

## Week Three- Psalm 23: Praying our Trust

### 1: CONTEXT

**A quick look back:** Spend a few minutes reviewing the big picture of Psalms from Week One. What kind of literature is the book of Psalms? Who is one of the primary authors? What is the book's main purpose? Where are we in the large story of Scripture? What have been some of the main themes or learnings from the past weeks?

**Today's Passage:** Psalm 23 (which is ascribed to David) may be the most well-known psalm of all time. It has been used in films and television shows, especially when depicting a funeral. Whether the story involves Jews, Catholics, Protestants, or people of no religious persuasion, Psalm 23 can be read as a psalm of comfort in a time of loss without offending anyone. It is one of the more publicly known parts of scripture.

Psalm 23 has inspired art, poems, articles and many, many books. If you were to go into any Christian bookstore, you will be assured that there will be art in some form (poster, mug, painting, etc.) that gets its inspiration from this psalm.

### 2: CONTENT

**Read Psalm 23 out loud and then pick ONE of the following ways (Option A, B, C, or D) to help your group engage with this passage.**

**Option A. Notice/Wonder:** Ask everyone to read the passage again quietly on their own. As they read, ask them to make a list like the one below. Remember that what people notice or wonder can just be small, simple things.

What do I NOTICE about this text?

What do I WONDER about?

Once everyone has had the chance to make their list, come together as a group and share your observations, writing them on a board or a place where everyone can see the list as it develops.

**Option B. Creative Engagement:** Give everyone paper and drawing supplies. Have everyone read the passage again on their own, then invite them to spend some time illustrating the passage (or a part of the passage) in whatever way they want- concrete, abstract, colors, images, words. When everyone has completed their art, come together and spend time sharing with each other what you drew and why.

**Option C. Lectio Divina:** Scripture is read four times, pausing after each reading:

1: HEAR the passage.

2: MEDITATE on the passage in the silence that follows.

3: IDENTIFY a word or phrase that stands out to you from the reading (leader may ask group to speak this out loud after the 3rd reading, or to share it as a group after the 4th reading)

4: REST in the presence of God.

Take time to share your reflections with each other as a group.

**Option D. Guided Bible Study Questions:**

1. There are two large metaphors in this Psalm: the shepherd and the dinner host. What do you learn about the actions and heart of the shepherd? What do you learn about the actions and heart of the host?
2. If God is Shepherd and Host in this Psalm, then we are sheep and dinner guests. What do we learn about ourselves in this psalm?
3. Psalm 23 isn't just green pastures and still waters. What are some of the hard realities that David names in this psalm? Why do you think these are part of this prayer?

4. Note or make a list of all of the verbs in this Psalm that describe the work of the shepherd and host. What do these words teach you about God?
5. Jesus says in John 10, “I Am the Good Shepherd.” How do we see echoes of Psalm 23 in the life of Jesus?

### **3: APPLICATION**

*No matter what method you used for content, spend some time talking about what this passage might mean to us now. Here are some questions to help guide this discussion. Feel free to use several or to just focus on one or two.*

- This week is called “praying our trust.” How often does your prayer life involve words of trust? When do you find it easiest to trust in God? When do you find it hardest? What are other places that you put your trust?
- Most Christians throughout time and around the world have not grown up around sheep or shepherds. We may have never even seen a shepherd. Despite this, people love this psalm.
  - Why do you think this psalm has resonated with people over thousands of years?
  - What parts of the psalm are you drawn to?
- David was a shepherd who knew what sheep needed: food, drink, rest, guidance. Sheep need someone to take care of them. They need someone to guide them to green shoots to eat, and calm water to drink, and a place to lie down and chew their cud. What do humans need, especially when we move to a new place (like college!)? We need food, drink, rest, guidance. We need places to lie down and mull over life. We need rest and renewal. Just like sheep.
  - What does it mean to you to have a God who cares about the basic needs of your life? Have you ever experienced God meeting you in these very regular places? What does trust in God look like when it doesn’t feel like He is in the midst of our needs?
- The very center of this Psalm comes in verse 4, with the phrase: “For you are with me.” Everything else in the Psalm hinges on this reality. What are the places in your life where you need to speak or hear or claim this truth?
- We know that much of our life does not feel like green pastures, quiet waters, lavish feasts. And yet, this Psalm reminds us that we have a God who calls us to rest, leads, restores, guides, prepares goodness for us. In what ways do you see this being demonstrated in your life? In what ways are you yearning for this to be evidenced in your life?

### **4: PRAYER**

*Close your time together in prayer using one of the ideas below*

- Use words/images/themes from the passage to guide your prayer.
- Raise up your “wonderings” from the notice/wonder section to God in prayer
- Practice praying your own trust. Name the ways God has been trustworthy in your life, and the places where you need help to trust in Him
- Take prayer requests and pray over each other as a group or in small groups
- Use this written prayer:

*Good Shepherd, you provide what we need—food, drink, rest, guidance. Forgive us when we run after these things, not trusting that you will provide. Remind us of your providing, protecting love that goes with us even into our darkest valleys. Today we pray especially for your care in these ways....*

*We thank you that goodness and love will follow us all the days of our lives, and we long for the day when we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.*