

2020 Adult Education FUMC Tulsa
The Heart of a King
Studies in Psalm 23 and 51

Overview

This series of lessons is based in two psalms although the weekly outlines will branch out significantly. David wrote 79 or the 150 psalms in the book of Psalms. His story is central to the content. As such this series puts full focus on David and on two very important psalms, Psalm 23 and Psalm 51.

Learning Objectives:

As you review this material, it is appropriate to come to understand what the learning objective of this series is. Every curriculum has learning objective which was the driving force for the preparation of the material. For a driver's education course, the objective is for the students to learn to drive. For a computer programming class, the goal is to produce computer programmers. These secular examples are different from a church curriculum because the objective is measurable to understand if the course was a success.

Nonetheless even courses you may have taught in the past had a learning objective even if it was not stated in the materials. On top of that, each teacher brings with him or her a learning objective for the class. When the teacher's learning objective in sync with the materials and especially in sync with what the Holy Spirit has in mind for the upcoming 8 weeks, the outcome is predictably more fruitful for the kingdom of God.

This curriculum can be classified entirely as a Bible study. The learning objective is for the people of God to have an encounter with the Word of God and as such see their personal walk with the Lord enhanced and strengthened. This is accomplished by making sure an abundance of scripture is presented each week. However, along with that, the people either subjectively or actively should interact with the material and with the Word.

There will be large amount of material in each lesson plan. These studies were developed as part of a focused small group environment where an hour a week we devoted entirely to bible study. As such there will be much more than can be done in a half hour Sunday School presentation. Do not feel you have to present it all. Much is provided to give you plenty to pick from. Both of the Psalms we are studying are extremely rich spiritual material. I pray the Holy Spirit will guide your preparation and how He will use it for your classes.

The curriculum is also designed to be highly interactive. The questions will be laced throughout the material, so they flow naturally with the presentation. They will be natural discussion starters intended to challenge the class members and engage them with you and with your material. The key to using them is to engage the question without necessarily a defined "answer" you are looking for. Remember the goal is to engage and as long as your classes come away having had an encounter with the Word of God, the class will have been a success.

This is essentially a study in Psalm 23 and 51 but there will be material for you to enhance the study from other sources in the Old and New Testament. One commentary that I found extremely helpful in my preparation and teaching of these lessons was “A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23” by Philip Keller. You will see references in the materials this text referenced simply as “Keller”.

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Week One - Background for Psalm 23

Psalm 23:1
I Samuel 8:1-9
I Samuel 16:8-7-13

Without question the most well-known and oft quoted and used psalm is the 23rd Psalm. I daresay we could all virtually say it by heart this. In this lesson series, we will look at this important scripture in depth. To do that, it is important that we go back to its author, David and look at his background that gives us insight into the psalm.

This first week is a study in the life of David from youth, his time as shepherd and the killing of the wild beast to protect his sheep to the confrontation of Goliath to his selection as king. The next 3 weeks our focus will be on Psalm 23. Part 2 will be about his sin and be covered in the next lesson on Psalm 51

King David clearly ranked with Moses and Elijah as a central figure of the Old Testament. Just as Moses represented the Law and its long ranging impact, David is the cornerstone of the background of Christ himself. In this lesson we will look at the episodes in David's life that provide background to the shepherd's psalm. David was a shepherd before he was called to become king and God used the role of shepherd both in David's reign and as prophecy to the coming of the great shepherd Jesus our Lord.

I have provided a general overview of David's life and career in the addendum to help you lay this background correctly. Also to understand the shepherd analogy we will study in Psalm 23, we need to understand the shepherd motif in the Old and New Testament. That material too is provided in the addendum of next week's lesson. These background materials along with Keller will give you a rich grounding in what the 23rd Psalm has to say to us.

Note: There is a lot of background material in this lesson to give you a rich grounding moving into this lesson series. After you study these materials, please do not feel you need to present all of it. The core of this lesson is in **I Samuel 8, 16-17**. The treasure of this introduction because it gives you a tremendous background into the heart and soul of David as you prepare to the study Psalm 23 over the next 3 weeks.

This lesson series begins in Psalm 23 and ends in Psalm 51. Psalm 23 is an exuberant declaration of God as our Shepherd. While the text ranks as one of a handful of the most familiar passages in scripture, it is also full of depth and spiritual wealth that we will seek to mine in this study. The grounding of the Psalm of course is King David's history and experience as a shepherd. To truly understand David's mind and heart as he began to write this phenomenal psalm, we must go to history and explore key moments in the life of the boy who would become king.

David was anointed to be king long before he knew it or was even born. It was prophesied that he would be and that his kingdom would be a central prophesy of Christ being in the line of David **Psalm 89:3- 4**

I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, thy seed will I establish forever, and build up thy throne to all generations.

The story begins long before David was born when the people of God demanded that they too wanted a king so they could be like the other kingdoms.

That story is in **I Samuel 8:1-9**. Read through this passage to see if you see it as part of what you want to present to your class. Note in verse 7-8 God clearly saw this as rejection and did not want to give them a king. It was not HIS idea.

The people did not want a theocracy. They wanted to be like other nations. They wanted to be like the cool kids. They did not like depending on God. Is depending on God hard? Even thousands of years later, we as the people of God struggle with having God in a place of total authority in our lives. We prefer to revert to earthly ways of seeing things rather than learn the difficult principles of how to live with God as our central authority, our King and our only king.

Problem – this event eventually took us to the establishment of the Kingdom of David which is basically the beginning of the coming of the Messiah. Ergo, this had to happen to fulfill prophecy that we covered AND YET it was not what God wanted at the time. Had this not happened, there would have been no David and no foundation of the coming of Christ. What's up with that? It was sin and YET HE ALLOWED IT!

Look at I Samuel 8: 6 – he allowed it. Why? Dear teacher this is one of those questions that perplex us and put us to the test. Throw this problem statement to your class with the knowledge that there is no definitive answer, but it does tell us much about God and his relationship with his people.

We fast forward now 8 chapters to the calling of David - **I Samuel 16:8-7-13**. Yes, we are passing over the entire episode with Saul because we are on a treasure hunt to learn as much as we can about the background to Psalm 23. Read through this passage as part of your preparation. If you choose to dive deep into it in your class, it will take up much of your session as it is a fascinating moment in the history of God's people.

Observations – The people look to the outward, but God directed Samuel not to regard that. The youngest and the smallest would be the King. God always uses the least qualified servant in our eyes so he can show himself great. What does that tell us about God and his relationship to his people even us?

David never called himself – He only responded to the calling when it was given to him. The seemingly unrelated “secular” skills and training were put in David to make him great at the calling he was born to do. Reflect on this in light of our calling in God. God put me and you here to use the gifts he has already implanted in us to fulfill the calling He has put in our lives. Even skills and experiences gained before we knew the Lord become tools and resources for God to use to lead others to him. It is not out of line to see that even bad or terrible things that have happened to us or that we have done before we knew him can be used by God to bless others and win souls for the kingdom of heaven.

The very next chapter is one of the great triumphs of Old Testament history. It is of course the story of **David and Goliath – 1 Samuel 17**. There is much to enjoy in this chapter as well. Because of its length it might be best to summarize the story. Notice David’s bold statement in verse 26. This was a boy who came confidently to face down God’s enemies.

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The key verse I want to make sure is emphasized from this story is when David recalls when he kills the lion in **1 Samuel 17:34-36**. The shepherd in Him prepared him to do God’s work. This is the backbone of who we see when we fast forward to Psalm 23. In verse 29 he fought with what he knew worked when he was protecting his sheep. When David threw that stone, he knew it was not his skill or strength that would guide that stone to take down the giant. He knew it was the power of God because he had been used by that power to defeat foes before. He knows what “the Lord is my Shepherd” meant and he was prepared to take that knowledge to war.

A wonderful reflection on this can be found in **Psalm 78:70-72**. “ *He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; From the care of the ewes with sucking lambs He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart and guided them with his skillful hands.*”

Addendum - David – An Outline

1043 BC Samuel the prophet anoints Saul as the first king of Israel. – **1 Samuel 10:1**

1035 BC Believed to be the approximate period that David is born in the town of Bethlehem.

1025 BC Samuel goes to the town of Bethlehem and anoints the shepherd David as the future king of Israel. He is between the age of 10-12 years old. – 1 Samuel 16:13

1023 BC David serves as a minstrel in Saul's court after he is learned to be a talented musician. – 1 Samuel 16:21-22 - Israel, led by King Saul, is at war with the Philistines.

1020 BC The Philistines send their champion warrior Goliath against the shepherd boy David. David kills Goliath with a single shot from his sling. – 1 Samuel 17

1010 BC King Saul fires David from his court but makes him a commander in his army. – 1 Samuel 18:13 David is successful as a warrior in Saul's army that the king offers his daughter in marriage to David. – 1 Samuel 18:21 Jonathan, a son of King Saul, and David become the best friends and make an oath to one another regarding future generations. – 1 Samuel 20

1008 BC David is threatened with bodily harm by Saul because of jealousy. He goes to Nob and receives the sword of Goliath from Ahimelech, a priest. – 1 Samuel 21. He then hides in the city of Gath, hometown of Goliath and pretends to be a crazy man. – 1 Samuel 21:10

1005 BC With a chance to kill Saul, David spares the life of the man who had been trying to hunt him down in order to kill him. – 1 Samuel 24

1000 BC Samuel the prophet dies. David meets Abigail and her husband Nabal. Nabal refuses to help David and his men. Abigail intervenes as David intends to do harm to Nabal. Nabal dies of natural causes, David marries Abigail. – 1 Samuel 25 After the death of Samuel, Saul consults a witch to call Samuel from the dead. Instead, Samuel predicts Saul's death the following day. Saul, along with three of his sons die in a battle with the Philistines. – 1 Samuel 28:3-7 The Amalekites are destroyed by David and his men. – 1 Samuel 30

993 BC David is anointed king of Judah with the help of his allies and he makes Hebron as the capital of his new "administration." – 2 Samuel 2:7 A nation still divided between Israel and Judah, a civil war rages on between the kingdoms. The northern kingdom, Israel is led by Ishbosheth, one of the surviving sons of Saul. He is helped by Abner, a general loyal to Saul. – 2 Samuel 2:9-12 David and his kingdom is strengthened by expansion and alliances. Joab, one of Davids generals, kills Abner. – 2 Samuel 3 David finally reigns over all Israel and Judah. – 2 Samuel 5, 1 Chronicles 11

992 BC David plans to build a temple for God. – 2 Samuel 7

982 BC *The Philistines, Moab, and Syrians are defeated by David and his army. – 2 Samuel 8 - While taking a break from fighting Israel's enemies, David sees the wife of Uriah, one of his soldiers, bathing out in the open from the rooftop of his palace. The woman was beautiful, her name was Bathsheba. – 2 Samuel 11*

980 BC *David desired to have Bathsheba for himself and has an adulterous relationship with her. He eventually had Uriah killed. He is confronted by Nathan, a prophet of God, for his actions. – 2 Samuel 12 The wife of Uriah gives birth to a son by David, his name is Solomon. – 2 Samuel 12:24*

978 BC *Amnon, one of David's sons lust for his half-sister Tamar. Amnon forces himself on her, and is eventually killed by Absalom, Tamar's brother. – 2 Samuel 13 David orders one his generals, Joab, to take a census to count the people of Israel . He later learns that he had ordered was not according to what God wanted and had consequences. – 1 Chronicles 21 A son of David, Absalom, conspires against his father by trying to draw the loyalties of the people from David. – 2 Samuel 14 & 15*

976 BC *David leaves Jerusalem when he learns of his son Absalom's intent to overthrow him. – 2 Samuel 15:13*

974 BC *During a battle against David's men, Absalom get himself caught on tree, he is then killed by Joab. – 2 Samuel 18*

972 BC *David comes back to Jerusalem after his mourning of Absalom's death. – 2 Samuel 19:14 The Philistines once again engage in battle against David and the Israelites. David is nearly killed by a giant, however, four giants were killed in the battle. The four were believed to have been brothers of Goliath. – 2 Samuel 21:15-22*

963 BC *David gives Solomon and his other sons the responsibility of building God's temple as he had originally hoped he would. – 1 Chronicles 22:6-19 Adonijah, David's fourth son attempts to take over the kingdom of Israel when he learns that the health of David was failing. – 1 Kings 1:5 Nathan has Bathsheba ask David to name Solomon king after they learn of Adonijah's plan. – 1 Kings 1:11 David gives the orders to Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, one of his faithful and trusted men to crown Solomon as king over Israel. – 1 Kings 1:32-35*

961 BC *David calls the people of Israel and Judah and formally hands over the plans for the temple to be built along with final instructions regarding his enemies. – 1 Chronicles 29:1-25, 1 Kings 2:1-9 David dies. Solomon becomes king of Israel. – 1 Kings 2:10-12*

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Week two - The Shepherd
Psalm 23:1-2

As we saw last week, David is uniquely qualified to make that profound statement that kicks off Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want". David had been a shepherd since a young child so he knew the strong relationship of trust between the shepherd and his sheep. He also knew the depth of commitment that went into being a shepherd so he could point to God as his shepherd with no difficulty.

Read Psalm 23. Have it read by someone in the class for greater impact. Psalm 23 is called the shepherds psalm. For starters we need orientation because in all likelihood none of us here have raised sheep. And even if we had, the life a shepherd circa 1025 B.C. would in no way line up with modern shepherding if you will. So part of understanding this psalm is to get a good grasp of the motif of the shepherd both historically and the spiritual meaning which is the real power of Psalm 23.

Shepherding was, and still is to a certain extent, a very common occupation for those in the Middle East. The Patriarchs were all shepherds, as was Moses and of course David. It was also shepherds in the field that the news of the birth of Christ was first revealed! The terrain and geography of the area lend itself to the raising of both sheep and goats, but in particular sheep. There is scarcity of grass and less than abundant sources of water. Sheep are moved from one area to another with relative ease and require less water than other domestic animals. Everyone was familiar with shepherding. To say the people to whom the scriptures were first written had a working knowledge of the concept would indeed be an understatement.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. That teaching is just one of many references to the shepherding theme in the Old and New Testaments. A new testament teaching on the shepherd concept can be found in **Revelation 7:17**, when the saints who come out of the tribulation are brought before God, John brings together two of the most striking images of the scripture by stating, "*for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eye.*" Below are just a few of many other passages that reference the shepherd and point to it as a motif for God and indeed Christ himself.

For additional study look at **Ezekiel 34:11-31, Isaiah 40:10-11, Psalm 79:13, Hebrews 13:20-21, John 21:15-17**

This Old Testament context on the image of the shepherd is compelling but nothing compares to the teachings of our Lord on the subject. In **John 10:1-18**. These passages deserve serious consideration as companion passages to Psalm 23

The Lord is My Shepherd

To get an in-depth teaching on the shepherd image – we need not go to commentaries or other sources when we have the greatest teacher of them all – Jesus himself teaches us in – **John 10:1-18**

This is a perfect spot in our curriculum for a full study of these 18 verses. Early in the passage Jesus makes numerous references to a protected area called the sheepfold. Keller tells us that this is often a hut that can only be entered by one way. The shepherd sleeps with his body across the entrance. In that way no sheep can get out and nothing can get in.

Focus on verse **John 10:4** – the sheep know his voice. How do we know the voice of God? We hear a lot of voices. How do we know when God is speaking to us? It is a spiritual “ear” we develop to be able to divide out the voice of our Lord, our shepherd from the many voices including our own that compete for our minds and our hearts.

John 10:15, the shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. Clearly Jesus was referencing the cross which is ahead for him. But the depth a shepherd will go to to protect his flock references back to last week. - **1 Samuel 17:34-37**.

34 But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, 35 I went after it struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. 36 Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.

Jesus continues – **John 10:25-30**. Discuss this concept in verse 28 – no one can snatch them out of my hand. Nobody can “steal “us from Christ. There is only one exit from the faith – you have to walk out. This is cause for reflection for those we care about near and especially far. Their salvation is secure. Nobody can steal them from Jesus

This is an extraordinarily rich text and I have only called out here passages that jump out to me. As you prepare and then teach, when the Holy Spirit unsprings truths of the kingdom of God, let Him.

I Shall Not Want

I shall not want is the cornerstone theme of Psalm 23. Want here implies more than just physical needs. It also takes in spiritual needs. We will never want by spiritual hunger or yearning. A reference to the fact that God will fill us physically and spiritually. – See **Psalm 34:9** “Fear the LORD, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing.”

I think the better interpretation of this phrase is “I shall not go lacking or lack for anything.” Of course we will want but God will assure that whatever we really we need get. It is a reassurance that can vanquish mountains of anxiety. Another approach is, I CHOOSE not to want – Now that is good to hear but hard to live out daily. It goes to the heart of what it might be like to live a life without anxiety. For a study in what that might look like look at **Matthew 6:25-34** – reflect on a life without anxiety

Psalm 23 is like a parable because it has two layers to interpret it. There is the physical level which looks at the shepherd and the sheep at face value. Hence, we can talk about providing for the physical needs of the sheep, their physical thirst and hunger etc.

But the value to us is when we go down a layer to the spiritual meaning being taught. In that way we look at the same ideas from the point of view of the spiritual needs, hunger etc. God's people. And at all times "God's people" meaning us.

Psalm 23:2 - He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:

Consider this passage from "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm23: by Philip Keller.

"The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very makeup it is almost impossible for them to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met. (1) Owing to their timidity they refuse to lie down unless they are free of all fear. (2) Because of the social behavior within a flock, sheep will not lie down unless they are free from friction with others of their kind (3) If tormented by flies or parasites, sheep will not lie down. (4) Sheep will not lie down as long as they feel in need of finding food. They must be free of hunger."

The Hebrew word for pastures here could also be translated as dwellings or habitations. Jesus references habitations in **John 14:1-4** –

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God¹; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

Animals lie down when they are satisfied and feel safe. The phrase "make me lie down" does not mean by force. It means to cause me to lie down, to make it possible to feel safe and satisfied and assured that all needs are provided now and always.

There are two factors here. The green pasture meaning the shepherd provides abundantly for the needs of his flock. The second is how he makes us lie down. He makes it possible for us to be at rest. Lie down – no longer working or anxious about the next thing. What does that mean in application? The presence of the savior and the knowledge that he will be there to take care of what we need, no matter it is can provide us with ultimate peace and security so our souls and spirits can be at rest.

Psalm 23:2 He leadeth me beside the still waters.

Sheep have difficulty drinking from a rapidly flowing stream. They need quiet waters to drink. E.g. the importance of water as a spiritual reference "To drink" in spiritual terminology means "to take in" or "to accept" or "to believe" That is to say it implies that a person accepts and assimilates the very life of god in Christ until it becomes part of him.

Hence, we drink the blood of Christ in communion as a symbol of him becoming part of our being. A good New Testament rephrasing might be "He leadeth me beside the living water. This is a term Jesus used to describe himself.

John 7:37-39 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Isaiah 58:11 "The LORD will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched lan and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

"Still waters "could also more accurately be translated "waters of quietness". Peaceful waters. Like the feeling of being by seashore with the waves making that gentle but continuous washing sound. There is something about resting by a body of water that is deeply peaceful and restorative.

From Keller –

"Most people are not aware that sheep can go for months on end... without actually drinking if there is heavy dew on the grass each morning. Sheep by habit rise just before dawn and start to feed or if there is bright moonlight, they will graze at night. The early hours are when the vegetation is drenched with dew and sheep can keep fit on the water taken in with their forage when they graze just before and after dawn.... There is no better picture of still waters than the silver droplets of dew hanging heavy on leaves and grass at the break of day."

The good shepherd rises early to make sure sheep can be out to graze when dew is available to them. Discuss the similarity to the manna God gave to the children of Israel as they journeyed to the promised land.. Keller's spiritual application of still waters points to early morning devotions...

"Those who are most confident and most able to cope with life's complexities are those who rise early to Be led beside the quite still waters to imbibe the very life of Christ each day."

Think about the discipline of daily devotion. How to do it and when.? If that discipline could use a tune up, a good start is the with the 23th Psalm. You see here that is a very deep passage of the Word of God. Let the depth that the Holy Spirit has for us in this series sink in like water being absorbed in the soil. The soil of our own spirits could do worse than to be saturated with this living water.

To teachers: What you see below is appendices or support materials to give you additional understanding of how rich the image of the shepherd is in scripture. Do not feel you must integrate any or all of it in your preparations for this lesson and in the ones to follow on Psalm 23.

The Shepherd Motif in the Old and New Testament

Author:
Mary Beth Gladwell

<https://www.xenos.org/essays/shepherd-motif-old-and-new-testament>

The motif of the shepherd is found throughout the scripture. In the Old Testament God has words of strong rebuke and warning for bad shepherds, and prophecies of a good shepherd that is to come. In the New Testament, Jesus identifies himself as the Good Shepherd and we find in the epistles the notion of good shepherding extended to those who would lead in the church.

This paper will attempt to explore the shepherding motif in some detail. In specific it will answer the following three questions: Why might have God chosen to use this particular image? *What are the characteristics of a good shepherd?* Who is the Shepherd that is to come referred to in the Old Testament?

Why the image of the shepherd?

The idea of shepherding, and in specific the idea of God acting as the Shepherd of His people, is a motif found throughout the Bible, from beginning to end. In Gen. 48:24, as Jacob, on his deathbed summarized his life, he declared that God had been his “*shepherd all of his life to this day.*” In Rev. 7:17, when the saints who come out of the tribulation are brought before God, John brings together two of the most striking images of the scripture by stating, “*for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eye.*”

While perhaps not found with as much frequency as other motifs in the Bible, the theme of the shepherd is very significant. It appears at critical times in the narrative of the history of God’s people, and hardly another motif is as rich in content.

Why did God choose to include this motif as part of His revelation to man? Scripture itself does not give a direct explanation, so the answer cannot be definitive. However, there would appear to be several good reasons. **Shepherding was, and still is to a certain extent, a very common occupation for those in the Middle East. The Patriarchs were all shepherds, as was Moses and of course David. (It was to shepherds in the field that the news of the birth of Christ was first revealed!) The terrain and geography of the area lend itself to the raising of both sheep and goats, but in particular sheep. There is scarcity of grass and less than abundant sources of water. Sheep are moved from one area to another with relative ease and require less water than other domestic animals. Everyone was familiar with shepherding --- to say the people to whom the scriptures were first written had a working knowledge of the concept would indeed be an understatement.**

However, it may be most noteworthy to realize that leaders and rulers being called shepherds was not exclusive to the Bible or for that matter to the nation of Israel. King Hammurabi of Babylon called himself a shepherd¹, and Homer regularly styles the Greek chiefs as shepherds of their people.² In fact, history has shown, “from ancient antiquity rulers were described as demonstrating their legitimacy to rule by their ability to ‘pasture’ their people.”³ This makes sense then of verses like those found in Jer.

49:19 and 50:44, where God asks, “*who is the shepherd who can stand against me?*” In this connection, the royal staff, or scepter, a common accessory for kings in the Ancient Near East, was itself a form of shepherd’s rod. Shepherds commonly used long poles such as these to poke around crevices in caves to scare out scorpions and snakes.² It came to be a symbol of protection, power and authority. Even in Egypt, a divine symbol of kingship was the shepherd’s crook.³ It is true that the idea of shepherd as leader was not exclusive to the Bible. However, what we will find is that God as the ultimate shepherd of His people takes this concept to a level not present in other cultures.

As we look at the characteristics of a good shepherd it will become clear that God chose this motif at least in part because His people are so apt to act like sheep. Scriptures like Is. 53:6 remind us over and over again that God’s people and sheep are very much alike and the connection is most often negative. “Sheep are not only dependent creatures; singularly unintelligent, prone to wandering and unable to find their way to a shepherd even when it is in sight.”⁴ The analogy is fitting. It is clear, because of our helplessness and our tendency to wander and get lost we are in need of a Good Shepherd.

The Characteristics of a Good Shepherd

The Bible sketches out in great detail what a good shepherd would look like both in the Psalms and in the words of Christ himself. However, before turning to these descriptions it will be beneficial to consider in the broadest terms what the focus of a leader of God’s people should be, and in specific how the poor leaders of Israel failed in this regard.

The focus of a good shepherd was to be on his flock--their provision, guidance and safety. The epitome of the bad shepherds, in Ezekiel’s expose of Israel’s leaders of his day (34:1-6), sketches out in vivid terms, what it looked like when leaders failed to provide this care. These leaders were slaughtering their sheep for their own gain rather than feeding them. (This calls to mind the hiring of John 10:10, who comes only to steal, kill and destroy and also of Jesus’ scathing rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 23.) Rather than caring for the flock, they treated them with “*force and severity*”. (vs.4) Perhaps Ezekiel’s greatest rebuke was for their lack of guidance. This is emphasized here (and in other passages). Three times he mentions that the sheep are scattered. They were lost, became prey for every beast and had no one to search or seek them. (vs.6) Jeremiah, in his judgment of the leaders of Israel took this notion on step further, connecting a lack of spirituality on the leader’s part with the scattering of the sheep. In Jer. 10:21 he states, no doubt in reference to the captivity of Judah, “*For the shepherds have become stupid, and have not sought the Lord; Therefore they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered.*”

Knowing that the bad shepherd fails to provide for the sheep, protect the sheep and guide the sheep, the picture of the good shepherd laid out in scripture comes into clearer view. The most famous description of the good shepherd, and perhaps one of the most well-known passages in the Bible, is Psalm 23. These lines were penned by David, not a theoretician when it came to sheep and their welfare, but a proven shepherd. (David’s ability as a shepherd was clearly connected with God using him to masterfully lead Israel. In Ps. 78:70-72 we read, “ *He also chose David His servant, And took him from the sheepfolds; From the care of the ewes with sucking lambs He brought him, To shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, And guided them with his skillful hands.*”) Entire books have been written detailing the work and nature of the shepherd in Psalm 23. What follows attempts to highlight some of the more important points of the shepherd’s provision for his flock.

The good shepherd provides nourishment and refreshment for his sheep. In verse 2 we are told he causes the sheep to lie down in green pastures. This indicates a place to rest but also a supply of food

on hand. Also present is water that is welcoming in addition to refreshing. This met a critical need due to the shortage of water in the region as already pointed out.

Later in the Psalm David conveys the idea of abundant provision in yet another way. He speaks of a table being set, his cup overflowing, and his head being anointed with oil. Bedouin hospitality often called for just such a lavish response to a guest, and the anointing with oil was a symbol of lavish generosity and goodness on behalf of a hostess for their guest. (Ecc. 9:8) David points out that the skilled shepherd **MAKES** them lie down (vs.2), **LEADS** them (vs.2) and **GUIDES** them (vs.3). **He provides guidance which is so critical for sheep that are by their nature apt to stray or wander into danger because they are so helpless. This was a critical aspect of leadership and the very reason given for Joshua being appointed to carry on for Moses in Num. 27:15 –17. It is interesting to note that David is aware that the shepherd provides in this way not because of the inherent worthiness of the sheep, but because of the reputation of the shepherd. Also, the picture here is of the shepherd leading the way. Sheep in the East are not driven like in the West due to differences in the terrain. For the most part, in the East the shepherd goes ahead of the sheep, choosing the way to go.**

Not only did the shepherd provide nourishment and direction, but David goes out of his way in the Psalm to convey the idea of the shepherd providing safety and protection. Sheep are extremely skittish and fearful, but the shepherd was equipped to protect the sheep. **The rod, which was more of a club, was use to ward off wild animals and robbers. The staff, as we have seen already was used to protect form scorpions and snakes. As a result the sheep were safe, even walking through the valley of the Shadow of Death--literally the valley of deepest darkness. (The shepherd himself is able to enjoy a banquet in the presence of his enemies too, vs.5.) Isaiah understood this about the good shepherd as well. In Is.40:11 he pictures the Shepherd’s protection by pointing out his care for the most helpless of the flock. The newborn and the nursing mothers with young are the members most vulnerable to attack. “Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.”**

In Jesus’ description of Himself in John 10 he adds to our understanding of what makes for a good shepherd. The good shepherd is sacrificial. He is willing to ignore his own needs in order to meet the needs of the sheep. Over and over in the passage he states the good shepherd gives his own life for his sheep. (vs.11, 15, 17, 18) In addition to this, though, Jesus’ audience understood the sacrificial nature of the shepherd in His discussion of the sheepfold. When sheep were penned in at night outside the city, the shepherd himself would often construct a makeshift fold. He would take brush and bushes and construct them in a “u” shape or some other formation depending on what was already at hand. He would then place thorny branches on top of the brush to both inhibit the sheep from jumping out and from wild animals and thieves jumping into the enclosure to hurt or kill the sheep. (Robbers would accomplish their goal by climbing over the enclosure, slitting the throat of the sheep and heaving the body/ bodies over the wall. This helps explain John 10:1.) The only way in and out of the fold was through a space he would leave open. The shepherd himself would actually lie across the opening, becoming the door in and out of the sheepfold. The shepherd’s own comfort and sleep were secondary to the comfort and safety of the sheep. Additionally, we know too from the story told in Luke 15 that a worthy shepherd indeed does go and search for a lost sheep. He is willing to make this effort unlike the worthless shepherds already mentioned who allow the sheep to wander and be preyed upon. Jesus finalizes the notion of the sheeps’ security by stating in John 10:28,29 that with Him they are eternally secure.

The other characteristic of the good shepherd Jesus makes crystal clear in his discussion of the topic in John 10, is that the good shepherd is personally, if not intimately involved with all his sheep. His closeness with the individual sheep is clear in vs. 3 when it says he calls them by name. From Nathan’s story in 2 Sam.12, we know that sheep were sometimes given the status of pet. In fact, so close were

the shepherd with their flock that one shepherd is reported to be able to tell which lamb went with which nursing mother in the dark by merely feeling it's head!²The shepherd is also involved enough with his flock that they know his voice. In this day multiple flocks would sometimes be brought into the sheepfold for the night. The next day each shepherd in turn would stand in the middle of the fold and call his own out. It was not a matter of the exact call or words used, but the sheep responded primarily to the distinct tone of the shepherd's voice.

In summary, the good shepherd showed great concern for his sheep. He provided for them in terms of nourishment and rest. He guided them, leading the way. He was intimately involved with the flock and concerned for the safety of each individual. He was willing to sacrifice his own comfort, even his own life, for the sake of his sheep.

This is the kind of love and care with which God wanted His rulers to lead Israel in the Old Testament, and the writers of the New Testament have much of this in mind when it comes to leadership in the church. It was in this context that Jesus challenged Peter to prove his love after his betrayal. After each admission of love on Peter's part Jesus said, "*Tend My lambs*" John 21:15, "*Shepherd my sheep*" vs.16, and "*Tend my sheep*" vs.17. Peter charges the elders at the churches in present day Asia Minor to "*shepherd the flock of God among you, not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.*" (1Peter 5:2-3)

Understanding the level of love, commitment and sacrifice expended by the shepherd on behalf of the sheep raises the bar for those who seek to lead in the church.

As mentioned earlier, the record of this kind of leadership in the Old Testament was abysmal, with the exception of David and a few others. Israel's leaders failed to be shepherds of this description. As a result prophets in the Old Testament looked forward to a time when a truly good shepherd would come. In the next section we will explore who that person would be and when He would come.

The Identity of the Shepherd in Old Testament Prophecy and When He Would Come

There are numbers of passages in the OT that make reference to a shepherd who is to come and who is to play a significant role in the history of Israel. In the case of Is. 44:28 the shepherd is actually named -Cyrus. In the remaining passages, the identity of the shepherd is unknown. In this section of the paper we will explore the major passages in the scripture that deal with the shepherd where his identity is unknown. Most passages that refer to the coming shepherd are clear as to this person being the Messiah. What is not as clear is when He will come and what He will do at that time. Where appropriate, we will investigate what meaning these passages had for their original audience and what they might mean for us today. We will also look at Ezek. 34: 23, where there is some controversy concerning the shepherd's identity. Here we will argue that the person of the shepherd is the Messiah.

Most passages referring to the coming shepherd are connected with the ultimate restoration of Israel which will take place at Christ's Second Coming. One of the most striking of these predictions is Is. 40:11. In the midst of the warning about the coming hardship of captivity, Isaiah lifts the eyes of his countrymen to a time when God will fully restore all things. The global scope of the language, "*Let every valley be lifted up...that the glory of the Lord will be revealed*" argues for a time frame of the Second Coming. According to vs.10, at this time He is coming in judgment and might; "*Behold, the Lord God will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold His reward is with Him, And His recompense before Him.*" However, Isaiah goes out of his way in the next verse to picture God in the

most tender and nurturing terms. *“Like a shepherd he will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs, And carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.”* Provision and care are inherent in this image of the ruling shepherd who is to come. This would not be missed by Isaiah’s audience. In chapter 49:8-10 Isaiah expands on this same theme, although not actually using the term shepherd. *“Thus says the Lord, ‘In a favorable time I have answered You, And in a day of salvation I have helped You; And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; Saying to those who are bound, Go Forth, To those who are in darkness, Show Yourselves, Along the roads they will feed, And their pasture will be on all bare heights. They will not hunger or thirst, Neither will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them, And will guide them to springs of water.”* Isaiah’s sees a time when the Lord of Hosts will appear as judge, which is a time to be feared especially for the enemies of His people. Yet because the nurturing care of His flock, a time to be anticipated with excitement as well. No doubt these words were words of comfort to Isaiah’s audience as they headed into a dark time. These words should be a comfort for us as well as we too wait for the Judge and Shepherd to return.

In Jer. 31:10-17 we find an emphasis not on a future Messiah coming as shepherd, but on God’s omniscience over the events in Israel’s history. Jeremiah declares, *“Hear the word of the Lord, O nations. And declare in the coastlands afar off, And say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him, And keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.”* vs.10 God oversaw and allowed the scattering of His people for their disobedience, and in His omniscience He will bring them back. Again, scripture connects the scattering of God’s flock as a hurtful and damaging thing. His promise to bring them back together, restoring them to the land, which He did in part in after the Babylonian captivity, conveyed great comfort to His people then in exile. They did not get where they were by accident, and the same God who scattered His people would see that they came back together. This truth, that God oversees and directs history (in a broad sense) should be a comfort to us as well. This is a passage that is typical of many prophecies in the Old Testament. It was fulfilled in part with the return of Judah to the land after the Babylonian captivity. It was further fulfilled when modern day Israel was restored to the land in 1948, and it will be completely fulfilled (to the top of the cup) when Christ comes back to establish His kingdom once and for all.

In Micah 5:2-5a we find another reference to the future shepherd of Israel. Here we see elements of the prophesy fulfilled at the first coming of Christ, but other aspects that will be completed at His second coming. Bethlehem is mentioned as the place where a ruler of Israel will go forth. Matthew 2:5-6 saw this fulfilled in Christ’s first coming. In vs.4 it states *“And He will arise and shepherd His flock, In the strength of the Lord, In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will remain, Because at that time He will be great.”* The language here suggests the global knowledge of Christ which will take place at His Second Coming. (Micah goes on to speak of the global peace Israel will experience at that time as well.) Again, these words were words of comfort to Micah’s audience, especially in view of the failure of the nation’s leaders of that day to properly care for their flock. The triumphal language that follows (vs.5-9) provided great comfort for Micah’s hearers as well. The church today, though not in the same situation can look forward to living in a state where our shepherd will at last “be great to the ends of the earth” and that “He will be our peace.”

When it comes to Zechariah’s mention of the shepherd to come, the line between fulfillment at Christ’s first and Second Coming becomes even more blurred. Zechariah’s prophecies are largely concerned with events at the end of history and the Second Coming of Christ. His imagery is often apocalyptic in nature and difficult to interpret. However, the gospel writers saw some of the events foreshadowed there as having to do with Christ’s first coming. For example, in the very complicated passage of Zech. 11:11-12, the speaker (the true shepherd?) asks for his wages. He receives 30 pieces of silver, which God then tells him to throw to the potter (a gesture of disdain and disregard.) Some see this prophecy

fulfilled in Matt. 26:14-16, when Judas betrayed Christ. Matthew carefully points out the exact price of his betrayal. Likewise in Zech. 13:7-9 there is mention of the sheep being scattered when the shepherd is struck down. Matthew 26:31 saw the fulfillment of this in the disciples' forsaking Christ the night He was arrested. Out of context this interpretation may seem a very clear fit. However in context it is not so clear. Just prior to the scattering of the sheep, it refers to the awakening of a "*sword against God's Shepherd, and against the man, My Associate*". (!!)(Some believe this last person referenced to be the Anti-Christ!) The verse ends with a remnant declaring, "*The Lord is my God*". Is this the remnant gathered together at Christ's Second Coming? These passages seem particularly unclear in terms of the time of the Shepherd's coming or what He will do, and yet the gospel writers view them as at least fulfilled in part in Jesus's lifetime.

Perhaps the most interesting of the OT prophecies concerning the shepherd of the future is in Ezek. 34. After Ezekiel extensively rebukes the shepherds of Israel for their abysmal failure to lead the people as God would have them, (vs.1-10), God interjects an unmistakable ray of hope. He says, (vs.11) "*I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out.*" He then goes on in beautiful imagery to paint the picture of the Good Shepherd searching for and restoring the lost and scattered sheep. He will return them to the land and feed them on the mountains of Israel. (vs.13-14) He will bind up the broken and strengthen the sick, but at the same time will come with judgment. (vs.16) In vs.17-19 we see He will execute judgment not only on the leaders, but also on individual members of the flock, some of whom have demonstrated the same self interest as the leaders. (vs.12) There is total restoration of the nation of Israel and they enter in to a time of abundance and blessing. (vs. 25-31) This would appear, quite clearly, to be a prediction of the Second Coming of Christ and the final restoration of the true Israel. However, in vs. 23 and 24 we read '*Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I, the Lord, have spoken.*' The mention here of David, for some is particularly controversial. Rather than the shepherd being Christ, they see David as God's shepherd, servant and prince. "However, nothing in Ezekiel 34:23 demands that Ezekiel was not referring to the literal King David who will be resurrected to serve as Israel's righteous prince."⁸ They argue that later in Ezek. 37:34-35 there is mention again of David. Here he is king and prince forever. David appears in the future predictions of Jer. 30:9 and Hos.3:5. In Ezek. 45:22, and 45:4 there is mention of sin offerings taking place in the millennium. These scholars (Walvoord) argue that it would be inappropriate for Jesus to offer such sacrifices, but appropriate for David the prince. From these lines of reason the conclusion is drawn that the shepherd mentioned here is not Christ but a literal resurrected David.

Aside from the obvious problem of dealing with Jesus Himself claiming to be the Good Shepherd, (and the writers of the NT agreeing with Him as in 1 Peter 2:25, Heb. 13:20 etc.) this conclusion ignores the marvelously deliberate and intricate way the scripture identifies Jesus with David. The promise to David from earliest times was that His descendent would be on the throne of Israel forever, not David himself. There is an eternal aspect to the kingship of David's line that he humanly could never fulfill. However, it was understood by all, including David himself that God would establish one of his descendants to sit on the throne eternally. Jesus was that descendent. Matthew's gospel from chapter 1 onward strives to make that point. Over and over again he refers to Jesus as the Son of David. The Jews knew the Messiah had to be a son of David. This causes them to ask in Mt. 12:23 "*This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?*" The answer to that question, though they didn't believe it was "YES". Jesus was the great and final descendant of David. Paul in trying to persuade the Jews that Christ was the Messiah makes this argument in Acts 13:23 and again in 13:34-36. Peter too points out that Jesus was in fact the son of David promised in the scripture. Acts 2:21-36 Jesus boldly asserts that not only is He the offspring of David, the very one that David anticipated, but He was God at the same time. Matt. 22:43, Mk. 12:35, Lk. 20:42 all record Jesus forcing the Jews to think through His identity by considering what David says in Ps.110. How like God to so fantastically tie Jesus in with the line of

David to fulfill that promise to sit on the throne forever. How like God it is that He Himself, not a resurrected David, is the Good Shepherd and as the Good Shepherd the final king for His people. This was always His desire. He allowed for a human king as a concession to his rebellious children, (1 Sam. 8:7) but it was His desire to rule and care for His children from the beginning.

Walvoord also argues that David, not Christ will preside over sacrifice in the Millennial Kingdom. The problem with this argument has more to do with the nature of the Kingdom to come than who is officiating as priest. The true question concerns the idea of sacrifice for sin in the Millennial Kingdom. Why would God bring back a system that he declared insufficient and obsolete over and over in the book of Hebrews? Why would it be reinstated after hundreds of years? It seems to make no sense. All other authors of the scripture speak metaphorically when referring to the kingdom to come. It is very hard to understand why Ezekiel alone would describe it in literal terms. It is not hard to understand, though, that the exiled priests who made up part of Ezekiel's audience would view the return of the sacrificial system as part of that which God would ultimately restore. This was no doubt something they longed for in their years of captivity. Ezekiel, again in speaking words of comfort to the people of his day could have included notions of the sacrificial system in his depiction of the kingdom to come.

In conclusion, it would seem that this passage in Ezekiel, like the others, looks forward to the coming of the Messiah, not David as the Good Shepherd of his people. As was the case with the other references to His coming to regather and care for his sheep, God intended to give hope and encouragement to the people of Ezekiel's day. Knowing that a day would come when God would "*feed His flock and lead them to rest*" (Ez. 34:15) was meant to bring them comfort in a day when they were cut off from their land, and seemingly cut off from their God. In the midst of the darkness God wanted them not to despair, but to know He had great plans for them. (Jer. 29:11)

The final prophecy of the shepherd to be considered is Mt. 25:32-34. "*And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and he will separate from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; And He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left.*" In this passage the shepherd goes on to direct the sheep (the righteous-vs.37, 46) to the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world, and the goats, to eternal punishment. The metaphor here relates to the fact that often a shepherd tended a mixed flock of both sheep and goats. (In a similar way we say judgment between individual sheep, as well as between sheep and goats in Ezekiel 34.) There were times when the two groups needed to be separated. This was a common part of the shepherding job, clearly understood by Jesus' audience. These passages teach that the Good Shepherd will come to judge between individuals at the end of the age. For those who are His, these were meant to be words of comfort. For those who were not, words of great sobriety.

In conclusion, the OT scripture does look forward to the coming of the Good Shepherd. As God's Messiah, Jesus fulfilled this prophetic role in some measure in His first coming. He will complete it in His second coming, however, when He will come in judgment to separate the righteous from those who did not know Him, and to finally care for and lead those that are His own.

2020 Adult Education FUMC Tulsa
The Heart of a King
Studies in Psalm 23 and 51

Week three - Psalm 23:3-4

It may seem odd that the goal of this lesson is to cover just two verses Psalm 23:3-4 . This is very rich material and each statement in this Psalm is overflowing with spiritual insights. Verses 1-2 which you studied last week stayed solidly within the shepherd image using the shepherd imagery that is so central to Jewish culture and to scripture at large to demonstrate the deep love and caring of God for his people or “his flock” to sustain the imagery.

In verses 3-4 David seems to be speaking more directly of the spiritual benefit that is to be expected from a relationship with God. The Psalm is a developing argument so some time refreshing your lesson on the first two verses is in order.

Psalm 23:3 He restoreth my soul:

Those 4 words may be the most elegant statement of oneness with god in all of scripture. Coming directly after the peace that is overflowing as the Holy Spirit provides as we are led to lay down beside still or quiet waters, David once again returns to this spiritual concept of the soul and the refreshing God brings to the soul.

Discuss the definition of the soul. This is a great discussion question as the exercise of trying to define the soul takes us in to David’s mind as he wrote this part of the psalm. Is there a difference between the spirit and the soul? One definition may be that it is that place where we connect to things bigger than us. Perhaps it is the spirit.

Note that everything discussed in the Psalm to date, leads up to the restoration of the soul. Discuss the concept or perhaps the feeling of having our souls restored. When does that happen? How do we know when we need that? There is no implication here that this restoration is a one-time deal. My take on this is “he restoreth my soul OFTEN.” Here are a few related scriptures where the soul is featured to help gain depth of understanding of what the soul is in light of David’s poetry.

Psalm 42:11 - Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

Psalm 103:1-5 Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

² Praise the LORD, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.

Psalm 62:1-2 Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him.

² Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

Matthew 16:26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

3 John 1:2 Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well.

Proverbs: 16:24 Gracious words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Many sources I read connected restoration of the soul with refreshing. I think that is too weak a translation. We refresh ourselves in God daily and certainly here in fellowship at church. No this is a more dramatic, more life changing, deeper and more moving restoration. Restoration of the soul implies that the soul was ill or damaged or far from God and it is God himself that engineers that restoration. Note that David does not say that he restores his soul in God. It is God who is the author and finisher of this inner healing.

It is also the perfect statement of what salvation is. But we need our souls restored every day, not just the first time we meet him. The literal translation is “he causes my life to return or he quickens me.” David speaks of the conversion of the soul again in **Psalm 19:7** – “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.”

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Scripture often utilizes theological words or themes that we take for granted what we think they mean. Righteousness is one of those ideas. In a Bible study setting it is a good idea to define righteousness. What is righteousness? It is surprising when this question is posed to even a group of long time Christians the diversity of answers you will get.

Is it one who does right behavior? This is not great definition because people who do not know God can have that kind of righteousness. Can anyone good and moral person go down the path of righteousness simply by “being a good person”? No clearly this righteousness comes from a relationship with God **Isaiah 64:6** tells us that any righteousness that we can muster from our own morality is “like filthy rags” to God. The paths of righteousness are paths that only God can lead us to. We can never find them on our own.

Note that the psalm is specific that the shepherd does not lead us to righteousness, he leads us to the PATH of righteousness. It is the believer who walks that path. We have some responsibility in this relationship. It is a path that leads to himself. They are paths by which we become righteous.

How does this work in terms of our own walk? We desire to be righteous. And yet if we define what that is, right away we are going to get that wrong. So what is our game plan? Sometimes suffering and struggle leads to righteousness.

What is meant by “for his namesake”? Going down the path or righteousness is not even for our sake but for his. It is so that He may be honored. The name or namesake of God is an entire lesson in itself and perhaps more than we can take with so much great theology in this Psalm. However here are a few support scriptures on this theme should the Holy Spirit take you there as you teach.

Isaiah 43:25, *“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, **for my own sake**, and remembers your sins no more.*

Jeremiah 14:7 Although *our sins testify against us, do something, LORD, **for the sake of your name.*** For we have often rebelled; we have sinned against you.

Psalm 25:8-11 *good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.*

⁹ *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.* ¹¹ **For the sake of your name, LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.**

Psalm 23:4 - Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:

This is the very next statement, so the logic is that the path of righteousness leads through the valley of the shadow of death. We do not like the idea of walking this valley. But clearly this is part of the faith walk. Certainly the path to the cross to death and resurrection taken by our Lord was that valley. In many ways just living life as mortal beings on this earth is always in the shadow of death. It looms over us at all times. We need the comfort and strength of God to get us through this valley. The good news is He has that strength for us in infinite abundance.

Is the valley of the shadow of death a valley where there seems to be no hope? I think it is a valley where it is hard to feel or hear God. Keller says that when sheep are following the shepherd, they often cannot see him. In the dark or fog where they are frightened, they often can only see his feet and his staff.

Another rich reference to the shadow of death is in **Psalm 107:8-10**

Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfies the longing soul and fills the hungry soul with goodness. Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron;

Some have referred to this walk as the dark night of the soul. It is that time when everything seems to be heading for the cliff and all is dark and frightening. There is much to be learned about faith when we walk these paths but there is no question, we all will walk them. May this Psalm prepare us for that path so that we can emerge victorious.

In stark contrast that phrase fear no evil doesn't mean evil is not there. We just do not fear it. Because we are brave? No because of verse 1, the Lord is my shepherd.

A Key phrase of this passage is “walk though”. The valley of the shadow of death is temporary, we will come out the other end.

An Important take away is that even in those times when we feel beset upon at all sides, in despair, fear, guilt and separated from God, we are not separated from God. We CAN have peace. All we need are the Rod and the Staff, that reminder of who the shepherd is and will be to us.

for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

The shepherd image was a common image of a ruler even beyond the Jewish culture. From ancient antiquity rulers were described as demonstrating their legitimacy to rule by their ability to ‘pasture’ their people.” This makes sense then of verses like those found in Jerimiah 49:19 and 50:44, where God asks, “*who is the shepherd who can stand against me?*” In this connection, the royal staff, or scepter, a common accessory for kings in the Ancient Near East, was itself a form of shepherd’s rod. Shepherds commonly used long poles such as these to poke around crevices in caves to scare out scorpions and snakes. It came to be a symbol of protection, power and authority. Even in Egypt, a divine symbol of kingship was the shepherd’s crook

The illustration of how the sheep see at the feet level of the shepherd. They see the base of that staff and they know the shepherd above them knows what is ahead and is there to protect them and guide them to that place where they lie down in green pastures.

“They comfort me” These three words are full of joy and peace. This is comfort that is given to ease our fears and to bring us peace and assurance. In comfort is peace. In peace is strength because in peace is faith. And faith is the currency of our relationship with God and what releases him to provide and protect us.

How do we follow God when it seems he is nowhere and when the darkness of fear, despair, worry etc. begin to close in? It is a dismal image but in no other time do we need our faith more.

So this is another piece in the great faith puzzle. What is his staff? It is a thing that reminds us that He is there and that He is trustworthy? What would that be for us?

2020 Adult Education FUMC Tulsa
The Heart of a King
Studies in Psalm 23 and 51

Week Four - Psalm 23:5-6

This Sunday you reach the halfway point in this study and conclude your time in Psalm 23. In light of the richness of these six verses, you may be wishing we had given the entire series over to Psalm 23. It would be a worthwhile 8 weeks indeed if we did that, but we have Psalm 51 laying ahead that is just as inspirational and moving. So we pick up with verse 5 this week.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:

David conveys the idea of abundant provision in yet another way. He speaks of a table being set, his cup overflowing, and his head being anointed with oil. Bedouin hospitality often called for just such a lavish response to a guest, and the anointing with oil was a symbol of lavish generosity and goodness on behalf of a hostess for their guest. (Ecc. 9:8)

From Keller we learn that the large vistas in the high country in Israel are often called “tables.” The shepherd works hard to make sure the sheep can graze safely even going so far as to clear the table area of plants that are deadly to sheep. When the sheep dine, their enemies are all about, but they cannot approach because of the shepherd. The shepherd would lead his sheep to this high country when he needed richer provision for his sheep perhaps when the fields of the lowlands become over grazed. In fact When the Prophet came to anoint a king, David was not available, and scholarship tells us he may have been taking his sheep to the high country.

This may also be a reference to a practice of David’s time where in a victorious prince would hold a huge banquet after victory in battle and force his prisoners to watch the victorious army feast at a massive table in celebration of their defeat. That interpretation is more than a little vindictive. But that is the psalms.

Thou anointest my head with oil;

Anointing is a familiar biblical idea that we really do not use much in modern vernacular. Anointing is thought of a way of cleansing. Look at **Mark 14:3-9** when Jesus was anointed with perfume.

In a more modern application British royalty are often anointed to rule as a way of conferring God’s blessing on their reign. But probably the anointing we as evangelical Christians are familiar with is the anointing of the Holy Spirit or the way we pray for anointing for a minister or missionary. That is clearly discussed in the New Testament in **1 John 2:20-27**.

The Anointing of the Oil is a strong Old Testament religious rite. **Exodus 29:7** “You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him.” This is describing the anointing of Aaron since he was the chief priest at the time of the Exodus. The oil is representative of the Spirit of God but also of the official designation to an office by God’s decree. Kings were frequently anointed in times past as an indication that they were sanctioned or ordained by God. In fact, Aaron and his sons were “anointed in them and ordained in them” indicating that the office and the official position of the

priesthood are ordained by God Himself who chooses who will be His priests. This is never a decision by men but always by God.

Another great reference to anointing is **Luke 4: 16-19** :

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Isaiah 61:1,2.

My cup runneth over.

The cup clearly is a symbol of God's provision for us. David expresses that because of the infinite provision of God's love, that abundance more than we need or can contain. Few of us have experienced such abundance in terms of physical blessings.

This also speaks of spiritual blessings. For one thing, salvation with the benefit of eternal life and then heaven are more than we ever could have asked for. The ability of God to flood our spiritual lives with blessings of anointing, joy and peace are infinite. This is hard for us to grasp or envision but only to know that if God has free right to be our savior, that is what our spiritual cup will look like.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:

This is a reward, not a command of behavior. In other words it is not a command to conduct our lives with goodness and mercy although in that we grow into the likeness of Christ, that will happen. No David is saying the goodness and mercy of God will never stop. What a wonderful statement of faith.

Notice the key word, follow me. So far it has been about him God leading us through the valley of the shadow of death. Here goodness and mercy follow me because where the Holy Spirit dwells, the goodness of God naturally follow. The goodness of God can be seen as His infinite abundance and desire to share it with us, his children. His mercy refers to his infinite patience and forgiveness disciples such as we who falter, sin, fall back but never stop seeking His face.

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Forever is a big word but refers to the actuality that with our relationship comes the promise of Heaven. Spend some time in **John 14:1-6** because just knowing that Jesus is there, on the other side as we say, preparing a place for our eternal home is a continuous comfort to God's people.

The psalm has been about this dangerous world and the role of the shepherd in providing safe passage. But the word of God does not leave us with hope alone. We also have the promise revealed in **Revelation 21:1-7**. Dwelling in this passage is like taking a moment to look from afar and see heaven itself. It is a stunning view and it is our future home.

1. thou anointest my head with oil;

a. Anointing to cleanse – as in when Jesus was anointed with perfume. **Matthew 26:6-13**

⁶ While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.⁸ When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. ⁹ “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”¹⁰ Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ The poor you will always have with you,^[a] but you will not always have me. ¹² When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

b. Anointing for royalty – ref the Victoria was anointed queen from The Crown

c. The Anointing of the Oil. **Exodus 29:7** “You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him.”

This is describing the anointing of Aaron since he was the chief priest at the time of the Exodus. The oil is representative of the Spirit of God but also of the official designation to an office by God’s decree. Kings were frequently anointed in times past as an indication that they were sanctioned or ordained by God. In fact, Aaron and his sons were “anointed in them and ordained in them” indicating that the office and the official position of the priesthood are ordained by God Himself who chooses who will be His priests. This is never a decision by men but always by God.

d. Luke 4: 16-19

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¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”^[b] (Isaiah 61:1,2 (see Septuagint); Isaiah 58:6

e. Seem also to be a clear reference to the anointing of the Holy Spirit as we use the term when a minister is anointed.

f. 1 John 2:20-27

²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.^[a] ²¹ I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. ²² Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.²⁴ As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is what he promised us—eternal life.²⁶ I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. ²⁷ As for

you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

g. Discussion Question - So what is being passed to us when he anoints our head with oil?

My cup runneth over.

The imagery here is of abundance more than we need or can contain. Few of us have experienced such abundance in terms of physical blessings. This speaks of spiritual blessings. For one thing, salvation with the benefit of eternal life and then heaven are more than we ever could have asked for. The ability of God to flood our spiritual lives with blessings of anointing, joy, peace, etc., are infinitude. This is hard for us to grasp or envision but only to know that if God has free right to be our savior, that is what our spatial cup will look like.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

This is a reward, not a command of behavior. Remember the Psalm is an evolving argument so this statement is the outcome of all of the previous poetry.

The word “surely means, I am certain. How do we interpret goodness and mercy? Is it morality and charity? I think a better take is that it is blessings and forgiveness. It is to follow us to we can pass it along to others. Notice the key word, follow me. So far it has been about him leading, Goodness and mercy follow.

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

What a wonderful way to end the Psalm with the promise of Heaven. Jesus spoke of it in **John 14:1-6**

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God^[a]; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

The psalm has been about this dangerous world and the role of the shepherd in providing safe passage. The promise revealed come from the magnificent words of **Revelation 21:1-7**

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death^l or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”⁶ He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

Scriptures about Anointing

Matthew 26:6-13

⁶ While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, ⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.⁸ When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. “Why this waste?” they asked. ⁹ “This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.”¹⁰ Aware of this, Jesus said to them, “Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. ¹¹ The poor you will always have with you,^[a] but you will not always have me. ¹² When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. ¹³ Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Exodus 29:7

“You shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him.”

Luke 4: 16-19

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1 John 2:20-27

²⁰ But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.^[a] ²¹ I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. ²² Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. ²³ No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. ²⁴ As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is what he promised us—eternal life. ²⁶ I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. ²⁷ As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.

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The Heart of a King
Studies in Psalm 23 and 51

Week Five
Psalms of Repentance
Background to Psalm 51
II Samuel 11

This week we look at repentance in light of our study of King David's tragic downfall in the Bathsheba incident as described in **II Samuel 11-12**. To get the ball rolling, work on an exercise where we "dissect" the word repentance. In this exercise we do not seek to define the word as much as lay out what component parts must be present for a repentance to happen. Make a list from the discussion of the components of repentance that might include humility, confession, revelation, sin, God, renewal etc.

After that exercise, go back and review the events of **II Samuel 11-12** and read God's harsh condemnation of David in **II Samuel 12:7-15**. It is a hard read. David's confession in verse 13 seems short but we know as David lay at the foot of his dying son's bed begging God not to take his child's life, this may be when this amazing Psalm is written. The theologian C.S. Spurgeon observed that God truly redeemed this horrible story of downfall by giving us one of the true treasures of both Judaism and Christianity in **Psalm 51**.

Begin with the background of David's fall in the Bathsheba incident.

Start out looking at the dedication of Psalm 51 which will take us into our study. "For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba."

Here is might be helpful to put the context of this incident in the overall arch of David's career.

Our Text: **2 Samuel 11:2-5, 14-15, 26-12:17**

This was beyond just spontaneous sin – there was scheming here, planning and abuse of power. The lust for Bathsheba may have been just that, lust. One sin took David to the next, the virtual murder of her husband. There is very little good take away from this sad incident.

David is cursed by Nathan in **2 Samuel 12:1-16** – Nathan begins with a parable. Notice the integrity of David was outraged and he never made the connection that this was him the parable was about. In **2 Samuel 12:-7-10** God confronts David. What was David's sin? Adultery for sure. But just as serious was the conspiracy to have Uriah killed to have his wife. This reeks of the worst kind of evil. God spoke through the prophet that it was a direct affront to him after God gave him everything, yet he took what was not his.

Samuel 12:11-16 – the punishment and David’s grief. While in verse 13 God stated he “put away” the sin, it is clear David would have to live with the results of sin. So too for us. There is no sin that we cannot find forgiveness, but we may have to live with the effect of the sin.

Take away – David fell but he did not lose his position with God. Like many great figures in scripture including St. Paul and Peter, their frailty and almost unforgiveable mistakes only made them greater. In David’s case we ask why he didn’t fall like Saul and other leaders of time. The key I think is in psalm 51 – remorse, repentance, forgiveness, restoration.

The reason Psalm 51 is so relatable is that we all have fallen from grace. We also all struggle with guilt and remorse over sin both present and past. That lingering remorse is something I wish to focus on with even greater intensity in this study. Just as the Lord’s Prayer is a template for how to pray to our heavenly father, **Psalm 51** is a template for restoring our relationship with him when we fall. It is a template we all may need to use far more often than we wish.

Psalm 51 reflects the remorse of sin and is a poetic and beautiful prayer of repentance. This is not an essay or a prepared presentation of David. David wrote this in a time of tremendous emotional upheaval, grief and distress, it is still an amazingly beautiful and uplifting psalm. Even in the depths of sin and repentance, the Holy Spirit turns David’s yearning for restoration into divine text and used him to pen the Word of God.

The theme of repentance reverberates throughout psalms which corresponding themes of restoration, salvation, intervention by the almighty and renewal. This is a huge theme in all of the psalms of David. These are referred to as the Penitential Psalms - The center theme is repentance. Some examples. There are seven psalms identified as penitential – 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143 –

Psalm 32:1-2, 5

Happy are they whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is put away! Happy are they to whom God imputes no guilt, and in whose spirit, there is no guile! Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal my guilt. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to God.” Then you forgave me the guilt of my sin.

Psalm 38:3, 6

There is no soundness in my flesh because of your anger nor any health in my bones because of my sin.... I am troubled. I am bowed down greatly, I go mourning all the day long.

Psalm 130:1-5

*Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD; Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.
If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand?
But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.
I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope.*

Psalm 143:2,4, 7-8

2. Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you.

4 So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed.

7 Answer me quickly, LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit.

⁸ Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you.

Indeed the theme of wandering, judgement, repentance and restoration is the pattern of the Old Testament. Throughout those books, Israel is constantly going through a pattern of falling away from God, falling into bondage, being called back to only serve the true God, restoration and then repeat. The primary draw into sin is idolatry or the desire to be like other nations and to serve other gods. The difference in that aspect of repentance and how we are approaching it and see it laid out in Psalm 51 is that Old Testament repentance is corporate while David speaks as one lost soul seeking restoration with God.

What this aspect of the psalms points us to is a very personal side of our relationship with God. The Psalms if anything are like a roadmap for our own private relationship with God. This is a relationship between weak, fallen, easy distracted, self-centered humans and an almighty God so immense and beyond us that we have reduce Him to the simplest terms so we can grasp who we are talking to. We let it go at love, answered prayer, a praise verse or two and a tithe. He will not be reduced. He calls us to embrace all of what he is even if we cannot possibly grasp it. The angsts of the Psalms speak to the undiluted sense of inadequate when we are faced with unhidden divinity. This is heady stuff for a Sunday morning, but this is where the Psalms take us.

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The Heart of a King
Studies in Psalm 23 and 51

Week Six - Psalm 51:1-9

We are about to take a close look at the Psalm that came out of David's downfall to disgrace as he faced tremendous loss for his sins. Last week we got a good context for this part of our study as we looked at the actual events of David's fall from grace. Now we move into the Psalm itself with a careful examination of the themes of each verse.

Now let's turn to a close study of **Psalm 51**.

]

Verses 1-2 – The plea for forgiveness. – notice the word – Mercy

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

David is calling on God for his unfailing love and compassion - as though to remind Him of that. "According" means he is not asking because of David's personal worthiness but based on God's nature. In other words the currency of forgiveness is not any justification for the sin or even a heartfelt plea for forgiveness.

It is a call upon the "bank" of God's mercy. The restoration is not based on David, it is grounded entirely in God. This is very much how we approach God in Christ. We do not seek forgiveness on our own merit or even a deeply expressed cry for it. We base it on Christ, his sacrifice on the cross and the power it holds to save us from sin. This is a key teaching theme in this lesson because the grounds we call out for forgiveness to God is a deep inner anxiety for all believers. This point deserves extra time to let the Holy Spirit do some inner healing for everyone in the class.

A fascinating aspect of David's words it that it seems he is going further than just asking for restoration of the way things were before his sin. He is asking for God to make it as though the sin disappeared and give him wisdom in his hidden part and a new heart that is an entirely new thing. David wanted to be a "new creature" that would be empowered with that "steadfast spirit" to never fall like this again. He is asking for God to not make him ok but better than he was before. How very New Testament. That is what God does in our own salvation. He doesn't just clean us up enough to not stink of sin. He makes us something amazing and far better than we could ever have imagined ourselves to be. Now that is a quiet theme of Psalm 51 that is worthy of our meditation this week.

"Blot out my transgressions." **Colossian 2:14** is the final fulfillment of this prayer. Only in Christ are our transgressions wiped away as though they never existed.

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you^l alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross."

Psalm 103:12

“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Blot out means to erase, make them not exist. That old turn on the word justification – Jesus makes us just as if we had never sinned. A just as important step in this purging of transgression is that both God and the sinner see the sin and the remembrance of it disappear. Yes David wanted the transgression to be wiped away from his slate with God. But more than that he is pleading the remorse of the sin of blotted out if his soul where it is tormenting him hideously.

Verses 3-6 – confession

Confession is not telling God anything he does not know. It is telling Him, as David says in verse 3, that we know it too and that it is in a transgression. The path to healing and genuinely ridding oneself of sin starts with knowing our transgressions. I submit that often not knowing our flaws come from a form of denial that they are there driven by ego or fear of what we will have to go through to change. Too often, as in David’s case, that means God has to let us hit “rock bottom” before we cry out as David did here. But it doesn’t have to be that way.

Psalm 32:5

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.” And you forgave the guilt of my sin.”

“My sin is always before me”. This is nothing more than guilt. Is guilt bad or good? That is an outstanding discussion question at this point in the study.

Verse 4 – **“Against you, you only have I sinned.”** Discuss this because what David did hurt others even destroyed a man’s life. But this is not the core of his prayer. Why? I think it is because the definition of sin is violating the relationship with God. When David let down his ethics, was he betraying the calling on his life?

This is a HUGE point to keep in mind. This Psalm and the Psalms are totally about our relationship with God. The definition of sin is a break in the relationship with God. We study this with only that in mind. Repentance is only to God; the outcome is to others. That is a big take away from this Psalm.

Verse 6 – truth in the inward parts – This clearly refers to the soul or spirit we talked about in Psalm 23. God doesn’t evaluate the truth that we present to others because that is always a presentation. Truth at the soul level is complete honesty because it is pointless to hide things from God. Wisdom is the fruit of repentance. This is not just knowledge wisdom but soul wisdom that is a changed way of living.

Verse 7-8 - This is a plea for forgiveness but more than that, it is a restoration of relationship. David clearly is throwing himself as the feet of His God with the acknowledgement that only God can cleanse him, but that cleansing can be complete. David’s spirit can sense what it would be like to be pure and clean before God again and his prayer is for nothing short of that.

Hyssop was used as part of ceremonial cleansing

Definition of hyssop. 1 : a plant used in purificatory sprinkling rites by the ancient Hebrews. 2 : a European mint (*Hyssopus officinalis*) that has highly aromatic and pungent leaves and is sometimes used as a potherb.

Hebrews 9:19

19 When Moses had proclaimed every command of the law to all the people, he took the blood of calves, together with water, scarlet wool and branches of hyssop, and sprinkled the scroll and all the people.

Hyssop is also used symbolically in the Bible. When the Israelites marked their doorposts with lamb's blood in order for the angel of death to pass over them, God instructed them to use a bunch of hyssop as a "paintbrush" (Exodus 12:22). This was probably because hyssop was sturdy and could withstand the brushing, but it also likely signified that God was marking His people as "pure" and not targets of the judgment God was about to deal out to the Egyptians.

Exodus 12:22

22 Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning.

Verse 8 starts out "Let me hear joy and gladness." David seeks the joy that is mentioned in **Psalm 32:1-2.**

Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

David was not broken but his grief must have weighed on him so heavily that he felt as if they were impossible to bear. I compare it to times when you are so weary that it seems your bones ache. Verse 14 points to David's awareness that his guilt resulted in bloodshed not only of the innocent Uriah but the death of the child that came from the sin he committed with Uriah's wife.

This was a heavy burden for David to endure and nobody could endure it for or with him. Only he knew an intimacy and sense of specialness with God that was uncommon at that time. He knew what it was like to have the presence of the Holy Spirit with him all the time. This is something we all know or can know at any time. But at that time it was unusual but when that sense of favor or "being ok" with God left David, it all but destroyed him. Remember he had felt God's presence since he was a child. Small wonder he cried out with such angst for it to be restored.

David shows here that the worst penalty of sin is the broken relationship with God. The restoration of that is the only thing he seeks. Note he is not calling for the penalties that came about in 2 Samuel 12 to be undone or to complain that they were not justified. I speculate that what David was feeling was that anytime he was in the presence of God, he could not interact with his heavenly father the way he did before because the devastating nature of his sin got in the way. He misses more than anything that feeling of being "ok" in the presence of God.

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The Heart of a King
Studies in Psalm 23 and 51
Week Seven - Psalm 51:10-12

In my view the centerpiece of psalm 51 is **Psalm 51:10-12**. These are verses that are essential texts of the faith as much as the Lord's Prayer, Psalm 23 or the Sermon on the Mount. Often these verses have become part of church liturgy and used in solemn ceremonies. These were the verses that drew me to the psalm and to feeling the need for this study.

Verse 10 – Create in me a pure heart oh God.

That first word "Create" in verse 10 here is the same word used in **Genesis 1:1** "in the beginning God created the heavens the earth". It means what we think – to make something come to be that did not exist before. God created the world "ex nihilo" or from nothing. He breathed it into existence. In this way though David is seeking more than restoration of a clean heart. His prayer implies he feels that he never had one and wants God to create that heart from nothing and make his heart perfect. As such he is seeking something completely new. Only the Holy Spirit could have revealed to him "in his hidden place" that this kind of creative change of the heart was even possible.

The verse reminds me the new creature concept of becoming a new creation in Christ – **2 Corinthians 5:17**. - *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here*

David is seeking here to come out of this horrible fall not just as good as he was but a whole new thing. The sin snuck up on him as sin does. David wants something BETTER than he was before. He wants a purity of heart like he never before experienced. This is a yearning to be pure as he was before the sin. Even more than God to forget his sin, David wanted to be able to forget it.

Some discussion questions for this passage might focus on what a pure heart really means. Can the human heart truly be pure in light of our sin nature?

And renew a Steadfast spirit within me.

This is a rich passage that opens the door to discover what the steadfast spirit is. It is that inner will and drive to be faithful to what God called him to be. In sinning David caved into his lesser self. We all have a lesser self. That steadfast spirit refuses to cave. It has a strength that is beyond human strength. It is the strength of the Holy Spirit. It is that inner will, Holy Spirit empowered ability to always "do the right thing".

Verse 11 – "Do not cast me away from your presence. And do not take your Holy Spirit from me."

Here we find another direct reference to the Holy Spirit. This is long before Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit to be our teacher in **John 14:15-17**.

¹⁵ "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be^o in you.

This is the core of David's plea to God in light of the condemnation he feels from his sin. The power of God's words through Nathan leave little doubt that God could unleash a fury of punishment that might result in David's loss of his throne including his power and position in life. In this plea, David does not ask for a pardon from any of that. He only asks for friendship with God. He asks for that simple thing that gave him joy since childhood. He wants once again to know the presence of the Holy Spirit. This harsh and stern scolding from God brought David back to who he really is and that is all he wants restored.

This looks forward to a similar conversation between David's son Solomon and God. In **Kings 3:5-14**. Solomon learned well how to walk with God. Children learn that from their parents. This is food for thought for us as parents as well.

One thing that jumped out doing this document is that phrase "cast away". David does not implore God to GIVE him his Holy Spirit. He knows it is with him as it has been since earliest youth. Instead he prays that it does not depart him because of his sin.

This is good to think on particularly in a theme that is common in our modern worship to beg God to send his Holy Spirit. This supposes that the Holy Spirit is not with us and that we have to perform certain actions, songs and lighting to make him show up. In truth, Jesus promises in John that the Holy Spirit would be with us and indeed He is. Instead of begging for him to come when he is already here, I pray we learn to sense him, how to talk to him and how to listen, learn from and obey what he tells us.

David had a virtually New Testament relationship with the Holy Spirit. One wonders if that relationship was available to any follower of the one true God at that time. Putting our study in context, the dynamic inner life we know and love with God through the Holy Spirit was not broadly known before the cross. However Psalm 51 and the entire Psalms library was the worship book of the Jewish faith. That means that this psalm was sung and used in devotions at that time just as we are doing today. One wonders if during David's time a group of devout people like ourselves gathered and wondered about those words "take not your Holy Spirit from me." Food for meditation.

It is interesting in all of David's angst, he still remembers and seeks after the joy in God's presence. Here are a few additional scriptures to about the Joy of the Lord for meditation....

Psalm 16:11 - *You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*

A time of celebrating in God's presence is described as the joy of the Lord - **Nehemiah 8:10**
¹⁰ *Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."*

I Peter 8-9 - *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Romans 15:13 - *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

Romans 14:17 - *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*

John 16:22 – *So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.*

In our next study we will look at **Psalm 51:14-19**. One concept David references in verse 17 are the **broken spirit** which is a desirable outcome of repentance in context. In context as well is that the broken spirit seems to give meaning to the sacrifices mentioned earlier in the passage. In other words, David is not saying God does not want sacrifices at all but that he only does so when it comes with a broken spirit, a spirit that has been opened up to knowledge of God and comes to worship with a full spirit.

The burnt offering and sacrifices in verse 17 represent religious ritual. We too have religious ritual although we avoid that term. Each week we enjoy in this church many phenomenal worship services. God honors that “ritual” of his people gathering in organized religious programs. The difference pointed out in our Psalm is that if the people come and perform such rituals as empty gestures as through to placate God with the movement of worship, that has no value at all.

The topic of the value of guilt is in the background of this Psalm. In a way guilt does serve a purpose to drive us to God. However guilt can be very dangerous as well particularly if we cling to it. Guilt condemns but the conviction of the Holy Spirit liberates us from sin and allows to live in our forgiveness. When we put our sins on the alter and the blood of the cross washes them away, they are gone forever. Scripture says they are cast into the depths of the ocean and as far as the east is from the west.

We all have sins that we may have trouble letting go of. We may have something in our past that we can say that yes God has forgiven us, but we cannot forgive ourselves. But forgive and let go we must. To cling to a sin as though the cross did not wipe it away denies the power of the cross in our lives and denies God his place. In effect that sin can push God aside and be used by the enemy to hamper our walk and keep us from doing what God wants us to do in this life. This is an area of healing where the Holy Spirit alone has the power to remove that sin from our hearts so it can no longer enslave us. I pray for that liberation for myself and for all of my brothers and sisters in this fine Sunday school community.

The doctrine of repentance is strong on both the Old and the New Testament. Below are some additional references on the topic in the New Testament that may enhance your preparations.

The Doctrine of Repentance in the New Testament

1. Repentance is essential to salvation –

1. Discuss your own salvation experience and the absence of remorse or regret. Was there repentance? Yes because I saw the error of my ways and turned from cults to the one true God.

Acts 3:19 - 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

2. There is sometimes sorrow in repentance

I Corinthians 7:9 - yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us

3. It is at the core of the gospel

Luke 24:46-48 - He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

4. Jesus described it as a form of healing

Luke 5:31-33 - Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Romans 2:4 - Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

5. It is linked to baptism

1. Discuss what baptism represents, death and resurrection. The washing away of the old which is the purpose of repentance.

Matthew 3:11 As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

6. The parable of the lost son

1. Emphasis on coming to our senses. The lost son saw the world in a certain way that was more or less a “live for today, for excitement, for thrills. Take whatever you can while you can.” His downfall brought him to his senses.
2. How do we come to our senses when God brings us there?
3. Notable that only God can do this.

Luke 5:17-20 - **When he came to his senses**, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am

no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

7. It is linked to fruit

1. **Matthew 3:8** - Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

2. **Matthew 7:17-19**

Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire

3. **Galatians 5:22**

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness and self-control.

2020 Adult Education FUMC Tulsa

The Heart of a King

Studies in Psalm 23 and 51

Week Eight - Background for Psalm 51:13-19

Review verses 10-12 as the heart of Psalm 51 versus 13-19 could be seen as the outcome of the fulfillment of David's prayer in those verses.

Psalm 51:13 – *Then I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn back to you.*

The natural outcome of the renewed knowledge of God's presence, the joy of salvation and the return of the Holy Spirit is evangelism. When one is delivered from soul crushing guilt, condemnation and separation from God the joy of forgiveness and renewed joy of the Lord, one cannot help but speak of it. Even if the delivered doesn't speak words, it glows from their inner being and that alone is a testimony.

This is the Old testament version of the great commission. But in the gospel, it is a command, here it is a renewed zeal to share God's life with others. This is precisely the sole command our Lord gave to just before ascended into heaven.

Matthew 28:16-20

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

It would seem the take away is that the broken spirit and the guilt and remorse resulted in David's zeal to spread knowledge of God. That would lead us to think in our own setting that it is repentance and somber reflection on our failings that is the driving force for evangelism. But that would be a mistake. The "then" of verse 13 comes from the resurgence of joy, of God's presence and the Holy Spirit as the engine of spiritual power for evangelism.

It is notable what David is going to teach sinners. While this is a psalm of repentance, he does not say here "then I will teach sinners how awful they are and put huge amount of guilt on them so they can enjoy this thing called repentance." He says teach them the ways of God and THEN they will be converted. Evangelism is never about the sinner's sin. It always points people to God.

Psalm 51:14 – *Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.*

We have discussed guilt before in this series. The oppressive nature of guilt can be crippling. There is no value in camping out in it. The Bible truth tells us that when sin is put at the foot of the cross, that is the end of it

Note that David is begging God for deliverance from guilt. So the broken spirit that is spoken of in verse 17 is not a spirit burdened down with guilt. The fact that the broken spirit is what God desires more than sacrifice indicates that it is a holy thing and a state of being that is to be stayed in. Guilt is an agony David wants out of and to stay out of it.

Verses 15-17 - *Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.*

This is an odd observation in that sacrifices were in essence the heart of the Jewish approach to salvation at that time. God commanded the system of sacrifices and it was held in strict reverence as THE way one reconciles with God. In our own setting we might see this as a shot at whether the corporate or ceremonial approach to worship is what God really wants and how we would cope with it if it was not. Some serious wisdom is needed here.

There is no question the corporate “ritual” of worship has value. As the praise of God goes up from the community of faith, the encounter with the Holy Spirit intensifies and becomes tremendously effective. What is being said here is that a meaningful ritual has value versus a meaningless ritualistic exercise that is done to simply placate the almighty.

Note that in verse 19 David references when God will be pleased with sacrifices after this internal spiritual battle has been won. So it is good to come into religious ritual when the heart is prepared to give meaning to what is being done. If that is not done, the ritual is a waste of time and does not please God. Scripture encourages introspection when we come to worship.

I Corinthians 11:28

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

Matthew 5:22-24

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister^l will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, “thou fool” is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Does this mean if we are unsure of our spiritual place, we should not participate in worship? I think not. If ever there is place where God can fix what is broken inside us, it is in worship.

Verse 17 - The broken and contrite heart –

In verse 15, the first use of the word "contrite" (in the phrase "*a contrite and humble spirit*") is translated from a Hebrew word whose root is 'daka,' but the word here is specifically 'dakka.' 'Dakka,' the word used here in verse 15, basically means crushed (literally into powder) ? in a word: PULVERIZED! This could very easily read, "*I (God) dwell in the spirit realm with those whose pride has been pulverized and as a result are humbled through and through.*" In scripture, the Greek word 'daka' is translated into the English words or phrases: beat to pieces, break in pieces, broken, bruise, contrite, crush, destroy, humble, oppress, and smite—to name a few.

I want to dwell on this thought from Psalm 51 because of the implication of how important this trait in the people of God (e.g. us) is. As with anytime we get a heads up about what God wants, even if it is perplexing, it is worthwhile to stop and think about it. This thing called the broken or contrite spirit is a characteristic of a follower of God in both Old and New Testaments.

Isaiah 57:15

For this is what the high and exalted One says. He who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Matthew 5:3

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 18:10-14

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' ¹³ "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' ¹⁴ "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Verses 18-19 are a celebration of the healing God has brought because of this prayer. Because God's good pleasure with his servant and his people is healthy, the people prosper because his benevolence is not restrained. The ritual of worship here spoken of as 'righteous' sacrifices have meaning and serve their purpose of restoring relationship between God and his people. The agony of this repentance spoken of so eloquently in Psalm 51 results in the restoration of the soul David speaks. And that makes it all worthwhile.