

STUDY 5. NOTES FOR LEADERS

1. **Share with the group a photo of you in earlier times.**
What has changed for you since this photo was taken? How have you changed?
Has the world changed?
2. **Which of the following have brought the most change to your life?**
Health Marriage Parenthood Work Study
3. **What special needs would these people have?**
 - a. A young woman who loves her job has become pregnant.
 - b. A policeman is about to retire.
 - c. A couple approaching middle age is about to have their last child leave home.
 - d. An elderly man discovers that his wife has Alzheimer's disease.
 - e. An accountant discovers that the computer package with which he is familiar is about to be ditched by his firm.
4. **Read Psalm 23.**
 - a. Which verses speak of times of prosperity?
 - b. Which verses speak of inner peace?
 - c. Which verses speak of danger?
 - d. Which verses speak of confidence and assurance?
 - e. What does the "shepherd" do for his sheep?
 - f. Which is the verse that you need to hear most right now?

The testimony of the famous "Shepherd Psalm" is that God is constant regardless of the changes that go on in life. Note that the psalm has both an individual emphasis and corporate - God does not only care for the nation of Israel but for the individual as well. Note that the shepherd leads, restores, protects, provides and anoints.

"Various metaphors are used throughout the Old Testament to express the covenant relationship between God and his people, and one of the most beautiful and meaningful is that of the shepherd and his sheep. The appropriateness of this figure is at once obvious when it is remembered that Israel was a semi-nomadic people. The patriarchs had flocks and herds. God called Moses from keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, to become the shepherd who would lead his people out of bondage. David, the shepherd lad, became the shepherd king of Israel (2 Sam. 5:2, 7:7, Ps. 78:70-72), a man after God's own heart. All the kings of God's people were supposed to be shepherds, and the Messianic king of the future, of whom David was a type, was to be the shepherd par excellence (Ezek. 34:23).

God is often referred to directly or indirectly as the shepherd of Israel (74:1, 77:20, 78:52, 70-72, 70:13, 80:1, Micah 7:14) but infrequently as the shepherd of an individual (Gen 48:15). This Psalm is therefore all the more remarkable for its emphasis upon God's care of an individual sheep. Sometimes the most valuable gifts are wrapped in the smallest packages. The little word "my" is not even a whole word in Hebrew; it is only a suffix on the word "shepherd"- but what an important suffix! To say "The Lord is my shepherd" is to say, "The Lord is my pastor" for "pastor" is simply the Latin word for "shepherd." To say, "The Lord is my shepherd" is also to say, "I shall not want." This does not mean that I shall have everything I desire, but that I shall not lack that which the Shepherd knows I need... The shepherd is not only guide and provider, he is also comforter. "The valley of the shadow of death" should probably be rendered "the valley of deep gloom." The shepherd must often lead his sheep through deep and dark ravines where wild beasts and robbers may lurk to pounce upon the sheep. But the presence of the shepherd banishes fear. With his rod the shepherd can ward off an attacker and with his staff rescue a sheep that has fallen in the pit... In some of life's hard experiences friends and loved ones go with us a long way, but only the Heavenly Pastor can go all the way. This is notably true when we pass through the experience of physical death. The presence of the Shepherd banishes fear." A.B. Rhodes, Psalms, SCM: London, 1960, p.51

5. What big decisions have you made about change and life in recent times?

- a. What caused you to make those decisions? (Life stage? Health? Tragedy? Boredom? Loneliness? Something else?)
 - b. How much control did you have in the decisions?
 - c. How did you come to your decisions? (Talking to friends? Took a “punt”? Weighed up the “pros and cons”? Something else?)
6. **Read Proverbs 3:5-6**
- a. Would it have been possible to have involved God in the big decisions? If so, how?
 - b. Have you ever experienced the guidance of God when you have had to make a life changing decision?
7. **Read Isaiah 43:1-3.**
- a. Does any one in the group know of the circumstances behind this great passage of Scripture?
 - b. What words describe the relationship of Israel and God?
 - c. What words imply threat and obstacles?
- This part of Isaiah is known as Deutero Isaiah. Biblical scholars feel that it was written during the exile rather than before the exile, (as is the case with the first 39 chapters). This was the time when Israel was about to be restored to its homeland, and many of the recipients of the message would have been born in captivity. The promise in this oracle is that God would accompany them during the time of restoration. The rivers and waters are references to the journey, and along with the fire, also refer to the extremes of dangers that could afflict God's people. The message of this oracle is similar to that of the Shepherd Psalm but is more clearly addressing the nation of Israel rather than just the individual.*
8.
 - a. What is the next significant change that you are facing?
 - b. Are you looking forward to it with anticipation or a feeling of dread?
 9. How would you rank from 1 (greatest) to 10 (least) the following snippets of advice for people facing change? Why did you choose that ranking?
 - a. Anticipate the change and plan for it.
 - b. Appreciate that it is difficult to turn the clock back.
 - c. Consider all the options and talk to people who have been through the change.
 - d. Ask God to guide you about the various options.
 - e. Appreciate that God goes through the change with you.
 - f. Ask God how you can grow through the change.
 - g. Have a clear focus on your purposes for the next stage of life.
 - h. Know that it is normal to experience some grief about leaving some aspects of life behind.
 - i. Minimise the number of changes that are going to occur at the same time. Plan some continuity.
 - j. Appreciate that the best is yet to be.