



Psalm 23

All Scripture is from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

Many of you can probably recite Psalm 23 by heart. It's often one of the first passages we learn in Sunday School—and that's a good thing. It's always wise to hide God's Word in our hearts. As David wrote in Psalm 119:11, *"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You."*

While this psalm may be familiar to many of us, **familiarity can sometimes be a problem.** We may know the words so well that we stop thinking about what they really mean. So, in this Bible study, we're going to examine Psalm 23 verse by verse.

Verse 1: LORD is my shepherd" — *This denotes a relationship.*

There is a relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.

The dictionary defines "shepherd" as:

1. A person who herds, tends, and guards sheep
2. A person who protects, guides, or watches over a person or group

That second definition is what we'll focus on.

The word *shepherd* is used about 40 times throughout the Bible, and rarely does it refer only to literal sheep. Most often, it's God referring to Himself as a shepherd to His people. And many times, He uses the absence of a shepherd to describe what happens when His people choose to go their own way. God will never leave us nor forsake us—but we can choose to walk away from Him.

In **I Kings 22:17** and **2 Chronicles 18:16**, the prophet Micaiah says, *“I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd.”*

Ezekiel echoed this in **Ezekiel 34:5**:

“So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.”

Later, in verse 8, God declares:

“As I live,” says the Lord GOD, “surely because My flock became a prey...because there was no shepherd, nor did My shepherds search for My flock...but the shepherds fed themselves and did not feed My flock.”



In **Matthew 9:36**, Matthew uses similar words to describe the heart of Jesus toward people: *“But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.”*

Notice the added detail—*weary* and scattered. If Jesus saw so many weary and scattered people in His day, how much more must He see now? Many of His sheep are still weary and scattered.

If you’ve gone astray, you can find your way back to Him. He’s waiting for you. He **wants** to be your Shepherd. He wants a relationship with each one of us.

Verse 2: “I shall not want” — *This expresses supply.*

In modern English, we usually separate the ideas of “want” and “need.” Want is something we desire; need is something we can’t live without. A child might say, *“I need that new video game or phone,”* but we know it’s not a true need like food, water, or air.

However, an older definition of the word “want” is *“to lack, or to be in need of.”* That’s what David means here. Because the Lord is his Shepherd, he knows he will lack nothing he truly needs. His **needs**—not always his **desires**—will be met.

Verse 3: “He makes me to lie down in green pastures” — *This indicates rest.*

We were all once scattered. Even if you grew up in church, at some point you had to make the decision to follow Christ. Until we follow the Shepherd, we are not only scattered—we are weary.

Think back to those times before giving your life to God. Do you remember how exhausting it was to try to navigate life on your own?

Who here knows the joy of rest after a long, difficult day or journey? It feels good, doesn't it? That's the kind of rest God wants for us—not just physical rest, but **spiritual** rest. When we go to Him in prayer and lay down our burdens, He carries them—and gives us rest.

God never promised us life would be easy. In fact, He warned us that it would be hard at times:

- **Matthew 10:22** – *“And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”*

Let's think about that word *endure*. It means to hold out against; sustain without impairment or yielding; undergo: to bear without resistance or with patience; tolerate. We don't endure *good* things—we endure the difficult. We endure against an opposing force. That puts this verse in perspective, doesn't it?

- **John 15:18** – *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.”*

Have you ever felt hated? That's a strong word. But hate isn't the opposite of love. The opposite of love is **indifference**—a lack of concern or care.

Jesus didn't just warn us that we'd be hated—He also promised to help us:

- **John 16:33** – *“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*
- **Deuteronomy 31:6** – *“Be strong and of good courage...for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”*
- **Matthew 11:28** – *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*



Verse 4: “He leads me beside the still waters” — *This means refreshment.*

Who enjoys going to the beach? The sound of crashing waves, calling birds, and constant activity can be exhilarating—but also very noisy.

David didn't compare God's refreshment to ocean waves or rushing rivers. Instead, he spoke of *still* waters—a pool, a quiet stream, a place of **peace** and **calm**.

We need that kind of stillness. The world moves so fast. With smartphones and the internet, information and entertainment are available at any time. Bored? Pick up your phone. Want news or connection? Pick up your phone.

But let me say this: **Put it down sometimes.** Rest your mind from the constant barrage of lights, data, and distraction. It's too much. Our children's attention spans are shortening because everything around them is always moving. They need rest. We need rest.

Studies show that constant screen exposure changes the brain—and not for the better.

I urge you: dedicate a portion of your day to turning off your phone and turning your heart toward God. Read His Word. Spend time in quiet with Him. **He deserves your full attention.**

Verse 5 – "He restores my soul;" –*This represents healing.*

If I had to pick a favorite line from Psalm 23, this would be it. *He restores my soul.*

Restore means:

1. To bring back into existence.
2. To bring back to a former, original, or normal condition.

I love the imagery of our souls being cracked, dry, and damaged, and our Shepherd coming along—not only to heal us but to **restore** us. He brings us back to where we belong, into the condition we were meant to be in.

Sometimes, a great work of art—a painting by a master—is found in a garage, attic, or home, covered in dirt and neglect. People may have looked at it, touched it, and passed it by for years, not realizing its value. Then one person comes along and sees its true worth. They're willing to pay any price to purchase it and restore it.

The restoration process is delicate and takes time. Layers of grime, damage, and even false paint are removed with Q-tips, soft brushes, and care. But after that comes healing—touch-ups, conditioning, sealant—so that the painting will not be damaged again.

We are like that painting. We are the Master's artwork, and when we are battered by life, He steps in to restore us.

Read Psalm 139:13–18 – He made us. He can heal and restore us.

Verse 6 – "He leads me in the paths of righteousness"—*This expresses guidance.*

We all need guidance. As we learned at the beginning, without the Shepherd, we are as sheep gone astray.

See: *I Kings 22:17, II Chronicles 18:16, Ezekiel 34:5* – Israel was scattered, having no shepherd.

When we lack the **right** guidance, we are not only scattered but also become prey to the beasts of the world. Everyone is guided by something or someone. Many people claim independence—"I don't need Jesus; I can take care of myself"—but that in itself is a deception. The devil doesn't have to shout or appear in a red suit to mislead you. It matters not to him if you miss Heaven by an inch or a mile, the result is the same. All he needs to do is get you to drift, inch by inch, off the narrow path.

The psalmist wrote:

Psalm 119:105 – "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."

But the context matters. Read verses 104–106:

"Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
I have sworn and confirmed that I will keep Your righteous judgments."

The writer doesn't just recognize the false paths—he hates them. And he takes active responsibility to stay on the right one. God's guidance is offered, but it must be received and followed.

There is no neutral territory in a war. The world is warring for your soul.

Verse 7 – "For His name's sake" – *This means purpose.*

Why does the Shepherd do all these things?

- Provide
- Restore
- Guide
- Protect

Answer: For His name's sake.



Every act of love and care is ultimately for **His glory**. We exist to glorify God, and everything He does for us magnifies His name.

Supporting verses: *I Corinthians 10:31, Matthew 5:16, Psalm 115:1, Revelation 4:11, I Corinthians 6:20, Colossians 3:17, Isaiah 43:7.*

Verse 8 – "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,"—*This signifies hard times.*

The phrase “valley of the shadow of death” sounds ominous—foreboding, threatening. Other translations render it as “**darkest valley.**” For this reason, David probably isn’t referring to death. Not everyone has faced literal death, but all of us have walked through dark valleys—periods of loss, grief, depression, or fear.

Now note how the verse begins:

“Yea, though...” (KJV/NKJV) or “Even though...” (NIV)

This tells us something important: **David expects to come through it.** If he had said, “I walk through the darkest valley,” it would leave us unsure of the outcome. But he says, “Even though I walk through...” — the implication is that *something good is coming next.*

Verse 9 – "I will fear no evil;"— *This refers to confidence and certainty.*

This short declaration is powerful:

“I will fear no evil.”

No hesitancy. No *maybe*. No *unless something really bad happens*. Just a simple, firm, *I will not fear.*

David knew trouble would come—it always did—but he also knew Who would be with him through it.

II Timothy 1:7 – “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”



Verse 10 – "For You are with me;"—*This expresses faithfulness.*

David's confidence in the face of darkness came from one unshakable truth: *God was with him.*

Deuteronomy 31:6, 8 – "He will never leave you nor forsake you."

Joshua 1:5, 9 – "As I was with Moses, so I will be with you."

Isaiah 41:10 – "I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you."

Verse 11 – "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me"— *This indicates discipline.*

David names two tools of the Shepherd:

- The **rod**: short and heavy, used for protection and correction.
- The **staff**: longer with a crook, used to guide, pull back, and rescue.

Both were used for **direction and discipline.**

David found comfort in the Shepherd's discipline—because discipline shows love.

Proverbs 3:12 – "For whom the LORD loves He corrects, just as a father the soon in whom he delights."

Hebrews 12:6 – "For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

Yes, "scourge" sounds strong, but correction on this side of eternity is mercy. In Heaven, the time for change is over. David was comforted by correction. We should be too.

Verse 12 – "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;"—*We should anticipate provision.*

Notice the **present tense**: "You prepare," not "You prepared" or "You will prepare." God is preparing even as we walk.

This could be literal or figurative:

- **Literally**: God providing strength and sustenance before or after battle.
- **Figuratively**: God blessing and providing for us—**in front of those who tried to harm us.**

Even in the midst of spiritual war, we must trust: **the Lord is preparing a feast for us when the battle is over!**

Just like He provided a ram for Abraham, quail for Moses, and bread for Elijah—God is always preparing provision for His people.

Verse 13: “You anoint my head with oil” — *This expresses consecration.*

Consecration means being set apart or dedicated to the service and worship of God. David likely meant this both literally. He had been anointed with oil by the prophet Samuel when God chose him to be king.

In the Old Testament, “anointing” wasn’t a symbolic gesture like we often see today—dabbing oil on the forehead. It was a pouring, often involving a full container of oil. This act symbolized being fully covered, set apart, and divinely chosen.

Psalm 133:2 gives us a vivid image of such anointing:

“It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments.”

When Moses anointed Aaron and his sons as priests, the oil flowed over their heads and garments, covering them completely. Likewise, Samuel did the same for David in first Samuel.

Today, we no longer anoint in the same way to consecrate someone into service. While oil is still used symbolically in prayer, healing, or blessing, our true consecration comes through Jesus Christ. As I Peter 2:9 declares, we are now a “royal priesthood.”

We weren’t consecrated with oil, but with the very **blood of Jesus**—as it ran down *His* face, *His* beard, and *His* garments. He tore down the barriers between the priesthood and people, so that all who follow Him may serve as priests in God’s Kingdom.

Verse 14: “My cup runs over” — *This denotes abundance.*

When a cup overflows, it signifies excess—more than we can contain. David knew that God would provide not only what he needed, but more than he could ever ask or imagine.

This theme of abundance appears throughout Scripture.

Psalm 65:11 (NIV) says:

“You crown the year with your bounty, and your carts overflow with abundance.”

In John 10:10, Jesus says:

“I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly.”

Luke 6:38 adds another layer to this promise:

“Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom...”

And Paul reminds us in Ephesians 3:20 that God is:

“...able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

God’s generosity cannot be measured. Our minds can’t fully comprehend what He is willing to do for those who trust Him.



Verse 15: “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me” — *This expresses future blessing.*

David acknowledges that God’s goodness and mercy aren’t just past experiences or present realities—they are *future promises*.

He didn’t expect a life without struggle, but he knew that God’s goodness and mercy would be with him no matter what. Not because he deserved them, but because of who **God** is.

We must be careful not to convey the idea—especially to children or new believers—that God’s goodness or mercy must be earned. We may not say it directly, but our actions can imply it. In truth, **God’s mercy and goodness are not conditional.**

Salvation does require a response from us (Acts 2:38), but God extended mercy and grace to us **before** we ever did anything for Him.

Verse 16: “All the days of my life” — *This expresses endurance.*

Earlier, David said, “You are with me,” showing God’s presence. Now he emphasizes **how long** that presence will last: *all the days of his life*.

David had many *really* bad days—not just the frustrating kind, but days filled with betrayal, violence, fear, and deep sorrow. His life story, found throughout First and Second Samuel and First and Second Chronicles, is full of hardship.

But David *knew* God was with him through it all—whether lying in green pastures, camping in a cave, or sleeping a palace. He woke each morning and laid down each night confident in God’s faithful presence.

Even in his doubts, he still knew in his heart: *God is with me.*

Oh, to have a heart like David! The good news? We don’t have to *earn* that heart—we just have to allow God to create it.

Verse 17: “And I will dwell in the house of the LORD” — *This signifies security.*

Security is the freedom from fear, doubt, and danger—a deep, unshakeable confidence.

Of all the places David had lived, he longed most to dwell *in the house of the Lord*. Long before Jesus promised to prepare “many mansions” (John 14:1-2), David envisioned a permanent, secure resting place with God.

Here on earth, homes are protected with locks, gates, lights, and security systems. We teach our children to be cautious—“stranger danger” becomes a part of life early on.

But in God’s house, there is **no fear**. No evil can reach us. No need for locks. It’s almost impossible to imagine—but oh, how glorious it will be!

Verse 18: “Forever” — *All eternity, not just a part, but all of it.*

David ends with a single, powerful word: **Forever**. Everything in this psalm is rooted in eternity.

- **Relationship** — forever
- **Supply** — forever
- **Rest** — forever
- **Refreshment** — forever
- **Healing** — forever
- **Guidance** — forever
- **Purpose** — forever
- **Through hard times** — forever

- **Confidence** — forever
- **Faithfulness** — forever
- **Discipline** — forever
- **Expectation** — forever
- **Consecration** — forever
- **Abundance** — forever
- **Endurance** — forever
- **Security** — forever



We can have **all** these things—**now and forever**.

Psalm 23 is a deeply *positive* psalm. Every line reflects something beautiful and powerful that the Lord has done for David—and for us. Even the mention of chastisement shows God's love and desire to keep us close to Him.

When was the last time you sat down and listed all the ways the Lord has blessed you—not just materially, but spiritually? Think about the *confidence*, the *purpose*, the *fearlessness*, the *refreshment*, and even the *correction* He's given you—all for His glory.

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