

Twenty-Three
Trails

23 Do-It-Yourself Bible Studies
on the Subject of Sheep and Shepherds in the Bible

Designed to Accompany ***The Lord is My Shepherd*** by Robert J. Morgan

Trail 1: The Lord is My Shepherd

In Psalm 23:1, the writer calls the Lord his “Shepherd.” Look up and read Genesis 49:24-25, a passage that was part of Jacob’s blessings to his son Joseph. This is the first time in the Bible God is referred to as a shepherd. Now look up the following verses:

How is God described in Psalm 80:1? _____

Who do you think is referred to in the last part of Zechariah 13:7? (See Matthew 26:31-32).

How did Jesus describe Himself in John 10:11? _____

How is Jesus described in Hebrews 13:20-21? _____

In 1 Peter 2:25? _____

In 1 Peter 5:4? _____

Jot down one way in which the Lord has been like a shepherd to you today.

Trail 2: The Good Shepherd

Near the beginning of *The Lord is My Shepherd*, Robert J. Morgan describes Psalms 22, 23, and 24 as a Messianic trilogy, written hundreds of years before Christ was born. Psalm 22 describes the Good Shepherd dying for His sheep; in Psalm 23, He is living for His sheep; and in Psalm 24, He is coming for His sheep. Read Psalm 22:1-2. These two verses were written by David to express his anguish at a time when he felt forsaken by God. But a thousand years later, Jesus Christ quoted these same words at the moment of His greatest anguish on the cross (See Matthew 27:45-46).

When in your life have you felt like uttering a cry like the one expressed in Psalm 22:1-2?

Did God the Father finally and forever forsake David? See Psalm 22:24.

Did God the Father finally and forever forsake Jesus? See Acts 2:22-33.

Will God forsake you? See Hebrews 13:5-6.

Trail 3: Dying for the Sheep

When Jesus said, “The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:11), He was combining the themes of Psalm 22 (laying down His life) with Psalm 23 (being the good shepherd). Read the first half of Psalm 22, and list some of the elements that describe the future crucifixion of Christ. Some of this material may include the actual words spoken from or near the cross. Others verses will describe the emotional or physical trauma Jesus endured. As you ponder these verses, remember we are the very sheep for whom the Good Shepherd laid down His life.

Verse 1 (See Matthew 27:46):

Verse 6 (See Isaiah 53:3):

Verse 7 (See Matthew 27:39 & 44):

Verse 8 (See Matthew 27:43):

Verse 14 (See John 19:34):

Verse 15 (See John 19:28):

Verse 16 (See John 20:27):

Verse 17 (See Luke 23:35):

Verse 18 (See Matthew 27:35):

Verse 31 (See John 19:30):

Why do you think the Bible pre-described the crucifixion a thousand years in advance?

Trail 4: The Lord is My...

Think of the powerful little phrase that occurs exactly a dozen times in the Bible (in the New King James Version)—“The Lord is my....” Here are the references to look up and complete. Notice that eleven of the twelve are from the Old Testament, and the one New Testament reference is simply a quotation from the Old Testament.

Exodus 15:2 – The Lord is my _____.

Exodus 17:15 – The Lord is my _____.

2 Samuel 22:2 – The Lord is my _____.

Psalms 18:2 – The Lord is my _____.

Psalms 23:1 – The Lord is my _____.

Psalms 27:1 – The Lord is my _____.

Psalms 28:7 – The Lord is my _____.

Psalms 118:14 – The Lord is my _____.

Isaiah 12:2 – The Lord is my _____.

Lamentations 3:24 – The Lord is my _____.

Zechariah 13:9 – The Lord is my _____.

Hebrews 13:6 – The Lord is my _____.

Which of these phrases most encourages you today? What need does it meet in your life?

Trail 5: Shepherd References in the Psalms

Psalm 23 isn't the only time in Psalms when the Lord is referred to as our Shepherd. Since David wrote many of the Psalms, it's not surprising that sheep and shepherds are mentioned here and there throughout its 150 divisions. In this set of cross-references, try to determine which aspects of God's shepherding ministry the passages are referring to.

Read Psalm 78:70-72 and jot down the responsibilities borne by a good shepherd.

In Psalm 77:20, Psalm 78:52-53, and Psalm 80:1, what does our Shepherd do for us?

According to Psalm 65:13, what should our attitude be?

Similarly in Psalm 79:13, what should our response be as we better comprehend God's shepherding ministries to us?

And in Psalm 95:6-7, how should we respond to our Shepherd?

In Psalm 100:3, how are we described? According to this Psalm, what attitudes should we exhibit every day?

What should we do when we go astray? See Psalm 119:176

Trail 6: I Shall Not Want

Psalm 23 says if the Lord is truly our Shepherd, we will not lack anything. Because He is our Shepherd, we'll have everything we need. This is a promise that occurs many times in the Bible, though it is stated in a variety of ways. Look up these parallel verses. Jot down the promise contained in each, along with any condition that is set forth.

Psalm 34:9-10:

Psalm 84:11:

Matthew 6:33:

Matthew 7:11:

2 Corinthians 9:8:

Philippians 4:19:

Circle the above verse that speaks most poignantly to you today.

Trail 7: What the Good Shepherd Does

Read Ezekiel 34:11-16. Though not as familiar as Psalm 23, it is very similar and just as rich and reassuring. Here the Lord was telling the nation of Judah what He would do for them, using the imagery of a shepherd. It's not hard to make application to our own needs and conditions. In the space below, make a simple list of the Lord's shepherding promises toward Israel, for the lessons are easily transferable to us. Underline the passage that gives you the greatest blessing today.

Trail 8: One Shepherd

Read Ezekiel 34:20-31. This is a prediction about the way Jesus will shepherd His people when He comes as Messiah. Notice verse 23: "I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and He will tend them." This is likely a prophecy about Jesus Christ, son of David and heir to David's throne, and there are hints here of His coming Millennial reign. There is much in this passage that applies reassuringly to us.

Read this passage and write out the verse that speaks most to you about your own needs and the Shepherd's care.

Bonus Question: There's a famous old Gospel song inspired by a phrase in this passage. Can you identify it?

Trail 9: Woe to the Shepherds

It's interesting to compare Jeremiah 23 with Psalm 23. Both chapters are about the Good Shepherd, but in Jeremiah 23 He is contrasted with false shepherds. In the context of the passage, the false shepherds are the failed leaders of Israel. Even if our human leaders fail, God will not. Verse 5 brings that point home with a prediction about the coming of Christ. Read Jeremiah 23:1-8. Make a list of God's "I will" statements in these verses. In other words, jot down the phrases in this passage in which the Lord says: "I will" do thus and so. *Circle the one that most impresses you.*

Trail 10: Good and Bad Shepherds

Jeremiah 23 is an interesting contrast to Psalm 23. Glance over the chapter and note the contrast between Psalm 23:1 ("The Lord is my shepherd) and Jeremiah 23:1 ("Woe to the shepherds").

Why does the Lord condemn the "shepherds" of Israel, in verses 1-2?

Who are the false shepherds to whom He referring? See verse 11.

What should prophets do if they want to teach the people correctly, in verses 18 and 22?

What do you think this means?

What does a good shepherd do, in verse 4?

How is the Good Shepherd (the Messiah) described, in verses 5-6?

Trail 11: He Tends His Flock Like a Shepherd

Isaiah 40 is one of the most powerfully comforting chapters in the Bible. Read this entire chapter of Isaiah 40 (it will take about two minutes at a normal reading rate), letting its strong words of comfort be strengthening for you today. Now focus on verse 11.

According to this verse, what does our Shepherd do for us?

Trail 12: He Leads Me in Paths of Righteousness

God has promised to guide His children in their decisions and destinies; He leads us in the right paths. Just a page or so away from Psalm 23 are some wonderful verses about guidance. They're found in Psalm 25. Read this Psalm in its entirety. Now make a list of what the following verses teach about God's guidance:

Verse 4: _____

Verse 5: _____

Verse 9: _____

Verse 10: _____

Verse 12: _____

Based on these verses, write out a one-sentence prayer asking God for His guidance in a particular way in your life.

Trail 13: For His Name's Sake

Psalm 23:3 says He leads us in righteous paths for His name's sake. Look up these other verses in the Psalms and jot down what else God does for the sake of His name.

Psalm 25:11: _____

Psalm 79:9: _____

Psalm 109:21: _____

Psalm 143:11: _____

Give some thought to this phrase in light of these passages. What do the words His name's sake mean to you?

Trail 14: For You Are With Me

Psalm 23:4 affirms the presence of God with His children, even in life's valleys. The nearness of God is a constantly-stated theme in the Bible. What phrases about God's presence occurs in the following verses?

Genesis 5:22 & 5:24 & 6:9

Genesis 28:16

Exodus 33:14

Deuteronomy 31:6 & 8

Joshua 1:5

Matthew 28:20

Philippians 4:5

Hebrews 13:5

According to Romans 8:38-39, what can separate us from His love?

According to John 10:28, who can snatch us from His hand?

Trail 15: I Will Fear No Evil

Fear comes in many forms—from terror and panic to anxiety and worry—and afflicts us every day. The Bible is full of “fear not” passages.

Look up the following handful of verses and list why the Bible tells us to not be afraid.

Isaiah 41:10 & 13

Joshua 1:9

2 Chronicles 20:15

Daniel 10:19

Joel 2:21

John 6:20

Revelation 1:17

What is worrying you or making you afraid today?

In light of the verses you've just looked up, what would you tell yourself if you were counseling yourself about your phobias, fears, or anxieties?

Trail 16: They Comfort Me

In *The Lord is My Shepherd*, Robert J. Morgan suggests that God's rod and staff are comforting to Christians because they represent God's protection of His children. The rod is the shepherd's weapon to chase away predators, and the staff with its crooked end is handy for snagging a sheep that has drifted too close the edge of a precipice. The Lord has a way of saving His children from others and from themselves, and that's a comforting thought.

According to the following two passages, what else bestows comfort to God's children?

Psalm 119:50-52:

2 Corinthians 1:3-7:

Do you know anyone who needs comforting today? What one thing can you do to pass along the comfort of God?

Trails 17: My Cup Overflows

John 1:16 (NIV/1984) says: “From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another.” Two New Testament books begin with an inventory of our riches in Christ. For today’s Bible study, read Ephesians 1:3-14 and/or 1 Peter 1:3-9. List the blessings catalogued here by the authors and offer a prayer of thanksgiving for your own overflowing cup.

Ephesians 1:3-14

1 Peter 1:3-9

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Make a brief list of those particular blessings that are brightening your day today:

Trail 18: Goodness and Mercy

In the Bible, the word “good” is a deeply meaningful word that is reflective of the character of God. We use the term “good” casually in our vocabularies, but there is a divine dimension of goodness that is pure, perfect, holy, divinely-given, and richly bestowed. James 1:17 says that every good and perfect gift comes down from above, from the Father of Lights. Matthew 7:11 says that God gives good gifts to His children who faithfully pray.

Look up these verses and list some of the “good things” God gives to us.

Genesis 1:4 & 31:

Joshua 21:45 & 23:14:

Nehemiah 9:20:

Psalms 73:28:

Psalms 133:1:

Luke 2:10:

John 10:11:

Romans 12:2:

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17:

From your own experience, add a few items to the list – “good things” God has given you.

Trail 19: I Will Dwell...

What is the most beautiful city you've ever visited? God saw fit to end His Book with a two-chapter travelogue of His city in heaven—New Jerusalem, the “House” of the Lord.

Read Revelation 21:1 – 22:5 and answer these questions.

1. *What descends from heaven onto the New Earth? (21:1-3).*

2. *What does God remove from the lives of His children in eternity? (21:4).*

3. *How is the Holy City described? (21:11).*

4. *What are the building materials of this city? (21:18).*

5. *What is in the center of the city? (22:1-2).*

6. *What will we be doing throughout eternity? (22:3)*

7. *What elements of Heaven give you the greatest sense of anticipation?*

Trail 20: The Shepherd's Crown

In 1 Peter 5, the apostle Peter addresses pastors (shepherds) who were leading the local churches to whom he was writing his letter.

Read 1 Peter 5:1-4.

1. *How does Peter describe himself in verse 1?*

2. *What were the local "shepherds" or pastors to do in verse 2?*

3. *What attitudes were to characterize their service in verses 2-3?*

4. *How is Jesus described in verse 4?*

5. *What promise does He give in verse 4?*

You may not be a the pastor of a local church, but each of us has a "flock." What is yours? For whom are you in some way responsible? Think of one insight from this passage that can help you as you serve the Lord among your "flock."

Trail 21: That Great Shepherd of the Sheep

Hebrews 13:20-21 gives us one of the greatest benedictions in the Bible.

Read it prayerfully and think through these questions.

1. *How is God the Father described?*

2. *How is God the Son described?*

3. *What has that Great Shepherd done for you in the past?*

4. *What does God want to do now in your life for the glory of Christ?*

This is a wonderful prayer to adapt for a loved one. Take a few moments now and turn these two verses into a prayer for yourself or for someone dear in your life.

Trail 22: The Good Shepherd

In John 10, Jesus identified Himself as the Shepherd of the Twenty-third Psalm. Read John 10:1-21 (it will take just over a minute at a normal reading speed).

List the characteristics or activities of the Good Shepherd in the following verses:

1. In verse 3:

2. In verse 4:

3. In verse 10:

4. In verse 11

5: In verse 14:

6. In verse 9, the shepherd is also described as a gate. In biblical times, shepherds would sometimes sleep in the doorway of the sheepfold to make sure no sheep drifted out and no predators entered in. What does this figure of speech of the "gate" tell us about Christ?

Which of the Lord's shepherding activities do you most need today?

Trail 23: My Sheep Listen to My Voice

In John 10:1-19, Jesus told a parable of a shepherd and his sheep, but His hearers were slow to understand (v. 19-21). So in verses 22-30, He explained it.

Read these verses.

- 1. Why do some people refuse to believe in Jesus? (verses 25-26).*
- 2. What do true Christians do? (verse 27).*
- 3. What does the Good Shepherd give us? (verse 28).*
- 4. Who holds us in His hands (verses 28-29).*

*Have you placed your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? If not, are you willing to do so now? If you have trusted Christ as Your Shepherd and Savior, take a moment and visualize yourself in His hand. Think of how secure and solid is the feeling of knowing Him. Let's end this series of Bible studies with prayer, **thanking God** for the shepherding work of the Lord Jesus and for the **joy of living out the reality of Psalm 23 and John 10 every day.***