

Hope Church June 7th 2026

Psalm 23

Nothing hidden #2

- **PSALM 23** is attributed to David. We first meet David in 1st Samuel 16. He was a shepherd growing up around Bethlehem.
⇒ A shepherd was a GUIDE and a GUARDIAN and a PHYSICIAN and a PROVIDER.
⇒ They **led their flock to food & water**. Protected them from predators. **Cared** for their **wounds**. Guided them through dangerous terrain.
- Most scholars believe David wrote this psalm while **fleeing Saul or during Absalom's rebellion**.
- PSALM 23 wasn't *written from a place of comfort*. It was written in a season of **real danger and uncertainty**.

Verse 1:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

- **יְהוָה רֹעִי** (*Yahweh Roi*) – The Lord is my shepherd.

- David is talking about **Yahweh**. The covenant God of Israel. The God who **makes promises** and the God who **keeps them**.
 - He uses the word – **my**. It shows that **David knows the Shepherd personally**.
 - David doesn't say – I have everything I want.
 - Most of us live with the assumption that one more thing will finally give us peace. A little **more money** or **better health** or a **different job** or a **different government** or a **different future**.
 - David says – ***I lack nothing***.
 - David reminds his listeners that our DEEPEST NEEDS are not ultimately met by our circumstances. Our deepest needs are **met by the Shepherd**.
- ⇒ Whatever lies ahead – God will provide.
- ⇒ Whatever I walks through – God will be enough.

Verse 2:

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters...

- Green pastures weren't everywhere in David's world. Most of the land was **dry** and **rocky** and **unforgiving**.
- Sheep DEPENDED on a shepherd who knew where to *find food and water* and to **lead them there**.

- David also mentions quiet waters.
- Sheep are *easily startled* and often *won't drink from fast-moving streams*. The shepherd would find **calm and safe places** where they could drink.
- That's David's point.
 ⇒ God knows what we need. He KNOWS our **fears**. He KNOWS our **weaknesses**. He KNOWS our **limitations**.
 ⇒ He KNOWS where we are and He *meets us there* and He **provides what we need**.

Verse 3:

...he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

- For the Hebrew people, your soul meant your whole being. Your **body** and **mind** and **emotions** and **strength**. Your entire **life**.
- The sheep don't fix themselves. *God is restoring all of it*.
- David's CONFIDENCE isn't in himself. His CONFIDENCE is **in the Shepherd** who comes looking for the tired and the weary and wandering people.

- *He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake* – God doesn't LEAD us because we deserve it. He LEADS us because **He is FAITHFUL**.
- He is FAITHFUL to His people. FAITHFUL to His promises. FAITHFUL to His own character.
- *Even when we lose our way, God doesn't stop being a Shepherd.*

Verse 4:

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.

- *The scene changes.* The green pastures and quiet waters are gone. David is in the **darkest valley**.
- David's audience understood the image well. Shepherds sometimes had to lead their flocks through dangerous ravines where *predators lurked in the shadows*.
- This is the **turning point** of PSALM 23.
- Up to now David has been talking about God: *He leads. He refreshes. He guides.*
- But in the valley, the *grammar changes*. David stops talking about God and **starts talking to God**. The HE becomes YOU: *You are with me. Your rod and staff. You prepare.*

- David's theology doesn't change in the valley. He doesn't **discover a different God**. He doesn't **learn some new truth** that he didn't know.
- Because **God hasn't changed**. He was FAITHFUL in the green pastures is the same in the dark valley.
- What changed was David's **lived experience**.
 - ⇒ What he once knew in his mind – he now **experiences in his own circumstances**.
 - ⇒ What was once only a truth he believed – **becomes a reality** he leans on.
- What David KNEW about God in the **pasture**, he **DISCOVERS** in the **darkest valley**.
 - ⇒ From knowing about God to really knowing God.
 - ⇒ From **something he has heard to something he has seen**.
 - ⇒ From a *truth he can explain to a truth he has experienced*.
- **PSALM 23** doesn't promise a pain-free life.
- We all walk through seasons of *loss* and *uncertainty* and *fear*.
- David reminds us that courage isn't the absence of fear. David isn't denying that the valley is scary.

- Courage is trusting that **God's presence is greater** than the thing I fear. Greater than my uncertainty. Greater than my loss.
- Then David says – Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
 - ⇒ The ROD protected the sheep.
 - ⇒ The STAFF **guided them and pulled them back** when they wandered.
 - ⇒ Both were REMINDERS that the shepherd was close.
- And that's David's comfort. Not the absence of trouble, but the **presence of the Shepherd** in his trouble.

Verse 5:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

- But God is also a **gracious Host**.
- David doesn't say God removes the enemies. He doesn't say the **opposition disappears**. He doesn't say the *threat is gone*.
- The enemies are still there. **Yet God prepares a meal.**

- In David's world sharing a table was much more than having dinner together. It was a SIGN of **welcome** and **belonging** and **protection**. To be invited to someone's table meant *you were under their care*.
- That's what makes this image so powerful.
 - ⇒ GOD'S PEOPLE can sit down and eat.
 - ⇒ They can **rest**.
 - ⇒ They can **breathe**.
 - ⇒ Not because every problem has been solved, but because we are secure in His care.
- The enemies may still be nearby. The uncertainty may still be real. The struggle may not be over. *But God's presence changes everything*.
- Then comes one of the great lines of the psalm – My cup overflows.
- Not barely enough. Not scraping by. **God's grace spills over the edges**.
- David knew suffering better than most. Despite all his struggles he knew – didn't just know – he knew that **God's goodness is never exhausted. God's mercy never runs dry**.

The **Shepherd** who LEADS us through the valley is also the **Host** who WELCOMES us to His table. He **provides** for us and **cares** for us and **honors** us and gives us **far more of His presence than we deserve**.

Verse 6:

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.

- David closes with one of the most beautiful promises in the entire psalm. But the HEBREW WORD is **much stronger than just follow**.
- The Hebrew word is **רָדַף** (radaph). Want to share a story to really understand the meaning.

Years ago in Pilanesberg National Park, I watched a cheetah stalking a springbok. A crowd had gathered. Some people were standing outside their vehicles and sitting on their roofs of their cars. Which tells you not everyone in a game reserve makes good decisions. Pastoral way of saying: people are stupid.

Then the chase began. The cheetah locked onto its target and took off. It wasn't casually following the springbok. It was pursuing it. Relentlessly. Through the vehicles. Through the spectators. Until it finally brought it down.

- That's the word David uses here. A **strong and aggressive** word. It was often used for pursuing or chasing something down. Not every hunt is successful. But everyone is intentional.
- It isn't fear or failure or guilt or shame chasing David down.
- **It's God's goodness and steadfast love.**
- The Shepherd doesn't simply walk ahead and hope we keep up. He goes before us. *He walks beside us*. **His goodness and mercy chase us down every step of the way.**
- What began as a journey **end as a homecoming**.
- The green pastures and quiet waters *were never the destination*.
- The goal for the Shepherd is always life with God.
- To one day live forever with the God.

And that's the great promise of PSALM 23. Whatever valley you are walking through today is not the end of the story. The Shepherd is leading you somewhere.

- Through every joy and sorrow.
- Through every victory and loss.
- Through every green pasture and every dark valley.

God is bringing you home.

Meaning for us today:

#1 The valley changes HE into YOU.

It moves us from talking about God to talking to God.

When the valley comes, David stops **talking about God and starts talking to God**.

That's often how faith works. It's easy to talk about God when life is going well. It's easy to listen to *podcasts* and *read books* and *attend church* and *have opinions about God*.

But valleys have a way of **revealing what we really believe about Him**. Valleys have a way of TURNING information and knowledge into relationship. Strips away everything fake about our faith.

Some of us are **carrying things** right now that nobody else can see:

- ⇒ The stress of paying bills.
- ⇒ A strained marriage.
- ⇒ A diagnosis.
- ⇒ A child making choices that keep you awake at night.

And in those moments, what we need most is not another conversation about God.

We need a conversation with God. Job experienced this too. After losing his children and his health and everything he owned, he finally said:

My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.

Job 42:5 NIV

Most of us would never choose the valley voluntarily. Yet throughout Scripture, people *come out of the valley* **knowing God in ways they never did before.**

Not because they learned something new about God.

But because they experienced for themselves what they had **only known in theory.**

THE VALLEY has a way of turning *belief into dependence* and **knowledge into relationship.**

#2 God prepares a table before removing the enemies.

It moves us from seeking provision to finding presence.

David doesn't say: I fear no evil because there is no danger.

The valley is still dark and the enemies are still present.

The difference is that the Shepherd is in the Valley too.

Most of us want God to fix the situation.

- Remove the problem.
- Open the door.
- Heal the disease.

Sometimes God *changes our circumstances*. Sometimes He *gives us just enough strength to push through*. But one of the most important discoveries in following Jesus is learning that God's greatest gift is not always fixing our problems.

It's discovering His presence.

And **we discover His presence** more clearly in the valley than we ever do in the green pastures. The question this week isn't simply: *What do I need God to do for me?* The deeper question is: **Am I aware that God is already with me?**

Because the promise of PSALM 23 is not that life will be easy. The promise is that we will never walk through it alone.

As **TIM KELLER** put it:

God has a celebration meal with us not after we finally get out of the dark valley, but in the middle of it, in the presence of our enemies.

#3 The Shepherd is taking His people home.

It moves us from positive thinking to real hope.

We live in a culture that often confuses positive thinking for hope. But positive thinking and hope are not the same thing.

- **POSITIVE THINKING** says: *everything will probably work out.*
- **HOPE** says: *Even if it doesn't, God is still faithful.*
- **Positive thinking depends on my circumstances.**
- *Hope depends on God.*

Biblical hope is not denial of reality. Denial of this messy broken world we live

in. It looks at this and says: No matter how crazy and messy this gets, **the Shepherd is here.**

Hope is not having confidence in myself. **It's not about the quality or the depth of my faith.** It's being confident in who God is.

- **Our salvation** – we belong to God, and not even death can take that away.
- **Our King** – Jesus is greater than political chaos and economic uncertainty and our deepest fears.

- **His presence** – God does not stand at a distance from our pain. He walks with His people through it.

Some of you need that reminder today.

Your HOPE does not rest on how tightly you are holding on to God.

Your HOPE rests on **how tightly God is holding on to you**.

God's faithfulness is not determined by your emotions.

Francis Thompson knew what it was like to run from God. In his famous poem *The Hound of Heaven* he DESCRIBES spending years **trying to escape God's pursuit**.

- He chased other things.
- He looked for life and meaning everywhere else.
- He did everything he could to avoid surrendering to God.

Francis famously writes:

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days; I fled Him, down the arches of the years.

Yet no matter how far he ran, **God kept coming after him**. And he discovered he could not outrun grace. So he allowed God bring him down.

And neither can we.

When you don't know what the future holds, hold on to what you do know:

- The Shepherd is good.
- The Shepherd is present.
- The Shepherd will bring you home.