



In October and November, we had a “Praise Station” setup in the church library. Some of us had a chance to experience this time of remembering who God is, what He has done, and what He will do. However, with Hamilton experiencing increased restrictions once again, I decided to transform this station into a pdf so that everyone can have a chance to experience the “Praise Station” from home.

This Praise Stations focus will be on God being our Perfect Shepherd. For each aspect of God being our Perfect Shepherd, I suggest you read the information, take the needed time to reflect, praise God for what He will do, and confess when we realize we were not placing our trust in our God.

I pray that God may use this experience to grow your confidence as you praise God for what He will do, and that you may have an intimate experience with our God.

Your Servant in Christ,

Pastor Matt

God Provides

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
³ he refreshes my soul.

Psalm 23:1-3

What does it take to be a shepherd?

One of the most memorable responses came from a Jordanian Bedouin, Abu-Jamal. Sitting together in his tent, he contemplated before answering. “What really matters is that you have a heart for it. If you do, you can begin tomorrow.”

Abu-Jamal’s comments remind me of a proverb, “A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal.” The Bedouin’s perspective illuminate other scriptures for me as well.

After centuries of leadership failure in the Old Testament, God promised Jeremiah that he would give the Israelite people “shepherds after my own heart.” (Jeremiah 3:15) God’s anger surfaced again in Zechariah’s preaching because “their own shepherds take no compassion on them” (Zechariah 11:5)

In Ezekiel divine condemnation for the leaders is piercing, while compassion for the flock is transparent:

“Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. (Ezekiel 34:2-4)

Ezekiel then promised that God would come personally to care for his flock. Jesus came as God in the flesh, expressing his shepherd love to a leaderless community. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Matthew 9:36) Compassion prompted his healing and deliverance ministry as well as his teaching. Through Jesus ministry, His actions revealed that He is the good Shepherd through the love He displayed, the compassion He showed, and the grace He had given.

Jesus said....

¹¹ *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

John 10:11-18



GOD PROVIDES FOR HIS
PLANS AND PREPARES
US TO CARRY THEM OUT

Understanding the Green Pastures?

The wilderness is known as green pastures. Now when you take a westerner for the first time and observe the Bedouin Shepherds in the wilderness as they walk in the green pastures, their response tends to be, "I don't know if I would like to go and experience those green pastures. Why? Because a Westerner's understanding of green pastures from Psalm 23 is the picture of belly deep alfalfa. In the wilderness, you will not see any belly deep alfalfa, as the wilderness is a desert like. From biblical times to today, it is rare to see a flock in the farm country because there is not a lot of farm country in the middle east. As a result, farmers would send their shepherds out as much as they could. Sometimes, the shepherds would come with the sheep to the farm fields just after harvest time to glean what remained in the farmer fields. However, you do not want sheep where you can farm, and so the wilderness is the land of the shepherd. These shepherds will take these sheep along grazing trails, and allow them to graze slowly. Take a look at the picture below of these grazing hills.



One may wonder what exactly these sheep eat, as all we can see is desert like terrain with many rocks. How can we call this green pastures? The answer is that there is a small amount of moisture present from the little bit of rain that the wilderness receives every year. Not much, but a little. Second, there is humidity in the air of the evening breeze coming from the west (off of the Mediterranean Sea), which causes moisture in

the air. That moisture, a combination of that rain and humidity, condenses or drips on the edge of the rocks. When a person looks closely, you would notice that right along those rocks, you get little tufts of green. That is what we refer to as the green pastures.

The shepherd looks for a hillside that was exposed by either the rain or the wind of humidity and they move that flock across that hillside. As the sheep graze, they take one mouth full here, then take a step or two, another mouth full there, then a step or two, then another mouth full.... until each sheep has had their fill.



This understanding changes our view on green pastures. Green pastures are not everything you need for the rest of your life. If green pastures were actually “belly deep alfalfa”, then God is communicating that if you follow Him, God will plunk you down in the green pastures and you will never have to move an inch for the rest of your life.

However, our life with God is not like that. “Worry”, said one Rabbi, “is dealing with tomorrows problems on today’s pasture.” In the desert you learn, the shepherd will get you what you need for right now. Ten minutes from now, you trust the shepherd. As the shepherd is the provider.

Scriptures for Reflection

7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. **8** For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. **9** “Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? **10** Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? **11** If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him! - Matthew 7:7-11

Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!

Luke 12:24

The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Psalms 34:10

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Ephesians 2:8-10

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:11

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Psalms 84:11

²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

John 16:24

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.

John 15:7



God Guides

He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

⁴ 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.

Psalm 23:3b-4

The Staff

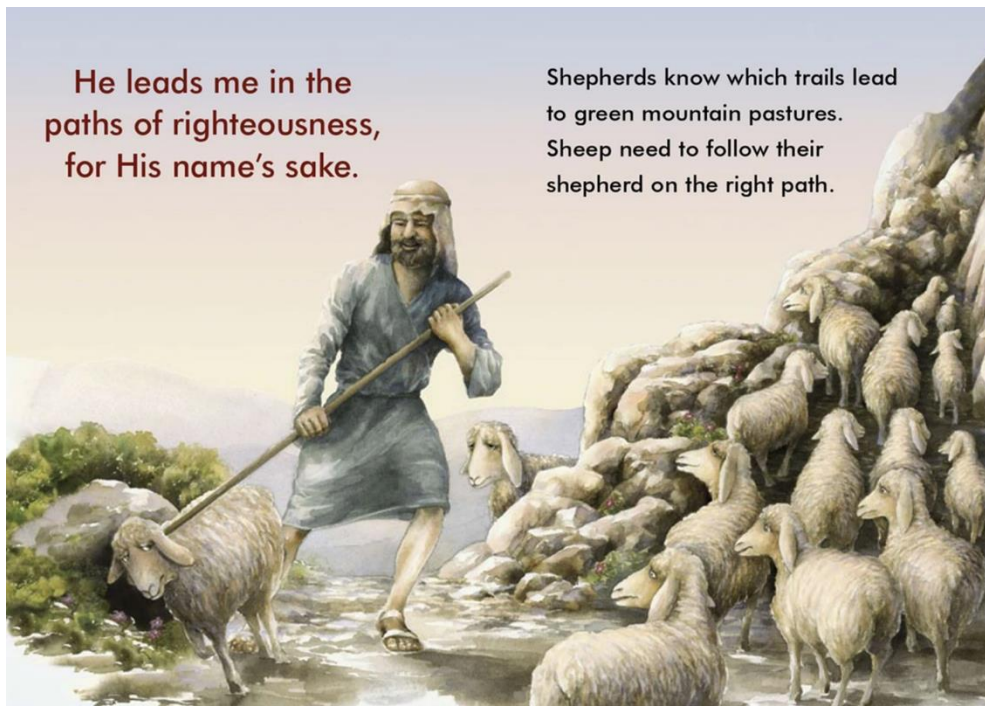
The Shepherd simple wooden staff had a very important purpose. A purpose that displayed care as the shepherd would use it to provide gentles assistance, direction, and encouragement at critical moments.



The staff is extremely important in rescue operations. Sheep have a way of getting caught in pits, fences, bushes, and crevices. They can get stuck in mud or, worse, swept off by a flash flood. The staff becomes an extension of the shepherd's arm, reaching carefully around the isolated creature and pulling it back to safety.

The staff is used to guide sheep through a pass, lightly pointing out the way with a shoulder tap. The staff gently separates sheep from

each other when tension arises, and it brings sheep together when they need to be. A simple stick becomes a tangible, tactile extension of the shepherd's voice, expressing his concerns or directions throughout the day.



The staff is used to “be in touch”. Walking side by side of a special animal. Special perhaps because it needs more frequent affirmation. Or because it most likely to wander. Or it might just be a favorite.

Jesus said, “¹⁴ I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.” John 10:14-16

Take some time and reflect...

- How Jesus has been your shepherd and used his symbolic staff to comfort you.
- How Jesus will continue to guide you today, tomorrow and forever.
- Praising God that He is your forever guide.

Scriptures for Reflection

Guidance Through the Holy Spirit

But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

John 16:13

God Establishes our Steps

In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps.

Proverbs 16:9

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Committed to those Who Are Committed to Him

He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. **10** All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.

Psalms 25:9-10

5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. **6** But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.

James 1:5-6

The LORD makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; **24** though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the LORD upholds him with his hand.

Psalms 37:23-24

Guides us through His Word

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

Psalms 32:8

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.

Psalms 119:105

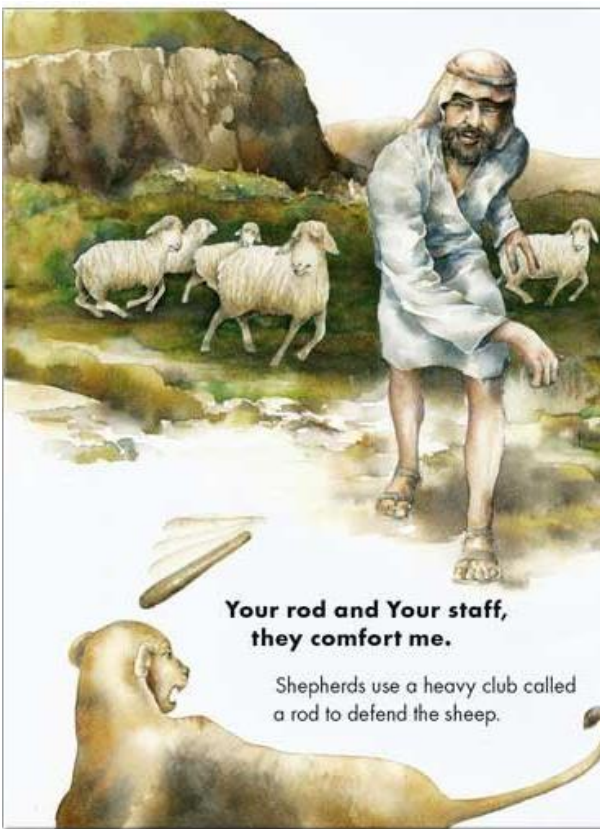
God Protects

⁴ 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.⁵ You prepare
a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Psalm 23:4-5

The Rod

Along with the staff, ancient shepherds carried a club, usually referred to as a rod. Typically, half the size of a staff, the rod was often made from the root of a tree with a natural bulb on one end. The shepherd could tuck this versatile weapon on his belt and use it for defense against both animal and human predators. King David when he once was a shepherd boy may have killed those lions and bears with his club. (1 Samuel 17:34-36) When the rod was thrown at a predator, every throw was done with deadly accuracy.



The rod has another use that is also defensive. In traditional settings the animals are counted and inspected every night as they “pass under the rod” of the shepherd. Running the implement against the wool, they examine each animal for evidence of little enemies such as ticks and parasites.

Shepherds have yet another use for the rod among the flocks. Once in awhile, a shepherd might “remind” straying animals with his wooden missile that their behavior is unacceptable. This important disciplinary function of the rod ensures the flock’s safety and well being.

The prophet Isaiah paints a beatific vision of paradise preceded by the use of Messiah’s rod:

“With righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his

mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together."

Isaiah 11:4-6

The Messianic era is possible because of a fundamental principle understood in ancient times. Protection and discipline breed security. The psalmist reflects this dynamic with poetic simplicity when he says, "Your rod and staff they comfort me". Security and comfort are the fruits of a shepherd who exercise judgment and discipline.

Reflection:

- Take some time and reflect how God has been your protector.
- Ask God to search your heart and to reveal to you whether you are responsive to the rod in your life?
- Take some time to praise God that his staff and his rod comfort you. Praise God for the protection and security we experience because God is our Shepherd and we are His sheep.

Sheep Need A Protector



Sheep are completely defenseless when in these remote regions. They don't have sharp teeth or claws. Their eyesight is limited to ten to fifteen yards. The animal's only instinct is to huddle or flock together. Isolation spells ruin. The only reliable source of security comes from the shepherd's presence. A flock cannot be left alone.

When the psalmist prays, "Though I walk through the valley of deadly shadows, I will fear no harm," his confidence is grounded in the fearless courage and vigilance of his Divine

Shepherd. A Shepherd warrior!

A provider must also be a trustworthy protector for the dependent animal's survival. Are we aware of the spiritual battle that rages around us? We are like sheep, completely defenseless. Only through God being our protector, can we be protected from the devil's schemes.

The Devil's Schemes:

Martin Luther's hymn... A Mighty Fortress is Our God.

"For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; His craft and power are great, and are armed with cruel hate, On earth is not his equal."

The devil attempts and can succeed to hold people captive and do it very subtly through seductive addictions: to drugs, alcohol, pornography, work, television, music, or the internet. The enemy's work is evident in the alarming rise of anorexia, bulimia, self-harm that takes place within our country.

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." - 1 Peter 5:8

But Martin Luther does not stop there with his view on the devil,

"And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us; We will not fear for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us; the prince of darkness grim; we tremble not for him; His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure; One little word shall fell him."

"In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one."

Ephesians 6:16

Scriptures for Reflection:

No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.

2 Thessalonians 3:3

Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Isaiah 41:10

But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.

Psalms 5:11

The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all;

Psalms 34:19

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Psalms 46:1

Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.

Psalms 57:1

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes; with your right hand you save me.

Psalms 138:7

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)

my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior— from violent people you save me. **4** “I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and have been saved from my enemies.

2 Samuel 22:3-4

Jesus said...

28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. **29** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. **30** I and the Father are one.”

John 10:28-30

1 I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from? **2** My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. **3** He will not let your foot slip—he who watches over you will not slumber; **4** indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. **5** The LORD watches over you— the LORD is your shade at your right hand; **6** the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. **7** The LORD will keep you from all harm— he will watch over your life; **8** the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. (Psalm 121)

1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. **2** I will say of the LORD, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.” **3** Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare and from the deadly pestilence. **4** He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. **5** You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, **6** nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. **7** A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. **8** You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. **9** If you say, “The LORD is my refuge,” and you make the Most High your dwelling, **10** no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent. **11** For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; **12** they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. **13** You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent. **14** “Because he loves me,” says the LORD, “I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. **15** He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. **16** With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.”

Psalm 91

The Perfect Shepherd

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

John 10:11

Jesus' death on the cross was a display of God's provisions, protection, and guidance.

Provided: Salvation, Forgiveness, Adoption, Eternal Life... etc.

Protected: From the Evil One's Schemes, Victory Over Temptation, From Judgment... etc.

Guided: Through His Word, Through Prayer, Through the Holy Spirit... etc.

Reflection:

Take some time to reflect on Jesus' suffering for us on the cross; the agony of being on the cross. What emotion would he have experienced?

When Jesus became sin for us, in that moment, fellowship was broken between Jesus and Father God. Reflect on the pain that this would have caused.

Take some time to praise God for being our perfect shepherd who laid down His life for us.

Resources Used:

- 1) While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks: 40 Daily Reflections on Biblical Leadership Hardcover – Illustrated, Jan. 1 2007. by Timothy Laniak
- 2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2x8MwiTs0hM>