



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V27 N37 September 14, 2025

## PSALMS: CELEBRATING CHRIST IN GOD'S HYMNBOOK

### "Psalm 23"

#### THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

##### Personal God

I believe God is involved  
in and cares about  
my daily life.

*"I lift up my eyes to the  
hills – where does my help  
come from? My help comes  
from the LORD, the Maker  
of heaven and earth."*

Psalm 121:1-2



Does God  
really  
own you?



"The Lord is my shepherd..." is perhaps one of the most memorable and beloved passages of Scripture. This poem is often seen as David's crown jewel of the Psalter. Our familiarity with Psalm 23 may overshadow some of the more challenging aspects of this "trust psalm." We can often romanticize God's care for us, thinking of sheep as cute and shepherds as lowly and gentle. Shepherding may be simple but is rarely easy. The work is hard work and the life of sheep is rarely cute. As God shepherds us, his care may be strong and corrective. There are many dangers God shields us from and many predators that our heavenly shepherd must stand guard against.

Phillip W. Keller, a popular author and lay pastor, spent a season of his life as a shepherd of a real flock of sheep. He writes of his experience in his bestselling work, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Keller writes of sheep, "Sheep do not 'just take care of themselves' as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care. It is no accident that God has chosen to call us sheep. The behavior of sheep and human beings is similar in many ways ... Our mass mind (or mob instincts), our fears and timidity, our stubbornness and stupidity, our perverse habits are all parallels of profound importance" (Keller, 19).

In his first chapter, Keller focuses on the ownership of the shepherd. Sheep do not pick shepherds. Shepherds pick, purchase, feed and care for sheep. For the LORD to be our shepherd means that we are his property. He owns us. The LORD is not our shepherd just when we want him to be so. God as our shepherd, our personal God who is involved in and cares about our daily lives, also commands our daily activities. My heavenly shepherd has a will and a plan for my life. I must seek him and obey him as his possession. The LORD as our shepherd will not share his flock with other lords or gods. The

Lord is *my* shepherd and others cannot be my shepherd is the sentiment. I cannot have the Lord as my shepherd and be heavily influenced by other forces or leaders. "The LORD is my shepherd" is more a statement of loyalty than a statement of bliss.

"Basically what it amounts to is this: A person exchanges the fickle fortunes of living life by sheer whimsy for the more productive and satisfying adventure of being guided by God. It is a tragic truth that many people who really have never come under His direction or management claim that 'The Lord is my shepherd.' They seem to hope that by merely admitting that He is their Shepherd somehow they will enjoy the benefits of His care and management without paying the price of forfeiting their own fickle and foolish way of life. One cannot have it both ways. Either we belong or we don't. Jesus Himself warned us that there would come a day when many would say, 'Lord, in Your name we did many wonderful things,' but He will retort that He never knew us as His own" (Keller, 22).

Keller asked his readers to consider these penetrating questions when thinking of the LORD our Shepherd as our Owner:

- Do I really belong to Him?
- Do I really recognize His right to me?
- Do I respond to His authority and acknowledge His ownership?
- Do I find freedom and complete fulfillment in this arrangement?
- Do I sense a purpose and deep contentment because I am under His direction?
- Do I know rest and repose, besides a definite sense of exciting adventure, in belonging to Him?

**Read Psalm 23**

*A psalm of David.*

1 *The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*

2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures,  
he leads me beside quiet waters,*

3 *he refreshes my soul.*

*He guides me along the right paths  
for his name's sake.*

4 *Even though I walk  
through the darkest valley,*

*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 your goodness and love will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
forever. [NIV]*

**Read another translation**

1 *The LORD is my shepherd,  
I lack nothing.*

2 *He takes me to lush pastures,  
he leads me to refreshing water.*

3 *He restores my strength.  
He leads me down the right paths  
for the sake of his reputation.*

4 *Even when I must walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no danger,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff reassure me.*

5 *You prepare a feast before me  
in plain sight of my enemies.  
You refresh my head with oil;  
my cup is completely full.*

6 *Surely your goodness and faithfulness will pursue me all  
my days,  
and I will live in the LORD's house for the rest of my life.  
[NET]*

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Double underline each occurrence of the name LORD in Psalm 23.
- Circle each word or phrase that involves shepherd-ing in Psalm 23.
- Box each word or phrase that involves hosting or hospitality in Psalm 23.
- Double circle all the occurrences of "you" or "your" in Psalm 23.
- Underline the word "for" in v. 3 and v. 4.
- Draw a line connecting the words "lead" in v. 2, "guide" in v. 3 and "follow" in v. 6.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about \_\_\_\_\_."



## DIG DEEPER

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Describe the metaphor used for God in Psalm 23:1-4.
2. Describe the metaphor used for God in Psalm 23:5-6.
3. In what ways does a follower of God not lack (v. 1)?
4. What do the images of vv. 2-3a have to contribute to the description of God as shepherd?
5. What are “right paths” (v. 3b)? Why is this important?
6. What removes fear and discomfort according to v. 4? How so?
7. How does Psalm 23 change in vv. 4b-6?
8. What does the mention of “enemies” contribute to the meaning of God’s lavish care (v. 5)?
9. God leads (vv. 2-3) and follows (v. 6) us. What does this say about God’s care for us?
10. What does dwelling in the house of the Lord forever entail?

Psalms 23 is very popular and many have it memorized. The poem's simplicity heightens its beauty and profound claims. The psalmist here makes no prayers, petitions or complaints. Rather, he reminds himself and us all that God's greatness is most compelling due to his thoughtful and detailed care of his followers. Many have labeled this psalm a "trust psalm."

The psalm can be divided into two major sections: God as shepherd (vv. 1-4) and God as host (vv. 5-6). The metaphor of shepherd could be applied to the entire psalm but would be stretched some as sheep rarely traffic in banquet tables, overflowing cups, anointings and houses (vv. 5-6).

God as shepherd is not unique to this psalm. God is described as Israel's shepherd many times in the Old Testament (Gen 48:15; 49:24; 2 Sam 5:2; Ps 28:9; 77:20; 78:52; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Is 40:11; 49:9-10; Jer 31:10; Ez 34:11-16; Micah 7:14). What is unique in this psalm is the personal application of God as shepherd to individuals and not only to the collective nation of Israel. God is intimately involved in the life and vitality of the psalmist and offers his care for individuals like you and me. God performs all of this care out of his love and goodness (v. 6) and in accordance with his righteous character connected to his name (v. 3).

Much is made of God's supply in Psalm 23. His supply of our needs creates for us a reality that lifts us above the mundane reality of need (v. 1). God provides for us more than we need, hence the "lying down in green pastures" (v. 2). Normally livestock would be grazing in green pastures, but here we are described as contentedly reclining in such places. We are even made to do so by God's hand. Quiet waters speak of rest or even Sabbath. Restoration of soul is a reviving experience of returning to a previous state of strength or vitality. God also supplies us with protection (v. 4), honor (v. 5), love (v. 6) and an eternal abode (v. 6). God's personal care for us is abundant. We may not be wealthy or prosperous in this life, but we can be assured that God will intimately care for us.

As encouraging as Psalm 23 might be, there are elements of challenge and difficulty in the psalm, even in the midst of God's provision. Psalm 23:4 mentions "darkest of valleys" and "evil." Psalm 23:5 mentions "enemies." God as our caring shepherd and our generous host does not guarantee that we will live without significant challenges. God's presence with us as shepherd (v. 4) can remove gripping fears. God does not remove "evil" in every instance, but he can provide courage as his presence is with us as we wrestle with evil all around us.

As God can shepherd from the battle that is without, he can also help shepherd us through the battle that is within. Sometimes we need the shepherd's protection and at other time we need the shepherd's personal correction. "God is present with his mighty protective power. For the protection of his flock, the shepherd carries an iron-shod cudgel [rod] (G. Dalman, AuS 6:238f.).

With this weapon he beats back hostile animals and men (cf. 1 Sam. 17:43). At the same time, the shepherd carries a staff in his hand, with which to urge the tardy sheep on and to bring the stray ones back to the flock. Accordingly, the protective weapon and the guiding staff inspire courage and fearless trust in those who are led – so the singer of the psalm declares. He knows he is under God's protection and guidance" (Hans-Joachim Kraus, *A Continental Commentary: Psalms 1-59*, 308).

God's hospitality towards us [see note on v. 5 table] may be a lesson to our enemies (v. 5) as well as an honor for us to enjoy. Again, God may not remove those who wish to harm us, but instead he celebrates with us victories over forces of evil.

God's care for us not only leads and guides us (vv. 2-3) but also follows us with intense pursuit. "The verb 'follow' translates the Hebrew root *rdp* ('pursue'). The KJV translates it 'shall follow me,' but it means 'follow me' in pursuit. And that puts a different hue on the landscape. We may stress the shift in the metaphor. Something has distracted the sheep, and the Shepherd, personified by 'goodness and love,' has dropped behind them, and they pursue us 'all the days' of our life. A Scottish preacher said, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, aye, and he has two fine collie dogs, goodness and mercy. They will see us safely home.' Isaiah uses this kind of imagery too. He speaks of Israel on her way home from Babylonian exile. They arrived in Babylonia in the first place by meandering from side to side along the moral path, and not keeping their eyes on the Shepherd. When the Lord brought them back home (about 536 BC), they could hear him behind them saying, 'This is the way; walk in it' (Isa. 30:21) – more pursued than led. Isaiah combines the two metaphors in 52:12 to describe that awesome and treacherous journey of the exiles on their way home, and he promises that the Lord will go 'before you' and will also be 'your rear guard'" (C. Hassell Bullock, *Psalms 1-72*, vol. 1, Teach the Text Commentary Series, 171).

Dwelling in the house of the LORD forever is the psalmist's final expectation. This "house" could be a reference to the tabernacle or temple. It could also be a reference to living forever in God's presence after this life. Some have understood "forever" to be just the lifetime of the psalmist. But it is possible that more than just a full earthly life is referred to here. "'Forever' is literal (in this verse) 'to length of days', which is not in itself an expression for eternity. But since the logic of God's covenant allows no ending to his commitment to a man, as our Lord pointed out (Matt. 22:32), the Christian understanding of these words does no violence to them. 'Neither death, nor life, ... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord'" (Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, 130).

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## Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *shepherd* "Like Abel and Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, David was a shepherd. When he declares that Yahweh relates to him the way that he related to his flocks, however, he does not speak merely from personal experience. When Yahweh led his people through the wilderness, providing manna from heaven and water from the rock, he was doing for them what a shepherd does for his flock. Recognizing this, Israel's psalmists and prophets spoke of Yahweh as their shepherd. In this psalm David speaks of the Lord in terms that have historical resonance and that are also deeply personal" (James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms*, vol. 1, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary, 295).

v. 1 *lack* "The focus of the word 'want' is not so much on the idea of 'desiring' something as on 'lacking' something needed. The psalmist does not mean that Yahweh shepherds us by giving us everything we desire. Rather, those who trust in Yahweh as sheep do in a shepherd will never lack for whatever they need. The NIV's translation 'I shall not be in want' succeeds in clarifying the true meaning of the phrase. In the verses that follow, the psalmist illustrates how the shepherd-God supplies abundantly all that his trusting people need" (Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary, 432).

v. 2 *lie down* "Causing the flock to lie down there rather than simply feed suggests ample provision. It implies that they have eaten, are satisfied, and have no need to move on to look for further grass: this pasture will provide the next meal, too. Lying down after feeding also hints at security (Ezek. 34:14-15; Zeph. 3:13; also Job 11:19; Isa. 17:2)" (John Goldingay, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms 1-41*, vol. 1, 349).

v. 2 *quiet waters* "David speaks of 'waters of resting places.' The term 'resting place' (מנוחה) is what the Lord sought for his people when the ark set out from Mount Sinai in Num 10:33. Even further back, the cognate verb is used in Gen 2:15 and could be rendered, 'And Yahweh God took the man and caused him to rest in the garden of Eden.' The term 'resting place' is also used in Deut 12:9 to describe the 'resting place' and 'the inheritance' that the Lord gave his people—the land of promise. This term appears in the Lord's declaration that the wilderness generation will not enter the land, his rest, in Ps 95:11 (cf. 132:8, 14; Isa 11:10; 66:1). When David refers to 'waters of resting places' with this term, then, he evokes the way that Yahweh shepherded his people to the good land he promised them. That good land God promised his people was an attempt to renew what was lost when Adam was driven from Eden. The goodness of God's presence, David says, is enjoyed by those who are shepherded by Yahweh to 'waters of resting places'" (Hamilton, 295).

v. 3 *restore* "The verb 'restores' is a common verb with a wide range of uses. In the basic *qal* verbal system it can mean simply 'return,' or it can mean 'repent.' In causative formations it has a wide range as well: it is used in 1 Kings 13:6 for the 'restoring' of a withered hand; it is used in Isaiah 52:8 for the 'restoring' of the captives to their land; in Isaiah 58:12 it refers to the 'repairing' of the walls, and in Daniel 9:25 for the 'rebuilding' of a ruined city. It therefore bears the idea of returning something to its original state. David's words are general enough to mean that the LORD restores him to his proper spiritual and physical condition by forgiving him and renewing him (see Pss. 32 and 51)" (Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1, Kregel Exegetical Commentary, 562).

v. 3 *paths* "These Scriptures also show the path worn into the land by the Lord's own wagon, 'the wagon tracks of righteousness.' God leads his 'sheep' on this path 'for the sake of his name' (cf. 25:11; 31:3 [MT 31:4]; 79:9; 106:8; 109:21; 143:11) because when David lives out God's own righteous character, God's reputation is magnified. God pursues what is right and good for all people, and David acknowledges that God's glory is at stake in the way he himself lives" (Hamilton, 296).

v. 3 *name* "It is the same with the paths of righteousness, which, in terms of sheep, mean no more than 'the right paths', but have, further, a demanding moral content for the human flock (cf. Prov. 11:15), whose ways will either shame or vindicate their Shepherd's good name. Ezekiel 36:22-32 draws out this searching implication of the phrase for his name's sake, but adds the corollary that, to uphold that name, God will make new men of us, whose ways will be his own" (Kidner, 128).

v. 4 *valley* "A valley where the danger of death lurked because of robbers and wild animals. Hakham identifies it geographically as 'a path that runs between two cliff embankments.' Job uses the term *tsalmawet* for death (Job 10:21-22; NIV: 'utter darkness'), and the prophet Jeremiah employs it metaphorically for the wilderness that God brought Israel through after the exodus (Jer. 2:6)" (Bullock, 168).

v. 5 *table* "In wealthy homes tables were common (cf. Judg. 1:7; 2 Sam. 9:7-13; 2 Kings 4:10; Job 36:16), but probably not in ordinary houses. The verbal placing together of 'you prepare' and 'before me' suggests the intimacy of the Host and guest. The theme of provision and rest is conjoined with protection by adding that the feast takes place in the sight of (*neged*) my enemies (*šōrerāy*, see Ps. 8:2) who look on helplessly. So mighty is his Host that the beneficiary conspicuously enjoys a royal banquet right in front of his adversaries who cannot touch him" (Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary*, 442).

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## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

God intimately cares for us like a diligent shepherd and a consummate host; we do not need to fear anything in life or death, because the LORD is with us.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



## 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## PARENT CONNECTION

When studying a familiar passage of Scripture, we might tend to gloss over it quickly while mentally preparing our grocery list. This might be the case with Psalm 23, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing...” yeah, yeah, yeah, except milk, paper towels, chicken nuggets, jelly.” We might think we know this passage well, but let’s try not to mistake familiarity with intimacy. Even if you can recite Psalm 23 by memory, take another look. Ask God to reveal Himself in a whole new way. Pray Psalm 119:18 before you begin, “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.” The beauty of God’s Word is that it’s living and active (Hebrews 4:32), so who knows what you’ll glean from another deep dive into a familiar passage with a little more spiritual maturity than you had a few years ago? Here’s a crazy thought – study it with your child. Try to see Psalm 23 through their fresh eyes. Don’t just read the psalm, say it out loud. Don’t rush through it; take time to unpack the riches of each verse. Talk about sheep and shepherds, green pastures and dark valleys, the shepherd’s rod and staff. Ask them (a) what they learn about God, (b) what they think God wants them to put into practice or change because of what they’ve learned and (c) how might God use them to make a difference in the world because of this Scripture. We have so much to teach our kids. In turn, their childlike innocence and their unwavering faith in a loving and merciful God have much to teach us. We’re praying for you!

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read Psalm 23

1. Circle the word “He” throughout this psalm and make a list of all the things God does.
2. Circle the word “You” throughout this psalm and make a list of all the things God does.
3. Circle the word “I” throughout this psalm and make a list of all the things we learn about David.

### What Do You Think?

Why is the word shepherd, rather than something else, used to describe the Lord?

### What Do You Do?

Take your pet (or a neighbor’s pet) for a walk this week. How well did they follow your lead? How well do you follow God’s lead?

## CORE COMPETENCY: Personal God

I believe God cares about everything in my life.

## MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 103:8

*“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.”*

## KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- \_\_\_\_\_ I completed my Bible Study
- \_\_\_\_\_ I memorized this week’s verse
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought my Bible to church
- \_\_\_\_\_ I brought a friend



CHILD’S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)

*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)

*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)

*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)

*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)

*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)

*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)

*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)

*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)

*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)

*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)

*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)

*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)

*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)

*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)

*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)

*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)

*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)

*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)

*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)

*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)

*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)

*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)

*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)

*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)

*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)

*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)

*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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**Stephanie Thomas** (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have five children: Elijah, Levi, Bo, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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### OUR MISSION

Making God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.