

August 9, 2026 - The Shepherd Who Knows Your Name – Pastor John Henry Raskin

Big Idea: Jesus is not a distant religious figure—He is the Good Shepherd who knows you personally, calls you by name, leads you with care, and gave His life so you can live with Him.

Hear His Voice	Trust His Care	Follow His Lead
He knows your name, your story, your wounds, and your hopes.	He protects, provides, restores, and stays close in every season.	He calls you out of fear and into a life shaped by His love.

Key Scripture: The 23rd Psalm

<i>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.</i>	<i>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</i>	<i>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 ^[d]dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.</i>
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***“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.”
— John 10:3***

Sermon Notes

- **The Shepherd knows me.** I am not anonymous to God; I am personally seen and lovingly called.
- **The Shepherd speaks.** His voice cuts through noise, fear, shame, and competing voices.
- **The Shepherd leads.** His direction may stretch me, but it is always rooted in love and life.
- **The Shepherd lays down His life.** Jesus does not abandon the sheep; He rescues them at great cost.

Reflect & Respond

1. Where do I most need to remember that Jesus knows me by name?
2. What voices have been louder than the Shepherd's voice lately?
3. What is one step of trust or obedience Jesus may be calling me to take?

This Week's Practice: Spend five quiet minutes each day with Psalm 23 and John 10:1–18. Ask: “Jesus, help me recognize Your voice today.” Write down one word, phrase, or invitation you sense from Him.

THE SHEPHERD WHO KNOWS YOUR NAME

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Last week we talked about a familiar scripture in the Book of James that says to be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger.

We learned that James was talking to believers who were going through trials and telling them to be attentive to what the Holy Spirit was saying to them through the scriptures, and to be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

Today we are going to talk about another very familiar scripture, the 23rd Psalm, and I want to approach it from a kid's perspective.

I want to start with a question for everybody in the room this morning, young or old: do you know what a shepherd actually does?

The obvious answer is this... A shepherd's whole job — every single day — is to take care of sheep.

A good shepherd really takes good care of his sheep, his flock. He doesn't just feed them and walk away.

A good shepherd knows every one of his sheep.

He knows which ones are brave, and which ones are scaredy-cats.

He knows which ones like to wander off to explore, and which ones like to stay close to him.

He knows them so well that he actually gives them names — the same way each one of us has a name, a name that matters to somebody who cares for us.

And here's the thing about sheep — I'll let you in on a little secret.

Sheep are not the smartest animals in the world.

They get lost easily. They can't fight off a wolf or a mountain lion or a bear.

They can't even always find water on their own.

A sheep, left completely by themselves, is in a lot of trouble.

So, you can see this is why a sheep needs a shepherd.

Not because the sheep is bad. Just because the sheep needs someone stronger and wiser watching over it, walking with it, protecting it.

I want you to think for a second about a time that you may have gotten separated from someone you were with in a crowded place — even for just a few seconds.

When I was six years old my parents took me to a big toy store in Manhattan called FAO Schwarz. They told me that I could pick one toy and they would buy it for me.

It was a big store and there were so many toys and as I went running down the aisles, I lost track of my surroundings and when I turned around to tell my mother about a toy I'd found she wasn't there.

I panicked. Then I heard the familiar family whistle, and I knew that my parents were there and so I called out and immediately they came from the next aisle over.

Maybe you can relate to my story. Maybe as a kid in a store, maybe as a grown-up in an airport.

Do you remember that little jolt of fear, and then the relief the moment you found your person again?

That feeling — “I’m okay now” — is a small taste of what this whole psalm of David is about.

Except it's about Someone who never actually loses track of us in the first place.

A long, long time ago, there was a shepherd boy named David — who grew up to be a king — and he wrote a song about this.

You see, a Psalm is really another name for a song.

This was a song that was sung by the people of ancient Israel.

It was used as a song of trust, comfort and communal worship and it was performed with stringed instruments like the lyre or harp during personal devotion, festive pilgrimages and sacred gatherings.

The Psalm we are about to read is not really a song about sheep. It's a song about us. About every person in this room, this morning.

David wrote this song to say, “I want to tell you what it's like to have God as my Shepherd.”

This song that he wrote has comforted people — kings and children, the certain and the unsure, the ones who've believed in God all their lives and the ones who are just beginning to wonder — for about three thousand years now.

Let's read the whole thing together, and then walk through it slowly, the way a good shepherd walks with his sheep.

PSALM 23

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.

That's the whole thing. Six sentences.

A child can learn it by heart, and grown men have leaned on it their whole lives without wearing it out. Let's slow down and look at it piece by piece.

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT.”

The very first thing David says isn't a rule. It isn't a warning. He describes his relationship with God.

He says the Lord is My shepherd. Not “a” shepherd out there somewhere — mine. This is a personal relationship.

Think about it this way. If you had a shepherd like David describes watching over you all the time — someone strong, someone who never got tired, someone who never once looked away — how would you feel walking around?

Pretty safe, right? You'd feel free to just live your life, and explore, and not carry so much worry.

“I shall not want” doesn't mean David never wanted a snack or a new toy.

It means he wasn't afraid he'd be left without what he really needed because he had Somebody watching over and caring for him.

That's the invitation underneath this whole psalm, right from the first line: you don't have to carry your own safety on your own shoulders.

Someone stronger is looking out for you and offering to carry it for you.

And then David says...

“HE MAKES ME TO LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES; HE LEADS ME BESIDE THE STILL WATERS.”

Here's something interesting about sheep: they will not lie down and rest if they're scared, or thirsty, or fighting with the other sheep.

A sheep only lies down even in green grass, next to calm water, when it feels completely safe.

What David is saying here is not that God forces him to lie down, but that God provides gentle loving guidance when he is too stubborn or worried to rest.

So, when David says the Shepherd makes him lie down in green pastures, he's saying: God doesn't just meet my needs — He gives me rest. He gives me peace.

He leads you by still waters. Not loud, churning water that would scare a sheep away, but “still waters” — calm, quiet, easy to drink from.

As adults, we all know what it's like to not be able to rest — to lie in bed at night with our minds still running, replaying the day, worrying about tomorrow.

This verse is a promise that the Shepherd wants to bring us to a place — inside of us, in our minds and our hearts — where we can finally put things down and breathe easily, simply rest.

Think about the difference between a raging river and a calm lake.

You wouldn't let a little kid wade into rushing whitewater to get a drink — it's too dangerous, too loud, too much. But a still, quiet lake?

You can kneel right down at the edge of it. That's the kind of place the Shepherd leads us to.

Not because life is never loud or rushing — it is, plenty of the time — but because the Shepherd knows exactly where the quiet places are, and He knows how to get us there.

Then David says...

“HE RESTORES MY SOUL; HE LEADS ME IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE.”

“Restores” is just a grown-up word for “fixes what's broken” or “makes new again.”

Have you ever had a really hard day — you were tired, or sad, or you made a mistake and felt bad about it — and then something happened that made you feel better again?

Maybe someone hugged you, or you got some sleep, and the next morning things felt okay again?

That's a small picture of what David means.

The Shepherd doesn't just feed the sheep and walk away.

When something in us is worn out, or hurting, or has gone the wrong way, He knows how to bring us back to a good place.

And He leads us. A good shepherd walks in front, showing the way, not behind, cracking a whip.

“Paths of righteousness” just means the right paths — the good ones, the ones that lead us somewhere safe instead of off a cliff.

Now David says...

“YEA, THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL; FOR YOU ARE WITH ME.”

Now here's the part of the psalm that might sound a little scary at first. A valley with a dark shadow in it.

But notice — David doesn't say the Shepherd removes every scary valley from his path.

He says something better: He says the Shepherd will lead him through the scary places, and he doesn't have to be afraid or fear anything bad, because the Shepherd is with him.

Think about a time you were somewhere dark — a bedroom at night, a hallway with the lights off — and it felt a little scary until someone you trusted was right there next to you.

Same hallway. Same dark. But everything feels different when you're not alone in it.

That's what this verse is saying.

Life has some valleys in it — hard, sad, scary things happen to everybody, even kids, even grown-ups.

Sometimes it's a bad dream.

Sometimes it's a friend moving away, or someone we love getting sick, or just a day when everything feels heavy for no clear reason.

This verse doesn't promise the valley disappears. It doesn't promise there won't be shadows. It promises you never have to walk through it by yourself.

Notice too — it's called “the valley of the shadow.”

A shadow can look scary in the dark, but a shadow itself can't actually hurt you.

It has no teeth. It has no strength of its own.

That doesn't mean the hard things in life aren't real — they are, very real — but it means they don't get the final word, because the Shepherd is bigger and more real than any shadow.

And notice what gives David comfort in that moment — he doesn't look for answers or explanations for why the valley is there.

He says...

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

He remembers the Shepherd's rod and staff.

The rod is the tool a shepherd would use to fight off anything trying to hurt the sheep — a wolf, a bear, whatever came against the flock.

The staff is that long stick with a curved hook on the end, the kind you've probably seen in pictures —

a shepherd would use it to gently pull a sheep back if it wandered too close to the edge of a cliff, or to lift a lamb out of a thorn bush it got tangled in.

Those two tools don't scare the sheep. They comfort the sheep.

Because the sheep has watched the shepherd use them before and he knows exactly what they're for.

Then David uses a different picture...

“YOU PREPARE A TABLE BEFORE ME... YOU ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP RUNS OVER.”

This next picture switches from a God as a shepherd in a field to the Lord as a host at a dinner table.

In David's time, when you welcomed someone as an honored guest into your home, you'd set a full table for them, you'd pour oil on their head as a sign of blessing and honor, and you'd fill their cup all the way to the top and keep filling it.

That's the picture David is showing us. This is David's relationship with the Lord.

He is not a stingy God handing out just enough to get by.

His Lord is a generous host, setting a full table, filling the cup past full, saying: you are welcome here. You are honored here. Come and sit down.

And He does this, David says “in the presence of my enemies” — right in the middle of hard circumstances, right in the middle of a world that can feel unsafe —

the Shepherd still pulls out a chair and says, sit with Me. Eat. You're safe at this table.

Think about your favorite family dinner — maybe a birthday, maybe a holiday, the table so full there's almost too much food, and

everybody's laughing, and nobody has to earn their seat, they just get to be there because they belong there.

That's the picture David is painting about God. Not a God who makes you prove yourself first.

A God who sets the table and calls you over before you've done anything to deserve it.

And David ends his Psalm with this...

“SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER.”

I love that word “follow.” Not just today, not just when things are going well — goodness and mercy following you, every single day, like a couple of good dogs that never leave your side.

And then the psalm ends by looking all the way out to forever: a permanent home.

Your life is not a hotel room you're passing through. God provides a house you belong in — forever.

Let's see if we can remember what we've learned together.

- 1. The Shepherd gives us rest in green pastures.**
- 2. He leads us beside calm, quiet water.**
- 3. He fixes what's broken inside of us.**
- 4. He walks right beside us in the scary, shadowy valleys.**
- 5. He sets a full table for us and welcomes us to it.**
- 6. His goodness follows us — every single day — all the way home.**

Six short pictures. One big truth underneath all of them: you are known, you are led, and you are loved, by a Shepherd who never once looks away.

So here's what I want each of us to carry out of this room today.

If you are not yet an adult, you get to grow up knowing that the God who made the stars and the mountains and every animal and every ocean wants to be your Shepherd.

Not just a distant God, far off somewhere. Yours.

Somebody who knows your name, who walks in front of you on the good days, who stays right beside you on the scary days, and who has already set a place for you at His table.

And if you're older, and we're honest, faith may sit differently with each of us in this room.

Some of us grew up surrounded by the image of Christ the Good Shepherd — in a family, a tradition, an icon on a wall — hearing His name our whole lives, and yet we are still searching for a relationship with Him.

Others of us have chosen to follow Him and are confident and secure in our relationship with Jesus even though we were not taught anything about God growing up.

Others of us are still turning all this over in our minds, still deciding what we think, and that's alright.

David himself wrote whole psalms full of honest questions for God before he ever wrote psalms full of confidence and praise.

This isn't a psalm demanding anyone have it all figured out before they're welcome.

It's a psalm about a Shepherd who goes looking for the sheep that wandered off, He is not one who waits at the gate with His arms crossed for the sheep to come home.

That's really the whole invitation of the 23rd Psalm, and honestly, the whole invitation of Jesus Himself.

Centuries after David wrote this psalm, Jesus stood up in front of a crowd and said, “I am the good shepherd.” He wasn't quoting the psalm by accident.

He was saying, I am the One David was writing about.

I am the Shepherd who lays down His own life for the sheep.

That's what makes this more than a nice poem about sheep and green fields — it's about a real Person, extending a real invitation, to real people.

You don't have to know everything. You don't have to have your questions answered.

You just have to be willing to let Him lead — to trust, even a little, that the One who made you knows exactly how to take care of you.

I'm asking you to consider this today: what would it be like to walk through your life — the green pastures and the dark valleys both — knowing Someone that good was walking right beside you, and that His table already has a seat with your name on it?

That's what God wants for every person in this room.

That's what He's wanted for you since before you were born.

Let's pray.