

TEXT: Psalm 23

THEME: THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD

1. He Cares for Us Daily
2. He Leads Us to Eternal Life

Dear Family and Friends of Our Dear Departed Brother, Tony,

The 23rd Psalm is one of the most beloved passages in all of Scripture, especially by those with a few miles on the odometer of life. I know that was true of Tony. He asked me to share it with him when he was in the hospital a few years ago. I suspect that the older a person gets the more he falls in love with the 23rd Psalm. I think I know why! There are some things in life that are only fully appreciated with a few years under your belt. Though one's eyes may dim with the years, some things become clearer. That's part of the reason Scripture can say that **"gray hair is a crown of splendor"** (Prov. 16:31). Or why the Lord would tell Abraham that he would live to a **"good old age"** (Gen 15:15).

At age 88, Tony lived to a good old age. He served his country in the Army during WWII. He worked hard his whole life—too hard to have any real hobbies like hunting, fishing, or golf. He may have considered his farm his hobby after he retired from Midland Contracting, but I grew up on a farm, and if a farm is a hobby, it's a hobby that takes a whole lot of work! He worked hard to provide for his family—his wife and children. He was a great dad who provided well for his family. He worked hard to have something to give back to the Lord for all his blessings. Tony made sure his thank-offering got to church each month, even after his hurting back kept him from sitting through a worship service any more.

Yes, Tony was a hard worker, but I don't think that's why he loved the 23rd Psalm so much. Tony understood that no matter how hard he worked, no matter how well he provided for his family, no matter how much he gave to his church, God still didn't owe him anything. Tony knew that, as a sinner, the only thing he deserved was hell. But Tony also knew the 23rd Psalm. He knew and believed: **"The Lord is my shepherd."** That's why he loved the 23rd Psalm. Tony knew that even though spiritually he was nothing but a dumb, stinking sheep, the Lord loved him and would take care of him, not only in this life but for all eternity.

Look at the first two verses of this psalm: **"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul."** Tony and all of us who believe in Jesus as our Savior know that we are part of the flock that our Lord personally guides and nourishes. He gives us nourishment and refreshment in his Word. Through that Word, those **"quiet waters,"** God gives us rest from the guilt and power of sin. Tony got that especially through the pile of *Meditation* booklets from church that you found in his home.

Verse three states: **"He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."** Paths of righteousness are the paths that lead us on the way of enjoying the blessings of God's covenant promises. Think of the well-known passage in Romans, **"In all things God works for the good of those who love him"** (8:28). God does all this for us not because of our own goodness but for the sake of his name, which means love and blessing through

Jesus. Tony didn't look to himself for righteousness, but to his Savior and Shepherd, Jesus.

Verse four is of great comfort to Christians and to the survivors of Christians who have died in the Lord, like Tony. **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”** Tony was not afraid to walk through **“the valley of the shadow of death”** because he knew his Good Shepherd Jesus had been there before him, would lead him through it, and welcome him into heaven on the other side. So, he didn't fear any evil in this life, because he knew a glorious new life was waiting for him, where he would be reunited with his beloved Rosalie and live with his Good Shepherd Jesus forever. And throughout this life, he had the protection of the Good Shepherd's rod and staff. Jesus protects his sheep with his shepherd's rod and staff. Our Shepherd protects us from the wicked people of this world, especially from false teachers and from all the attacks of Satan. This protection forces what seems bad in our lives to serve for our good.

Verse five speaks of Tony's new life now in heaven. **“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”** Our Lord spreads out rich banquet tables, at which we are anointed with oil as a symbol of honor and joy in being in the royal court. He sets these banquets in the sight of our enemies, who see clearly that we have put our trust in the right person. In this position, we can be sure we are safe from all our enemies.

And finally, verse six gives us the greatest comfort and confidence of all. **“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”** Throughout his life, Tony knew the goodness and love of his Good Shepherd. Now he dwells **“in the house of the Lord forever.”** That same blessed eternity is promised to all who trust in Jesus as their one and only Savior from sin.

Tony loved the 23rd Psalm because it assured him of God's love and his salvation. I love the 23rd Psalm. I hope each of you loves the 23rd Psalm too, for all the right reasons. Amen.