



SUNDAY SERVICE

FOLLOWED

PSALM 23

# Psalm 23:1-3

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.

# Psalm 23:4-5

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.

# Psalm 23:6

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.

# The Shepherd's Psalm

This beloved passage contains 118 words of comfort that have sustained believers through every generation and circumstance.



## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

# Understanding the Book of Psalms

### Author

King David composed Psalm 23, drawing from his own experience as a shepherd in his youth

### Collection

The Book of Psalms contains 150 psalms divided into five distinct books

### Timespan

From Moses (Psalm 90, the earliest) to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah (Psalm 137, among the latest)

# The Five Books of Psalms

The Psalter is structured into five books, each ending with a doxology—an expression of praise to God's glory, reminiscent of the Gloria in Excelsis found in Luke 2:14.

1

**Book I**  
Psalms 1-41

2

**Book II**  
Psalms 42-72

3

**Book III**  
Psalms 73-89

4

**Book IV**  
Psalms 90-106

5

**Book V**  
Psalms 107-150

- Of the 150 psalms, 75 are directly attributed to King David, making him the most prolific contributor to this sacred collection.

# From Lament to Trust

## The Context of Psalm 22

To fully appreciate Psalm 23's comfort, we must first understand Psalm 22—a psalm of deep lament. Its language portrays intense suffering with phrases like "all my bones are on display" and most significantly, the cry Jesus uttered from the cross:

**"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"**

The psalmist experienced overwhelming stress, pressure, and turmoil, yet discovered a pathway to trust in God despite the darkness.

## The Journey

From the valley of despair in Psalm 22 to the green pastures of Psalm 23, we witness a profound spiritual transformation—moving from feeling forsaken to being shepherded.

*"The Shepherd doesn't remove the valley—He removes the fear."*



# The LORD Is My Shepherd

This opening declaration is profound in its simplicity. By calling the LORD his shepherd, David acknowledges that we are His sheep—dependent, vulnerable, and in constant need of guidance and protection.

The relationship is both intimate and instructive, revealing our true nature and God's faithful character.

SACRED NAME

# YHWH: The Personal Name of God

## Understanding the Tetragrammaton

The Tetragrammaton refers to the four Hebrew letters (יהוָה or YHWH) representing God's personal name in the Hebrew Bible. The term comes from Greek meaning "four letters."

This sacred name appears thousands of times in Scripture and likely derives from a Hebrew verb meaning "to be" or "to exist," signifying God as the ever-present, self-existent One.

In Judaism, this name is considered too sacred to speak aloud, leading to substitutions like "Adonai" (Lord) or "Elohim." English Bibles typically render it as "LORD" in all capital letters.

# The Nature of Sheep

Understanding why David chose the sheep metaphor reveals much about our relationship with God. Sheep are among the most dependent of all domesticated animals, requiring constant care and protection.

## Limited Vision

Sheep cannot see clearly ahead but have excellent peripheral vision, seeing almost 360 degrees around them—always aware of danger but unable to focus on the path forward

## Prone to Wander

They have a strong tendency to get lost, wandering away from safety without realizing the danger they're entering

## Easily Frightened

Sheep scare very easily and can panic at the slightest disturbance, needing constant reassurance

## Constant Need

They require someone to look out for them at all times—they cannot survive independently



# Sheep: Designed for Dependence

## **Poor Eyesight, Excellent Hearing**



While sheep have poor eyesight, they possess an excellent sense of hearing. This physical trait mirrors our spiritual condition—we may not clearly see the path ahead, but we are designed to hear and recognize the Shepherd's voice.

This is why Scripture repeatedly emphasizes hearing and obeying God's voice. We walk by faith, not by sight, listening for the guidance of the One who can see what we cannot.

# Sheep vs. Goats

Though they may look similar to the untrained eye, sheep and goats are entirely different species with contrasting natures that carry spiritual significance.



## Sheep

- Make the sound "baa" and are grazers
- Have a strong flocking instinct and become agitated when separated from the group
- Dependent and communal by nature



## Goats

- Make the sound "maa" and are mostly browsers
- Seek to isolate themselves and prefer independence
- Self-reliant and individualistic by nature

This distinction echoes Jesus' teaching about separating the sheep from the goats—not just different behaviors, but fundamentally different natures.

# Understanding the Shepherd

David makes the relationship with the Shepherd deeply personal—"my shepherd"—yet the purest intent of a shepherd is actually corporate in nature. The shepherd cares for the entire flock, guiding and protecting them as a group.

However, the shepherd becomes intensely personal when a sheep has strayed away from the flock. At that moment, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to seek the one.

- **Shepherd** literally means "**SHEEP HERD**" – one who herds or gathers sheep together, emphasizing the communal nature of the calling.



# The Shepherd's Tools



Rod

Staff

Voice

The shepherd relies on three primary instruments to care for the flock. The rod serves as a weapon of protection against predators and threats. The staff, with its distinctive crook, is used to guide sheep along safe paths and to rescue those who have fallen or become trapped. But most importantly, the shepherd uses his voice—sheep learn to recognize and follow the unique sound of their own shepherd's call, distinguishing it from all others.

# The Good Shepherd

## Jesus Declares His Identity

**John 10:11-12**

**"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep."**

The difference between a true shepherd and a hireling is profound. The hireling flees because he has no real relationship with the sheep—they are not his own. But the good shepherd knows his sheep intimately and willingly lays down his life for them.

# The Tender Shepherd

## Isaiah's Beautiful Portrait

**Isaiah 40:11**

**"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."**



This prophetic passage reveals the shepherd's tender care. He doesn't drive the flock harshly but feeds them gently. He carries the weakest lambs close to his heart and shows special consideration for those who are vulnerable or expecting, adjusting his pace to their needs.



KEY DECLARATION

# I Shall Not Want

This psalm was written in the Judean wilderness—a context that gives us pause. The writer is telling us that we will not lack for anything while being positioned in a place that lacks everything.

This paradox reveals a profound spiritual truth: provision doesn't depend on circumstances but on the Shepherd's presence.

# The Great Hope of the Saints

**"If the LORD is  
my Shepherd...  
I SHALL  
NOT WANT"**

This declaration has little to do with desire or material supply. It speaks primarily to the execution of purpose and destiny. When the LORD is our shepherd, we will not lack what we need to fulfill His calling on our lives.

The Hebrew word ***chacer (khaw-sare')*** means "to lack, to fail, to be lessened." It can mean to be abated, bereaved, decreased, or made lower. The promise is comprehensive—in every way we might experience lack, the Shepherd provides.

# Provision in the Wilderness

Psalm 23 uses the picture of a shepherd caring for sheep to show how God takes care of His people, even during hard seasons. The contrast is striking and intentional.

## **The Setting**

Written in the Judean wilderness—a dry, empty place that seems to have nothing to offer for survival

## **The Promise**

Yet the shepherd still provides everything the sheep need—food, water, protection, and peace

## **The Truth**

The sheep do not survive because the land is rich, but because the shepherd is present and attentive

## **The Lesson**

When life feels barren or lacking, God is still able to provide everything we need for the journey

# Just because you're in the wilderness doesn't mean you're without provision

Psalm 23 shifts our focus from what we think we lack to the God who supplies it all. When the Lord is our Shepherd, we may be in the wilderness—but we are never without what we need.

**"If the Lord is your Shepherd, lack is illegal."**



# The Assignment of the Shepherd

The shepherd's care for his sheep is not passive but involves deliberate, continuous action. Each verb in Psalm 23 reveals a different aspect of how God actively tends to our needs.



# Goodness That Follows

## Understanding Biblical Goodness

The Hebrew word *towb* (tobe) is rich in meaning. It functions as both an adjective and a noun, encompassing good things, good people, and goodness itself in the widest sense.

God wants His people to know that when goodness follows you, actual good things are included in the equation—not just abstract concepts, but tangible blessings.

### As an Adjective

"God is a good God"

### As a Noun

"He that findeth a wife, findeth a good thing"

### God's Promise

"No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly"



# Believing to See God's Goodness

## **Psalm 27:13-14**

**"I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."**

David confesses he would have given up entirely without the expectation of experiencing God's goodness in this present life—not just in eternity, but in "the land of the living." This requires patient waiting and courageous faith.

DIVINE ATTRIBUTE

# The LORD's Mercy

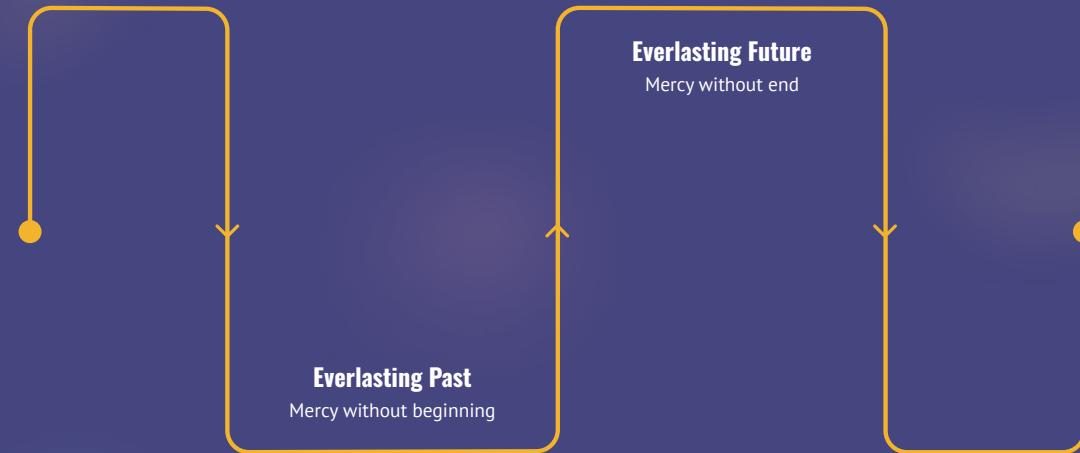


## Lamentations 3:21-23

**"This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness."**

Mercy means compassionate treatment—to be kind or forgiving, especially when judgment would be justified. God's mercy is not a one-time gift but a daily renewal, fresh every morning.

# Everlasting Mercy



## Psalm 103:17

**"But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children."**

God's mercy extends backward into eternity past and forward into eternity future. It reaches not only us but continues to our children's children—a multi-generational blessing for those who fear and honor Him.



DIVINE PURSUIT

# Shall Follow Me

The Hebrew word *radaph* (raw-daf') is a primitive root meaning "to run after," usually with hostile intent. It can mean to chase, pursue, hunt, or persecute.

This is why the Lord will not let you continue on a destructive path. Goodness and Mercy have orders from heaven to [follow](#) you—to chase you down, to pursue you relentlessly.

# God Will Hunt You Down To Bless You

# Overtaken by Blessing

## The Promise of Deuteronomy

### Deuteronomy 28:2

"And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God."

The blessings don't just arrive—they overtake you. They pursue and catch up to you. You cannot outrun God's goodness when you're walking in obedience to His voice.

- **Blessed in the city and in the field**
- **Blessed in your family and your work**
- **Blessed in your provision and storage**
- **Blessed when you come in and go out**

# The Scope of God's Blessing

Deuteronomy 28 paints a comprehensive picture of what it means to be blessed by God—covering every dimension of daily life.



## In the City

Your work, relationships, and urban endeavors are blessed



## In the Field

Your agriculture, business ventures, and labor bear fruit



## Your Family

The fruit of your body—your children and descendants



## Your Provision

Your basket and store—your income and savings



ULTIMATE DESTINATION

# In the House of the Lord

**Psalm 23:6**

**"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."**

The psalm concludes not with temporary blessings but with an eternal promise—dwelling in God's presence forever. This is the ultimate destination, the final rest for every sheep who has been faithfully shepherded.

# Fullness of Joy in His Presence

## **Psalm 16:11**

**"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."**

The path of life leads to God's presence, where joy is not partial but full, and pleasures are not temporary but everlasting. This is what awaits those who dwell in the house of the LORD.



# One Thing I Desire

**Psalm 27:4**

**"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple."**

David's singular desire was not wealth, fame, or victory in battle—it was to dwell continuously in God's presence, to behold His beauty, and to seek His wisdom. This is the heart of a sheep who knows their Shepherd.

## **The Pursuit**

Not many things, but **one thing**

Not occasionally, but **all the days** of my life

Not distant observation, but **dwelling** in His house

▲ KEY THEMES

# The Central Truths of Psalm 23

## God's Character

He is a faithful, personal, caring shepherd who never abandons His flock

## Our Identity

We are dependent sheep who need constant guidance, provision, and protection

## Divine Provision

In the wilderness of life, God supplies everything we need for the journey

## Active Blessing

Goodness and mercy don't just arrive—they pursue and overtake us

## Eternal Hope

Our ultimate destination is dwelling forever in the house of the LORD

# Living as Followed Sheep



## Listen for His Voice

Sheep recognize their shepherd's voice—cultivate spiritual hearing through prayer and Scripture



## Stay with the Flock

Resist the temptation to isolate—God designed us for community and mutual care



## Trust His Provision

Even in the wilderness, depend on the Shepherd rather than circumstances



## Desire His Presence

Make dwelling in God's house your one consuming passion and priority

# The Invitation

Psalm 23 is more than beautiful poetry—it's an invitation to a relationship. The LORD invites you to trust Him as your Shepherd, to depend on His guidance, to receive His provision, and to rest in His care.

The question is not whether God is a faithful shepherd. The question is: **Will you be His sheep?**

Will you listen for His voice? Will you follow where He leads? Will you trust that He provides even in the wilderness?



APPLICATION

# Reflect and Respond

## Personal Reflection

In what areas of life are you trying to be independent rather than dependent on the Shepherd?

## Faith Exercise

Where do you need to trust God's provision in your current "wilderness"?

## Community Connection

How can you better stay connected to the flock instead of wandering alone?

## Spiritual Practice

What would it look like to make dwelling in God's presence your one desire this week?

Take time this week to meditate on each verse of Psalm 23, allowing the Shepherd to speak personally to your heart about His care for you.

# FOLLOWED

## By Goodness and Mercy All the Days of Your Life

May you walk confidently as a sheep who knows the Shepherd's voice. May you rest in green pastures and drink from still waters. May you trust His rod and staff to comfort you. And may you experience the relentless pursuit of God's goodness and mercy, until you dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

### Psalm 23:1

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



