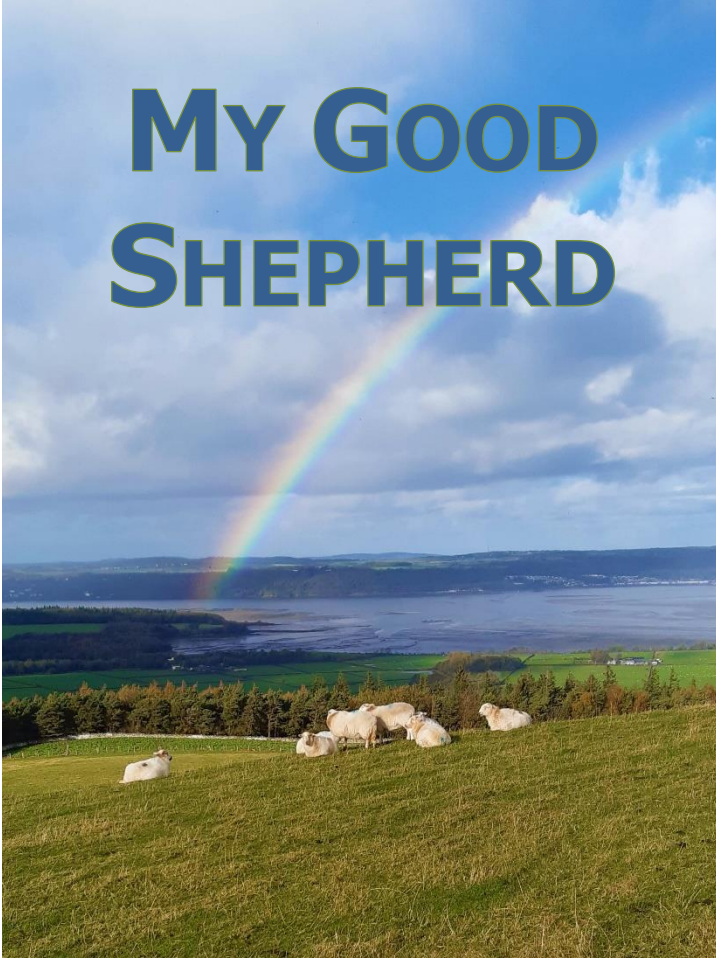


MY GOOD SHEPHERD



Katherine Hilditch

LifeinJesus.net

‘My Good Shepherd’
by
Katherine Hilditch

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Cover photo by MR

MY GOOD SHEPHERD

Psalms is a book in the Bible made up of 150 songs written long before Jesus was born. Psalm 23 begins with the words, '*The Lord is my shepherd.*' It is rare to find a shepherd in the UK now – looking after the sheep is usually part of the farmer's overall job, but they still exist around the world and were common in Bible times.

Sheep

I feel sheep get a bad press. People often think they are stupid, as they always follow each other around and don't seem to think for themselves. But the opposite is true – they keep together so they are safer if an animal tries to attack them. They are protecting themselves. But sticking together can lead sheep into trouble. If one heads into a dangerous situation, the others are likely to follow too. In Isaiah 53:6 the Bible says that – '*All we like sheep have gone astray.*' And it's true. Everyone has wandered away from the perfect life God has for them – no-one can get it right all the time. People need a shepherd too.

The Shepherd

In Bible times, the shepherd lived with his sheep. He led them around looking for good grass and water for them and he kept them safe and healthy. The sheep were very important to the shepherd and a good shepherd would risk his own life for his sheep. If a wild animal tried to attack them, he would try to kill the animal in order to save his sheep. The shepherd in Bible times always led his sheep from the front and they followed behind him, not like today when farmers herd their sheep.

David's Psalm

Psalm 23 was written hundreds of years before Jesus was born, but God showed the writer David, who had been a shepherd, something of what Jesus would be. Years later, Jesus said in John 10:14-15 – *“I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and I’m known by my own; ¹⁵... I lay down my life for the sheep.”*

Jesus – My Shepherd

Christians who have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Saviour are like sheep belonging to and following their shepherd, Jesus. He told a story in Luke 15:4-6 – *“Which of you men, if you had one hundred sheep, and lost one of them, wouldn’t leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one that was lost, until he found it? ⁵When he has found it, he carries it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶When he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’”* Every sheep was so important to the shepherd – if one was lost, he would look for it and rejoice when He found it. And that’s how special you are to Jesus. He loves you personally and unconditionally.

Are You a Sheep in Jesus's Flock?

Jesus did lay down His life – He took the punishment for every sin when He died, so you can be forgiven and know Him as your Lord and Saviour – what the Bible calls being born-again. It is only then that you become part of Jesus’s flock. When you don’t know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour, you are lost like a sheep without a shepherd. But Jesus longs for you to come to Him and let Him care for you and help and guide you. He’s looking for you just like the shepherd in the story, and drawing you to Himself

with love, but He'll never force you to join His flock – He'll always give you the choice. That's love too. God loves you totally and unconditionally, but it's only as you're born-again that He becomes your Father and Jesus becomes your Shepherd and you are able to experience that personal love relationship with Him.

Romans 10:9 says - *'if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'* Tell God you are sorry for the wrong things you do, say and think. Believe that Jesus is Lord, that He died for you and that He is now alive. Accept Him as your Lord and Saviour. Say it with your voice and believe it in your heart.

If you've done that sincerely, you are now born-again. Jesus has come to live in you and your spirit has been made brand-new – believe it and thank Him. Everything you've ever done wrong or ever will do wrong is forgiven, and you'll be with God for eternity. As a child of God you have lots of brothers and sisters – a whole new family. Tell a trusted Christian you are now born-again so they can help you in your new life in Jesus.

And you have the Bible, God's Word to you, which will help you to understand more about Jesus and all He has done and won for you and to experience more of God's unconditional love.

Psalm 23

Let's look at Psalm 23 in detail now and see how it tells of Jesus's love for you. If you are born-again, everything it says is true for you. If you aren't, then it is all waiting for you – all you have to do is respond to God's call of love and you will be like the lost sheep which Jesus found. He won't tell you off for the way you've lived your life – no, He will rejoice over you and shower you with love.

The actual words of the psalm are printed in bold italics.

The Lord is my shepherd:

Jesus is the good Shepherd. But those who follow Him can call Him my Shepherd. His love for you is personal and unconditional. He said in John 14:6 – *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.”* Jesus is the only way to God, not one of many. If you are born-again, you can say with David, “The Lord is my Shepherd”.

I shall lack nothing.

The sheep do not worry about whether they are going to have enough to eat and drink – they just follow their shepherd, instinctively trusting him for all they need. And when you follow Jesus, you can trust Him to provide all you need too. Philippians 4:19 says – *‘My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.’*

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

Green pasture or grass provides food for the sheep and Jesus wants you to have good food, not only physically, but spiritually too. The psalm says that the shepherd makes the sheep lie down in the grass. If you trust Jesus totally for everything you need, you don’t have to rush round panicking about what to eat or drink or wear. You can be at peace, knowing that He will provide all you need and lead you to it. Jesus has the best and wants to give you the best, but you have to believe Him and follow Him to find it. He says in Matthew 6:31&33 – *“Don’t be anxious, saying, ‘What will we eat?’, ‘What will we drink?’ or, ‘With what will we be clothed?’ ... ³³But seek first God’s Kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things will be given to you as well.”* Follow Him and He will look after the day to day things you need. Lie down in the green pastures and rest in Him.

He leads me beside still waters.

Sheep need water that is still because their nostrils are very near their mouths. If the water is disturbed for any reason, they are in danger of breathing it in. God doesn't want you to live your life in turmoil. He wants you to live in peace. Jesus said in John 4:14 – “*whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again.*” He was saying that if you follow Him you will be completely satisfied spiritually – follow Him and find true peace.

He restores my soul.

Your soul is where you think, make decisions and feel emotions. Sometimes life can batter you or confuse you. Jesus can restore you if you will let Him, so you can cope and be more able to think positive thoughts, make good decisions and refuse negative emotions. It won't happen overnight and you need to cooperate with Jesus, but He so wants to restore your soul – believe it and work with Him. He wants you to think the best, because He knows it is the way to a happy fulfilled life for you.

He guides me in the paths of righteousness ...

A simple definition of righteousness is being right with God. No-one can be righteous by their own effort, but you can be righteous by being born-again. Jesus took the punishment for all your sins so you are forgiven and are made righteous in your new spirit. In your spirit you are just like Jesus and can walk along the paths of righteousness with Him. Just as the shepherd chooses the right paths to lead his flock, so Jesus will lead you along the right paths too, if you will follow Him.

... for his name's sake.

The name Jesus means Saviour and this is exactly what Jesus is – the Saviour of all who will follow Him. When He died on the Cross and took your sins so you could be righteous, He was

fulfilling His name of Saviour – He was saving you. So your righteousness depends on Jesus being true to His name. It was to fulfil His name that He made it possible for you to follow Him in paths of righteousness. It's for His name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

There is a valley in Israel called the valley of the shadow of death. It feels scary and sheep, sensing this, won't follow their shepherd into it. So he has to go to the back of his flock and encourage them to go head of him through the valley. There will be trouble in this life, but with Jesus there is always a way through and out the other side. You may manage to get through on your own, but with Jesus as your Shepherd you will be able to have peace and joy even in the middle of the difficulties. Only with Him can you be certain you'll come through intact.

I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

Not being afraid is a decision. If you wait for your emotions to move away from fear they probably won't until the danger is past. But if you refuse to think fearful thoughts, with Jesus's help you'll be able to find that peace. Jesus often told His followers not to be afraid and He also told them in Matthew 28:20 – *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Choose to refuse fearful thoughts and focus instead on Jesus and His promises.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

The way the shepherd encouraged his sheep to go through the valley was to keep tapping them on their backs with his rod and his staff. This isn't anything to do with punishment – He was reassuring them that he was still there even though they couldn't see Him. Jesus will always be with you in the hard times and He will keep reassuring you that He's still there, taking you through the difficulties and out the other end.

You prepare a table before me ...

Most celebrations involve a meal, and Jesus is preparing the most wonderful celebration feast for His followers in heaven. Meals make people feel special and Jesus wants you to know how special you are and how He wants you there with Him at His feast.

... in the presence of my enemies.

When Jesus suffered and died on the Cross He defeated sin, death, sickness and poverty – everything that the devil would try to throw at you to harm you or hinder you. He triumphed over the devil and all his schemes. One day, if you are born-again, the devil will see you seated with Jesus at the celebration feast, and he will know that you are safe forever with Jesus and He is finally beaten. But you don't have to wait till then – you can triumph over him in this life too, because of Jesus's victory.

You anoint my head with oil.

In Bible times, the shepherd used to put oil on the horns of his sheep so that if they started to fight, their horns would slide off each other and do less damage. Jesus covers His followers with the 'oil' of His presence – His Holy Spirit living inside each believer, to protect them so they are less likely to be hurt as they follow Him.

My cup runs over.

God is a wonderfully generous God. He doesn't just want to give you enough – He wants to bless you with so much in every way that it runs over and you can bless others too. When God is filling your cup, He doesn't want you to say 'when' – He wants to keep blessing you. The blessings are already yours because of Jesus's death, but you have to take them. Open yourself to them and start to enjoy a running-over blessed life.

Surely goodness and loving kindness shall follow me all the days of my life,

A good shepherd is good to his sheep and treats them with loving kindness. If you're following Jesus, whatever your life is like, goodness and loving kindness are with you. When times are difficult, visualise them behind you helping you, reassuring you and giving you hope and purpose in your life.

... and I will dwell in the Lord's house forever."

Before Jesus died, He told His followers that He was going to prepare a special home for them. If you are born-again, Jesus has prepared somewhere for you to live with Him for ever. It is the most wonderful place – beyond anything you can imagine and it will be just perfect for you. You'll never need to be concerned about it in any way – it is yours for eternity.

Your Shepherd

Next time you read this psalm, don't do it with a vague awareness of God's care. Read it with the full knowledge of Jesus's love just for you. Allow Him to care for you and guide you in your life – He'll take you to places where all your needs are met and you can find true peace and rest. He will restore every part of your life if you let Him. You can trust Him to lead you in good paths. Because He laid down His life for you, you can be righteous and enjoy God. Even in the difficult times you can be sure that He is with you and know that He will bring you through. With Jesus you have the victory. You can know that God has blessed you to overflowing and is surrounding you with goodness and loving kindness. And you can be absolutely certain that you will be with Jesus, your Shepherd, forever and ever. You can say with David today – "The Lord is my shepherd."

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The 23rd psalm is very well-known,
but have you ever really thought about it
or do you just read it with a comforting
but rather vague awareness
of God's love and care for you?
Find out that it is all about Jesus,
and see how He wants to be your Shepherd,
caring for you and guiding you
through your whole life.



Katherine Hilditch has been teaching in local churches for many years. In 2013 she wrote her first booklet and since then has written many more. She created her website to make all the booklets freely available to everyone. They can be read online or printed out. Katherine's threefold purpose is to help people understand more about Jesus and all He has done and won for them, to encourage them to go deeper in their relationship with God and to provide material to help them share their faith with others. To read her story and find all the booklets go to –

Website: LifeinJesus.net

Email: contact@lifeinjesus.net