

I Shall Not Want

Psalm 27

Pastor John Miller

David said, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Psalm 23 is the most beloved of the 150 psalms, and it is very possibly the best-loved and best-known passage in the entire Bible. Along with the Lord's Prayer, this is probably the one piece of Scripture that most people know and most people could site.

Carl Yates, in his excellent book, *Preaching Through the Psalms*, said about Psalm 23 that “It pictures God in love with His people, with rest in His bosom, with grace for all our need and with comfort and joy in sorrow. With a message of hope so sweet and clear that the music breaks forth from the soul.” I like that.

In case you didn't know it, psalms are songs. They are Hebrew poetry. David is the author of this psalm, and he is writing about the Lord, his shepherd.

David was a shepherd, and he also became king of Israel. We don't know at what point in time in his life that he wrote this psalm. But the majority of the psalms were written by King David, the humble, shepherd boy, who became the king of Israel. God described David as “a man after His own heart.”

We don't know if David wrote this psalm as a young, shepherd boy, and he took out his harp; he was jammin' out in the wilderness as he worshipped the Lord. He was looking at his sheep thinking, The love I have for the sheep and the protection, provision and care is the same love, protection and care that God has for me. In the Old Testament, many times God referred to “the shepherd of Israel.” But David didn't say, “The Lord is the shepherd of Israel”; he said, “The Lord is my shepherd.” David makes it very personal.

So maybe David is a young boy when he wrote this psalm, but he also might have been in middle age. Maybe it wasn't the harp in his hand but the sword. David became one of the most- mighty warriors in all of Israel. With a sling and a rock he slew Goliath, the great giant. But David also wiped out the enemies with a sword as a great warrior for the Lord. It might have been after some battle that David went back to his tent and wrote, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

Or possibly—and this is my preference—it wasn't when he had the harp or the sword in his

hand but when he had the crown on his head that he wrote this psalm. When David was an old man. I see his long, gray hair and long, gray beard. He's getting old. Now David looks back over his whole life and begins to recount how "goodness and mercy" followed him "all the days" of his life. God had taken care of him.

There is one benefit of getting old: You have a perspective you didn't have when you were young. It's funny that when you're old, you know a lot of things, but nobody wants to ask you questions anymore; they think you're too old. "No; I still know things." I learned the phrase, "I wasn't born yesterday." I use that. "I know what's goin' on." As a matter of fact, I was born a long time ago.

I see a gray-haired David looking back over his life saying, "Surely goodness and mercy [have] followed me all the days of my life." So we don't know when David wrote the psalm, but we do know that David wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. I believe that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, whether it be history, poetry, prophecy, the Gospels, Acts, the epistles or Revelation. It doesn't matter; all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.

So David pictured God as his shepherd, and because the Lord was his shepherd, he had everything he needed in life, in death and for eternity. Psalm 23 is not just for funerals; we commonly use it there. But it is a life psalm; it's all about God guiding us and leading us now.

The theme of the psalm is found in verse 1. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." (By the way, I did a seven-week series on Psalm 23. It is archived on our website. I went into great depth there.) Who is the shepherd? It is the Lord. The word "Lord," when written in all capital letters in the Old Testament indicates it is a reference to "Jehovah" or "Yahweh." It refers to the Covenant-keeping God or the great "I AM."

Remember when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush? God told Moses to tell the people, "I AM has sent me to you." That's the name "Lord," "Yahweh" or "Jehovah." He is the eternal God. He is the Covenant-keeping God of the nation of Israel. He is the sustaining God.

In the Hebrew, this phrase, "The Lord is my shepherd," is called a compound name for God; it's "Jehovah Raah." It's tied in with the idea of the I AM statements in the New Testament. Very simply, the idea of God being the great I AM means that He is whatever you need Him to be. If you need a shepherd, He is Jehovah Raah, the Lord your shepherd. If you need provision, He is Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who provides. If you need peace, He's Jehovah Shalom, the Lord your peace. If you need a banner over you, He's Jehovah Nissi, the Lord our banner. If you need righteousness, He's Jehovah Tsidkenu, the Lord our righteousness. It's like having a blank check; you just fill out whatever you need, and then the Lord signs it. He is the I AM. If you need peace, strength or provision, God is the one who meets all of your needs. Whether it is in life, in death or in eternity, "The Lord is my shepherd."

The New Testament makes it clear that this Psalm 23 shepherd is none other than Jesus Christ. In John 10:11, Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd." (There is the I AM again.) In the

Greek, it is “I am the shepherd, the good one.” I like that. There are bad ones out there, but Jesus is the good one. So Jesus is our shepherd, and He’s the one we are reading about in Psalm 23.

Then if the Lord is our shepherd, verse 1, it is implied that we are His sheep. I know that this word is not very flattering. If I read that we are His lions, I can dig it. Or if we are His bears or leopards, great! How many NFL teams are called “the Sheep”? None. “Yeah, my team’s in the Super Bowl, the Sheep. Hallelujah!” We’ve got the Hawks, the Lions, the Bears—all these awesome team names in the NFL! The “Sheep”? No. Why? Because nobody wants to be sheep—baa, baa.

Sheep are dumb, they are dependent on the shepherd and they are defenseless. Those three things characterize us as God’s people. Basically, it implies that we need a shepherd. I’m dumb; I don’t know the path to walk on. I’m dependent on Him; I need Him to guide me and lead me. I’m defenseless; I need Him to protect me. So He guides us, provides for us and protects us.

Now when Jesus is our shepherd, “I shall not want.” I love that. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Years ago, when I was a young believer, I was reading the New Testament in The Living Bible. It’s a paraphrase, but I like the way it’s paraphrased in this verse. It reads, “The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.” I like that. When you can say that “The Lord is my shepherd,” then you can say, “I have everything I need.”

In Psalm 23, I want to point out three areas of need that the Good Shepherd provides in my life. He takes care of my frailties, my fears and my future.

First of all, the Good Shepherd cares for my frailties. Verses 2-3 say, “He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name’s sake.”

By the way, as you go through Psalm 23, you should mark all the personal pronouns; “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down.” This is a very personal psalm. That’s what makes it so beautiful; it’s not about what the Lord is, in general, but it’s about what He is, specifically, to me in my relationship to Him.

In Psalm 103:14, it says that the Lord “knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.” It speaks of the fact that we are frail. Sometimes we think we are strong, but we need to realize that we need a shepherd.

There are three things that the Good Shepherd supplies us in our frailties. First of all, He provides rest, verse 2. “He makes me to lie down in green pastures.” The implication there is that God brings rest to my weary soul.

In the Middle East, there is very little grass, so the sheep must keep moving to find pastures. In the summer, the lowlands dry up, so they have to go up into the highlands or to the table lands

to find green grass. Even around here, the shepherds have to move their flocks to find green pastures. Sheep won't rest unless they are free from fear and free from hunger.

How like us is that; we need to be free from fear and free from hunger. When the Lord becomes your shepherd, He takes away your fears, and He satisfies the hungering in your heart and brings rest for your soul.

One of the most beautiful promises Jesus ever made in the Bible is in Matthew 11:28. He said, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." Jesus promises us rest in our souls. You need rest? The Bible says, "There is no rest for the wicked." But when you come to God, there is rest for your soul. You finally have "the peace of God which passes all understanding." Jesus is the Good Shepherd who provides rest for your soul.

So if you are restless today, if you are hungry today, come to Jesus and let Him give you rest.

The second thing that He does in my frailties is that in His care, He gives me restoration. Verse 3 says, "He restores my soul." In the Hebrew, that literally means that "He brings back my health." The Hebrew is an idiom for "He cleanses me, heals me and forgives me." Some feel it is a reference to "God grants me repentance"; that when I fall or stumble, He not only gives me rest, but He refreshes me and restores me.

Remember that David committed the sin of adultery. He looked over the courtyard to a rooftop one day and saw Bathsheba. He lusted after her, so he told his servants to go get her, and then he committed adultery with a woman married to another man. To try to cover his sin, David had Bathsheba's husband killed in battle. So David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, was an adulterer and a murderer. Psalm 51 shows David's repentance. In that psalm, David said, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation"; he wanted restoration. He said, "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me." He said, "Forgive my transgressions and my sins. Blot out the stain of my sins." So David, the "man after God's own heart," knew what it was to stumble and fall into sin.

There is a great book on Psalm 23 called, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. It's written by Phillip Keller. He was a pastor, but in his early years, he was a shepherd in New Zealand. New Zealand and Australia have a lot of sheep. In New Zealand, there are more sheep than people. Phillip Keller wrote in his book about what he called "cast sheep." A sheep can eat too much, so that their equilibrium shifts, their legs come up, they end up on their backs and can't get up.

In the psalms, David says, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" or "Why are you disquieted within me?" he said, talking to his own heart. So David used that imagery of a cast sheep being discouraged or falling down or sinning and needing God to save them.

Keller said that the shepherd would have to find the cast sheep, massage its legs, set it back on its feet and help it to get started back on the path. What a picture that is of us when we wander off God's path and we become cast sheep, because of our sin, and we need Him to set us straight. Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to

his own way.” So God has to come to us and rescue us and redeem us.

Jesus told a story of a shepherd in Luke 15 who had 10 sheep. One of them got lost, so he went out into the hills and looked for the lost sheep. If I had 100 sheep and one got lost, I’d just say, “Good riddance!” the good shepherd that I am. He should have stuck around if he didn’t want to get lost! But the shepherd went out into the hills, highways and canyons in the dark of night searching for his lost sheep. When he found it, he put it on his shoulders and brought it back. He said, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!”

Isn’t God the Good Shepherd? Hasn’t He sought you when you wandered off the path? He restored you back to righteousness. Why does He restore us? Verse 3 says so He can put us on the righteous path. So in my frailties, what He does is He gives me rest, He gives me restoration and then, thirdly, He puts me on righteous paths. “He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”

Sheep have no sense of direction. A dog knows its way home. A horse can find its way back to the barn. Cows go out to the pasture, and they make their way back to the barn. But not a sheep. Sheep are dumb; they get lost, and they don’t know where they’re going. So we need the shepherd to lead us.

One of the things about shepherds—unlike cattlemen, who drive the cattle—is that they lead the sheep; they don’t drive the sheep, because they’ll just scatter in all different directions. You have to lead sheep.

When I was in high school, I had an agricultural, Future Farmers of America class. Do I look like a future farmer? My name is John, so I was perfect for that class as Farmer John. We had to go out to get the sheep into the barn one rainy day, and they were huddled in a corner of the corral. Even though the barn door was wide open, we couldn’t get them into the barn. Eventually I said, “Just die out here in the cold! Forget you dumb sheep!” and I split. (Aren’t you glad I’m not your shepherd?!)

But the Lord goes before us, and He leads us. One of the primary ways that God leads us is by His Word, through the Bible, and by His Spirit. God’s Spirit, through God’s Word, speaking to our hearts, will guide us and lead us in the way that we should go. God forgives us, in order to restore us, so that He might lead us. So He gives us rest—forgiveness, He gives us restoration—healing, and He gives us righteous paths.

Note where He leads us, verse 3. “He leads me in the paths of righteousness.” His paths are always righteous and holy. When Jesus forgave the woman in adultery, He said, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” Those were His last words to that woman. He was saying, “I don’t condemn you; I forgive you. But go and sin no more.”

Why were you forgiven? Not so you can sin again, but so you can walk in a righteous way, so you can walk in God’s righteous path. So God’s paths are always right and righteous.

Why does He lead us? Verse 3 says, “for His name’s sake.” Where He leads us is in righteousness, and why He leads us is “for His name’s sake.” It means He leads us for His glory. God saves you and restores you and leads you in righteous paths for His glory. Everything God has done in your life is for His glory.

After Paul describes blessings from the Father, from the Son and from the Holy Spirit, he says, in Ephesians 1:6, 12 and 14, “...to the praise of the glory of His grace...That we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory...” Some translations have “to the praise of His glorious grace.” That’s why God saved you: because He wants glory from your life.

He forgave me, He restores me and He leads me—all for His glory. He takes care of my frailties.

The second area of need that the Good Shepherd provides for in my life is that the Good Shepherd cares for my fears, verses 4-5. “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...”—Why?—“...for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” And I’m not afraid because, “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.”

Sheep have no natural defenses; they don’t have fangs, they don’t have a hard shell and they don’t have claws. If you’re walking a mountain road late at night you wouldn’t say, “Oh, what if we run into a sheep?! Oh, that would be frightening!” No; you wouldn’t be afraid of sheep. Since they have no natural defenses, sheep need a shepherd to take care of their fears and to protect them.

We have many fears. Verse 4 says, “the valley of the shadow of death.” Many people are afraid to die. When the Lord is your shepherd, you don’t have to be afraid to die. It doesn’t mean that you want to die. Someone said, “I want to go to heaven, but not quite yet.” It just means that when that day comes, in the Lord’s timing, that I’m not afraid. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has died in my place, was buried, rose from the dead and has the keys to death and hell. So if Jesus is your shepherd, He’s holding the keys, and you don’t need to be afraid of death.

We also don’t need to be afraid of life. Verse 4 says, “the valley of the shadow of death.” The Hebrew could be translated “the valley of deep darkness.” He’s not primarily talking about dying—although it could include that. That’s why we use this Scripture when we do a funeral: it has the reference to death. But generally, the psalmist, David, here is talking about deep, dark valleys in our lives. The valleys represent hard times—trials, troubles, temptations, difficulties—whenever I’m walking through life and I go through a deep, dark valley. Maybe it’s a deep, dark valley of emotional distress, of financial reverses, of marital strife and problems or divorce. Maybe it’s a deep, dark valley of sickness and disease. Maybe you’ve been recently diagnosed with cancer, and it’s a deep, dark valley that you’re walking through. Or maybe it’s that someone you love has died; that’s a deep, dark valley of bereavement and loss. Only the Good Shepherd can give you comfort in those hours of need, in all of the dangers we pass through.

So in verse 4, he says, “I will fear no evil.” But how is it that we fear no evil? Let me give you

three reasons why we don't need to be afraid. Number one, the shepherd is with us; we have His presence. Verse 4 says, "For You are with me." This is the rationale for why I don't need to be afraid: I am never alone. Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." I'm glad. I've been forsaken by a lot of people, but Jesus will never forsake me. We have His presence, so He calms our fears.

Someone said, "I'd rather walk with God in the dark than to walk alone in the light. I'd rather walk with Him by faith than to walk alone by sight." I like that. If you're alone right now, God is with you; you're not alone.

The second reason that we don't need to be afraid is because the shepherd protects us. We have His presence and His protection. Notice verse 4: "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." What was the rod? The rod was basically a club. The shepherd carried a club, like a baseball bat. The rod was not for the sheep; the rod was used for protection against the enemy, against lions, bears and wolves. The club was used as a defensive weapon to protect the sheep.

What about the staff? The staff was for the sheep, and it is for direction. So He protects us and He directs us. If we start to go astray, the staff is a long pole with a curved hook at the end. You can hook the sheep with the curved end and pull them where you want them to go. Some of you know the staff; He's always pulling you back onto the path. He may use things in your life that bring you back onto His path. Thank the Lord for that. So His rod and staff give us courage and comfort.

Thirdly, we don't need to fear because the shepherd gives us provision, verse 5. He said, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over."

Take note that beginning in verse 5, this psalm is talking to the Lord, not about the Lord. In verses 1-4, David is talking about the Lord, but beginning in verse 5, he is talking to the Lord. David says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over." He turns his words to direct them to the Lord.

There is now a change in image or metaphor. He's not speaking of the Lord our shepherd in verse 5; he's specifically talking about the Lord, our host, who meets our every need. This would be Jehovah Jireh, the Lord who provides.

In Psalm 37:25, David said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread." Isn't that great? When you get old, you have a perspective you didn't have when you were young. When you're young, you say, "Well, I don't know what the future holds," but when you get old, you say, "Man, God's been with me all the way."

I can't tell you how many times my dear dad looked me in the eye and said, "John, the Lord takes care of us; He will provide. You can trust the Lord." And my dad did just that; he was an

example to me. I watched him through valleys of deep darkness trusting God in his time of need.

So we can trust the Lord; He's our provider. He takes us into His house, He spreads this big table before us, He anoints our head with oil and He fills our cup to overflowing. He is Jehovah Jireh. What a marvelous thing. In Philippians 4:19, Paul said, "And my God shall supply all your need..."—your "need," not your greed—"...according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

So if the Lord is your shepherd, you have everything you need. You need not fear, because you have His presence, you have His protection and you have His provision. I don't know what fear is gripping your heart, but the Lord is your shepherd. He's with you, He'll guide you and protect you and He will provide for you.

The third and last area of need that the Good Shepherd provides for in my life is He takes care of my future. He takes care of my frailties, my fears and my future. Verse 6 says, "Surely..."—He speaks with such confidence—"...goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That's one of my favorite statements in this psalm. It's "forever"; not until He kicks me out, not until I can't pay the rent or mortgage. No; it's "forever."

In the song Amazing Grace, by John Newton, he says,

"When we've been there ten thousand years

Bright shining as the sun,

We've no less days to sing God's praise

Than when we've first begun."

That's awesome! Ten thousand years in heaven, and we're just getting started! What a glorious prospect.

I believe that verse 6 is a summary of the whole psalm. David summarizes the whole psalm by saying, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." And when he comes to the end of his life, David says, "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

The Christian life is a pilgrimage. It starts when you are born again and you begin to follow the Lord. Then all your life long you're walking with Him as a stranger and a pilgrim in this world. But goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life.

I want you to note that includes the deep, dark valleys mentioned in verse 4. You might say, "Wait a minute. Didn't he say he went through 'the valley of the shadow of death'? Then how is it that now David could say, 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life'?" Never doubt the goodness of God. Never doubt in the dark what God has spoken in the

light. When all around you it's dark, and you think God has forsaken you, remember the goodness of God, that God is good. When you can't understand, don't ask the question, "Why?" Just know that He is with you, He will protect you and He will provide for you. So we don't need to be afraid in life, because "goodness and mercy" will follow us throughout our life.

The word "mercy" in the Hebrew could be translated "loving kindness." I thought it would be cool to have two dogs, one named "Goodness" and one name "Mercy." Train them to follow you wherever you go. Every time you turn around Goodness and Mercy would be following you. That's a cool thought.

Then David made this closing statement: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Not "I might..." Not "If I'm lucky..." Not "Maybe..." Not "I hope to..." But "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

"The house of the Lord" is a reference to heaven. When we come to the end of our life, and God has led us, restored us, protected us and provided for us, and it's all been "goodness and mercy," God keeps His best for last.

In John 2, Jesus turned the water into wine. The wine was taken to the head master of the wedding, and he said, "Wow! Most people give everyone the good wine at the beginning of the wedding feast. Then after they've gotten a little tipsy, they're given the cheaper, poorer wine. But You've saved the best for last!" That's what God does; God saves the best for last. That's called "the house of the Lord."

In Psalm 73, the psalmist, Asaph, said that God had protected him, guided him and kept him, and afterward he'll be received into glory. He's basically saying, "All this and heaven, too?!" He had God to shepherd him and guide him, and then he got to go to heaven, too.

Jesus said it like this: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house..."—He's talking about heaven—"...are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

D. L. Moody said it like this: "With me—the Lord; beneath me—green pastures; beside me—still waters; before me—a table; around me—my enemies; after me—goodness and mercy; and ahead of me—"the house of the Lord forever."

Notice the confidence and assurance in verse 6 that David closes this psalm with: "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

You ask, "How can he be so confident?" The Bible teaches that we can have assurance that when we die, we will go to heaven. You need to have that assurance that you're going to heaven. You don't just cross your fingers and say, "Man, I hope I make it." You can have the assurance that you have eternal life. Your assurance, and the answer to your question, is found back in verse 1: "The Lord is my shepherd." David didn't say, "The Lord is my mom's

shepherd,” “The Lord is my dad’s shepherd” or “The Lord is my friend’s shepherd.” He said “The Lord is my shepherd.” When you can say, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,” then you can say, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Is the Lord your shepherd? If the Lord is your shepherd, you have everything you need.