

SERIES: LIVING THE GOOD LIFE  
PART 7: HOW JESUS RELATES TO HIS SHEEP

I welcome you home to your CVCHURCH family. If you are a guest with us today we welcome you home to our family, and we consider you family. We are a multicultural and intergenerational church. If you would like to know more about what it means to become a part of our CVCHURCH family, I want to invite you to our Life Development Seminar 101 which we call **HOW TO BECOME A PART OF OUR CVCHURCH FAMILY.**

We continue today in our study of the most famous chapter in the Bible, Psalm 23. It is one of the most compact explanations on the goodness of God. We're in a series I have entitled LIVING THE GOOD LIFE. We're in the back half of this series and this Psalm. Please read out loud with me Psalm 23:1-4, **"The Lord is my Shepherd; I have all that I need. 2 He lets me rest in green meadows; He leads me beside peaceful streams. 3 He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to His name. 4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for You are close beside me. Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me."**

David was a shepherd, and he uses a lot of different metaphors that come from a shepherd's life to communicate all of the different ways that God wants to bless your life. Today I want to focus on the meaning of verse four, which is this phrase, **"Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for You are close beside me. Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me."** What does David mean when he says, "Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me?" The rod and the staff were two ancient tools that have been used by shepherds for thousands of years. So let's look at point...

**I. What's the purpose of a shepherd's rod and staff?**

**A. A rod is a tool for guarding and protecting**

A shepherd's rod is predominantly a defensive tool that is used against predators like wolves and coyotes or anyone who's trying to attack the sheepfold. The rod is a shorter, mace-like implement that could be used as a striking weapon for raining heavy blows against an enemy or attacking beasts. One of the leading characteristics of sheep is that they are defenseless animals. Without a shepherd they are prey to any kind of predator. The shepherd's rod would bring a source of comfort to them, because they know that they would be protected if they came under an attack.

## **B. A staff is a tool for guiding and direction**

The shepherd's staff has the familiar crook at one end of it, and was used for disciplining a wandering sheep by encircling a sheep's neck or belly to rescue it from a gully and laying across the backs of sheep for the purposes of counting them—the so-called rodding of the sheep—as they entered the sheepfold. Sheep have an amazing ability to graze on extremely difficult terrain. They can stand on a hillside at almost a 50, 60 even 70 degree angle. Cows could never graze on what sheep can graze on. But they can be on mountains and they can be on cliffs, they can wander too close to the edges and they often fall off. They often get out of balance, and a skillful shepherd will use the crooked part of his or her staff and place it either around a sheep's foot or their neck to keep them safe. So the staff was used to pull sheep back so they don't get too close to the edge of a cliff, or if a sheep is straying off into a bramble bush with thorns that can hurt and cut them, the shepherd can herd them away from certain danger. The staff is a tool of recovery and a tool for protection. It's a tool to get you out of a tight jam. Universally, this is the symbol of the shepherd's staff. It helps guide and lead the sheep.

## **II. What's the meaning of these two metaphors?**

### **A. The rod represents power and authority**

The rod has to do with authority. It says if you're not supposed to be here I will make sure that you're not. The rod has the meaning of a 'tribe' or a 'scepter'.

The primary role of the king was to protect his people. The rod is symbolic of the power of God in discipline for His own and judgment for others. It is a protection from danger from within and without. Hebrews 12:5-6, 10-11 **“My child, don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline, and don’t give up when He corrects you. 6 For the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes each one He accepts as His child.... 10 For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God’s discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in His holiness. 11 No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.”** The rod is God’s authority and power in our lives to correct us and to train us so that our character takes on God’s character, which is holiness. Holiness here is expressed as vital for two relationships in life. Holiness, wholeness of mind, attitude and heart has a profound impact on our relationships with other people. In Hebrews 12 the author makes it clear that holiness is indispensable for an authentic Christian life. The person who chooses to live an unholy life can be offered no assurance of “seeing the Lord.” Hebrews 12:14 says, **“Work at living in peace with everyone, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord.”** One of the leading examples of how God uses His rod in our lives, so that we benefit from His power and His authority, is His Word, the Bible. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, **“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true (teaching) to make us realize what is wrong in our lives (for reproof). It corrects us when we are wrong (correction) and teaches us to do what is right (training in righteousness). 17 God uses it to prepare and equip His people to do every good work.”**

## **B. The staff represents care and compassion**

What does it mean for you that God’s staff represents care and compassion? What does the phrase mean, **“Your rod and Your staff protect and comfort me”**? How do I receive comfort from God’s rod and staff? Hebrews 13:20-21 says this about Jesus, **“Now may the God of peace who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an**

**eternal covenant with His blood--21 may He equip you with all you need for doing His will. May He produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to Him. All glory to Him forever and ever! Amen.”** These two verses demonstrate the most important thing Jesus as the great Shepherd of His sheep did on our behalf. Jesus’ defining role as our Great Shepherd was that He gave His life for us so that through His blood shed on the cross established through His covenant our eternal relationship with Father God. Throughout the Bible, sheep are a symbol for God’s people. The church is called “the flock of God.” Psalm 100:3 says, **“Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are His. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.”** In John chapter 10:10-11 Jesus says, **“The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. 11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices His life for the sheep.”** If you are here today and you have surrendered your life to Jesus Christ and you have committed your life to follow His purposes for your life, it is important that you know how Jesus desires to respond to you. Just as a physical shepherd used the physical tools of the rod and the staff for direction and protection, for guidance and for guarding, God wants to do those things in your life. He wants to guide you and guard, and protect you and direct you. I want to look with you for the next few minutes at the actual words of Jesus and how He wants to care for you as your Shepherd. We’re going to look at five ways Jesus wants to treat you if you’ll trust Him.

## **II. How does Jesus, our Shepherd, care for His sheep?**

### **A. If I bring Him my hurts, Jesus shows me compassion**

When I come to God and I say, “God, I’ve got a problem in my finances. I’m hurting in my emotions. I am struggling in my relationships. God, I’m really hurting here. I’m weak, I’m depressed, I’m anxious, I’m angry. I hurt because someone has been unfaithful to me.” Please hear me, dear ones. When I bring Jesus, my Shepherd, my hurts—Jesus responds. How? He doesn’t scold you; He serves you. He doesn’t put you down; He lifts you up. He doesn’t hassle

you; He heals you. Look at how Jesus responded to the people in His time who were hurting in Matthew 9:36, **“When Jesus saw the crowds, His heart was filled with compassion for them because they were hurting and didn’t know where to get help. They were like sheep without a shepherd.”** Did you know how you look at people determines a lot and tells us a lot about what’s in your heart? When you look at other people, do they irritate you? Do you think of a loss of your privacy? Do you judge how they think and act without knowing what is going on in their lives? The Bible says when Jesus looked at the crowd and at people He was moved with compassion because they were hurting, they were helpless and they were like sheep without a shepherd. This is the way God looks at your problems and your hurts. He has deep compassion for you. What does that mean that Jesus is compassionate towards you? There is a difference between sympathy, empathy and compassion. Sympathy means, “I’m sorry you’re hurt.” You might even send a sympathy card. Empathy means, “I hurt with you.” It’s more than I’m sorry for your pain, but I’m hurting with you. But compassion means, “I will do anything I can to stop your hurt.” The Bible repeatedly says that when Jesus looked at people who were in pain, He was moved with compassion. “I will do anything it takes to stop your hurt, even it means dying on the cross for you. Even if it means having nails nailed through my hands and feet.” That’s compassion, friends. “I will do whatever it takes to stop your pain.” Matthew 20:28—Jesus speaking, **“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give His life as a ransom for many.”** Jesus came to show compassion. He says, “I came to serve and to give.” This is exactly what it means to follow Jesus Christ. Giving and serving defines a Christian’s life. If you don’t give, if you don’t serve, how in the world can you follow Jesus when He says that was His purpose for coming to earth, and He has called you to follow in His footsteps. There is an interesting paradox in this verse. Jesus says He came because only He could offer His life to save us. So we could be saved. Jesus says it is all about you. But in your relationships with others, it’s not about you, but it is about Jesus and others. With Jesus, it’s all about you. He came to earth for you. He died for you. He suffered for you. He sacrificed for you. It’s all about you from God’s point of view. God is unselfish and God wants you to be like Him, He wants you to be Christ-like. Christ was not

thinking about himself; He was thinking of others, and the same thing is to be true of you. You're to focus on others. When I bring my hurts to Him, He shows compassion. He will not razz me, or tease me or put me down or scold me or intimidate me. He will show compassion because He wants to heal my hurt so I can take my focus off of me and put it on Him and others.

## **B. If I choose to follow Him, Jesus leads me in the right direction**

When you give your life to Jesus Christ He promises you, as your shepherd, that He will lead you in the right direction. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, becomes your guide through life. If you have ever gone to a city like Tokyo, or Paris, London or any other famous city you learn a whole lot more about a city if you have a guide than if you just walk through Paris on your own. You're going to miss all kinds of important things because you don't know what they are. It helps to have a guide. The same is true with your life. You need a shepherd who knows the ropes and someone who's more experienced in life than you are. Jesus says, "If you're going to choose to follow Me, I will be your guide, and I will lead you along the right paths. You have hundreds of decisions in a day and week and you need guidance." Psalm 23:3 says, "**He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to His name.**" The key here is I need to be willing to follow His plan and will for my life. Psalm 32:8-9 says, "**The Lord says, 'I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. 9 Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control.'**" In John 10:4 Jesus says, "**After He has gathered His own flock, He walks ahead of them, and they follow Him because they know His voice.**" In shepherding the shepherd always goes first. Why? He's the model. He's mentoring and leading by example. A cowboy drives cattle, but you lead sheep. Big difference. You drive cattle from the back, and you push them forward. But you lead sheep from the front. You get out front and they follow you. Here's the point, loved friends. Jesus is not going to push you through your life. He will not force you to do something you're not willing to do. But as a shepherd, He's going to lead the way. He will say, "Watch how I do it. Look where I go. Now, you do it." Jesus

will lead us with His love, not a lot of laws. He leads us with His faithfulness if we will choose to follow His lead.

### **C. If I get confused and wander off, Jesus finds me and brings me back**

We all wander off at times, don't we? If you have a child you know just how easy it is for them to get lost if you don't keep an eye on them. In Matthew 18:12 Jesus says, **"If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost?"** Yes. Why? Because every sheep matters. You matter to God, precious friend. You matter to God. He says, "If I've got 100 sheep, 99 of them are saved and one of them is lost, I'm going after the unsaved one. Loved ones, that is our heartbeat here at CVCHURCH. This is why we cannot ever stop growing. We don't grow for our benefit. We grow because people need Jesus. As long as there's one person still out there who has not heard the Good News of Jesus, we're going to leave the 99 saved sheep and go after the one. Why? Because that's what Jesus did. Let me be honest and frank with you. It takes unselfish people to grow a church to leave the 99 and go after the one; that's what Jesus did. The church that doesn't want to grow is basically saying to the world, "We don't care if you end up in hell." That hurts just to hear that, doesn't it? We're all saved, we're happy and we're going to heaven. The rest of you, too bad. It takes unselfish people to be like Jesus and say, "We're going to keep reaching out there; there's still one who needs Jesus." If there's someone out there confused and wandering, Jesus says, "I'm going after him, and we're going to bring him back. This is exactly the reason that Jesus came to earth. Luke 19:10 says, **"For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."**

Often times when we wander, Jesus will let us experience the consequences of our rebelling or resisting His will and word. The consequences are often painful. In Psalm 119:67 & 71 says, **"I used to wander off until You disciplined me; but now I closely follow Your Word.... 71 My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to Your decrees."**

Jesus never wastes our wanderings. It might hurt, but if we will surrender to His will He can and will bring us back to Himself.

#### **D. If I fail or fall, Jesus rescues and recovers me**

Jesus rescues and recovers me. Like all sheep, we not only wander, we also stumble. We also fall down many times in life. Anyone want to give a testimony to that? We've all stumbled, we've all fallen flat on our face, and we do it with great regularity. The further I get away from God, the more problems I'm going to have in my life. All sheep stumble and fall. How does Jesus react to this? Let me ask you—what do you think Jesus does when you fall? When you fail? When you flub up? When you do something really evil, wicked and mean? In Matthew 12:11-12 Jesus says this, **“If you had a sheep that fell into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you work to pull it out? Of course you would. 12 And how much more valuable is a person than a sheep!”** Jesus is committed to rescuing you when you fall. Psalm 71:20 **“You have allowed me to suffer much hardship, but You will restore me to life again and life me up from the depths of the earth.”** Jesus will allow you to suffer and to experience your own consequences for the bad choices that you make, but if you will call out to Him and ask Him to rescue and to help you recover from your hurts, habits and hang ups, He will.

I want to close by asking you a question. Who's your shepherd? Can you truly say, “The Lord is my Shepherd?” Or are you a sheep without a shepherd? You know, you're not going to last very long in this life as a solitary sheep on your own. There are just too many predators. You need a shepherd—that's Jesus, and you need a flock to be a part of. That's a church. Knowing now how Jesus treats His sheep, who's flock do you want to be in? If not Jesus, who's going to offer you something better? There is no political group or economic group, no sexual identity group, no social group, no age group—that can offer you what Jesus does. You only get it from the Creator of the universe, the Son of God, the Good Shepherd.

I want to invite you to pray this prayer with me right now. “Jesus Christ, I want You to be my Shepherd. I need You to guide me, and I need You to guard me with Your rod and staff. I want You to protect me and I want You to direct me with Your rod and staff. I thank You for Your power and authority which can protect me, and I thank You for Your care and compassion which can care for me. Jesus, I want You to be Shepherd of my life, the Lord of my life and the Master of my life. I will bring my hurts to You when I’m hurting, because I know you’ll show me compassion. I want to follow You because I know You’ll lead me in the right direction. Jesus, it is comforting to know that if I get confused and wander off, You’re going to find me, and You’re going to bring me back. Thank You that You came to earth to seek and save me because I was lost.

Jesus, I thank You for Your discipline in my life. I realize it’s not punishment. You don’t discipline me out of anger, because You correct me because You want what’s best for me, and You’re a good God. Lord, sometimes it takes affliction to teach me things. Some things I’ll only learn through difficulty.” You may say to Jesus, “Lord, I’m in a pit right now, and I need You to rescue and recover me. I’m in a pit of frustration, or I’m in a pit of discouragement, or I’m in a financial pit or a pit of depression. I’m in a pit of confusion, and I need You to rescue and recover me.

Thank You for loving me, forgiving me, accepting me correcting and disciplining me all because You love me. It is in Your name I pray.”