

**Bethel Christian Fellowship  
Fair Lawn, NJ**

**A Word From The Psalmist:  
Unwavering Confidence In The Good Shepherd & Gracious Host  
Psalm 23: 1-6**

**May 3, 2026**

Psalm 23 is one of the most well known passages in all of Scripture. It's seen on wallpaper and screensavers; songs are written about it, and some even have verses tattooed on them. It's quoted by both Bible believing Christians and those who know next to nothing about the Bible. They are words of encouragement, meant to bring hope and comfort in troubling times. For Christians they also point to the confidence we have in an unfailing, unchanging, covenant keeping God. That's the reason Psalm 23 is one of the many songs of confidence in the book of Psalms (cf 4, 11, 16, 27, 62, 90).

Throughout scripture, authors use metaphors to describe the LORD, such as; Rock, King, Judge, Father, Potter, Fortress and more. Here the Psalmist uses the metaphors of the LORD as shepherd and gracious host. While we are not sure when this Psalm was written, there is no better person to have penned this hymn than David, who was both shepherd and King. As we can see, the heading above verse one attributes this Psalm to him.

One of the best ways to view the structure of this psalm as well as its purpose is found in one of the Study Bible notes: "This song of confidence represents a literary unity but presents two separate metaphors (v1-4;5-6), both of which communicate God's care and goodness. Its original purpose was to comfort God's people in any distress," **NIV Reformation Study Bible**. If we follow this outline, we can well imagine this Psalm as a one act play with two separate scenes.

**The First Scene: The Good Shepherd (1-4):** As the curtain rises, a beautiful pastoral scene is set before us. The sun is rising as the shepherd begins his day. His sheep are grazing in lush green pastures; drinking from quiet calm waters; all the while being led by the shepherd. We also see deep dark valleys that would normally startle the sheep, but "have no fear, the shepherd is here." He is protecting and keeping his sheep from any hurt, harm or danger. His sheep are completely reliant on him; he provides the very best provisions. His sheep have no idea when it's time to rest; he guides them to quiet places and makes them lie down. His sheep have no sense of direction; he leads and they follow. Knowing how defenseless his sheep are; He protects them in the midst of great danger and distress, giving his sheep the utmost confidence in him.

**A. We can Rely on our Shepherd (Verse 1):** *"The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want."*

Our English translators want us to know that when David says "the LORD is my shepherd"; he's referring to Yahweh; the faithful, steadfast, covenant keeping God. David knows this because he knows his Bible. In Exodus 34, the LORD has this to say about his name. "And (he) passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (v6-7a). That's who the God of Israel is!

The next thing to note is that this is David's personal declaration of trust in the LORD. His emphasis is on "my," not "our." While it is true that all the people of Israel were the sheep of His pasture (Ps. 100:3), David never lost sight that he was one of those sheep. That's why he's not *asking* the Lord to be his shepherd, he's *affirming* that He is. Given this insight about who the LORD is, David now affirms how the shepherd faithfully provides for those who belong to Him. He provides for His sheep in many ways, *ways in which the LORD provides for us as well.*

**B. We Find Rest with our Shepherd ( Verse 2a ):** *"He makes me lie down in green pastures."*

Sheep have a strong instinct to follow the sheep in front of them, even when it may not be the best decision. Whether it's off a cliff or into a ditch, they will keep going and going until they drop, or drop dead! Thankfully the shepherd knows exactly what the sheep need for nourishment, where the best places are for refreshment, and exactly when it's the right time to do so. We see him making the sheep lie down on plush green grass; they're grazing and resting. The sun is shining as they enjoy all that the shepherd has for them. We can also trust him to do the same for us (cf Isa 40:11).

**C. We Are Restored and Refreshed by our Shepherd (Verse 2b - 3a):** *"He leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul."*

It's around noon, the sheep have rested but now they need to be cleansed and renewed. The shepherd knows this, but he also knows how easily his sheep get startled. Rushing streams are impossible to drink from and would cause the sheep to panic. So he guides them to quiet, calm waters. Here their thirst is quenched but the shepherd would also use the water to wash their wounds. It's both an inward and outward cleansing giving them complete restoration; which literally means the act of returning to its former state. Once again the Shepherd proves to be a reliable source of provision for his sheep. We can also trust him to do the same for us.

**D. We Are Led by our Shepherd (Verse 3b):** *"He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake."*

For the shepherd to lead them in righteousness, means that he leads his flock in the right paths. He does this because his reputation depends on it. What happens to the sheep is a direct indication of who the shepherd is. Therefore, he will do everything in his power to fulfill his role as such. Hence his love, care, and provision for the sake of his name. As Sam Storms has said, "God's aim is the fame of His name,"

We find this same level of confidence in other psalms as well; **(1)** *For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great (PS. 25:11).* **(2)** *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us and atone for our sins, for your name's sake! (Ps. 79:9).* **(3)** *Yet he saved them for his name's sake, to make his mighty power known (Ps. 106:8).* **(4)** *For your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble (Ps. 143:11).* These Psalms remind us that God acts and keeps His promises to uphold His glory, not based on human merit or righteousness. These truths instill unshakable confidence in his sheep, and should do the same for us. When all else fails, he will lead us for His name's sake; so that we may give him all the glory, all the honor and all the praise!

**E. We Are Protected by our Shepherd (Verse 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 staff, they comfort me.”*

As the first scene draws to a close, there are no green pastures or calm refreshing waters. Instead, we can barely see anything at all. The shepherd is set to take his flock through their toughest challenge yet; the dark valley known as a wadi. Wadi's are dry creeks or riverbeds that fill up during rainy seasons, but right now that's not the case. High walls of rock surround them, blocking the sun, making it a dark and strenuous journey. Wild animals are lurking in the shadows, the path is covered with sharp rocks, the way is unclear. Surely the sheep are fearful and afraid, scattered and confused.

Surprisingly they're not, and that's because the shepherd is there with his rod and staff. The rod was a heavy short club used to defend them from danger. The staff was longer and thinner with a hook on the end and was used for direction, it was also used to bring wandering sheep back into his safety. This re-assures his sheep, they are comforted by his presence and know without a doubt, that he will do everything to protect them. Every one of his sheep have made it through the dark valley and head back into their sheep pens; all thanks to the faithful shepherd. As we stay close to the shepherd, we learn that he does the same for us.

*In Pilgrim's Progress, like many of us, Christian experiences this Valley, and in the midst of turmoil he ponders his path; “By now I may be half-way through the Valley. And the danger of going back may be as great as the danger of going forward. So he resolved to go on, and he shouted into the darkness with a vehement voice: “ I will walk in the strength of the Lord God!” And for a while, silence fell about him once again. But not for long. For now one of the wicked ones came up behind him, and started whispering many base suggestions in his ear, which he verily thought proceeded from his own mind. And this worried poor Christian more than anything he had met with before; he might easily have fallen on his sword, and put an end to his misery. At the moment, he thought he heard the voice of a man going before him, saying: Though I walk through the Valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Immediately Christian took courage. He gathered that there were in the Valley others who feared God, beside himself. He perceived that God was with THEM; and if with them, why not HIM”?*

**The Second Scene: The Gracious Host (5-6):** As the curtain rises on this final scene, the imagery changes but the message is the same. The shepherd is now a generous, benevolent Host and the sheep are now his honored guests. Instead of plush green pastures and quiet still waters; there's a huge table, heavy laden with luxurious gold plated cups and sterling silverware.

**A. The Host in the Banquet Hall (v5):** *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” At this point we see David addressing the LORD himself.*

Before entering a banquet hall, an ancient host would anoint his honored guests with oil made by adding perfumes to olive oil, (something that Jesus expected of his host when he came to the house of Simon; see in Luke 7:46). The cup overflowing with choice wine, and the table abundantly laden with the choicest of food are more than the guests could ever imagine. The dates, grapes, pomegranates, figs, almonds, goat, lamb, fattened calf, all reinforce God's bountiful care and provision for us. They reinforce the opening image of the green pastures and quiet still waters. When in the presence of God, and focusing on His great love, the guests can now view the presence of their enemies in a new light. They tend to forget their troubles and tears when feasting on His abundance. The same is true for us.

**B. The LORD's Continued Goodness and Loyal Love (v 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."* Once again David is speaking directly to the LORD, affirming his unwavering confidence in Him. One commentator offers a very helpful explanation of how this verse moves David from speaking in metaphors to speaking in real time.

"Using the settings of a pasture and a banquet hall, David meditates on several important ways that the LORD provides for his spiritual and physical well-being and concludes that this persistent loyal love of the LORD draws him back to full communion in the house of the LORD."

For David, the house of the LORD was the tent (Tabernacle), which David had built to house the Ark of the LORD. There, he would directly call on the LORD, with the LORD's people; with burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, blessing and feeding people in the name of the LORD. In David's mind, that was the place he would dwell when he said, "all the days of my life" which means, throughout all the years of my life. Experiencing first hand, the LORD's steadfast loyal love and the many ways he provides. Leaves no question in David's mind. "Surely", the LORD will supply all of his needs, now and forevermore.

Our sanctuary is the gathering together on the LORD's day, where we are fed the Word of God by our God-given undershepherds; *"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."* (1 Peter 5:2-3). This is how we are strengthened; we avail ourselves of the means of grace and gain the same unwavering confidence the psalmist demonstrates, along with our mutual encouragement and fellowship, prayer, and communion with the Lord Jesus Christ around His table. No wonder why David will later say in psalm 122:1 "I rejoiced with those who said to me, Let us go to the House of the LORD."

**The Conclusion:** The curtain closes, and we realize this beautiful play was actually written for us. There's something we must know before leaving. Our spiritual lives depend on it. The sheep and guests in this play represent all who belong to him. Just like they relied completely on their shepherd-host, those who are His, must rely on theirs. Our Shepherd-King is now David's messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ (*Micah 5:2-4*).

The New Testament tells us that there are three things about our Shepherd we must come to know: **(1)** He is the *Good Shepherd*, willing to do anything for the sake of his sheep; "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). **(2)** He is the *Chief Shepherd*, promising to glorify us on that final day; *"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away"* (1 Peter 5:4). **(3)** He is the *Great Shepherd*, sustaining us for his name's sake until his return; *"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that Great shepherd of the sheep, equip you with every good work for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen."* (*Hebrews 13:20-21*).

*One of the most beautiful scenes of heaven is found in Rev 7:16-17. Our shepherd-king is on his throne, and all of his blood-bought sheep that were once scattered throughout the world are now together with him in heavenly glory. There we will be with the Great Shepherd of our souls. "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*