



# FAITHFUL.

a closer look at Psalm 23

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*yes. ministries*

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IS *yes.*

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*FAITHFUL.*

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# INTRODUCTION

I love music and song lyrics. There's something about a song that expresses the heart more than mere words can. When I was a young mother, I would sing songs to my kids that were so quirky, like "A Bushel and a Peck" from *Guys and Dolls*. I'm still not sure what that song even means, but it just seemed to flow out of me, expressing my heart of love for these little babies of mine. When Jason and I first fell in love, every love song on the radio expressed my heart for him. I was a fool in love, and I sang about it all the time!

Music also inspires us. It reminds us that we're able, that we're conquerors. My kids play sports. Before any game they get to pick the song we play on the way. They tell me they need to get "pumped up"--music is the catalyst.

Music plays a key role throughout the Bible, too. King David of the Old Testament is known for his love of music. In Psalm 23, he reflects on his life and the faithful God that led him every step of the way. It's a love song that flows from the heart of a man to his God who he views as the Good Shepherd. Every verse hinges on the first one demonstrating the sheep's utter trust and confidence in the Shepherd.

The same is true for you and me. Everything in our lives hinges on one thing: what we believe about the Shepherd. Is He A Shepherd? Is He THE Shepherd? Is He MY Shepherd?

In this study of Psalm 23, we will journey through the life of David, and in many aspects, the life of any of us. It's a beautiful reflection on the ups and downs, the highs and lows, the wins and losses in this life. And through it all, the one thing that holds, the one constant, the only one that is faithful--the Shepherd.

This complete study is made up of three parts: **FAITHFUL**. video teaching, **DISCUSS FURTHER**. questions related to the video, and a **DIG DEEPER**. study of Psalm 23.

Because fresh understanding can be found in comparing Bible translations, I've used the English Standard Version (ESV) in the video teaching and **DISCUSS FURTHER.**, and the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) in **DIG DEEPER.** Whether you are doing this study on your own or in a small group, do it all or do what you can!

This study could not have come together without a small village of people. Van Williams with envision! Video graciously led me through uncharted territory with such confidence and kindness to produce the **FAITHFUL.** videos. Wendy Scott, teacher, blogger, pastor, theologian, and all-around great friend, collaborated with me bringing her transformative insights to the **DIG DEEPER.** sections. And, all of you who just keep saying Yes.: Anne Finstuen for your love of editing; the Yes. ministries Board of Directors for your resourceful leadership; Paul and Tracy Hopkins for the beautiful filming location; and my most cherished family for your boundless support. I don't deserve you, but the good folks that find this study certainly do. God bless each one of you.

You, too, have said Yes. and as we study Psalm 23 together, I believe you will be writing your own song about your Good Shepherd. He is so very **FAITHFUL.**

*Laura Seifert*



# DISCUSS FURTHER.

Psalm 23:1 ESV

*“The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.”*

*After Laura’s teaching, make your way through the following questions in personal reflection or small group discussion. For more study into this verse, keep going to **DIG DEEPER**.*



- > What's your favorite song? Do you have a “signature song” with anyone special?
- > How familiar are you with Psalm 23? Does this psalm have special meaning to you?
- > David identifies himself as a sheep under the constant care of his Shepherd. Do you see God as a Shepherd? Is He your Shepherd? Specifically, how does your Shepherd care for you?
- > As we journey through life, the song we sing in the depths of our hearts is determined by our relationship with the Shepherd. What is your song?

# DIG DEEPER.

Psalm 23:1 CSB

*“The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need.”*

If someone asked you to recite Psalm 23, you might begin the way most of us start. “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (Psalm 23:1 ESV). After all, even if you didn’t memorize it, you’ve seen enough movies with a preacher saying it at a funeral. We understand that we’re supposed to be comforted by this poem, but how? What does “I shall not want” even mean? Is it condemning or warning against any sort of wanting? Is it referring to a future time when we will transcend wanting? Maybe it means that one day, when we’re dead, we won’t want anymore, because, you know, we’ll be dead?

Either way, that line feels vague and archaic, so it’s easy to dismiss.

While I tend to be a loyalist to a particular Bible translation, reading familiar passages in different translations is a good practice. It makes the brain slow down to process the material because the eyes don’t see the words the brain expects. Initially, it’s agitating to keep slowing down. Over time, it almost feels like reading a new book. The brain lets go of expectations and begins to absorb the material as if it is fresh.

“The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need,” the CBS translation brazenly reads in its modern vernacular.

“I shall not want” is a phrase that is up for interpretation. “I have what I need,” however, is not. It’s as blunt and direct as a statement can be, and it’s with this bluntness that I feel offended. My internal dialogue sounds something like this.

*“The LORD is my Shepherd.”*

*Oh, David! That’s so sweet! You’re so wise and such a good songwriter. The LORD is my Shepherd, too. I love this song!*

“I have what I need.”

*Wait. What? Do I, David? Do I have what I need? Maybe when you wrote this, you had what you needed, but you were a shepherd. How much did you even need in the first place? What did you even know anyway? Had life even been complicated for you yet? This is a stupid song.*

I surprised myself with my reaction. I don't usually speak to Biblical authors in such a sassy tone. Clearly, these five words hit a nerve.

I wonder if they touch a nerve with you, too. I wonder where you find yourself these days. Do you have what you need?

Or maybe you're doing a mental inventory and finding more needs every day.

Currently, I feel as if I'm in the latter category. I can rattle off a series of areas right now where I am majorly wanting. I can think of a handful of hurts that are still waiting for healing, and too often, I feel as if I've received ashes for beauty instead of the other way around. It's enough to make me shake my head bitterly at the Pollyanna who penned this poem.

Except...

I can't shake this phrase, “I have what I need.” It keeps rolling around in my head, and, instead of feeling as if my mind is chewing on this verse, I realize this verse is chewing on my mind. As the Word of God is prone to do, it's stirring things up in my heart and isn't giving one thought to personal boundaries, propriety, or privacy. Sometimes I feel like the Bible has the worst social skills, and I'm offended. It always brings up the things which aren't supposed to be discussed in polite company. It's so rude.

And so kind.

Feeling offended is often an indicator of unreasonable expectations, misaligned values, or wrong beliefs and conclusions. Recognizing offense in my heart is the kindness of God to bring into the light that which I have hidden. In love, He

dredges my heart to reveal lies on which I have constructed beliefs. I've put in enough time with Jesus to know that if He drags it up, He wants to heal it, remove it, or cut it off.

The lie that has taken root is that if I have major needs, the LORD must not be a very competent shepherd or He doesn't really care that much about me. Either way, I realize that I'm questioning His fitness or His motive and coming to the wrong conclusion about each.

*"The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need."*

I'm not an expert on Bible interpretation, but I know enough to know that the structure of Biblical poetry or narrative is important and typically communicates a deeper meaning or gives clues to the full interpretation. In an effort to reconcile with the text, I decided to see if I could play with the structure of this line, maybe that would show me something more, and we could kiss and make up. While doodling one morning, I accidentally discovered something that changed this verse from vinegar to wine. Try this exercise with me.

Write the first phrase of the poem on one line leaving a space between "The LORD is" and "my shepherd." Write the second phrase in the same form directly under the first. Then, draw an "X" between the four groups and read the newly created phrases. Do you see it?

The LORD is            my shepherd.  
                          X  
I have                 what I need.

The LORD is what I need. I have my shepherd.

A simple exercise.

A tectonic shift.

**The LORD is what I need.**

When I work from the wrong premise, I will always draw a false conclusion. If I am the one who determines what I need and don't need, I will always end up confusing needs and wants, and God's performance evaluation will constantly vacillate between good and bad.



For example, at this very minute, I am sitting on a balcony overlooking the ocean while a soft rain falls and the waves break on the sandbar and then, the shore. Ask me right now what my needs are, and I will tell you, “*I need a beach house,*” but I don’t have one, nor do I ever anticipate being able to own one. By this standard, no beach house = bad shepherd. That seems like a silly example, but scale it to fit your circumstance to see what I mean.

“I got into the graduate program I wanted.” = Good Shepherd

“I didn’t get enough scholarship money to go.” = bad shepherd

“My parents abandoned me when I was young.” = bad shepherd

“I was adopted by a family who adores me.” = Good Shepherd

“I made a career change and am doing something I love.” = Good Shepherd

“I lost my job.” = bad shepherd

“I thought I would be married by now.” = bad shepherd

“I got married.” = Good Shepherd

“My marriage fell apart.” = bad shepherd

“My health is failing.” = bad shepherd

“I finally had a baby after two miscarriages.” = Good Shepherd

(but, bad shepherd during the miscarriages)

“My children are grown and healthy.” = Good Shepherd

“My child rebelled, and we don’t speak anymore.” = bad shepherd

One of the things we know to be true about God is that He does not change.<sup>1</sup>

What He was when the world began, He will be when it ends and at every point in between and ever after. If He was kind, He will always be kind. He cannot be unkind. If He was wise, He will always be wise. If loving, always loving. If good, always good. Therefore, He cannot be good on some occasions and bad on others. Whatever He does, whatever He is, it must always align with His nature.

Exercising His wisdom, God made you and me and all things. As the Maker, He knows what His creations need more than His creations know what they need. God determines what I need, even when it offends my sensibilities. Above all else, I need Him, and in His mercy, He has not withheld Himself.

*"The LORD is my shepherd. I have what I need."*

*"The LORD is what I need. I have my shepherd."*

I have what I need because the Shepherd has given me Himself.

I guess David's song wasn't so stupid after all.

I probably owe him an apology.



> There are many names used for God in the scriptures. Each one defines an aspect of His character and nature, and whatever word is used has a purpose. When LORD is used in all capital letters, it is the covenant name of God, YHVH.<sup>2</sup> (יהוה). We often pronounce this Yahweh, meaning "I will be what I will be" and more specifically, "the God who stands outside of time." It is the name by which He makes His covenants with humans. Why is it significant that this is the name used in this psalm?

> Meditate on the word "MY." How would the meaning of the psalm change by replacing it with "THE" or "A"? Read John 10:1-6. How does a sheep recognize her shepherd? Can you genuinely say of the LORD, "He is MY shepherd."?

> Read Ezekiel 34. God calls Himself a shepherd in this chapter. Make a list comparing a bad shepherd and the Good Shepherd. What does this passage reveal about the responsibilities God takes upon Himself versus what He expects from His sheep? What does comparing God to a shepherd reveal about His character? What does this mean to you?

# DISCUSS FURTHER.

Psalm 23:2-3a ESV

*“He makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters.  
He restores my soul.”*

*After Laura’s teaching, make your way through the following questions in personal reflection or small group discussion. For more study into these verses, keep going to **DIG DEEPER**.*



- > We’re good at escaping. We’re bad at resting. Agree or disagree?
- > What are some ways you escape? What are the “green pastures” and “still waters” that lead you to find rest?
- > Describe a season in your life when you were made to rest? Did brokenness precede that rest? How did that rest restore your soul?
- > If resting in the Father’s heart of goodness and love over you is difficult, what first step will you take to allow the Lord to restore your soul?

# DIG DEEPER.

Psalm 23:2-3a CSB

*“He lets me lie down in green pastures;...”*

It's easy for me to mistake escaping for REST. For example, when I'm stressed out, I love to go to Target or Marshall's and wander the aisles for an unrushed amount of time. Something about shopping makes me feel relaxed, and it takes my mind off whatever's pressing on me. You may prefer a cheeseburger to a new pair of jeans. Or perhaps a glass of cabernet or a good book. Regardless of the vice, and these things aren't necessarily bad, they don't bring about the meaning of rest that David intends.

Real rest is soul-oriented. Real rest comes from God alone. Real rest is difficult for us because it requires a pause in our lives. It means I have to step out of the chaos and into the presence of God, and that can be scary. Like it or not, we're conditioned to avoid rest and seek escape, but it's not a smart move.

Sheep aren't incredibly smart, either. That's why they can be easily managed with an energetic, bossy dog. What they lack in intelligence, though, they make up for in fussiness. In order for a sheep to rest, it must be free of pests, feel completely secure, and be fully sated. A good shepherd will, therefore, maintain his flock in such a way that they are pest-free, safe, and full. When the criteria are met, the sheep have no other concerns and can, therefore, lie down. The verb form of the word *rabats*<sup>1</sup> is translated as “makes me” or “lets me” which shows benevolent cause, not force. In other words, what David intends to communicate is that, as a shepherd, God causes His sheep to lie down and rest. He does not force them. He creates for His sheep what they cannot--the very best conditions under which they can rest.

What keeps you up at night? Or prevents you from falling asleep? Or distracts you from being fully present with your family and friends? What robs you of rest? Name those things. Put words to them. Write them down. Do you know that the LORD, who is your Shepherd, cares for your needs? Do you know it is not His intention for you to strive and angst over how your needs will be met?

In a world that idolizes earning and striving, it should come as no surprise that the world's way is oppositional to God's. When the world screams, "EARN!" Jesus beckons, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."<sup>2</sup> When the world frets, "You will never have enough," the LORD counters, "My God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."<sup>3</sup> When the world commands, "Toil!" the Good Shepherd beckons, "Be still."<sup>4</sup> The Father God, who knows what we need before we ask, who knows how to give good gifts to His children, who does not withhold any good thing from those who seek Him, will care for those who belong to Him. Where I have lack and feel panic stirring is nothing more than a kind Shepherd creating the context for His provision to be realized. Unless I have needs for which I could never provide, how else could I ever see that "the LORD is my Shepherd" who cares tenderly and extravagantly for me, His sheep? Like Jesus in a REM cycle on the boat in the storm<sup>5</sup>, God makes it possible for me to rest even when rest should seem unreasonable.

Psalm 23 begins with the premise, "The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need." The next few verses prove the statement, and the first evidence David offers to support the claim is, "He lets me lie down (rest) in green pastures."

I have what I need. I have the Shepherd. But the Shepherd is the One who made me and all things. He knows better than anyone that I am an embodied person with physical needs. Funny thing, though. When I list my needs, rest doesn't usually make the top ten. When God lists my needs, however, rest is the very first one.

Why? Why is rest such a big deal to God?

In Genesis 1, the creation story has intentional cadence and repetition. The pattern of the story is "there was evening, and there was morning..." From this, Jewish people understood that each new day begins at sundown, and at sundown, one reclines at a table to eat then goes to bed. It's a strange concept for our way of thinking, but in the Jewish mind, the day begins with sleep. Additionally, the story emphasizes the expectation. The narrative teaches that humans were created on the sixth day, and on the seventh God rested. This means that the very first thing the man and woman did wasn't work, even though that was their explicit mandate. The first thing they did was nothing. They observed the Sabbath, the day of rest, the weekly rhythm imitating creation and the day on which the only constraint was abstinence from work.

The act of resting is both a reminder and a declaration that we are not God and that we are, like sheep, in need of care. Lying down is a vulnerable position, sleeping even more so. If a sheep lies down and sleeps, she is defenseless, an easy target for predators. How else could the animal lie down unless she is confident that her needs are met and that she is under the protection of her shepherd? Rest is a way to say to God, "I trust you."

My Shepherd gives me all I need, and it's His good plan to begin with rest. He desires that everything His sheep do flows from a posture of confidence in their Shepherd.

Want to make a radical stand against the enemy? Maybe start with a nap.

I will shepherd them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will tend them in good pasture, and their grazing place will be on Israel's lofty mountains. There they will lie down in a good grazing place; they will feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

*"...he leads me beside quiet waters."*

Among the first outdoor survival skills every useful backpacking guide teaches new backpackers is how to collect safe water for drinking. It's not hard to understand why it isn't a good idea to collect water from the bank of a deep, swiftly moving snowmelt river. Not only is the water churned up and full of sediment, but even a slight misstep could also spell disaster. On the flip side, stagnant water is just as dangerous because of toxic microbes. The best place to collect water is in a shallow spot where the water is gently flowing over a rock.

Being led "beside quiet waters" is to journey along places where the water is easily consumable and safe. There is no danger of being swept away by a current nor peril of being poisoned by contaminated water. Instead, the opportunity to drink deeply of water that sustains life without fear of harm is available.

So, put the whole picture together. The Shepherd God causes His sheep to lie down in nutrient-dense pastures near a sustained water source. If this is where the Good Shepherd brings His sheep, what response from the sheep most honors the Shepherd? Frantic pacing or quiet resting? Paranoia or peace? Nibbling or feasting?

The LORD is your Shepherd. Feast on His Word, drink deeply of His presence, rest in His goodness.

*“...He renews my life;”*

Psalms 23:2a tells of the goodness of the Shepherd who feeds, waters, and rests His flock. It's not just sheep for whom a good meal and a nap fix a whole lot of wrong. All creatures know how critical food and sleep are to physical existence, obviously, but how do those things affect the nonphysical?

For the past couple of years, a group of friends has gathered to celebrate Passover, the retelling of the Hebrew people's freedom from Egyptian slavery.<sup>7</sup> Passover is commemorated by a meal, called the Seder, served in an order in which the elements, items of food and drink, represent something in the Passover story. Several of my friends transform a living room into a banquet hall with a long, lavishly set dining table. The rest of us bring our fancy food, (I texted to see if I could bring my store-bought Greek salad), and one of us retells the story of the Exodus as we consume the elements in order. Lingering for hours at the table, we sip wine and savor food. We laugh and cry, toast and sing, have seconds and sometimes thirds. Food, wine, candlelight, leisure, and fellowship all work in harmony to slice open this broken world and give us a momentary taste of the world to come. For just a minute, we glimpse heaven, and when the evening ends, each person leaves, not just full, but wholly renewed. The act of observing the Seder doesn't only affect our physical bodies; it affects our whole person.

That is what David means when he says, “He renews my life.”

The LORD renews every part of His sheep's lives, tangible and intangible, with rest, food, and water. I don't mean to imply that the psalm is speaking only of *actual* provisions. David is also using metaphors to speak of spiritual things, but my Western way of thinking is often guilty of missing this both in life and in the Bible.

On the opening pages of the scriptures, we are told that God created humans and animated them by breathing His own breath into their lungs.<sup>8</sup> He called this masterpiece “very good.”<sup>9</sup> By this, we understand that the whole of a person, both the physical and nonphysical, have equal value and function together to make a very good creation. It was God’s design that the two parts should never be separated. However, sin fractured the good design. Both the physical and nonphysical parts of man and woman were corrupted when Adam and Eve sinned. Mind, will, emotions, and desires were poisoned, and the flesh became subject to death and decay. The story of redemption, therefore, is not a story of how our spirits get freed from these fallen fleshy prisons, but rather how both body and spirit are redeemed and restored. The hope God gave through Jesus is not heaven for our disembodied souls when we die, but the resurrection of our bodies into an existence in which both body and spirit cannot be corrupted and will no longer operate at odds with one another. We will exist, not in a new creation, rather in creation made new. As Jesus was raised, so shall we be!

He renews our lives.

### ***Now***

This renewedness is something believers experience in part right now. Paul states it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:16, “Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day.” From the moment one believes in Jesus, the Spirit of God initiates renewal. If you have given your life to Jesus, you understand. You are not who you were before you were saved. Whether the difference was visibly dramatic or subtle, you know you are not who you used to be, and as time passes, you sense the change in your core. You see the fruit of inward renewal.

### ***Not Yet***

At the same time that the Spirit is refreshing and renewing inwardly day by day, what is happening on the inside doesn’t seem to have any effect on the outside. You may be a dewy-skinned twenty-something, but trust me, the day is coming when each new day is an adventure in aging. For a time in our lives, it doesn’t feel as if outwardly we are wasting away until, virtually overnight, it does. One day we realize no cream can hold back the wrinkles of time. There is no doubt; outwardly, we are wasting away.



Revelation paints the picture of the future, of what is yet to come.

Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away. Then the one seated on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new."<sup>10</sup>

Ultimately, through the blood of Jesus, we are reborn to our perfected state. The tangible and intangible parts of who we are will no longer move in opposite directions where one part is being renewed daily while the other part decays by degrees. Instead, we will exist as we were meant to exist, whole and integrated, inwardly and outwardly made complete.



> What are your thoughts on why rest is so important to God? What difference does it make that rest precedes work rather than follow it? What would change for you if you begin to view your day starting at bedtime?

> The Hebrew word, *ra'ah*<sup>11</sup>, is translated as "shepherd" and is also the same root word used for "companion" or "friend." Meditate on what this means. Does it enhance the image of who the LORD is and how He abides with you?

> How does the LORD renew your life now? For what renewal are you longing? What hope fills you as you think of yourself as a renewed creation? What does that mean to you presently and eternally?

# DISCUSS FURTHER.

Psalm 23:3b ESV

*“He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.”*

*After Laura's teaching, make your way through the following questions in personal reflection or small group discussion. For more study into this verse, keep going to **DIG DEEPER**.*



> God doesn't give us the full plan, but He asks us to trust Him. How can God's paths be right and good, but sometimes be difficult and dark, too? When the dark times come, how do you view your Shepherd?

> God leads us in the context of relationships. We must know Him if we're ever going to trust Him. How well do you know your Shepherd?

> Walking in right paths is contingent on three steps:

*Remember* to follow the Shepherd.<sup>1</sup>

*Wait* on the LORD to present the next step.<sup>2</sup>

*Trust* that His ways are always good.<sup>3</sup>

Which step is hardest for you? Which one step can you take to know Him better?

> God's glory is always our best. Always. The two are not mutually exclusive. When your path is difficult and dark, what do you do? In the midst of this path, how can you shift your focus to see the Good Shepherd most clearly?

# DIG DEEPER.

Psalm 23:3b CSB

*“...he leads me...”*

The only time I ever remember getting lost happened when I was five. Several families were going to the rodeo in Ft. Worth. It was already after sunset as we were headed into the arena. I followed my dad into the building, but it wasn't until after we passed through the ticket booth and were in the light that I realized the man I had been following wasn't my dad. A good Samaritan turned me over to the police, and I was shortly reunited with my panic-stricken parents. I was fine, but my mom probably had diarrhea and heart palpitations for a month.

My parents had no intention of losing me that night. They thought I was following behind them, but when you're a kid, it's easy to confuse one dad's Wranglers with another's in a crowd.

Look at how the Lord leads as a shepherd.

The point is, it matters how one leads. Isaiah 30:21 says, “...and whenever you turn to the right or the left, your ears will hear this command behind you: ‘This is the way. Walk in it.’” This is an interesting way to lead. How often do you hear of leading *from behind*? What sense does that make? Looking back at five-year-old me, it makes a great deal of sense. What would have been different if my parents had been behind me, if they had their eyes on me and the path in front of me rather than assuming I was following close behind? It's not always as critical that the sheep see the shepherd as much as it is that the shepherd sees the sheep.

But God is so kind. He doesn't remain a mysterious presence behind us.

In John 10:3b-4, Jesus says, “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice.”

Where is the shepherd in relation to the sheep? Ahead of them. The shepherd who goes ahead of his sheep prepares the way. He scouts out all possible dangers and makes a right path, even in treacherous terrain.

Psalm 139:5 describes God's unique leadership ability in this way, "You have encircled me; you have placed your hand on me."

God leads you and me by going before and by bringing up the rear. He has His hand on each of us. That means His care completely insulates us. No one else can lead as He can.

I'm not always convinced of that, though. I think I know a better way. However, when I read Psalm 14 and Romans 1-3, I'm confronted with the truth that there is no person who is righteous, who does what is good, and who seeks God first. I know the wages of sin is death.<sup>4</sup>

### *"...along the right paths..."*

What would it look like if you and I were in charge of labeling "right paths"? Remember the scene in Disney's animated *Beauty and the Beast* where Maurice is taking his invention to the fair and comes to a fork in the road? On one side, the sun is shining, birds and butterflies are flitting, and the vegetation is lush. The other path leads into a thick, overgrown wood and becomes almost immediately dark because the knotty trees block all sunlight. Scary noises come from the black hole we assume to be the path. Naturally, Maurice chooses the overgrown wood, which any fool can see is the wrong path. Based on how the story turns out, though, we are left to question our notions about what right paths are supposed to resemble. If Maurice had chosen the path the audience would have chosen, the beast would have remained a beast.

The very first path in the Bible is in Genesis 3. In response to Adam and Eve eating from the tree of knowledge,

The LORD God said, "Since the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, take from the tree of life, eat, and live forever." So the LORD God sent him away from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove the man out and stationed the cherubim and the flaming, whirling sword east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life.<sup>5</sup>

God, who crafted the delightful garden for the pleasure of the creatures, was the One who set Adam and Eve's feet on the one-way path away from the garden. Because sin had entered and fractured His good creation, Adam and Eve in their fallen, rebellious state could not stay in the garden with God's presence.

Right paths don't always *feel* like the right paths. Most of the time, those paths are hard, painful, and we don't want to go where they lead. They make us question whether God is *really* good. Or, maybe we think He's good, well-intentioned at least, but question whether He is powerful enough to stand up against evil. On the darkest days, we may even imagine that God is mean--that He put us on the path of pain because He is punishing us.

Where did the path out of Eden lead? To a life of scraping by, toiling in dirt, pain, sweat, tears, thorns, weeds, and death.

By God's great love, the path out of Eden also leads to Jesus, the Rescuer, who would redeem and restore the relationship with God that was severed when Adam and Eve sinned.

***"...for his name's sake."***

Why does the Shepherd, against whom I rebel by nature, choose to shepherd me? Why doesn't He leave you and me to our own destructive devices? Why does He even care about my paths, let alone lead me in the right ones?

One reason--God moves towards us, acts for us, and works in us for His name's sake.

My children don't know the first thing about Chick-fil-A's business model, but when we're on the road and they spot a Chick-fil-A sign, it doesn't matter what other restaurants are around, they want to stop at Chick-fil-A. Unlike many other fast food chains, the sandwich, waffle fries, and "My pleasure." does not differ from one location to another or from one owner to another. If you have walked into one Chick-fil-A, you have walked into them all. They are known for their consistent customer service and food quality at every location. I'm sure some of their employees wonder why they must respond, "My pleasure." to every "Thank you." But as loyal customers, we can easily see the value of universally high standards throughout the company. Standards that maintain the reputation of the company, or to put it a different way, for the sake of the name of the company.

Have you ever considered that God's reputation is at stake in the way He cares for you? It is. For those who follow Jesus, who are the sheep of His pasture and chosen as one in His flock, He has called us by name and claimed us as His own. We belong to Him, which means the burden of our care falls on His shoulders.

How does creation know that the LORD is a good shepherd? Well, the proof is in the pudding, so to speak. The glory of God is displayed in what He does and how He does it. If He cares for His sheep poorly, can He rightfully be called a good shepherd? No! My confidence in His care does not, therefore, rest on whether or not I *deserve* His attention. Instead, it rests on whether or not He will maintain His own glorious reputation.

I lie down because He is good.  
I walk beside quiet waters because He is good.  
I enjoy renewal because He is good.  
I am led in right paths because He is good.

I am redeemed by His blood...  
I am justified by His righteousness...  
I am sanctified by His discipline...  
I am glorified by His grace...

...because He is good.

All of this and more, *for the sake of His name.*



> Read Romans 11:36 and 1 Corinthians 8:6. What do they indicate about you? About God?

> Consider your own paths. Right paths don't always feel right. How would you describe where you are now? How does your path feel? How can you trust the path is right?

> Read Genesis 17:1-2 and Revelation 1:8. Identify the name by which God is called. What aspect of His nature does the name highlight? How does God maintain the reputation of the specific name? How is this characteristic of God good news for you?

# DISCUSS FURTHER.

Psalm 23:4 ESV

*“Even 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.”*

*After Laura’s teaching, make your way through the following questions in personal reflection or small group discussion. For more study into this verse, keep going to **DIG DEEPER**.*



- > There are times when our path takes us through valleys, what we call the low points in life. Think of a current or past valley. How would you describe it?
- > What do you believe about the Shepherd while in this valley? Does this belief differ on either side of that valley?
- > Think specifically, how has God met you in the valley with His rod of protection and staff of provision? How have they comforted you?
- > Valleys can make us feel alone, isolated, and powerless. In the darkest valley, which truths in Ephesians 6:13-18 shed the most light for you?

# DIG DEEPER.

Psalm 23:4 CSB

*“Even when I go through the darkest valley...”*

Reading a book is an exercise that requires more than just the ability to read words printed on a page. Comprehending what all the words are trying to communicate means employing some critical thinking and analytical skills. Often we do this without even recognizing that we’re doing it. For example, we read *People magazine* much differently than we read instruction manuals than we read fashion blogs--genre matters in how we interpret what we read and what we do with the information.

When reading Psalms and applying analysis, we look for how the verses build on one another, how phrases and stanzas are related, and for repeated words, phrases, and ideas. In Psalm 23:4, “Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger,” or as the English Standard Version (ESV) reads, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,” is a distinct phrase, but it is not a self-contained thought. It exists in a context. What came before and what comes after gives this verse its full meaning. David knows he has just painted a rosy picture--green pastures, quiet water--but what I believe he intends to do is zoom out from those spots of refreshment and satisfaction to the broader context. It’s as if he is saying, *“My Shepherd is so excellent that He can find nourishment and safe drinking water in the place where other shepherds cannot, even in the desolate valley of the shadow of death. I don’t have to fear what the sheep of other shepherds fear. My Shepherd is armed and alert, so I am comforted when others are afraid.”*

By this point in his life, David has walked through many of his own dark valleys that in some cases were very literally shadowed with the threat of death.<sup>1</sup> My guess is that in each of those seasons David walked paths he would not have chosen were it left to him to decide. I’ve experienced my own versions of dark valleys. You have, too. I’ve seen the redemption of some of those circumstances. Not all, but a few, and it’s enough for me to know that my Shepherd can be trusted to be with me in the darkness and to lead me to places I wouldn’t have known to go.



My daughter Beth was born with a heart defect that could have been deadly. When the doctor relayed the news to Jason and me, I thought I might pass out in his office. My first response was, NO. This is not a right path; this is a wrong path, a bad path, a cruel path. God, fix it, change the path now. I believed if I prayed the right way, and had enough people praying with me, we could change the path and her heart would miraculously be made well. That's an honest response, and God was pleased with our prayers. And sometimes, He answers with miraculous healing. However, at some point along the way, my prayers turned to demands. I'm sure God heard my prayers in all caps, "*CHANGE THE PATH, LORD, NOW!*" Through lots of wrestling and a ton of support from Christian friends, I reached a place of surrender. That surrender looked like this: "*God, I don't get to call the shots. I get to trust the truth that you're a Good Shepherd even when the path isn't one I would choose or like.*" That surrender brought peace. Surrender always brings peace. Beth's heart wasn't made well on its own. In fact, the hole grew larger and a second hole was discovered. But God was faithful. She had a successful surgery and today, bears a scar proudly! Through this valley, I experienced His presence in a way I had not known before. God provided for every need we had, and we experienced the tender care of the Good Shepherd in ways we hadn't before.

This conversation about right paths is always a tricky one. It's easy to inadvertently imply that God leads us through darkness and suffering as though He is the cause of evil and bad things. Far from it! Suffering in this sin-fractured world is a guarantee that Jesus acknowledges in John 16:33, "I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." In that same passage, however, He points us to THE source of comfort in the darkness, that which was His own comfort in His shadow of death. He was not alone, because the Father was with Him.<sup>2</sup>

Now, go one step further with this idea of the valley of the shadow of death. The valley of the shadow of death isn't only a reference to passing circumstances. The valley of the shadow of death is our perpetual state; the condition into which we are born. It's true that some circumstances *feel* darker than others. There are certainly times when we have a heightened awareness of the death threat which hangs over us and needs deeper consolation, but the truth is that you and I are born into a grave.

Death is the result of sin<sup>3</sup>, and all people are sinners<sup>4</sup>; therefore, the mortality rate of all humans is 100%. But, death isn't the *only* result of sin. Sin perverts our perspective and our desires. Sin separates us from God. Even if somehow in our rebellious state we wanted to come to God, we could not find the right path to Him on our own. Without the intervention of Jesus, we are incapable of choosing the path that God made for us to approach His holy dwelling place. To live in this world deformed by the effect of sin is to live in the valley of the shadow of death because the shadow of death hangs over us all from the moment we are born, and we cannot feel our way out. "There is a way that seems right to a person," Proverbs 16:25 says, "but its end is the way to death." Marred by sin, unable to trust what we think is right, which of us could find the *only* right path out of the valley of death? Who knows the way out of this valley that will become our tomb?

*When he (Jesus) saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd.<sup>5</sup> He wept saying, "If you only knew this day what would bring you peace...<sup>6</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me...<sup>7</sup> I lay down my life for the sheep.<sup>8</sup> I call my sheep by name and lead them out,<sup>9</sup> so that where I am you may be also.<sup>10</sup> I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me,"<sup>11</sup> so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.<sup>12</sup>*

Jesus leads us in the right path through the valley of the shadow of death. By His mercy, in the valley, we taste the goodness of the renewed creation to which we are being led. We receive His care, rest, and provision. When Jesus ultimately reconciles all things to Himself, these mere deposits will come into fullness for His sheep who have followed His voice through the valley of the shadow of death.

***"...I fear no danger, for you are with me;..."***

The confidence of this statement is mind-boggling, especially if you have ever battled fear. Some of us struggle more frequently and intensely with fear than others, but there is no human for whom fear is not, at least periodically, a struggle. What is it we fear? We don't fear good things. No one has ever been

in a fetal position in the corner because they worried that their children would be safe, healthy, and prosperous. No one ever blew into a paper bag on takeoff because they feared the airplane would make it safely to the destination. No. We fear danger. We fear evil things. We fear them because we instinctively understand our own vulnerable, defenseless position against them. Sometimes we fear things we've imagined, but often we fear real dangers. David doesn't say, "I fear no danger because there really aren't any dangers." He acknowledges the genuine threats but confesses that the threats do not have control over his soul.

Why did David have such confidence to say, "I fear no danger"? Was he delusional? Was he able, by force of will and self-mastery, to dispel his own fear? No, his confidence was in the presence of the Shepherd, the Protector, the Provider, and the One on whom all burden for the well-being of the sheep rests. He knew he would never be alone.

***"...your rod and your staff—they comfort me."***

If you have spent any time around little boys, you know their affinity for weapons. In the hands of an eight-year-old boy, a stick is a tool for mass destruction. In that sense, we may not view a rod and staff as sources of comfort. They are comforts only when they are in the hands of one who knows how to manage them correctly. The rod is a symbol of protection and the staff a symbol of rescue or provision. We are comforted when those tools are in the hands of the Good Shepherd.

When the veil of this life is lifted, we will stand on the other side of the valley and proclaim with new stamina the praises of the One who held the rod and staff of comfort in one hand and the keys of death and hell in the other and led us out of the grave by His blood-bought path.

Life is hard. Our own paths of suffering are not only painful but confusing. We struggle to reconcile our experiences with the truth of the LORD's goodness and His ability to lead us on the path to His dwelling place. These are not the paths you or I would have chosen, but neither was the road to the cross. In the end, with an eternal perspective, we will look back and marvel at the skill of the Shepherd who led us through the valley of death and delivered us to the throne room of God.



> Each of us walks paths we wouldn't have chosen. Some have been the result of our own rebellion, but many have been in spite of our best choices. How can we reconcile the experiences in our lives with the truth that He is leading us on right paths? How has God redeemed some of those valleys? What were some things the enemy intended for evil that God flipped and worked for good?

> Verse four shifts from talking about God to talking to Him. How does the shift affect the mood as well as the meaning? What does it tell you about fearful valleys? Does God's presence diminish your fear? Why or why not?

>How do you see God using His rod and staff on your behalf? How have you been protected? How have you been rescued? What comfort do you find in John 10:1-18?

# DISCUSS FURTHER.

Psalm 23:5 ESV

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

*After Laura’s teaching, make your way through the following questions in personal reflection or small group discussion. For more study into this verse, keep going to **DIG DEEPER**.*



- > One day we will all partake in the wedding feast of the lamb. (Revelation 19:6-9). Our faith will finally be realized, and we will enjoy His fellowship for eternity. How does this truth make you feel?
- > What or who are your enemies? In addition to relational conflicts, how else does Satan attack you? How can you find rest amid surrounding attack and adversity?
- > To be anointed means to be favored. To overflow with blessings means deep intimacy with the LORD. Is it difficult to believe the truth that God wants you at His table? And, that His purpose there is to honor, anoint, and bless you, mess and all?
- > How can overflowing blessings meet you in the valleys of life? What does that say to you about your Shepherd?

# DIG DEEPER.

Psalm 23:5 CSB

*“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;...”*

One of the difficulties with reading the Bible is that we are reading ancient texts translated from their original language, which were written to ancient people in vastly different cultural contexts. There are often nuances or implications we miss because we haven't been steeped in the culture of the original audience. That means we have to do a little more work as we read Scripture. Before we land on an interpretation of a difficult passage, we must first ask, “What did this passage mean to the original audience?” Only then can we begin to interpret what it means for us.

Some texts, however, don't need that kind of work. Some metaphors aren't tied to cultural context but are a universal human experience. Preparing a table is among them. Hosting guests at a lavish table is a gesture of hospitality that every culture possesses. Jason and I love to have friends to our home for dinner. There's just something disarming about a good meal and rich conversations. Somehow, that combination removes all feelings of loneliness, and it reminds me that there's strength in community.

It's not surprising, given the value of feasting as an expression of hospitality in the ancient Mideast, that the metaphor appears in this psalm. Further, David shows the LORD as both the Shepherd demonstrating His tenderness and love to His sheep and the King demonstrating His power and wealth to His people. What is surprising, however, is where this table is prepared.

In verse four, we were in the valley of the shadow of death fearing no evil. In the next breath, David says, “You set a table for me.” Where? In a grand banquet hall? No, we're in the valley of the shadow of death. The Shepherd King prepares a table at which He intends us to sit in the middle of a battlefield. What's that all about? What sense does it make that a table is prepared *“in the presence of my enemies”*? What kind of a battle strategy is that?

Actually, it's brilliant on two levels.

On one level, it takes us out of the equation. The Lord of Hosts invites us to recline at the table. From our place at the table, we have the vantage to, “Come, see the works of the LORD, who brings devastation on the earth. He makes wars cease throughout the earth. He shatters bows and cuts spears to pieces; He sets wagons ablaze.”<sup>1</sup> In the battlefield, always at the table of His presence, we can observe that He is God who fights for us.

On another level, it clearly defines the battle lines. Those on one side of the table belong to God. Those on the other are His enemies. God is not stealthy. He does not need to resort to hidden identities or covert activities. At His table, those who belong to God are on display. Those who’ve been invited and are His allies experience His hospitality. Those who are His enemies experience His wrath. The table is the line of demarcation.

Poetry is an interesting genre. It has flex room. Not that it allows a liberal interpretive license to make something mean whatever the author wants it to mean, but it definitely adds some spandex to the denim, if you know what I mean. With that in mind, imagine what is on the menu at this feast. Using the context of a table arrayed in opposition to an enemy, can you think of another table arrayed in opposition to an enemy?

Consider that puzzling passage in John 6, where Jesus says that He is, “the bread of life.”<sup>2</sup> The Jewish leaders get angry and question Him about it. He offends them further by saying,

Truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day, because my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven; it is not like the manna your ancestors ate—and they died. The one who eats this bread will live forever.<sup>3</sup>

*On the night before Jesus was crucified, He sat with His disciples at a prepared table. On it, He served simple elements: bread and wine. He took the bread, then calling it His body, He gave thanks, and broke it to distribute among those seated with Him. Then, He poured the wine, His blood, and did the same.<sup>4</sup>*

Those who were with Him at His table ate and drank, not realizing its significance until later. The Lord's Supper, as we commonly call it, is a meal that remembers the story of the crucifixion. It's a table set with simple elements, hardly anything we would call a "feast," and yet, it's the most costly, lavish meal ever prepared; *salvation which has been prepared in the presence of all peoples--a light for revelation to the Gentiles.*<sup>5</sup>

***"...you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."***

The Lord's Supper is a feast, unlike any other feast that has ever been hosted. For one, the simplicity of the elements does not require a refined palate to appreciate. It's not a meal that creates class distinctions and segregation. No caviar, no beef tenderloin, no crème brûlée. Just bread and wine. Everyone feels welcome. Everyone feels at home. At the same time, everyone who sits at the table is *the* honored guest. The King, delighted by your presence, stoops to anoint you. At His table, *you* are royalty. Your cup overflows with blessings from the One who stands to defend you and who honors you in the face of your enemies. This treatment is what the King does to bestow honor.

Are you thirsty? Hungry? Battleworn and weary? Come! Lay down your weapons and recline at the table prepared for you by the One who takes up arms on your behalf and who makes your cup overflow. "The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied!"<sup>6</sup> Your act of war against the enemy who opposes you is consuming the food set before you. "Taste and see that the LORD is good. How happy is the person who takes refuge in him!"<sup>7</sup>

Don't forget; this is a progressive feast! We will not stay in the valley forever. One day, the Lord of Hosts, the Shepherd King, will say to the enemy, *Enough!* One day, we will step out of the valley and into the mountain city where God dwells. Death and hell will be defeated, and we will recline at the wedding feast prepared by Jesus for His bride.

Blessed are those invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb!<sup>8</sup>





>Read Psalm 46. In what ways does it demonstrate the way God defends His people?

>What unexpected provision have you experienced from God? Where have you had a table prepared for you in the presence of your enemies?

>How does the honor you have received from the King make you feel? The King has made you worthy. You don't have to qualify yourself for His honor, but you do have to receive it by faith. Spend a few minutes meditating on this truth.

## DISCUSS FURTHER.

Psalm 23:6 ESV

*“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever.”*

*After Laura’s teaching, make your way through the following questions in personal reflection or small group discussion. For more study into this verse, keep going to **DIG DEEPER**.*



- > Soak this truth in: *His goodness and mercy will follow you ALL the days of your life.* No matter what! Wow, what does that do to your heart song?
- > Not only does the LORD invite you to His house, but He DELIGHTS to have you home. How do you live, really live, this earthly life, knowing your eternal home is in the house of the LORD? Are you living first as a daughter or as a servant?
- > Psalm 23 was David’s song to the LORD. What is your song?
- > While Psalm 23 is David’s song, it’s also meant to encourage each one of us. Is there someone in your life that can be inspired by your heart song of the LORD’s goodness and mercy?

# DIG DEEPER.

Psalm 23:6 CSB

## "Only..."

Adverbs can be overused. Sometimes, however, the modifying adverb is where the masterpiece comes to life. Psalm 23 is such a place. In some translations, the adverb that begins verse six is translated, "Surely..." The CSB translation uses "Only..." I like both of these because together they round out the meaning.

### "Surely"

David doesn't possess doubt about the statement that follows. It is sure. Guaranteed. Indisputable. Proven.

### "Only"

In the valley of the shadow of death, it seems as if any number of vile things could be in pursuit. I think David is confidently saying, *"I don't fear evil, because I am only pursued by these things: goodness and mercy. Any attempt my enemy makes to chase me are foiled by the One who hems me in behind and before."*

## *"...goodness and faithful love will pursue me..."*

One of my favorite books in C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* series is *The Horse and His Boy*. Through the book, the main character, Shasta, experiences three perilous encounters with lions on his journey in addition to all his other difficulties. He feels very sorry for himself, and when he finally meets Aslan in the dark (before he knows that Aslan is the King), Shasta recounts each episode. Expecting sympathy, Shasta is met with none. Surprised by the lack of compassion, he questions Aslan's reaction. Aslan explains that each encounter was not with multiple lions, but with only one, and it was him. While Shasta believed that he was being pursued by ferocious beasts intending to eat him, Aslan tells him the story from the proper perspective. What Shasta perceived as danger was really Aslan guiding him and protecting him.

David concludes this psalm with the realization that God's goodness and covenant love pursue him. Like an animal who stalks his prey, God pursues us with His goodness and mercy. Under any other circumstances, I don't think being stalked would be a good thing, but who can complain about being hunted by God's loving-kindness?

### ***“Goodness”***

The Hebrew root word for “goodness” is *towb*.<sup>1</sup> It's a basic word that means exactly what it says--good. It's the same word used in Genesis 1 when God looks at what He has made and calls it “good.” It's an easy enough word to translate, though, as we discussed in Psalm 23:1, we may have to adjust our definition of what is “good” to match that of God's. This adjusting doesn't mean we have to call our situations “good.” We can acknowledge distressing circumstances while at the same time proclaiming God's goodness. Instead, we must employ the use of both hands, as Gregory of Nyssa observed of St. Basil's “ambidextrous faith”<sup>2</sup> in which he was able to hold affliction in one hand and blessing in the other and trust that God is good. We can do the same. When we hold affliction, we trust God to redeem it and use it to produce Christ-likeness in us. When we hold blessing, we praise God for the deposit of peace in our lives now and for the promise that is to come. This balancing is a tension in the life of faith.

### ***“Faithful Love”***

The word used in this verse for “faithful love” or “mercy” is the Hebrew word *cheched*.<sup>3</sup> Translators have difficulty concisely translating this word because it encapsulates such a grand concept. In short, *cheched* is God's undeserved covenant loyalty and love. It is His faithful love in action as seen in His persistent, unyielding, unconditional mercy and kindness. It is love that flows out of sincere devotion rather than duty. It is sacrificial, selfless, and gentle.

*Cheched* cannot be understood outside the context of covenants. Pastor, Theologian, and Christian Apologist Tim Keller describes a covenant as “a bond that creates a more intimate relationship than a legal contract produces” and yet is “more durable than a relationship that is based (solely) on affection or feeling.”<sup>4</sup> As Keller observes, the difference between a covenant and a contract lies in the nature of the relationship produced as a result. A contract creates a legal bond in which both parties seek only their own best interest and is only concerned with the law. Covenants, on the other hand, do something incredible. They create a legal bond while simultaneously creating a relationship in which the participants work for the good of the other. A covenant is a way to irrevocably bind oneself not only to the terms of an agreement but also to a person and their well-being.

As a covenant-maker, God alone initiates, mediates, and sustains His covenant.

*When He made His covenant with Abraham, He did not call a meeting, work out the terms, and have both parties sign on the dotted line. Instead, He put Abraham to sleep and God alone walked the path of blood between the slaughtered animals stating that He Himself would be treated as these animals if the covenant is broken by any member of the covenant.<sup>5</sup>*

He initiates and pursues us with His covenant loyalty. God doesn't persist because He knows we can somehow keep our end of the agreement. He's not chasing us to see if we can be faithful to Him. Instead, He's pursuing us to demonstrate His faithfulness to us. "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love that he had for us, made us alive with Christ even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace!"<sup>6</sup>

Mercy, great love, grace; in these, the meaning of *cheched* begins to solidify. Look no further than the cross for the ultimate expression of the *cheched* by which we are pursued. The highest expression of God's *cheched* is Jesus. On the cross, Jesus displayed the *cheched* of God and received the penalty for the covenant we broke.

### ***"...all the days of my life,..."***

Being followed by something unknown or unexpected can be frightening. If we are being pursued like this, we might call the police. Not the case here. We have a wonderful promise of a blissful future. We revel in the joy of being pursued by goodness and loyal, loving-kindness "*all the days of my life*"!

It's important to recognize when the pursuit occurs. Does it start when I say "YES" to Jesus? Does it ebb and flow? Does it end at any point?

The passage reads "*all the days of my life.*"

That means that it's not only happening on my good days. It's also happening on my bad days. Not just on the days when I have my life together and am crushing my "to-do" list, but also on the days when I can't make anything work. *ALL the days of my life*. When you were conceived, and God saw you in your mother's womb, He was pursuing you. His covenant affection saw your unformed body and was already stalking you with His goodness and mercy. Our days are bathed in His pursuit of us with His love and goodness, and He moves toward us before we ever even care to move toward Him.

*“...and I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live.”*

The brilliance of this poem will never cease to fascinate me. David takes us on a remarkable journey in six short phrases. Don't you feel as if you've lived a lifetime through these stanzas? Life starts easily enough. It's calm, even sweet. But growing up means stepping in to hard realities, overwhelming circumstances, painful paths. The hope we have in Jesus is that our dark valley shadowed by death is punctuated with appetizers of the final feast waiting for us when we step into life with no shadows at all.

David ends this psalm with a phrase that puts the fairytale line, “And they lived happily ever after,” to shame. From the valley David points to the final destination--the house of the LORD. And I take his confident expectation to mean, *“That will be where I stop. That is where I will dwell.”*

Finally, the leadership, provision, care, generosity, and covenant loyalty of the Shepherd King culminate in one thing--union with God in His house forever.

*Forever.*

Blessed be the day when our eyes behold the face of the LORD who shepherded us in green pastures and hosted us at the feast and guided us through the valley of death. In His house, we will dwell forever, for the glory of His name!

Who is a God like you, forgiving iniquity and passing over rebellion for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not hold on to his anger forever because he delights in faithful love. He will again have compassion on us; he will vanquish our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show loyalty to Jacob and faithful love to Abraham, as you swore to our fathers from days long ago.<sup>7</sup>



> How can you be confident, like David, that God's goodness and mercy will not fail? Read Joshua 4:5-7. What did Joshua command the men to do? Why? What memorials do you need to set up to help you recall what God has done to build your assurance about His goodness?

> How are covenants different from contracts? How does God fulfill His covenant to us? How do you personally realize and respond to His promise over you?

> What is the difference between dwelling in a place and just living there? Read Ephesians 3:16-18 and Colossians 3:15-17. What insights and encouragements do you find about dwelling in the presence of your faithful Shepherd?

# NOTES

## Psalm 23:1

<sup>1</sup>Malachi 3:6, Psalm 55:19.

<sup>2</sup>"YHVH," *Strong's H3068*. Blue Letter Bible. 22 July 2019.

<<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H3068&t=KJV>>

## Psalm 23:2-3a

<sup>1</sup>"rabats," *Strong's H7257*. Blue Letter Bible. 22 July 2019.

<<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H7257&t=CSB>>

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 11:28.

<sup>3</sup>Philippians 4:19.

<sup>4</sup>Psalm 46:10.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew 8:24.

<sup>6</sup>Ezekiel 34:13b-14.

<sup>7</sup>Exodus 12.

<sup>8</sup>Genesis 2:7.

<sup>9</sup>Genesis 1:31.

<sup>10</sup>Revelation 21:3-5a.

<sup>11</sup>"ra'ah," *Strong's H7462*. Blue Letter Bible. 22 July 2019.

<<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H7462&t=KJV>>

## Psalm 23:3b

<sup>1</sup>Proverbs 14:12.

<sup>2</sup>Psalm 119:105.

<sup>3</sup>Proverbs 3:5-6.

<sup>4</sup>Romans 6:23.

<sup>5</sup>Genesis 3:22-24.

## Psalm 23:4

<sup>1</sup>Psalm 55, 1 Samuel 18, 1 Samuel 19, Psalm 42, Psalm 43.

<sup>2</sup>John 16:32.

<sup>3</sup>Romans 6:23.

<sup>4</sup>Romans 3:23.

<sup>5</sup>Matthew 9:36.

<sup>6</sup>Luke 19:42a.

<sup>7</sup>John 10:14.

<sup>8</sup>John 10:15b.

<sup>9</sup>John 10:3b.

<sup>10</sup>John 14:3.

<sup>11</sup>John 14:6.

<sup>12</sup>1 Peter 2:9.



**Psalm 23:5**

<sup>1</sup>Psalm 46:8-9.

<sup>2</sup>John 6:35.

<sup>3</sup>John 6:53-58.

<sup>4</sup>1 Corinthians 11:23-26. *paraphrased*

<sup>5</sup>Luke 2:30-32a. *paraphrased*

<sup>6</sup>Psalm 22:26 ESV.

<sup>7</sup>Psalm 34:8.

<sup>8</sup>Revelation 19:9.

**Psalm 23:6**

<sup>1</sup>"towb," *Strong's H2896*. Blue Letter Bible. 22 July 2019.

<<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H2896&t=CSB>>

<sup>2</sup>Yancy, Phillip. *Reaching For The Invisible God: What Can We Expect To Find?*

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 69.

<sup>3</sup>"cheched," *Strong's H2617*. Blue Letter Bible. 22 July 2019.

<<https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H2617&t=CSB>>

<sup>4</sup>Keller, Timothy. 2007. "A Covenant Relationship" (sermon). Recorded September 9,

2007 at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York, NY.

<https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/a-covenant-relationship-5548/>

<sup>5</sup>Genesis 15. *paraphrased*

<sup>6</sup>Ephesians 2:4-5.

<sup>7</sup>Micah 7:18-20.

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