

Journeying with the Good Shepherd

Reflections on Psalm 23

You can take as much time as you like, or as little as you can spare. Take a few minutes just to sit in the quiet, to feel the chair underneath you, to settle into the place where you are. If thoughts or plans intrude, just acknowledge them and hand them over to God, so that you can become quiet inside as well as outside, and become more open to the Spirit within you. When you are ready, read the Psalm through.

1. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
2. He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters,
3. he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
4. Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff - they comfort me.
5. You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

NRSV



The journey of Psalm 23

This psalmist takes us on a thought journey, in stages.

First, he uses his own experience of shepherding: providing for the needs of his flock – food, water, and rest. And he speaks of God as his own Shepherd, restoring his soul (1-3).

Then, in places of danger where a sheep need protection, the Shepherd's rod and staff ward off his enemies (4).

Next, the psalmist no longer thinks of himself as a sheep in God's care but as one for whom a feast will be prepared and an anointing given for a task that is not defined (5).

And finally, trust is expressed in the goodness of God who will give the psalmist a space in his house (6).

Questions for reflection

- What experience do you have, from your work or home life, that could speak of your relationship with God?
- How would you speak of God's provision for you?
- What dangers would you need (or have you needed) God to protect you from, or see you through?
If you are in physical or mental danger at the moment, as well as praying, do you need to ask a friend or relative to help, or call a group such as the Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247, or go to <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk?>
- What are the rewards God has in store for you?
- For what would God anoint you? What task does he have for you?
- What does 'heaven' mean to you?
- How might you know that 'heaven' begins in the here and now, and in the task God has for you?

Following your reflection you might like to listen to Stewart Townend's version of Psalm 23 at <https://youtu.be/-elQQayhpak>

Pondering Scripture

A long-established way of spending time with Scripture, and asking God to speak through it, is called Lectio Divina. There are four stages:

1. Read slowly and purposefully through the passage three or four times.
2. Reflect on the passage. Read it aloud so that you have to add inflexion in your voice to give meaning to the written words, and that you do not miss out any words.
3. Allow the passage to touch your heart – what words speak to you, interest, excite, challenge, repel you? If you print off the passage you might like to underline words that leap off the page at you, and spend time thinking through why that word or phrase has caught your attention.
4. Repeat one phrase over until you can leave words behind and simply be with God in silence.

Try using this method with the psalm in a different version:

Psalm 23 *Contemporary English Version*

You, Lord, are my shepherd.

I will never be in need.

You let me rest in fields
of green grass.

You lead me to streams
of peaceful water,
and you refresh my life.

You are true to your name,
and you lead me
along the right paths.

I may walk through valleys
as dark as death,
but I won't be afraid.

You are with me,
and your shepherd's rod
makes me feel safe.

You treat me to a feast
while my enemies watch.

You honour me as your guest
and you fill my cup
until it overflows.

Your kindness and love
will always be with me
each day of my life,
and I will live forever
in your house, Lord.

Bringing things to a close

Reflect and resolve

- Thank God for this time of quietness with him.
- Offer to Him any thoughts that have come to you.
- How will you allow this time to change you?
- If you have felt an encouragement, or a challenge, what will you now do with it?

Prayer

Good Lord who provides all that I need,

thank you that you walk with me in the sunshine and in the dark times.

Help me to pick my way along the path in front of me,

knowing that you are with me.

Thank you that, wherever my path takes me,

it leads me ultimately to you.

Thank you that you have a calling on my life

and you will give me all I need to fulfil it.

Help me to walk close beside you, not running ahead or lagging behind.

And help me to go from this place into the future you have planned.

In the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, Amen.