"Thanks to God"
November 22, 2026
Psalm 23

I. Introduction

Without a doubt, Psalm 23 is the most familiar psalm in the book of Psalms and may be the most familiar passage in the whole Bible. Because it is a psalm of comfort and hope, it is often read as part of a funeral service. But, since it focuses on what the Shepherd does for His flock **"all the days of my life"** and not just at death, this is actually a Psalm of Thanksgiving and for that reason, it seemed appropriate for the Sunday before Thanksgiving.

Some picture David writing this psalm as a young shepherd boy lying on his back in a pasture and pondering the things of God. But he probably wrote this psalm later in his life—perhaps during the rebellion of his son Absalom which is found in 2 Samuel 13-19. Looking back, David would have remembered some of the rewarding times and some of the difficult things he experienced during his long walk with the Lord first as a shepherd of sheep and later as a shepherd of people when he was King of Israel. While believers and nonbelievers both love and quote this psalm, its message is really for those who are part of God's flock. This is a Psalm of Thanksgiving for God's sheep, for Christians who, as they go through life, must fight battles and carry burdens. David reminds us that we are not alone.

For many, Thanksgiving is a time to consider all the things for which one can be thankful—some make lists of things for which they are thankful. If we were to make such a list, it would probably include major things like life, health, family, friends, and, despite its flaws, the nation we live in. But we must not overlook the greatest reason for giving thanks—God's love and care for us—which sometimes we see but many times are unseen. In Psalm 23 David listed the various places where God was with him and is with us. He listed the things for which one needs to be thankful. David began by writing about how God cares for His sheep when they are away from the fold—when they are out in the field and in the pasture.

II. The Field

A. In the Pasture When the flock is outside in the pasture, David wrote that the Lord—not an angel or some special person but the Almighty Jehovah God—the Creator of the universe is personally watching over and caring for His sheep. The 1st verse of Psalm 23 really should be translated: *"Yahweh, i.e., the God of Israel, is my shepherd.*" The Almighty God is our Shepherd as well; He is continually watching over and caring for those who belong to Him. In Deuteronomy 31:6, Moses wrote, **"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."** In John 10:11, Jesus called Himself **"the Good Shepherd."** In Hebrews 13:20 Jesus is called **"that great Shepherd of the sheep."** As the children of God, Christians don't go through anything on their own—God is always there with them as their Shepherd.

But God isn't watching like a spectator at a football game, He is intimately involved—in Matthew 28:20, Jesus, the Good Shepherd, said, **"Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** Since the omnipotent God is with us, David wrote that we **"shall not want."** Psalm 34:9 says, **"Fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing."** Philippians 4:19 says**, "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."** As the Creator, God is more than able to provide all of the needs of those who belong to Him—His sheep—us. The Good Shepherd knows that we need food, water, and rest. Our Shepherd, our Savior, knows what we need and supplies those needs. That's why we can pray, **"Give us this day our daily bread"** (Matthew 6:11).

"Green pastures" would be good places to lie down and rest—a place of comfort. But sheep will not lie down when they are hungry, so the Good Shepherd first leads His sheep to green pastures to feed them. God can and will supply the basic necessities of food and, after they are full, the Good Shepherd will lead His sheep to a place of rest.

"Beside the still waters" may be a soothing place to rest—the sound of quietly rippling water does have a soothing effect on many. But, more importantly, sheep are afraid to drink from a flowing stream. They know instinctively that with all their wool; this is dangerous for them. "*Still waters*" or "*quiet waters*"

means that the shepherd will have—or even make, if necessary—a place where sheep can drink in safety until they are satisfied. These first verses remind us that the Shepherd—God—supplies the basic necessities of life—food and water and rest—so that our physical and spiritual strength is restored or renewed. For such things we should give thanks.

In verse 3, David wrote that the shepherd **"leads"** or **"guides"** in the path of righteousness. Turn to John 10:2-4. The ever-present Shepherd is in the front leading His sheep—choosing the good paths and rejecting the bad. By being in front—if there is any danger, He will see it first.

For sheep, the difference between the right path and the wrong path can mean the difference between life and death. The right path means safety, shelter, and protection. The wrong path means being separated from the shepherd and from the rest of the flock. If a sheep goes off on the wrong path, it may become lost or even be attacked by predators or robbers. For this reason, if one of his sheep does go astray on the wrong path, a good shepherd will leave the flock in charge of his helpers and go search for the lost one. Turn to Matthew 18:12-14.

The Good Shepherd, the Lord, cares for His sheep in the same way because He loves them and, as the God of love, it is His nature to provide safety as well as the fundamental necessities of life. Because He loves them, God not only supplies their basic needs, but He is also Guide and Protector. In John 16:13 Jesus said, **"When he, the Spirit of truth i.e. the Holy Spirit, comes, he will guide you into all truth."**

B. In the Valley When the sheep are outside the fold, they don't spend all their time in lush, safe pastures; sometimes they must go through valleys—ominous valleys—places of danger and perhaps even death. Thinking of the valley, David wrote that the Good Shepherd is beside those that belong to Him, leading them and, at the same time, calming them. As David showed by his change of pronoun from **"he"** to **"You,"** God is right there with us, caring for us. When the angel came to tell Joseph about the birth of Jesus in Matthew 1:23, he said that **"they will call him Immanuel—which means "God with us."**

David called those difficult situations that come into our lives that make us afraid—including death itself—the **"valley of the shadow of death."** But God is right there with us through it all. As God's

sheep—as His children—Philippians 4:7 says that there is no reason to be afraid; we can have **"the peace that transcends all understanding."**

In the valley the shepherd doesn't just stand around and watch what's happening, he is ready to protect his flock—he is carrying a **"rod and a staff"** both of which he is ready to use. He is ready to protect His sheep in every way possible. The rod was used as a club to defend the sheep from predators and thieves. The staff was used to guide the sheep—when necessary to prod them along or to hook them and pull them back to safety.

As we go through life, we, like sheep, have a variety of experiences. Our Good Shepherd is there with us in the hard times as well as the good. He is always ready to protect and defend us. In Psalm 34:7 David wrote, **"The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them."** Turn to Psalm 118:5-7. Some of the experiences that come into our lives are trying and difficult, they may suddenly appear and be beyond our control, but nothing takes the Lord by surprise or is beyond His control. In Revelation 1:17-18, Jesus said**, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."** Do not be afraid. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 3:5-6 that all a child of God needs to do is to **"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."** We need to thank God for His protection in times of trouble.

III. The Fold

Verse 5 says, **"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."** After being in the field for several days, the goal of the shepherd is to bring his flock safely back to the fold where the weary sheep can rest safely through the night. The fold was a place of safety and healing. As the sheep entered the fold, the shepherd examined each one for bruises or injuries. To the hurts, the shepherd would apply a soothing salve; He would also apply oil to the heads and horns and other areas to keep flies and other insects away. Once they are all in the fold, the shepherd would spread out food in a trough—a table, so to speak. Here, in the fold, the sheep can lie down and rest in

safety. While they eat and sleep, they will be protected by the stone walls of the fold that surround them. Often the shepherd himself would sleep across the entrance and be the door to the fold.

Robbers and dangerous animals may come near to the fold, but there is no way they can get to the sheep—the fold was a place of safety in the midst of enemies. Because of the food and water in the fold, because of the safety there, because of the individual attention given by the shepherd, the sheep would have all they need—they would be content—their cup would be filled with blessings.

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus knows that there are times when we need a respite from the cares and troubles of this world—a safe place—a haven of rest. There are times when He takes us away to a safe place where He can feed us and care for our needs—both physical and spiritual—a place safe from the attacks of sin and Satan. But to come to this place we must follow Him. Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."**

IV. The Future

After looking back at the protection the Good Shepherd had given in the field and in the fold, David looked to the future. As he considered the care of the Shepherd in the past, David knew beyond any shadow of doubt that in spite of his sins and his failures, in spite of the enemies that would try to harm him, the Shepherd would surely continue to care for him and love him in the days to come far into the future. Paul wrote about this in Romans. Turn to Romans 8:35-39. Nothing—absolutely nothing—past, present, or future can separate us from the Good Shepherd and His love and His care for His children.

As he looked even farther ahead to eternity, David knew that God's goodness and love would continue for ever and ever. **"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."** Similarly, Jesus said in John 14:1-3, **"Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also."** For this, too, we must give thanks.

V. The Finale

If Jesus Christ is your Savior and Lord, then He is your Good Shepherd, and David's words of comfort and thanksgiving are for you. There is so much for which we can thank God beginning with His sacrificial love—His agape love. As John 3:16 says, because of His love, God sent the Good Shepherd—Jesus Christ, His Son, to die for His sheep. We need to thank Him not only for His love but for the opportunity to become one of His children, one of His sheep.

Obviously, we need to thank God for supplying the necessities of life for us—both physical and spiritual. But we must also thank God for the difficult things He allows to come into our lives—as James 1:2 says, **"Consider it pure joy, my brothers when you face trials of many kinds."** Much as we may want to know, we will not understand the "*why*" of everything, but as a child of God—one of His sheep—we know that as we go **"through the Valley of the Shadow of death,"** God will be with us. And because of the love He has for us, we also **"know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"** (Romans 8:28). As James went on to write and as Paul wrote in Romans 5:1-5, the difficult things help us grow stronger in the Lord.

As we read earlier, Jesus said, **"I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** We don't have to go through the good or bad times on our own—in our own strength. We need to thank God for always being with us. In 1 Peter 5:7 Peter wrote, **"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."** If you let Him, if you just give them to Him, Jesus is ready and able to carry your burdens. Thank Him for carrying your burdens.

Finally, you can thank God that as one of His sheep, one of His children, you will spend eternity in heaven with Him where, as Revelation 7:16-17 says, **"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."** This is obviously an incomplete list, but I would challenge you to sometime in the next couple of days to take time to thank God for what He has done for you and will do for you in the future.