Thought For The Week

Articles: *Yahweh is My Shepherd* ~300 words, ~1400 words

Some Thoughts on Psalm 23

Sunday, November 15, 2026 — Jim Lokenbauer

Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved passages in all of Scripture. For three thousand years it has given comfort, strength, and encouragement to those who read it. Next to John 3:16 it is the most recognized text in the Bible. It assures the believer of the love and care of the invisible God during the earthly journey. Though God cannot be seen, the psalm declares that He is the good Shepherd who is always near, ever watchful, always providing, continually leading and guiding, and protecting His people even at the worst points of life. Both believers and non-believers have requested that it be read at their funerals; it was read only weeks earlier at the funeral of one of our own family's members who had chosen it for comfort.

David, himself a shepherd boy who became king, wrote 73 of the 150 psalms (and inspired New Testament writers attribute two more to him, making half the Psalter his). Of those, Psalm 23 is only six verses and roughly 114 words, yet those few words carry enormous weight. Throughout the day we walked through the psalm, beginning in the morning with verses 1–3 and continuing in the evening with the remainder. The morning readings set the theme: Exodus 15:11–13 declared that no god compares with the Lord who leads His redeemed people in unfailing love to His holy dwelling, and John 10:11–18 presented Jesus as the good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep, knows them, and gathers one flock under one Shepherd.

Yahweh Is My Shepherd

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). The word printed in all capitals as "LORD" is not God's personal name. It is a title the translators substituted for the most holy name, Yahweh—"I Am." God never said His name is Jehovah. That name was created in the thirteenth century by a Spanish monk who combined the consonants of YHWH with the vowels of Adonai. It is a man-made nickname. God told Moses that His name forever is Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 3:13–15). When David says "the Lord is my shepherd," he is saying Yahweh Ra'ah—Yahweh is my Shepherd.

With Yahweh as Shepherd the sheep lack nothing. Throughout Israel's history it was the second person of the Godhead—the pre-incarnate Christ, the angel of the Lord—who engaged personally with His people. He led them as the pillar of cloud and fire, spoke with Moses, appeared to Joshua as captain of the Lord's host, and gave Gideon peace. Paul says Christ was the rock that followed them in the wilderness. The same Shepherd who guided Israel guides His people today.

Green Pastures and Quiet Waters

"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters" (Psalm 23:2). Sheep will not lie down until they are completely at peace and feel secure. It is the shepherd's responsibility to

produce that condition. Yahweh knows exactly how much His people can bear and will not push them beyond their limits. Jesus is Yahweh Shalom, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). When believers follow the instructions of Philippians 4, anxiety is replaced not only by the peace of God that surpasses understanding but by the God of that peace Himself. Then they can lie down and rest.

He Restores My Soul and Guides Me

“He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name’s sake” (Psalm 23:3). Jesus is Yahweh-Rapha, the healer and restorer. God’s word itself revives the soul (Psalm 119:50). He is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in every affliction so that we may comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3–5). His invitation remains the same as the promise given to Moses: “Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28; cf. Exodus 33:14).

He is also Yahweh Tsedeq—the Lord our righteousness—who guides His sheep in paths of righteousness. When we follow the Good Shepherd’s path, conform to His will, and are transformed into His image, we become little Christs, Christians. The King of righteousness shares His own righteousness with those who have none of their own.

As children of God we are His namesake. A namesake is a child purposely named after another family member to honor the lineage and preserve the heritage. Christ has no physical children, yet we are His spiritual offspring. Born of the Spirit through baptism, we bear His name. Our behavior either honors or profanes that name. Paths of righteousness are the way we live up to the great name of Christ, for His name’s sake.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death

“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” (Psalm 23:4).

The valley is not only poetry. It corresponds to the real canyon between Jerusalem and Jericho known as Wadi Qelt (Hebrew: Nahal Prat)—a desolate place of sheer cliffs, loose rock, and deep chasms. People who needed to disappear fled there: Elijah from Jezebel, David from Absalom, Zedekiah from Nebuchadnezzar. Tradition also places the traveler in the Good Samaritan parable on the same road. Each was in genuine fear for his life.

Jesus is the light that dawns on those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death (Matthew 4:12–16). He is the Good Shepherd who goes ahead, clearing the way with His rod and staff. He is Yahweh Shammah—“the Lord is there”—present at every moment. He is also Yahweh Nissi—“the Lord is my banner”—our victor. The same Shepherd who leads us through the valley will deliver us from the grave itself. “Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:54–55). Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

A Table in the Presence of Enemies

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows” (Psalm 23:5).

This is Yahweh Jireh—the Lord will provide. The provision is so abundant and so public that it is set before those who oppose us. In Egypt God made a clear distinction between His people and the Egyptians, showing the difference between false gods and the true God, between the common and the special, the profane and the holy. The Hebrew idea of “table” is a full spread, a feast. In this psalm the only guest is the child of God.

The image also looks forward to Judgment Day. Like the wedding feast and the separation of the sheep from the goats, a place at the table is reserved for those who respond to the invitation, who follow the Shepherd, and who obey the Son. Those who do not believe, who mock God, or who hate His children remain outside, watching Him care for His own.

Goodness, Mercy, and the House of the Lord Forever

“Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:6).

Goodness and mercy pursue the believer who walks in the light. The goal of the journey is heaven itself—the house of the Lord. On Mount Moriah Abraham saw a ram caught in a thicket and named the place “The Lord will provide” (Genesis 22:13–14). Centuries later the Lord provided His own Lamb. Our Shepherd became our Passover Lamb. When the Chief Shepherd appears, the faithful receive the unfading crown of glory (1 Peter 5:4).

The same Shepherd who led Israel through the sea with loving devotion will guide His redeemed people to His holy dwelling (Exodus 15:11–13). He leads the way and will not let one of His sheep slip away. With His staff He keeps us in line. God has given us His Spirit and His Word so that we can live lives that glorify Him. His Word and merciful grace teach us to say no to ungodliness and to prepare for the life that is to come.

Psalm 23 is a poem that has brought comfort even to those who do not yet believe. For those who belong to the Good Shepherd it is far more. It is the assurance that the One who knows our name, who walks with us through every valley, who prepares a table before our enemies, and who pursues us with goodness and mercy will bring us safely home to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

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Psalm 23 has comforted God's people for three thousand years. It is only six short verses, yet it assures us that the invisible God is near, watchful, and actively caring for us—even in the hardest seasons of life.

David begins, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." With Yahweh as our Shepherd we lack nothing essential. He makes us lie down in green pastures and leads us beside quiet waters. Sheep will not rest until they feel completely safe; our Shepherd knows exactly what unsettles us and provides the peace we need. He restores our souls when we are weary and guides us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. As those who bear Christ's name, our daily walk either honors or dishonors Him.

Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we need not fear, for He is with us. His rod and staff comfort us. Jesus is the light that shines in that darkness and the Good Shepherd who goes ahead of us, clearing the way. He is present at every moment and will one day give us victory even over the grave.

He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies and anoints us with overflowing blessing. Those who follow the Shepherd and obey the Son have a place at His feast; those who reject Him remain outside. Surely goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The same Shepherd who led Israel through the sea with loving devotion leads us still. He will not let one of His sheep slip away. Psalm 23 is not merely a poem of comfort for funerals; it is the daily assurance that our Good Shepherd knows us, walks with us through every valley, provides for us, and will bring us safely home.

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