

**Joke:** Two guys were watching sheep in the meadow and the first one says that there are exactly 1432 sheep there. The second guy doesn't believe him and goes to the shepherd and asks him: How many sheep do you have? The shepherd responds that he has 1432 sheep. After an hour on another meadow, the first guy guesses the exact number of sheep again. Confused and also surprised the second guy asks him: How do you count those sheep so quickly? The first guy responds: It's pretty simple, you count all the legs and divide by four!

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## TWOC -Week 2 Peace

Here we are church week 2 of our Christmas series The Wonder of Christmas. Today we will be sharing the wonder of His peace.

A shepherd in biblical days lived with his sheep.

So, when a shepherd is with the flock, all who are under the shepherd's care feel a sense of peace.

Because the shepherd lived with the sheep, the shepherd knew everything about them; he was the one that nurtured them, guided them and always had his eye on his sheep.

The imagery of a shepherd should stir emotions of care, provision, and protection. A good shepherd is someone that is personally concerned with the welfare of his sheep.

The wonder of Christmas includes a wonderful peace because not only was our Savior born, but with that it also meant that our Good Shepherd had finally arrived.

The baby born in that Bethlehem sheep pen would grow up to lead, guide, provide, protect, care for, and bring peace to all who would follow Him as their Good Shepherd.

It is worth mentioning that the town of Bethlehem where our Good Shepherd was born was also known as the City of David.

And of all the references of shepherds in the Bible, David, the once-upon-a-time shepherd boy turned king, arguably wrote the most well-known Psalm that describes God as a shepherd.

You know it, it's Psalm 23 and it depicts God as a good shepherd who leads us towards wonderful peace as His care and direction are given to the ones who follow Him.

Let's look at Psalm 23. . .

Psalm 23:1–6 (NIV): The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley, 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 overflows. 6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

That Psalm is a passage of peace for all those who are weary and also for those wandering this Christmas.

This Psalm connects with people because it offers comfort to those who have endured the most difficult periods of life.

It's a Psalm about protection and provision that moves people toward peace through a relationship with the Good Shepherd.

David had been a shepherd boy in his youth; he understood the imagery and the depth of what he was writing as a song and poem to God.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Right out of the gate, David calls the Lord, “my shepherd.”

In the word “shepherd,” David uses the most comprehensive and intimate metaphor that had yet been used in all the Psalms when describing God's nature and character.

And interestingly, David identifies himself not as a fellow shepherd but as a sheep. He says, “The Lord is my shepherd;”

In other words, God is the one who knows everything about me. God is the one who spends time with me, nurtures me, guides me, always has his eye on me, cares for me, provides for me, and protects me.

The Lord is personally concerned for my welfare in life because I am one of his sheep.

And because that is David’s experience, he follows the declaration of the Lord being his shepherd with this incredibly statement: “. . . I shall not want.”

Because God is such a Good Shepherd, He takes care of all my needs. I have plenty to eat, good water to drink, and I don’t have to worry about wandering off and being lost.

And even if the big bad wolves of life come and try to attack me it’s going to all work out because my

shepherding God is leading me well and has my best interest at heart, and has his wings of protection around me.

He's restoring the upside-down places in my soul that verse 3 refers to in the Psalm and turning them right-side up as He comforts me with his tangible presence.

And according to verse 4, He is with me in and through the valley of the shadow of death, so I don't have to be afraid because I am not alone. I'm not alone because He is with me.

He is preparing good things for me. He is leading me onward to experience places of peace filled with His anointing, His goodness, His mercy and grace both now and throughout eternity.

I am on a walk, a journey with The Lord, my Good Shepherd and according to verses 5 and 6, it is places filled with favor, blessing and a culmination of peace in the presence of God my Shepherd and Savior.

Yes, The Lord God is a Good Shepherd; therefore, I can be at peace because of Him and His presence in my life.

As we so often proclaim and remind ourselves, especially at Christmas time, He is Immanuel, God and I might add the Good Shepherd who is with us.

This part of the nature and character of God helps usher in the wonder of Christmas that is filled with peace.

When God came near in the person of Jesus, our Good Shepherd arrived on the scene. The Good Shepherd is how Jesus describes himself in chapter 10 of the Gospel of John.

In many Bibles, there is a heading before the beginning of that chapter titled: The Good Shepherd.

In John 10:1-6, Jesus is talking and He uses the imagery of sheep and a shepherd.

John 10:1–6 (TPT): Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Listen to this eternal truth: The person who sneaks over the wall to enter into the sheep pen, rather than coming through the gate, reveals himself as a thief coming to steal. 2 But the true Shepherd walks right up to the gate, 3 and because the gatekeeper knows who he is, he opens the gate to let him in. And the sheep recognize the voice of the true Shepherd, for he calls his own by name and leads them out, for they belong to him. 4 And when he has brought out all his sheep, he walks ahead of them and they will follow him, for they are familiar with his voice. 5 But they will run away from strangers and never follow them because they know it’s the voice of a stranger.” 6 Jesus told the Pharisees this parable even though they didn’t understand a word of what he meant.

Do you know why they did not understand what he was saying to them? It wasn’t just because His audience was like sheep. But also because they didn’t recognize Him as the Good Shepherd that He is.



Do you know how sheep are often characterized? They have been described as dumb livestock; here's a news flash, sheep are not the most intelligent creatures.

Watch this video as they try and describe sheep.

### **Show Video: TWOC - peace**

Many scholars believe that if sheep had not been domesticated, they likely would have become extinct thousands of years ago because they are so dumb and need so much care, attention, and leadership to succeed.

And honestly, if we stop and assess ourselves, we can see how we can be like sheep in some areas of our lives as well: we can be pretty slow learners ourselves, amen.

We make the same mistakes over and over, we wander off course, and we need help figuring out what to do and where to go.

We qualify as sheep in lots of ways and in some areas in our lives.

The choices we know are wrong, but we do them anyway, indicates we are like sheep. The same arguments we have with our spouse because we keep doing the same dumb stuff indicate we are like sheep. The patterns of spending more money than we make and thus keep going deeper and deeper into debt indicate we are like sheep.

Do you know why almost 50% of Americans make new year's resolutions and less than 10% keep them? It's because we are like those undisciplined sheep!

And do you know when sheep thrive? It is when they have a shepherd who loves them like crazy, lives with them, leads them, knows them, and calls them by name.

When the shepherd is with his sheep, he builds trust with them in such a way that just the sound of the shepherd's voice causes the sheep to be at peace.

## **Show Video from You Tube - Do sheep only hear the shepherds voice?**

I mentioned that when the shepherd is with his sheep, he builds trust with them in such a way that just the sound of the shepherd's voice causes the sheep to be at peace.

And the reason is that Good Shepherds take care of all their inadequacies and lead them to the second half of Psalm 23:1, which says: "I shall not want."

"I shall not want" because I am so well taken care of by my shepherd.

"I shall not want" because he leads me to where it's best for me.

"I shall not want" because since I know the Good Shepherds voice, and because His sheep hear and know His voice I lack nothing.

When the Lord is your shepherd, you will not be left wanting. That means God will provide you with everything you need as you follow His lead.

Jesus talks about this shepherd-to-sheep relationship and dynamic with his disciples in John 10 verses 7-15. Within these words are where Jesus specifically identifies Himself as the Good Shepherd.

John 10:7–15 (TPT): So Jesus went over it again, “I speak to you eternal truth: I am the Gate for the flock. 8 All those who broke in before me are thieves who came to steal, but the sheep never listened to them. 9 I am the Gateway. To enter through me is to experience life, freedom, and satisfaction. 10 A thief has only one thing in mind—he wants to steal, slaughter, and destroy. But I have come to give you everything in abundance, more than you expect—life in its fullness until you overflow! 11 I am the Good Shepherd who lays down my life as a sacrifice for the sheep. 12–13 But the worker who serves only for wages is not a real shepherd. Because he has no heart for the sheep he will run away and abandon them when he sees

the wolf coming. And then the wolf mauls the sheep, drags them off, and scatters them. 14 “I alone am the Good Shepherd, and I know those whose hearts are mine, for they recognize me and know me, 15 just as my Father knows my heart and I know my Father’s heart. I am ready to give my life for the sheep.

And the Good Shepherd laid down his life which was foretold to us years before through the prophet Isaiah. . .

Isaiah 53:5–7 (NIV): But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

That passage in Isaiah is known as the Suffering Servant passage; it foreshadows what the Good Shepherd, Jesus,

would go through to make provision for all the wandering sheep. It's a passage leading to peace for those who find themselves lost, in trouble, on their own, and outside of what they were created to be: that by the way is being led, cared for, and protected by their shepherd.

Jesus articulated how a Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

That's precisely the mission Jesus was born to accomplish. He ultimately would go all the way to the cross to lay down His life to rescue us from everything that separated us from God and gave us the opportunity to make the decision to be reconciled back to God through our repentance for the disobedience and sin that blinded us from receiving God's mercy, grace, and peace that passes all understanding.

And our Good Shepherd not only secured our eternity by laying down His life but also leads us to provision and places of peace in our lives right now as we follow Him in faith.

That's what the remaining verses of Psalm 23 convey.

They speak of what happens when we follow the Lord, our Good Shepherd. While all of the verses in Psalm 23 portray various aspects of what happens when a shepherd leads his sheep, let's focus our remaining attention today on verse 2.

Psalm 23:2 (NIV): He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

It is comprised of two parts. The first: "He makes me lie down in green pastures."

By nature, sheep tend to be unsettled, skittish, and a bit nervous. Do you know when a sheep will lie down? They lie down when they are confident that a shepherd is with them and watching over them.

If sheep are fearful, at odds with other sheep, dealing with pests that are irritating them, or feeling unsettled due to hunger, they will have difficulty "lying down."

Aren't you and I the same way, we get offended by the pests that irritate us, we feel unsettled by something that was said to us or that we said to someone else, so we have difficulty "lying down" to rest.

You also should know that when sheep are around running water, they get afraid.

And the Good Shepherd knows that so He will make sure his flock has sufficient water. That's the second part worth mentioning in verse 2. "He leads me beside still waters."

Part of the nature and character of a good shepherd is that he leads his sheep. Notice that it does not say he drives them. Cattle are driven sheep are led.

They must know the shepherd's voice and be able to trust the shepherd. Once they do, sheep will follow their shepherd because they know this is the person who puts them on the green pasture. This is the one who doesn't make me try to drink from a fire hydrant or fast-moving waters. He leads me beside the still waters.



The shepherd is key to removing these different challenging circumstances so sheep will lie in green pastures in peace and drink from the still waters in quiet, refreshing reassurance.

Philip Keller, an East African shepherd with a lifetime of experience in this field, came to the realization of how important the shepherd-to-sheep relationship really was.

He said, “In the course of time, I came to realize that nothing so quieted and reassured the sheep as to see me in the field. The presence of their master and owner and protector put them at ease as nothing else could do, and this applied day and night.”

The same sentiment is true about our relationship with Jesus as our Good Shepherd. His presence in our life has the same effect on us as His followers as sheep do with their shepherd. He brings peace and confidence that it is ok to lie down and rest because He is with us and taking care of us.

Perhaps that is what Jesus, your Good Shepherd, wants to remind you about most of all this Christmas. He is present with you. He is near you. You can count on him to lead you to those green pastures where you can lie down on the inside of your soul.

He leads you beside those still waters where you can drink deeply without fear of being swept away by life's currents.

His leadership in your life as your Good Shepherd is towards places where you can know you have security and provision in who He is and what He has done for you through His own life, death, resurrection, and the empowerment by His Spirit for those who have put their faith, hope, and trust in Him for salvation.

It is then we truly find our peace in life that is contained in Him. His peace offered to us through His birth leading ultimately to our salvation, is part of the wonder of Christmas.

Let me close today with some Scriptures that talk about His peace, but before I do I want to invite you back next week as we examine the Wonder of His Joy.

Now look at these verses. . .

Psalms 4:8 (NIV): In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

Psalms 29:11 (NIV): The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Isaiah 26:12 (NIV): Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

John 14:27 (TPT): 27 “I leave the gift of peace with you—my peace. Not the kind of fragile peace given by the world, but my perfect peace. Don’t yield to fear or be troubled in your hearts—instead, be courageous!

Colossians 3:15 (TPT): Let your heart be always guided by the peace of the Anointed One, who called you to peace as part of his one body. And always be thankful.

Talk about the always be thankful part.

I have two more but before I get to them let's pray a moment and then we will let these last two be like the doxology as we depart today.

Prayer. . .

2 Thessalonians 3:16 (TPT): Now, may the Lord himself, the Lord of peace, pour into you his peace in every circumstance and in every possible way. The Lord's tangible presence be with you all.

Romans 15:13 (TPT): Now may God, the inspiration and fountain of hope, fill you to overflowing with uncontainable joy and perfect peace as you trust in him. And may the power of the Holy Spirit continually surround your life with his super-abundance until you radiate with hope!