



Welcome to an exciting adventure!

Life is filled with stress. This is not a secret. We feel the pressure of family life and work demands. We must deal with health issues and financial difficulties. We struggle with our own internal fears. Jesus said that He came so that we can experience life to the full (John 10:10). But how to experience that life often seems like a secret we haven't discovered.

The good news is that God wants to pour His supernatural life into your life. Better still, God's ways for filling your life are not secrets. King David certainly knew these ways. In the Psalms, David proclaims the joy, peace, strength, courage, confidence and fresh starts God has filled his life with. David also honestly shares the price he paid when he stopped following God's ways.

Is it possible for us to learn these ways and come to know God as personally and deeply as David knew God? Yes! In Psalm 23, David gives us an incredible picture of what following the ways God will look and feel like. The imagery of Psalm 23 is so rich it has stood the test of time and made this Psalm the most well-known passage in the Bible.

In StressBusters, you are going to spend 40 days immersed in Psalm 23. You will be learning the ways that Jesus, our Shepherd, uses to fill your life to the full. These ways will bust your stress and replace it with peace, balance, success, courage and confidence. Follow these ways and you will develop a life that overflows with God's goodness and love. The next 40 days will be an exciting adventure as you get to know the Shepherd as well as David knew him.

May your cup overflow,
Phil and Linda Sommerville

Now may the adventure begin...

How to get the most out of StressBusters

This book is designed so that you can spend time with God each day. Each day's devotion has Scripture for you to read and a simple study method that will help you hear what God is saying to you through His word. Jesus said that His sheep hear his voice and follow Him (John 10). If you want to learn to follow the Shepherd, it will not be enough to just read the stories. You need to hear Jesus' voice speaking to you from the Bible.

Next, there is also a devotional reading each day that shares real life stories that will help you connect the lessons of this ancient Psalm to your life.

Finally, each day's devotion has a section called "Follow the Shepherd." This section offers instruction on how to practice the ways that God uses to fill your life. Many of these ways have been practiced by Christians for centuries. If you want to get the most out of this book and begin to experience God as David experienced him, be sure to try these practices.

StressBusters was written as part of a larger, all-church spiritual growth experience that includes weekly sermons and small group studies. If you are able to do this study with your church or a small group it can add even more to your experience. You can find out to get the small group studies and sermons at www.ALIVE365.org.



Day 1: It Helps to Know Your Destination

by Phil Sommerville

Read Psalm 23

When I told a friend that I was writing a book on Psalm 23, he asked, “Is that the one about the valley of the shadow of death?” Psalm 23 is famous for its “shadow of death” verse. It has been read at every funeral I’ve ever attended because it speaks so powerfully to our human experience. Unfortunately, though, people have come to associate this Psalm with dying when it is in fact about living. This Psalm is about a way of life that decreases stress and increases joy, that decreases fear and increases confidence.

“In Psalm 23 David is showing us the ways of God, ways that allow us to know God as closely as he knew God.”

Even though Psalm 23 was written thousands of years ago it is still beloved today because David has vividly described the core fears, joys, and deep desires of being human. David’s description of God is also powerful. David describes God as someone he knows personally in a close knit relationship. Now, David writes about his experiences. He shares with us how life with

God will fulfill our deepest desires and overcome our greatest fears. Better yet, David gives us trustworthy directions on how we can experience that kind of life.

After college, I worked for a bicycle touring company. My first week on the job I was given the task of shepherding a group of six riders along the back roads of Indiana as part of a weekend tour to enjoy the fall colors. I didn’t know my destination but was told that if I followed the signs painted on the road I would have no problems. It turned out that there was more than one set of signs painted on the road. I chose the wrong set and spent hours going the wrong way.

I was lost, had no idea where I was supposed to go, and six people were wondering how they got stuck with “Bozo” as their guide. After miles of extra riding and long after dark, we finally found our destination. I preferred to look at the day as an adventure. My group described it differently. I have never since gone on a trip without knowing how to get to my destination.

What about your life? Do you know where you’re headed? Do you have a destination in mind, other than death? Do you know how to get there? Psalm 23 shows us a destination for our lives and shares with us God’s ways for getting there.

The climax of Psalm 23 is not the famous “Valley of Death” verse, but what follows after it. “You prepare a table before me...you anoint my head with oil...my cup overflows...goodness and love follow me all the days of my life.” This is not a description of the afterlife, this is a description of what present life can be like in God’s company. Read it again. Does it sound good to you? We don’t have to wait for heaven to experience life with God. We can experience God now.

Our own experience, however, tells us that there are times in life that are dark and dangerous. David is honest about the dark valleys we experience and in Psalm 23 he teaches us the steps that will give us the courage to make it through to a life filled with goodness and love. It starts with making the Lord our Shepherd. Then, we get to know Him by spending time in His green pastures. After that we build confidence as we follow Him on right paths. These experiences build the courage we need to go through the dark valleys. Are you noticing that there is a progression to Psalm 23?

I believe that even if you know Psalm 23 well, God will speak to you in fresh ways over the next six weeks. What you will learn in the next 40 days are God’s ways for:

- restoring your soul.
- gaining direction for your life.
- building courage and overcoming fear.
- experiencing the table set before you – the joy of God’s presence.

To get the most out of this book, be sure to do the daily Bible studies and practice the “Following the Shepherd” sections. As you do these things, God’s life will expand in you, your stress will turn into joy and your fears will be replaced with courage. Also, we strongly encourage you to join with a small group of friends to study Psalm 23. When others are able to share their discoveries with you and you are able to share your discoveries with them, your growth will be much richer. Small group studies have been written to compliment this book and are available at www.alive365.com.

Over the next 40 days you can experience God the way David experienced God, but only if you make the commitment to follow Him as your Shepherd and practice what you learn. Are you ready?



Study, Reflect and Grow

1. Do you have a destination for your life other than death? How do you react to the idea that Psalm 23 can show you a destination for your life and show you God's ways for getting there?
2. As you read Psalm 23, notice the cycle of committing, learning, obeying, struggling and celebrating that will allow God to grow stronger in your life. Which stage do you believe you are at on this journey?
3. Every step in this journey with the Shepherd prepares you for the next step. Which of these steps do you feel will be the most valuable for you to focus on during the next six weeks?

Following the Shepherd

To follow the Shepherd we must learn His ways and we learn His ways by regularly studying His word. For this devotional, we encourage you to use a simple but effective method of studying the Bible called the "4 C's." As you read the suggested Scripture passages each day, ask these four questions about what you are reading:

Celebrate: What can I praise God for from this passage?

Confess: Does this passage convict me of something I need to confess?

Commit: What commitment does this passage challenge me to make?

Communicate: What did I learn that I can share with others?

Now, ask these questions of today's reading of Psalm 23 and write your answers on the next page.

Journal

Writing is a proven way to capture, collect, crystallize and reinforce your thoughts. From ancient times, believers have found writing to be a helpful and effective way of allowing God to speak to them. We are offering you this space each day as a place for your own writing. We encourage you to use it to write down thoughts that come to you as you read and study, thoughts that may be God speaking to you. You can also write down commitments you want to make as a way of reinforcing them. Also try writing down your prayers. You may be surprised at how powerful simply writing down your prayers and responses to God can be...but you won't really know until you try it.

