

From the Heart of the First Lady

He Restores My Soul

Psalm 23:1-3 (NIV) ¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

As we enter this year's retreat season, I can think of no better scripture to prepare our hearts and minds to align with GOD than the 23rd Psalm. No doubt most, if not all of you can recite it from heart; but have you considered these verses in the literal sense? It's significant that David, whose resume includes king, warrior, psalmist and man after GOD's own heart, would write his most famous psalm from his most humble position – a sheep. No need to adjust your screen, it's not a typo. As we learn about sheep, we will have greater insight into David and his relationship with GOD.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want: It is one thing to view GOD as a shepherd, but quite another to believe He is my shepherd. When we mature to completely trusting GOD as a sheep does the shepherd, we move into a place of contentment and can say "I have everything I need" or better yet, "I am completely satisfied with GOD's management of my life". Can you currently say this? Luke 12:29-32

He makes me lie down in green pastures: Sheep are timid and easily frightened animals because they are one of few mammals created without defense mechanisms. (While deer and moose, have horns; the strong legs of a bull and horse can kick and buck; bears can maul and crush its attackers and tigers and wolves have claws and fangs, sheep are completely dependent upon the shepherd for its protection.) Because of this, oftentimes sheep will not lie down and rest in an open meadow for fear of being exposed and attacked. Therefore, the shepherd has to make them lie down. His comforting caresses and his voice soothes them into a restful state. Use your time at the retreat to quiet yourself and "lie down" in GOD's presence, allowing Him to speak to your soul.

He leads me beside quiet waters: If you've ever held a wet wool blanket, you'll appreciate this verse. Prior to sheering time, the wool on a sheep's head and back is so heavy that it is easily thrown off balance. If it drank near turbulent waters and slipped, the current would pull it in, causing the sheep to get swept up and drown. Likewise, our good shepherd blesses us at a pace we can handle; which means that desire we didn't yet receive could very well have been because we need to be sheared first (too much weight on our backs and in our heads) to safeguard us against being swept up and destroyed.

Prayer:

Lord, there is none like You. When I am sad, You are my comfort. Your calm presence restores my soul. Your words are cool, refreshing water to my spirit. Despite any confusion, You guide me in paths of righteousness, and it's all for your glory. Even when I feel like I'm lost in a dark valley, I will not be afraid-for You are with me. Your gentle strength and your divine authority comfort me. ... Amen



He restores my soul: For sheep, this has a different meaning than you think as it refers to an animal that has been "cast down". (A cast down sheep is one that has fallen and is on its back unable to flip over because it got top heavy from its long, thick wool. If it stays in that state long, its stomach will bloat and it'll die.) Imagine the panicked state of a cast down sheep (fighting and flailing to stand) knowing it will not survive without the help of the shepherd, who first calms the sheep by talking to it. Once at peace, the shepherd can gently restore the sheep to an upright position. It is important to note that the shepherd never leaves its side, but commits to this process for as long as it takes. This is helpful for us when we find ourselves flat on our backs as in 2Cor. 4:8-9. Likewise, we are called to the same level of commitment to each other in everything we do concerning the flock.

He guides me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake: Sheep are not intelligent animals and left to their own devices are likely to deviate towards beaten paths with no thought where they lead. If one sheep goes astray, many others automatically follow. They follow each other in the same path until it becomes a rut. Many times these paths lead to dangerous places (like oncoming traffic). Additionally, they are prone to parasites because they don't know how to avoid stepping in their own feces. Because of this, the shepherd guides the sheep along unfamiliar and least traveled paths not only to keep them from getting into a rut, but also to preserve his reputation as a good shepherd. (If his sheep are known to be sickly and disease-ridden, unkempt and smelly with feces matted within their fleece, or dying by the hundreds from veering into oncoming traffic, his name would be blacklisted among the shepherding community. John 10:11-16) This implies that the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep is not about the sheep, but all about the shepherd. He does all that He does for the sheep simply because He is a good shepherd – not because we are good sheep.

As we get ready to retreat, let's commit to preparing our hearts and minds to receive what GOD has to say to us by meditating on these three verses. There is so much revelation in Psalm 23 that it can't be shared in just one article. In the ones to follow, we will explore the attributes of our good shepherd revealed in the last three verses (our "constant companion", "Divine disciplinarian", "advocate", "anointer", "merciful shadow", and "eternal host").