

**Bible
Teachings
Series**



*A self-study
book with
stories and
thoughts on
Psalm 23*

The Lord Cares for Me

The Lord Cares for Me

A self-study with stories and thoughts
on Psalm 23



**Multi-Language
Productions**

Bringing the Word to the World

The text of this book is written and produced by Multi-Language Productions of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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Level One, Book 30



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Getting Started

This book will teach you that God does care for you like shepherd who watches over his sheep.

In each chapter you will read a story about a person and also the lesson we can learn from that story. Then you will read a few lines and answer some questions. At the end of each chapter there is a short test. The test questions cover only what you have learned in that chapter and the questions you have answered.

When you have answered a group of questions you will be given the page number where you can turn to check your answers. Check your answers before reading any further.

At the end of the book there is a final test. Before you answer the questions in this final test, go back and review the chapter tests. When you have completed the final test, you can either turn the test over to the person who gave you this book, or you can mail it to the address on the back cover of this book.

We pray that Psalm 23 will give you comfort and inspire you to trust in your shepherd, Jesus Christ.



Jesus is our Shepherd.



Introduction

Psalm 23 is a spiritual poem that teaches us to love and praise God for his Word. God gave us his Word through men like David, a shepherd boy who became a king. David wrote Psalm 23 and many other such poems. All the Bible's writers were inspired by the Spirit of God; they wrote what God led them to write.

At the end of his life, David's last words thanked God for giving him words to write. "The Most High God has greatly honored me. ... I am Israel's singer of songs. The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me. I spoke his word with my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:1-2).

Psalm 23 is a small portion of God's Word, but full of lessons and comfort. The psalm uses the picture of a shepherd and sheep to describe the relationship that God has with his people, how God cares for those who trust in him.

This booklet will explore the ideas that David put into Psalm 23, but will do so in stories that relate to our present day lives. Not many people reading this book are shepherds or know much about taking care of sheep. So we'll look at the ideas in Psalm 23 as they apply to the way our lives might go in our world today. For each of the ideas in the poem, we'll have a story that shows how those ideas would have meaning in the lives of people who need God's help as their shepherd—as the one who cares for them.



Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

The LORD is my shepherd. He gives me
everything I need.

He lets me lie down in fields of green grass.

He leads me beside quiet waters.

He gives me new strength.

He guides me in the right paths for the honor of
his name.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid. You are with me.

Your shepherd's rod and staff comfort me.

You prepare a feast for me right in front of my
enemies.

You pour oil on my head. My cup runs over.

I am sure that your goodness and love will
follow me

all the days of my life.

And I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

Note:

In Bibles the name “the LORD” often is written in all capital letters. This is because it is a special name for God that was used in the Hebrew language. (The first Bible books were written in Hebrew long ago.) The special name means “He is” – because God always is the same, yesterday and today and forever. When God was sending Moses to lead his people, and Moses asked God, “What is your name?” God said, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3:14). We always can depend on the LORD, because he is who he is and he does not change.

At other times the name “the Lord” is written without capitalizing all the letters. This is the name that indicates that God is like a king or ruler who is in charge of our lives. He watches over us and guides us and provides for us.



Chapter 1

The LORD provides for me

*The LORD is my shepherd.
He gives me everything I need (Psalm 23:1).*

The story of Jake and Sally

Jake had struggled all through high school. He never fit in well with other students. He had trouble paying attention to what teachers said. His mind would wander. He passed some classes but flunked others.

Jake never had known his father. About all his father ever had done was get Jake's mom pregnant... then he was gone. Jake's mother

worked two jobs to try to pay the rent and keep food on the table. She wasn't around much. Jake didn't have much support at home. No one was pushing him to do well in school, and he didn't. He ended up dropping out of high school after a couple years. He got into drugs and got arrested a couple times for drug possession while still in his teens. He did some time in juvenile detention.

The only good thing Jake got out of high school was a girlfriend, Sally. Sally was sweet, and she loved Jake very much. She didn't do any better in school than he did. Her home life wasn't much better than Jake's either. Her parents were divorced and she bounced back and forth between them. They both seemed more concerned about other things. Sally's dad drank a lot. Her mom seemed to have a new boyfriend every few weeks. Sally took care of herself a lot.

Sally also dropped out of high school. She worked as a waitress at a local diner. Jake got a job at an auto repair shop. He had no training but was willing to work. So they hired him for low pay. He could help out with basic tasks, and he could learn on the job. Jake and Sally

found a cheap apartment and moved in together. But Sally said, “You have to be more than my boyfriend, Jake.” She wanted something real that would last. They went to the courthouse and got married by a judge.

It wasn’t long before Sally was pregnant, and when baby came along she had to quit work. Jake’s pay from the repair shop wasn’t enough to pay the rent and other bills. They started filling out forms for whatever help they could get from the government. But there wasn’t enough money. Jake did not know what to do.

Jake started taking money from the cash box at work when nobody was looking. He started by taking small amounts that might not be noticed. But then he started taking more—hundreds of dollars over several weeks. The boss, a man named Phil, was getting angry. They always were short of money when they counted each day’s sales.

Phil had a plan. He hid a camera in the ceiling that would record video of the area by the cash box. That’s how he caught Jake stealing money. He had the police arrest him. Jake was found guilty. The judge saw his previous record

of arrests and decided to send Jake to jail for several months.

In the county jail there was a chaplain who visited the inmates. His name was Pastor Davidson, a man who led one of the churches in the city. When Pastor Davidson visited Jake, he read to him from Psalm 23: "The LORD is my shepherd. He gives me everything I need" (Psalm 23:1).

"I don't know much about shepherds," Jake said. "But if you're saying God gives me everything I need, well, it sure doesn't look that way to me."

"Well, let's talk about that," Pastor Davidson answered. "What is it that you think you need?"

"Well, I need a decent job. Enough money. Food on the table. To be able to take care of my wife and my kid."

"Those are needs, for sure, yeah. But I think you have deeper needs than that."

"What do you mean?" Jake asked.

“Jesus said, ‘What good is it if someone gains the whole world but loses or gives up his very self?’ (Luke 9:25). There’s more to life than just putting food on the table. You’re sitting here in jail because you gave up your self, your own worth and value. You became a thief. You were willing to steal from someone else—worse than that, from someone who had given you a chance and hired you for a job when you had no training and very little education.”

“Okay, but how was I supposed to survive? How were Sally and the baby and I supposed to survive?”

“We can talk about that more, Jake. I know good people on the outside who can help you and your family. But what you need most, what you need first, is to be in a relationship with God as the one who cares for your soul, for your self, for who you are as a person.”

“I’ve never been much of a church person,” Jake said.

“God doesn’t just care for people who have been part of the church,” the pastor said.
“Jesus was like a shepherd who cared very

much for lost sheep—for people who got lost along the way in life. Some of the church people talked against Jesus. They said, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’ (Luke 15:2). But Jesus told them this story:

“Suppose one of you has 100 sheep and loses one of them. Won’t he leave the 99 in the open country? Won’t he go and look for the one lost sheep until he finds it? When he finds it, he will joyfully put it on his shoulders and go home. Then he will call his friends and neighbors together. He will say, ‘Be joyful with me. I have found my lost sheep.’

“I tell you, it will be the same in heaven. There will be great joy when one sinner turns away from sin. Yes, there will be more joy than for 99 godly people who do not need to turn away from their sins.”

“So I guess I’m the lost sheep, huh?” Jake said.

“Yes, Jake. And Jesus is reaching out to find you. I am acting as one of Jesus’ helpers to look for you and find you. So let me read that



The lost son returns to his father.

verse from Psalm 23 one more time. 'The LORD is my shepherd. He gives me everything I need' (Psalm 23:1). What you needed most, Jake, was for God to reach out and find you. You need God to be your shepherd. You need God to bring you home to him, because you had wandered away and got lost."

Pastor Davidson kept visiting Jake during the time he was in jail. The pastor also visited Sally and baptized Johnny, their young child. The members of Pastor Davidson's church began to provide food and baby supplies and other help to Sally and Johnny.

The pastor even went to the repair shop to visit Jake's boss, who was a Christian man. Pastor Davidson reminded Phil about a man named Philemon. Philemon had a slave that ran away and may even have stolen from Philemon before running away. But then that slave ended up becoming a Christian. Paul, one of the leaders in the church, sent him back to Philemon. (In those days, the lowest class workers were slaves, without freedom to go work for someone else.) Paul asked Philemon to forgive the young man and accept him back as a brother in faith. Pastor Davidson said,

“Phil, you’re in the spot of Philemon now. Jake needs your forgiveness and your trust. And he needs his job back when he gets out of jail. Will you help him?” Phil agreed.

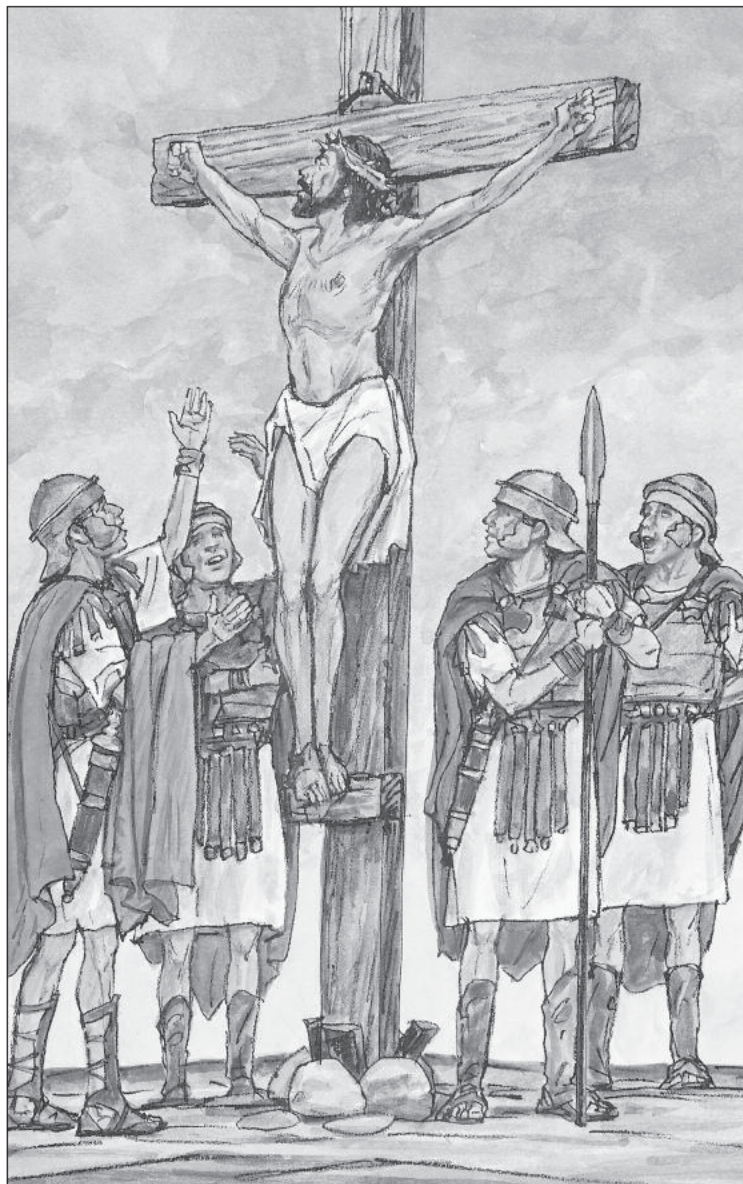
The Lord was taking care of Jake and Sally. It didn’t come easy, but God was making sure they did get everything they needed.

The lesson: The LORD provides for us

God does promise to provide for his people.

When we are not connected to God, we are lost. When we are lost, what we need the most is for God to find us, to bring us back to him, the way a shepherd would look for a lost sheep.

Jesus is the one who connects us to God. He forgives us for what we’ve done wrong, because he gave up his life to pay for all the wrong things we did. He was given a death sentence like a criminal, but Jesus was not a criminal. And he was more than an ordinary man. He is God’s own Son. He had come down from heaven to live in our place on earth. And

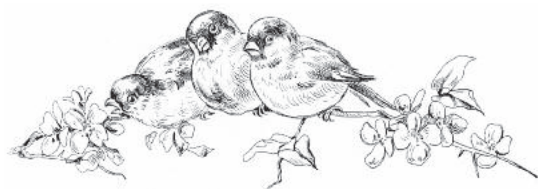


Jesus suffers and dies on the cross for us.

so after he was killed, he came back to life. And because of what he did, he promises us a whole new life. "Jesus was handed over to die for our sins. He was raised to life in order to make us right with God" (Romans 4:25). Being right with God is always what we need the most.

God does take care of our other needs too. Jesus told us not to worry, that our Father in heaven does care for us and will provide for us. Here's what Jesus said:

"Don't worry about your life and what you will eat or drink. And don't worry about your body and what you will wear. Isn't there more to life than eating? Aren't there more important things for the body than clothes?



Look at the birds of the air. They don't plant or gather

crops. ...But your Father who is in heaven feeds them. Aren't you worth much more than they are? ...So don't worry. Don't say, 'What will we eat?' Or, 'What will we drink?' Or, 'What will we wear?' People who are

ungodly run after all of those things. Your Father who is in heaven knows that you need them. But put God's kingdom first. Do what he wants you to do. Then all of those things will also be given to you" (Matthew 6:25-33).

So God does promise to provide for his people. That doesn't mean we will always have lots of money or things. Sometimes we may barely have enough. But God says he won't abandon us. And he wants us to think about spiritual needs too, not just physical needs. He does not want us love money and things or to set our hearts on such things. He tells us, "Think about things that are in heaven. Don't think about things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2).

If we think too much about money we can cause ourselves trouble. The Bible says that people who want to get rich often wander away from faith in God (1 Timothy 6:10). Instead, we are urged to think this way: "You gain a lot when you live a godly life. But you must be happy with what you have. We didn't bring anything into the world. We can't take anything out of it. If we have food and clothing, we will be happy with that" (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

One of the ways God provides for us is through the help of others. In the story of Jake and Sally, we saw that Pastor Davidson and his church members worked in various ways to help their family through their struggles. When we are facing struggles in our lives, we may need to look to others for help. God calls on his people to help each other, to show love to each other. "So when we can do good to everyone, let us do it. Let us make a special point of doing good to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10).

What Psalm 23 says is true. The Lord is our shepherd. He gives us everything we need. He gives us a relationship with him, which is what our spirits need. And he makes sure the basics of daily bread and clothing are met, which is what our bodies need. And in the end, when the time comes that our bodies die, God promises to provide for us even then. "I am the resurrection and the life," Jesus said. "Anyone who believes in me will live, even if he dies" (John 11:25). Jesus faced death and came back to life. He promises to give us the same ending to our life story. He really is the Lord who provides everything we need.

Chapter One Test

1. Psalm 23 was written by a man named _____, who was _____ by God's Spirit to write these words. This means he wrote what _____ led him to write.
2. In the story of Jake and Sally, Jake ended up in _____ because he had been _____ from his employer.
3. Pastor Davidson read to Jake from Psalm 23: "The _____ is my _____. He gives me _____ I need."
4. Pastor Davidson told Jake that what he needed most was to be in a _____ with _____.
5. Jesus told a story about someone having _____ sheep and losing one of them, but caring so much about that one that he kept looking until he _____ it.
6. Pastor Davidson reminded Jake's boss Phil about a Bible story involving a man named _____ and a runaway _____.

7. _____ is the one who connects us to God, because he _____ us for what we've done wrong.
8. Jesus told us not to _____ about what we'll eat or wear, because God will _____ for us.
9. We may not have a lot of _____ or things, but God will not _____ us.
10. One of the ways God provides for us is through the _____ of others.

(Check your answers on page 123)



Noah is delivered from the Flood.



Chapter 2

The LORD gives me peace

*The LORD is my shepherd ...
He lets me lie down in fields of green grass.
He leads me beside quiet waters (Psalm 23:1,2).*

The story of Tammy Jo

Tammy Jo grew up in West Texas. She never liked going to church. Church frightened her. As a little girl it hadn't been so bad, but still wasn't a happy experience. As a child, she went to the children's church room. There they learned Bible stories and were taught to be good. The constant emphasis on "being good" bothered her.

Tammy Jo remembered lessons like ...

- Adam and Eve ate fruit that God had told them not to eat. They did a bad thing when they went against what God said. We should always do what God says.
- God told Noah to build a very big boat because a flood was coming that would cover the whole world with water. Noah did what God said. Because Noah and his family obeyed God, they had a safe place when the flood came, and many animals were kept safe with them.
- Jesus spent forty days in a dry desert area. While he was there, the devil came and tempted him to sin. Each time Jesus answered the devil with a quote from the Bible, and he did not sin. We should be like Jesus and fight against sin. We must learn the Bible well so we can say no when we are tempted.

The lessons in children's church weren't scary, but they weren't comforting either. All the lessons had the same sort of idea: Be good if you want God to be good to you. Tammy Jo never felt like she was good enough. So she never felt sure that God loved her or would care for her.

Church got worse for Tammy Jo when she became a teenager. She didn't go to the children's room anymore. She began to go to the main worship room with her parents. That's when things got really scary. The preacher looked angry and spoke angry words. He yelled about how everyone was going to burn in hell if they didn't quit all their sins and start living right. And then some of the old men suddenly would get full of the Spirit (or that's what the preacher said was happening). They'd run around the worship room screaming and waving their arms wildly. Sometimes they'd fall on the floor and start shaking. Their bodies would twist and turn. Their eyes rolled back into their heads and spit spilled from their mouths.

All of this made Tammy Jo shake a little herself. She was scared and uncomfortable whenever she was in church. She told her parents she did not want to go anymore. That only made them angry, and they were harsh with her. "Do you want to go to hell?" her father scolded her. "You will go to church! You must go to church ... or else!" When Tammy Jo tried to stay home one Sunday, her father took off his belt and beat her with it several times, then pulled her to the car.

Tammy Jo obeyed her father (and his belt) for the next couple of years. But when she got done with high school and turned eighteen, she planned to leave home.

An aunt in Memphis had invited Tammy Jo to come and stay with her. Tammy Jo used money she had saved from her part-time job and bought a bus ticket to Memphis. Her aunt, Gracie, welcomed her lovingly. Gracie could see how much Tammy Jo had been beaten down and made afraid. The poor young woman hardly ever smiled. She was timid and unsure of herself. She was very quiet and spoke just a few words when she did say anything.

When the weekend came, Gracie said to Tammy Jo, "I'll take you to church tomorrow."

"Please, I'd rather not," Tammy Jo begged. "Church was the main reason I left home. I don't think I can take any more of the ranting and raving, telling me I'm not good enough, and scaring me about the devil and hell."

"I understand," Gracie said. "A lot of churches can be that way—and it's the wrong way for a church to be. They aren't understanding God's

message to us very well. Yes, the devil and hell are real, but Jesus is the one who rescues us from those evils. We don't have to do it ourselves. We don't get to heaven by our own effort or goodness. We need Jesus.

“When Jesus was born on earth, angels from heaven showed themselves to simple, everyday people like us. They came to shepherds out in the fields near where Jesus was born. They said, ‘Do not be afraid.’ They brought a message of great joy for all people. They told the shepherds, ‘Today a Savior has been born to you. He is Christ the Lord. ... May glory be given to God in the highest heaven! And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!’ (Luke 2:10-14).

Jesus came as God from heaven to be with us here on earth, to save us and not to frighten us. The most famous passage of the Bible, John 3:16, tells us that Jesus came because God loves us. God does not want to condemn us or send us to hell. Here's what it says: ‘God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son. Anyone who believes in him will not die but will have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to judge the world.



Jesus is born.

He sent his Son to save the world through him” (John 3:16-17).

“Hmm, I didn’t hear much of that in my church back home,” Tammy Jo said.

“Come to church with me,” Gracie invited again. “I promise it will be different. It’s a place where God brings peace to us, not a place where you’re shouted at or made afraid.”

Tammy Jo agreed to go. When they arrived at Gracie’s church on Sunday, right away people greeted Tammy Jo with friendly smiles. They made her feel welcome. The worship hour began with a song, “Amazing Grace,” and already Tammy Jo could tell there was a different feel to this place. The preacher spoke about the grace of God—love that he gave to us when we didn’t deserve anything from him. He talked about sin and the fact that we aren’t good enough, but said that’s why Jesus came as our Savior. The promises about Jesus said he would be called “The LORD Who Makes Us Right With Himself” (Jeremiah 23:6). We don’t become good in God’s eyes by the things we do, but God sees us as good because of what Jesus did for us. And knowing Jesus is our

Savior and our Brother, now we have strength to do good things that we never could do by



ourselves. “Jesus said he is like a vine, a root in the ground, and we are like branches connected to him,” the preacher said.

“No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain joined to the vine. In the

same way, you can’t bear fruit unless you remain joined to me,’ Jesus said (John 15:4). So our lives depend on Jesus. We can do everything by the power of Jesus. He gives us strength,” the preacher said (see Philippians 4:13).

After church was over, as they drove home, Tammy Jo said to Gracie, “Thank you for convincing me to come. I’ve never felt so much peace in my heart as I did today. Going to your church was like getting rest for my frightened and weary soul. It was like getting a cool drink of fresh water when I was so very thirsty. It’s just what I needed.”

“That’s what church is meant to provide, Tammy Jo. It’s a place where God speaks his

words to us, and he speaks words of rest and peace and refreshment. It's like the psalm from the Bible says about God being like a shepherd to us: He lets us lie down in fields of green grass. He leads us beside quiet waters" (see Psalm 23:2).

The lesson: The LORD gives us peace

Can you imagine a shepherd who mostly screamed at his sheep or beat them with a stick? That would be a harsh and uncaring kind of shepherd! That's not the kind of shepherd that Jesus is.

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Jesus doesn't yell at us and demand we do things for him. He came and gave up his own life for us. He said about us as his people, "I have come so they can have life. I want them to have it in the fullest possible way" (John 10:10).

Jesus' message to us is one meant to give us peace and hope and joy because we know he is on our side. He loves us. He forgives us. He encourages us.

Life in this world often isn't very encouraging. People push us down and treat us harshly. Sometimes even our own parents and families are the ones pushing us down, discouraging us or threatening us. Sometimes even people we think are our friends push us down, hurting us or being mean to us. Sometimes even churches are the ones pushing us down, scolding us with angry messages, beating us up with harsh words because we aren't good enough. We so very much need words that refresh us, that give us hope. Jesus gives us those words in the Bible. Families and friends and churches that know the hope Jesus gives will speak those refreshing words of Jesus to us. And when we know the hope Jesus gives, we will speak his refreshing words to others.

"The LORD is my shepherd," David wrote in Psalm 23. "He lets me lie down in fields of green grass. He leads me beside quiet waters" (Psalm 23:2). It's like we are sheep that are worn out and tired from the hot sun and the LORD finds a cool shady place in the grass for us to rest. It's like we are dying of thirst and the LORD takes us to a pool of clear spring water to revive us and give us strength again.



Jesus leads us so we receive peace and comfort.

As people who belong to the LORD, we learn to look for the “green grass” and “quiet waters” where God brings us comfort and peace. We look for a church where the emphasis is on God’s grace—on his endless love for us, forgiving us all of our wrongs. We look for Christian friends who will support us with words of hope and encouragement in Jesus. And we try to be the sort of friends and family members who provide refreshing and encouragement to others by pointing to Jesus. He is our Savior, our good shepherd. He gives us peace.

Chapter Two Test

1. At the church where Tammy Jo went as a child, all the lessons had the same sort of message: "Be _____ if you want God to _____ to you." (This was the wrong sort of message for a church to be teaching.)
2. Tammy Jo never felt like she was _____ enough. So she never felt sure that God _____ her or would _____ for her.
3. Tammy Jo's church scared her because the preacher yelled about how everyone was going to _____ if they didn't quit all their _____ and start _____.
4. Gracie told Tammy Jo, "Yes, the _____ and _____ are real, but _____ is the one who rescues us from those evils."
5. When Jesus was born on earth, angels brought a message of great _____ for _____ people, because a _____ had been born and that he would be pleased to give _____ to people on earth.

6. The Bible says, "God did not send his Son into the world to _____ the world. He sent his Son to _____ the world through him."
7. The preacher at Gracie's church said, "We don't become good in God's eyes by the things _____, but God sees us as good because of what _____ for us."
8. We can do everything by the power of _____. He gives us _____.
9. Jesus said about us as his people, "I have come so they can have _____. I want them to have it in the _____ possible way."
10. In our lives, it's like we are sheep that are worn out and tired and the LORD provides a place in the grass for us to _____. It's like we are dying of _____ and the LORD gives us _____ to revive us and give us strength again.

(Check your answers on page 123)



Chapter 3

The LORD lifts me up

The LORD is my shepherd ... He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths for the honor of his name (Psalm 23:1,3).

The story of DeShawn

DeShawn got tough already when he was a boy. He grew up in a tough neighborhood in Chicago. Too many young men in the neighborhood had no job. Too many young men in the neighborhood had guns. The way you fit in was to become part of somebody's group, one of the gangs, and you protected each other.

DeShawn committed his first crime when he was twelve years old. He stole a purse from an old woman who lived in the neighborhood. He grabbed her as she was walking back to her apartment from the corner store. She had no way to defend herself against his strength or his speed. He ripped the purse strap right off her arm and ran away. He bought himself a new pair of basketball shoes with the money he pulled from her purse.

As DeShawn got older, he got into bigger crimes. He became a seller for a local marijuana dealer. He broke into a liquor store one night. He took as much cash as he could find and as much booze as he could carry. He was trying to impress the older boys in the neighborhood who were even tougher than he was. He was also scaring his mother terribly by his attitude and behavior.

DeShawn's mother, LaDonna, worried about him more and more. DeShawn's father had left soon after the boy was born, and so DeShawn had never had a strong male role model in his life. The tough teens of the neighborhood had been his models—and they were models of bad behavior. By the time he was fourteen,

DeShawn had dropped out of school and just hung out in the neighborhood. He was on the street with his gang or on the playground basketball courts more than he was ever at home.

One day, LaDonna was talking to a friend, a woman named Shanice, about her problems with DeShawn. Shanice said, "Let me introduce you to Terrell. Maybe he can help."

Terrell was a man who commanded respect. He had played basketball for the University of Michigan, and after college came back to his old neighborhood in Chicago. He ran a downtown gym, which provided him a good income. And he gave back to the neighborhood by letting local youth use the basketball court in his gym in the late night hours—if they obeyed his rules. They had to be respectful and polite—not just when they were in his gym, but always. He had a habit of making the rounds and checking up on them around the neighborhood. And they had to stay in school; no drop-outs allowed.

Terrell would play ball with the boys, and coach them on their skills. And if they worked hard at

school and got okay grades, he would help them fill out college applications and apply for scholarships. Several of the boys who went through Terrell's gym had gone to college on basketball scholarships. Terrell called his gym "The Home of Eagles." On one wall of the basketball court he had these words painted in large letters: "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31). To be one of Terrell's "eagles" was something special. And thanks to Shanice, DeShawn got a personal visit from Terrell. Terrell invited DeShawn to play ball at his gym.

DeShawn started going to school again. (That was one of Terrell's rules: If you don't go to school, you can't come into the gym.) Terrell started to lean on DeShawn to change his behavior. He caught him with weed in his backpack and made DeShawn flush it down the toilet. "If I ever catch you with this again, ever hear you're selling this stuff again, you're out of this gym forever. You hear me?" Terrell scolded.

When he found DeShawn fighting in the locker room with one of the other boys, Terrell dragged them both back into the gym and

made them run sprints back and forth until they could hardly walk anymore. "Don't you mess with me," Terrell said. "I'm trying to turn you into actual men. Quit acting like stupid animals."

Terrell did Bible studies with the boys and got them to pray with him. Terrell was a Christian man, and he wanted these young men to know the God who made them, the Lord who saved them. He wanted their lives to give glory to God and be useful to people. He taught them about Jesus, who died like a criminal to take away the sins of all people on earth, even our most criminal sins. He told them how Jesus rose to life again after he was dead, as a promise that we too would rise up again after our lives on earth end.

DeShawn grew close to Terrell, trusted him more and more. He told Terrell there were things on his mind that bothered him a lot. "If you've got sins weighing you down, DeShawn, you need to confess them." DeShawn confessed about how he had mugged the old lady and stole her purse, and how he had broken in and robbed the liquor store. These were things he now felt awful about.

“DeShawn, Jesus forgives your sins,” Terrell said. “That is why he came and bled and died—for sinners like me and you. And he wants to put you on the right path.”

Terrell thought for a moment, then asked, “Do you know where that lady lives?”

“Yeah, she’s in an apartment building not far from me and my mom.”

“We’re going to go to her. You’re going to make it right with her ... and with the owner of the liquor store. And if either of them wants to press charges against you – even now a couple years later – you are going to stand up like a man and accept whatever punishment comes. Do you understand?”

DeShawn nodded. He was scared ... but he was also relieved. His heart felt like it had been cleaned out with a hose and could beat loud and strong again.

Terrell went with DeShawn to talk to the lady in his neighborhood and to the owner of the liquor store.

When Terrell asked the lady if she wanted to press charges, she said no. "But I could use someone to help me with errands," she said. DeShawn was all smiles and said he'd be glad to help. He became like a grandson to the old woman.

When Terrell asked the liquor store owner if he wanted to press charges, he thought for a minute. "I don't know," he said. "I respect that this young man is coming to me to confess his crime, but he did a lot of damage."

"Sir, if you'd let me," DeShawn said, "I will work for you until I've paid back double for everything I broke or took." There was honesty in DeShawn's eyes, and the store owner was impressed.

"Yeah, okay," the store owner said. And DeShawn came to work for him ... and kept working for him even after he'd paid off his debt.

DeShawn stayed in school and got to play on the basketball team for two years. College scouts were impressed by his play, and with Terrell's help he got a college scholarship lined up for a school in Indiana.

DeShawn came running into Terrell's gym when he got his letter from the college about the scholarship. "Guess what the best part is!" DeShawn said, and could not stop jumping up and down.

"What's the best part, DeShawn?"

"The team at Southern Indiana – they're the Eagles! I get to be an Eagle!"



Terrell hugged him. "You have indeed become an eagle, young man. The Lord has lifted you up. Remember that always: 'Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles' (Isaiah 40:31). God is the one giving you strength now.

Stay on the right path, stay true to his name. You're not a criminal young man anymore, DeShawn. You're a Christian man. You live with the name of Christ in your heart and you show him to others by what you do."

When the fall of that year came, Terrell helped LaDonna pack up DeShawn's things and drive him to school in Indiana. They left right after church on a Sunday.

The lesson: The LORD lifts us up

David's psalm, Psalm 23, described what God did for him. David said, "The LORD lifts me up. He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths for the honor of his name."

In each of our lives, the Lord is constantly working to lift us up and turn our lives in the right direction. The right direction is when we are living in a way that honors God. We can't live lives like that by our own power. On our own we are sinners who tend to sink further into our own sins – into harmful attitudes and bad behaviors. Some of us sink even to the lowest of crimes.

But when God gets hold of us, he lifts us up. In one of his other psalms, David said it this way: "The LORD ... lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a

new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God" (Psalm 40:2-3). It's like we were stuck in slimy muck of our own sinful lives, and God has pulled us up out of that, cleaned us up, and gives us solid ground to stand on. When we see what God has done for us, we just want to jump and sing for joy. And we want to live our lives in a way that is honorable, a way that honors God. And he guides us in right paths for the honor of his name.

Thank God for people in your life who have been like Terrell was to DeShawn – people that God has used to reach out to you and lift you up, set you on a right path. And look around you; see what opportunities you can see. Now that you are walking in right paths for the honor of Jesus' name, you can be someone like Terrell, someone who provides help and Christian witness to others. Or even someone like LaDonna's friend Shanice. If you can't help someone entirely by yourself, maybe you can connect them to someone who can help – someone like your pastor or another Christian friend.

Without God, our lives have no strength. Oh, we can fake like we are strong, the way that

DeShawn tried to act tough as a teenager in his neighborhood. But that's not real strength. That's just bullying and sinfulness. Real strength comes from God, through Jesus and the forgiveness and life that he gives us. Another one of the psalms in the Bible says, "I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation" (Psalm 118:13-14).

Thank God that he has become your salvation, forgiving you for all your sins and crimes, through Jesus.

Honor God now with the life that you live – lean on him for your strength. For you are someone who now carries the name of Jesus Christ. You are a Christian.

The LORD has lifted you up. He has given you new strength. He guides you in the right paths for the honor of his name.

Chapter Three Test

1. Terrell's gym had a verse from the Bible book of Isaiah painted on one wall. The verse read: "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their _____. They will soar on wings like _____."
2. Terrell was a Christian man, and he wanted the young men who came to his gym to know the God who _____ and who _____ them. He wanted their lives to give _____ to God and be useful to people.
3. Terrell taught others about _____, who died like a criminal to take away the _____ of all people on earth. He also told them how _____ rose to _____ again after he was dead, as a promise that we will live again after our lives on earth end.
4. When DeShawn told Terrell about two of the crimes that still bothered his conscience, Terrell told him, "Jesus _____ your sins." He also made sure DeShawn was ready to make things _____ with the people he had hurt.

5. Terrell told DeShawn, “You’re a Christian man. You live with the _____ of _____ in your heart and you show him to others by what you do.”
6. In Psalm 23, David said, “The _____ lifts me up. He gives me new _____. He guides me in the _____ paths for the honor of his _____.”
7. We can’t live good lives by our own _____. On our own we are _____ who tend to sink further into our own _____.
8. In Psalm 40, David said, “The LORD lifted me out of the slimy _____, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a _____ and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a _____ _____ in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.”
9. You will want to thank God for _____ in your life that God has used to reach out to you and _____ you up, setting you on a _____ path.

10. Now that you are walking in _____
paths for the honor of Jesus' _____, you
can be someone who provides help and
_____ witness to others.

(Check your answers on page 123)



Chapter 4

The LORD keeps me safe

*The LORD is my shepherd ...
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid. You are with me.
Your shepherd's rod and staff comfort me
(Psalm 23:1,4).*

The story of Tom and Tina

Tina and Tom and their three children had made a trip to Seattle. Seattle was many miles from their home in southern Colorado, but they wanted to attend a wedding of some very dear friends there. They also planned a variety of sightseeing on the way. They camped in Sawtooth National Forest as part of their road trip to the northwest. On their way home, they had decided to head south for a ways, down

the coastline of the Pacific Ocean. They camped overnight at a state park in Oregon that was right on the coast, so that in the evening they could watch the sun set over the water. Tom had mapped everything out in advance. There was an east-west highway across central Oregon that they could take to reconnect to the interstate freeway system and head home.

Morning came and they rose with the sun. They cooked breakfast on the beach – pork sausages roasted on sticks over a fire. They also had some granola bars and juice. Their children were young and enjoyed the simple foods. Haley was 5, Rose was 3, and Zack not quite a year old. After finishing breakfast and putting out the campfire, it was time to pack up and get back on the road. After a few last looks at the ocean, everyone was strapped into their seats in the family's van, and away they went.

The first part of the journey eastward was challenging, as the road wound up into the mountains at a steep angle. There were twists and turns, and thick trees lined both sides of the road. Now, whenever they drove with the kids in the vehicle, Tina tended to be nervous.

She was a worrier. The narrow lanes of this road and the inability to see past each tight turn only added to her tension.

Then things got worse. They came to a section where road construction was being done. For



several miles, the lanes got even narrower, the traffic more congested.

Inside herself, Tina's emotions were boiling. The fun the family had enjoyed on the Oregon coast wasn't worth the stress they had added to their trip by taking this way home. She wanted to yell at Tom for planning a bad route ... but held her tongue in front of the kids. Tom was feeling the stress too, partly because he could tell how much the tension was eating at his wife.

They were relieved when they descended the eastern ridge of the mountains and came out to a city in the flatness of the valley below. They stopped for gas, got the kids some drinks and snacks, and then continued on their way. Tina took her turn behind the wheel now. She was less stressed when she was driving. It

made her feel like she had at least a little bit of control over things.

Tina's feeling of control faded before long. East of the mountains, Oregon seemed like a barren wasteland. They had been driving east for about half an hour, and had not seen anything. "Literally, we haven't seen anything!" Tina thought. There were no cattle or farms. There were towns and no signs anyone living on the land. There were hardly any plants growing. And for a half hour of driving, they hadn't even seen another car on the road. No one was in front of them or behind them, and no one coming from the other direction either.

"What happens if we run out of gas out here?" Tina blurted out when she couldn't hold back her worries anymore.

"We have plenty of gas," Tom assured her. "We filled up the tank less than an hour ago."

"But there's **nothing** out here!" Tina said, almost screaming. The fact that the children were in the back seat wasn't enough to restrain her anymore. Her raw emotions were showing.

“Check your cell phone,” she said to Tom. “Can you get a signal?”

Tom looked at his phone. There was no signal.

“See, we could die out here!” Tina moaned, her fears overwhelming her.

Hayley spoke up from the back seat. “Mommy, I think God knows where we are even if the cell phone doesn’t work.”

“Thanks for that reminder, Hayley,” her dad said. The young girl’s faith calmed everyone for a moment.

Tina tried to show calm on the outside, but inside her mind, her worries would not be quiet. She drove for another half hour. Still they saw no other cars on the road. Still the landscape around them was as barren as could be.

Tina tended to notice everything when she was driving. It was a tendency of her extremely cautious nature. She began now to notice the temperature gauge on the van’s dashboard.

The engine temperature was rising above its normal zone.

“Tom, the engine is getting hotter. What happens if the engine overheats?” There was a tone of panic in Tina’s voice.

Tom leaned over and looked. “Hmm, let’s keep an eye on it,” he said. “Still looks okay for the moment. Maybe slow your speed a little.”

Tina had been going about ten miles an hour over the speed limit. In her nervousness, she just wanted to get the family to where they were going. She eased her speed some. But the engine temperature kept rising.

“Let’s pull off the road for a while,” Tom suggested. “Let the engine cool a little.”

It was hot outside. The children began to get cranky. Zack wouldn’t stop crying. Tina tried to hold him and soothe him, but soon she was crying uncontrollably too. Hayley and Rose were scared – mostly because Mom was so scared. Tom tried to calm everyone down. “Let’s all say a prayer,” he said, and asked God to keep them safe, to guard them with his angels.

Tom prayed in a confident voice, but he too was worried. "I'll try to drive again," he said. "I'll go slow, try to take it easy on the engine."

Tom drove, traveling only about 40 miles per hour. Before long, in his rearview mirror he saw a car approaching from behind. Tom slowed further and turned on his flashers. He hoped if he stopped, the other car would stop. Maybe it would be someone who knew something about car engines and could look under the hood of his van and diagnose the problem. As the car came closer, Tom realized it was a patrol car, a state trooper. Normally Tom didn't like seeing the lights of a patrol car in his rearview mirror. Most times it meant he was in trouble for



speeding or breaking some other traffic law. But today, when he saw the emergency lights flashing red and blue behind him, Tom was happy. Tina breathed a huge sigh of relief. They were comforted by the presence of the state trooper. They weren't alone on the road. Someone was there to watch over them.

"How can I help you folks?" the officer said when he walked up alongside the van.

“You’ve helped us already, just by being here!” Tom said. “We thought we were all alone on this road!”

Tom explained the situation. The trooper said he’d follow behind them to make sure they made it to the next town, which now was about 40 miles away. Their trip home was delayed by half a day while a mechanic in that town fixed their engine problem. But they made it home safe, and in the end, that was all that mattered.

As Tina tucked the children into bed at home, one by one, Rose said to her, “Mommy ... the policeman who stopped to help us ... was he an angel?”

“Well, he was an answer to our prayers, that’s for sure!” Tina told her daughter. She took Rose’s hands in hers to say a prayer of thanks to God for watching over them on their journey.

The lesson: The LORD keeps us safe

As we go through our lives here on earth, we might like to think we’re in control, in the driver’s seat. But we experience all sorts of

problems that we can't control. Not every day is a walk on the beach. Some days everything seems scary or dangerous. Some parts of our lives are like long, lonely roads where we seem all alone. The fear that Tina felt for her family's safety on that road in the middle of nowhere is the way we all feel at times. And yet we have someone who is watching over us – the LORD our God.

When we think about God seeing us wherever we are, our natural instinct is to be afraid. We know that God is perfect and rules over the whole world. We know he has laws that we should obey, and we so often are guilty of disobeying his laws. The way we feel about God may be something like the way Tom usually felt about seeing state troopers on the highway. Thinking about God makes us feel angry or guilty because we know we have broken his laws. But when we realize how alone and vulnerable we are in our lives, the thought that God is right there behind us fills us with comfort instead of fear. The God who is in control of all things is looking out for us, ready to rescue us when we're in trouble. Having God guiding us through life is far better than having a state trooper escorting us along a lonely



Jesus stills the storm.

highway. With God on our side, we know that nothing can really harm us. “Since God is on our side, who can be against us?” the Bible says, and reminds us: “God did not spare his own Son. He gave him up for us all. Then won’t he also freely give us everything else” (Romans 8:31-32)? When the whole world was in the worst of all trouble and had broken all of God’s laws, God gave Jesus to us. “After many sins, God’s gift made people right with him” (Romans 5:16). “Once we were God’s enemies. But we have been brought back to him because his Son has died for us” (Romans 5:10). The same God who gave us his law to rule over our behavior also gives us the good news that Jesus is our Savior. When we find ourselves on roads or paths in life that aren’t good, God does not abandon us. Knowing that God is interested in our safety, our salvation, we rejoice that he comes to us and follows us wherever we are in life.

David’s psalm reminds us that the Lord our shepherd is always with us. “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid,” David said. He looked to the Lord and confessed, “You are with me. Your shepherd’s rod and staff comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

David had been a shepherd, and knew what it was like to guide his sheep along difficult paths



to find greener, grassier places.

The “darkest valleys” for David as a shepherd were shadowy gaps through rocky regions, where sunlight was blocked and wild animals lurked. A shepherd would keep a heavy club (called a rod) tucked in his belt. He could use this rod as a weapon to beat off any wild animal that attacked his sheep. The

shepherd also carried a staff, which was a long walking stick with a curved end. He could hook the curved end of his staff around a sheep that had fallen into trouble and pull it back to safety.

The LORD our God is like that with us. He has ways of watching over us and protecting us. He wards off evils that attack us. He grabs onto us and pulls us out of trouble when we stray into dangerous paths or patterns in our lives.

In another one of his psalms, David wrote about God’s constant presence in his life. David’s words spell out just how completely God has his eye on us:

“Lord, you have seen what is in my heart.

You know all about me.

You know when I sit down and when I get up.

You know what I’m thinking even though you are far away.

You know when I go out to work and when I come back home.

You know exactly how I live.

Lord, even before I speak a word,
you know all about it.

You are all around me. You are behind me and in front of me.

You hold me in your power.

I’m amazed at how well you know me.

It’s more than I can understand.

How can I get away from your Spirit?

Where can I go to escape from you?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there.

If I lie down in the deepest parts of the earth, you are also there.

Suppose I were to rise with the sun in the east
and then cross over to the west where it
sinks into the ocean.

Your hand would always be there to guide me.

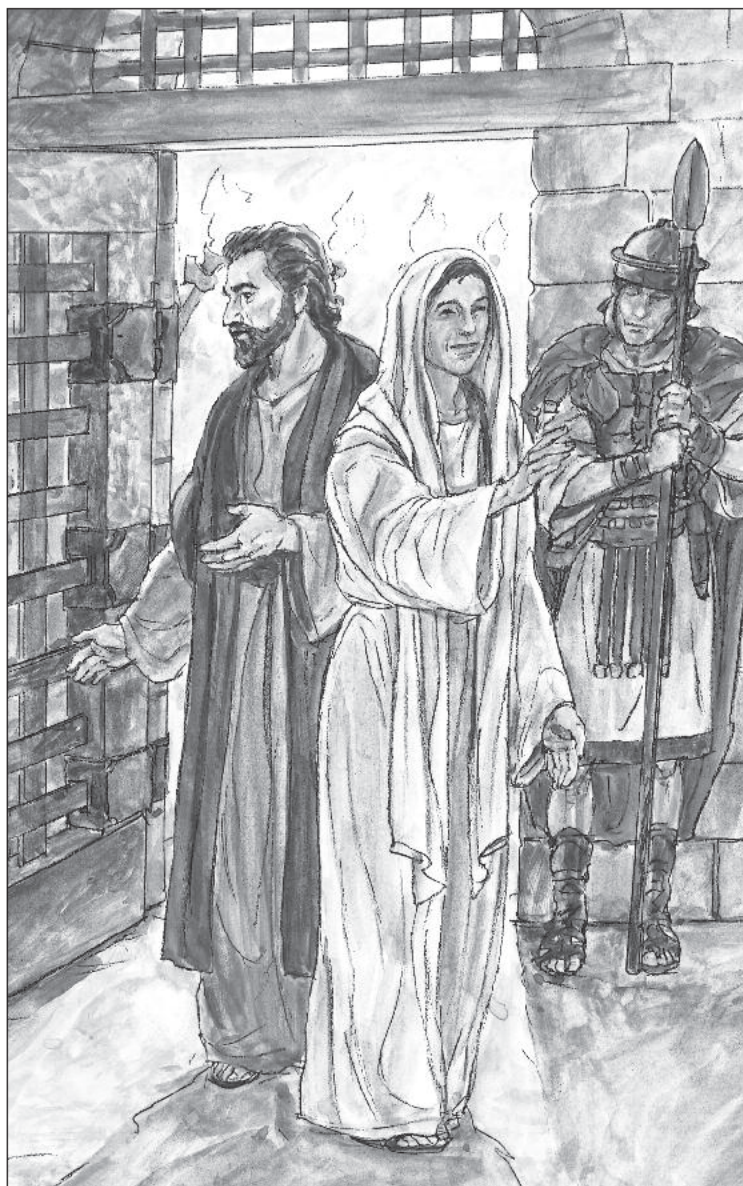
Your right hand would still be holding me
close” (Psalm 139:1-10).

David's words make it quite clear. No matter where we go, no matter how desolate or lonely a place in which we find ourselves, God is there with us as our protector. We might be far away from the nearest cell phone signal, but God is never far away from us. We might be afraid and not know where life is taking us, but God knows and will hold onto us all the way through.

And not only is God himself watching over us. We also are told that God has angels keeping an eye on his people always. "All angels are spirits who serve. God sends them to serve those who will receive salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). "The Lord is the one who keeps you safe. ... The Lord will command his angels to take good care of you" (Psalm 91:9,11).

So we have this assurance: As members of God's family through Jesus, we will be safe. Everywhere we go, God himself is looking out for us and his angels watch over us.

But what if the circumstances of our lives turn from bad to worse? What if the story of Tom and Tina and their children had ended differently than it did? What if their car did



An angel leads Peter out of prison.

break down on the barren road and no one came to help them? Or what about in our own lives when problems seem to pile on top of each other and there's no relief or rescue? Does that mean God has deserted us? That he doesn't care anymore?

No, the LORD our God is always shepherding us – even when we are walking through the darkest corners of life and we don't see anything that makes it seem like God is aware of our problems. He's not just our God in good times, for temporary solutions to problems while we're living here on earth. His ultimate purpose is to lead us beyond this life to an eternity with him in heaven. One of the teachers Jesus gave to the church said, "I push hard toward what is ahead of me. I move on toward the goal to win the prize. ... The heavenly prize is Christ Jesus himself" (Philippians 3:13-14). The same teacher (the apostle Paul) also assured us: "I am absolutely sure that not even death or life can separate us from God's love. ... Nothing at all can ever separate us from God's love because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done" (Romans 8:38-39).

A man of God from long ago expressed this same confidence—that not even death can remove us from God's safekeeping. When everything had gone wrong in his life and his health was a wreck and he felt life slipping away, he said, "I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end he will stand on the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, in my body I'll still see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes. I'll see him, and he won't be a stranger to me. How my heart longs for that day!" (Job 19:25-27).

As Christian people, we trust in Jesus for life today and tomorrow and forever. No matter what dangers or troubles we face, we can say with confidence to our Lord, "I will not be afraid. You are with me" (Psalm 23:4). Going through difficult times in our lives is not a bad thing. It's like we're traveling down a very scary road, but we know the road is leading us home and we know God is with us. And that teaches us to trust in our Lord all the more. The Lord is always there to catch us when we fall, and he is close by our side even when we die. "Then, by God's grace, we will rise from the dead" (Philippians 3:11).

The LORD is our shepherd. Even though we walk through the darkest valley, we will not be afraid, for he is with us. His shepherd's rod and staff comfort us.

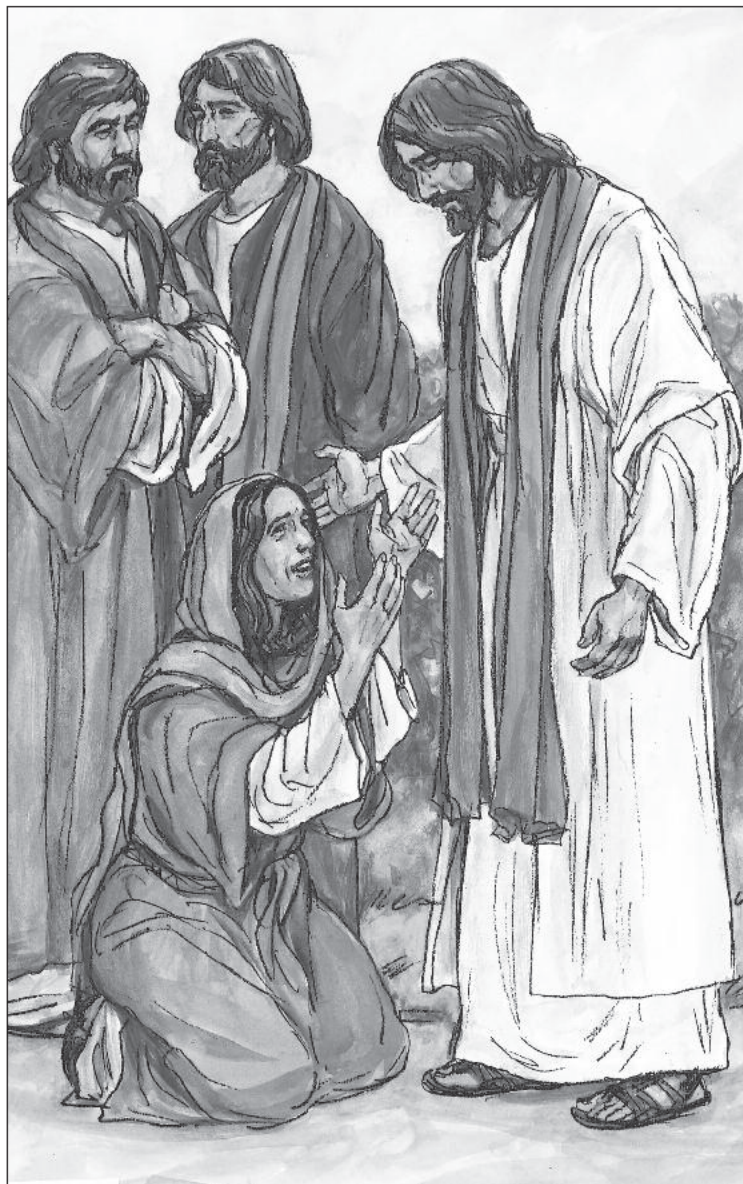
Chapter Four Test

1. In the story of Tom and Tina and their children, the daughter Hayley reminded her mother that _____ knows where we are even if we are in a very barren place.
2. When Tom tried to calm the family down, he _____ for _____ to keep them _____ and to guard them with his _____.
3. When they got home, Tina and her daughter Rose said a _____ of _____ to God for watching over the family on their journey.
4. Thinking about God can make us feel angry or _____ because we know we have broken his _____.
5. But when we realize how alone and vulnerable we are in our lives, the thought

that God is right there behind us fills us with _____ instead of _____.

6. David's psalm said, "Even though I walk through the _____, I will not be afraid" – because he was confident the LORD was with him.
7. David looked to the Lord and confessed, "You are with me. Your _____ and _____ comfort me."
8. Another psalm (Psalm 91) tells us: "The Lord is the one who keeps you _____. ... The Lord will command his _____ to take good care of you."
9. _____ at all can ever separate us from God's _____ because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done.
10. The Lord is close by our side even when we _____. Then, by God's _____, we will rise from the _____.

(Check your answers on page 123)



A Canaanite woman begs before Jesus.



Chapter 5

The LORD gives me a new life

*The LORD is my shepherd ...
You prepare a feast for me
right in front of my enemies.
You pour oil on my head.
My cup runs over. (Psalm 23:1,5).*

The story of Charlotte

Charlotte ran a business in New Orleans. Her business didn't advertise on the radio or in the newspaper. Word on the street and pictures on the Internet attracted customers. Charlotte ran an escort agency. Actually, it was a prostitution business. Charlotte had been a prostitute herself. Now she was in her mid-30s and had

taken over as the head of the agency. The younger girls now worked for her, providing sex for money for sex-hungry men. Charlotte kept a large share of the money for herself, because she found customers and made arrangements and kept things safe for her girls. Charlotte's business made lots of money. She lived well in a comfortable apartment that was home for Charlotte and her son, Logan.

Logan had been a mistake. Charlotte had gotten lazy about pregnancy protection sometimes when she had been selling herself for sex. When she got pregnant, she decided to have the baby. She'd never had anyone to love, and the baby meant the world to her. Now Logan was five years old and ready to start school.

Charlotte's business kept her up through the overnight hours most nights. She slept during the morning hours, into the early afternoon. Logan stayed with a neighbor as his babysitter during those hours. Logan's babysitter, Maria, had a five-year-old boy of her own. Maria was a Christian. She knew how Charlotte made her living. She didn't quite have the courage to talk to Charlotte about it, or know what to say if she

did. But she invited Logan to come along to a summer activity program at her church in the mornings, and Charlotte said it was okay.

Logan loved the church program. He told his mom, "I want to go to school there all the time!" The church operated a school, so Charlotte filled out papers to get Logan enrolled.

Maria spoke to the school's director. "There's something you maybe should know about Logan's mom," she said, and told him the type of work Charlotte did. The school director replied, "Well, it's no different for Charlotte than for any other parent at our school. We ask all parents to take a series of Bible classes so they'll know the faith that we're teaching to their children in our school. If Charlotte agrees to do that, her son is as welcome in our school as anyone else."

Charlotte did agree. She began classes with the pastor's assistant, Stephen. Once a week, Stephen met with Charlotte in the afternoon. He taught Charlotte about God and about how God created the world and the first people. He explained how some of the angels God had created rebelled against him and became

devils, and how Satan, the leader of the evil angels, tempted the first man and woman away from God. Stephen said, “After the first people disobeyed God, all people have been stuck in sin ever since.” He warned that sin is a real problem – and not just for our lives with one another as human beings.

Stephen told Charlotte, “Sin has created a horrible separation between us and God. The Bible tells it like it is: ‘Your sins have separated you from your God. They have caused him to turn his face away from you. So he won’t listen to you’ (Isaiah 59:2). And our separation from God is a permanent thing, a deadly thing. ‘People will die because of their own sins’ (Ezekiel 18:20). ‘When you sin, the pay you get is death’ (Romans 6:23). Because we are sinners and live in sinful ways, we will die forever, be in hell forever. Jesus warned us about the way we use our bodies to commit sins. He said, ‘If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It would be better for you to enter the kingdom of heaven with only one hand or one foot than to go into hell with two hands and two feet. In hell the fire burns forever’ (Matthew 18:8). We can’t actually help our situation by cutting off body parts. But

Jesus' words were meant to show us just how serious a problem sin is."

Charlotte was uncomfortable with these lessons from the Bible, with all the harsh words of God's law. The 10 Commandments bothered her. She knew she was a sinner. But she didn't like to think about it. She told herself she was just making money in the best way she knew how, to support herself and her son. She didn't like the fact that God was judging her life when the world seemed such an unfair place and God never seemed like he was there to help her anyway.

As uncomfortable as she was, Charlotte continued to meet with Stephen for Bible lessons. Sometimes she argued. Sometimes she got upset. But she kept thinking about these things.

Once Stephen saw that Charlotte was thinking seriously about sin, he shifted his message. "You know, Charlotte, the Bible isn't all commandments and condemnation. I've started there because that's where the story starts – with our sins against God. But there's much more to the story than that. There's good news

for us too – amazing good news. Jesus warned us about the dangers of our sins, yes. But Jesus mostly came to do something about our sins, to fix the mess we have made for ourselves. The Bible says, ‘Those who do what is sinful belong to the devil. They are just like him. ... But the Son of God came to destroy the devil’s work’ (1 John 3:8). The damage the devil had done was undone by Jesus. Jesus is God along with the Father in heaven and the Holy Spirit. But he became human. He became one of us to rescue us. God says that people ‘have bodies made out of flesh and blood. So Jesus became human like them in order to die for them. By doing that, he could destroy the one who rules over the kingdom of death. I’m talking about the devil. Jesus could set people free who were afraid of death. All their lives they were held as slaves by that fear’” (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Charlotte looked at Stephen like had seen into her soul. “For a long time in my life,” she admitted, “I wanted to die. But I was too scared of dying to actually end my life.” She told Stephen more of her story: “I had run away from home as a girl because home was awful, but life on the streets was worse. I survived, but

I hated what I was doing. I wanted to die but couldn't. I wanted to live but it wasn't really a life. I grew numb to the kind of life I was living. I just made it about the money. Then Logan came along. Now I want to make a decent life for him, an actual life for both of us."

"The only actual life there is," Stephen said, "is life that God gives us. Jesus said, 'Anyone who hears my word and believes ... has crossed over from death to life' (John 5:24). Having our lives connected to Jesus is the one thing that matters, the one thing that is needed, as Jesus put it (Luke 10:42).

"One time Jesus was talking to a woman who had been with many men in her life. She was drawing water from the well in the center of her city at a time of day when no one else was around because she was seen by her society as an awful sinner. But Jesus 'came to look for the lost and save them' (Luke 19:10). Jesus went to the well to find her there that day. He said to that woman: 'All who drink this water will be thirsty again. But anyone who drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty. In fact, the water I give him will become a spring of water in him. It will flow up into eternal life' (John

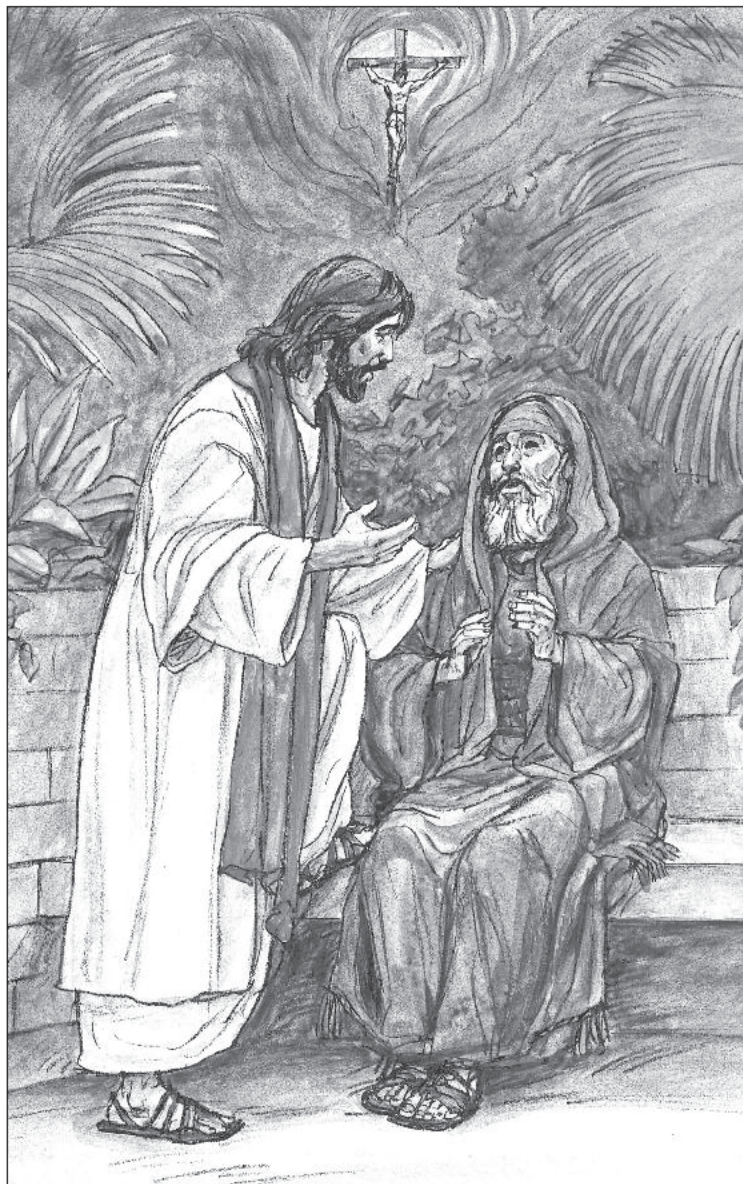


Jesus speaks to the woman at the well.

4:13-14). The water Jesus gives is his word, the good news of his forgiveness of sins. Charlotte, Jesus is offering you that living water. He forgives your sins and gives you a new life, heading in a different direction. Where you've been trying to feed and sustain your life in other ways, Jesus said he is really what you need to be alive. He said, 'I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Everyone who eats some of this bread will live forever' (John 6:51). Charlotte, what I've been bringing you in our Bible lessons is really the bread of life from Jesus. His promises to you are like the best meal you've ever had in your life. Not a meal you had to get for yourself somehow. Not something where you had to sell your body or anybody's body to get money to have food on your table or a roof over your head. Jesus promises you he will take care of your life now and forever, purely because he loves you."

"I have a hard time believing God could love me," Charlotte said.

Stephen answered, again quoting from the Bible, "But here is how God has shown his love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. The blood of Christ has made us



Jesus speaks to Nicodemus.

right with God” (Romans 5:8-9). Jesus came to save everybody, Charlotte—including prostitutes. There’s a saying in the Bible – a saying that the Bible says all of us can say with confidence: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And I am the worst sinner of all’ (1 Timothy 1:15). So even if you feel like you are the worst sinner of all, God does love you and forgives you. ‘Even though your sins are bright red, they will be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18).

Stephen continued, “Let me share one of my favorite Bible verses with you, Psalm 23 verse 5. It’s a prayer talking to the Lord, and says, ‘You prepare a feast for me right in front of my enemies. You pour oil on my head. My cup runs over.’ Our enemies are all the devils and even people in this world that want to tempt us in all the wrong directions. We think we need to go along with them in order to get something out of life. But the opposite is actually true. All those influences suck the life out of us. Jesus is the one who really gives us what we need. When we have Jesus, it’s like he feeds us fully and pours the best perfumed oil over us and treats us like royalty – like members of a king’s family. Because when Jesus makes us his

sisters and brothers, we are sisters and brothers of a king – “the greatest King of all and the most powerful Lord of all” (Revelation 19:16).

Tears flowed from Charlotte’s eyes. “Can I really be part of Jesus’ family? Can I really become a member of your church? And can Logan really come to the Christian school?”

“Yes, Charlotte,” Stephen said. “But I’ll say to you what Jesus said to a woman who had been ‘caught having sex with a man who was not her husband’ (John 8:4). Jesus forgave her and protected her against those who wanted to punish her. But he also said to her, ‘Go now and leave your life of sin’ (John 8:11). Charlotte, you have to walk away from the prostitution business. We’ll help you find a proper job.”

Charlotte was scared. Her world had been full of criminal people that would not let her go easily. But she did it. She left the world of prostitution. She became a member of the church. And Logan went to the church school and began learning the Bible too.

After school one day Logan came home and said, “Mommy, mommy! I learned a new song at school today! Do you want to hear it?”

“Of course!”

Logan sang:

*Jesus loves me! He who died
Heaven's gate to open wide;
He will wash away my sin,
Let his little child come in.*

“That’s right, my child,” Charlotte said. “Jesus does take away our sins. And he lets us into his family.” And she hugged her son happily.

The lesson: The LORD gives us a new life

David’s psalm tells us that the LORD is our shepherd, who prepares a feast of good things for us, right in front of our enemies.

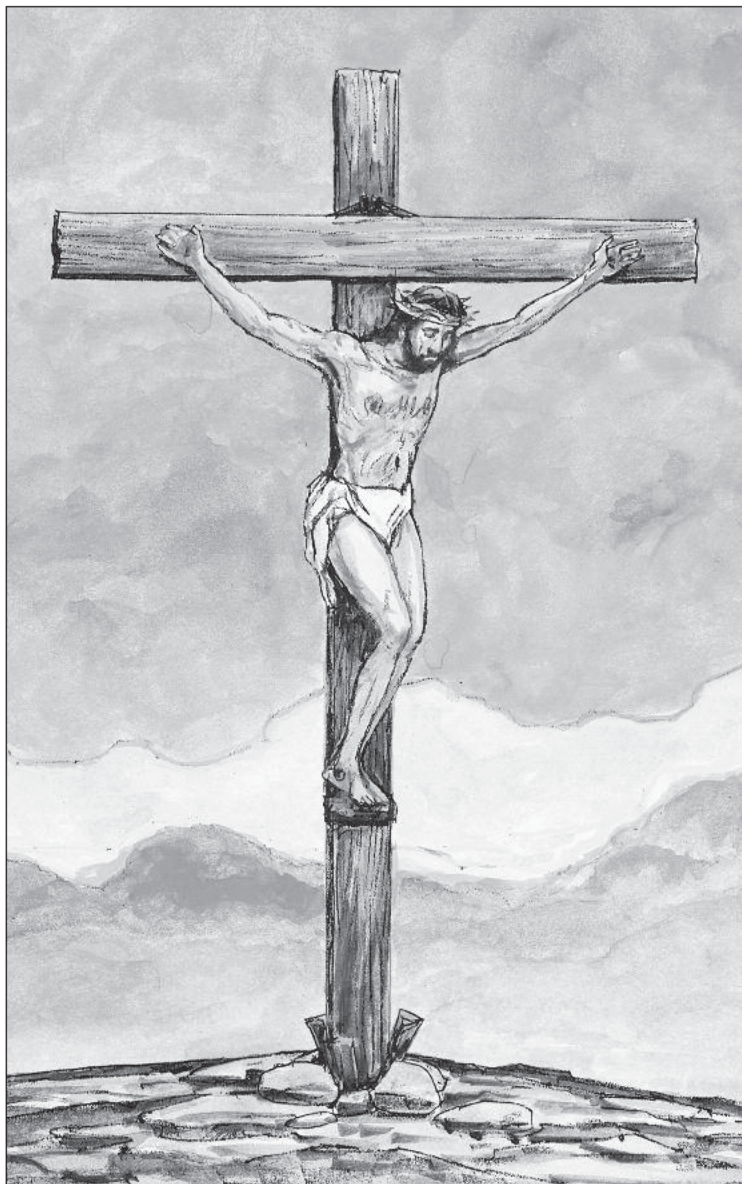
If we were sheep, our enemies would be snakes and wolves and other wild animals. A good shepherd would protect us from those dangers while leading us to places where we could eat and drink peacefully.

If we were sheep, we also would be our own worst enemies. Sheep tend to wander off and get themselves in trouble. A good shepherd has to save sheep from the harm they cause to themselves. A good shepherd rescues his sheep even when they have wandered very far away, because he cares for them.

We “are like sheep,” the Bible says. “We have wandered away from God. All of us have turned to our own way. And the LORD has placed on his servant the sins of all of us” (Isaiah 53:6). When we were deep in our sins, Jesus came to save us.

Enemies of our life with God are all around us too. The Bible tells us, “Your enemy the devil is like a roaring lion. He prowls around looking for someone to chew up and swallow” (1 Peter 5:8). But Jesus keeps us safe from enemies like the devil and the death that the devil brings. Jesus “has given us a new birth and a hope that is alive” (1 Peter 1:3). Through faith in Jesus we “are kept safe by God’s power” (1 Peter 1:5).

Not everyone’s life looks like it is as far away from God and full of danger as Charlotte’s life



God made a plan to save us.

was. But the reality is that every person is just as lost and on the road to death until we are rescued and turned around by Jesus. When Jesus comes into our lives, he gives us a whole new life. We were “children of the devil” (1 John 3:10), but through Jesus we become children of God. We were enemies of God, but God “brought us back to himself through Christ’s death on the cross” (2 Corinthians 5:18).

And when God brings us back to himself, he pours his love into our lives in ways that overflow with blessings. Psalm 23 describes our blessings from God in these words, “You pour oil on my head. My cup runs over.” Other places in the Bible use similar pictures, describing our place with God as a fabulous feast where we could never go hungry or thirsty, because we have God’s love. “The best and richest foods and the finest aged wines will be served. ... The LORD will destroy the gloom that is spread over everyone. He will swallow up death forever. The Lord and King will wipe away the tears from everyone’s face. He will remove the shame of his people” (Isaiah 25:6-8).

Charlotte had her life turned around by the saving grace of Jesus. Her cup of blessings overflowed, even though her life had been one full of sin. She still had sin in her life after she came to faith and joined the church, but she found her safety day by day in Jesus.

God has the same turnaround in mind for all of us. "God our Savior ... wants everyone to be saved. He wants them to come to know the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3-4). He wants to rescue us from our enemies and prepare a new feast for us, a new way of life for us. In our new way of life, we get our strength from Jesus and his word.

Chapter Five Test

1. Sin has created a horrible _____ between us and God. Our sins have caused him to turn his _____ away from us so he won't _____ to us.
2. Jesus said, "It would be better for you to enter the kingdom of _____ with only one hand or one foot than to go into _____ with two hands and two feet."
3. Those who do what is sinful belong to the _____. They are just like him. ... But the Son of God came to _____ the _____ work.
4. Anyone who hears Jesus' word and believes has crossed over from _____ to _____. Having our lives connected to _____ is the one thing that matters.
5. Jesus said, "Anyone who drinks the water I give him will never be _____." The water Jesus gives is his _____, the _____ of his forgiveness of sins.

6. Here is how God has shown his _____
for us. While we were still _____,
Christ _____ for us. The blood of Christ
has made us _____ with God.
7. Even though your sins are bright _____,
they will be as _____ as snow.
8. David's psalm tells us that the LORD is our
_____, who prepares a _____
of good things for us, right in front of our
_____.
9. We were children of the _____, but
through Jesus we become children of
_____. We were enemies of God, but
God _____ us _____ to
himself through Christ's death on the cross.
10. God our _____ wants everyone to be
_____. He wants them to come to
know the _____.

(Check your answers on page 123)



The rich man and Lazarus the beggar.



Chapter 6

The LORD leads me to life that lasts forever

*The LORD is my shepherd ...
I am sure that your goodness and love
will follow me all the days of my life.
And I will live in the house of the LORD forever.
(Psalm 23:1,6).*

The story of Larry

Larry struggled in school. He had a hard time remembering things. His writing wasn't so good. He was very much afraid of public speaking. He passed all his classes in high school, but his grades were below average.

Larry applied to the private college in Des Moines, where he lived. He also applied to the state university that was close by. But his grades and test scores weren't strong enough for either school. He probably could not have afforded tuition anyway. Larry's parents were in poor health and did not have great jobs. They struggled to make ends meet.

Larry ended up at the community college, where classes were cheaper. He got a two-year degree which helped him get a job with a heating and air conditioning company. That went well for a while, but during a slump in the nation's economy, the company went out of business. Larry found himself out of work. He had a series of odd jobs over the next few years. Most were temporary or seasonal positions. Finally, he landed a full-time job at the local meat-packing plant. The work was a chore, but the pay was good. Larry was able to save up for the down payment on a house.

Larry never got married. He wasn't the kind of man most women found attractive, and he was awkward and shy about talking to people. He lived alone in the small house he had bought ... until his father died. Then his mother came

to live with him, and Larry cared for her. A year or so later his mother also died. So now, in his forties, Larry was alone and barely keeping ahead of house payments and medical bills that he had taken on for his mother in her last months.

Then the meat-packing plant got new owners. The new owners had new ideas on how to run the plant. They fired a large number of the full-time workers and hired people for part-time and temporary positions instead. The new bosses were great at cutting costs to the company—but this also cost people like Larry their jobs and security. Larry had no success finding another solid job. He collected unemployment checks for as long as he could, but eventually that money ran out.

Larry lost his house. He couldn't make the monthly payments anymore. He rented a small apartment, but soon couldn't even afford that. Larry was now 50 years old and homeless. He found a sheltered spot under a railroad bridge where he set up camp for himself. He wondered what he would do when winter came.

An old stray dog kept coming around Larry's campsite. Though he didn't have much food, Larry always shared some with the dog, whom he decided to call Rufus. Larry was glad to have the little bit of companionship that Rufus provided. It was about all he had left.

Larry did have one other thing left—something which he'd had with him through all the years, in good times or bad. Larry had his Bible. It was nearly worn out from daily use over the years. Larry treasured the book and kept it wrapped in plastic when not using it, to keep it from getting wet or damaged.

Larry read a chapter in the Bible every day. Lately he'd been reading several chapters a day. He marked verses that really grabbed his heart. He held onto God's promises with all his heart. He believed the Bible's promises that God was watching over him no matter how life looked. He knew God was preparing a place in heaven for him and for all those who trust in Jesus.

Sometimes Larry would flip through his Bible and reread favorite verses that he had marked, verses like these ...

- “‘I know the plans I have for you,’ announces the Lord. ... ‘I want you to enjoy success. I do not plan to harm you. I will give you hope for the years to come’” (Jeremiah 29:11).
- “Come to me, all of you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest. Become my servants and learn from me. I am gentle and free of pride. You will find rest for your souls. Serving me is easy, and my load is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).
- “The Lord is the God who lives forever. ... He gives strength to those who are tired. He gives power to those who are weak. Even young people become worn out and get tired. Even the best of them trip and fall. But those who trust in the Lord will receive new strength. ... They will run and not get tired. They will walk and not grow weak” (Isaiah 40:28-31).
- “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him. ... Who can separate us from Christ's love? Can trouble or hard times or harm or hunger? Can nakedness or danger or war? ... No! In all these things we will do even more than win!

We owe it all to Christ, who has loved us. I am absolutely sure that not even death or life can separate us from God's love. Not even angels or demons, the present or the future, or any powers can do that. Not even the highest places or the lowest, or anything else in all creation can do that. Nothing at all can ever separate us from God's love because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done" (Romans 8:28-39).

- "Do not let your hearts be troubled," Jesus said. "Trust in God. Trust in me also. There are many rooms in my Father's house. If this were not true, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. If I go and do that, I will come back. And I will take you to be with me. Then you will also be where I am" (John 14:1-3).

Larry longed to go and live with Jesus in the Father's house in heaven. Life on earth was hard.

Winter came in central Iowa, and Larry hadn't found steady work or a place to live. He slept in homeless shelters at night, but would go back

to his campsite during the day to check on Rufus and bring him food that he collected from garbage cans. Larry had built a doghouse for Rufus out of stones and old bricks, lining it with torn blankets.

One afternoon, Larry brought Rufus some steak bones he'd found in the trash behind a restaurant. The temperature that day was in the low 40s, so Larry spent the afternoon with Rufus. While the dog chewed happily on the steak bones, Larry sat reading his Bible and praying for the Lord to see him through life, no matter how hard things got. Rufus snuggled up next to Larry. Larry was tired and fell asleep. As night fell, a cold front blew harsh winds into Des Moines. Temperatures dropped into single digits. Rufus crawled into his doghouse to get out of the wind. Larry didn't wake up. He froze to death that night.

The Lord whom Larry loved had not abandoned him. Larry had prayed for the Lord to see him through life, and that's just what Jesus did. Jesus carried Larry through all the days of his life, holding him extra close on the hardest days. And he carried Larry on into eternal life when life had worn him out.

Larry's most favorite Bible verse of all was Psalm 23:6 - "I am sure that your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. And I will live in the house of the LORD forever." Surely God's goodness and love had been with Larry every step of the way. And now he is living in the heavenly Father's house. Never again will Larry be homeless. He is forever at home with Jesus.

The lesson: The LORD leads us to life that lasts forever

Larry's story may seem an unhappy one. But the way things seem and the way things really are often are not the same. Larry had a rough life, in which mostly bad things seemed to happen to him. But God was always at his side. His faith always was kept alive by God's Spirit through the promises in the Bible. So Larry truly was blessed, because he had the riches of God in his heart. Larry's faith was like that of a man from long ago named Habakkuk, who said, "The vines might not produce any grapes. The olive crop might fail. The fields might not produce any food. There might not be any sheep in the pens. There might not be any

cattle in the barns. But I will still be glad because of what the Lord has done. God my Savior fills me with joy. The Lord and King gives me strength” (Habakkuk 3:17-19). Or another believer in God, named Paul, said, “I have learned to be content no matter what happens to me. I know what it’s like not to have what I need. I also know what it’s like to have more than I need. I have learned the secret of being content no matter what happens. I am content whether I am well fed or hungry. I am content whether I have more than enough or not enough. I can do everything by the power of Christ. He gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13).

Larry’s story also was much like a story Jesus told about a man named Lazarus. “Lazarus was a beggar. His body was covered with sores” (Luke 16:20). It looked like Lazarus’ life was miserable. He looked especially poor and forsaken because the spot where he sat to beg for food was at the gate outside a very fancy house. In the fancy house “there was a rich man. He was dressed in purple cloth and fine linen. He lived an easy life every day” (Luke 16:19). The contrast was clear. The rich man’s life was full of the best things this world has to

offer. Lazarus had almost nothing on earth that he could call his own—except maybe the stray dogs who came and licked his sores (Luke 16:20). But Lazarus had something more valuable, something that the rich man didn't care about. Lazarus had faith in the promises of God. When Lazarus died, he was carried by angels to heaven. When the rich man died, he ended up in hell. As Jesus told the story, the rich man cried out from hell for Lazarus to come down from heaven to give him a drop of water to ease his pain and suffering. But it was too late for that. So the rich man begged for Lazarus to be sent back to earth to warn the rich man's brothers. But the answer came from heaven: "They do not listen to Moses and the Prophets [the words of the Bible]. So they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

The word of God in the Bible is really all we need to get through life. Jesus once said, "Man doesn't live only on bread. He also lives on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4).

David's psalm, Psalm 23, promises us that God's goodness and love will follow us all the

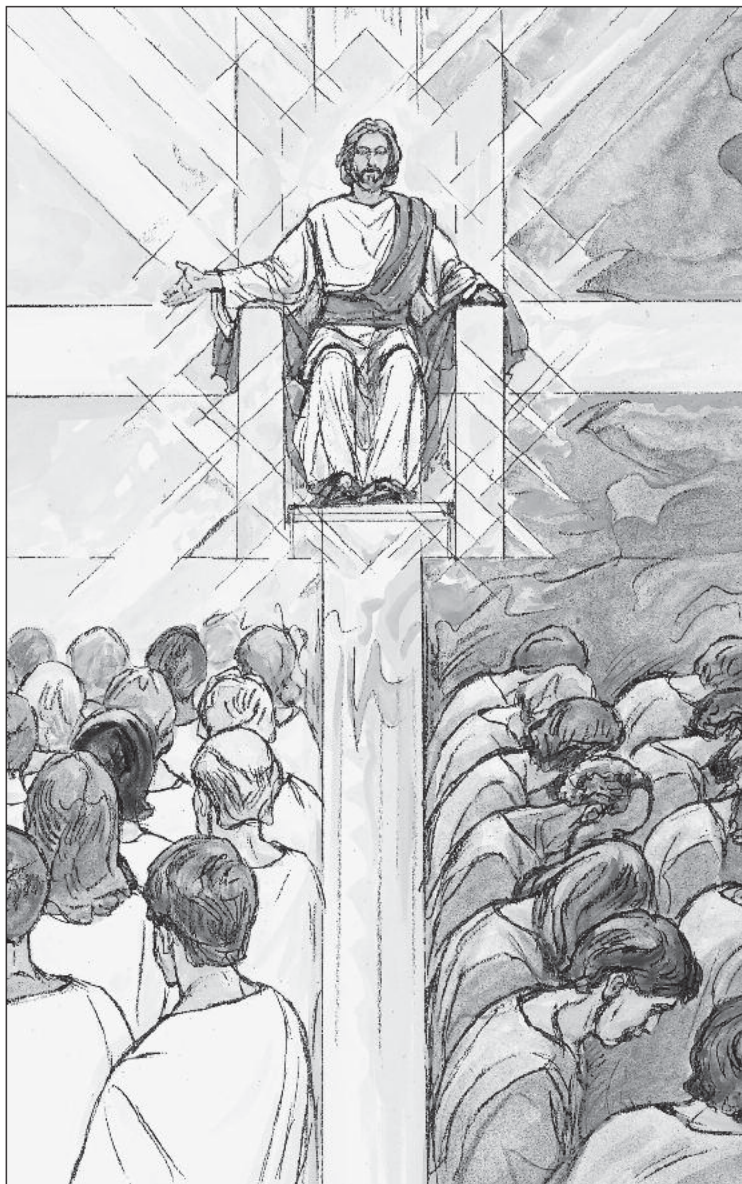
days of our lives. Don't think of that promise of "goodness and love" in purely material terms. If we think that way, we'll think that God loves us when we have a good job and plenty of money, but that if we have hard times God has stopped loving us. That isn't how it is. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). God's love for us in Jesus is constant. He loves us just as much one day as the next. And the best gifts of his love are not things of this earth, but the things of heaven.

Here especially is what the Bible promises us. (This is a section Larry had marked in his Bible and he'd read it again and again.)

"In his great mercy God has given us a new birth and a hope that is alive. ... It is a gift that can never be destroyed. It can never spoil or even fade away. It is kept in heaven for you. Through faith you are kept safe by God's power. Your salvation is going to be completed. ... Because you know this, you have great joy. You have joy even though you may have had to suffer for a little while. You may have had to suffer sadness in all kinds of trouble. Your troubles have come in order to prove that your faith is real. It is

worth more than gold. Gold can pass away even though fire has made it pure. Your faith is meant to bring praise, honor and glory to God. That will happen when Jesus Christ returns. Even though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, you believe in him. You are filled with a glorious joy that can't be put into words. You are receiving the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:3-9).

As we live our lives, whether things are easy or difficult for us on this earth, we know that God the "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. Those blessings come from the heavenly world. They belong to us because we belong to Christ" (Ephesians 1:3). God fills our lives with goodness and love every day in the form of spiritual blessings—faith, hope, love, forgiveness, truth, joy. Those spiritual treasures from God make us rich, no matter what our physical circumstances. Whether well fed or hungry, whether we have good health or face sickness and pain, we always know "the grace shown by our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though he was rich, he became poor" to help us (2 Corinthians 8:9). Because he became poor



The glorified and victorious Jesus promises eternal life to believers.

for us, we become rich in him. The grace of Jesus makes us rich forever, because Jesus gives us eternity. Through Jesus we “will live in the house of the LORD forever” (Psalm 23:6).

And when we do go on to the eternal place Jesus has prepared for us, God himself will be with us and will be our God. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain (Revelation 21:3-4).

Yes indeed, the LORD is our shepherd. He guides us throughout our lives, even when we “walk through the darkest valley” (Psalm 23:4). He takes us on to a life that never ends—“in the house of the LORD forever” (Psalm 23:6). We cling to our Lord’s promises always.

Chapter Six Test

1. The Lord is the God who lives forever. He gives _____ to those who are tired. He gives power to those who are _____. Those who trust in the _____ will receive new _____.
2. We know that in all things God works for the _____ of those who _____ him.
3. Nothing can separate us from Christ's love – not trouble or _____ times or harm or hunger, not nakedness or _____ or war. In all these things we will do even more than _____ because _____ has loved us.
4. Jesus said, “_____ in God. _____ in me also. There are many _____ in my Father's _____. I am going there to prepare a place for you.”
5. The Lord whom Larry loved had not abandoned him. _____ carried Larry through all the days of his life, holding him extra close on the hardest days. And he carried Larry on into _____ _____ when life had worn him out.

6. A believer named Paul said, "I have learned the secret of being _____ no matter what happens. I am _____ whether I am well fed or _____. I can do _____ by the power of _____. He gives me strength."
7. Jesus told a story of a man named _____ who was a beggar. His life looked miserable, but when he died _____ carried him to _____.
8. People don't live only on _____. We also live on every _____ that comes from the _____ of God.
9. God's _____ for us in Jesus is _____. He _____ us just as much one day as the next.
10. When we go to the eternal place Jesus has prepared for us, God will wipe away every _____ from our eyes. There will be no more _____ or _____. There will be no more crying or _____.

(Check your answers on page 123)



Conclusion

In this small book, we've looked at stories about people getting through their lives with the help of the Lord. Let's take a little time here on these final pages to review the lessons we've learned from David's poem, Psalm 23. The psalm teaches us about how the Lord acts as the shepherd who watches over our lives. Let's walk through the promises of the psalm again, one line at a time.

Psalm 23:1 - The LORD is my shepherd. He gives me everything I need.

The Lord promises to provide for us. We won't have empty lives. We won't be abandoned or alone. God promises to give us everything we need. That doesn't mean he'll give us everything we might desire in this world. The Lord also tells us, "Do not love the world or anything in it. If you love the world, love for the Father is not in you" (1 John 2:15). What we need more than anything else is a relationship with God as our Father.

We saw an example of God giving everything they needed to Jake and Sally. It wasn't just about Jake getting his job back and having food on the table for the family. Above all it was about their young family getting connected to God and to other people in God's family.

There may be days or weeks or even years in our lives when we face hunger or hard times. But when we know that the LORD is our shepherd, we always have all that our hearts need. We keep trusting God to get us through difficult times. He will carry us forward to better places.

Psalm 23:2 - He lets me lie down in fields of green grass. He leads me beside quiet waters.

What are the better places—the green pastures and quiet waters—where God makes us comfortable? They are the places where God's true words give rest to our souls. When God leads us to people and churches who share his good news with us, we find peace. The good news is that Jesus is our Savior completely. There are not a

bunch of requirements we must meet in order for God to love us. He has already shown his love to us by sending Jesus to us.

Through the story of Tammy Jo, we learned that “green grass” and “quiet waters” are waiting for us in Jesus’ words. And we learned not to be confused by people who claim to speak words from God but don’t give us the comfort Jesus gives us.

When we are afraid, Jesus’ words calm our fears. When we are lonely, Jesus’ words connect us to his love and the love of other Christians. When we are hurting, Jesus’ words promise us that we will have life that never ends with him, in a place where “there will be no more death or sadness ... no more crying or pain” (Revelation 21:4). So we keep running back to the words of Jesus for the “living water” that our spirits need to drink. By his promises, the LORD gives us peace.

**Psalm 23:3 - He gives me new strength.
He guides me in the right paths for the
honor of his name.**

We followed the story of DeShawn, a young man whose life was headed for trouble. But then he was lifted up and given a better purpose. He turned away from a life of crime and was given new life in the Lord.

The Lord leads all of us on paths like that. He is always seeking to lift us up from paths in which we will do ourselves harm. He takes us by the hand and leads us closer to himself. God's Spirit leads us to the truth in Jesus. In him we find forgiveness for all our crimes and sins. We are put on a path toward heaven.

And since God has put us on a path to heaven in Jesus, that changes the direction of our footsteps here on earth too. We walk in ways that are pleasing to him. And when we stumble and fall, he picks us up to make us right with him again.

In the LORD we renew our strength. The LORD lifts us up and guides us in right paths.

Psalm 23:4 - Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid. You are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff comfort me.

Life is full of many scary moments. The story of Tom and Tina and their family on a lonely, barren road was just one example. There can be many things in life that bring fear to our hearts. A soldier may face the horrors of war. A relative or friend may be told, "You have cancer." Storms or other disasters may threaten our safety.

But no matter where we are in life, no matter how dark or terrible it is, God is with us. Wherever we go, his hand is always there to guide us (Psalm 139:10). He is constantly holding us close and caring for us. We don't see him, and sometimes we wonder if he's there. But we have his promise that he is at our side at all times. And God never breaks a promise that he makes to us.

In any and every situation, the LORD keeps us safe. Even when we reach our dying day, we have his promise that he's with us then

too. He will take us through the valley of death and bring us into eternal life on the other side.

Psalm 23:5 - You prepare a feast for me right in front of my enemies. You pour oil on my head. My cup runs over.

This book told you the story of Charlotte. In her life as a prostitute, she would have looked at people who attended church as her enemies. She would not have thought of sitting down to dinner with church folks, or becoming friends with people in a church. But really, the Christians at the church near her apartment were the friends she needed. Her actual enemies were all those engaging in lives of sin that supported her life of sin. And her biggest enemy, stirring up all the sin, was the devil himself.

The Lord turned Charlotte's life around, giving her victory over the devil and sin. He prepared a place for her in the church and a spot for her son in the church's school.

The LORD gives us all new life, just as he did for Charlotte. He pours all sorts of

blessings out on our lives. The blessings of his Spirit are “love, joy and peace ... being patient, kind and good. ... There is no law against things of that kind” (Galatians 5:22,23). Those who have been brought to Jesus “don’t want what their sinful nature loves and longs for” (Galatians 5:24). Instead, they “live by the Spirit” and keep “in step with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

Our new life with God is like having a feast prepared for us and a cup of blessing that is overflowing.

Psalm 23:6 - I am sure that your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. And I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

The last story in this book looked at the life of Larry, a man whose life was not easy. Life in this world is hard for many people. We struggle along from one day to the next. And for everyone—even for those who have easier lives—life is limited. Whether our life is long or short, easy or hard, in the end we die. And so more than anything, we need an answer to the question, “What will happen to me when I die?”

The LORD leads us to life that lasts forever. That's the most important thing. We are truly alive when we know Jesus loves us, that he lived and died for us. Jesus rose to life again after he died, and he promises the same to us. "Anyone who believes in me will live, even if he dies," Jesus said (John 11:25).

When we have Jesus' love in our life, we can truly say that goodness follows us all the days of our life. Even when some of our days are painful or sad, his love carries us through. And in the end, he carries us into heaven to be with him forever. That is the best news of all. "It is the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. He is Lord of all" (Acts 10:36).

The LORD is our shepherd. "He is our God. We are the sheep belonging to his flock. We are the people he takes good care of" (Psalm 95:7). He really does give us everything we need.



Jesus and Martha at Lazarus' grave.



Word List

A list of words you may not know

10 Commandments – ten statements from God about what he wants people to do and not to do

Abandon – leave alone

Absolutely – without question

Advertise – promote, call attention to a product or service

Afford – be able to pay for

Aged wines – a drink made of grapes, “aged wine” means very good wine

Air conditioning company – a business that sells and fixes equipment to make a building cooler

Amazing – surprising

Angels – good spirits who serve God and believers

Applications – a written request to be accepted into a school or a place of employment

Attitude – a way of thinking and acting

Awkward – clumsy, lacking skill

Basketball – a game played between two teams in which a goal is scored by throwing a ball through a netted hoop

Beggar – someone who lives by asking for money or food

Believer – someone who trusts in God

Blessing – something from God that makes us happy

Blurt out – speak suddenly without thinking first

Booze – alcohol, a drink

Bully – use strength or power to scare or harm someone who is weaker

Bunch – many

Business – a person's regular job, profession or trade

Go out of business – to close a business

Cautious nature – someone who is very careful about many things

Chaplain – a person who brings the word of God to people in prison or the military

Circumstance – situation a person is in

Community college – a cheaper college that offers two years of training

Companionship – a feeling of friendship

Condemn – find guilty

Confidence – being sure of something

Congested – crowded

Connect – join

Constant – all the time

Contrast – being very different from something else

Convince – persuade

Couple – two or about two

Courage – bravery

Demons – evil spirits controlled by the devil

Descend – go down

Desert – 1) A sandy, dry area with very few plants, 2) leave someone

Deserve – earn

Destroy – ruin completely

Devil – a spiritual being who hates God and tries to bring people to hell

Diagnose – identify a problem, find the reason for a problem

Discourage – disappoint

Divorce – a married couple decides to end their marriage

Economy – the sum of people earning money and buying things

Effort – work

Emergency lights – lights on a police car to draw people's attention

Emphasis – stress

Encourage – cheer up

Engaging – participating in, doing

Escort – go with

Escort agency – a business that provides companions for men

Eternal – forever

Experience – something that happens to someone

Fabulous – great, wonderful

Fake -- pretend

Feast – large meal

Fired – lose or dismiss from a job

Flip through – look through a book quickly

Flunk – fail a class at school

Forgive – cancel a debt, pardon

Frighten – scare

Glorious – great, wonderful

Grace – undeserved love from God

Harsh – tough, unpleasant

Hebrew – language people in the Bible spoke before Jesus was born

Hebrews – a book of the Bible

Held her tongue – kept quiet

Hell – place where God punishes unbelievers forever

Impress – make someone respect you

Influence – something that has an effect on someone's character or behavior

Inspired – words and thoughts come from God

Juvenile detention – jail for teenagers

Liquor store – store that sells alcoholic drinks, like beer, wine, whiskey

Living bread – food for our souls

Longed to – wanted something very much

Making the rounds – go from one place to another

Marijuana dealer – someone who sells a drug that people smoke

Material terms – bodily, earthly things

Meat-packing – a business that kills animals and turns them into meat that people can buy

Mechanic – someone who fixes things like cars

Mind...wander – think about other things

Miserable – very unhappy

Moses – leader of God's people 1,500 years before Jesus was born

Mug – attack and steal

Nervousness – fearful, worried

Numb – without feeling

Operate – run something

Opportunity – chance to do something

Overflow – have more than enough

Overnight – during the night

Overwhelming – overpowering

Pastor – the leader of a church

Pastor's assistant – someone who helps the leader of a church

Patrol car – car driven by a policemen

Pattern – a usual behavior

Permanent – lasting

Physical – bodily

Pour oil – put oil on somebody's head to make the person feel better, or to show the person has a special task

Pregnancy protection – prevent a baby from being formed in a woman

Private college – a school attended by people after the age of 18, "private" means not supported by the government

Prostitution – selling sex

Protect – keep safe from harm

Provide – give, supply, take care of

Public speaking – talking about something in front of other people

Rave – yell

Raw emotions – strong feelings

Redeemer – Jesus - the one who rescued us from sin and death

Refresh – give new strength, cheer up

Relationship – a bond or link between God and those who believe in him

Renew – start again, make new

Requirement – rule

Restrain – hold back

Rod – stick

Role model – an example to follow

Salvation – saving from sin, bringing a person to heaven

Scholarships – money given to students to help them go to college or a university

Scream – yell

Security – being free from danger

Serious – thoughtful, important

Sex-hungry – want sex

Shame – dishonor

Shepherd – guide, one who takes care of sheep

Sinner – someone who disobeys God

Slump – downturn, a time when many people lose jobs

Soothe – calm

Soul – spiritual part God created in people, A soul cannot be seen and will not die

Southern Indiana – the name of a university

Spiritual – related to God

Staff – a long stick with a curved end carried in the hand to help with walking or climbing

State trooper – a kind of policeman

Struggle – use great effort, do something with difficulty, hard to deal with

Survive – continue to live even in hardship, not die

Temporary position – job for a short period of time

Temporary solution – way to solve a problem for a short period of time

Tension – fear, worry, stress

Treasure – riches, keep something carefully because it is valuable

Tuition – the cost of going to a school

Two-year degree – what a student receives after finishing community college

Ultimate – final

Uncontrollably – not possible to manage

Unemployment – not having a job

University – a large school attended by students beginning at the age of 18

Vulnerable – helpless

Ward – keep away from

Weary – tired

Wreck – ruin



Answers to Chapter Tests

Chapter One Test: (pages 20-21)

1. David, inspired, God; 2. jail, stealing; 3. LORD, shepherd, everything; 4. relationship, God; 5. 100, found; 6. Philemon, slave; 7. Jesus, forgives; 8. worry, provide; 9. money, abandon; 10. help.

Chapter Two Test: (pages 35-36)

1. good, be good; 2. good, loved, care; 3. burn in hell, sins, living right; 4. devil, hell, Jesus; 5. joy, all, Savior, peace; 6. judge, save; 7. we do, Jesus did; 8. Jesus, strength; 9. life, fullest; 10. rest, thirst, water.

Chapter Three Test: (pages 48-50)

1. strength, eagles; 2. made, saved, glory; 3. Jesus, sins, Jesus, life; 4. forgives, right; 5. name, Christ; 6. LORD, strength, right, name; 7. power, sinners, sins; 8. pit, rock, new song; 9. people, lift, right; 10. right, name, Christian.

Chapter Four Test: (pages 68-69)

1. God; 2. prayed God, safe, angels; 3. prayer, thanks; 4. guilty, laws; 5. comfort, fear; 6. darkest valley; 7. rod, staff; 8. safe, angels; 9. nothing, love; 10. die, grace, dead.

Chapter Five Test: (pages 88-89)

1. separation, face, listen; 2. heaven, hell; 3. devil, destroy, devil's; 4. death, life, Jesus; 5. thirsty, word, good news; 6. love, sinners, died, right; 7. red, white; 8. shepherd, feast, enemies; 9. devil, God, brought, back; 10. Savior, saved, truth.

Chapter Six Test: (pages 105-106)

1. strength, weak, Lord, strength; 2. good, love; 3. hard, danger, win, Christ; 4. trust, trust, rooms, house; 5. Jesus, eternal life; 6. content, content, hungry, everything, Christ; 7. Lazarus, angels, heaven; 8. bread, word, mouth; 9. love, constant, loves; 10. tear, death, sadness, pain.



Final Test

Go back through the book and review the chapter tests. The final test serves as a review of the material you learned in each chapter.

Also review the “Conclusion” section of the book. Some of the questions in the final test are based on what you read in that “Conclusion” section.

When you are finished with the final test, give it to the person who gave you this book, or mail it to the address on the back cover. Someone will check it for you. You may also ask for more study books in this series.



The Lord Cares for Me ***Final Test***

1. Psalm 23 was written by a man named _____, who was _____ by God's Spirit to write these words. This means he wrote what God led him to write.
2. Jesus told us not to _____ about what we'll eat or wear, because God will _____ for us.
3. The _____ and hell are real ... but _____ is the one who rescues us from those evils."
4. The Bible says, "God did not send his Son into the world to _____ the world. He sent his Son to _____ the world through him."
5. We don't become good in God's eyes by the things we _____, but God sees us as good because of what Jesus _____ for us.
6. We can do everything by the power of _____. He gives us _____.

7. Jesus said about us as his people, “I have come so they can have _____. I want them to have it in the _____ possible way.”
8. A verse from the Bible book of Isaiah says, “Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like _____.”
9. We can’t live good lives by our own power. On our own we are _____ who tend to sink further into our own _____.
10. In Psalm 23, David said, ““The LORD lifts me up. He gives me new strength. He guides me in the _____ paths for the honor of his _____.”
11. In Psalm 40 (another of his poems), David said, “The LORD lifted me out of the slimy _____, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a _____ and gave me a firm place to stand.”
12. Now that you are walking in right paths for the honor of Jesus’ _____, you can be someone who provides help and _____ witness to others.

13. Thinking about God can make us feel angry or _____ because we know we have broken his _____.
14. David's psalm said, "Even though I walk through the _____ valley, I will not be afraid" – because he was confident the LORD was with him.
15. David looked to the Lord and confessed, "You are with me. Your _____ and _____ comfort me."
16. Another psalm (Psalm 91) tells us: "The Lord is the one who keeps you safe. ... The Lord will command his _____ to take good care of you."
17. Nothing at all can ever separate us from God's _____ because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done.
18. The Lord is close by our side even when we die. Then, by God's _____, we will rise from the _____.
19. Sin has created a horrible _____ between us and God.

Our sins have caused him to turn his face away from us so he won't _____ to us.

20. Those who do what is sinful belong to the _____. They are just like him. ... But the Son of God came to destroy the _____ work.

21. Anyone who hears Jesus' word and believes has crossed over from death to _____.

22. Jesus said, "Anyone who drinks the water I give him will never be _____." The water Jesus gives is his word, the good _____ of his forgiveness of sins.

23. Here is how God has shown his _____ for us. While we were still _____, Christ died for us. The blood of Christ has made us right with God.

24. David's psalm tells us that the LORD is our _____, who prepares a feast of good things for us, right in front of our _____.

25. We were children of the _____, but through Jesus we become children of _____. We were enemies of God, but God brought us back to himself through Christ's death on the cross.
26. God our Savior wants everyone to be _____. He wants them to come to know the _____.
27. We know that in all things God works for the _____ of those who _____ him.
28. A believer named Paul said, "I have learned the secret of being _____ no matter what happens. I am _____ whether I am well fed or _____. I can do everything by the power of Christ. He gives me strength."
29. People don't live only on bread. We also live on every _____ that comes from the _____ of God.
30. When we go to the eternal place Jesus has prepared for us, God will wipe away every _____ from our eyes. There will be no

more death or _____. There will be
no more crying or _____.

31. Extra credit question:

If you would like to share a story of how
the Lord has been your shepherd,
watching over your life, you may do so in
the space below.

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