

Good Shepherd

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

- [0 : 0 0] Hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. Thank you so much for tuning in to this radio broadcast. And it is our simple prayer that God will take our hearts as we humble ourselves before his word today.
- He will take our hearts and mold and shape us even more into the image of Jesus Christ. And hey, if you would like any more information about FCC Greensburg, go to our website, FCCGreensburg.com, and you can check out some more information about all the great things God is doing in and through this body of believers.
- But I want you to start out this way. Say this with me if you know it. The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters.
- He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. 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.
- [1 : 1 4] Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Now, how many of you would say that probably the last time you heard that read or recited was at a funeral?
- Yeah. And there's a reason why those words are read at a graveside, whether you recite it from the NIV like we just did, or maybe from the old King James like a lot of us were tempted to do.
- But those words are comforting, right? Those words offer hope. Those words end with a promise of eternal life in heaven. But I would make this challenge to you today.
- Just like the Lord's Prayer that we studied in May of last year, I'm convinced that most of us that can quote this psalm have never truly gone deeper in studying out the power of these words.
- Because if you and I truly believe what we just recited, it changes everything. How I see the Lord, how I think, how I respond to adversity, how I face criticism, what I run to for comfort, even how I see the big picture of life on this earth and life beyond.
- [2 : 2 3] See, these words, probably a top five quoted passage in all the Bible, maybe some of the least understood words at the same time. And I hope that we can change that over these next five weeks as we start into this series on Psalm 23 called, I Shall Not Want.
- You know, just the other day, my dad and I were sitting on his porch talking about life. And somehow my grandpa that both my dad and I are named after, he came up. See, he passed away roughly 14 years ago.
- And we were talking about how he served our country faithfully. Several wars and even spent six months as a 19 or 20 year old in a German concentration camp before he was rescued.

And then he talked about another family member, a generation older than my grandfather. And I was blown away because I had no idea. I was blown away to learn that this man three generations before me that I never knew that he was a preacher.

I had no idea. Now, that wasn't his full time job, but on a lot of Sundays, you would find him in the pulpit preaching. And then my dad said something that really just crushed my heart.

[3 : 33] And it's just stuck with me the last couple of weeks. He said, but sadly, he was also an alcoholic. And I kind of did a double take just to make sure I heard right. But it just stung that a man who knew the word of God, who proclaimed the life-saving gospel of Jesus, also ran to alcohol to try to fill a void that only Jesus Christ could fill.

Now, I'm not looking to pick on this guy. I'm not looking to pick on anyone else because I know how hard this guy's life had to be. He didn't have it easy. He raised a family during the Great Depression.

That man dealt with heartbreak and sorrow in his life. He faced stress and frustrations and failure. And yet this passage in Psalm 23 that he very well may have quoted from the pulpit never came alive in his heart.

And instead, he ran to alcohol. And maybe that's been our story as well. We sing the songs. We amen the preacher every week. But we've never truly believed the words of this psalm.

Maybe for you, it's not alcohol, but it's prescription drugs. Maybe for me, it's a critical and negative spirit. Maybe for that person over there, it's manipulation, lies, or gossip.

[4 : 48] Maybe for them, it's lust or they do relationships outside of God's perfect design. Maybe for her, it's the pursuit to always be the prettiest one in the room who gets the attention.

Or for him, the drive to be the best and have the most. Maybe it's a victim mentality that consumes our heart. Maybe it's pride that gets in the way. It could be an unhealthy obsession with food.

Or maybe spiritual laziness and a lack of discipline. Maybe I'm a workaholic. Woo! It's like I'm starting off today firing all cylinders, right?

Beret's bringing the heat today. But I want you to hear my heart for you and me both. I don't want to be someone's great-great-grandpa or whatever it is and have that sentence be said of me.

He was a great preacher, but you couldn't tell it through the week. She was a Christian and yet you wouldn't believe what happened behind closed doors. Instead, this is my prayer that my kids, my grandkids, my church family, everybody I encounter, yeah, they may laugh about my quirks and trust me, I have them.

[5 : 52] They may talk about how obsessed he was with everything being just right, but hopefully they'll say something like this too. No, he wasn't perfect, but he sure did love Jesus and seek to be authentic in his walk with Christ.

And he truly wanted others to see that they too could be set free from the chains of sin and walk in the amazing grace of Christ. And that's why this first verse of this famous psalm is so important.

So if you would, if you got your Bibles there, grab them for me. Turn to Psalm 23. Psalm 23. If you just kind of flip your Bible about halfway, you probably will come to a psalm.

Go to Psalm 23. Probably, you know, about halfway through. If you have trouble finding it, you can always go to the table of contents in the front of your Bible. But as you're turning there, we know this psalm was written by King David, the greatest king Israel had ever known.

A man called the shepherd king of Israel for a reason. The only person God called a man after his own heart. And we know that David was not only a warrior for the Lord, but he was what I would call a sentimental type, an emotional type.

[7 : 04] He had a gift of expressing himself through song, through poetry. He wasn't afraid to authentically express his emotions. And we see that throughout the psalms. Now, as we rewind a little bit into his younger years, I think it's safe to say that he was the runt of the litter in his family.

And he was put in charge of tending the sheep. So he understood what it was to truly have to care for the flock. He understood the life of a shepherd. And then there was the shocking day when David was called in from the fields.

He looked nothing like a traditional king looked in those days. He was way too short, not strong and bulky enough. And that's when God told the prophet Samuel, the Lord does not look at the things that people look at.

People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. And because David's heart was to honor the Lord in everything, God told Samuel to anoint him as the next king over Israel.

And yet his journey wasn't easy. His brothers were jealous. He had a Philistine giant standing in his way. He had a bipolar King Saul coming for his head. And between following his own lust and pride, he made some really big mistakes along the way.

[8 : 18] And even as king, his own son hated him and came for his head and for the throne. And yet here he is. Most scholars think he is late in his life here, looking back over his life after leading the nation for so many years.

And he writes what we know as Psalm 23. A psalm that has strengthened and encouraged God's church for around 3,000 years now. And David is all about proclaiming how awesome the Lord has been through good days, through bad, through his obedience, through his rebellion, through it all.

God has been a faithful shepherd. Here's what Psalm 23.1 says. The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.

A lot of us learned it a little bit differently from the King James. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. And what I want us to do is to just break this verse down into two parts.

And first we'll talk about this phrase that we could preach for a year if we wanted. The Lord is my shepherd. But let me ask you this. How many of you listening to this right now have a flock of sheep outside of your home?

[9 : 30] Probably not very many, right? There may be some exceptions because we are in a rural community here. But most of us are not shepherds. At least not in the sense that would have happened in the days of David where that was your 24-7.

You were with them pretty much all the time. And yet he starts off this Psalm calling God the shepherd. Which means what? If God is the shepherd, then we are the what?

We are the sheep. And that may not sound like a compliment. So if you would like to go to the YouVersion Bible app, go to the bottom right-hand corner, hit the menu, go to events, go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana.

You can see our outline. But here's the first thing I want you to see. I am completely dependent on the shepherd. I am completely dependent upon my shepherd.

You know, one book that I've been using as a resource to help me dive into the life of a shepherd is a classic Christian book called A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23 by W. Philip Keller, who actually grew up in East Africa, surrounded by simple native sheep herders who would have shepherded a lot like ancient Middle Eastern culture.

[10 : 43] And then even in his young adult life, Keller became a shepherd himself for about a decade before becoming a Christian author and preacher. And he put it like this.

He said, Sheep do not just take care of themselves, as some might suppose. They require more than any other class of livestock, endless attention, and meticulous care.

It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. I think I could say, Ouch! And you may be thinking, Well, I'm so glad that I listened to this today so I could hear the preacher call me dumb.

But here's the reality. Don't shoot the messenger, man. God's the one that's saying it. Over 200 times in the Bible, we are called sheep. And if we're honest about our own hearts, we can easily just follow the crowd like sheep do.

We're easily driven by fear and timidity. Sometimes our hearts are stubborn and prideful and rebellious, which leads to some not so good decisions. And I think we all can say, You know what?

[11 : 43] Yeah, I'm guilty. Been there, done that, got the t-shirt. And that's what David is doing as a man who knew his sheep were completely dependent upon him, or else they would die from things like walking off a cliff, which sheep actually do.

Or getting ate up with parasites or other bugs or getting eaten by another animal. He's just being honest about the fact that you and I, like sheep, are in desperate need of a shepherd.

Because we have a real enemy that doesn't want us to live out these words, The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. See, 1 Peter 5, verse 8 puts it like this, Be alert and of sober mind.

Why? Why would he say that? He says, Because your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. And yet we know when we are completely dependent upon our Jehovah-Rohi, the Lord who is our shepherd, we know that 1 John 4, verse 4 is absolutely true.

But you, dear child, you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the Spirit who lives in this world.

[13 : 02] So maybe we're just honest today, okay? Maybe we need to have some honesty and say, Yeah, I'm a lot more like a sheep than I like to admit. But this sheep is going to be completely dependent on the shepherd, my God.

Okay? And that leads us to our second point here. I'm under the shepherd's perfect care. I'm under the shepherd's perfect care. In his book, Keller talks about how he truly took seriously the charge to take care of his flock of sheep and make sure they were healthy and well cared for.

And yet, sadly, he had a neighbor who didn't do the same. He said his stock was always thin, weak, and riddled with disease or parasites. Again and again, they would come, the sheep would come and stand at the fence, staring blankly through the woven wire at the green, lush pastures that my flock enjoyed.

And then he said, had they been able to speak, I'm sure they would have said, Oh, to be set free from this awful owner. And that's a pretty good comparison between being under the care of the good shepherd versus being a part of the world.

Because Satan will come and he will entice you with some shiny things and it's going to look like green pastures ahead that promise to satisfy every longing.

[14 : 17] But listen, they simply don't. And it's brown grass ahead. And they leave us empty, longing for that true satisfaction that only comes when you are a child of the King, Jesus Christ.

And King David understood this world well. As a young man, that was his job. When bears or lions or other wild animals would come after the sheep, David went on the offensive and he attacked them hand to hand.

When sheep got hurt, he cared for them and nursed them back to health. When a sheep was rebellious and leading others astray, he would discipline them. And in all of that, he gently led them where they needed to be for them to be safe and to be satisfied.

And in his own care for his own flock of sheep, he saw the bigger picture of his God who did the same thing for him. As he reflected on his life, he could say confidently, The Lord is my shepherd.

So when those words come out of my mouth, I don't want them to just be a churchy thing that I like to say. I want to mean every word of it.

[15 : 22] I hope that I can see that I have a God who leads, feeds, protects, and loves me perfectly. And that God who is awesome in power as he spoke and creation sprang into existence.

That's my God. He's tender and merciful in his care as he daily sustains us. He's gracious in his forgiveness that we don't deserve. He's effective in his discipline that makes us more into his image.

And I can trust that his plans and his will over me are perfect because he sees the big picture and he even controls it. And in John chapter 10, Jesus is using this same sheep and shepherd analogy.

And he says these words. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. So this makes more sense as you can picture like a wolf out in the flock trying to steal, kill, and destroy the sheep.

Right? And that's what Satan's trying to do. He wants to either destroy your faith or drive you so down where you have no joy and you're not walking in the power and the purpose that God has for your life.

[16 : 35] And then this passage says, I have come. Jesus says, I have come that you may have life and have it to the full. And then he says this. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

And while we cover this more in depth in coming weeks, I want to touch on what that means. When I say the shepherd leads, feeds, protects, and loves me. See, it means he leads me out of his perfect and full wisdom over his creation.

He leads me outside of my comfort zone and my will over my life into a place that is so much better where I can truly walk in God's will for me as I grow deeper in him.

As I'm used in ways I could never even imagine that God would use a broken vessel like me. The Holy Spirit leads me daily as I lay down my selfishness and I seek to walk God's path for my life.

But he also feeds me by the power of his word. And I'm reminded of Psalm 119 verse 105 that says, Your word, God, your word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path.

[17 : 45] So as I grow deeper in God's word, it's amazing how the Lord begins to nourish my soul and transform this heart more and more into his image. As I follow God's truth, he begins one day at a time to change this heart of stone, to deal with the pride and the selfishness and the insecurities and the fear that comes from the enemy.

As I immerse myself in God's truth, my worldview changes and I start to see everything through godly lenses, through God goggles. And then next, the good shepherd protects his sheep.

And I love Isaiah 41 verse 10 where God says, So do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.

I will strengthen you and I will help you. I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. So when I say those words, the Lord is my shepherd, I'm not just blindly following this unknown God.

I'm trusting a God who, like a shepherd, goes on the offensive after anything that comes after his flock. A God who's got the muscles to back it up.

[18 : 55] A God who's not only leading us and feeding us, but whose power and protection over his children are more than enough for you and me. And then there's his love. And we talked a lot about this last week on Easter Sunday, but his love for his sheep that was shown on the cross as the sinless son of man gave his life to pay the price our sins demand.

And then three days later, he rose from the grave in power to conquer death and offer us life on this earth and life eternal. And the more you understand about the good shepherd, the more you realize that we're completely dependent upon him.

And that's okay because we're under his perfect care. Now let's look at the second phrase from Psalm 23.1. We've talked about the Lord is my shepherd, but what about this phrase?

I shall not want. Fill in this last point with me. My contentment is found in Jesus alone. My contentment is found in Jesus alone.

You know, W. Philip Keller also told the story about his first flock of sheep that he had. He said, The day I bought my first 30 ewes, my neighbor and I sat on the dusty coral rails that enclosed the sheep pens, and we admired the choice, strong, well-bred ewes that had become mine.

[20 : 16] Turning to me, he handed me a large, sharp killing knife, and he remarked tersely, Well, Philip, they're yours. Now you have to put your mark on them. I knew exactly what he meant.

Each shepherd has his own distinct earmark, which he cuts into one of the ears of his sheep. In this way, even at a distance, it's easy to determine to whom the sheep belongs.

It was not the most pleasant procedure to catch each ewe in turn and lay her ear on a wooden block and then notch it deeply with a razor-sharp edge of a knife. There was pain for both of us, but from the mutual suffering, an indelible lifelong mark of ownership was made that can never be erased.

And from then on, every sheep that came into my possession would bear my mark. You know, as I think about that statement, I shall not want, there's one word that comes to my mind that I think captures that phrase.

The word is contentment. David, after all the ups and downs of life, David, through his obedience to God and even his rebellion and sin that he had to repent from, through everything he had faced in life, tragedy, everything, seeing the Lord come through time and time and time again, he basically comes to this conclusion.

[21 : 35] God, you are more than enough for me. In you and in you alone, I am content. See, I think in a lot of ways, contentment needs to be that earmark, that mark of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And yet, to be completely real with you, this is a struggle for me, just like it might be for you. Like David, I'm a reflective and emotional person at times myself. And yet, the cry of my heart, as I grow deeper in my relationship with Christ, my heart's cry is to be able to boldly proclaim and live this statement, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

See, the definition of contentment is simply this, not craving or desiring anything more. And when we truly come to understand who the good shepherd is and who he wants to be in our lives, we'll understand that everything our soul longs for is found in him alone.

And in the words of Brennan Manning, we were made for God and nothing else really satisfies us. And yet, why do I still chase after bigger and better and shinier objects?

Why do I think a new phone or house or car is really going to satisfy me? Why do I think a new relationship or physical intimacy will fill that void in my heart? Why do I think success and accolades will fill me up to overflowing and finally put me where my heart longs to be?

[22 : 59] Why? Why do I chase after all these other things? When the Lord is my shepherd and in him, I shall not want. And listen, those other things when done within God's parameters, you know, they can be blessings from God for sure.

But listen, my hope is found in Jesus Christ alone. And one thing I've learned is that ministry can even be an idol when it goes from glorifying God to somehow trying to show my worth by ministry success.

It's so easy to want to be the best preacher around, to have the biggest church in town, to have the most people repent and get baptized. And yet my identity and my worth, one thing God has reminded me of time and time again when I'm tempted to run after those other things is that my identity isn't found in any of those things.

I am simply called to be faithful to Jesus. Whatever that looks like in my specific context, and then I turn it all over to him. And he's the one who has to take care of results.

When I keep it in that priority list, that's when ministry is going to happen the way ministry should. See, Satan has a way of taking even good things in our life, like ministry, like your family, like doing good things or whatever it is.

[24 : 17] And he can appeal to our flesh and our pride. And when we give in, we can easily make these things idols. And yet we have a God who's calling us to contentment in him, who's calling us to seek his kingdom and his righteousness before anything else, who's calling us to sit in his presence, be still and know that he is God, to be satisfied by his grace.

We have a God who meets us in every single moment of life, the good, the bad, the in-between, the heartaches, the frustrations, the stress, the joys, the celebrations. And he wants more than anything.

If everything is stripped away, the job, the accolades, the money, the house, everything is stripped away, will we truly find contentment in him and in him alone?

You know what? I am so impressed with the Apostle Paul. That guy walked away from so much worldly prestige and gave it all up to run after the heart of Jesus.

He suffered immensely to run after the heart of Jesus and share the love of Christ with so many people. But it's amazing the contentment that he walked in through so much persecution and suffering.

[25 : 32] See, in Philippians 4, verses 12 and 13, Paul puts it like this. He says, I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well-fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

He says, I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength. And so today, as we've looked at these nine powerful words, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

I pray that you and me both can understand these simple truths that I am completely dependent on my shepherd and that's good. I'm under the shepherd's perfect care and there's no better place to be.

And my contentment cannot be found in all these other things. It's found in Jesus Christ alone. And I'm good with that. Pray with me. Father, thank you so much for these words of life that you have spoken over us today.

I thank you for just how faithful you are. Even in our failure, even in our sin and our pride and our rebellion, God, you are faithful.

[26 : 45] And you're always calling us back to yourself. So thank you for these words. And I just pray that today that we can just get a glimpse of how awesome, majestic, holy, righteous, powerful, wrathful against sin, God, just how awesome you are in your holiness.

And that we will fall before you and trust you in everything. And we will be able to say with contentment in our heart, with Jesus Christ in the forefront of our life, I shall not want.

I don't know about anybody else listening to my voice right now, but I know that I struggle with that. And so God, I just pray you meet us in that and that this will be the goal, the aim, and you will help us every day to work towards that end as we seek to love you and honor you, Jesus, with every part of our hearts, of our minds, of our words, and everything that flows out of our lives.

Help us not to compartmentalize it. Help us to give it all to you. Jesus, you are so good. We worship you in the splendor of your majesty. And we thank you that you are the good shepherd.

We pray all these things in your precious name. And God's people said from home, your car, wherever you are, amen and amen. Hey, just want to give you this simple invitation.

[28 : 11] I have no idea who's listening. I have no idea what's going on in your heart, whether you belong to Jesus or whether you've been following him for six months or for 60 years. I have no idea.

But I know this. He loves you. And if you do not have a relationship with him, he can come into your life and change everything. And so today, I just want to give you the invitation that we would love as a church.

We're First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. We would love as a church to come alongside you and be an encouragement to you, help you to see what God's word teaches and see you come to know Christ and be baptized into him.

And so please reach out. Once again, my name is Ray. You can email me at ray at FCC Greensburg dot com or you can call us in the office Monday through Thursday, 8 to 430.

You can call 812-663-8488, 812-663-8488. Hey, God bless you. And I pray you have a great week as you truly make the Lord your shepherd because in him, you'll find that contentment that your heart longs for.

[29 : 23] God bless. Have a great week. God bless.