Brockley Homegroup Study Psalm 23

**LEADERS NOTES**

The purpose of this study is to explore the well-loved Psalm 23. We want to understand it better, see how it makes a practical difference to how we live and think. Doing this together is important. We learn from each other’s questions and answers and we learn about each other too – which helps build our sense of family and care for each other.

Start on time even if some people haven’t quite made it yet.

**Psalm 23**

The Lord *is* my shepherd;  
I shall not want.  
**2**He makes me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside the still waters.  
**3**He restores my soul;  
He leads me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name’s sake.

**4**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.

**5**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;  
You anoint my head with oil;  
My cup runs over.  
**6**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
All the days of my life;  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord  
Forever.

**Q1**  
Without looking - can anybody recite Psalm 23 from memory? (Any version is fine) If one single person can’t do it – see if you can do it as a group.

**A1**  
After the Lord’s prayer – its my guess that Psalm 23 is the best-known bit of the Bible.

**Q2**  
Here is a quiz on the Psalms. All the answers are numbers. Closest guess wins!

(i)  
How many Psalms are there?

(150)

(ii)  
How many of the Psalms were written by David?  
(73)

(iii)  
How many different authors contribute to the Psalms?

(There is no answer to this one. Asaph, the sons of Korah, Solomon, Ethan, and Heman the Ezrahite are all listed as authors, but how many were the sons of Korak? – and there are around 50 Psalms where no author is listed.)

(iv)  
Which is the longest Psalm?

(119)

(v)  
How many verses in the longest Psalm?

(176)

(vi)  
Which is the shortest Psalm?

(117)

(vii)  
How many verses in the shortest Psalm?

(2)

(viii)  
How long in years between the earliest and the latest psalms?

(The Psalms span around 1000 years from Moses (Psalm 90) to Psalm 126 which expresses the joy of the people returning to Jerusalem after the exile. Thus the Psalms, even if you don’t accept the divine origin, are the biggest collection of accumulated experience of life and wisdom anywhere in world literature.)

**Q3**  
What evidence is there that the Psalms were written so that they could be memorised?

**A3**  
(1) they are written as poetry – with its structure, rhythm and word play – poetry is easier to learn by heart than prose.

(2)  
Many of them are set to music – its easier to remember the words of a song, than words alone

(3) Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 119 are written as acrostics – this means that each verse (or section) begins with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This is a well know literary form – but it also helps with memorisation.

(4) Tucked into the early verses of the longest is this phrase, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Psalm 119:11. This serves as a challenge, a spur and motivation to anybody who is setting out to learn this longest and therefore most challenging of Psalms.

(5)  
In a world of low literacy, the Psalms aims to be a guide, a hymn book and a God-given framework on which to hang the experiences and emotions of life. There is a Psalm for all occasions. Birth, death, marriage, happiness, love, heartbreak, sadness, lament, travel, homesickness, celebration

**Q4**  
In the ancient world what was the job of the shepherd like and how does this help us understand God as our Shepherd?  
  
**A4**  
There weren’t fences and barbed wire in the ancient world. The shepherd lived with the sheep and the sheep followed the shepherd. He protected them, by leading them in safe places and gathering them up at night into a little walled enclosure and sleeping in the entrance. King David was a shepherd and he fought off lions and bear to keep the sheep safe. The shepherd also looked after the health of the sheep making sure they fed on the good stuff and rested too.

In terms of our relationship with God – God protects, guides and provides. The sheep’s role is beautifully simple – we need to recognise Jesus voice and follow – we can leave the rest to him.

**Q5**  
For you where or what are the green pastures and still waters? What restores your soul? The phrase ‘he makes me lie down’ is interesting. It suggests that the sheep is reluctant to stop and rest. Do you find it hard to stop, relax and do nothing? Did the enforced ‘rest’ of the lockdown make you feel better or worse?

**A5**  
There isn’t a right / wrong answer to this. I think we all find green pastures and still waters in different ways – but try and draw out the importance of rest. Our culture is a very busy one, it values activity and action – almost giving people no time to think about life and meaning.

Another subtle thing here is the word soul. I would argue that all sorts of things can restore our bodies, all sorts of things can lift our spirits, but only God can restore our soul.

**Q6**  
In verse 3 David says, “He leads me in the paths of righteousness”. How do you understand this? What are the paths of righteousness? Do you feel God leading you and how does he do it?

**A6**  
This is another tricky one! This might be a good chance to let the Christians in your group give testimony to the intimacy and personal relationship that they have with the Lord.

Within the context of the Psalm, I think the paths of righteousness are those that don’t lead to danger. In life, I think we usually know (from conscience, God’s Word, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit) if we are heading in a direction that is going to do us good or harm.

**Q7**  
How afraid of dying are you? In Psalm 23 how does David face death and the other troubles of life?

**A7**  
Again, this might be a moment to let the older Christians give testimony?

Me – I have sat with people who are dying quite a few times. With Christians it has often been a time of confidence and expectation. I’m not afraid of dying, but I am afraid of pain.

How does David face trouble and death?

(1)  
With realism. Our culture shies away from the whole subject and tries to pretend that it won’t happen. David is realistic about enemies, trouble and death.

(2)  
David speaks of life at two levels. At one level his enemies are all around and trying to get him. But at the same time he is conscious of God being with him and inviting him to sit down at his table. Yes – trouble is real, but the Christian always has another dimension.

(3)  
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. This is present tense and personal. Its happening. But David’s comfort is twofold – (1) it’s the shadow of death not real thing. The real death is spiritual death – and Jesus has taken that away. We only have to face deaths shadow and (2) God is with us every step of the way.

(4)  
Death is not the end. After all the days of my life is not a full stop its and AND. After death, is life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Death is the last enemy. It is an enemy – but it is a defeated enemy. And it is the last enemy you will ever meet. After that a Christian will only ever meet friends.

**Prayer**

Don’t let time for praise and prayer get squeezed out. Don’t let prayer become just a list of ill people and woes.