

## 10. Jesus Went Before His Sheep

In John 10, we read about some of the ministries of Christ as the Good Shepherd. John 10:4 says, “And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” In this verse, we see that one of the ministries of Christ is to go before His sheep. That will be the focus of our topic today.

One of the things we see, about the ministry of Christ, is that He always leads His sheep. He never drives them. One of the most important things, for a developing Christian leader, to learn is to learn to lead others, instead of driving them. In the world, we have many worldly leaders who try to drive others, instead of leading them. Today, an increasing number of Christian leaders are following the pattern of the world, instead of following the example of Christ. We see that Christ gives us an example of how to lead and serve His sheep. An effective leader will always remember that:

- ◆ if we drive people, we will only drive them until they can get out of the way
- ◆ if we lead people, we will be able to lead them as far as we have gone
- ◆ if we lead and serve people, we will help them develop the full potential Christ has given them and they may be able to go far beyond what we are able to do

Psalm 23 gives us a wonderful picture of some of the things Christ did as He went before His sheep (the disciples). Psalm 23:1 says, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” The word that is translated “want” means *to lack or have a need*. In Luke 22:35, Christ said to the disciples, “When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and sandals, did you lack anything?” So they said, “Nothing.” Here, we see that Christ provided what the disciples needed when He sent them out in teams to minister. One of the things we show others, by our example, is that we have learned that the Lord will provide our needs as we follow Him. Every developing leader needs to learn to depend on the Lord to supply what is needed for the work Christ has called that person to do.

Psalm 23:2 says, “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.” The green pastures are the fields where there is a lot of food for the sheep. Christ certainly provided a lot of spiritual food for His disciples. In Matthew 5:1-2, we read, “And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying...” Although there was a large crowd, we see that the focus of Christ was to feed His disciples with spiritual food. Chapters 5-7 of Matthew show us the teaching Christ gave His disciples in just one day. Christ made sure that His disciples received a lot of spiritual food as He explained the meaning of many things they already knew from the Old Testament.

The second phrase of Psalm 23:2 says, “He leads me beside the still waters.” The waters of a fast mountain stream would be dangerous to the sheep when they went to drink. As a result, we see that an effective shepherd leads his sheep to the places where the water is like a quiet pool where they can easily drink the water. In John 4:14, Christ told a woman, who would soon become a follower of Christ, “But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting

life.” Christ wanted all of those who followed Him to know that the spiritual water He gave them was living water that produced everlasting life.

Christ also taught His disciples one other thing about living water. In John 7:37-39, we read, “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” One of the ways Christ led His disciples, after He returned to heaven, was through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:18 points out a key lesson about what happens as Christ leads us through the Holy Spirit, “But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.” As a developing leader learns to be led by the Spirit, He learns that the liberty Christ has given him makes it possible for him to serve other Christians in love, instead of fear

Psalm 23:3 says, “He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.” This gives us two more ministries of Christ to His disciples. Christ restored their souls. The soul is a person's mind, emotions, and will. Often when Christians fail, and sin, they feel like failures. Christ told Peter in advance that he would be restored after he denied Christ. Luke 22:31-32 says, “And the Lord said, ‘Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.’” Peter was told in advance that his faith would not fail and that he was to strengthen the brethren after he returned to Christ.

The second phrase of Psalm 23:3 says, “He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.” Christ led the disciples in the paths of righteousness. He wants all developing leaders to know how to lead people in the paths of righteousness. One of the ways Christ led the disciples was by explaining to them how to respond to those who were against them. Luke 6:27-28 says, “‘But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.’” However, Christ did not just teach the disciples to love their enemies. Christ showed them, by His example, how to love their enemies. This is illustrated so well in Luke 23:34a, when Christ said, “‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’”

Psalm 23:4 tells us another way that Christ went before His disciples. That verse says, “Yea, 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.” Christ took away the fear of death for His disciples and replaced that fear with victory. 1 Corinthians 15:55-58 says, “‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” The disciples were shown how to face death from the example of Christ. We want to help developing leaders learn to be able to talk with Christians who are facing death and remind them of the victory they have because of Christ.

Psalm 23:5 says, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.” Here, we see that Christ provides what is needed, even in times of opposition. The disciples were filled with fear after the crucifixion of Christ. They had no idea what the future held for them. John 20:19-20 shows how Christ assured the disciples of His presence with them and gave them the assurance that they did not need to fear. Those verses say, “Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.” Christ showed the disciples that His death and resurrection meant they no longer had to fear those who treated them as enemies.

Psalm 23:6 says, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Christ took time to assure His disciples of His presence with them for the rest of their lives. In John 14:16-17, Christ told the disciples, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever--the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” Christ assured the disciples of His presence with them in the Person of the Holy Spirit. In the same way, developing leaders need to have a very clear understanding of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit for the rest of their lives.

The last phrase of Psalm 23:6 says, “...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Christ also took time to remind the disciples of their future hope of eternal fellowship with Him. The night before He was crucified, Christ told the disciples in John 14:1-3, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” Developing leaders need to be shown how to remind all Christians of the confident assurance that we have in the return of Christ to take us to be with Him for eternity.

Jesus went before His sheep. We want to help developing leaders know how to go before those they are leading and carry out each of the ministries mentioned in Psalm 23. In that way, they will help those they are leading have peace as they follow them. May the Lord richly bless you as you help developing leaders learn to follow the example of Christ and go before those they are leading.