



## PREVIEW

The Bible is full of warnings, some from God, others from man. Usually when we think of the word warning, we think about it in a negative light. Let's look at a familiar passage of Scripture and see a warning in a way we might not have thought about it before.

## PRAISE

When you think of the word **warning**, what comes to mind?  
In what ways can warning be good?

## PARABLE

Read Psalm 23. It is difficult to pinpoint the historical background of this psalm. Some have suggested David wrote it when he was a shepherd boy, but this most likely is inaccurate as the psalm refers to experiences an older person would have. One commentator suggests that David wrote Psalm 23 during the rebellion and attempted coup of his son Absalom. He began his rebellion very subtly. He would station himself at the city gate and waylay anyone seeking an audience with King David. He would shake their hand and have a friendly chat, then inquire about the nature of their problem. He would say things like, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you. If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice." (See II Samuel 15:3-4, NIV.) In this way he ingratiated himself with the people of the land.

# A Major WARNING

## **PARABLE** *(continued)*

In spite of Absalom's reputation as a scoundrel (he had killed his half-brother in revenge and spent several years in exile), David loved his son. When Absalom was declared king in Hebron, instead of standing up to him, David fled from Jerusalem and crossed the Jordan River to Mahanaim (about 40 miles), a city in Gilead. Second Samuel 15:30 says David wept as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him likewise covered their heads and wept as they went. (These were expressions of intense grief.) At Mahanaim, friends provided David and his men with abundant provisions. Psalm 23:5 says, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

As David's men were going out to fight Absalom's forces, the king cautioned them, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake" (II Samuel 18:5, NIV). They all heard his words and went solemnly. The Forest of Ephraim, where the battle took place, must have been rugged, because the Bible says "the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword" (18:8). Absalom's thick mane of hair, which had been a matter of pride (II Samuel 14:25–26), became his downfall when his mule passed under the thick branches of a gnarly oak tree and snagged his hair. The mule kept going, leaving Absalom hanging by his hair. Joab, one of King David's captains, heard about it, found Absalom, and killed him.

# A Major WARNING

## PRESENT

David wept for Absalom, saying, "My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!" (II Samuel 18:33, NIV). Yet in Psalm 23 David wrote, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Despite the enemy's best attempts, David was victorious because God was with him. He lacked nothing, and he found comfort in his darkest hour. David reminded himself and us today that God Himself is the shepherd. He is our provider, our guide, and our protector.

## PRACTICE

The full extent of the Shepherd metaphor is described in John 10. The image in picture books—a well-manicured green pasture with pearly white sheep, and a shepherd gently carrying a lamb on his shoulders—tells only a half-truth about the Shepherd. The other half is the extent to which the Shepherd will go to protect his sheep. John said, "He lays his life down for the sheep" (v.11). When it concerns his sheep, a shepherd becomes ruthless. The staff is his weapon of choice, as observed in the story of Moses. He will protect his sheep regardless of who the enemy is: a son, a giant, an army, a devil. Thus, "The LORD is my Shepherd" is a major warning to our enemy!

## PRAY

Jesus, we thank You today that You are indeed our protector in times of trouble. When we feel like we are alone, let us remember that You will stick closer to us than family. Help us to look to You first as we navigate through troubled waters. Thank You for confirming in Your Word that we really do have everything we will ever need because You are there. Thank You for the confidence to look our enemy in the eye and declare with You, "We shall not want." Let goodness and mercy follow us as we leave this place today. In Jesus' name, amen.

# A Major *WARNING*

## PLUS

Close out the meeting by quoting Psalm 23. Gather together in a circle. Each person says one word and then the next person says the next word. If you miss a word or can't think of the word in 15 seconds or less, you are out. Continue playing until one person remains. For example, the first person says "The" and the next person says "Lord" and the next person says "is" and so on.