

## **“Thanks to God”**

*November 26, 2017*

Psalm 23

### **I. Introduction**

Without a doubt, Psalm 23 is the most familiar psalm in the book of Psalms and may be the most familiar passage in the whole Bible. Because it is a psalm of comfort and hope, we often read it as a part of funerals. But, since it focuses on what the Shepherd does for us **“all the days of my life”** and not just at death, this is actually a Psalm of Thanksgiving and for that reason, it is appropriate for today.

Some see David writing this psalm as a young shepherd boy lying on his back in a pasture and pondering the things of God. But he probably wrote this psalm later in his life—perhaps during the rebellion of his son Absalom which we find in [2 Samuel 13-19](#). Looking back, David would have remembered some of the rewarding times and some of difficult things he experienced during his long walk with the Lord as a shepherd of sheep and then a shepherd of people. While believers and nonbelievers both love and quote this psalm, its message is really for those who are part of God’s flock. This is a Psalm of Thanksgiving for God’s sheep—Christians who as they go through life must fight battles and carry burdens. David reminds us that we are not alone.

For many people, Thanksgiving is a time to consider all the things for which one can be thankful. If we were to make such a list, it would probably include major things like life, health, family, friends, and, despite all its flaws, the nation we live in. But we must not overlook the greatest reason for giving thanks—God’s love and care for us—which sometimes we see but many times, I suspect, His care is unseen. In Psalm 23 David listed the various places where God was with him and is with us and he listed the things for which we need to be thankful. First, David wrote about how God cares for His sheep when they are away from the fold—when they are out in the field and in the pasture.

### **II. The Field**

**A. In the Pasture** When the flock is outside in the pasture, David wrote that the Lord—not an angel or some special person but the Almighty Jehovah God—the Creator of the universe is personally watching over and caring for His sheep. The 1<sup>st</sup> verse of Psalm 23 really should be translated: “*Jehovah (the God of Israel) is my shepherd.*” Think about it: The Almighty God is our Shepherd. God is continually watching and caring for those who belong to Him. In **Deuteronomy 31:6**, Moses wrote, “**Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.**” In **John 10:11**, Jesus called Himself “**the Good Shepherd.**” In **Hebrews 13:20** Jesus is called “**that great Shepherd of the sheep.**” As the children of God, Christians don’t go through anything on their own—God is always there with them as their Shepherd.

But God isn’t just there watching like a person watches TV or a movie, He is intimately involved—in **Matthew 28:20**, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, said, “**Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**” Since the omnipotent God is with us, David wrote that we “**shall not be in want.**” **Psalm 34:9** says, “**Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing.**” In **Philippians 4:19** Paul wrote, “**My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.**” In the Lord’s Prayer in **Matthew 7:11** we pray, “**Give us this day our daily bread.**” As the Creator, God is more than able to provide all of the needs of those who belong to Him—His sheep--us. The Good Shepherd knows that we need food, water, and rest. Our Shepherd, our Savior, knows what we need and supplies those needs.

“**Green pastures**” may be a place to lie down and rest—a place of comfort. But sheep will not lie down when they are hungry, so the Good Shepherd first leads His sheep to green pastures to feed them. He can and will supply the basic necessities of food and then His sheep can lie down satisfied. After being fed, the Good Shepherd will then lead them to a place of rest.

“**Beside quiet waters**” may be a soothing place to rest—the sound of quietly rippling water does have a soothing effect on many. But, more importantly, sheep are afraid to drink from a flowing stream.

They know instinctively that with all their wool, this is dangerous for them. “*Still waters*” or “*quiet waters*” means that the shepherd will have—or even make, if necessary—a place where sheep can drink in safety until they are full. In other words, these first verses remind us that the Shepherd—God—supplies the basic necessities of life—food and water and rest—so that our physical and spiritual strength is restored or renewed. For such things we should give thanks.

In verse 3, we see that the shepherd “**leads**” or “**guides**” in the path of righteousness. The ever present Shepherd is in the front leading His sheep—choosing the good paths and rejecting the bad. By being in front—if there is any danger, He will see it first. [Turn to John 10:3-4.](#)

For sheep, the difference between the right path and the wrong path can mean the difference between life and death. The right path means safety, shelter, and protection. The wrong path means being separated from the shepherd and from the rest of the flock. If a sheep goes off on the wrong path, it may become lost or even be attacked by predators or robbers. For this reason, if one of his sheep does go astray on the wrong path, a good shepherd will leave the flock in charge of his helpers and go search for the lost animal. [Turn to Matthew 18:12-14.](#)

The Good Shepherd, the Lord, cares for His sheep in the same way because He loves them and, as the God of love, it is His nature to provide safety as well as the fundamental necessities of life. Because He loves them, God not only supplies these basic needs, He is also Guide and Protector. In [John 16:13](#) Jesus said, “**When he, the Spirit of truth i.e. the Holy Spirit, comes, he will guide you into all truth.**”

**B. In the Valley** When the sheep are outside the fold, they don’t spend all their time in lush, safe pastures; sometimes they must go through valleys—ominous valleys—places of danger and perhaps even death. In the valley, David wrote that the Good Shepherd is beside those that belong to Him, leading them and, at the same time, calming them. As David showed by his change of pronoun from “**he**” to “**You,**” God is right there with us, caring for us. When the angel came to tell Joseph about the birth of Jesus in [Matthew 1:23](#), he said that “**they will call him Immanuel—which means “God with us.”**”

David called those difficult situations that come into our lives that make us afraid—including death itself—the “**valley of the shadow of death.**” But God is right there with us through it all. As God’s sheep—as His children—**Philippians 4:7** says that we don’t need to be afraid; we can have “**the peace that transcends all understanding.**”

Again, the shepherd doesn’t just stand around and watch what’s happening, he is ready to protect his flock—he is carrying a “**rod and a staff**” both of which he is ready to use. He is ready to protect His sheep in every way possible. The rod was used as a club to defend the sheep from predators and thieves. The staff was used to guide the sheep—when necessary to prod them along or to hook them and pull them back to safety.

As we go through life, we, like sheep, have a variety of experiences. Our Good Shepherd is there with us in the hard times as well as the good. He is always ready to protect and defend us. In **Psalm 34:7** David wrote, “**The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.**” **Turn to Psalm 118:6-7.** Some of the experiences that come into our lives are trying and difficult, they may suddenly appear and be beyond our control, but nothing takes the Lord by surprise or is beyond His control. In **Revelation 1:17-18**, Jesus said, “**Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.**” Do not be afraid. Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 3:5-6** that all a child of God needs to do is to “**Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.**”

### **III. The Fold**

Back in **Psalm 23, verse 5** says, “**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.**” After being in the field for several days, the goal of the shepherd is to bring his flock safely back to the fold where the weary sheep can rest safely through the night. The fold is a place of safety. As the sheep enter the fold, the shepherd examines each one for bruises or injuries. To the hurts, the shepherd would

apply soothing oil. He would also apply oil to the heads and horns and other areas to keep flies and other insects away. Once they are all in the fold, the shepherd will spread out food in a trough. Here, in the fold, the sheep can lie down and rest in safety. As they eat and sleep, they will be protected by the stone walls of the fold that surrounded them. Often the shepherd himself would sleep across the entrance and be the door.

Robbers and dangerous animals may come near to the fold, but there is no way they can get to the sheep—the fold is a place of safety in the midst of enemies. Because of the food and water in the fold, because of the safety there, because of the individual attention given by the shepherd, the sheep would have all they need—they would be content—their cup would be filled with blessings.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus knows that there are times when we need a respite from the cares and troubles of this world—a safe place—a haven of rest. There are times when He takes us away to a safe place where He can feed us and care for our needs—both physical and spiritual—a place safe from the attacks of sin and Satan. But to come to this place we must follow Him. Jesus said in [Matthew 11:28](#), "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

#### **IV. The Future**

After looking back at the protection the Good Shepherd had given in the field and in the fold, David looked to the future. As he remembered the care of the Shepherd in the past, David knew beyond the shadow of any doubt that in spite of his sins and his failures, in spite of the enemies that would try to harm him, the Shepherd would surely continue to care for him and love him in the days to come far into the future. Paul wrote about this in Romans. [Turn to Romans 8:35-39](#). Nothing—absolutely nothing—can separate us from the Good Shepherd and His love and His care.

As he looked even farther ahead to eternity, David knew that this goodness and love would continue for ever and ever. He would live in heaven in the Father's house forever. Jesus used these same words in John 14—[turn to John 14:1-3](#). For this, too, we must give thanks.

## V. The Finale

If Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord, then He is your Good Shepherd and these words of comfort and thanksgiving are for you. There is so much for which we can thank God—to begin, we need to thank Him for His sacrificial love—His agape love. As [John 3:16](#) says because of God’s love, He sent the Good Shepherd—Jesus Christ, His Son, to die for His sheep. We need to thank Him not only for His love but for the opportunity to become one of His children—one of His sheep.

Obviously, we need to thank God for supplying the necessities of life for us—both physical and spiritual. But we must also thank God for the difficult things He allows to come into our lives—as [James 1:2](#) says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers when you face trials of many kinds.” Much as we may want to know, we will not understand the “why” of everything, but as a child of God—one of His sheep—we know that as we go “through the Valley of the Shadow of death,” God will be with us. And because of the love He has for us, we also “know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” ([Romans 8:28](#)). As James went on to say and as Paul wrote in [Romans 5:1-5](#), the difficult things help us grow strong in the Lord.

Jesus said in [Matthew 28:20](#), He will always be with us and we don’t have to go through the good or bad times on our own—in our own strength. We need to thank God for always being with us. In [1 Peter 5:7](#) Peter wrote, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” If you let Him, if you just give them to Him, Jesus is ready and able to carry your burdens. Thank Him for carrying your burdens.

Finally, you can thank God that as one of His sheep, one of His children, you will spend eternity in heaven with Him where, as John wrote in [Revelation 7:16-17](#), “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

This is obviously an incomplete list, but if you haven't already done so, sometime today, take time to thank God for what He has done for you and will do for you in the future.