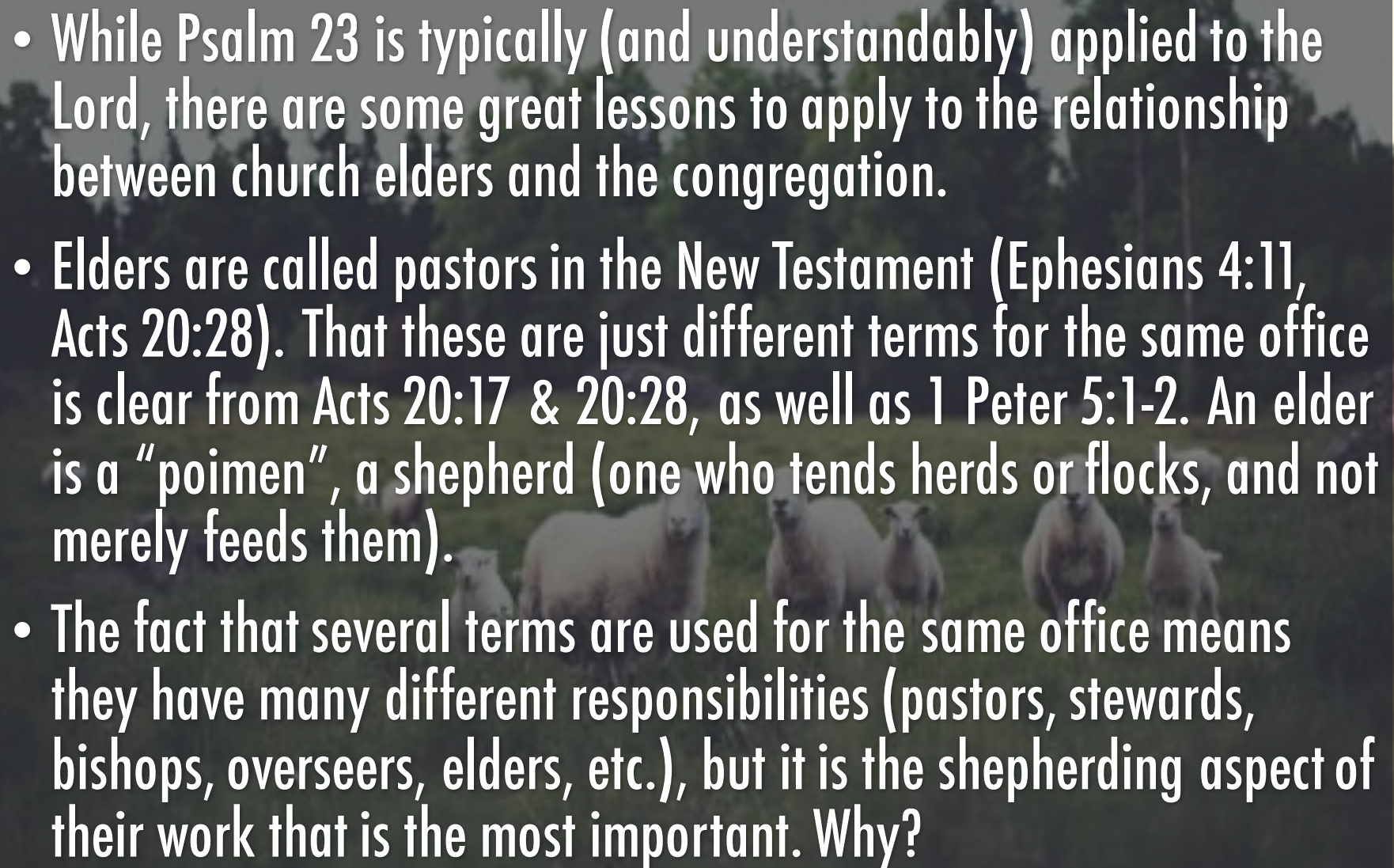


A photograph of a flock of sheep in a lush green field. Several sheep are in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The background is filled with a dense forest of tall evergreen trees under a soft, overcast sky. The overall tone is natural and pastoral.

SHEPHERD US

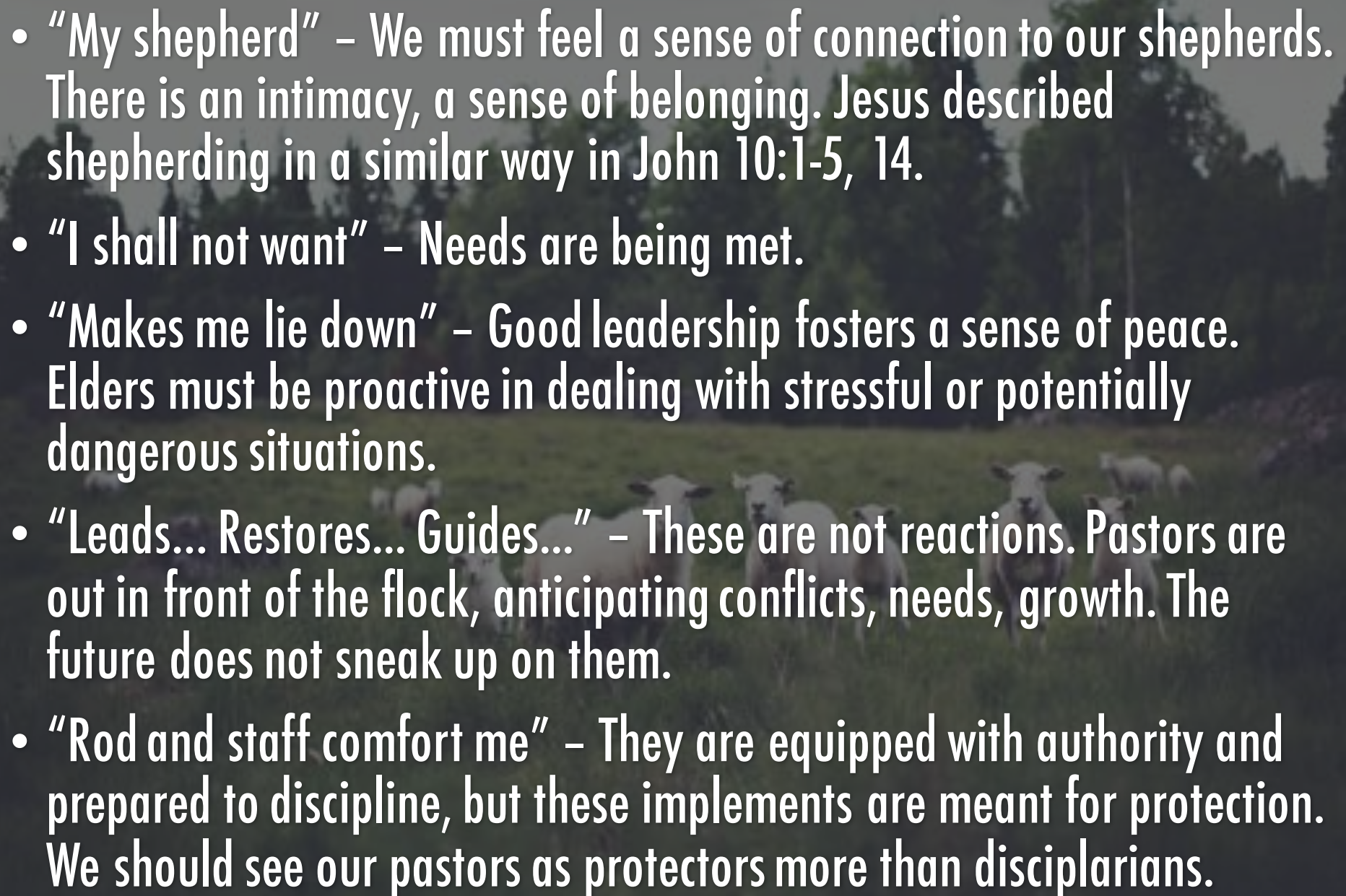
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- While Psalm 23 is typically (and understandably) applied to the Lord, there are some great lessons to apply to the relationship between church elders and the congregation.
 - Elders are called pastors in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11, Acts 20:28). That these are just different terms for the same office is clear from Acts 20:17 & 20:28, as well as 1 Peter 5:1-2. An elder is a “poimen”, a shepherd (one who tends herds or flocks, and not merely feeds them).
 - The fact that several terms are used for the same office means they have many different responsibilities (pastors, stewards, bishops, overseers, elders, etc.), but it is the shepherding aspect of their work that is the most important. Why?

SHEPHERD US

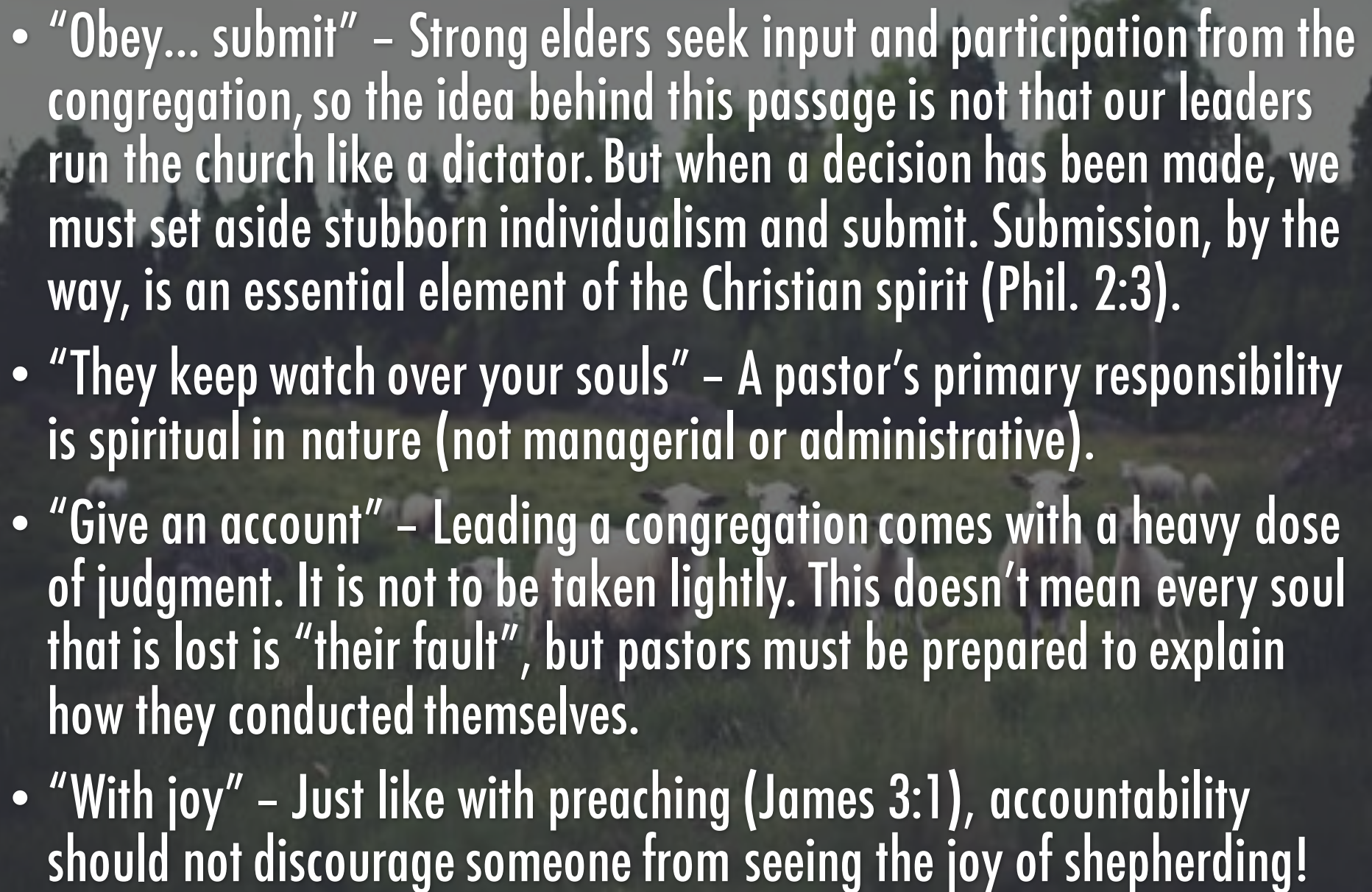
A pastoral scene with sheep grazing in a green field under a line of trees.

ELDERS

- Teach (1 Tim. 3:2, Tit. 1:9), but so do teachers and preachers (Eph. 4:11)
- Are stewards (Tit. 1:7), but so are other servants (1 Cor. 9:17, 4:1-2)
- Oversee (1 Pet. 5:2), but that can be delegated to others, such as deacons
- Are older men, but a congregation might have many older men
- Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:2, Acts 20:28), which is a role that nobody else can fill in the church. It is a responsibility singularly assigned to elders.

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- “My shepherd” – We must feel a sense of connection to our shepherds. There is an intimacy, a sense of belonging. Jesus described shepherding in a similar way in John 10:1-5, 14.
 - “I shall not want” – Needs are being met.
 - “Makes me lie down” – Good leadership fosters a sense of peace. Elders must be proactive in dealing with stressful or potentially dangerous situations.
 - “Leads... Restores... Guides...” – These are not reactions. Pastors are out in front of the flock, anticipating conflicts, needs, growth. The future does not sneak up on them.
 - “Rod and staff comfort me” – They are equipped with authority and prepared to discipline, but these implements are meant for protection. We should see our pastors as protectors more than disciplinarians.

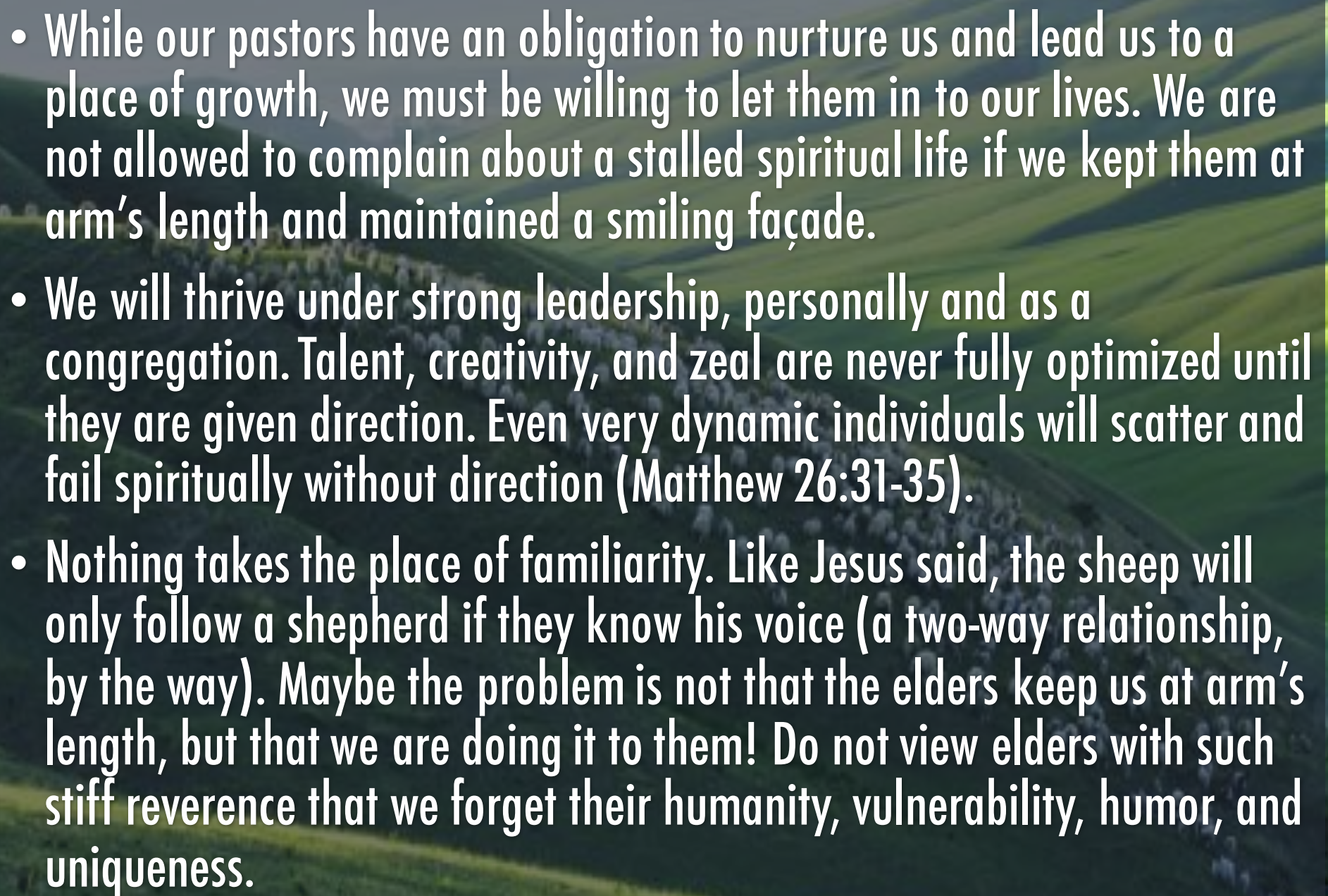
PSALM 23

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- “Obey... submit” – Strong elders seek input and participation from the congregation, so the idea behind this passage is not that our leaders run the church like a dictator. But when a decision has been made, we must set aside stubborn individualism and submit. Submission, by the way, is an essential element of the Christian spirit (Phil. 2:3).
 - “They keep watch over your souls” – A pastor’s primary responsibility is spiritual in nature (not managerial or administrative).
 - “Give an account” – Leading a congregation comes with a heavy dose of judgment. It is not to be taken lightly. This doesn’t mean every soul that is lost is “their fault”, but pastors must be prepared to explain how they conducted themselves.
 - “With joy” – Just like with preaching (James 3:1), accountability should not discourage someone from seeing the joy of shepherding!

HEBREWS 13:17



**WE WANT TO
BE SHEPHERDED**

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- While our pastors have an obligation to nurture us and lead us to a place of growth, we must be willing to let them in to our lives. We are not allowed to complain about a stalled spiritual life if we kept them at arm's length and maintained a smiling façade.
 - We will thrive under strong leadership, personally and as a congregation. Talent, creativity, and zeal are never fully optimized until they are given direction. Even very dynamic individuals will scatter and fail spiritually without direction (Matthew 26:31-35).
 - Nothing takes the place of familiarity. Like Jesus said, the sheep will only follow a shepherd if they know his voice (a two-way relationship, by the way). Maybe the problem is not that the elders keep us at arm's length, but that we are doing it to them! Do not view elders with such stiff reverence that we forget their humanity, vulnerability, humor, and uniqueness.