



DEVOTIONAL | Psalm 23:1

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. (NIV)

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (KJV)

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (NKJV)

Overview: Perhaps our best-known psalm extols the relationship of the individual believer with the Divine Shepherd. Psalm 100:3 says that believers are the Lord's people. John 10 portrays our Lord Jesus Christ as the Good Shepherd. Here, the sheep speaks of his Savior. The first verse is a statement of trust and possession. It is in the singular, not plural. The psalmist could have said, *The Lord is our shepherd; we shall not want*, but he says it with such an intimacy and knowledge of the One caring that it draws us into that assurance. Verses 2 to 6 speak of the aspects of the Shepherd's care which make the first statement a confident assertion.

Word-view: *Shepherd* can be defined as "the one who feeds or pastures."¹ As sheep are reliant on their shepherd for life, so God's people are dependent on the Lord for this life and the one forever. "The Lord is my Savior" must be realized before the promises of Psalm 23 become valid—*The Lord is my shepherd*.

Inner-view: Do a Bible search around the Lord as our shepherd:

- Matthew 2:6: Simeon predicts that the Christmas baby would be the shepherd of God's people when Jesus is presented on the eighth day after His birth.

- Matthew 10:6: The people of Israel are like lost sheep. Isaiah 53:6 says every one of us has strayed.
- Matthew 18:12-13: Recovery of a lost sheep is cause for great rejoicing. The Lord rejoices over us in love (Zephaniah 3:17).
- John 10: The Good Shepherd calls, leads, knows and lays down His life for the sheep. This is giving them abundant life.
- Acts 20:28: The Holy Spirit gives under-shepherds who are supposed to feed and lead the flock.
- Hebrews 13:20: The Lord Jesus has shed His blood to secure a covenant relationship, which shall have the Great Shepherd's pleasure of glory forever and good works perfected.
- 1 Peter 5:4: The Chief Shepherd will come again to reward us.

Question: Are you following the right shepherd? Are you living as a submissive sheep?

Worldview: Our world is not random and chaotic in spite of what appears to be happening. A "Good Shepherd" is watching out for us, and in that relationship we need not suffer lack. We have everything we need to live a godly life (2 Peter 1:3)!

¹ Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985, page 559.



DEVOTIONAL | Psalm 23:2

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters. (NIV)*

*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
He leadeth me beside the still waters. (KJV)*

*He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters. (NKJV)*

Overview: God’s provision and guidance are in view in these verses. Sometimes when counseling a depressed or discouraged person, one of the first admonishments a counselor gives is “If possible, have a good meal (maybe not fast food) with an encouraging friend and get eight to nine hours of sleep tonight.” This advice often works wonders. In the same way, our shepherd leads us to green pastures of His providence and quiet waters of His refreshment. The Good Shepherd smoothes our chaotic lives and *makes us lie down*.

Word-view: “The strange thing about sheep is that because of their very make-up it is almost impossible for them to be made to *lie down* until four requirements are met:”²

1. Free from all fear
2. Free from friction with others of their kind
3. Free from the torment of pests such as flies and parasites
4. Free from hunger.

Inner-view: A practical way to apply this verse might be to create a “burden list.” Follow these steps:

1. Write down everything that is weighing you down, causing you concern or creating worry.

2. Review each item in prayer. Mark each burden with one of four symbols—

↑ = Give to the Lord. ↓ = Receive from the Lord.
! = Depend on the Lord. ↔ = Interact with God’s people.

For example:

- a. ↑ = Give to the Lord (1 Peter 5:7). Sometimes there is nothing else to do other than trust.
- b. ↓ = Receive from the Lord (Philippians 4:6,7). Watch for the Lord’s provision. Start saying thank you in faith.
- c. ! = Depend on the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). Taking decisive action that you know the Lord wants you to take can break the logjam of spiritual paralysis.
- d. ↔ = Interact with God’s people (Philippians 2:1-4). Our Savior often answers our prayers via other believers (James 5:13-16).

Question: Are you following the right shepherd? Are you living as a submissive sheep?

Worldview: Our world is not random and chaotic in spite of what appears to be happening. A “Good Shepherd” is watching out for us, and in that relationship we need not suffer lack. We have everything we need to live a godly life (2 Peter 1:3)!

² Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970, page 35.



DEVOTIONAL | Psalm 23:3

*He restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (NIV)*

*He restoreth my soul:
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (KJV)*

*He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. (NKJV)*

Overview: Speaking as a sheep, it seems easy to get lost, frustrated and worn out. Verse three assures us that the Good Shepherd will guide with His eye on us (Psalm 32:9) so we don't have to act like the horse or mule who need bit and bridle to get guidance.

Word-view: *Paths* are described by John Gadsby: "In the wilderness and in the desert there are no raised paths, the paths being merely tracks; and sometimes there are six or eight running unevenly alongside each other. No doubt this is what is figuratively referred to in Psalm 23:3."³

Inner-view: How does the Lord restore your soul? For some active, never-stay-still people, restoration happens when we are quieted. We need to *be still and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10). Others will need the prodding of the Good Shepherd to keep moving toward good goals and better pastures. "The greatest single safeguard which a shepherd has in handling his flock is to keep them on the move."⁴ So then, whether it's quiet time or time to move, it can be hard knowing which is when. That's why we can depend on the Good Shepherd. We *know His voice* (John 10:27) and can trust His guidance. So where is your Shepherd leading?

Quiet Restoration:	Well-directed Paths:
Half day of prayer	Witnessing training
15 minutes more of "quiet time" in the morning	15 minutes of talking with a friend
Reading and reflecting on a book	Writing a letter or poem
Clearing your calendar	Scheduling an appointment
Praying for yourself and others	Praying for yourself and others
Memorizing a passage of Scripture	Memorizing a passage of Scripture

It really is amazing when you consider the spiritual disciplines and how we can draw close to the Lord, knowing He will draw close to us (James 4:8).

Worldview: Sheep need guidance in the confusing "tracks" of life. Proverbs 21:2 says that we all think our ways are right, but the Lord knows the heart. So it is in the conflicting viewpoints. Our Good Shepherd knows the paths, and He knows our heart. We should allow Him to guide us into truth.

³ John Gadsby as quoted by C.H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977, Vol. I, page 411.

⁴ Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970, page 72.



DEVOTIONAL | Psalm 23:4

*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. (NIV)*

*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. (KJV)*

*Yea, 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. (NKJV)*

Overview: The sheep encounter treacherous terrain in this next verse. Journeying with the flock to find pasture, steep cliffs in the wilderness and deep ravines would have been on David's mind. He remembers how carefully he had to guide the sheep or one would be lost. What a picture of the care of the Lord Jesus! He instructs, reproveth, corrects and trains His people (2 Timothy 3:16,17) so that they would be wholly and holy in glorifying the One who saves and shepherds them.

Word-view: *The valley of the shadow of death* is, for the Christian, only a transition. Death is an enemy, but the sting has been removed, says 1 Corinthians 15:51-57. "It is only the shadow of death, the moment of darkness, then the miracle of glory. It is good to realize that you cannot have a shadow without a light, and, in one sense, the shadow of death is the result of the presence of the One who is the Light of the World. Jesus is there awaiting you."⁵

Inner-view: Discipline never seemed that joyful as a child when we were on the receiving end. It didn't get much better when those of us as parents had to apply it to our children. Yet the psalmist states that *the rod and the staff, they comfort me*. The rod was usually a short, thick, hardwood club used for exerting authority in an extension of the shepherd's mind into the control of the herd. "For, in fact, the Scriptures are His rod. They are the extension of His mind and will and intentions to mortal man."⁶ The rod was used for discipline, for examining the sheep (Ezekiel 20:37—*passing under the rod*) and for protection. The staff was more ready to guide and to draw an individual sheep into close contact with the shepherd. Intimacy and direction come from the Holy Spirit as He comforts us in Christ (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).

Worldview: The Lord has not left us without a standard and guide. His Word sets our views for righteousness. God's Word is truth (Psalm 119:143; John 17:17).

⁵ John E. Hunter, *Christ in the Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972, page 19.

⁶ Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970, page 94.



DEVOTIONAL | Psalm 23:5

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (NIV)*

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

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. (NKJV)*

Overview: Danger may be near, but the Good Shepherd is with us. Prepared pastures, anointed heads and ample water solidify the complete trust of the sheep. They need not fear the enemy, for the Good Shepherd is prepared. The exposure and pain of life is soothed with the oil of healing. Overflowing life results. John 10:10 comes from the lips of the Good Shepherd—He came to give life and that abundantly! And the cup overflows! The psalm pictures the Good Shepherd providing so that there is no want—table, anointing, cup overflowing!

Word-view: *Oil* can mean healing ointment—as when the sheep is exposed to sun, wind or injury. Charles Slemming gives a deeper insight about oil. He states that the oil is really a repellent for small snakes who hide in the grass of a new field. The shepherd would circle the adder’s nest with oil and anoint the sheep’s head. This would hinder the snake from movement toward the sheep. Even if the adder was able to pass over the slippery confinement, it would be put off by the smell of the ointment on the sheep.⁷

Inner-view: A war veteran once said that one of the greatest concerns during combat is to get adequate rest and food. In the heat of the battle, always having to be on the alert and “under fire,” soldiers would have to be reminded to eat and take turns watching so that others could sleep. So it is in the spiritual struggles that we find ourselves! Our Good Shepherd prepares a table to strengthen us and watches for us (Psalm 127:2) so we can be ready and able. Have you taken advantage of the resource of the Word of God? Don’t just memorize a few passages. Saturate yourself with the provision of the Scriptures. Rely on the God who gave you those Scriptures so that you can be equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17).

Worldview: In the battle of worldviews (Ephesians 6:12), it is good to be reminded that our Savior is watching out for us. And no matter how dire the wrestling with evil may be—our Lord prevails! “The friends of God are made to triumph in the very presence of their foes. Their enemies are compelled to see how He interposes on their behalf, how He provides for them and how He defends them.”⁸

⁷ Charles W. Slemming, *He Leadeth Me, The Shepherd's Life in Palestine*. Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1964, 64 pages.

⁸ Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1955, page 218.



DEVOTIONAL | Psalm 23:6

*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (NIV)*

*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. (KJV)*

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (NKJV)*

Overview: The final verse of this psalm has a lasting ring. Both in this life and in the eternal one, goodness and God’s promised lovingkindness follow and fill. The dwelling place of the believer is always with God! Ponder the *forever* of the Good Shepherd’s care. We can trust in the Lord’s mercy and unfailing love forever and ever (Psalm 52:8).

Word-view: *House of the Lord* – we often refer to the building where the people of God meet as “the Lord’s house.” However, the physical place has a deeper meaning—dwelling with our Savior forever. Hebrews 8:1-6 describe the ministry of mediation which the Lord Jesus now effects. The tabernacle was but a shadow of our eternal home with Him.

Inner-view: David speaks with assurance that the goodness of God will go with him all the days of his life. Four time periods are evident in the shepherd boy’s life:

- 15 years in the pasture as a shepherd
- 15 years in the cave as a fugitive from King Saul
- 20 years in the palace as the king in triumph
- 20 years in the pits as the king in decline.

David wrote psalms to portray the relationship with a loving God in every stage and situation of life.

- Pasture—Psalm 23 and Psalm 19
- Cave—Psalm 18 and 57
- Palace—Psalm 20 and 21
- Pits—Psalm 30 and 31

Where are you finding yourself these days? What circumstances need God’s goodness applied? Goodness and merciful love will “pursue”—follow you all your days. The Good Shepherd is here!

Worldview: What is that which follows my life? In the conflicting struggle between biblical and worldly philosophies, it is good to remember that having the Lord as our shepherd is not just an individual treasure but a community blessing. “Just as God’s goodness and mercy flow to me all the days of my life, so goodness and mercy should follow me, should be left behind me, as a legacy to others, wherever I may go.”⁹

⁹ Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970, pages 130-131.