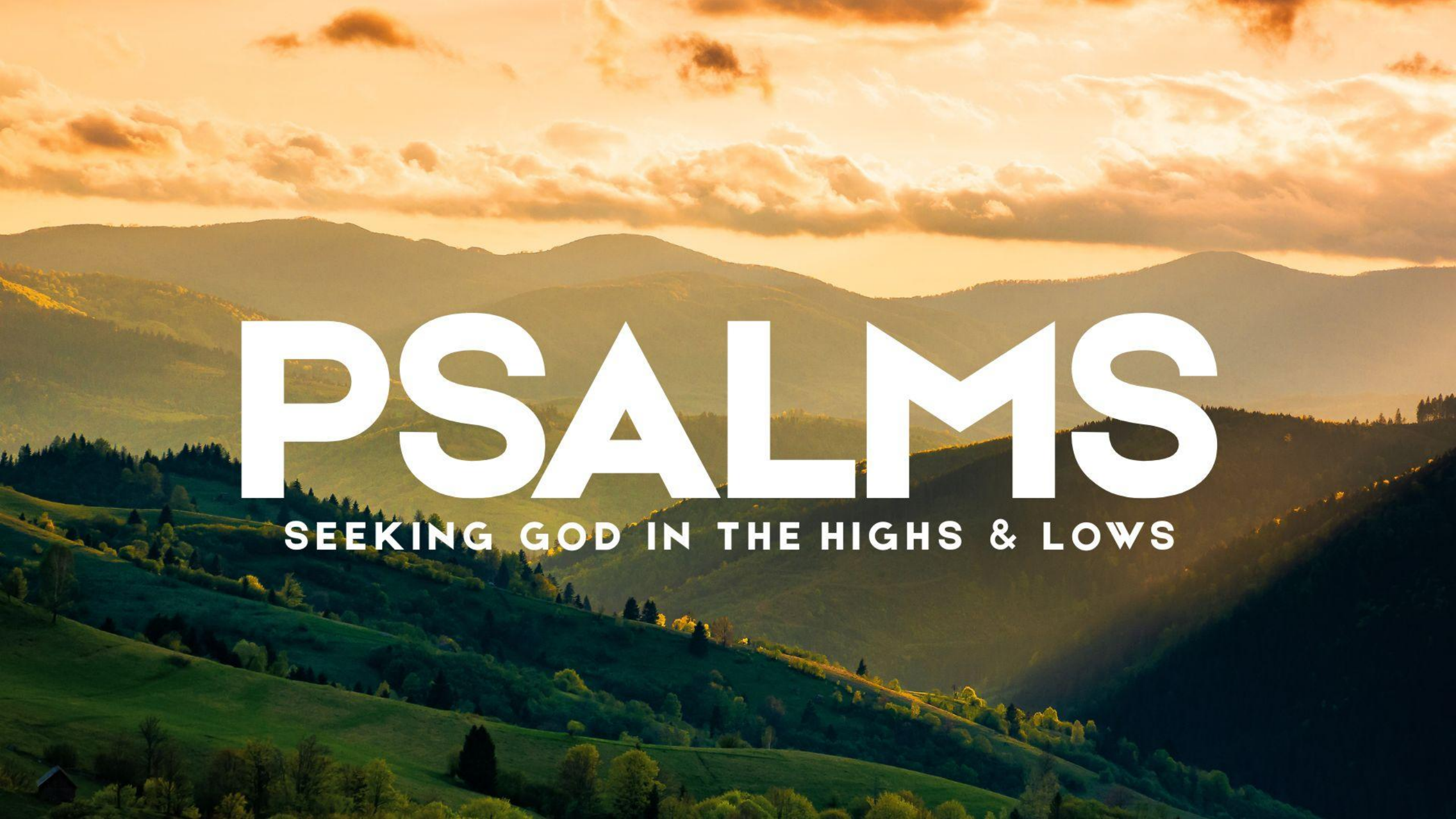




PSALMS

SEEKING GOD IN THE HIGHS & LOWS



Psalm 23

The LORD is My Shepherd

Have you ever wondered why we are often compared to sheep in the Bible?



*Is it because
we are cute
and cuddly?*

*Is it because
we are dumb
and helpless?*



We Are God's Sheep

Psalm 74:1

O God, why do you cast us off forever?
Why does your anger smoke
against **the sheep of your pasture?**

Psalm 78:52

Then he led out **his people like sheep**
and guided them in the wilderness
like a flock.

Psalm 79:13

But we your people, **the sheep of your pasture,**
will give thanks to you forever;
from generation to generation we will
recount your praise.

Psalm 95:7

For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and **the sheep of his hand.** – Ps 95:7

Psalm 100:3

Know that the LORD, he is God!
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people, **and the sheep of his pasture.**

Isaiah 53:6

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.

We are More Like Sheep than We Think

- **Need for Direction:** Sheep easily lose their way and lack a sense of direction without help.
- **Defenseless:** Sheep are weak and slow, with little ability to protect themselves from danger.
- **Follow the Crowd:** Sheep tend to follow the leader of the flock, even if it leads into trouble. Sheep lack discernment.
- **Not Burden-Bearing:** Sheep are not meant to carry heavy loads like other animals, mirroring the idea that humans are not meant to carry all of life's heavy worries alone.

We are More Like Sheep than We Think

- **Sheep will settle for less:** When sheep are thirsty, they will stop at a dirty puddle right in front of them instead of going for the clean water twenty feet ahead of them.
- **Sheep are fearful:** Easily panicked and when scared, will not lie down to rest. They are even afraid of rushing water.
- **Sheep are stubborn:** Left to their own devices, sheep will graze the same land over and over. They will eat grass to the roots and can ruin the land.
- **Sheep have a pecking order:** Stronger sheep bully & block weaker sheep from food and water.

We are More Like Sheep than We Think

- **Sheep smell and they don't know it:** Their wool picks up manure and urine. Have a distinct earthly scent and need to be cleaned regularly.
- **Sheep are loyal:** Sheep quickly learn the specific sound of their shepherd's voice and will ignore or flee from the voice of strangers.
- **Sheep bite:** If a sheep is handled roughly, cornered, or restrained against its will, it may bite to protect itself.

Psalm 23

The LORD Is My Shepherd A Psalm of David.

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.

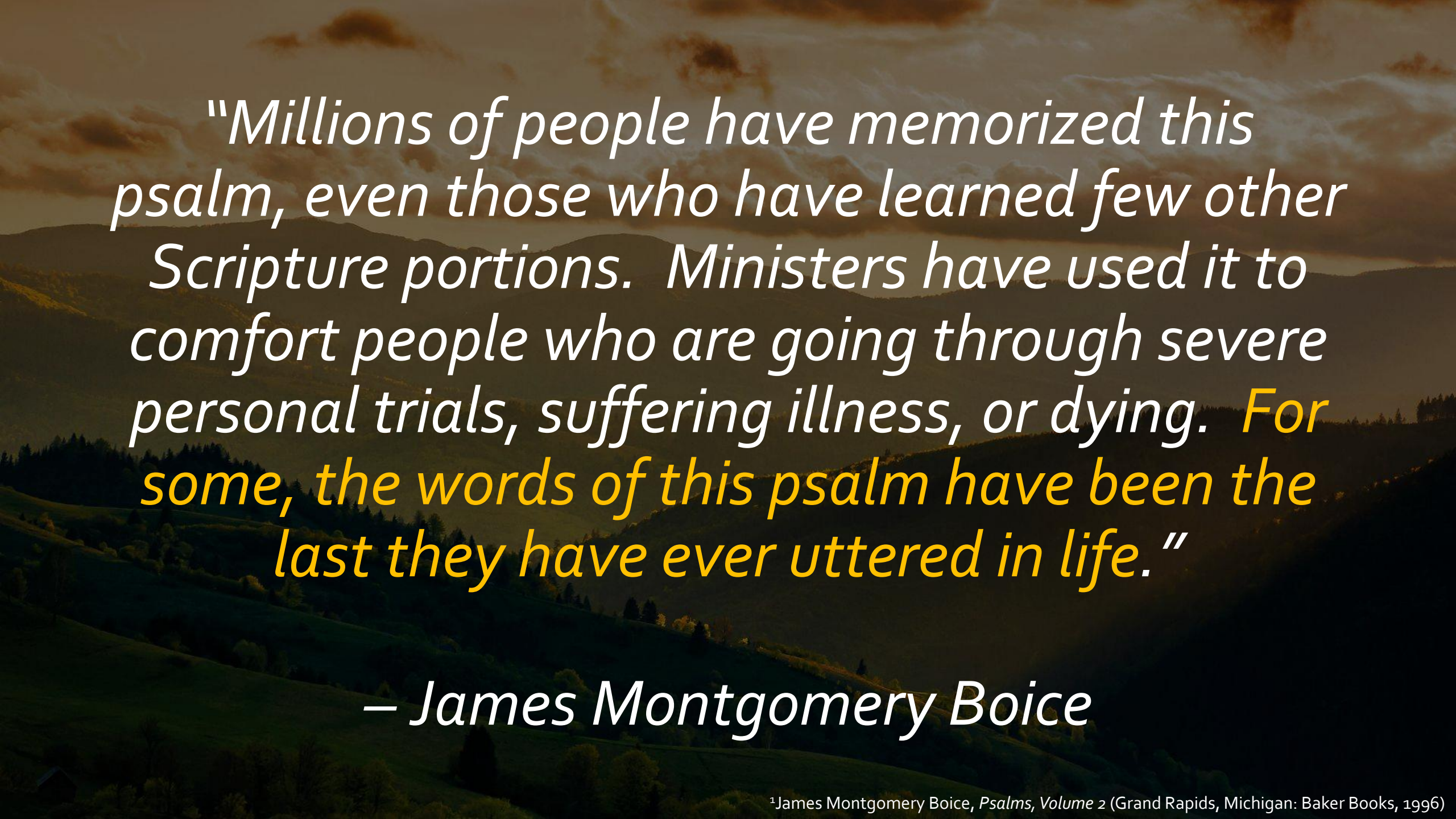
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Even 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.

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
forever.



*"Millions of people have memorized this psalm, even those who have learned few other Scripture portions. Ministers have used it to comfort people who are going through severe personal trials, suffering illness, or dying. **For some, the words of this psalm have been the last they have ever uttered in life.**"*

— James Montgomery Boice

God as Shepherd

- God was first referred to as a shepherd by **Jacob** in Genesis when he was blessing his twelve sons:

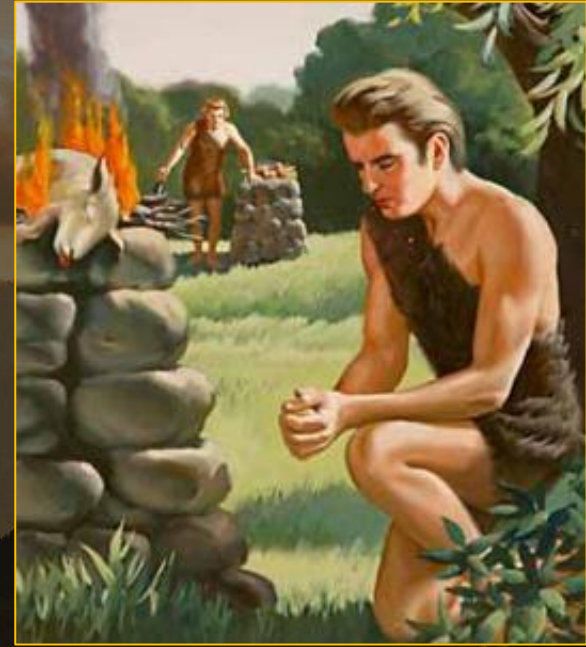
*¹⁴And **Israel** stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). ¹⁵And he blessed Joseph and said,*

*"The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day,
¹⁶the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys;
and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers
Abraham and Isaac;
and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."*

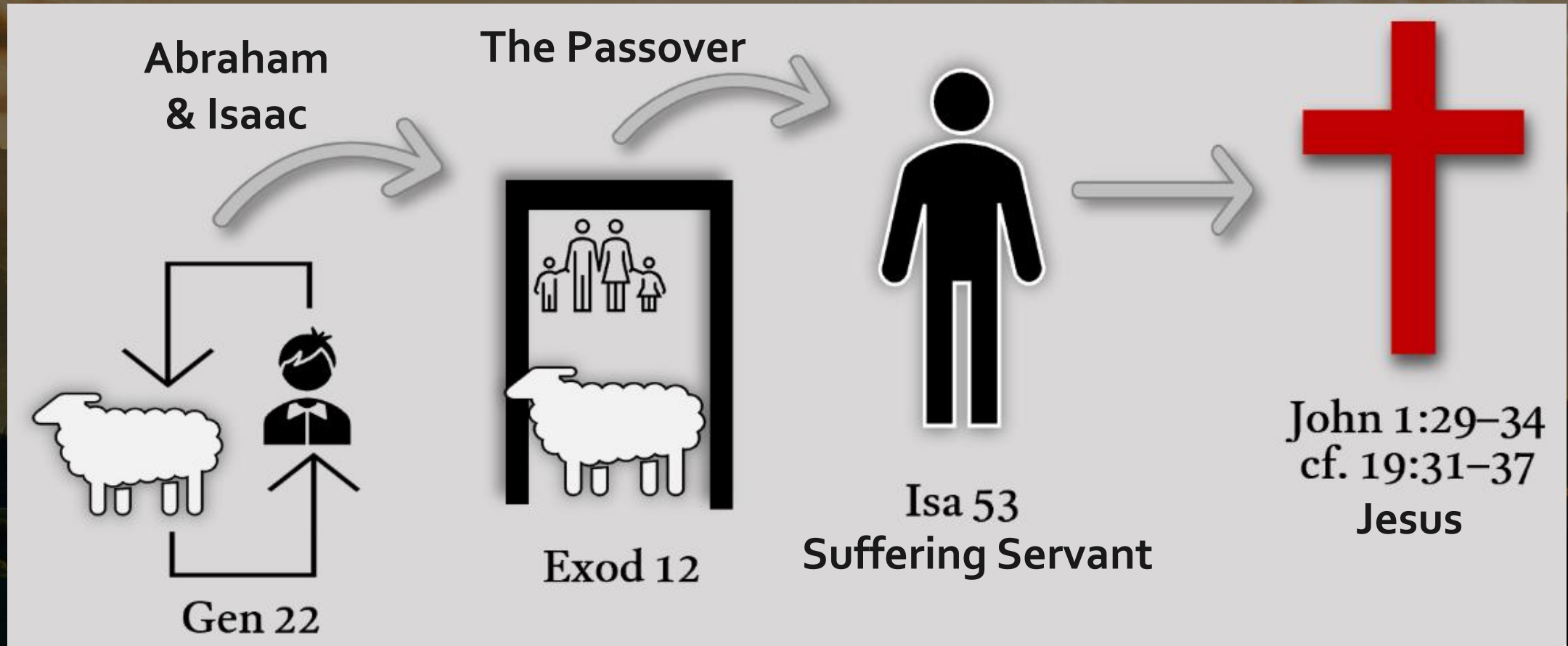
– Genesis 48:14-16

Sheep in Scripture¹

- One of the Bible's first references to sheep is probably in **Genesis 4:4** when "*Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions*" to the Lord:
 - Although the Bible does not state specifically that this sacrifice was a lamb, most scholars agree that it was likely a sheep because of the word **flock** and because sheep were among the first domesticated animals.
- An even earlier reference to sheep may be in **Genesis 3:21** when "*the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.*"
 - Again, while the Bible does not state explicitly that these were sheepskins, it is very likely that God used sheep because of the **later symbolic importance of lambs as sacrificial animals** (Numbers 6:14; Leviticus 14:10; Exodus 12:5).



Sheep in Scripture¹



- Abraham told to sacrifice only son
- God provides a substitute



*For Christ, our
Passover lamb, has
been sacrificed.*
– 1 Cor 5:7



- Silently suffering for other people's sins
- Substitutionary Atonement



*Behold, the Lamb of
God, who takes
away the sin of the
world! – John 1:29*

¹Graphic from <https://christoverall.com/article/concise/the-lamb-of-god-a-pattern-of-redemption/>

Jesus the Good Shepherd

- Psalm 23 and John 10 are closely connected:
 - Psalm 23 presents **God as the Shepherd** of His people
 - John 10 shows Jesus identifying Himself as that **Shepherd**.
- New Testament writers consistently taught that Jesus is our shepherd:

*And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will **shepherd** my people Israel – Matt 2:6*

*²⁰Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead **our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep**, by the blood of the eternal covenant. – Hebrews 13:20*

*²⁴He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵**For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.** – 1 Peter 2:24-25*



Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He makes me lie down in

- Not “a” shepherd. The word “my” emphasizes the deeply personal and intimate relationship David had with God.¹

⁴ Even though I walk through the
of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;

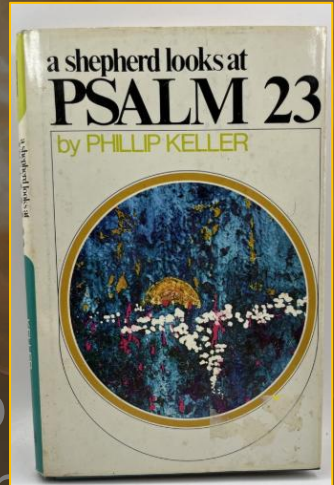
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before
in the presence of my

- Phillip Keller:²

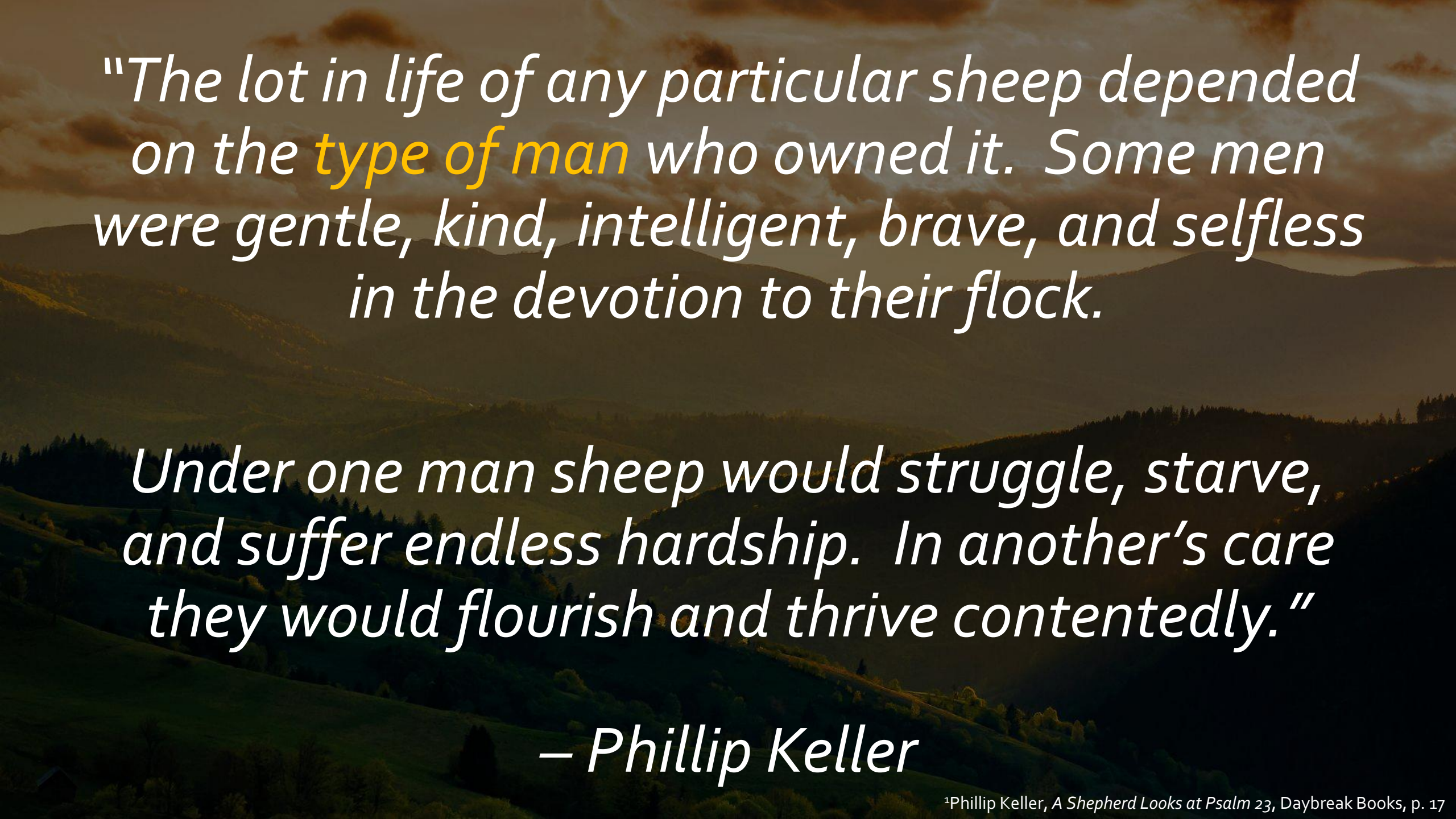
“Sheep do not ‘just take care of themselves’ as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care.”

This is the sentiment of a sheep utterly satisfied with its owner, perfectly content with its lot in life.”



¹Holman Old Testament Commentary, Psalms 1-75, p. 126

²Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Daybreak Books, p. 20



*"The lot in life of any particular sheep depended on the **type of man** who owned it. Some men were gentle, kind, intelligent, brave, and selfless in the devotion to their flock.*

Under one man sheep would struggle, starve, and suffer endless hardship. In another's care they would flourish and thrive contentedly."

– Phillip Keller

Psalms 23

Or lets (NASB)

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

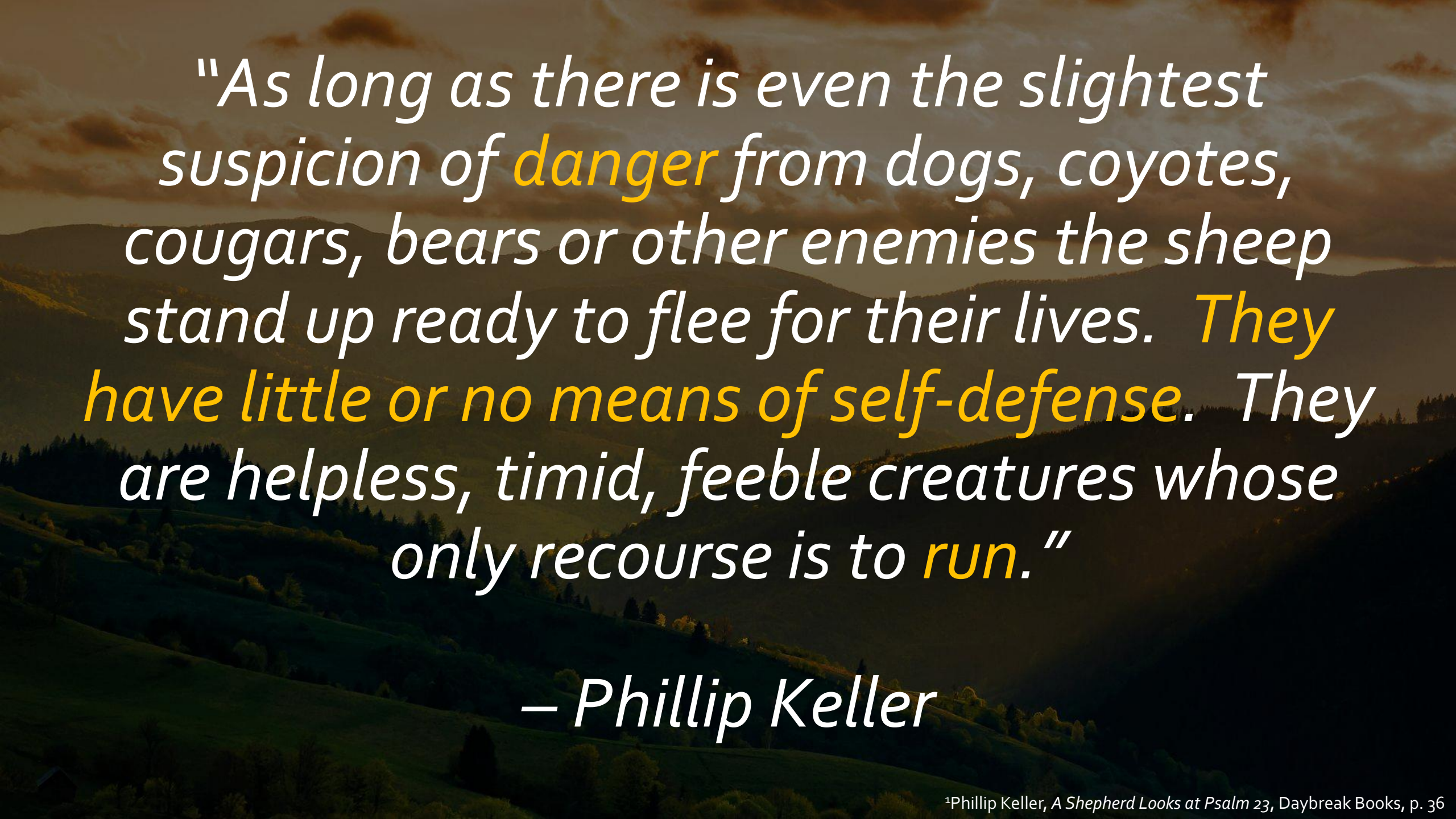
² He **makes** me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness

- Even afraid of running water, the shepherd must pick up a few large stones and dam up a place, causing the rushing stream to slow its currents and create quiet waters.¹



- Sheep are very nervous animals. They need four items before they will lie down:¹
 1. *They must be free from fear.*
 2. *They must be free from conflict or friction with other sheep.*
 3. *They must not be tormented by flies or parasites.*
 4. *They must be free from hunger.*
- The shepherd must provide all of these in order for sheep to lie down.



*"As long as there is even the slightest suspicion of **danger** from dogs, coyotes, cougars, bears or other enemies the sheep stand up ready to flee for their lives. **They have little or no means of self-defense.** They are helpless, timid, feeble creatures whose only recourse is to **run.**"*

– Phillip Keller

Psalm 23

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 paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear
for you are with me.

- It may mean that the Lord restored David after Absalom's rebellion or to physical health after some trial.
- Life causes us to be weary and God refreshes us.¹

- It may picture a straying sheep being brought back into the fold (Luke 15:3-7).

⁵ You prepare a table
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head
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
forever.



LUKE 15:4

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

- Our security does not depend on us – it depends on God's covenant faithfulness.

² He leads me beside still waters.

He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me – Psalm 31:3

- The greatest single safeguard which a shepherd has in handling his flock is to keep them on the move – leading them from one safe pasture to another.
- Whenever the shepherd opens a gate into a fresh pasture the sheep are filled with excitement.¹

all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of
the LORD
forever.

His Name's Sake

- The phrase "*for his name's sake*" means that God acts, saves, or guides people not because of human merit, but to uphold His own holy character, reputation, and glory.

Psalm 106:8

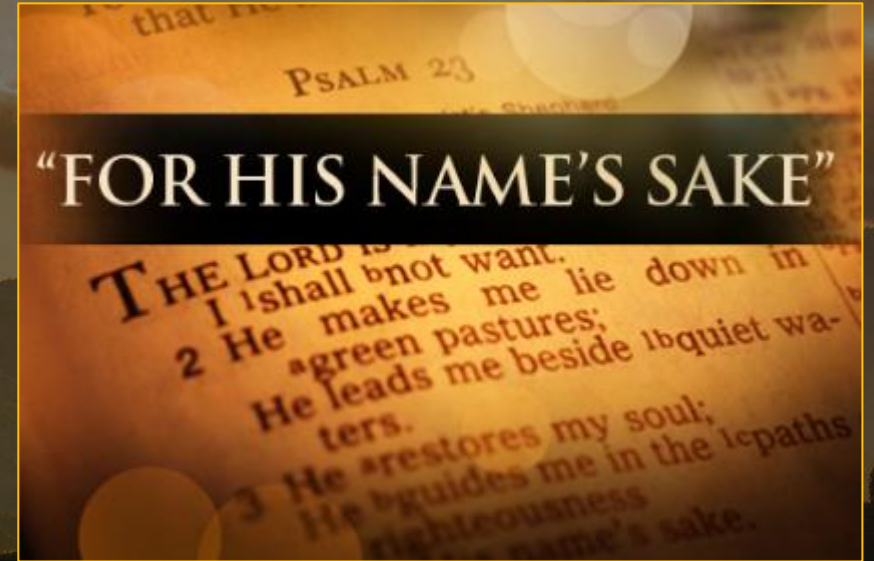
Yet he saved them *for his name's sake*,
that he might make known his mighty power.

Jeremiah 14:7

Though our iniquities testify against us,
act, O LORD, *for your name's sake*;
for our backslidings are many;
we have sinned against you.

Psalm 25:11

Yet he saved them *for his name's sake*,
that he might make known his mighty
power.



God works for both his glory and our good.¹

¹<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/for-the-sake-of-gods-name/>

Psalm 23

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 paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,

The word combines roots for "shadow" and "death," creating a picture of a darkness so thick it feels like death itself.

- Shepherds and their flocks often had to pass through narrow, steep valleys to find new pastures. These dark places were dangerous because predators or robbers hid in the shadows.¹

your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

you anoint my

my cup over

⁶ Surely goodness

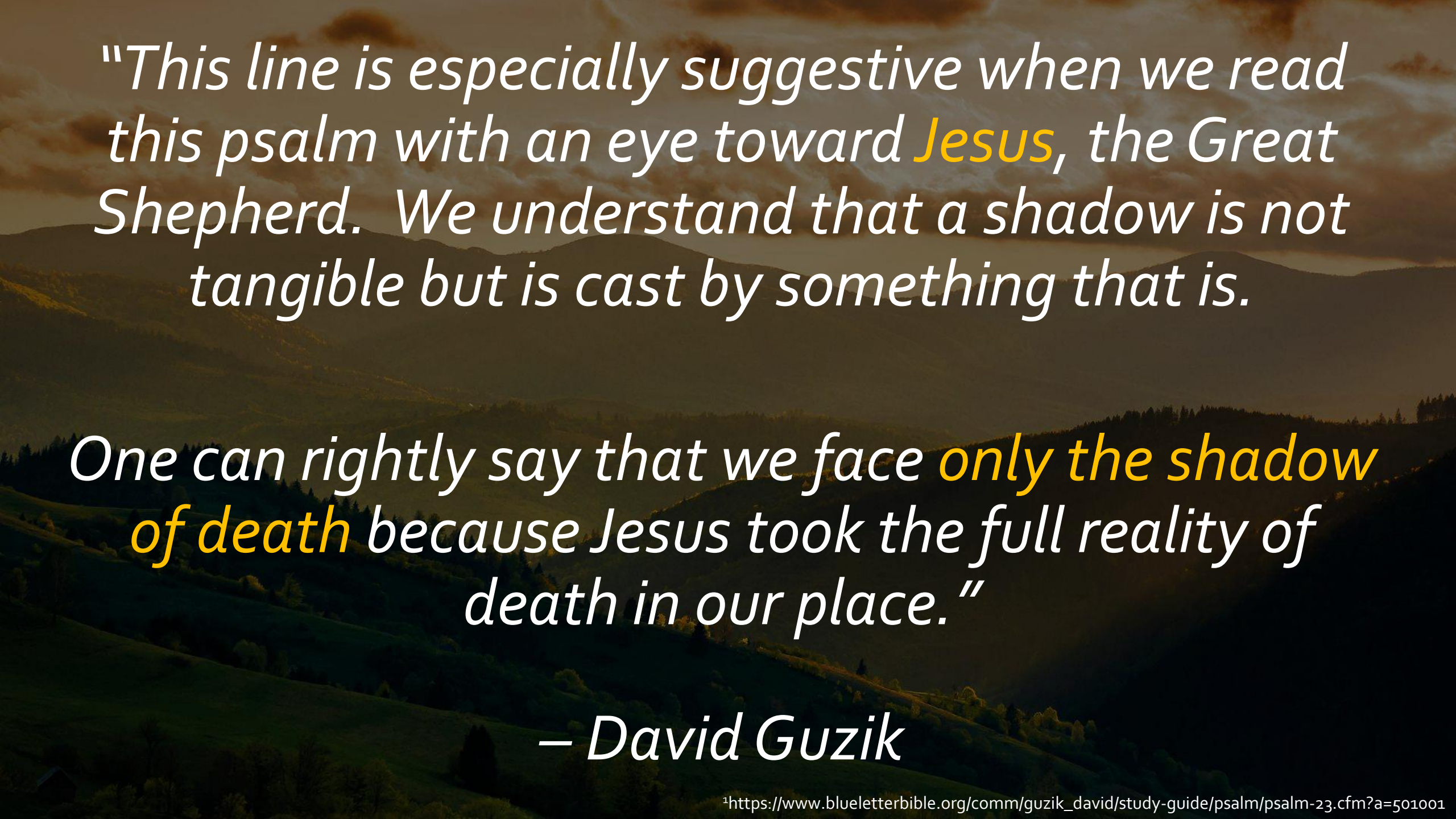
follow me

all the days

and I shall dwell

the LORD





*"This line is especially suggestive when we read this psalm with an eye toward **Jesus**, the Great Shepherd. We understand that a shadow is not tangible but is cast by something that is.*

*One can rightly say that we face **only the shadow of death** because Jesus took the full reality of death in our place."*

— David Guzik

Psalm 23

- Our courage does not come from our abilities – it comes because of who is with us.

Hebrews 13:5

for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you"

Psalm 46:1-2

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way.

*4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;*

Matthew 28:20

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

*your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.*

Psalm 27:1

*The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?*

Psalm 27:3

*Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.*

Psalm 23

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 paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴ Even 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.

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
forever.

Verse 4b represents a shift in David's focus.

Psalm 23

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 paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Even 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.

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

*Shift occurs when David enters the valley of death.
Hard times and danger make God feel very close.*

Psalm 23

¹ **The LORD** is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² **He makes** me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside the waters.

³ **He restores** my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, **for you** are with me;

David is talking about God and describing Him.



3rd ppl

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;

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

David is talking to God and how God takes care of him personally.

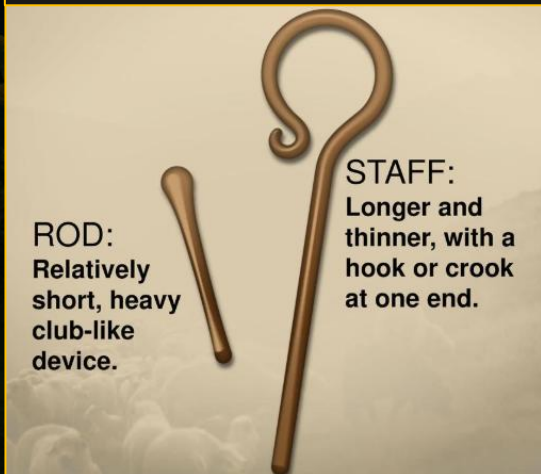


2nd ppl

David shifts our focus from knowing about God to experiencing God personally.

Psalm 23

- There is some debate as to whether David had the idea of two separate instruments (the **rod** and the **staff**) or one instrument used two ways:
 - The Hebrew word for **rod** (*shaybet*) here seems to simply mean “a stick” with a variety of applications.
 - The Hebrew word for **staff** (*mishaynaw*) seems to speak of “a support” in the sense of a walking stick.¹



ROD:
Relatively
short, heavy
club-like
device.

STAFF:
Longer and
thinner, with a
hook or crook
at one end.

your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;

6 Surely
follow
all
and I shall dwell in the house of
the LORD
forever.

- A skilled shepherd uses the rod to drive off predators.
- He also uses it to beat the brush to drive away snakes.²

¹https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/psalm/psalm-23.cfm?a=501001

²Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Daybreak Books, p. 97

Interesting Contrast with John 10

- Psalm 23 – The Lord uses his rod & staff **to protect** the sheep.
- John 10 – Jesus willingly **lays down his life** for the sheep:

*¹¹I am the good shepherd. **The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.***

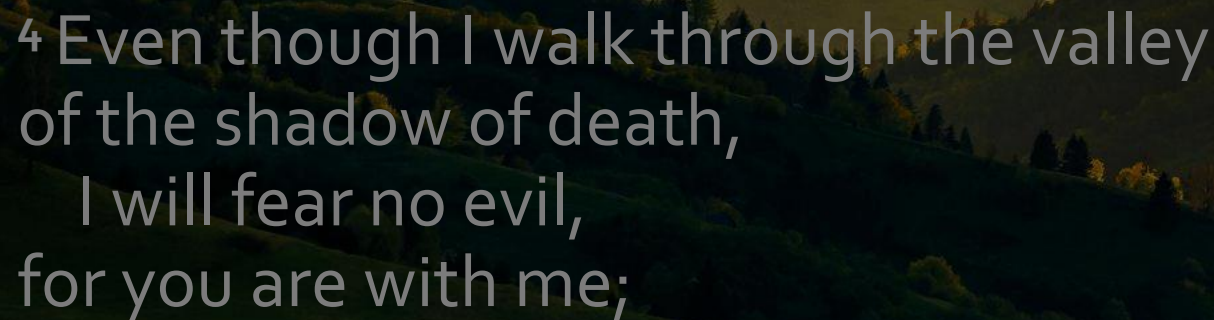
¹²He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. – John 10:11

*¹⁴I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ... ¹⁵**and I lay down my life for the sheep** ... ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. – John 10:14-15, 18*

Psalm 23

² He makes me lie down in
green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.

³ He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.



4 Even 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.

5 You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;

- This could be a reference to 1 Sam 21:6 (fleeing from Saul) or 2 Sam 17:27-29 (fleeing from Absalom).

and I shall dwell in the house of
the LORD
forever.

Psalm 23

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 paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ **• These two verses have led many to believe that David wrote this psalm after fleeing because of Absalom's rebellion.**

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;

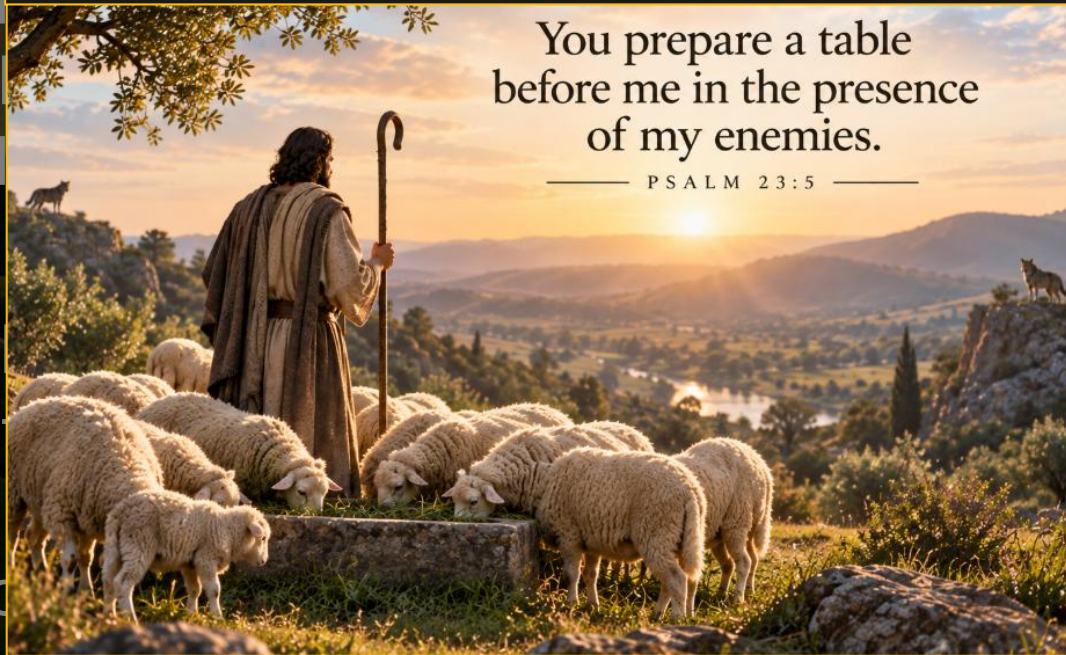
⁶ **• This could be a reference to 1 Sam 21:6 (fleeing from Saul) or 2 Sam 17:27-29 (fleeing from Absalom).**

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

- God provides safety, honor, and abundance for a person even while hostile rivals or dangers watch.



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;

- The reference to “enemies” may mean that they are held at a distance and can’t interfere with the guests’ security.¹

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

And the LORD said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life.” — Job 2:6

¹John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-shepherd-the-host-and-the-highway-patrol>

Psalm 23

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 keeps me from stumbling,
and he will restore my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

- Many people associate oil with anointing like Samuel did for David.



- Hebrew word (*dāšēn*) actually means to be made fat.

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 will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

- Sheep are troubled by nose fly that buzz around a sheep's head and try to deposit their eggs in the damp mucous of the sheep's nose which lead to infections.
- Good shepherds put linseed oil over the sheep's nose as a protection against flies.¹



- An overflowing cup is a sign of abundance – due to overwhelming generosity.²

¹Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Daybreak Books, p. 116

²NIV Study Bible on Psalm 23:5-6, p. 729

Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

- The song "Goodness of God" features the famous bridge line: *"Your goodness is running after, it's running after me."*

³ He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness

- Jesus' words:
²⁷My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. – John 10:27-29

- John Piper comments:

A beautiful picture is a little bit obscured in verse 6 by the English word "follow." The Hebrew word (*rāḏaḇ*) is much more active than "follow." It almost always means pursue.¹

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 forever.

¹John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-shepherd-the-host-and-the-highway-patrol>

God is the
Good Shepherd
and
I am Safe in
His Flock



Summary of Psalm 23¹
The Lord is your Shepherd.
Christ is your Savior.
And your future is secure.

Psalm 23 If Written Today

*"The TV is my shepherd,
I shall not want anything else.
It maketh me to lie down on the sofa,
It leadeth me away from the Scripture.
It destroys my soul.
It leadeth me in the paths of sex
and violence for the sponsors sake.
Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will enjoy the evil,
For blood and sex they excite me.
It's cable and remote, they comfort me.
It prepares a commercial before me in the presence of my children.
It anoints my head with humanism.
My coveting runneth over.
Surely laziness and ignorance shall follow my family all the days of our lives,
And we shall dwell in the house watching TV forever."*

— No Greater Joy Volume One, page 91



Jesus the Good Shepherd

The Ultimate Fulfillment of Psalm 23



"The LORD is my shepherd"
(23:1)

"I shall not want" (23:1)

**"He makes me lie down in
green pastures"** (23:2)

**"He leads me beside still
waters"** (23:2)

"He restores my soul"
(23:3)

**"He leads me in paths of
righteousness"** (23:3)

"I am the good shepherd" (10:11)

**"I came that they may have life,
and have it abundantly"** (10:10)

**"He will go in and out and find
pasture"** (10:9)

**"He goes before them, and the
sheep follow him"** (10:4)

"I came that they may have life"
(10:10)

**"My sheep hear my voice, and I
know them, and they follow
me"** (10:27)

Jesus the Good Shepherd

The Ultimate Fulfillment of Psalm 23



"I will fear no evil, for you are with me" (23:4)

"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (23:4)

"You prepare a table before me" (23:5)

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me" (23:6)

"I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (23:6)

"No one will snatch them out of my hand" (10:28)

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (10:11)

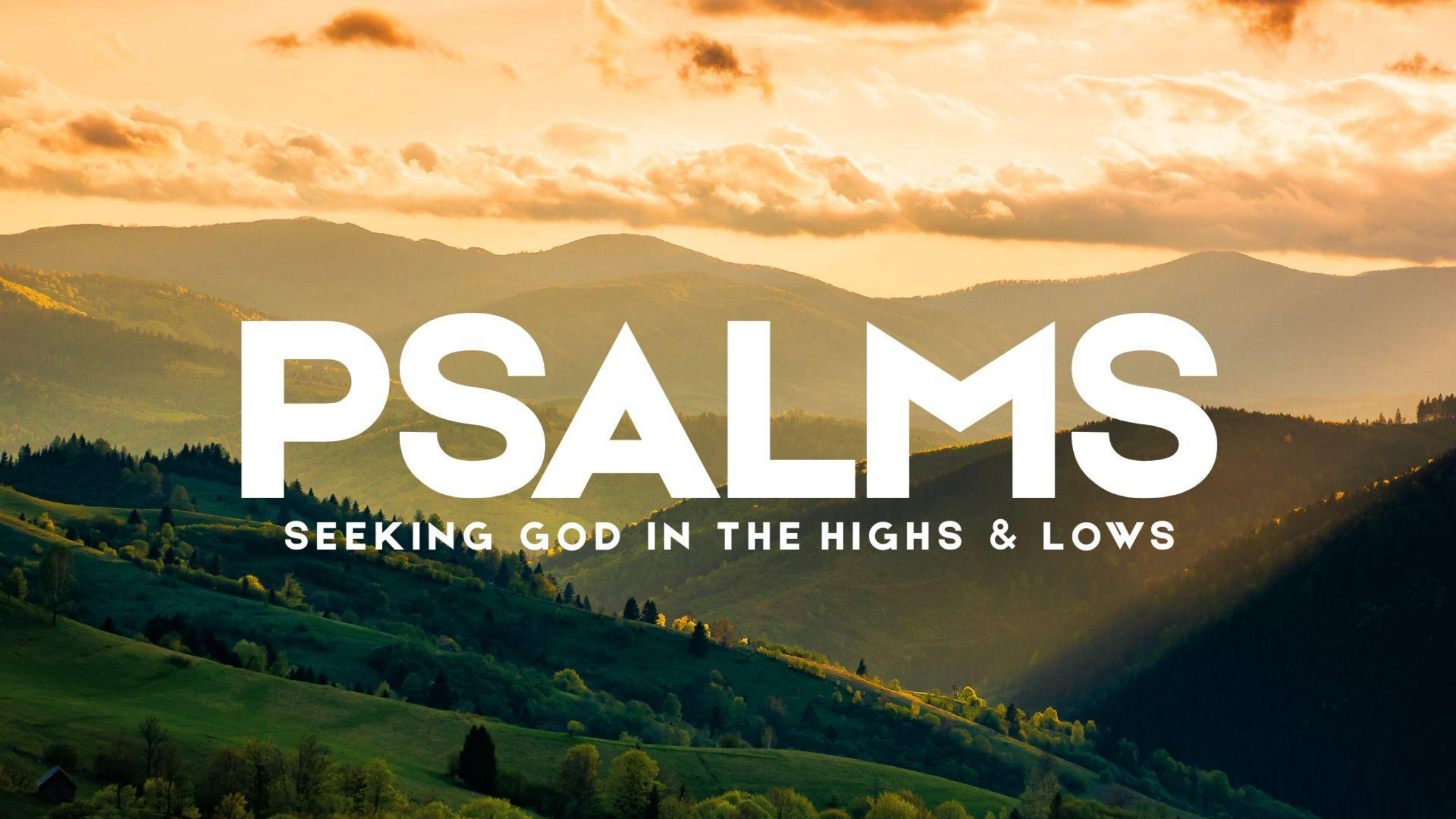
"He will go in and out and find pasture" (10:9)

"I give them eternal life" (10:28)

"No one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (10:29)

Why We are Secure

- **He protects us from danger:** Unlike hired workers who run away when trouble comes, Jesus stays to guard and fight for His flock against spiritual threats.
- **He laid down His life:** Jesus proved His deep, self-sacrificial love by dying on the cross so we can live free from the penalty of sin.
- **He guides us personally:** He leads us from the front and knows us by name, meaning He never guides us into a place where He has not already been.
- **He provides what we need:** Just as Psalm 23 promises, He restores our souls, leads us safely through dark valleys, and ensures we lack nothing essential.



PSALMS

SEEKING GOD IN THE HIGHS & LOWS