

The Shepherd
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Psalm 23

- **Giving either a reference or a few words, what would you guess are the most memorized verses or passages of scripture?** <http://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/the-25-most-read-bible-verses/> <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2009/05/the-100-most-read-bible-verses-at-biblegatewaycom/>
- **When you think of Psalm 23, what are some words that come to mind?**
- Psalm 23 is one of the most familiar and most memorized passages of scripture. Even those who don't claim to be Christ followers find comfort in these lines.
- The challenge with such a familiar passage is failing to slow down and take in the rich meaning of each sentence.
- If ever there was a passage for meditation, it's the 23rd Psalm!
- During our time, let's take a slow, meditative walk verse by verse and enjoy the beauty and assurance of this wonderfully encouraging passage!
- First, let's read this Psalm in unison together. Most translations are similar.

Psalm 23 (ESV)

A Psalm of David.

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

³He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

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

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

- Big Idea: God can be trusted since He is always good.
- Psalm 23 is a Psalm of David. It's not surprising David would use the word picture of a shepherd to describe God's goodness and protection. He had lived this metaphor! David KNEW about shepherding sheep.
- **What do WE know about sheep? Why is it a good metaphor for us?**
- Our Lord is portrayed not only as a shepherd, but also as a gracious host.
- The Shepherd leads, provides, and protects; the host feeds and celebrates graciously and lavishly. The danger and evil of life cannot interfere with our Shepherd's care and hospitality.
- Verse one is really a summary of the whole Psalm. The Lord is my Shepherd; therefore I will never lack anything I need.
- The Lord is portrayed as a Shepherd more than 40 times in scripture.

Isaiah 40:11 (NLT)

¹¹He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

John 10:11 (ESV) Jesus said:

¹¹I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:15 (ESV)

¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

- Just as sheep are totally dependent on the shepherd, we are totally dependent on the Good Shepherd. When the Lord is our Shepherd every need will be supplied.
- Verse two paints a serene picture: green grass and still, quiet waters.
- A young boy asked Winston Churchill, *“Mr. Winston Churchill, sir, to what do you attribute your success in life?”* and he said *without hesitating: ‘Economy of effort. Never stand up when you can sit down, and never sit down when you can lie down.’”*¹

- The Shepherd “leads” us to rest. He knows we need it! Left alone the sheep would wander aimlessly till exhausted.
- The Shepherd MAKES them lie down in green pastures.
- Picture an “over-tired” baby that refuses to lie down for a nap. **How can we apply that to you and me and our crazy hectic lives? In contrast, how would you describe a baby sleeping safely in a parents arms?**
- *“I don’t have time to rest! If I slow down I won’t get it all done!”* **Why are we so frantic? What keeps us going at such a pace? How is refusing to rest an indication that we don’t believe verse one? What did Jesus teach us about work and rest?**
- Question: Do I trust the care, provision, and protection of the Good Shepherd enough to take a Sabbath rest? Do I believe He will provide?
- The term is *“a little R&R, rest & relaxation.”* There’s a third “R,” restoration.
- Verse three: He restores my soul. Not just physical restoration, but soul restoration. Let’s camp there a moment. **What does it mean to restore something? What do you think restoring our soul means?**
- When something is beautifully restored we say, *“It’s just like new!”* When we clean up after a mess, we say: *“It’s just like it never happened.”*
- Our souls get scuffed up and soiled by sin; the sin around us and our own sin. We get beaten up and bruised by life. We can sink into the depressed belief that the scars, dirt, and dents in our soul will never be removed. The Good Shepherd makes us new, like nothing ever happened.
- Our lesson writer reminds us: *“Sometimes, sheep fall over on their backs and need someone to set them on their feet again. God the Shepherd does that for those who are in His flock. David wrote, he restores my soul. God helps us start over again. David knew what it was like to be defeated. He committed adultery with Bathsheba. After that, Psalm 51:12 says he prayed, “Restore to me the joy of your salvation.” He needed God to put him back on his feet.”²*
- Charles Spurgeon writes: *“When the soul grows sorrowful he revives it; when it is sinful he sanctifies it; when it is weak he strengthens it. “He” does it. His ministers could not do it if he*

*did not. His Word would not avail by itself. "He restoreth my soul." Are any of us low in grace? Do we feel that our spirituality is at its lowest ebb? He who turns the ebb into the flood can soon restore our soul. Pray to him, then, for the blessing -- "Restore thou me, thou Shepherd of my soul!"*³

- The Shepherd promises to restore your soul. Do you believe that?
- We can't receive restoration unless we obey the Shepherd's call to rest.
- Verse three also says "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake." **What do you think it means to walk in paths of righteousness? Why for HIS name's sake?**
- Sheep don't naturally walk down the right path. Left alone, the sheep would walk into the path of wolves or right off a cliff. Human "sheep" are just the same. We don't naturally walk in a righteous path.
- The key to walking in the way that's best for us is proximity to the Shepherd. If we will totally follow His direction and stay in His presence, focused on him, we'll walk rightly, safely, and in a way that honors Him.
- Following the Shepherd guarantees the right path. Do you believe that?
- Verse four: The Shepherd protects us even in dark, scary places.
- Our Lesson writer: *"Valleys are dangerous for sheep. As they pass through canyons, predators like wolves and lions hide among the rocks, ready to attack. Canyons are especially dangerous in the dark. Furthermore, sheep are prone to panic. In Idaho, one night in 2013, two wolves attacked a flock of sheep, and 176 sheep died. Only about ten sheep died of bite wounds. The others died as a result of running in panic, piling up on one another, and suffocating. For almost all of those sheep, the cause of death was not a wolf attack but fear."* <http://www.outdoorlife.com/blogs/newshound/2013/08/two-wolves-kill-176-sheep-1-night-near-idaho-falls>
- The writer asks: *"When those sheep died that night, where was the shepherd? Why didn't he hear the panicked cries of the sheep? Why didn't he run to fight off the wolves and rescue the sheep? Obviously, no shepherd was there. Sheep have no*

natural means of defense. Without a shepherd, sheep are without protection.”⁴

- A shepherd’s staff is to keep the sheep on the right path. A shepherd’s rod is to protect the sheep from a dangerous predator. What is making you feel threatened this week? Have you trusted the Shepherd to protect you?
- We live life in the midst of darkness, danger, and threat of death. The Lord’s power protects us so we don’t have to fear any of that.
- Remember John 10:11, the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep? **How does that assure us of God’s protection?**
- If Jesus died to save us, He will never abandon us! Do you believe that?
- In verses five and six, David shifts from seeing the Lord as Shepherd to a picture of the ultimate, gracious host.
- **What is remarkable about verses five and six?**
- In ancient eastern culture a great host would anoint the honored guest with beautifully smelling oils to refresh them from their dusty journey.
- Then, they would pour the wine. And tradition tells us the amount of wine indicated how long the guest was welcome. A little bit meant you were expected to leave quickly. To the brim meant stay a long time. Overflowing meant stay as long as you like.
- The expression “my cup overflows” has become a common expression. **What does it mean when we say that?**
- Back to Jesus words in John chapter 10. In the verse right before He said the Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep, He said: John 10:10 (ESV) ¹⁰*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*
- The Good Shepherd doesn’t just want us to survive life. He gives us abundant life now and eternal life forever. That leads to the promise in verse six: ⁶*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* Do you believe that?

So, What’s The Takeaway?

- “Peter Jeffery writes: ‘Psalm 23 is pre-eminently a psalm of privilege. It speaks throughout of what God does for his people. ... David is not praying in this Psalm, he is not asking God to do something for him. Rather he is rejoicing in what the Lord has done and continues to do in his life.’”⁵
- Have you slowed down lately and really meditated on the promises of Psalm 23? Have you prayed them back to the Father to remind yourself of His care, protection, provision, abundance, goodness, and mercy?
- Have you said after each promise, “Do I BELIEVE that?”
- The sheep prove they trust the shepherd when they follow him obediently.
- We prove our trust in the Good Shepherd in the same way.
- This week, let’s see the 23rd Psalm, not as a poem we’ve memorized, but as a set of promises we cling to and live by.
- Let’s remember, because the LORD is my Shepherd, I have everything I need!
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¹ <https://www.winstonchurchill.org/resources/in-the-media/churchill-in-the-news/winston-churchill-distilled>

² Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*.

³ <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-23-3.html>

⁴ Lifeway. (n.d.). *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*.

⁵ Ellsworth, R. (2006). *Opening up Psalms* (pp. 43–44). Leominster: Day One Publications.