

Our Sufficient Shepherd

Psalm 23 - NCBC, November 18, 2018

Main Point: **Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I can trust Him with all my needs and my fears.**

**Because the Lord is my shepherd,
I can trust Him with all my needs:**

- My need for rest (v. 2)
- My need for restoration (v. 3)
- My need for righteousness (v. 3)

**Because the Lord is my shepherd,
I can trust Him with all my fears:**

- My fear of evil (v. 4)
- My fear of enemies (v. 5)
- My fear of everything to come (v. 6)

Application: **Trust your all-sufficient shepherd!**

Opening Announcements:

- Thanksgiving Eve Service – Weds 11/21 7pm

<<The Lord is My Salvation>>

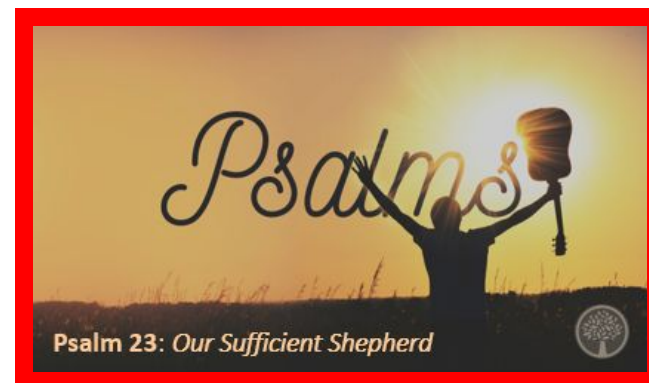


What a joy to continue our study of New Castle Bible Church's top favorite Psalms. Last week we considered **Psalm 1**, and today I invite you to open your Bibles to **Psalm 23**.



If you don't have a Bible today, simply raise your hand and we'd be delighted to give you one. You can find **Psalm 23** on page ____ in the giveaway Bibles today.

So now with expectant and joyful hearts,



please stand now in honor of the public reading of God's Word, I read **Psalm 23** from the **English Standard Translation**:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ³ He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. ⁴ 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. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

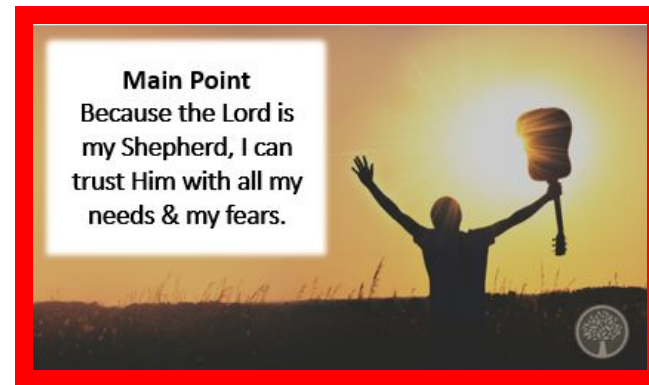
May God bless the reading of His Word. Please be seated.

Let's Pray.

The Scripture before us this morning has been called the "Pearl of the Psalms." Its rich truths have likely ushered more souls into eternity than any other passage of Scripture. More tears have been dried with the truth of **Psalm 23** than any other. More fears have been put to flight here than anywhere else.

But the reason this psalm is so loved, is not because of its simple poetry – but because of the Shepherd of which it speaks.

So bring your heartaches this morning... bring your disappointments... bring your conflicts and your needs...bring all your fears and come boldly to submit yourself under the truth which is before us this morning in God's Word. There's good news this morning... there is a shepherd that cares for your soul.



And **because the Lord is your Shepherd, you can trust Him with all your needs and with all your fears.**

Psalm 23 shows theology in action in the life of a man like ourselves. Not only was David the heroic slayer of Goliath, the devoted friend of Jonathan, the lover of music and an able king, ...but he was also a haggard fugitive, an adulterer and a murderer. As a father he had watched his baby die, and had wept over his rebellious son Absalom. By the time he pens these short 6 verses of praise and prayer, David is probably an old man looking back on the sufficient faithfulness of His Shepherd God throughout all the high mesas and dark valleys of his life.

So look now at **verse 1**, and notice this shepherd King's overarching statement of faith:

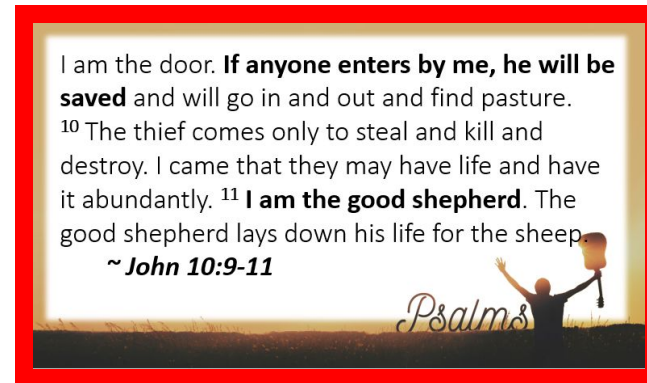
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

This psalm starts and ends with the name of our sufficient covenant-keeping God...Yahweh is my shepherd. The Lord.

Yet this God is not far off – but an intimate Shepherd. Notice all the personal pronouns in this Psalm. This is the He-Me psalm. 17xs David refers to himself; 13xs to the Lord. This is emphatically personal. The Lord is *My* Shepherd... not just a Shepherd.

Dear soul – is the Lord *your* shepherd? Are you one of *His* sheep? David here writes this pastoral heavenly from the perspective of a sheep – speaking of his all-sufficient Shepherd. Remember, we are the sheep; and sheep are weak, defenseless, and simple animals. Sheep operate with a mob-mentality, are very fearful and timid, and yet stubborn and perverse in their simplicity. Sheep, like us, have many needs. Sheep, like us, have many fears.

If the Lord is not *your* Shepherd... then all that is before us in this psalm is not for you. Jesus said,



I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.¹

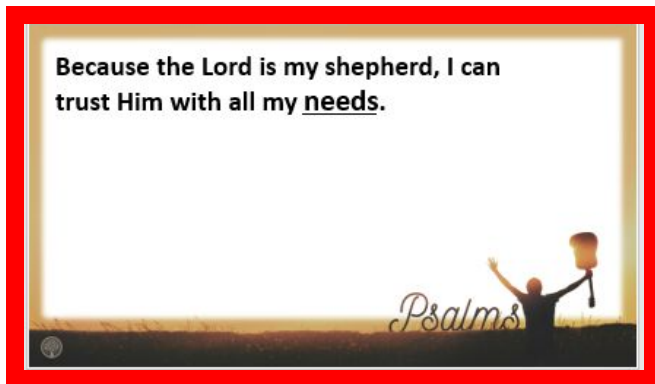
Saved from what? Saved from our sins yes, but saved from the just and righteous anger of God against our sins. The Good Shepherd says, I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and find food and rest. So believe on Jesus – turn your eyes upon the all-sufficient Shepherd who is our meditation this morning.

The sinner's heart is always far from satisfaction, restless, striving after something unattainable. But the heart of the sheep – content in the flock of the Shepherd, perfectly cared for by the Shepherd is at rest and content.

This morning we will see that because the Lord is my Shepherd, I can trust Him. I can trust Him with my needs, and I can trust Him with my fears.

Let's look first at how we can trust Him with our needs.

¹ John 10:9

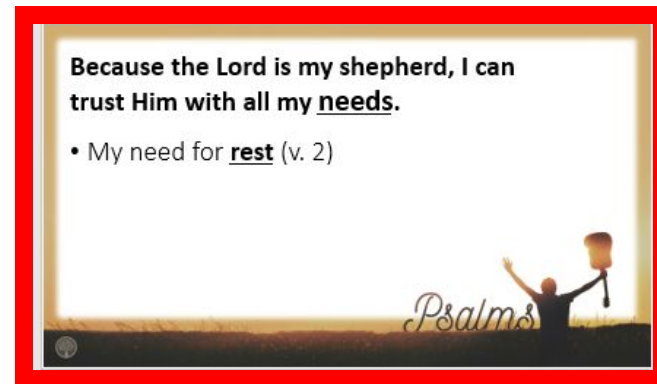


Notice how he ends **verse 1**... *I shall not want.*²
 This doesn't mean all my desires will always be met...
 but what it does mean is that because the Lord is my
 Shepherd, He will make sure that I always have
 everything that I need.

Church do you believe that? Do you believe that
 because the Lord is your Shepherd this morning that you
 will never lack anything you genuinely need?

One of the first ways that the Lord shepherds us in our
 needs is by providing us with rest.

² The Hebrew here is very strong. Only one other time in Scripture is
 this verb, "want" used without an object. So complete and
 all-inclusive. **Nehemiah 9:21** is the only other place in Scripture
 where this word is used like this, and it's in the same context. You
 shall not lack anything that you need!



Our sufficient Shepherd meets **my need for rest.**

Look at **verse 2**.

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

The **green pastures** are the exceedingly great and
 precious promises of God's Word. He makes us lie down
 to perceive the preciousness of God's promises. Gospel
 promises are precious, and wise, and worthy of our
 affection. And when we embrace these promises as our
 own by faith, we experience the rest that they give.

He leads me besides still waters. Sheep are fickle
 animals, and they will not drink from rushing water. They
 have this instinct that if somehow their wool gets wet,
 they'll become water-logged, and drug into the water, and
 drown. And so they refuse to drink from rushing water.
 So you know what the shepherd does? He takes his
 staff, and he takes some rocks, and he dams up a little
 pool where the water is calm, and the sheep can come
 beside still waters, and have their thirst quenched!

Our Savior and Shepherd is so sufficient for His care for us!

And did you notice the phrase... *He makes me to lie down*. What does that mean?

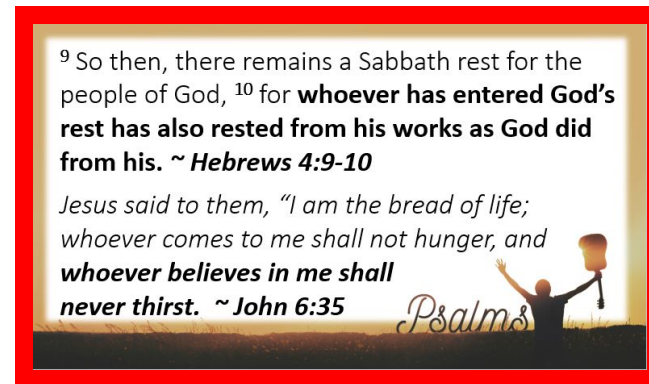
Sheep are so nervous they don't know when they need to rest...people are the same... racing around in maddening circles – always busy, but rarely accomplishing much...fearful that if we would stop to rest we would only fall farther behind everyone else.

But Jesus comes and says, I'll make you lie down.

Phillip Keller gives us an interesting insight in his popular book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* when he says that there are 4 reasons why sheep refuse to rest:

- Fear;
- Friction within others;
- Hunger
- Or if flies, or parasites, or pests are bothering them

This is why the text says, "He makes me...lie down". He says I will take away whatever keeps you from rest. All that striving and inner fighting where we try to clamor for God's attention, or for some significance on our own. Rest my child. Be still my soul. Leave to thy God to order and provide. In every change, He faithful will remain.



Hebrews 4:10 describes the perfect rest that our Shepherd is, stating

whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

Our shepherd provides us with perfect rest, ...and perfect refreshment. For after all, Jesus says,

"...whoever believes in me shall never thirst."³

So are you experiencing the rest that comes from trusting in our good Shepherd this morning?

The Lord not only sufficiently meets my need for rest,

³ John 6:35



but also **my need for restoration (v.3)**. This is so beautiful. Look at **verse 3** with me:

He restores my soul.

We are often like cast sheep. A “cast” sheep is one who loses its balance in some weird way, and finds itself lying on its back, its feet in the air, frantically lashing about trying to stand up, and without success. If the shepherd doesn’t quickly right the “cast” sheep, it will die.⁴

The Lord is my Shepherd, and He is sufficient to restore every part of me. When you are full of sorrow, he revives you; when you are sinful He sanctifies you; when you are weak He strengthens you. When you are cast down, He lifts up. When condemned, He intercedes. My sufficient Shepherd restores me.

Through the person and work of Jesus Christ on the cross, my broken relationship with my Creator God can be restored! What merciful restoration!

⁴ Keller, 60.



Psalm 103:3 says He *forgives all of your iniquity*. **Psalm 147:3** says *He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds*.

He is perfect in his restoration and perfect in His redemption of us.

He meets all my needs for rest and for restoration, and finally,



the Lord also sufficiently meets **my need for righteousness**.

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

He leads me – O blessed thought! “God does not give us a set of directions and tell us to go off on our own. But our good Shepherd takes the low-hanging fruit of His Word and holds it behind his back as it were so that His sheep can come up behind him and nibble and feed as they follow Him.

And where does He lead me? In righteous paths. Literally “right paths,” “right ruts or tracks” – habits of righteous living which flow out of righteous attitudes.

Notice the progression of this Psalm, He starts with rest. But the Shepherd’s rest is purposeful. For his quiet provision of feeding and refreshment allows our soul to be restored, so that he can lead us into right paths of good works.

Let us never get this backward church. There can be no righteous deeds, no righteous ministry, no righteous obedience on the right paths apart from first the rest that comes from putting your faith and trust in Jesus Christ. First having your soul restored by Him – and then – He leads to righteousness.

In other words, the emphasis of God’s guidance is not on *where* He wants me to be, but *who* He wants me to become.⁵

He’s making us more like Himself! The perfectly

⁵ Robinson, 32.
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righteous One! Our Shepherd is perfect righteousness. And He is perfect Guidance.

*Jesus is " ...the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus."*⁶

Church, you can trust Jesus. He is your sufficient Shepherd. And don’t miss the end of **verse 3**. His care for us is motivated by the sake of His own holy reputation.

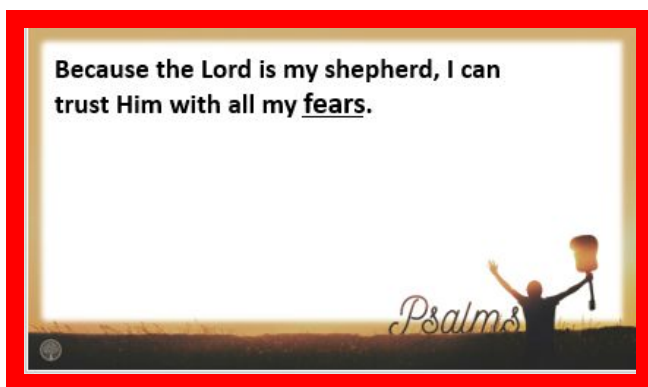
...for his name's sake, it says.

This links back to all the verbs which precede it... the Lord will not let us lack anything we need, *for His name’s sake*. The Lord gives us rest *for His name’s sake*. The Lord restores us *for His name’s sake*. The Lord guides us into right paths *for His name’s sake*. It’s all about Him!

God is the beginning and the end of all my righteousness. The path of righteousness has his grace as its starting point (for he leads me into it), and it has his glory as its destination (because his leading is for his name’s sake).

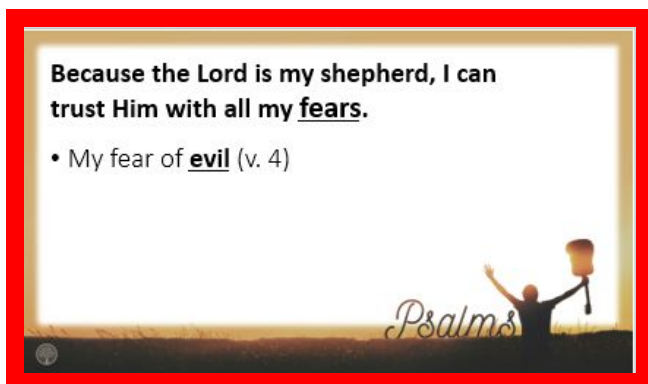
Hallelujah, what a Shepherd! What a Savior!

⁶ John 14:6



Because the Lord is your shepherd, you can not only trust Him with all your needs, but you can also trust Him with all your fears.

Now notice there's a major transition here that happens in this Psalm. The pronouns change in **verse 4**. Up to this point, David has been talking *about* His Shepherd. But now - as all true study of God should – David's study about God turns into prayer, worship, and adoration! That's what should happen every time we study about God – our heart should turn to praise Him for who He is.



First, David praises the Lord for His sufficiency **over his**

fear of evil.

Look at verse 4:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

Interestingly, one of the “right paths” of **verse 3** of which the Shepherd leads the sheep is the ravine of the shadow of death.⁷ While we “enjoy romping on the recess playground of prosperity” God knows the only way we can reach the higher places of Christian experience is to “go through the schoolroom of suffering.”⁸

So some of the right paths God leads us into are these dark valleys of life. And David confidently prays, “I will fear no evil.”

What evil do you fear? Perhaps some of us fear the evil one? Others may fear evil circumstances that may come into your life. Perhaps some of us here fear death? Often when we hear **Psalm 23**, and we hear “*the valley of the shadow of death*” we think of our physical death. Yet “the figure is not *primarily*, as is sometimes supposed, our dying moments, though it will beautifully bear that explanation.”⁹ For God's presence is the only sure support in death. Death is not dying – “we go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. We only sleep to wake in glory. Death is not the house but the porch, not the goal but the

⁷ Robinson, 35.

⁸ Robinson, 36.

⁹ John Gadsby, as quoted in Spurgeon, 367.

passage to it.”¹⁰

So when David says you don’t have to be afraid of evil – this is an Old Testament Gospel kernel – this is the salvation word par excellence of Scripture: You don’t have to be afraid! This is the good news that can turn tears of anguish and fear into shouts of joy!¹¹ The Lord is my shepherd – He’s with me, and He’s able. I will not fear! I can trust what I cannot see! Death has lost its sting, and the grave no longer has its victory!

But notice that David did not say the “valley of death” but the “valley of *the shadow of death*.” That’s a huge difference!

You see if you stood outside this building at the right time of day, the shadow of this building would fall on you. And that shadow would change your perspective, maybe even cause you to shudder under its dark chill.

But you would much rather have the shadow of the building fall on you than the building itself, right? It’s the shadow of death.

Shadows are created in the presence of light. The reason that death is only a mere shadow is because light is there! Jesus is on the other side of that death, and Jesus Christ gives us the power and strength to overcome all affects of evil here in this life.

That’s what He means when he says you comfort me with your rod and staff. That word *comfort* means to strengthen. To supply the power to withstand and stand.

¹⁰ Spurgeon, 355.

¹¹ Miller, 115.

The Lord is a sufficient Shepherd. He cares for us. He is Emmanuel – God with us.

Now what’s this rod and staff he speaks of? David says, *your rod and your staff, they comfort me*.

Well the shepherd’s rod was usually a 2’ long – kind of like a mace – a big oak club, often with metal bits embedded on the end. It could be swung or thrown as a weapon, for defense. Sometimes for correction, but mostly for defense. It was an extension of the right arm of the Shepherd.

What about the staff with the crook? That was for guidance, for direction, for lifting that lamb up out of the crevice, for picking the low hanging fruit. For care, and provision. You see, in the rod and the staff, we have the symbols of God’s sovereign and affectionate care for us.

His power is great! His affection is great! We can trust Him church.

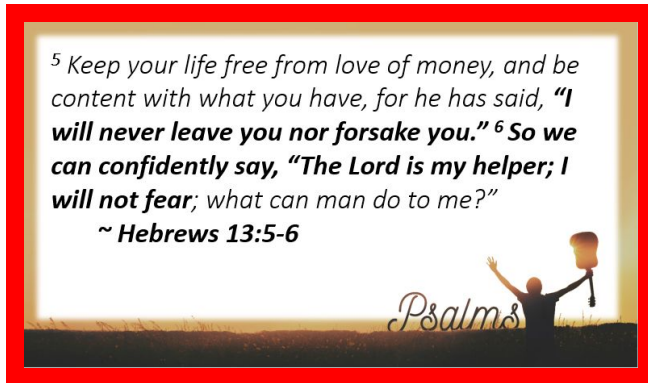
So often when we find ourselves in difficult situations – we don’t look to our Shepherd! (At least I don’t!) I look to myself. I trust my own tongue to defend me sometimes. I trust my own ability to make alliances, make strategic plans, I trust my own ability to figure it out.

But no honest sheep believes himself to be a match for the wolf. The courageous sheep is the sheep who trusts His Shepherd. Because he knows that the Shepherd has the rod and the staff. And they will strengthen him. They will comfort him. For right in the middle of this psalm

David exclaims,

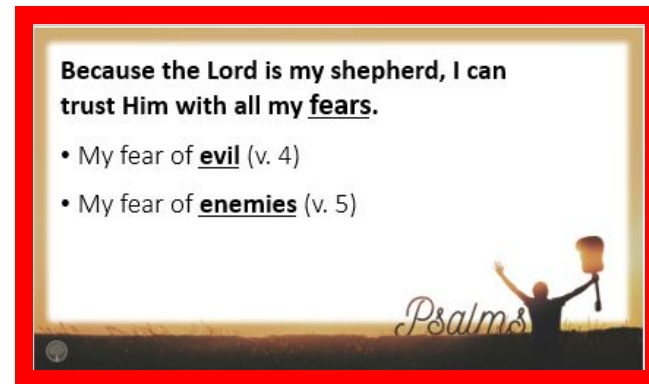
For you are with me.

God is our perfect companion.



Hebrews 13 says, *I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear."*¹²

But not only is my Shepherd sufficient over my fear of evil, but also He can be trusted with



My fear of enemies

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

Now this is a beautiful shepherding picture actually. For when Middle Eastern Shepherds entered a new field to feed his flock, he'd leave the sheep behind and go and set the table. Meaning he make careful inspection of the field. He would remove poisonous weeds, set out salt blocks, scope out resident enemies, clean and prepare the water sources, etc. He was "setting the table" if you were.

He would also look for enemies. Fox dens. Viper holes. Poisonous snakes who lived under ground so that when the sheep would come and graze on the tufts of grass between the rocks, the snakes could strike out and bite the sheep on the nose, sometimes leading to their death.

So the caring shepherd would find all the viper holes, and encircle that hole with oil. For the oil served as a scented repellent which would trap the slippery enemy in their holes.

¹² Hebrews 13:5-6
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Then before granting the sheep access to the new pasture he would anoint each of their heads with oil – for medicinal purposes for sure – for flies and parasites, and scabs – but also because that oil served as scented repellant for any viper that was outside their holes.¹³

Our sufficient Shepherd can be trusted with our fear of enemies! Our Shepherd provides us with an impenetrable shield so that we can feast in the presence of enemies – they can only but watch. But they are unable to do us any harm while we are under the Shepherd's care.

Church – do you realize that while your enemies are watching vindictively over you, even while your outer nature is wasting away, your inner soul is being renewed and strengthened by God's grace day by day.¹⁴

David celebrates this when he says,

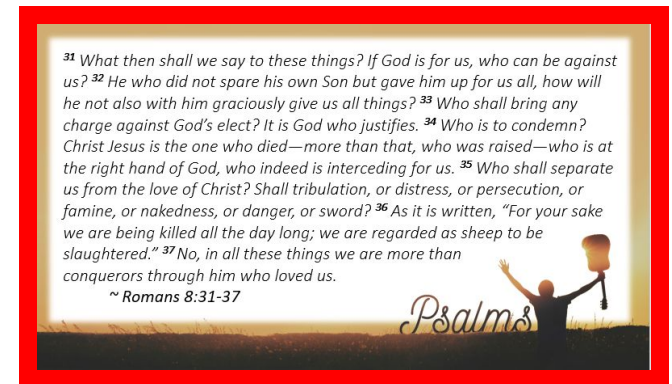
My cup overflows! God is untiring in His provision for me. Since the sheep did not like to get wet, and it was a "mark of special kindness to keep the cups filled to the brim so that they could drink with ease. It's a symbol of God's abundance and super-abundance. He is so faithful. His provision is perfect.¹⁵

This is just like **Romans 8** where Paul writes,

¹³ Robinson, 47-48.

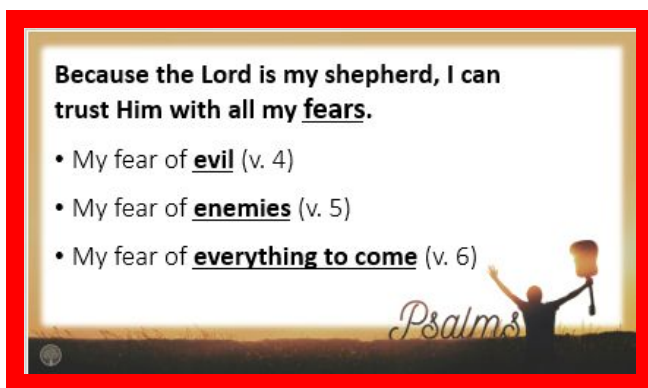
¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

¹⁵ Robinson, 52.



If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ...Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us....

Our good Shepherd is perfect and sufficient in every way that He provides for us. Certainly, also with our,



fear of everything to come (v.6)

Certainly there are many unknowns in our future. We don't know about our finances. We don't know about the hospital bed that is waiting for us. We don't know about the relationship we may lose next. There are so many unknowns in our futures – can we really trust our Shepherd with the unknowns of everything that is to come?

What does He say?

Surely [with confidence] *goodness and mercy* [the two German shepherds of heaven] *will follow me* ...

Follow me – that's an active word in the Hebrew ... its very aggressive – it means to pursue. To chase after and to bestow their kind graces on the unmerited soul, continually, always, following...pursuing...like the highway patrol.¹⁶

¹⁶ See John Piper's excellent sermon on **Psalm 23** entitled, "The Shepherd, the Host, and the Highway Patrol"

Goodness is God's care and promises. *Mercy* is God's Covenant Loyal Love.

Goodness to provide, mercy to pardon.¹⁷ Goodness to supply all my needs, and mercy to cancel all my sins.¹⁸

God is with you. And you will never get far from Him – He is pursuing you. And that's why David says,

I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

That's his everlasting fellowship. It's the same root word from the word, *restore* in **verse 3**. To dwell means to continually return to the same place. To continually come back. I will dwell in the house of the Lord.

Now David's not speaking here of the house of the Lord – meaning physical temple, for it wasn't built yet. Rather He is speaking of the family of God. I will dwell with the household of God. I will dwell in the presence of God. He's not speaking of a place – but who he shall be with!

I will always dwell, both here and forever, with my sufficient Shepherd. What beautiful fellowship. What a perfect destiny.

Let me read for you **Revelation chapter 7**,

¹⁷ Robinson, 56.

¹⁸ Watkinson, 113.

¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For **the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd**, and He will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

~ Revelation 7:15-17

Psalm

"Therefore they are before the throne of God, [this is speaking of God's sheep in their final destiny] and serve him day and night in his temple; and He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. 17 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

We have a sufficient Shepherd. Are you trusting Him?

Main Point
Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I can trust Him with all my needs & my fears.

Are you really trusting Him with all your needs, and with all your fears? Are you looking to Him who is perfect rest and perfect refreshment? To Him who is perfect restoration and perfect redemption? To Him whose righteousness and guidance is perfect for your life? Are you trusting Jesus?

Application

Trust your all-sufficient Shepherd!

Trust our Shepherd! He's the perfect companion. He's perfect in comfort. He's perfect in provision. He's perfect in His care for you, and He offers you a perfect destiny. There's nothing that you need, and there's nothing that you fear, that you cannot trust into His good care.

He is the Lord, Yahweh, my Shepherd. And because He is my shepherd, I shall not want.



Let's Pray.

<<He Will Hold Me Fast>>

Speaking of Thanksgiving, next Sunday Pastor Ritch Boerckel from Bethany Baptist Church in Peoria will be preaching God's Word for us here. You will not want to miss his Spirit-gifted preaching.



As you leave today, we would appreciate your help in carrying our shoeboxes to the waiting vehicles at the

north entrance. Please allow Renee Huschen to count your boxes as you carry them out, and your help will be much appreciated.

Let's pray our Benediction now as we are dismissed,



Benediction

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen! Ps 72:18-19

Recommended Resources on Our Sufficient Shepherd:

- Nehemiah 9:21
- Psalm 80:1
- Isaiah 40:11
- Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-31
- John 10:1-5, 7-18, 25-30
- Hebrews 13:20
- 1 Peter 2:25; 5:4
- Revelation 7:13-17

- <https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/psalms/23>
- <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/our-shepherding-god/>

- *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller
- *Psalm Twenty-Three*, Haddon Robinson

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Read the entire Psalm 23. Are there any needs you have presently that the Shepherd of this psalm does not somehow address? Go around the room and each share why you are thankful that God is your shepherd.
2. Read Psalm 23:3. Why is the last phrase, "...for his name's sake" so important and significant? How would this psalm's meaning be different without that phrase? How does the glory of God elevate your understanding of God's shepherding of you?
3. Read Psalm 23:6. Understanding that the word "follow" means "to actively chase" rather than "to lag behind," why do you believe David was so confident of God's continued work of goodness and mercy in his life? Do you share David's confidence? How come? Or why not?
4. What are you most afraid of? How do you respond when faced with the possibility of this? How should the promises and prayers of Psalm 23 change your perspective?
5. Read Psalm 23:4. The phrase "for you are with me" is right in the middle of this song. How does God's presence give you peace in life? How do you seek to cultivate a conscious awareness of God's presence throughout your day?
6. What's your favorite aspect of Psalm 23? Discuss together, and pray that God will help us all grow more in our trust of our sufficient Shepherd.