

I Shall Not Want

Psalm 23

Pastor John Miller

David said, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." I want you to notice all the personal pronouns in this psalm—"I," "me," "my." Notice how personal this psalm is. "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."

No doubt about it, Psalm 23 is the most beloved of the 150 psalms, and it possibly is the best-known, best-loved text in the whole Bible. The only thing close to it would be The Lord's Prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9). But we all know and love Psalm 23—and rightly so.

Carl Yeates, in his commentary on the psalms, said, "More griefs have been put to rest by its sweet assurances, more sadness has been driven away, more confidence has been instilled than tongue can tell or pen can record. To know it is to love it. To believe it is to live it; a life of victory, a life of joy and peace. It pictures God in love with His people, with rest in His bosom, with grace for all of our needs." What a beautiful psalm!

David is the author of Psalm 23. He was the humble shepherd boy who God raised up to become the King of Israel. Who doesn't like the story of David, the shepherd boy, in 1 Samuel 16? He had red hair, freckles, out there watching the sheep. Samuel arrived at the house of Jesse to check out his sons. He was to anoint the next king of Israel. When he saw Eliab, the big, tall, good-looking, oldest son, he thought that would be the next king. He was ready to anoint Eliab, but God stopped him. He said, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." The Lord had rejected all of these sons before Samuel. So he asked Jesse, "Are all the young men here?" Jesse said, "There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep."

I read that no one in a family at this time wanted to watch the sheep. It was the lowest task of any slave or servant in the family. So David had the job of watching the sheep, like the job of taking out the trash.

So Samuel said that they weren't going to sit down to eat until David was brought in. David came in and the Lord said to Samuel, "Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!" Samuel poured the oil over David and the others looked on astonished. The Bible said that David "was a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). He took David from watching sheep to becoming the shepherd of the nation of Israel. He went from the sheepfold to becoming King of Israel.

At what point in David's life he penned this marvelous psalm we don't know; the Scriptures do not tell us. I'd like to think that it might have been when he was young, when he was a shepherd out in the field. Picture David as a teenage boy, he has his harp with him, he is singing psalms and praising the Lord. By the way, the psalms were songs and meant to be sung. So David might have sung, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Or David might have been in midlife when he penned this psalm. He was running from Saul and had a sword in his hand. David actually became a mighty man of war; so much so that he was not allowed by God to build the temple. That task was given to Solomon, his son, to do, because David had blood on his hands (1 Chronicles 28:3).

But maybe it wasn't in David's youth or midlife when this psalm was written. Maybe it was when he was old. This is what speaks to my heart the most, maybe because of my age. I picture David sitting on the throne, with gray hair, the crown kind of crooked on his head and he was looking back over all his life; from out there with the sheep, to running from Saul and hiding in the cave, to fighting the Lord's battles and now he is sitting on the throne. And maybe he looked back then and said, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

What we do know is that David wrote this psalm by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable" (2 Timothy 3:16). So David pictured God as his shepherd, so he had everything he needed—in life, in death and in eternity.

I did a whole series on Psalm 23 called "I Shall Not Want." It's a series of six sermons, each on one verse of Psalm 23. It's on our homepage under the sermons that are archived. Check those out.

The theme of this psalm is in verse 1. David said, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Who is "the Lord"? "Lord" is in all capital letters, which indicates it is referring to "Jehovah" or "Yahweh," the covenant-keeping God. This is the great "I AM" statement of God.

In Exodus 3 when God spoke to Moses from the burning bush, He commissioned Moses to go to Pharaoh in Egypt to demand him to release the Israelites. Moses asked God what he should tell Pharaoh who sent him. So God said to tell Pharaoh, "I AM WHO I AM....I AM has sent me to you." This is the name that is translated in English "Lord" with all capital letters. It speaks of His timelessness and His self-sufficiency; that He is eternal, unchanging, immutable, all-knowing, all-powerful and that He is the great, awesome Lord God.

This is actually a compound name for God. It is "Jehovah-Rohi" in the Hebrew, which means "the Lord my shepherd." This phrase is that great "I AM" statement. It's interesting because it basically conveys the idea that whatever you need, God is what you need. If you need a shepherd, He's Jehovah-Rohi. If you need righteousness, He's Jehovah-Tsidkenu, "the Lord our Righteousness." If you need peace, He's Jehovah-Shalom, "the Lord our Peace." If you need provision, He's Jehovah-Jireh, "the Lord who sees and provides." If you need a banner, He's Jehovah-Nissi, "the Lord my banner." So whatever you need, God becomes. That's the

revelation we have in Psalm 23.

In the New Testament in John 10:11, Jesus used the same phrase. He said, "I am the good shepherd." Again He used the "I am." I believe this "shepherd" in Psalm 23 is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is our "Good Shepherd."

If the Lord is our shepherd, then that makes us His sheep. Being a sheep is not a flattering title. No NFL team is called The Sheep. We have The Lions, The Bears, The Seahawks. We have all these great names for the teams. No one is called The Sheep.

So being a sheep speaks of dependence, defenselessness and being dumb. Sheep are the dumbest animals on planet earth. So we need a shepherd. We can't go it on our own. We need a shepherd to guide us, to provide for us and to protect us.

So when Jesus is our shepherd, we "shall not want." I like that. The paraphrase in the New Living Bible by Kenneth Taylor renders this, "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need." I like that.

In Psalm 23, I want to point out three areas of need the shepherd takes care of. He takes care of my frailties, my fears and my future in eternity.

First, in verses 2-3, he takes care of my frailties. "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." In Psalm 103:14, David said, "For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."

There are three blessings the shepherd supplies in our frailties. Number one, he gives us rest, verse 2. "He makes me to lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters."

In the Middle East, there is very little grass, so the shepherd must keep moving the sheep to find green pastures. They're always on the move; from lowlands to high plateaus or mesas, through the deep canyons. He takes the sheep to find the green pastures.

But the sheep will not rest unless they are free from fear and hunger. They won't sleep or rest if they're fearful or hungry. And some people are the same; when there is fear in our hearts, we're not getting rest in our lives. The Bible says, "There is no peace, says the Lord, for the wicked" (Isaiah 48:22). "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest" (Isaiah 57:20). But in Matthew 11:28, Jesus made a beautiful promise: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." You can go to the drug store and buy sleep, but you can't buy rest for your soul. Only Jesus Christ can give you rest in your heart. So come to Jesus. Come to the Good Shepherd, and He will give you rest for your soul.

Number two blessing is restoration in our frailties, verse 3. "He restores my soul." In the Hebrew, this literally means that "He brings back life" or "He brings back health." I believe what this describes is the beginning of the Christian life, when Jesus forgives our sins and spiritually

restores our health. We come to a relationship with Christ. In the Hebrew, it's an idiom for "He cleanses, He heals, He forgives, He restores." And some have said that it conveys the idea that He brings me to repentance, so that I can be restored.

W. Phillip Keller, who wrote the book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, was a shepherd in New Zealand and a pastor. New Zealand has more sheep than people. And West Australia has lots of sheep. In one of the chapters of this book, Keller talked about the concept of a sheep getting "cast." That happens when a sheep lays down after eating, its equilibrium shifts, so it rolls over on its back, the legs go up in the air and the sheep is unable to get back on its feet. The sheep is helpless. The shepherd hears the bleating of the sheep and comes to the rescue. He puts the sheep back on its feet and massages its legs to get the blood circulating, so it can walk again.

How many times do we stumble and fall? Do we cry out to the Lord, "Baaa"? He hears our plea, our bleating, and comes to our rescue.

This is why after David sinned with Bathsheba and repented, he turned back to the Lord and said, in Psalm 51:12, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation." He needed restoration. He had become "cast." This is why he also said, "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God" (Psalm 42:5). Many times we get cast down, and we need the Lord to come after us to restore us and to bring us back into fellowship with Him.

I like the parable Jesus gave in Luke 15 of the lost sheep. The shepherd had 100 sheep, and one of them became lost. If I was the shepherd, I'd wash my hands of the situation. "Stupid sheep! I won't risk my life trying to find it! I've got 99 left; that's good enough!" Aren't you glad I'm not your shepherd?

But this Good Shepherd, to make sure the sheep are safe, got the 99 in the sheepfold and went out looking for the one, lost sheep. That's you and me.

I can look back on my life and see that God sought after me. He pursued me. He tracked me down, and then He restored my soul. How wonderful that when we sin and fall, God forgives us, puts us on His shoulders and brings us back.

Number three, in our frailties, He puts us on righteous paths. Verse 3, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake" or "for his glory." He restores me and leads me onto righteous paths.

What a blessing that is, because sheep have no sense of direction. Sheep get lost so easily. They can't find their way home. A dog, a horse and a cow can find their way home, but sheep can't find their way home. When you see cows out in the field, do you wonder how they find their way home? "Do they have GPS?" But sheep have no sense of direction, and that's why Isaiah 53:6 says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

So don't be afraid; God will lead us and guide us. Jesus forgives us, restores us and leads us in

our frailties. Where does He lead us? “He leads me in the paths of righteousness.” It’s always onto a righteous path.

When Jesus forgave the adulterous woman in John 8, He told her, “Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.” We’ve been forgiven by God’s grace, saved by faith in Christ, that we might walk in holiness and righteousness. We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to walk on His righteous paths.

So why does He lead us? “For His name’s sake” or “for His glory.” Ephesians 1:6, 12 and 14 say that we are saved to be “to the praise of the glory of His grace,” who first trusted in Christ. So He forgives me, He restores me, He leads me—all this for His glory. I need a shepherd.

The second area of need that I have that the shepherd takes care of is my fears. He takes care of my frailties, but he also takes care of my fears, verses 4-5. We are so filled with fear. “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.”

Sheep have no natural defenses. They don’t have claws or sharp teeth. So they need a shepherd to protect them. So going through the dark valley the sheep are timid and afraid. They don’t want to go through the canyons. They are fearful.

But Jesus goes before us and takes away our fears. For us as believers, there is no fear of death, and we have no fear in life. In verse 4, David calls it “the valley of the shadow of death.” You don’t have to fear death; it’s just a “shadow.” Jesus took the sting out of death. If you are a Christian, you do not need to be afraid to die. I heard someone say, “I’m not afraid to die; I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” I don’t know how that works. But as a Christian, you should have no fear of death. No fear in life and no fear in death. You’re not ready to live until you’re ready to die. You know you’re forgiven and you’ll go to heaven when you die.

Jesus died on the Cross to pay the penalty of our sins, so to take the sting out of death, and He rose from the dead. 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 says, “For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven...that mortality may be swallowed up by life.” We will spend eternity with God. So there is no fear in death.

There also is no fear in life. The phrase “valley of the shadow of death” in the Hebrew is literally “valley of deep darkness.” Many Hebrew scholars believe, and rightly so, that it conveys not only that the fear of death is taken away, but the fear of trials, darkness and hardships in this life are taken away.

Maybe you are going through a deep, dark valley of discouragement, doubt or fear. Maybe you’ve just been diagnosed with cancer. Maybe you have lost a job or lost a loved one. Maybe you just buried a child. You are going through a difficult, dark time in your life. Even when you go through those deep, dark valleys, God is with you. He watches over you. He will take care of

you. No fear in death, no fear in life.

And how is it that we have no fear of evil? It's because of the shepherd's presence. Verse 4, "For You are with me." Jesus said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Isn't that a great promise? He's promised never to leave us alone. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." And Romans 8:39 ends with "[Nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Someone said, "I'd rather walk with God in the dark than walk alone in the light. I'd rather walk with Him by faith than walk alone by sight." So we have the shepherd's presence.

Notice that we also have the shepherd's protection, verse 4. David said, "Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." What is the "rod"? It is a club for protection. It's not used on the sheep; the sheep are comforted that the shepherd has the club. Should a lion or bear come, the shepherd will beat it away, fight it off. David killed lions and took back his lambs that they had stolen. So the rod was for protection.

The staff speaks of direction. He will direct us and lead us. It was a long staff with a hook on the end. The shepherd used it to hook the sheep, pull it back onto the path and direct it. It provides courage and comfort.

We also don't need to be afraid, because the shepherd provides for us. We have provision. Verse 5 says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." I have enemies, but I don't have to be afraid. "You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over."

Many scholars rightfully point out that the picture now changes from the Lord as our Shepherd to the Lord as our host. We go from the sheep in the pasture to the guest in His home. So now He is Jehovah-Jireh, which means that God sees, so God will provide. 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."

I remember when I was young, I couldn't say I was old, because I wasn't old. But now that I've been young and now I'm old, I can actually say that from the time I was young, to the time now when I'm old, I've never seen "the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread."

God takes care of us. God will provide. Remind yourself when you are fearful, when you're afraid and wondering how you're going to provide for your family, how you're going to pay for your retirement years, that God will provide. He is Jehovah-Jireh. Whenever God sees your circumstances, He provides. If you are His sheep, He sees, He knows, and He'll take care of you. Paul said, in Philippians 4:19, "My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." So whatever you are afraid of today, in death and in life, God will provide, God will take care of you.

If the Lord is your shepherd, you "have everything [you] need." No fear of death, you have His presence and protection and you have His provision.

Third, He not only takes care of my frailties and my fears, but He takes care of my future, verse 6. This is my favorite verse of the psalm. “Surely goodness and mercy...” or “loving kindness” in the Hebrew “...shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” In verse 6, David is summarizing the entire psalm.

The Christian life is a pilgrimage. If you're a Christian, you're a pilgrim; you're just passing through on a journey from earth to heaven. We should let our contacts with the world be as light as possible. “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:2-3). So when the Lord is our Shepherd, we will dwell one day in the house of the Lord.

There are two categories in verse 6: in life and in death. In life, “goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.” I want you to note something: “goodness and mercy” followed you when you were in “the valley of the shadow of death.” Even in the deepest, darkest, hardest times of your life, God is good and God is the God of mercy.

Take just a moment and turn your thoughts to God's goodness in your own life. Say, “Thank You, Lord, for watching over me, for providing for me, for caring for me, for restoring my soul, for leading me back onto paths of righteousness, for the rest, for the provision. God, all my life You have led me, guided me and taken care of me.” “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

Even in the deep, dark valleys, God is merciful and filled with loving kindness. Even in death. I like that. Verse 6 says, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” God keeps the best for last. All this and heaven too!

This is a great parallel to John 14:1-2. When Jesus was with His disciples in the upper room and He told them He would be going back to heaven, their hearts were sad. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions.” The Greek word for “mansions” is “abiding places.” It's a provision.

You are a pilgrim, a stranger just passing through this world. There is a place for you in heaven in the “Father's house.” He has prepared it for you. That's your home. When a Christian dies, he goes home. Don't weep for them; weep for us, because we're still in Menifee. God have mercy on us! But when a believer dies, he goes to be with Jesus. They are in His presence. “In [His] presence is fullness of joy; at [His] right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). So we are then at home with the Lord. This is talking about heaven. So all the blessings of this life—and in the end, heaven too!

I like how D.L. Moody packaged this psalm. He put it together in seven points. “With me, the Lord; beneath me, green pastures; beside me, still waters; before me, a table; around me, my enemies; after me, the goodness and mercy of the Lord; ahead of me, the house of the Lord forever.” Amen.

I like the fact that David is so sure. You talk about a verse of assurance! In verse 6, he said, “I

will." He didn't say, "I hope," "maybe, if I'm lucky, if I'm good." No; he said, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

You can know that when you die you'll go to heaven. And you'll know that when the Lord becomes your shepherd. Only those who can say, "The Lord is my shepherd," verse 1, can say, in verse 6, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Have you put your faith in Christ? Have you trusted Him who died for you? It's the only way to have hope beyond the grave.