Chickens have a "pecking order" and cattle a "horning order," while sheep have a "butting order," through which they establish and maintain a hierarchy. Us humans try to be "top sheep" too, don't we? (Or we at least try to "keep up with the Joneses")



Read **Matthew 20.1-16**. What do you think Jesus means when he says “the last will be first, and the first will be last?” How would this look in a flock of sheep?
How does Paul build on Jesus’ teaching in **Philippians 2.1-11**?

- d. Sheep also need to be free of flies and ticks, for which they require repellants and regular cleaning by their shepherd. No wonder we too use the phrase “bugged” when we’re annoyed by life’s challenges!

Read **Philippians 4.6-7** for how we should call upon God when we’re “bugged.”
How and where do you best do so?

- e. Lastly, before lying down, sheep need to be free of hunger. While David writes of green pastures, most of Palestine is a “dry, brown, sun-burned wasteland”! The existence of green pastures meant that shepherds had cleared rocky land, torn out brush, plowed soil, and irrigated water.

Similarly, we can give thanks to God for our “daily bread”! But there’s an even deeper meaning to be explored. Read **Matthew 13.1-9**.

Phillip Keller concludes, “How He works to clear the life of rocks of stony unbelief. How He tries to tear out the roots of bitterness. He attempts to break up the hard, proud human heart that is set like sun-dried clay. He then sows the seed of His own precious Word, which, if given half a chance to grow, will produce rich crops of contentment and peace. He waters this with the dews of His own presence by the Holy Spirit. He tends and cares and cultivates the life, longing to see it become rich and green and productive.” Thanks be to God our Shepherd!

- f. Various passages in the Scriptures reveal that God is our true pasture – that we “feast on” His Word and “drink in” His grace. See **Psalms 42.1-2** and **John 6.25-69**.

How best can you feast on God’s Word this week?

How can you share the “green pastures” of God’s provision with others who feel spiritually lost in a dry, brown, sun-burned wasteland?

- g. St. Augustine once questioned, “What will *make* me take my rest in you... so I can forget my restlessness and take hold of you, the one good thing in my life?”

What about you? What will make you take your rest in God?

IV. Pray

- a. Lift up the ongoing dissention and division throughout our country, that God’s justice would be done and that Christ’s peace would be received,
- b. Pray for those you know that have not welcomed God as *their* shepherd, and ask that the Holy Spirit would equip you with words that point them to Jesus.

