

# Psalm 23 | Jesus the Shepherd

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*Knowing God Part 2*

*Spence Shelton, January 22, 2017*

## **Intro**

Ministry Team Rally Announcement – THIS SATURDAY!

Today we are continuing our series in the Psalms we are calling “Knowing God.” The idea behind this series like we said last week was that for many people their idea of God has been reduced down to a set of facts you know & rules you follow. God, especially for many who’ve been around church a long time, is just facts & rules. Yet the bible portrays God as a person who we can relate to. And so we said our goal for these four weeks in the Psalms is to help you move from just knowing about God to knowing God himself.

To that end, today we are going to open up perhaps the most familiar chapter of the bible. I want you to turn in your bibles to Psalm 23. Remember what we said last week, the Psalms are written as songs.

Psalm 23 in particular is so rich, so deep, that explaining it is kinda like trying to explain your first favorite music

album growing up. 1994 Cracked Rear View by Hootie and the Blowfish. My first real favorite album. I wore that thing out. Awesomeness on a CD. For some of you, a CD is something that looks like a DVD but only has music on it. They were really popular in this era called the 90s. Some of you are like...shoot son, if it ain’t on vinyl, it ain’t music. But I would never have to explain or defend Hootie. You just turn it on and let the awesomeness wash over you. And then one day he shows up alone with a cowboy hat with no word on what he did to the blowfish.

Psalm 23 is a lot like that record. In some sense, you should just read it over and over again and watch it come alive to you. That said, this carries a lot more significance than some album. So I hope by diving into it, God is going to awaken some of you to a new depth of what it means to really know him. I want you to listen to it; I’m going to make a few observations as we walk through it to help us understand it then I want to show you the truths and promises that are all over it.

And let me say out front I know how familiar this is to many of you. If you’ve been around church for a while you’ve got this cross-stitched on a throw pillow with a tree & a sheep drinking from a stream. I get it.

There is a reason it is so recognizable: It is powerful! Every single word in this Psalm heralds great truth for the follower of Christ. Henry Ward Beecher said of this Psalm:

“It has sung courage to the army of the disappointed. It has poured balm and consolation into the heart of the sick, of captives in dungeons, of widows in their grief, of orphans in their loneliness. Dying soldiers have died easier as it was read to them; ghastly hospitals have been illuminated; it has visited the prisoner, and broken his chains. It has made the dying Christian slave freer than his master...nor is its work done. It will go singing to your children and my children, and to their children, through all the generations of time.”<sup>1</sup>

This Psalm is so powerful because it describes a personal closeness to God unlike any other. It is often called the pastoral Psalm because in it you see how Jesus is your pastor. Like a shepherd is to sheep so he is to you. David who usually refers to God as a King talks about him like he is right with us. Walking with us and paints this incredible portrait of the soul-satisfying life with Christ. If you consider it, meditate on it, God will use it to move you into that space of really knowing him.

So we will humbly approach Psalm 23 together. I have to ask you to do something if you are familiar with this passage: I have to ask you to lock in. Cause some of ya’ll will be like “HEARD IT! Been there done that!” Coolio talked about it in gangsta’s paradise. I know it man! Isn’t there

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Ward Beecher in “Life Thoughts.” As cited in Charles Spurgeon’s *The Treasury of David* Vol 1 (Peabody, MA Henderson Publishers 2016) 356.

somewhere a little more fresh you can go in the bible!? I heard there is a story about a donkey talking in numbers. Let’s check that out.

Ok, nobody is thinking about the book of numbers but if you are tempted to check out because its familiar... you’ve never really gotten it. Because those who get what is in here could hear it every day and it never grow old.

What I’m going to do is walk through this Psalm verse by verse and make some observations about what the life of one who walks with God looks like. Then, I’m going to show you the rich gospel truths and promises for us in here.

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

This one verse is so packed we could stop here and easily have enough for the rest of today. Just real quick look at each statement like a little cause and effect. **Make sure to bold in yellow the bolded words in these next two highlights**

**[1] The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.** –The one who is infinite, who created the universe and gives life to everything...that is the Lord we are talking about. And David is saying this Lord is so close to him that he is a shepherd. The LORD God who rules with all authority is a shepherd? A stinky gets down in the muck with sheep Shepherd? That’s what David is saying. And by the way...whose shepherd is he? He is *MY* shepherd. David doesn’t say he is the “shepherd of the whole world” no he

says he is MY shepherd. Which is really personal. And that's where the rest of this Psalm goes. Personal. He is a shepherd to me. Watches over me. Cares for *me*. Come what may...he is MY shepherd. You see how personal David is describing his relationship with God?

And BECAUSE the Lord is his shepherd...

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

That is the greatest promise in scripture. Can you imagine if you were able to say that? Because the Lord is my shepherd there will never come a moment, there will never come a relationship, there will never come a job or an illness or anything where I will be lacking in any way. Sounds IMPOSSIBLE! How is this true? What he's means is "I will lack nothing." I may WISH for things, but I will not be in need of anything. That's the deep sufficiency of Jesus. Jesus says in Matthew 6.38 that if God clothes the lilies of the field & feeds the birds, how much more will he care for his own children! Physically yes, but in a deeper way as well. That need for approval...you find it in him. That need for forgiveness...you find it in him. That need for peace instead of anxiety...You find it in Jesus. That need to mean something to somebody so you aren't lonely anymore...Your shepherd will give you that. That good blessing you are asking him for that he hasn't given you yet...you don't *need* it. because you have HIM! This is what we mean when we talk about satisfaction of the soul. The gospel says your soul will be FULL. It will not lack for anything.

\* It's like the difference between going A La Carte vs. All inclusive. I can't stand A La Carte dinner because I'm a meat & 3 kind of guy and when you tell me I gotta pay separate for my green beans I'm like WHAT! I know that makes it good to you foodies. But there is nothing like an all-inclusive restaurant. Pay once & you are in. You know what I'm talking about...Golden Corral! You enter through those turnstiles...and you will lack nothing Pay once...get it ALL. Want 2 steaks? How bout endless prime rib every Thursday! You are thinking is he about to say the Lord is like Golden Corral because that's too far. NO I'm not going there. That steak is probably going to be like chewing a tire.

But the point is you lack NOTHING with him.

More coming on that. Listen as he keeps going:

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

Here's where David loses people sometimes. Especially guys that think of themselves as MEN's MEN. You feel like he's painting in watercolors while cupid strums a harp in the background. This isn't girly fru fru stuff guys. This is the countryside and David is country strong. And you need to get over yourself and lock into the image.

This one will mess with you. He **makes** you lie down. That means its happening one way or the other doesn't it? You can lie down or the shepherd can put you down. And here's the thing we are caught up in a metaphor here where we

are sheep & Jesus is the Shepherd. We are going to come back to what it means for us to be sheep but listen he makes you lie down in green pastures & leads you beside still waters.

The shepherd is providing for his sheep. Charles Spurgeon talked about the pastures as the word of God and the water as the Spirit of God. Maybe. But the point is to paint the picture of verse 1. You shall not want. What does a sheep need? *Don't look like a lot of sheep herders are in here today so don't act like you know.* They are animals. They need food, water, & protection. And the psalmist is saying Jesus is providing all of that! He is reinforcing you will never want for anything!

### [3] He restores my soul.

I love every single word of this sentence. He, not one of his angels...Jesus doesn't subcontract this out...but Jesus Christ himself...he. See how close he is to you? He intends to be closer than anyone else. He restores MY soul. When I'm in sin, I go to him and He redeems me. He brings me up out of the pit. When I am weak...he strengthens my soul. When I am depressed, he revives my soul. See Jesus got up out of the grave and because of that he can bring dead things to life again. And some of you are spiritually dead! You made it in here on life support and you are smiling but inside you are screaming GOD HELP ME! And right here he says I can restore your soul. I'm that powerful, and that close. Maybe you wouldn't say you are "dead" but you are on autopilot and Jesus says when you really know him he will bring LIFE to your soul.

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

Jesus, the shepherd, guides us down paths of righteousness. We don't just follow a set of rules. We follow a person who models righteousness for us. When you understand that, obedience to God's commands changes from religion to relationship. Because obedience becomes a pathway to walking with Christ. Which is where I want to be. And then sin becomes something I grieve because it separates me from my Lord who is there on the path of righteousness. You see that? This is relationship driven Christianity versus rule based religion. Rule-based religion says do all these things and then at the end of it God's blessings will be waiting for you at the end of the path. You in effect earn his blessings. But relationship driven Christianity says no, Jesus is right there with you. And you follow him because you love him. Because your ONLY hope for righteousness is him and, your only real desire is him. So if this path is the path Jesus is on I'm there because I just want to be where he is!

And why does Jesus lead us? For his name's sake. Not for yours. Not for mine, for his. Here it comes get ready: God is **NOT** first and foremost about you. GOD IS ABOUT GOD! He's about his glory. That's Gigantic for the way you relate to him. He's not your bro, he's not your butler who is going to grant your wishes...He's GOD and he is about himself! We are going to come back to this in a really big way in just a few minutes so I'm going to move on for a second.

[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.

As a shepherd, when David talks about walking through the valley of the shadow of death, that's a real place where sheep can be killed and so can their shepherd. But David says no I will walk. I will face the valley one day but I will not run I will walk through it. Everyone will. Some of you need to let this be your salvation today. You are walking through hell right now and you need to be able to say I'm not going to fear evil because YOU ARE WITH ME. You see that!? YOU ARE WITH ME! Your rod and your staff COMFORT ME. Comfort? You know what a shepherd's crook is? It's what the shepherd uses to grab dumb sheep that wander away. And the sheep might just be looking for a little food and have no idea its about to walk right off a cliff. And it will! Cause sheep are short sighted and led by hunger. And the shepherd Grabs that sheep with the rod and staff and RESCUES it. Sometimes he even wounds the sheep to keep it from wandering back into danger. These are discipline devices used to bring the sheep back in line! But they are a comfort because David knows the Shepherd only uses the rod to SAVE the sheep. To bring it back from danger!

How insanely good is this analogy? That's because God made it. So much better than Golden Corral. And some of you are feeling the discipline of God and you need to see it as God bringing you back to himself. Maybe it's a

relationship that was never about God's glory finally ending. And it's painful but God is using it to bring you back to him. Maybe you got caught cheating or cutting corners. Whatever it is that is hurting...your shepherd may be using that to wake you up and bring you back to himself.

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

This is the oddest verse right? Prepare a table before me while my enemies are around? The metaphor slightly changed to sound more like war than shepherding. And David was a man of war. He was chased by his enemies. Once by the king before him, once by an army of his own son. Even when he was surrounded and hiding out in caves...listen to how he talks about his relationship with God. In battle, soldiers do not eat a table meal when the enemy is around. They hunker down and eat MREs. Ever had one of those? It's a vacuum packed meal that will keep until the end of time. 3k calories and whatever you do don't chew the gum until you are ready. I prefer the one that is just called "Ham Slice." Cause I like ham. But they are quick, rushed meals-ready-to eat because you don't have time for a table meal when you are in battle.

But, what Jesus does is he says no even in the moment where you feel surrounded by enemies on all sides...I'm not just there, I'm giving you such peace that you can sit down with me and have a meal. You can relax. You can celebrate and still have joy.

Do you walk through life with that kind of rock solid inner peace? You parents of young kids who feel like you will never get a night sleep and exhaustion is your enemy...Jesus says, "Here, sit down at the table and eat. "Get strength from him. High Schooler who is being bullied or picked on or outcast by others Jesus says here, sit down and talk with the God of the universe who loves you, who knows you, and who will never leave your side. They can't touch what matters most and even in the darkest of your days...Jesus has got you. You are not just ok...you are good. You are full. And aside I want you to know that bully is only a bully because they don't have the love of Christ and they aren't experiencing love from others. As Dr. King so pointedly said "Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that." And the way you respond to hate with love may be what changes that bully forever.

Is that you? Maybe you don't have enemies by name but you most certainly have AN enemy. An enemy who according to 1 Peter 5 prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. That's what Satan does. He is out to destroy you. YET, God says you will have such peace with him you will feel like you can sit down to a meal. No hysteria, no "oh my life is out of control." No, peace & friendship with God even in the middle of war.

Here's what happens when you get to that point you are able to say verse 6.

[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.

Where David says, "follow" the actual best translation is to "pursue." The goodness and mercy of God stays right on the heels of the Christian. Charles Spurgeon in commenting on this verse said "in the dark days as well as the bright days, the days of fasting as well as the days of feasting, the dreary days of winter as well as the bright days of summer. Goodness supplies our needs, and mercy blots out our sins." If you have goodness and mercy...you will never lack for anything! Which is the Psalmists whole point in this Psalm. Follow the shepherd.

See this Psalm does such a rich job pointing forward to the gospel. And as people on this side of the cross Jesus tells us to read Psalm 23 through the lens of the cross. So I want to show you 3 gospel truths and 4 gospel promises about your relationship to God that are flowing out of Psalm 23.

### 3 Gospel Truths

**1. Jesus is not your advisor, he's your shepherd** – I know this one is easy to hear as the most predictable sermon point ever but don't let it pass by you. John 10:10-11 says

[10] The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. [11] I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Make no mistake Jesus is claiming that he is the shepherd of Psalm 23. He is the boss of the sheep. And the shepherd does not look at the sheep and say "I don't want to offend you, I just think it might be a good idea if you go this way. But it's up to you little sheep." NO! The Shepherd has authority over the sheep. He provides for the sheep, he protects the sheep even to the point of laying down his life for the sheep! And he commands the sheep. Do you understand Jesus has no desire to be a spiritual advisor for you to take or leave his advice? That's not the relationship. He's either your shepherd who is in charge or he is nothing to you. You pick. Which means you can't pick and choose which commands of his you follow. "I'm cool with being kind to poor people but stay out of my sex life Jesus!" "I agree we shouldn't murder but don't you dare touch my money. That's mine." Not how it works! It means you say yes he is Lord of all or not Lord at all. And the way you are able to say yes to him is because you see how good he is to the sheep!

The Gospel is that Jesus humbled himself to the point of death on a cross. Why? The Gospel message is that we were owed death. We ran from our shepherd and were facing certain death and the good shepherd stepped in between us and death and out of his love for us gave up his own life so that we might walk away unharmed. Free. The abundant life is life close to the good shepherd who...get this...designed the whole world to work. And greater life is

obedience to the way he wired the world to work! Leads me right into the next truth in this Psalm:

**2. You are a sheep & Sheep are dumb.** There are only two roles here! The shepherd and his sheep. And if Jesus is the shepherd...that means you are a sheep. Let's do a little interactive learning: "I am a sheep." "Sheep are dumb." "baaaaa." -

WHICH MEANS...you are not as smart as you think you are. You are not as enlightened as you think you are. Compared to the mind of God you are a sheep. You know what sheep do in a herd? They walk with their noses right at the ground looking at the next 8 inches in front of them. Usually following the rear end of the other sheep. If their friends fall off a cliff they are going right behind unless the shepherd intervenes so contrary to what you may believe...your shepherd knows more than you do. Application: He's in charge! You submit to him or not but those are the terms. He's not your advisor because you don't need advice. Advice can't save you. You need a shepherd who will walk with you. That's your only hope!

### **3. Your life is for His Glory<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> This point is inspired by a sermon preached by Matt Chandler during a revival service at Elevation Church here in Charlotte, NC. The sermon is only available on secondary YouTube channels. Chandler made much of this verse in Psalm 23 and the idea that "God is for God" is from him.



Remember when we paused in verse 3 and I told you we'd come back to it? Here is this little line that defines everything in this passage.

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

Listen to what this means: God is not first and foremost about YOU. God is about God. Now listen that is good news for you and I'll explain why in a second but the world and everything in it...it is about God and his glory. In fact if you will just read the bible you will see this little line in there so many times and it shows you what is at the forefront of God's agenda.

Isaiah 43.7 God says he created you FOR HIS GLORY. Psalm 19, which kills me we won't get to this series opens with "THE HEAVENS DECLARE THE GLORY OF GOD." Why did God make a giant universe? FOR HIS GLORY! Remember when Jesus resurrected Lazarus from the dead? Why did he do it? John 10 – For the Glory of God. John 12 Jesus is talking about how he is troubled about the hour to come and he says verse 27 shall I say father save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come...Father...Glorify your name!

**Ephesians 1:5-6**

**[5] he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,**

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Who got it from John Piper. Who got it from Jonathan Edwards. It's good to stand on the shoulders of faithful men.

**[6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.**

Ephesians 1.13 Paul finishes with that same phrase...to the praise of his glorious grace.

The point of the whole bible...and the point of YOUR LIFE...is to give glory to GOD! God is about GOD! Here's why that's good for you:

Most of your problems stem from you thinking the world is about you. Your blood pressure goes up in traffic because why? IVE GOT TO BE SOMEWHERE!!! I'm IMPORTANT! If your world is about you, you will always be frustrated and angry and on the road to disappointment. You'll battle fear and anxiety. But if the World is about God and his glory, you will be free! God wrecked me with this week as I listened to a sermon on Psalm 23 from another pastor who said If when I walk through the door to my house after work and I think its about me...I'll be quick tempered and I'll have a list of demands to be met. "WOMAN! I need food!" Good luck with that. Don't need a march to know that's a bad idea. And that wrecked me. Cause that is so often me. But if it's about God's glory...I'm free. Free to love, free to give myself to my family and free to die to my glory. Don't need my glory. My life is about God's glory, so I approach my wife who has been with those 4 kids and think how can I live as Christ to her? Cause its not about me! It's about God and his glory. Frees me from being a slave to work, from being a slave to approval of friends, from fear of failure, from fear of suffering. For those of you wounded by someone you'll



be able to let it go and give it to God. Because you now trust God with Justice and you now have no need for vengeance because vengeance is the Lord's. So you can let go of anger and bitterness. And that's how the Lord will restore your soul.

The beautiful truth tucked into this intimate relationship in Psalm 23...Jesus is your shepherd and you are his sheep and the whole thing is about him and not you.

Gospel Promises in Psalm 23

**1. The gospel promises you have everything you need in Christ**

That's not just a preaching line. "*You will not want*" or, as we said, you will not lack anything. Here's how the gospel makes good on that promise: God knows that your greatest need is to be restored to him. The gospel says you have a wicked heart that ran away from God and the payment for that rebellion is death. And so the wrath of God should be coming your way because justice would be you dying for your sin and spending eternity apart from God. You needed saving and God saw that need and made a way. And then listen...he didn't stop there. He's providing for you still. You may not get what you want, but he's giving you that which makes life worth it. See this is why a starving woman in sub-Saharan Africa can be richer than the Wall Street billionaire. Because "need" isn't about money or what it can buy, it's about the state of your soul and its relationship to God. Everything else you can handle if that need is met and

the gospel says God meets that need. In the darkest of days & the brightest of days, you have everything you need in Christ.

Some of you need to come to God for salvation today!

**2. The gospel promises God's presence is with you.**

Do you notice the progression of the pronouns in this Psalm? It starts with The Lord is my shepherd...HE makes me lie down and restores my soul. 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular...I think. But then verse 4 he shifts.

[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.

2<sup>nd</sup> person singular. This little subtle thing I think is the key to unlocking how you relate to God. See David goes from thinking about God to talking directly to him. And I think that's what knowing God is like. When you begin to relate to God the bible is this access point. You learn about his character his goodness and you just shift to talking to him. John 14 Jesus said when he left he would send another helper, the Spirit of God who would live IN US. Matthew 28 I will be "with you" always. That wasn't just sentimentality like "I'm with you." NO that is theology! If you are a Christian God himself walks with you. And has taken up residence with you.

Which means you can use the words of God to talk to him. He's listening! By God's grace I had a friend model this for

me this week. He said he was reading Psalm 145 that says, "Great is the Lord and most worth of praise, his greatness none can fathom." And then he prayed that I would be captivated by the greatness of God and that my family, especially my kids, would experience the love and goodness of God that is unmatched by anything in this world. He took the truths about God and began to claim them for me as a part of my relationship with God. He finished his email with "basically man I prayed that you would know God." And I was like...bro you have no idea how much I need that prayer answered. Cause I got us into this series called knowing God and I really want to know God myself so I can help others so great timing.

### **3. The gospel promises death is a shadow**

Last fall just a few weeks before thanksgiving I got a call that my younger cousin Caleb had died very tragically. I was asked to preach at the funeral, which was really hard. I read this passage over by the graveside because of this truth. I know this passage gets read in funerals because it talks about God being with us in death but do you get what the gospel does to death!? As I walk through the valley of the SHADOW of death. Not death itself. See because of what Christ did on the cross I will never experience the full force of death because it has been...according to the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 15...death has been swallowed up in victory. And Paul as he writes those words busts into song "O death where is your victory, Oh death where is your sting?"

See death came into the world as a penalty for sin and when Christ died for MY sin, he set me free from that penalty. So yes my body will breath its last breath but for Christians to live is Christ and to die is gain! So here is what death is like for the Christian. Think about standing on the side of the road and an 18-wheeler comes barreling down the right lane. You don't realize where you are and that you've wandered out into the lane and are about to be killed. At the last second someone jumps & pushes you out of the way. And when you are over on the side of the road the shadow of the truck moves over you as it goes by. That's what Jesus has done to death for the Christian. Taken the sting out of it. He stood in front of the truck so that you only ever had to face its shadow. And you can say with Paul...to live is Christ but to die is gain!

Why this is big: Our church is young, and I don't want to be a downer...but there will come a point where we will face death. Where our church will face tragedy. And it might be you or your family or someone in your community group. And you can't wait until that moment to decide if the Lord is your shepherd. Are you ready to trust him?

### **4. The gospel promises you fulfillment in this life**

I think that last verse is sometimes missed because this feels like an "after death" moment in the Psalm. But David is saying goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of this life! Again goodness supplies our needs and mercy forgives our sins. Just look at the ground we've covered today. In Christ, you will want for nothing, you will be led

spiritually...which is so desperately what some of you want. You've finally come to the surrender spot where you are waving the white flag because you've made a mess of your life. And you are like PLEASE somebody help me. I am my own worst enemy. And God is like YOUR SHEPHERD WILL LEAD YOU IN PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS! He restores you, redeems you, protects you, feeds you, cares for you, stays with you, provides goodness and mercy to you who so desperately needs it, and promises a seat at his table forever which gives you hope more powerful than anything else can give on this earth. Ya'll that is wealth. Are you experiencing that? See why we can't settle for a facts and rules God? Such a deep relationship with God is available. We can't settle.

Some of you are chasing the American dream hard right now and I am all about hard work. I'm all about putting yourself in good positions of influence, working hard and having a successful career. But if you let it, that career will become your joy. And you will give your time, your family or prospects for a family, I know you'll give your church life. We've got people listening to this podcast and calling it church because they've sacrificed church on the altar of job. Family is on that altar, meaningful friendships are on that altar, but it will not deliver the fulfillment you seek. But in Christ...you can be free! You can have a meaningful career for sure, but it doesn't have to own you or define you. And then listen, you'll be free to start trying to figure out how to leverage that career for his glory...which is what it was all about to begin with anyway.

We have a good friend in our church who is a really successful business owner and that's what he does. Because work doesn't define him, it has become an opportunity for God's glory! Incredible to see the impact that has had on his employees.

Closing