

*the*  
twenty  
-third

A *psalm* FOR THE LIVING

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## FOREWORD

Over my years as a pastor, I have had the privilege of caring for families during their time of loss. One of the things many people find comforting is this short chapter in the book of Psalms. During a memorial service, I wondered, “Why do we read Psalm 23 at a funeral?” It is a Psalm for the living, not some prayer for those journeying into the afterlife. The Twenty-third is a study of Psalm 23 where I hope you will discover this is a “Psalm for the Living!” The first verse is foundational in our walk with God, beautifully proclaiming, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I lack nothing.” As the late Dallas Willard said, “The experience of a life without lack depends first and foremost upon the presence of God in our lives, because the source of this life is God himself.” I hope you begin to live in the fullness of Psalm 23 and allow it to transform the way you see the world in which you live.

- C.J. Clymer, NewLife Church



### DIG DEEPER

This resource has been designed to help you dig deeper into God's Word with invitations for meditation and reflection, spaces to journal, and verses referenced for further study. Be sure to keep your Bible close as you read and check out the playlist created as a companion to your Psalm 23 journey at the **QR Code here!**

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.  
He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.  
He guides me along the right  
paths for his name sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
surely your goodness and love  
will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house  
of the Lord forever.

*psalm 23*





The Lord is my shepherd.

*psalm 23:1*

## “THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD.”

Our belief and understanding of this foundational truth about the nature of God shapes the core of our trusting relationship with Him, is essential to our thriving presence in His kingdom, and is our anchor when circumstances challenge what we know and believe about His goodness and presence. In his book *Knowledge of the Holy*, A.W. Tozer observes, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”

In our current culture, the image of Jesus as our shepherd is far from a foreign idea within most of our church experiences. Your mind may have lit up with images of sun-soaked stained glass church windows, framed pastel art prints at your grandparent’s house, or flannelgraph Jesus from Sunday school morning past, red-sashed and cradling a lamb under His arm. Or maybe your connection to this passage relates more to funerals and death.

“It’s the problem of wrong ideas. As someone said long ago, ‘it ain’t what we know that hurts us. It’s what we know that ain’t so.’ All the things that we know about God that ‘ain’t so’ destroy our lives, poison us, throw our lives out of kilter, and throw our bodies out of an appropriate relationship to reality. Wrong ideas about God make it impossible for us to function in relationship to one another. We are not able to love one another because we do not have our minds filled with an accurate vision of God.”

- Dallas Willard, *Life Without Lack*

Our understanding of what it actually means for us to know and trust Him as our Good Shepherd is difficult to wrap our minds around when we approach this revolutionary idea from a 21st-century, American mindset. In order to better grasp the significance that this passage and the effect that its promises have on our daily lives, and how it relates to how we love God and others, we need to understand what a Good Shepherd is and how we relate to Him as His sheep.

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Owner. Manager. Giver of constant, diligent care. These are some familiar terms that can help expand our understanding of this position. King David, who wrote this Psalm, was a shepherd himself and would have resonated deeply with what it meant to make this bold declaration about God as our caretaker. In the cultures that both David and later Jesus, who also emphasizes His role as “the Good Shepherd,” lived in, the significance of the nature of this prominent role in their society would have been inherently understood. Most of us probably know little about the responsibilities and tasks associated with shepherding, and even less about shepherding in a desert environment totally void of all modern resources. W. Philip Keller in his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, reflects on purchasing his first sheep to start his flock: “...the day I bought them I also realized that this was the first stage in a long-lasting endeavor in which from then on, I would continually lay down my life for them if they were to flourish and prosper.” The welfare of any flock completely depends on the shepherd leading them. Morning, noon, and night reveal new dangers as well as opportunities for the shepherd to protect and provide for the sheep he calls his own. The tasks that a shepherd takes on in caring for their herd are literally never ending, and the quality of the sheep’s lives and ability to survive rests entirely in the hands of the one they follow. As we explore David’s psalm of praise, we will discover the depth of goodness of our Shepherd and the ways He loves and longs to lead and provide for His sheep.

## CONCERNING SHEEP

“Sheep do not just ‘take care of themselves’ as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care. It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep,” writes Keller. Sheep also establish a social hierarchy in their flocks, are affected by mass mind/mob instincts, repeatedly suffer because of their stubbornness and stupidity, and exhibit feelings of fear and timidity. On the flip side, sheep are known to be relational animals who feel complex and deep emotions, and can recognize the voice of their owner like few other animals. While we may feel that identifying as a sheep paints us in an unflattering light, there is also something deeply comforting about knowing that we have a trustworthy provider who is completely alert and focused on our care. This all rests in our ability to respect our Creator and recognize Him as our Shepherd, Owner, and Manager instead of trying to promote ourselves to that position. We would probably think it pretty ridiculous to imagine a sheep with its limited perspective and abilities trying to act in the role assigned to the shepherd, but how often do we try to assume the role that we truly must learn to rely on and trust God to lead us in instead? Recognizing our limitations as sheep to be cared for and humbly led by our Good Shepherd is the beginning of peace, joy, and abundant life within His flock.

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them,  
and they follow me. I give them eternal life,  
and they will never perish.  
No one can snatch them away from me.”  
JOHN 10:27-28



## REFLECT & APPLY

*Has reflecting on the Shepherd/sheep role presented in this Psalm challenged any of the ways you have come to think about the nature of God? In what way?*

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*How does realizing that you have a Shepherd who loves you enough to diligently concern Himself with your care and flourishing impact your trust in Him?*

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*A sheep's very existence relies wholly on resting in close relationship with its shepherd. In what ways can you intentionally seek to experience the glory and majesty of your Shepherd this week?*

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*Name some other personal roles that you can rely upon God to fill for you this week: (ie, provider, comforter, friend, etc.)*

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The Lord is my rock, and my safe place, and the One Who takes me out of trouble. My God is my rock, in Whom I am safe. He is my safe-covering, my saving strength, and my strong tower.

PSALM 18:2

“I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father— and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.”

JOHN 10:14-16





I lack nothing.  
*psalm 23:16*



## “I LACK NOTHING.”

This may be one of the boldest and most audacious statements we can make in our culture today. In some ways, it may seem like this declaration couldn't possibly be all-encompassing in a world where we've felt such need across so many tangible, emotional, relational, and spiritual fronts. But David, though separated by many centuries from our current way of life, was surely aware of the truth and assurance of what he was proclaiming. God's Word promises that we already have been provided with everything that we need to flourish in our life here and now, and in eternity through the endless love of our Father, the sacrificial gift of salvation through Jesus, and the Spirit that dwells within us as His children. Jesus made it abundantly clear that our priorities look different when we follow Him as our Shepherd.

Then Jesus said to his disciples:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life,  
what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear.  
For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes.

Consider the ravens:

They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom  
or barn; yet God feeds them.

And how much more valuable you are than birds!  
Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?  
Since you cannot do this very little thing,  
why do you worry about the rest?

“Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin.  
Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed  
like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field,  
which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire,  
how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith!  
And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink;  
do not worry about it. For the pagan world runs after all such things,  
and your Father knows that you need them.  
But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you  
the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor.  
Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven  
that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.  
For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

LUKE 12:22-34 (NIV)

## THE ISSUE OF “LACK”

Sin entered our world when Satan introduced to mankind the lie that God was withholding something good from His creation. Still today we sometimes believe the lie of the enemy and allow our self-centered understanding of what we think we need for fulfillment and happiness distract us from looking to God as our provider and source for all good things. Proverbs 3:5-6 addresses this, directing us to “trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways

submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” It is when we learn to trust our Father in the way that Jesus guided His disciples to do in Luke 12 that we realize that we can confidently rely on God as the creator and source of all that is good, beautiful, and true to direct our paths and provide all that we could possibly need as we follow Him, even in our own sense of uncertainty.

Dallas Willard writes, “There is absolutely nothing that God lacks. We must understand this, because the overflowing sufficiency that we will experience when Yahweh is our shepherd lies in the all-sufficiency of the shepherd himself... what we need, God has – in infinite supply.” When we look for fulfillment outside of our relationship with Jesus and where He is leading us, it is incredibly easy to wander away from His side in pursuit of what we believe to be a source of instant or ultimate satisfaction. Seeking provision outside of what He has already completely and lovingly provided is when we meet destruction and peril.

## THE DEPTH OF HIS PROVISION

Like sheep, we don’t have the ability to see beyond what is right in front of us. We easily grow anxious about where our next meal will come from or can be consumed with something minor that we perceive as a threat to our happiness and well-being. But He has promised to provide all that we need when we rely on Him as our provider and source of life. Jesus demonstrated our need to daily come to Him in reliance and faith when He taught us how to pray in Matthew 6:9-13. He directs us to ask our Father for “our daily bread.” Learning to ask our Father to provide what we need for daily survival is a great reminder of his constant provision that we so often overlook. The sheep that has learned to acknowledge its dependency on its shepherd for all life and thriving can move into the peace and joy of an “I lack nothing” mindset. “What a proud, positive, bold statement to make! Obviously, this is the sentiment of a sheep utterly satisfied with its owner, perfectly content with its lot in life. Since the Lord is my Shepherd, then I shall not want. Actually, the word want, as used here, has a broader meaning than might at first be imagined. No doubt the main concept is that of not lacking—not deficient—in proper care, management, or husbandry. But a second emphasis is the idea of being utterly contented in the Good Shepherd’s care and consequently not craving or desiring anything more.” writes Keller.



## REFLECT & APPLY

*In what area of life have you struggled with the most perceived “lack”?*

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*How does David’s bold statement “I lack nothing” encourage you in your approach to this difficult area of trusting our Good Shepherd?*

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How does Jesus' instruction for how we should live and abide as His sheep in Luke 12:22-34 shift your perspective from earth-bound to one that is more eternity focused?

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In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes, "...but I am sure that God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait. When you do enter your room, you will find that the long wait has done you some kind of good which you would not have had otherwise." Sometimes we get so wrapped up in our view of our circumstances that we completely miss out on an opportunity to look back and see how God had guided us many steps back. How does this truth deepen your trust in His abiding presence and provision even when you can't see what's next?

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Write down some situations where you would like to recognize God's presence and provision this week. Ask God to open your eyes and reveal how you can learn to trust Him more as your Good Shepherd so your soul can say, "I lack nothing."

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Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found;  
surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.  
You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble  
and surround me with songs of deliverance.

PSALM 32:6-7

### FURTHER READING:

GENESIS 3:21, GENESIS 8:20-22, GENESIS 9:3, GENESIS 13:14-17, GENESIS 22:13-14,  
EXODUS 14:21-22, DEUTERONOMY 2:7, DEUTERONOMY 29:5, PSALM 34:10,  
PSALM 36:7-8, PSALM 37:25, PSALM 78:21-25, PSALM 81:10, PROVERBS 3:5-6,  
ISAIAH 55:7, JEREMIAH 29:11-13, MALACHI 3:10, MATTHEW 6:26-33,  
MATTHEW 7:7-11, MATTHEW 11:28-29, JOHN 10:10, JOHN 16:23-24,  
ROMANS 8:31-35, 37-39, 2 CORINTHIANS 9:8-11, 15,  
EPHESIANS 3:20-21, PHILIPPIANS 4:19, HEBREWS 11:6,  
HEBREWS 13:5, 2 PETER 1:2-4, & 1 JOHN 3:22





He makes me lie down  
in green pastures,  
he leads me beside  
quiet waters,  
he refreshes my soul.

*psalm 23:2-3*

God listens to our hearts and is sensitive to the needs of His sheep. But only when we recognize Him as our Shepherd and rely on Him for provision and direction will we find rest. That makes an examination of the previous two statements “the Lord is my Shepherd” and “I lack nothing” crucial to our ability to find and abide in the peace and rest only He can provide.

Philip Keller acknowledges, “It is significant that to be at rest there must be a definite sense of freedom from fear, tension, aggravation, and hunger. The unique aspect of this picture is that it is only the sheepman himself who can provide release from these anxieties. It all depends upon the diligence of the owner whether or not his flock is free of disturbing influences. When we examine each of these four factors that affect sheep so severely we will understand why the part the owner plays in their management is so tremendously important. It is actually he who makes it possible for them to lie down, to rest, to relax, to be content and quiet and flourishing.” It is definitely not a stretch to relate fear, tension, aggravation, and hunger as afflictions that can also keep us from lying down in green pastures when we’re not secure in the knowledge and trust of our shepherd. But, as Keller points out, it is only the nature of “our owner” that ultimately determines our ability to rest. This makes the confidence that we can have in God as our Shepherd all the more significant as we choose to trust Him to provide the green pastures we need for rest. “In the Christian’s life, there is no substitute for the keen awareness that my Shepherd is nearby” writes Keller.

“O God! Thou hast made us for Thyself,  
and our souls are restless, searching  
‘til they find their rest in Thee.”

- St. Augustine

## QUIET WATERS

Weariness is a condition that most individuals are familiar with at one time or another. There are many causes (both physical and spiritual) and no one rule on how long it endures, but in most cases, it leaves us feeling drained, discouraged, and all too focused on our own mortal limitations. In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you

and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Jesus is very aware of our human condition and the spiritual battles that we encounter while we journey through our time on earth. It was with compassion for His disciples then and now that He shared that the true remedy for our earthly weariness is following Him in obedience to our heavenly Father and abiding in the Spirit. Keller points out, “David when he composed Psalm 23, knew this. Looking at life from the standpoint of a sheep, he wrote, ‘He [The Good Shepherd] leads me beside quiet waters.’ In other words, He alone knows where the still, quiet, deep, clean, pure water is to be found that can satisfy His sheep and keep them fit.”

## A REFRESHED SOUL

When we learn to find rest by trusting our Shepherd and going to Him to find relief for our thirst and weariness, we don’t react out of desperation or fear of Him not providing tomorrow. Dallas Willard reminds us, “The obviously well-kept secret of the ‘ordinary’ is that it is made to be a receptacle of the divine, a place where the life of God flows.” We can be confident that the purpose of anywhere that our Shepherd leads us is for His glory and our good. As we experience His never-ending patience, love, and goodness, we learn to listen for and recognize His voice and praise Him when we witness the places where we firsthand see **“a place where the life of God flows.”**

“If He is the Good Shepherd, we can rest assured that He knows what He is doing. This in and of itself should be sufficient to continually refresh and restore my soul. I know of nothing which so quiets and enlivens my own spiritual life as the knowledge that God knows what He is doing with me.”

- W. PHILLIP KELLER



*What are some gifts that God has provided that refresh your soul?*

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*Ask the Good Shepherd to reveal a personal place or situation where “the life of God flows” in the ordinary:*

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He stoops to look down on heaven  
and on earth. He lifts the poor  
from the dust and the needy  
from the garbage dump.

He sets them among princes,  
even the princes of his own people!

PSALM 113:6-8





He leads me  
along the right paths  
for his names sake.

*psalm 23:3b*



“Sheep are notorious creatures of habit. If left to themselves, they will follow the same trails until they become ruts; graze the same hills until they turn to desert wastes; pollute their own ground until it is corrupt with disease and parasites.

Many of the world’s finest sheep ranges have been ruined beyond repair by overgrazing, poor management, and indifferent or ignorant sheep owners.”

- W. Phillip Keller

## THE RIGHT PATHS

The picture painted of sheep (and ourselves) when left without the guidance of a good shepherd is pretty dismal. When we feel a lack of direction or instruction and we wander aimlessly, we often create destruction for ourselves and those in our wake. Not only is it possible to overuse and in turn bankrupt a material resource or environment when we over-rely on it for support and sustenance, but we also rob ourselves of better pastures when we only dwell in that with which we are already familiar and comfortable. Keller expounds further: “A commonly held but serious misconception about sheep is that they can just ‘get along anywhere.’ The truth is quite the reverse. No other class of livestock requires more careful handling, more detailed direction than do sheep. No doubt David, as a shepherd himself, had learned this firsthand from tough experience. He knew beyond dispute that if the flock was to flourish and the owner’s reputation was to be held in high esteem as a good manager, the sheep had to be constantly under his meticulous control and guidance.” The new life and reality that we can experience when we are “constantly under His meticulous control and guidance” is a world away from and far better than any place that we would wander ourselves.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

JOHN 15:5-8

## THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The NLT translation of Psalm 23:3b reads, “He leads me in the way of living right with Himself which brings honor to His name.” In the above passage from John 15, Jesus shows us the correlation between our source of life and the way that it directly affects everything that flows from us. We see throughout His word the destruction that befalls both individuals and mankind as a whole when they insist on proceeding in the pride of their own way. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way which looks right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” When we abide in Him and seek to obey His voice and live righteously before Him, our lives will overflow with the fruit of His Spirit. Likewise, the road outside of His direction leads to death and destruction, much like the land inhabited by sheep without a Good Shepherd. God’s desire for our good goes far beyond our earthly understanding. We don’t need to doubt His plan or nature. To trust completely in the plan and direction of our Good Shepherd brings us closer to His side, joy to His heart, and glory to His name.

“We have the potential to create something incredibly precious and good, and God is going to bring it to pass. If we miss our chance to participate with him, we miss our chance, but he is not going to be defeated in this. He is going to create a community of loving, creative, intelligent, loyal, faithful, and powerful human beings, and they are going to rule the earth. It is going to come to pass. If you want to be a part of that, just get on board.”

- Dallas Willard



## REFLECT & APPLY

*Can you think of an example when you followed your own direction and it led to destruction?*

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*What did God teach you about His faithfulness and goodness through that situation?*

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*What fruit have you seen the Spirit reveal when you have chosen to abide in Jesus?*

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Even though I walk through  
the darkest valley,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me,  
your rod and your staff;  
they comfort me.  
*psalm 23:4*

As discussed in verse three, when we follow the leading of God, it may take us down unclear paths. We can take strength in knowing that even in our uncertainty and fear, we can always trust that He is in control. In the world of shepherding, taking sheep down through a valley can be a nerve-racking experience for the sheep, but is also an intentional move by the shepherd to provide the best possible grazing. Surrounding cliffs can provide shade and protection to pastures that grow along streams in the deep valleys they border. A knowledgeable, confident shepherd is willing to rest in his awareness and ability to protect his sheep while they are exposed to animals or predators taking refuge in rocks or hiding in the darkness of the valley walls, and pursue a place where they can feed and thrive if they trust Him to lead them and guard them on the journey. As we are directed by our Shepherd, we may also face many challenges and times of uncertainty as we follow His leading.

“Father, if you are willing, please take  
this cup of suffering away from me.  
Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.”  
LUKE 22:42

In this passage, we see how Jesus responded when He was faced with following the leading of His Father, even to death. Dallas Willard comments, “It is essential to remember that Jesus did not give himself up to God and death with an attitude of resignation. He gave himself up in faith, certain that he would rise again, and that the kernel of wheat that fell to the ground would bring forth abundant fruit. Death to self is abandonment to God in faith. It is laying down the satisfaction of my desires, with confidence in the greatness and plentitude of God.” As we learn to trust more fully in the leading of the Shepherd, our will should align with His even to the point of self-abandonment, as Jesus modeled when He gave up His own life so we could live with Him in eternal communion.

## STRENGTH & COMPASSION

It is important for us to remember the self-sacrificing and loving nature of God when we are confronted by difficult times in our lives and the lives of those around us. Our heart’s response to uncertainty and suffering is our most real indication of the security and assurance that we have in God. In his examination of verse four of Psalm 23, Keller says, “The staff is essentially a symbol of the concern, the compassion that a shepherd has for his charges. No other single word can better describe its function on behalf of the flock than that it is for their comfort. Whereas the rod conveys the concept of authority, of power, of discipline, of defense against danger, the word “staff” speaks of all that is longsuffering and kind.” While in the midst of turmoil or perceived darkness, it’s often difficult for us to feel fully aware of the presence and constant protection of our Shepherd, but when we have trained our hearts and minds to rest consistently in the deep truth of His ultimate strength and never wavering compassion, we can endure anything that comes up along the pathway. Keller continues, “Just as the rod of God is emblematic of the Word of God, so the staff of God is symbolic of the Spirit of God. In Christ’s dealings with us as individuals there is the essence of the sweetness, the comfort and consolation, the gentle correction brought about by the work of His gracious Spirit.”

## THE GIFT OF SURRENDER

Surrendering our will is not an easy feat for most of us and is entirely impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 12:8-10, the apostle Paul encourages us through his testimony of surrender: “Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time he said, ‘My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.’ So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

“The basic question is not whether we have many or few valleys. It is not whether those valleys are dark or merely dim with shadows.

The question is how do I react to them?

How do I go through them?

How do I cope with the calamities that come my way?

With Christ I face them calmly.

With His gracious Spirit to guide me I face them fearlessly.

I know of a surety that only through them can I possibly travel on to higher ground with God.

In this way not only shall I be blessed but in turn I will become a benediction to others around me who may live in fear.”

- W. Phillip Keller



## REFLECT & APPLY

*So often the troubles we face are the true tests of our faith and trust in God. How has God shown Himself in a time of darkness?*

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*Jesus' response to His coming suffering and death is an incredible example of sacrifice. Take time to write/pray a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for this incredible gift:*

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*Think of a time when God's power worked best in your weakness.  
What did He teach you through that experience?*

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*Shepherds utilize a rod and staff in the care of their sheep. How have you seen God's strength and compassion in your own life?*

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“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!  
I have overcome the world.”  
JOHN 16:33

He humbled himself and became obedient  
to the point of death.  
PHILIPPIANS 2:8





You prepare a table before  
me in the presence  
of my enemies.  
You anoint my  
head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
*psalm 23:5*



“The parallel in the Christian life is that Christ, our great Good Shepherd, has Himself already gone before us into every situation and every extremity that we might encounter. We are told emphatically that He was tempted in all points like as we are. We know He entered fully and completely and very intimately into the life of men upon our planet. He has known our sufferings, experienced our sorrows, and endured our struggles in this life; He was a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief.”

- W. Phillip Keller

The “table” or “mesa” that David describes in this Psalm refers to a place the shepherd would take his sheep on a high mountain range during the summer. Although intended as a safe haven destination on a future journey, he would begin the process of making certain it was a fitting resting place many months in advance. Meticulous care was taken to ensure that the grassy areas where his sheep would graze and pause for a time were free from poisonous plants, lurking predators, or other elements that could cause them harm. The astounding care and provision we saw in the previous verse represented by the strength of His rod and the compassion of His staff through our darkest valleys continue as He prepares a place where we can dwell and drink in His goodness and constant love.

“God’s gracious gifts of faith, death to self, and agape love empower and enable our journey of growth into their fullness and into the abundance of eternal life we have in Jesus our Shepherd.”

- DALLAS WILLARD

## OVERFLOWING

While the summer season promotes growth to the highlands the shepherd prepared ahead as an oasis for his flock, it also brings the right conditions for flies and parasites to breed and invade the herd in a dramatic and deadly way. If sheep are left unprepared and unprotected, insects will lay and hatch eggs within the sheep’s nasal passageways which have devastating effects on the individual sheep and the entire herd community. In anticipation of this invasion of his sheep’s peace and well-being, a shepherd will apply an oil mixture to the vulnerable areas of his sheep to make them prepared for the place he is leading them. Our Good Shepherd is also always aware of what lies ahead and will not leave us without protection or His presence when we face invasion and spiritual attack. Peter 2 1:3 reads, “By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence.” When we belong to Him, walk by His side, and live by His Spirit, He will always provide His presence when we are surrendered to His ownership. We have been gifted a bottomless supply of guidance and comfort from the Spirit that our Shepherd is constantly willing to pour out on His flock. Keller writes, “If He is the One who has all knowledge and wisdom and understanding of my affairs and management; if He is able to cope with every situation, good or bad, that I encounter, happy one that overflows with benefits of all sorts.”



## REFLECT & APPLY

*Recall a time that God went before you in a scary or stressful situation:*

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*How did this experience strengthen your trust in His love for you?*

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*What "flies" invade your peace and mind and harm your ability to live abundantly?*

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*How can taking this truth to heart affect your perspective this week?*

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*Pray and praise God for His gift of His Spirit and ask him to remind you have been given an advocate to guide and bring you peace.*

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But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.  
Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.  
I do not give to you as the world gives.  
Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.  
JOHN 14:26-27

So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.  
LUKE 11:13





Surely your goodness and  
mercy will follow me all  
the days of my life  
and I will dwell in the  
house of the Lord forever.

*psalm 23:6*

“The emphasis throughout the Shepherd’s Psalm is the fact that God is with us. The life without lack flows from our relationship with Him. Our challenge is to stay with him in the increasing belief that God truly desires to be with us.”

- Dallas Willard

Our belief in the love and presence of God influences every aspect of our lives as His children. Exploring the depth of Psalm 23 gives us a glimpse into what a relationship built on intimate trust, our deep love and surrender, and a learned knowledge of the vast goodness and provision of our Shepherd can look like even as we walk through our dark and unknown valleys. Philip Keller writes: “He looks on my life in tenderness, for He loves me deeply. He sees the long years during which His goodness and mercy have followed me without slackening. He longs to see some measure of that same goodness and mercy not only passed on to others by me but also passed back to Him with joy. He longs for love—my love. And I love Him—only and because He first loved me. Then He is satisfied.”

## DWELLING HERE & BEYOND

Psalm 23’s six verses give us a vivid look at how loved and cared for we are by our Shepherd. When our souls are at rest and abiding solely in love, trust, and surrender to our Father, we live in a way that reflects His shepherding of our lives. This anchoring of our souls to His presence and guidance gives us not only a clear purpose for every aspect of our lives here as part of His family on earth, but also nurtures our desire and gives us a glimpse here of all that He is calling us to participate in eternally. Our response as His loved and perfectly provided for people is to follow His will, words, and example put forth by His son, Jesus. John Mark Comer explains in his *Preaching on Vocation*, “The longer I follow Jesus, the more I see discipleship as the primary category for what this is all about. I would define discipleship as living as a student, or apprentice to Jesus. Making it your life’s ambition to be with him, learn his teachings, become like him, and, in time, carry on his work in the world.”

“As I respond to Him and move in harmony with His wishes, I discover that life becomes satisfying and worthwhile. It acquires great serenity and is made an exciting adventure of fulfillment as I progress in it.

This is made possible as I allow His gracious Spirit to control, manage, and direct my daily decisions.

In fact, I should deliberately ask for His direction even in minute details.

Then there is the wider but equally thrilling awareness of God all around me. I live surrounded by His presence. I am an open person, an open individual, living life open to His scrutiny. He is conscious of every circumstance I encounter.

He attends me with care and concern because I belong to Him. And this will continue through eternity.

What an assurance! I shall dwell in the presence of (in the care of) the Lord forever.

Bless His Name.”

- W. PHILIP KELLER



## REFLECT & APPLY

*How have you been challenged to pursue more trust in your Good Shepherd through Psalm 23?*

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*What areas of your life can you better and more completely surrender to the will of your Father?*

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*How has learning more about the nature of God changed your trust and confidence in Him?*

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*Ask the Spirit to show you how to abide in the presence and provision of God more intentionally:*

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*How can your decision to more intentionally abide in His presence help you live aware and more like Jesus with those around you?*

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*What do you think living for eternity here and now looks like as you pursue “dwelling in the house of the Lord forever”?*

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“You did not choose Me, but I chose you.”

JOHN 16:33

Don't be obsessed with getting more material things. Be relaxed with what you have. Since God assured us, “I'll never let you down, never walk off and leave you,” we can boldly quote, God is there, ready to help; I'm fearless no matter what. Who or what can get to me?

HEBREWS 13:5-6 (MSG)

For all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding “Yes!” And through Christ, our “Amen” (which means “Yes”) ascends to God for his glory. It is God who enables us, along with you, to stand firm for Christ. He has commissioned us, and he has identified us as his own by placing the Holy Spirit in our hearts as the first installment that guarantees everything he has promised us.

2 CORINTHIANS 1:20-22



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