

# God as Our Shepherd

Bible Background • [PSALM 23](#)  
Printed Text • [PSALM 23](#)  
Devotional Reading • [JOHN 10:11-18](#)

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXPLORE Psalm 23's use of the metaphor of shepherding for trusting in God; APPRECIATE ways that God's love provides goodness and mercy to people when they face challenges; and CHOOSE to trust God's leading, which transforms challenges and difficulties.



Tanya stepped outside for some air but found herself crying. It was happening again. Doug, her supervisor, was making sexual advances toward her, and she felt afraid and embarrassed. Carol came outside after her. She knew what was happening with Doug. "Are you okay?" Tanya nodded, but Carrie knew better. "No, you're not."

"I just feel trapped. I hate what he is doing, but I have no options. If I keep refusing him or go to Human Resources, I'm afraid I'll lose my job."

"You have to do something. I doubt that he will stop on his own." Carol hugged Tanya. "The Lord's gonna take care of this whole situation girl. He'll lead you in what to do and what to say. Trying times like this are why we need God. I believe you should go to the authorities and have them investigate and take action against Doug. Have no fear of retaliation. The Lord'll protect you and fight your battles for you"

"I'm not sure that He will do that for me."

"Girl, He longs to do this for you. God's got your back." Carol prayed for the Lord's comfort, guidance, and protection for Tanya.

*The Lord cares for His people and provides for all their needs. He comforts and protects. We are dependent on Him like sheep are dependent on their shepherd. In what ways has God been a shepherd to you?*

## Keep in Mind

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want” ([Psalm 23:1](#)).

### KJV

[Psalm 23:1](#) The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4 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.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

### NLT

[Psalm 23:1](#) The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need.

2 He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams.

3 He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.

4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

5 You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.

6 Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

## The People, Places, and Times

**David.** David was the youngest son of Jesse of the tribe of Judah, and the second king of Israel. David is also the author of many hymns, including Psalm 23. He was brought up to be a shepherd, and in this occupation he learned the courage he would later demonstrate in battle.

**Shepherd.** The shepherd is charged with caring for the sheep. He must find food and water, protect the sheep from predators, and return any that have strayed.

## Background

The role of shepherd goes back to the days of Abel. Psalm 23 is a psalm of David, who was raised in that very occupation. As a shepherd, he fought with lions and bears to protect his sheep ([1 Samuel 17:34–35](#)). He was well acquainted with all the responsibilities of a shepherd. David uses his experience as a shepherd to illustrate the love and care of God. In ancient Middle Eastern culture, sheep were prized symbols of wealth. Their wool was used to make yarn. Also, sheep were a common animal for sacrifice or food, which made them especially precious.

## In Depth

### 1. God as Shepherd ([Psalm 23:1–4](#))

Psalm 23 presents Yahweh as the Shepherd who loves and cares for His sheep. Sheep are unable to survive on their own, so they depend completely on the shepherd. Psalm 23 elaborates on God's providential care as He cares for, guides, and gives refreshment to His people.

David opens by affirming the Lord as his shepherd, and that he has everything he needs. First, he delights in God's care, providing everything he needed. As his shepherd, the Lord also guided him. He led David beside the still waters, which may be interpreted as a resting place. Like a shepherd who knows the right paths to lead the sheep home, the Lord led David down the right path to bring glory to His name.

David next describes God's protection. With God as his shepherd, David had no reason to fear evil. The shepherd protected his sheep. He fought off wild animals that might attack them. The shepherd used his rod and staff to protect the flock. At night the shepherd would lay in the only doorway to the sheep pen, using his body to bar anyone who might try to steal the sheep. David experienced God's presence and protection.

The Lord is also the shepherd for believers today. We have the same intimate, lifelong fellowship with Him. We experience God's love and peace when facing stressful situations. Jesus describes Himself as the Good Shepherd ([Matthew 10:14](#)). As our Leader, He provides all our needs, restores us, and guides us to safety and paths pleasing to Him, bringing glory to His name. Like David, we need not fear the deep, dark valley. The believers are always under the Lord's watchful eye, and He never forsakes His sheep.

### 2. Guests in God's House (vv. 5–6)

The psalm shifts to God as gracious host and provider. God offers safety and protection, even spreading a table of lavish hospitality. Even in the presence of David's enemies, the Lord made provision for him. God's abundant care can be symbolized by the anointing with oil and the overflowing cup. The psalm ends with David affirming that God gives him victory over death and that he will spend eternity with Him.

As in Psalm 23, God graciously protects and provides for believers today. Believers have enemies and experience stressful and dangerous situations, just like David did. He offers us sanctuary in times of difficulty. God can transform our situations and our lives. As with David,

God's blessing is always on His people. We can dwell with the Lord and experience full communion with Him forever.

## **Search the Scriptures**

1. How does David describe his relationship with God ([Psalm 23:1](#))?
2. How does David describe his ongoing fellowship with God (v. 6)?

## **Discuss the Meaning**

1. God still seeks to lead, protect, and provide for His people. As believers, we must submit to His leading as sheep to their shepherd. How do you relate to God as your shepherd?
2. Even believers have problems. We have enemies. We can experience periods of darkness in our lives as David did. How has the Lord protected you or comforted you during trying times?

## **Lesson in Our Society**

Adults face difficult situations. We face danger, anxiety, and fear as we journey through life. We can turn to God as our shepherd to lead, protect, and provide for us. We must understand that He is our shepherd and leader, and must submit to His leadership. We must trust Him as our provider, asking and thanking Him for making provision for our needs. We must run to Him as our refuge in times of trouble. Finally, we must maintain a vital union with God for life.

## **Make It Happen**

Meditate on God's Word and reflect on the Lord as your shepherd. Ask Him to lead you as a shepherd leads and cares for his sheep. Rest in the truth that the Lord will protect and provide for you. Finally, thank Him for His love and providential care in your life.

## **More Light on the Text**

### **[Psalm 23:1-6](#)**

This famous psalm ([Psalm 23](#)) identifies God as the faithful Shepherd. For the reader, the psalm provides a deep sense of trust and confidence in God. The first four verses describe how our Divine Shepherd watches over His flock. The final two verses speak of the future thanksgiving in God's house. Biblical scholars believe that Psalm 23 utilizes the shepherd metaphor to remember God's help during the Exodus. Most believe King David to be the author. However, regardless of who authored this passage, it still remains one of the best known and loved psalms.

### **1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

Immediately, verse 1 affirms Yahweh as Shepherd. This concept originated in the early life of the Israelites, particularly during the time of Jacob. The traditions of Israel's time in the desert

seem to have given rise to the thought of God as their Shepherd. This concept became a favorite idiom throughout Israelite history. Several biblical passages highlight God as Shepherd and Protector ([Genesis 49:24](#); [Jeremiah 13:17](#); [Micah 7:14](#)).

Traditionally, the shepherd theme is interpreted communally. The shepherd has a relationship with his flock. The pronoun “my” makes this portion of the psalm distinct in that it speaks of one individual’s personal relationship with the shepherd. The speaker confirms that a relationship with the shepherd brings about wonderful results. The needs of the sheep are met and God (the Shepherd) becomes the ultimate source of provision. This verse establishes that God is loyal and devoted to each individual sheep.

**2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.  
3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.**

The verses extend the metaphor of a loving and devoted shepherd, illustrating the nature of the shepherd’s guidance and provision. The psalmist speaks of God guiding him through the ups and downs of life. Green pastures and still waters are significant elements in the beginning of the psalm. Grassy pastures indicate tender grass, young herbage, and abundance. God puts the psalmist in the midst of plenty to enjoy it with ease and comfort. The shepherd leading the sheep by still waters portrays the Lord showing the psalmist to a resting place where he could be refreshed safely.

This not only confirms the duties of the shepherd, but also affirms that he is prepared to keep the sheep nourished in every way. It is important to note that it was the shepherd’s job to supply the sheep with water either at a running stream or at troughs attached to the wells ([Genesis 29:7](#), [30:38](#); [Exodus 2:16](#)).

**4 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.**

This verse uses several metaphors to specify the relationship between the Shepherd and His sheep. First, the phrase “valley of shadow of death” might have a few different meanings. The term might refer to the hill country of Judah, which consisted of narrow valleys that were often dark, gloomy, and difficult to climb. Also, the valleys had deep caves where wild beasts and robbers resided. This made the journey for the pilgrim extremely dangerous as he passed through the hill country. Literally, the peril of death could occur in the valleys of the hill country. Second, the phrase might also be used figuratively. The author could be comparing the deep shadow of death’s valley to Egyptian slavery or the Israelites’ long time in the wilderness.

The Great Shepherd protects His people during their exodus and wandering in the wilderness. Triumphantly, the Good Shepherd leads the sheep out of the wilderness into the Promised Land ([Jeremiah 2:6](#)). Such language could also be used as a tool of encouragement to the exiled Israelites later. Certainly God, who led the ancestors out of bondage, will liberate these captives. Whatever the psalmist’s intent, he emphasizes that there is divine protection in the midst of danger or death.

In keeping with the image of God as Shepherd, the psalmist highlights a rod and a staff. Shepherds used rods to count the sheep, care for the sheep, and check the condition of the sheep. It was also a symbol of power and authority. Staffs were used to aid the shepherd in climbing hills and beating away bushes and reptiles in the area. These symbols imply that the shepherd is capable of protecting his flock as well as leading them.

**5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anoinest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

Here, the image changes from a shepherd to a host. The intimate relationship between God and His people are like that of a host and his guests. God as the gracious host protects the guests from any enemy. In the ancient East, the host would customarily protect the guest from his enemies at all costs. A man pursued by enemies could seek another man's tent for refuge. The owner of that tent would be obligated to protect his guest from the enemy. Additionally, the host would sprinkle the guests with perfume as a way of welcoming them into his fellowship.

Such a loving and gracious host gives pure satisfaction and security to the guests ("my cup overflows"). These images provide us with more detail about God's nature. God is a gracious host who protects His guests from all enemies. He is our shield and protector. Our enemies stand outside the tent door glaring, but they are not allowed to destroy us. Their plans are frustrated while our God makes a statement. He is truly a friend.

God also prepares a great banquet and longs for our fellowship. Feasting in His presence nourishes our souls and prepares us for greatness. The psalm ends with some future expectation. A relationship with the Divine Shepherd or the Gracious Host will result in goodness, mercy, and God's everlasting presence. The psalmist is convinced that God's wise guidance will lead to a promising future.

## **Say It Correctly**

Pastures. **PAS**-chers.

Anointest. ah-**NOYNT**-ist.

## **Daily Bible Readings**

### **MONDAY**

God's People Seek a Resting Place  
([Numbers 10:29-36](#))

### **TUESDAY**

God the True Shepherd  
([Ezekiel 34:11-16](#))

## **WEDNESDAY**

The Lord Brings the People Home  
([Jeremiah 23:1-8](#))

## **THURSDAY**

Jesus Sacrifices for the Flock  
([John 10:11-18](#))

## **FRIDAY**

Shepherds in God's Household Today  
([Hebrews 13:17, 20-21](#))

## **SATURDAY**

Tending the Flock of God  
([1 Peter 5:1-11](#))

## **SUNDAY**

A Caring Shepherd and Gracious Host  
([Psalm 23](#))