

**Langham:** [00:00:00] Welcome, my friends, to Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd. The 23rd Psalm is elegant, iconic, classic, powerful, and perhaps the most beloved work of poetry in the history of the world. A psalm of David, the Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul.

What is it about these words that can move the heart so simply, so powerfully?

Perhaps it's the relationship we long for. The Lord is my shepherd. David sings and every line echoes with contented confidence.

And when he carries that contentment without fear, through the valley of the shadow of death, we can't help but long for what he has.

For a musical rendition, I recommend John Forman's *The House of God Forever*, and the band Mikadem sing Psalm [00:01:00] 23 in Hebrew. Both are deeply moving. Verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. It is one of the most sublime statements in all of Scripture.

To look to the creator of all the universe, the weaver of your very DNA, and see in him your shepherd, your provider, protector, and the guide of your life.

I lack nothing. That tiny statement delivers a whole world of contentedness. Not that I have everything I could imagine. But I have God, and he's got me. I'm good. It should be noticed that the first statement cannot be claimed by just anyone, for the shepherd relationship works two ways.

A sheep follows a shepherd. All the description that follows is testimony to that relationship. Sheep belong to the shepherd. They are owned, not wild.

Also poignant is the order of Psalm 23. [00:02:00] Immediately after 22, the Psalm of crucifixion, good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. It's the foundation of our trust.

Verse 2, He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. And what a picture is that! So tranquil it nearly invites you in. Green pastures, like Ireland in springtime, but it's not just the pasture, it's the protection. Sheep are vulnerable. They will not lie down until they feel secure.

With my shepherd on guard, I relax. Do you know those rare moments when you know you're safe and you actually enjoy life the way it was meant to be enjoyed? He leads me beside quiet waters. No dangerous torrents.

Cool and quiet waters to restore and refresh. And yes, at this point I picture Bob Ross painting happy trees in a meadow. So what's the [00:03:00] metaphor here? Some see God's word in the green grass, and the refreshing of the Holy Spirit in the quiet waters. you might see more still.

That's the beauty of poetry. And perhaps my favorite line of all, he refreshes my soul. Other translations say he restores. What a thing to do. The human soul can be weighed down with worries, harassed by fears, torn apart by grief, and just plain exhausted with life.

He refreshes, he restores. The Hebrew word was used for riding a sheep that had fallen onto its back. Sheep lack the muscle to right themselves, and a flipped sheep is wolf prey for sure.

But the shepherd restores. Our shepherd restores a broken, tattered and flipped over soul. Back in verse three, He guides me along the right paths for his namesake.

Path guiding is crucial. No creature is more prone to wander than [00:04:00] sheep nor more lost when they do. All we like sheep have gone astray. If you've ever been truly lost and desperate to find the way, the right path is a treasured commodity. He guides us on them again and again.

There are two meanings here for his name's sake. God's name represents his character. He guides me because that's who he is. He is faithful. For his namesake also means that my actions affect his reputation. I represent him and he shows me right paths so I can better represent his righteousness. now the first three verses have been somewhat idyllic and somewhat idealistic. David well knows that the right paths are not always pretty green pastures.

So in verse four. 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. [00:05:00] the psalm turns sharply from lush pastures into shadow and threat.

The land of Bethlehem, where David kept sheep, sits on a hill surrounded by hills. Guiding sheep to pasture meant traversing valleys. Darker, shadowed, even dangerous.

The Hebrew word for darkest valley carries gloom and terror and just a subtle change in Hebrew pronunciation gave it the translation you likely recall, Valley of the Shadow of Death.

The word death is not explicitly there. The feeling is. For every dark shadow in life looms toward that final shadow.

That's why these words have been spoken over more hospital beds, funerals, and gravestones than any others. Does verse four truly offer comfort?

Or simply placate the grief. That depends on how honestly I can sing verse one to my shepherd.

Even though I walk through, there is a knowing in that dark valley, a deep sense of [00:06:00] awareness that the shepherd still guides and he will see us through.

I can't help but think here of the Frozen movies, and Olaf's absurd confidence in the creepy forest, that this will all make sense when I get older.

Silly, I know. But if you've seen it, his unfazed confidence is inspiring, if not well founded. David, on the other hand, has reason for his faith. I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

Eyes off the shadows. Eyes on the shepherd. He's with me. Don't stop. Keep walking.

Emmanuel. God is with us.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Rod and staff are the shepherd's tools for leading. The shepherd prods a sheep toward good pasture, and we quickly learn to associate that slight discomfort with his faithful guidance.

We learn to trust it. That crook atop the staff is great for catching a sheep standing [00:07:00] obliviously and dangerously close to a ledge.

**Langham:** Ever been there? The rod was for guidance, but also for correction. The Lord disciplines the one he loves. and the staff doubles as a weapon for protection. When I see the wolf watching from the hilltop, my eyes dart back to the shepherd's staff and find great comfort.

I have deep appreciation for the word comfort. In the Bible, it is often used for the consoling offered to one grieving. here it is not a soft pillowy sort of comfort, but the shepherd's strength and care that provides safety. The firm boundaries delivered by rod and staff.

The Holy Spirit is our comforter, and he works in our lives very much like a shepherd's rod and staff guiding, convicting, correcting, protecting. Verse five, you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

Now I must confess, this line has long confused [00:08:00] me. Why would I want to picnic in the company of enemies? David has previously expressed great fear and frustration with enemies, yet here in Psalm 23, David's heart is transformed. He is safe. He is content. The Lord is with him.

God prepared a table. That's an invitation to relax and enjoy food, to enjoy the company of your host. The Lord is indeed a gracious host. And perhaps the most surprising part of it all is in fact the presence of enemies. As a warrior, David knows that you don't stop to enjoy food when the enemy is near.

Yet here is David, Enemy still in view but heart at peace. Able to fully enjoy the hospitality of his Lord.

Wolves watching, but the sheep nibbles away at the grass, trusting the shepherd to protect. something I figured out, I can't afford to wait for my problems to go away to enjoy life.

[00:09:00] Trust God and enjoy the table. Back in verse 5, You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. There is goodness in these words. A sense of deep gratitude. It is that moment when you look around at life and see all that God has given you. Suddenly you realize how distracted you were with all that could go wrong and how you lost sight of what you have.

My cup overflows. The picture is of a gracious and generous host welcoming you. The sort of host who really wants you to enjoy his generosity.

That one's a life lesson for me, one that I too easily forget. Enjoy grace. Enjoy God's grace. open your heart to enjoy it and you'll find your heart running full over with plenty spilling over to share all around.

And as the psalm closes, David looks at the feast before him with gratitude overflowing, he lifts his eyes heavenward in [00:10:00] verse six. 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.

And what a blissful place to close. Chased through life by the Lord's goodness and love. And a contented confidence for all of forever to come. I will dwell at home and at peace in the house of the Lord forever.