The Greatest Champion

A COMMENTARY ON PSALM 23

LEADERSHIP
This pamphlet is designed to help you understand God’s expectations of His leaders. Throughout the Bible, we see several passages about leadership. In scripture God’s leaders rise to the top only through trusting Him and letting Him lead through them. Our prayer is that this examination of Psalm 23 -- “A Shepherd’s Psalm” -- will help you allow God to lead through you! Humility, trust, and confidence in God are a “must find” in any leader’s heart. Through reading this psalm and a few points that go along with it, we hope that you will fall more in love with God and that these characteristics will radiate from your heart.

-Jack Easterby
PSALM 23

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
his guides me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even 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.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.
Introduction

To begin, we must understand why we are studying Psalm 23 and King David. You see, every good leader throughout history has had a mentor whom they have learned from or looked up to, which is simply part of what makes them a success. Coaches learn from other coaches, great players watch other players, and great leaders are made through watching the leaders who have gone before them. David was a great leader and a great king in his day and although he was not perfect as we all know, it seemed his leadership was unparalleled. So through studying his divinely inspired Psalm we can take a snapshot of his heart and learn what made him great.

David’s Life

Many view David as the shepherd boy who defeated a giant named Goliath. Others recall David as the wise Jewish ruler who brought the tribes of Israel together as a united nation. The ancient texts also present David as a powerful warrior, cunning diplomat, and talented musician. However, with all these tremendous accolades, the foundation of David’s fame and faith can be traced to a period of severe trial and doubting in his life.

Indeed, early in his journey, David was chosen to succeed Saul as the king of Judah. Although Saul was initially impressed by David’s skills as a soldier, politician, and musician, Saul became wary of his successor, so he put out a contract on David’s life. David was forced to live on the run, often spending weeks hiding in the network of caves surrounding the Dead Sea. It is here that David really began asking the tough questions of life. Alone in the dark or on the run through enemy territory, David opened up and honestly shared his thoughts, struggles, and fears. David was frustrated with God’s plan for his life, and he wrote about it in his prayer journals. Although Saul stopped at nothing to kill David, David never followed through on his opportunities to kill Saul. David’s years alone with God forged his exemplary character and unflinching faith. Through loneliness and struggle, David learned to be fully dependant on God. When Saul finally died in an unrelated battle, David returned to Judah and claimed his position as king over Judah in 1009 BC. Seven years later, the northern tribes of Israel accepted him as king and he became ruler of a united Jewish nation until his death in 969 BC. David wasn’t a perfect leader or a perfect man, but his years alone with God, humbled and crumbled in the dark, developed the soul of a legendary philosopher-king, and forged a legacy that endures to this day. Have you noticed one of the major themes running through David’s writings? He paints a picture of utter trial and turmoil in his life, yet maintains an internal compass that always points to “true north.” Whereas most of us look for happiness based on external circumstances in our lives, David has discovered a deeper joy grounded in his inner self. Most of us strive for happiness that’s external and temporary. David teaches us to drive towards a place of deeper well-being, where we develop trust and hope in God that extends beyond our external realities.
David learned that happiness and joy are different things. Happiness is that fleeting state of emotion that's dependant on doing. However, joy is a long-term process of the mind that's dependant on being. For David, it's the seasons of trial and suffering - chaos and confusion -- that ultimately develop deeper and more profound joy. The key is to know God as your internal compass.
PSALM 23 AND LEADERSHIP

Jack Easterby

1. God must be your Shepherd
2. You must find complete contentment in Him
3. He restores and guides so it’s not about You!
4. Build everything on Him, He is with you no matter what
5. Provision will come if you aren’t looking for it, you are living it out!
In order to begin our journey to become biblically sound leaders, we must first understand that even leaders have to be led by someone! All of us, no matter how proudful we are, yield to someone or something for help. When you were young, you had to have your parents’ help. When you ride in a car, you have to rely on the engine. And as leaders we must follow this trend and also rely on something greater than ourselves in order to be successful. However, relying on someone else isn’t easy, because most leaders are outgoing strong personalities who can capture a crowd by hardly even trying -- but you must yield your leadership to your leader (God). The most important godly characteristic of a leader in any church or Christian organization is the fact that they are not too prideful to admit that the Lord is their leader and without Him they would be nothing. David does that emphatically to open the Twenty-Third Psalm by saying, “The Lord is my shepherd!” Remembering that David was a shepherd, this is like saying the Lord is my leader or my boss or my coach! David was a shepherd and he knew what it was like to lead a herd of sheep, so he knew what he was saying when he wrote this. He knew that sheep are hopeless without a shepherd, so by saying this bold statement he is placing himself at the level of a lost, confused, dumb sheep. So what does all this mean? It means that the king of the nation of Israel, David, understood that God had to lead him in order for him to lead anyone else. This thought that may seem simple, but it is an attitude we all must have if our aim is to lead effectively as Christ would! As you aim to become a leader on your campus, the first question I would ask is not “Will you be a leader?” -- Because anyone can do that. The important question is, “Who will lead you?”

*When did God become my shepherd? And since He has been my shepherd, how have I seen him lead me?*

*How can I model God’s leadership in my life to others?*
YOU MUST FIND COMPLETE CONTENTMENT IN HIM!

The second part of leadership and Psalm 23 is that of contentment, a non-negotiable “must” for Christ-like leadership. If you truly have an intimate relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then you should desire nothing else outside of that relationship. David says in the second verse that he “shall not want!” What does that mean? Does it mean that he doesn’t want nice things or doesn’t battle with sin and the desires of the world? NO!!! What it means is that since he has a relationship with God, his prayer daily is “God help me want nothing but you and your will today!” To be frank with you, no one will follow a leader who is not content and satisfied. If they look to you and do not see complete dedication and satisfaction in the cause you are leading them, then why should they follow?! You are the first advertisement that they will see for Christ. I tell my players all the time, “You might be the only Bible someone reads today . . . What will they read?” Your friends and peers are looking for joy and contentment, and the only place they can truly find it is in Christ. But if they do not see your content and full of joy, then why should they follow. Your goal must be to want Christ and Christ alone in all you do and think and desire! Wanting to be good at business or great on the field are great goals to have; but our satisfaction must come from Him, not from paychecks or championships. Then you will become attractive to others as a leader and you can focus on their hearts and your campus!

Am I content in Christ alone?

What is a worry or want I have that keeps me from being an effective leader?

In my own goal setting for me and those I lead, where do my spiritual goals fall?
In verses two and three, David mentions that God takes him places, restores his soul and that God guides him. The truth of this verse is amazing and should be directly applied to leadership! First, we have that God “makes me lie down in green pastures” and “leads me beside quiet waters.” What is this saying that would apply to leadership? God’s word through David here is the result of bowing your own agenda to his. Green pastures and quiet waters are not places that we, in our own sin, would take ourselves; but, instead they are places God leads us as a result of Him being our shepherd. Our agendas and prideful goals will take us to rocky places and very little joy! However, by letting Him lead us through all we attempt to accomplish both personally and in those we lead, we lead the way He asks us to. This is better said than accomplished! It is easy to say that you want God to take you to green pastures and quiet waters, but the daily walk isn’t all roses. There will be hardships, persecution and trials along the way, but it is through those events the pastures and waters become even sweeter.

Secondly, in verse three God through David adds that he “restores our souls” and then “walks in paths of righteousness for His name sake.” These phrases are rich with meaning for leaders. First, David mentions that God his shepherd “restores his soul” -- which is tremendously important. If you have ever led in anything before, you should know that leadership can be lonely from the top. Sometimes when you are the top dog you feel like, if you turn to others you lead or to others around you, it will make you look weak or make you seem less of a leader. But here David puts those theories to rest -- Your restoration as a leader will come from Him and Him alone. The verse clearly says that “HE” restores my soul, which is clearly referencing the shepherd. The second half of the verse centers on the reason you are called to lead, which is simple . . . “... for His name’s sake!” Your leadership is not for you, your family or your friends, it is for God -- and the quicker we learn that, the quicker we can see God move within our group! Martin Luther once said about being a humble leader that “God made the world out of nothing -- perhaps if I realize I am nothing, He can use me.” All leadership positions, especially in high school, make it hard for it not to become about you! Sometimes leaders are the biggest gossips and self promoters in the world because they feel others need to notice them and their efforts and offer them some type of credit! This mindset has no place in leadership. Whenever your group is at an all-time high or all-time low, you must remember that He restored you and He led you to the path you are on now so that He could get the glory!

Where did the leadership that you now have come from and what must you do to communicate to God you know He is the author of the restored soul?

How does one overcome the pride, popularity and plaudits of being a leader?

How are you using your leadership for His glory on your campus?
Next, David prepares you for leadership when times aren’t so great -- and let’s face it, they will not always be roses. However, the way the Lord comforts us is through challenges and through trust. The next verse says that even in the valley God will be with us and we should have nothing to fear -- no matter the circumstances -- because God is with us! So where does this verse tie into leadership? Well, we all know leadership is full of planning, organizing and praying, all which are much needed for a successful group. However, what about the times we are not prepared or when we get thrown the old “curve ball?” This verse comforts us that He will be there then, too! So, our confidence cannot be placed in our plans or our well thought out visions. Our confidence must mainly come from knowing He is with us no matter what -- the planning just adds to the comfort. When times do not go the way you expect, your fearless and God-honoring leadership will come from knowing that He is with you! It is a simple concept, but most people miss it! Do not build your leadership this year on your plans, because plans are altered. Build it on God and no matter what happens, He will comfort you and lead you through the hills and the valleys!

What are some hills and valleys that I have allowed to alter my leadership in the past?

What would be a good reminder for me that God will be with me throughout my leadership and individual walk with Him?

What is my first reaction when things do not go according to plans? Have I surrounded myself with people who have confidence, fear no evil, and know He will be with us? (list a few)

What is one valley that God has been with me through that I could use as a testimony for how GREAT HE IS as my leader?
**LIVE IT OUT**

In the last two verses, David hits on concepts that drive all we have talked about with leadership home! Trust in God, humility in leadership and a god-fearing attitude all lead up to a success in God’s eyes no matter what they world says! It should be your prayer every day that God will prepare a table before you, anoint you, and send mercy your way because you will need it all. David closes his famous psalm this way so that we can see that it is only because of all God has done through restoring us, leading us, and disciplining us that He will then provide for us. These last two verses and leadership go hand in hand. How? Well, simple really! Blessings are the product of the ministry that your leadership team will produce as a result of your obedience and diligence in your walks with the Lord individually. The reason David speaks so confidently about his meal in front of his enemies, his anointing with oil, and his mercy that God has promised him, is a result of his confidence which comes from his daily walk with God. This confidence can only come from intimate experiences living out your faith. David had killed bears and lions and had trusted God with all he had and he had seen God provide time after time without fail! In leadership you can only gain strength and confidence to lead through having seen God provide and lead you personally! David was a fearless leader and rose up to be one of the greatest Kings ever because he had no doubts that God would provide because the life he lead was worthy of God showing up. In order to be a great leader on your campus you must live a life, on and off the field, worthy of the calling and trust Him more than you ever have. When others aren’t around you should be praying and with others around you should be sharing and testifying! This is the way others, and God know you are serious about your faith and having confidence in what you believe! Be a leader and let Him use you to do more than you ever asked or dreamed.

*What are the blessings and provisions from God a result of?*

*How can you best be confident that God will provide blessings and anointing for you as you face your enemies?*

*Set three goals for yourself that you can only accomplish with God’s help and surrender to them and to God now! Watch Him work and you will yourself in the same place but working with Him you will find yourself blessed and provided for!*
Overall Leadership Questions

Why is God being our shepherd and our leader so important?

Our world is obviously lacking for content people, what can I do to make sure that I gain all of my contentment from Christ and Him alone?

What or who can I put in my life as a reminder that I must remain humble in order to lead the best that I can?

Am I prepared for rough times that are surely ahead? Am I confident in my guide? What evidence do I have in my life that I can look to so that I can be reminded He will be there for me!

Am I being obedient and walking in God’s word or am I expecting Him to bless me and provide for me doing things my way?