

PSALMS

Chapter 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. ² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶ Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Ps 23 A profession of joyful trust in the Lord as the good Shepherd-King. The psalm may have accompanied a festival of praise at “the house of the LORD” (v. 6) following a deliverance, such as is contemplated in 22:25–31 (see note on 7:17). The psalm can be divided into two balanced stanzas, each having four couplets (a couplet is one line of Hebrew poetry): (1) stanza one: vv. 1–2a, 2b–3a, 3b–c, 4a–c (v. 4a–b is metrically a half-couplet); (2) stanza two: vv. 5a–b, 5c–d, 6a–b, 6c–d. The triplet in the middle (v. 4d–f) is then a centering line (see note on 6:6), focusing on the Shepherd-King’s reassuring presence with his people. It serves as a transition between the two stanzas, concluding the shepherd-sheep motif of the first and introducing the direct address (“you”) of the second. The psalm is framed by the first and last couplets, each of which refers to “the LORD.” (CSB)

” (Luther: “A psalm of thanks in which a Christian heart praise and thanks God for teaching him and keeping him on the right way, comforting and protecting him in every danger through His holy Word PIML, p. 32). (TLSB)

David is here speaking in the name of all believers of all time. This is the meaning of “I” and the “my,” the use of the first person employed throughout the Psalm. (Stoekhardt)

Psalm 23 is a very well-known Psalm of comfort. It is intended to convey comfort to every believer of all times and under all conditions. The Psalm recalls to believers, in general, the mercy and loving kindness of God. This alone makes for comforting reading. When the Psalmist addresses these same truths to some individuals, as for instance, in Ps. 91, it strengthens the appeal of comfort. When, however, as in this Psalm, the individual believer is moved by his knowledge of God’s excellences to speak out himself, extolling his Lord’s most wonderful virtues, then comfort has really hit home. “The Lord is my Shepherd” is the outburst of a confident, consoled child of God. Here is a Psalm which is particularly welcome at the bedsides of a suffering believer. (Stoekhardt)

Though the psalms do not connect to one another in the same way as chapters of a book, the arrangement of the Book of Psalms places the plaintive cry of him who is forsaken to redeem his people (Ps 22:1) with the psalm that praises this same Lord as the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. The Shepherd is also the Lamb who is sacrificed. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

This is not the usual psalm of complaint followed by its resolution. This psalm presumes the complaint and focuses instead on the call to trust in him who is the Shepherd, or Pastor, of all things. In it we praise and thank God for his shepherding care. At the same time, this psalm has a corporate or social element; the gifts of God and his house are not the domain of me alone but of all those who call on his name. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

Psalm 23 is the introduction of a group of psalms (23-28) which share many common themes. All of them deal in some way with God's protective shepherding of his people. (PBC)

Why did David write the twenty-third Psalm? To build our trust in God... to remind us of who He is. God is Yahweh - an unchanging God, an uncaused God, and an ungoverned God. (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

When Lloyd Douglas, author of *The Robe* and other novels, attended college, he lived in a boardinghouse. A retired, wheelchair-bound music professor resided on the first floor. Each morning Douglas would stick his head in the door of the teacher's apartment and ask the same question. "Well, what's the good news?" The old man would pick up his tuning fork, tap it on the side of the side of the wheelchair and say, "That's middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow, it will be middle C a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs sings flat. The piano across the hall is out of tune, but my friend that is middle C" (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

You and I need a middle C. Haven't you had enough change in your life? Relationships change. Health changes. The weather changes. But the Yahweh who ruled the earth last night is the same Yahweh who rules it today. Same convictions. Same plan, Same mood. Same love. He never changes. You can no more alter God than a pebble can the rhythm of the Pacific. Yahweh is our middle C. A still point in a turning world. Don't we need a still point? Don't we need an unchanging shepherd? (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

We equally need an uncaused shepherd. No one breathed life into Yahweh. No one sired Him. No one gave birth to Him. No one caused Him. No act brought him forth. (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

Though He creates, God was never created. Though He makes, He was never made. Though He causes, He was never caused. Hence the psalmist's

proclamation: "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (Ps. 90:2). (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

God - our Shepherd - doesn't check the weather; He makes it. He doesn't defy gravity; He created it. He isn't affected by health, He has no body. Jesus said, "God is spirit" (John 4:24). Since He has no body, He has no limitation - equally active in Cambodia as He is in Connecticut. "Where can I go to get away from your Spirit?" asked David. "Where can I run from you? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I lie down in the grave, you are there" (Ps. 139:7-8). (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

Since no act brought Him forth, no act can take Him out. Does He fear an earthquake? Does He tremble at a tornado? Hardly, Yahweh sleeps through storms and calms the winds with a word. Cancer does not trouble Him and cemeteries do not disturb Him. He was here before they came. He'll be here after they are gone. (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

You don't need to carry the burden of a lesser god... a god on shelf, a god in a box, or a god in a bottle. No, you need a God who can place 100 billion stars in our galaxy and 100 billion galaxies in the universe. You need a God who can shape two fists of flesh into 75 to 100 billion nerve cells, each with as many as 10,000 connections to other nerve cells, place it in a skull, and call it a brain. (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

23:1 THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

First of all the prophet, and every believing heart, calls God his Shepherd. Scripture gives God many friendly names; but especially dear and charming is the one that the prophet gives God here in calling Him a Shepherd and saying, "The Lord is my Shepherd." It is most comforting when Scripture calls God our Refuge, our Strength, our Rock, our Fortress, Shield, Hope, our Comfort, Savior, King, etc. For by His actions and without ceasing He truly demonstrates in His people that He is exactly as Scripture portrays Him. It is exceedingly comforting to know, however, that here and in other places in Scripture He is frequently called a Shepherd. For in this single little word "shepherd" there are gathered together in one almost all the good and comforting things that we praise in God. (Luther)

Therefore this metaphor is one of the most beautiful and comforting and yet most common of all in Scripture, when it compares His Divine Majesty to a pious, faithful, or as Christ says, "good shepherd" (John 10:14), and compares us poor, weak, miserable sinners to sheep. One can, however, understand this comforting and beautiful picture best when one goes to nature, from which the Prophets have taken this picture and similar ones, and carefully learns from it the traits and characteristics of a natural sheep and the office, the work, and the care of a

pious shepherd. Whoever does this carefully, will not only readily understand this comparison and others in Scripture concerning the shepherd and the sheep, but will also find the comparisons exceedingly sweet and comforting. (Luther)

A sheep must live entirely by its shepherd's help, protection, and care. As soon as it loses him, it is surrounded by all kinds of dangers and must perish, for it is quite unable to help itself. The reason? It is a poor, weak, simple little beast that can neither feed nor rule itself, nor find the right way, nor protect itself against any kind of danger or misfortune. Moreover, it is by nature timid, shy, and likely to go astray. When it does go a bit astray and leaves its shepherd, it is unable to find its way back to him; indeed, it merely runs farther away from him. Though it may find other shepherds and sheep, that does not help it, for it does not know the voices of strange shepherds. Therefore it flees them and strays about until the wolf seizes it or it perishes some other way. (Luther)

Still, however weak and small an animal a sheep may be, it nevertheless has this trait about it: it is very careful to stay near its shepherd, take comfort in his help and protection, and follow him however and wherever he may lead it. And if it can only so much as be near him, it worries about nothing, fears no one, and is secure and happy; for it lacks absolutely nothing. It also has this virtue—and this is to be marked well, because Christ praises it especially in His sheep (John 10:4)—that it very carefully and surely hears and knows its shepherd's voice, is guided by it, does not let itself be turned away from it, but follows it without swerving. On the other hand, it pays no attention at all to the voices of strange shepherds. Though they may tempt and lure it in the most friendly manner, it does not heed them, much less does it follow them. (Luther)

It is the function of a faithful shepherd not only to supply his sheep with good pasture and other related things, but also to keep them from suffering harm. Moreover, he takes good care not to lose any of them. But if one of them should go astray, he goes after it, seeks it, and returns it (Luke 15:4). He looks after the young, the weak and the sick very carefully, waits on them, lifts them up and carries them in his arms (Is. 40:11) until they are grown and are strong and well. (Luther)

Just so it is in spiritual shepherding, that is, in Christendom. As little as a natural sheep can feed, direct, guide itself, or guard and protect itself against danger and misfortune—for it is a weak and quite defenseless little animal—just so little can we poor, weak, miserable people feed and guide ourselves spiritually, walk and remain on the right path, or by our own power protect ourselves against all evil and gain help and comfort for ourselves in anxiety and distress. (Luther)

Let us therefore conclude freely: as little as a natural sheep can help itself in even the slightest degree but must simply depend on its shepherd for all benefits, just so little—and much less—can a man govern himself and find comfort, help, and counsel in himself in the things that pertain to his salvation. He must depend

on God, his Shepherd, for all of that. And God is a thousand times more willing and ready to do everything that is to be done for His sheep than is any faithful human shepherd. (Luther)

The voice of this Shepherd, however, with which He speaks to His sheep and calls them, is the Holy Gospel. It teaches us how we may win grace, forgiveness of sins, and eternal salvation: not by the Law of Moses, which makes us even more shy, unstable, and discouraged, though even in times past we were excessively timid, shy, and frightened; but by Christ, who is “the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls” (1 Peter 2:25). For Christ has sought us miserable, lost sheep and has brought us back from the wilderness. That is, He has redeemed us from the Law, sin, death, the power of the devil, and eternal damnation. By giving His life for us He has obtained for us grace, forgiveness of sin, comfort, help, strength, and eternal life against the devil and all misfortune. To the sheep of Christ this is a dear, sweet voice. They are sincerely glad to hear it, for they know it well and let themselves be guided by it. But a strange voice they neither know nor hear, because it sounds unfamiliar; they avoid it and flee from it (John 10:5). (Luther)

THE LORD – The great name of God, Yahweh, is used most appropriately, for this name always connotes God’s absolute faithfulness to his people. (Leupold)

This is the confession of a believer. He declares what he has experienced. The speaker address “the Lord (Jehovah), the covenant God who has promised salvation, the God of grace and mercy. Luther set this superscription to the Psalm: “Of Christ the Good Shepherd.” The name Jehovah in the OT is applied, not only to Christ, but also to the Father. In fact, often the name Jehovah is used of God in general, without requiring us to think of a certain Person of the Godhead. At all times the mention of this name would lead believers to think of God as their only source of grace and salvation. (Stoeckhardt)

This is the personal and covenant name of God, emphasizing his role as Israel’s redeemer and covenant Lord. (CSB Gen. 2:4)

Jews out of reverence read “adonai” as a substitute so as to misuse the name “Yahweh.” (Concordia Bible Dictionary)

He was directly responsible for the creation of all things, both natural and supernatural. (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

Looking up at the star-studded sky I remember that at least 250,000,000 x 250,000,000 such bodies – each larger than our sun, one of the smallest stars, have been scattered across the vast spaces of the universe by His hand. I recall that the planet earth, which is my temporary home for a few short years, is so minute a speck of matter in space that if it were possible to transport our most

powerful telescope to our nearest neighbor star, Alpha Centauri, and look back this way, the earth could not be seen, even with the aid of that powerful instrument. All this is a bit humbling. It drains the “ego” from a man and puts things in proper perspective. It makes me see myself as a mere mite of material in an enormous universe. Yet the staggering fact remains that Christ the Creator of such an enormous universe of overwhelming magnitude, deigns to call Himself my Shepherd and invites me to consider myself His sheep – His special object of affection and attention. Who better could care for me? (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

²⁵ “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. (Isaiah 40:25-26)

⁴ He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. ⁵ Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit. (Psalm 139:4-5)

Portals of Prayer October 10, 2000.. Amazing, isn't it! According to the World Book Encyclopedia, “with large telescopes astronomers can photograph over thirty billion stars. And we think there must be billions more beyond the reach of our most telescopes.” How great is the omniscience of our God to number and give names to countless stars in distant galaxies of His created universe. Such wonderful truth, however, reminds us of something much more wonderful. Our gracious Lord proclaims, “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are Mine” (Isaiah 43:1). Your name and mine are known to this living, ever present God – right now. This may frighten some who live in unbelief and without the truth of the Gospel. For us, however, who know Him as the triune God, who has redeemed us from sin, death and the power of the devil by the precious blood of His Son, it is a great comfort day after day, especially in the of our death. With David we say in faith, “O Lord, You have searched me and You know me...You are familiar with all my ways...Such knowledge is too wonderful for me” (Psalm 139:1-6).

A few other powerful images of God: ¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. ¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. ¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens? Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket, or weighed the mountains on the scales and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed him as his counselor? ¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him, and who taught him the right way? Who was it that taught him knowledge or showed him the path of understanding? ¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine

dust. ¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires, nor its animals enough for burnt offerings. ¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing; they are regarded by him as worthless and less than nothing. ¹⁸ To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? ¹⁹ As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it. ²⁰ A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. ²¹ Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? ²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a canopy, and spreads them out like a tent to live in. ²³ He brings princes to naught and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing. ²⁴ No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground, than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. (Isaiah 40:10-24)

Luther: "It is most comforting when Scripture calls God our Refuge, our Strength, our Rock, our Fortress, Shield, Hope, our Comfort, Savior, King, etc... It is exceedingly comforting to know, however, that here and in other places in Scripture he is frequently called a Shepherd. For in this single little word 'shepherd' there are gathered together in one almost all the good and comforting things that we praise in God. The prophet therefore uses these words with a happy, secure heart - a heart that is filled with faith and overflows with great joy and comfort. He does not say, 'The Lord is my Strength, Fortress,' etc., which would also be very comforting, but 'my Shepherd'; as though he would say: 'If the Lord is my Shepherd and I am his sheep, then I am very well supplied both in body and soul. He will feed me well, protect and preserve me from misfortune, care for me, help me out of all troubles, comfort me, and strengthen me. In short, he will do for me what a good shepherd can be expected to do'" (LW 12:152).

"The LORD." The Shepherd of this psalm is no hireling or agent but Yahweh himself, who promised to become the Shepherd of his people (Ezek 34:11–16). The one who has this Shepherd has all things and lacks for nothing—not for the surprisingly verdant green of an oasis nor the still, deep waters that refresh. Even more, this Shepherd shields against all fears of death and evil by his everlasting presence and power. His staff speaks fear to the enemies of the sheep but comfort to those who welcome his protection and even his discipline. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

Yahweh, used most appropriately, for this name always connotes God's absolute faithfulness to His people. (Leupold)

The Israelites considered the name too holy to be spoken by human lips. Whenever they needed to say Yahweh, they substituted the word Adonai, which means "Lord," If the name needed to be written, the scribes would take a bath before they wrote it and destroy the pen afterward. (Life/Light)

LORD-SHEPHERD – This immediately implies a profound yet practical working relationship between a human being and his maker. It links a lump of common clay to divine destiny – it means a mere mortal becomes the cherished object of divine diligence. This thought alone should stir my spirit, quicken my own sense of awareness, and lend enormous dignity to myself as an individual. To think that God in Christ is deeply concerned about me as a particular person immediately gives great purpose and enormous meaning to my short sojourn upon this planet. (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

shepherd. A widely used metaphor for kings in the ancient Near East, and also in Israel (see 78:71–72; 2Sa 5:2; Isa 44:28; Jer 3:15; 23:1–4; Mic 5:4). For the Lord as the shepherd of Israel see 28:9; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Ge 48:15; Isa 40:11; Jer 17:16; 31:10; 50:19; Eze 34:11–16. Here David the king acknowledges that the Lord is his Shepherd-King. For Jesus as the shepherd of his people see Jn 10:11, 14; Heb 13:20; 1Pe 5:4; Rev 7:17. (CSB)

Jehovah is the Shepherd. The believer says He is “my shepherd.” He speaks out of a deep personal experience. In other places in Scripture Jehovah is also figuratively presented as a Shepherd. In Genesis 48:50 Jacob declares that God all through life has tended and cared for him as a Shepherd. In Genesis 49:24 Jacob expresses the wish to his beloved son, Joseph, that he might be filled with the abundance of the blessings of the Shepherd of Israel. In Psalm 80:1 the God of Israel is addressed in this way: “Give ear, O Shepherd, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock.” In Psalm 95:7 the people who consider themselves the handiwork of God, declare of their God: “For He is our God; and we are the people of His pasture, and sheep of His hand.” They mean to say, God guides and provides for us like a Shepherd. (Stoeckhardt)

The term “Shepherd” is also used in the OT as a specific description for the Messiah. In Micah 7:14 God charges the Messiah, “Feed Thy people with Thy rod, the flock of Thine heritage, which dwells solitarily in the wood, in the midst of Carmel: let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, was in the day of old.” In Ezekiel 34:11 the Lord, who comes from heaven, says: “For this saith the Lord God: “Behold, I, even I will both search my sheep and seek them out” “As a shepherd seeketh out his flock,” etc. In Zech. 11:12 the Prophet prophesies that the good Shepherd is smitten and the flock is scattered abroad. In Luke 15:3 Christ compares Himself to a shepherd who seeks the lost sheep. In John 10:12 Jesus declares: “I am the good shepherd.” In 1 Peter 5:24 the Apostle calls Christ “the chief shepherd.” In 1 Peter 2:35 the same Apostle reminds Christians that they have been converted by Christ, the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls. Finally, in Hebrews 13:20 it is stated: Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect. (Stoeckhardt)

What would Scripture bring home to us by comparing God and Christ, the Messiah, to a shepherd. Israel and all true individual believers together are included in the use of the term flock. Thus every believer of all time is a sheep of God, is included in this Psalm and joins David in confessing: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Luther says of this: “In this little word “Shepherd,” there are gathered together in one all the good and comforting things that we praise in God.” The point of comparison really lies in this: While the sheep recognize the Shepherd as their Shepherd, the Shepherd regards these sheep as entirely His own. Therefore the owner relationship between Christ and His believers is here taught and emphasized. The Lord claims believers as all His own, while believers look up to their Lord as their own. In His discourse, when He speaks about the intimate relationship between Himself and His believers, Jesus says: I am the Good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine.” Jesus thus here recognizes believers as truly belonging to Him. In this sense He refers to them as “My sheep,” while at the same time He asserts of them, “and am known of Mine.” (Stoeckhardt)

This was a common term describing kings in the Near Eastern culture. As a shepherd cares for all the needs of his flock, God cares for every human need: physical, emotional, and spiritual. (TLSB)

Everyone needs a friend to guide and to help at some time in life. Even the most cheerful life has its dark times. As God’s people, we celebrate the fact that we have a friend, a shepherd, like no other. (Life/Light)

Of all God’s animals, the sheep is the least able to take care of himself. Sheep are dumb, and defenseless. What’s more, sheep are dirty. (Traveling Light - Max Lucado)

When David says this he is proudly implying that he (David) is his sheep. (Safe in the Shepherd’s Arms - Max Lucado)

Those who have Jehovah to protect and provide for them will not want any good thing. He will guide them by His counsel while on earth, and afterwards receive them to glory. (CB)

The day I bought them I also realized that this was but the first stage in a long, lasting endeavor in which from then on, I would as their owner, have to continually lay down my life for them, if they were to flourish and prosper. Sheep do not “just take care of themselves” as some might suppose. They require, more than any other class of livestock, endless attention and meticulous care. He literally lays Himself out for us continually. He is ever interceding for us; He is ever guiding us by His gracious Spirit; He is ever working on our behalf to ensure that we will benefit from His care. Romans 8:34 says it well, “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at

the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.” (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

JESUS THE GOOD SHEPHERD – John 10:11-18, ¹¹ “*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.* ¹² *The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it.* ¹³ *The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.* ¹⁴ “*I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—* ¹⁵ *just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.* ¹⁶ *I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.* ¹⁷ *The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again.* ¹⁸ *No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*

10:11 GOOD SHEPHERD – kalos - good, that is, valuable or virtuous, good, or worthy. This indicates that this much better than the average “good shepherd.” The shepherd had to feed as well as protect the flock. That meant he had to travel some distance, especially in the hot summer. Each night he counted the sheep into an open fold and himself lay across the opening so become the “door of the sheep.” He had to watch for wild animals (lions in the OT). The title sums up so much: the close, personal relationship between himself and each of the sheep; the absolute security we have in him; his leadership and guidance; his constant company’ his unfailing care; and his sacrificial love. The whole life of a shepherd must be completely given over to meet the wants of the dependent, needy, hungry, foolish creatures that have been made his responsibility. Jesus held nothing back or looked out not for his own interests.

10:11 LAYS DOWN LIFE FOR SHEEP – A good shepherd set himself between the flock and potential problems. Danger of any kind can only reach them over his dead body. If it is necessary, he will die to save them. This Christ did for us.

10:14 KNOW MY SHEEP – A good shepherd has intimate knowledge of each of his flock. He knows then at a glance, their characteristics and idiosyncrasies.

10:14 MY SHEEP KNOW ME – A good shepherd opens himself up to his sheep so that they trust coming to him at any time or in any circumstance. He also teaches them about who he is and what they can expect.

10:15 JUST AS THE FATHER KNOWS ME AND I KNOW THE FATHER – This was the highest of all relationships. They were of one mind. They were not only “like one” but were “one.”

10:16 OTHER SHEEP – Samaritans and Gentile Christians.

10:16 BRING THEM ALSO – They don't find him, he finds them. Today we are a part of that bringing process.

10:17 LAY IT DOWN AND TAKE IT UP AGAIN – If he would have died and not risen his shepherd functions would have ceased. In retaking his life, he is able to continue, on perfectly different terms.

10:18 AUTHORITY – *ezousia* - force, capacity, competency, power, right, strength. – Same word as in Matthew 28:18. It means to have an ability to the extend that there are no hindrances in the way of accomplishing the task that needs to be done.

Each sheep-man has his own distinctive earmark which he cuts into one or other of the ears of his sheep. In this way, even at a distance, it easy to determine to whom the sheep belongs. When a slave in any Hebrew household chose, of his own freewill, to become a life-time member of that home, he was subjected to a certain ritual. His master and owner would take him to his door, put his ear lobe against the door post and with an awl puncture a hole though the ear. From then on he was a man marked for life as belonging to that house. (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

At our baptism the pastor made the sign of the cross on our forehead and on our heart. With that Jesus came into our lives and we were marked for Him. As we are nurtured through Word and sacraments that mark becomes indelible. The Scriptures speak of being sealed by God or having His seal on them. ¹³“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1:13-14) “Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.” (Revelation 14:1)

not be in want. On the contrary, he will enjoy “goodness” all his life (v. 6). (CSB)

This does not mean that he has no desires, rather, all of needs will be met. A proper host supplies the basics: food, drink, and protection. John Chrysostem: “This is great wealth, this is treasure. If we have the fear of God, we want nothing; if we have not this, though we have royalty itself, we are the poorest of all men” (NPNF1 13:197). (TLSB)

In just what way the Lord proves Himself a shepherd to His believers is indicated by the second statement in verse 1: “I shall not want, (lo echsar). The obvious meaning in this connection is, Since the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall have abundance and lack nothing that is good. The Lord as my Shepherd will supply

all my needs. The specific benefits which the Lord supplies are then enunciated in the words which follow. (Stoeckhardt)

Thus the prophet speaks, in a general way, of the various kinds of bodily and spiritual blessings that we receive through the office of preaching. It is as though he would say: "If the Lord is my Shepherd, then of course I shall not want. I shall have an abundance of meat, drink, clothing, food, protection, peace, and of all the necessities that pertain to the preservation of this life. For I have a rich Shepherd who will not let me suffer want." Chiefly, however, he speaks of the spiritual possessions and gifts that God's Word provides and says: "Because the Lord has taken me into His flock and provides me with His pasture and care, that is, because He has richly given me His holy Word, He will not let me want anywhere. He will bless His Word so that it may be effective and bring forth fruit in me. He will also give me His Spirit, who will assist and comfort me in all temptations and distresses and will also make my heart safe and sure. My heart, therefore, will not doubt that I am my Lord's dear sheep and that He is my faithful Shepherd. He will treat me gently as His poor, weak sheep. He will strengthen my faith and provide me with other spiritual gifts; comfort me in all my troubles; hear me when I call upon Him; keep the wolf, that is, the devil, from being able to do me harm; and finally redeem me from all misfortune." This is what the psalmist has in mind when he says, "I shall not want." (Luther)

If you do, then firmly believe that you are Christ's sheep and that He is your Shepherd, who knows you well and is also able to call you by your name. But when you have Him as your Shepherd, you will surely not want. Yes, you already have what you shall have—eternal life. Nor will you ever perish. Nor shall any power be so great and mighty that it could snatch you out of His hand. Of that you can be sure. For this Shepherds voice will surely not lead you astray. What more could you want? (Luther)

And He will keep this promise, no matter what happens to me. If because of my weakness some sin or other fault by chance is still found in me, He will not reject me on that account. For He is a friendly Shepherd, who watches over the weak sheep, binds up their wounds, and heals them. And so that I may be all the more sure and not doubt, He has given me, as a token, His holy Sacraments." (Luther)

Just so it was with the prophet. He was not always happy, nor was he at all times able to sing, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." At times he wanted much, almost too much. He would feel neither justice nor God's comfort and help, but only sin, God's wrath, terror, doubt, and the fear of hell, as he laments in many psalms. Nevertheless he abandons his feelings and holds God to His promise of a coming Messiah and thinks: "Be it with me as it may. This is still the comfort of my heart, that I have a gracious, merciful Lord, who is my Shepherd, whose Word and promise strengthen and comfort me. Therefore I shall not want." For this reason also he wrote this psalm and others, that we might be sure that in real temptation we can find counsel and comfort nowhere else, and that

this alone is the golden art: to cling to God's Word and promise, to make judgments on the basis of this Word and not on the basis of the feelings of the heart. Then help and comfort will surely follow, and absolutely nothing will be wanting. The second verse follows. (Luther)

The experience of Israel in the exodus is hinted at in the psalm. Israel lacked nothing in the wilderness, was brought into the rich green pasture of the land of promise, and was provided food and water for the journey. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

What you have in your Shepherd is greater than what you don't have in life. You and I can pray like the Puritan. He sat down to a meal of bread and water. He bowed his head and declared, "All this and Jesus too?" (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

The prison of want. You have seen her prisoners. They are "in want." They want something. They want something bigger, nicer, faster, and thinner. They want. (Traveling Light - Max Lucado)

When John D. Rockefeller was asked how much money would be enough, he replied, "A little more."

He provides everything we need. (LL)

I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still preserves them; also clothing and shoes, meat and drink, house and home, wife and children, fields, cattle, and all that I need to support this body and life; that He defends me against all danger, and guards and protects me from all evil; and all this purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me; for all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him. This is most certainly true. (1st Article)

I don't need a thing. (Message)

This is the sentiment of a sheep utterly satisfied with its owner, perfectly content with its lot in life. The main concept is that of not lacking anything – not deficient. The second emphasis is the idea of being utterly contented in the Good Shepherd's care and consequently not craving or desiring anything more. David is not referring to material or physical poverty when he made the statement. He means I shall not lack the expert care and management of my Master. Not even at night is he oblivious to their needs. He sleeps as it were "with one eye and both ears open" ready at the least sign of trouble to leap up and protect his own. Actually Psalm 121:3-4 says, "he who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber or sleep." (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

When one of the wealthiest men in history, John D. Rockefeller, died, his accountant was asked, "How much did John D leave?" The accountant's reply? "All of it." (Traveling Light - Max Lucado)

It's said that when Alexander the Great lay on his deathbed he commanded that contrary to the usual custom his hands not be wrapped. He wanted everyone to see his empty hands as he was carried to his grave. And so in death the great conqueror and king of nations was on equal terms with the poorest beggar. (PBC)

A short-term missionary met a lady with leprosy. On the final day, he was leading worship in a leper colony. He asked if anyone had a favorite song. When he did, the woman with leprosy turned around, and he saw the most disfigured face he'd even seen. She had no ears and no nose. Her lips were gone. But she raised a fingerless hand and asked, "Could we sing 'Count Your Many Blessings'?" (Traveling Light - Max Lucado)

1 Timothy 6:6-10 6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. [7](#)For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. [8](#)If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. [9](#)But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. [10](#)For the love of money is a root of kinds of evil.

23:2 *lie down*. For flocks lying down in contented and secure rest see Isa 14:30; 17:2; Jer 33:12; Eze 34:14–15; Zep 2:7; 3:13. (CSB)

יָרַבַּץ *rāḇaṣ*: A verb meaning to lie down, to rest; to lay something down. It is used figuratively of sin lying, crouching at the door (Gen_4:7); and it is used figuratively of a curse resting on a person (Deu_29:20 [19]). It refers to animals lying down, domestic or wild (Gen_49:9; Exo_23:5). It describes birds sitting on their eggs (Deu_22:6). It describes persons lying down in rest, reposing (Job_11:19; Isa_14:30); in security and safety (Eze_34:14). **It means in its causative stem to lay, to set stones (Isa_54:11); to cause one's flock to lie down to rest (Son_1:7).**

LHM – 8/29/16

Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it He rested from all the work of creating that he had done. Genesis 2:3

"I'm not tired."

Every parent has heard those words as their child slips into a much-needed slumber. Children seem to fight sleep, even though it's good for them. I suppose they are afraid they will miss something. By the time we become

adults, a nap sounds great -- just some rest. But the cares of this life are pressing. The concerns of work and family and medical needs will not wait for us to catch up on our sleep. And so we walk around knowing that we are tired, but also comprehending the reality that rest will simply have to wait.

Yet, in the *Small Catechism* Luther says something that has always stuck in my mind. After teaching believers to nightly say the Creeds, the Lord's Prayer, and a final evening prayer, he said, no matter what happened that day, "Then go to sleep at once and in good cheer."

Yes, get some rest!

You are probably saying, like me, "I wish I could." Well, you can! Just think about rest for a moment. It's even deeper, more revitalizing than mere refreshment from our exhaustion.

Genesis 2 says on the seventh day, God rested. We know how the creation story goes. After six days of creating, God rested on the seventh. But He wasn't tired. God wasn't worn out from the work of creating. God rested because the creation was complete as it should be. God rested because the goal of the creation week was achieved. It was good. Things were in harmony; everything was as it should be: at rest.

What if God's goal for your life is rest? Peace? What if the point of this life is that kind of rest with Him?

First, we need to realize our rest deprivation doesn't just come from the fast pace of our modern world or the items on our to-do lists that never seem to end. Our rest deprivation comes from our sin -- *our brokenness* -- our lives in an ever rebelliousness with the God who created us, redeemed us, the One who is the only true Source of refreshment and rest!

When Luther says to pray and "Then go to sleep at once and in good cheer," it wasn't that he didn't have a care in the world, at that moment. He had a lot of issues running through his mind. He was constantly in the middle of community and church squabbles and problems, often as the judge of an issue, or the one who was called upon to solve very real problems in people's lives.

No, he had some restless nights to be sure, but always in a restful, grace-filled confidence with the God who loved him and redeemed him.

If you need some rest today, the first place to start is with a clean conscience before God. And the way that can happen is to put your faith in the One who not only made all creation good, but the One who redeemed all creation from sin, death and the devil himself, on the cross of Calvary.

God the Father's goal in creation was rest. He had accomplished that goal in His Son Jesus. He gives that rest and peace to you. You might say it this way: Jesus is the Goal of creation. He is the Goal of the Scriptures. He is the Goal of our life. He is the Source of your needed rest, right now too.

So, after your prayers tonight, go to sleep at once and in good cheer; but if you find yourself struggling to sleep, then rest in the promise that whatever you are facing, Christ has already conquered it for you.

THE PRAYER: Dear Jesus, in my exhaustion -- an exhaustion that comes from a rat race kind of life or with worry I can't seem to overcome -- give me the rest and peace that comes from knowing that my life is ultimately secure in Your hands. You created me. You redeemed me, and You are with me. That's a recipe for rest, for sure. Amen.

For a natural sheep nothing can be better than when its shepherd feeds it in pleasant green pastures and near fresh water. Where that happens to it, it feels that no one on earth is richer and more blessed than it is. For it finds there whatever it might desire: fine, lush, heavy grass, from which it will grow strong and fat; fresh water, with which it can refresh and restore itself whenever it likes; and it has its joy and pleasure there, too. At this point David would also say that God had shown him no greater grace and blessing on earth than this, that he was permitted to be at a place and among people where God's Word and dwelling place and the right worship were to be found. Where these treasures are found, there things prosper well, both in the spiritual and in the secular realm. It is as if he were saying: "All people and kingdoms on earth are nothing. They may be richer, more powerful, and more splendid than we Jews, and they may also boast mightily of what they have. Moreover, they may glory in their wisdom and holiness, for they, too, have gods whom they serve. But with all their glory and splendor they are a mere desert and wilderness. For they have neither shepherd nor pasture, and therefore the sheep must go astray, famish, and perish. But though we are surrounded by many deserts, we can sit and rest here, safe and happy in Paradise and in a pleasant green pasture, where there is an abundance of grass and of fresh water and where we have our Shepherd near us, who feeds us, leads us to the watering place, and protects us. Therefore we cannot want." (Luther)

That man had spiritual eyes and therefore saw plainly what is the best and noblest thing on earth. He does not glory in his royal splendor and power, for he knows well that such possessions are gifts of God. He does not run away from them either and let them lie idle, but uses them to the glory of God and thanks God for them. Above all he glories in this, that the Lord is his Shepherd and that he is in His pasture and in His care, that is, that he has God's Word. This blessing he can never forget, but speaks about it very beautifully and with great joy, and praises it far above all possessions on earth, as he also does in many

other psalms. Thus he says (Ps. 119:72): “The word of Thy mouth is dearer to me than thousands of gold and silver pieces”; and also (Ps. 19:11): “It is more precious than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.” (Luther)

We, too, should learn this art, namely, to let the world glory forever in great riches, honor, and power. For these are indeed loose, uncertain, perishable wares that God lets men scramble for. It is a simple thing for Him to give to a scoundrel—who in turn blasphemes and slanders Him—a kingdom, a principality, or other honors and possessions on this earth. These are His chaff and His husks, with which He fills the bellies of His sows that He is about to slaughter (Luke 15:16). To His children, however, as David says here, He gives the genuine treasure. Therefore, as the dear children and heirs of God, we ought to glory in neither our wisdom, nor strength, nor riches, but in this, that we have the “pearl of great value” (Matt. 13:46), the dear Word, through which we know God, our dear Father, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent (John 17:3). That is our treasure and heritage, and it is sure and eternal and better than all worldly possessions. Whoever has this treasure may let others gather money, live riotously, be proud and haughty. Let him not be troubled by such things, though he be despised and poor in the eyes of the world. But let him thank God for His inexpressible gift (2 Cor. 9:15) and pray that he may abide by it. (Luther)

It does not matter how rich and glorious we are here on earth; if we keep this treasure, we are exceedingly rich and sufficiently honored. St. Paul was an unworthy, miserable man on earth, and the devil and the world assailed him most violently. To God he was a dear, worthy man. He was so poor, too, that he had to provide for himself with the work of his hands. And yet, despite such great poverty, he was richer than the emperor in Rome, though he had no other riches than the knowledge of Christ, in comparison with which, he says (Phil. 3:8): “I count all things (nothing on earth is excluded) but loss and refuse.” (Luther)

The prophet, however, calls God’s people and the Holy Christian Church a “green pasture,” for it is God’s pleasure ground, decorated and adorned with all kinds of spiritual gifts. The pasture, however, or the grass in it, is God’s Word, with which our consciences are strengthened and restored. Into this green pasture our Lord God gathers His sheep, feeds them in it with precious grass, and restores them with fresh water. That is, He commits to the Holy Christian Church the office of a shepherd, entrusts and gives to it the holy Gospel and the Sacraments, so that by means of these it may care for and watch over His sheep and so that these sheep may be richly provided with instruction, comfort, strength, and protection against all evil. But those who preach the Law of Moses or the ordinances of men do not feed the sheep in a green pasture but in the desert, where they famish, and lead them to foul, smelly water, which will cause them to decay and die. (Luther)

By means of the allegory of the green pasture, however, the prophet wants to indicate the great abundance and the riches of the holy Gospel and of the knowledge of Christ among the believers. For just as the grass in a green pasture stands very thick and full and grows more and more, so it is with the believers: they not only have God's Word richly, but the more they use and apply it, the more it increases and grows among them. Therefore the psalmist expresses himself very plainly. He does not say, "He leads me once, or often, in a green pasture," but: "He leads me in them without ceasing, so that amid the grass and in the pasture I may lie, rest, and dwell securely and never suffer hunger or any other want." The word that he uses here means "lie" and "rest," as a four-footed animal lies and rests. In the same manner Solomon also speaks in the Seventy-second Psalm, where he prophesies that the kingdom of God and the Gospel will prevail with might and go to all places, and says, "In the land, on the tops of the mountains, may the grain wave and blossom forth in the cities like the grass of the field" (Ps. 72:16). David shows that he is speaking of the Gospel also in this psalm when he says later: "He restores my soul"; and "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." (Luther)

This, then, is the first fruit of the dear Word: that the Christians are instructed through it in such a way that they grow in faith and hope, learn to commit all their doings and ways unto God, and hope in Him for everything they need in soul and body. (Luther)

Luther: "At this point David would also say that God had shown him no greater grace and blessing on earth than this, that he was permitted to be at a place and among people where God's Word and dwelling place and the right worship were to be found" (LW 12:160).

Emphasis is now placed upon the rest which the shepherd know how to provide for his sheep at proper times. For it is characteristic of the everyday task of most Oriental shepherds that, with but scanty pasturage available, they must spend a good bit of time moving from one spot where a bit of grass is available to another. This verse actually starts with noonday, when the flock has already covered quite a bit of ground in thus moving about and is in need of rest lest it be overdriven (Gen 33:13). When the shepherd makes the sheep to lie down, it is in a place where there are "grassy meadows." We have translated thus because sheep do not graze when they lie down, and the verb also does not mention grazing but only resting. (Leupold)

I'll give you the consequences of the burden; you guess the cause.

- It afflicts 70 million Americans and is faulted for 38,000 deaths each year.
- The condition annually costs the US \$70 billion worth of productivity.
- Teenagers suffer from it. Studies show that 64 percent of teens blame it for poor school performance.
- Middle ages face it. Researchers say the most severe cases occur between ages 30 and 40.

- Senior citizens are afflicted by it. One study suggests that the condition impacts 50% of the over-sixty five population.
- Treatments involve everything from mouth guards to herbal teas to meditation.

The answer is insomnia. America can't get to sleep. (Traveling Light - Max Lucado)

Most animals know how to rest. There is one exception. Sheep can't sleep. (Traveling Light - Max Lucado)

Nestle deeply in the tall shoots of his love and there you will find rest. For sheep to sleep, everything must be just right. No predators. No tension in the flock. No bugs in the air. No hunger in the belly. Everything has to be just so. Without a shepherd, they can't rest. (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

The unique aspect of the picture is that it is only the sheepman himself who can provide release from these anxieties. In the Christian's life there is no substitute for the keen awareness that my Shepherd is nearby. (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

green pastures. Metaphor for all that makes life to flourish (see Eze 34:14; Jn 10:9). (CSB)

God provides abundantly and daily. "The Sacrament is given as a daily pasture and sustenance, that faith may refresh and strengthen itself so that it will not fall back in such a battle, but become ever stronger and stronger. The new life must be guided so that it continually increases and progresses" (LC V 24-25). (TLSB)

He leads them as His sheep into pastures of green, unto luscious green (desheb). This indicates freshly sprouted, succulent food. (Stoekhardt)

One could say that God Himself is both pasture and water for His sheep. The Psalmist says "Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." Ps. 73:25. (Stoekhardt)

The green pastures and quiet waters in this passage are the truths of the gospel which give spiritual life and peace to our souls. The comparison of God's Word to food and drink occurs in all parts of the Scripture. Christ himself can also be called food and drink because he is the content of the gospel. Some most important examples of such passages are Isaiah 55:1,2; John 4:14 and John 6:32-59. (PBC)

Green pastures were not the natural terrain of Judea. The hills around Bethlehem where David kept his flock were not lush and green. Even today they are white and parched. Any green pasture in Judea is the work of some shepherd. He has cleared the rough, rocky land. Stumps have been torn out,

and brush has been burned. Irrigation. Cultivation. Such are the work of a shepherd. My Shepherd makes me lie down in finished work. With his own pierced hands, Jesus created a pasture for the soul. (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

You have bedded me down in lush meadows. (Message)

It is not generally recognized that many of the great sheep countries of the world are dry, semi-arid areas. Most breeds of sheep flourish best in this sort of terrain. They are susceptible to fewer hazards of health or parasites where the climate is dry. But in those same regions it is neither natural nor common to find green pastures. For example, Palestine where David wrote this Psalm and kept his father's flocks, especially near Bethlehem, is a dry brown, sun-burned wasteland. Green pastures did not just happen by chance. Green pastures were the product of tremendous labor, time and skill in land use. Green pastures were the result of clearing rough, rocky land; of tearing out brush and roots and stumps; of deep plowing and careful soil preparation; of seeding and planting special grains and legumes; of irrigating with water and husbanding with care the crops of forage that would feed the flocks. (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures—Margin, “Pastures of tender grass.” The Hebrew word rendered “pastures” means usually “dwellings,” or “habitations.” It is applied here properly to “pastures,” as places where flocks and herds lie down for repose. The word rendered in the margin “tender grass”—*deshe*—refers to the first shoots of vegetation from the earth—young herbage—tender grass—as clothing the meadows, and as delicate food for cattle, Job 6:5. It differs from ripe grass ready for mowing, which is expressed by a different word—*chaòts*. The idea is that of calmness and repose, as suggested by the image of flocks “lying down on the grass.” But this is not the only idea. It is that of flocks that lie down on the grass “fully fed” or “satisfied,” their wants being completely supplied. The exact point of contemplation in the mind of the poet, I apprehend, is that of a flock in young and luxuriant grass, surrounded by abundance, and, having satisfied their wants, lying down amidst this luxuriance with calm contentment. It is not merely a flock enjoying repose; it is a flock whose wants are supplied, lying down in the midst of abundance. Applied to the psalmist himself, or to the people of God generally, the idea is, that the wants of the soul are met and satisfied, and that, in the full enjoyment of this, there is the conviction of abundance—the repose of the soul at present satisfied, and feeling that in such abundance want will always be unknown. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

leads me. Like a shepherd (see Isa 40:11). (CSB)

He leads them to his Word, where they find nourishment and rest for their souls. (PBC)

The shepherd is in charge. The sheep's job – our job – is to watch the shepherd. With our eyes on our Shepherd, we'll be able to get some sleep. For you to be healthy, you must rest. God will do the right thing at the right times. God isn't behind me, yelling, "Go!" He is ahead of me, bidding, "Come!" He is in front, clearing the path, cutting the brush, showing the way. He tells us what we need to know we need to know it. He promises a lamp unto our feet, not a crystal ball into the future (Ps 119:105). Corrie ten Boom used to say, "When the train goes through a tunnel and the world gets dark, do you jump out? Of course not. You sit still and trust the engineer to get you through." (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

quiet waters. Lit. "waters of resting places," i.e., restful waters—waters that provide refreshment and well-being (see Isa 49:10). (CSB)

However, the Psalmist here asserts, not only that the Lord nourishes us well, but also adds, "He leads me to the waters of rest." When sheep are well filled with luscious grass and have been refreshed from the sparkling clear water, they lie down to rest. Thus also the sheep of Jesus, well-nourished in body and soul, find complete rest, peace, and contentment in the Lord, their Good Shepherd. (Stoeckhardt)

Sheep cannot safely drink from swift streams; they need quiet pools. God not only gives us what we need, but He also gives it to us in the best possible way. (TLSB)

This is the second fruit of the dear Word. It is not only the believers' pasture and grass, with which they are satisfied and grow strong in the faith; to them it is also pleasantly cool, fresh water, through which they gain refreshment and comfort. The psalmist therefore does not stop with saying, "He makes me lie down in green pastures," but also adds, "He leads me to the fresh water." It is as though he would say: "In great heat, when the sun smites hard (Ps. 121:6) and I can have no shade, He leads me to fresh water, gives me to drink, and refreshes me." That is, in all kinds of afflictions, anxieties, and distresses—spiritual and physical—when I cannot find help and comfort anywhere, I cling to the Word of grace. There alone, and nowhere else, do I find the right comfort and refreshment—and find it richly. What he says here in figurative language he expresses elsewhere in sober, clear words and says (Ps. 119:92): "If Thy Law had not been my delight, I should have perished in my affliction. I will never forget it, for with it Thou dost restore me." (Luther)

But he still retains the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep, which is a common thing among all the Prophets. For the Jews had their best food from sheep and other animals and commonly were shepherds, even as David himself and also the dear patriarchs were shepherds. Therefore this metaphor is often employed in Scripture. David, however, speaks of this matter in keeping with the

nature of the country; the Promised Land is a hot, dry, sandy, stony land that has many deserts and little water. Therefore the Book of Genesis reports more than once how the shepherds of the heathen quarreled with the shepherds of the patriarchs about water. They accordingly considered it a special treasure in that land when they could have water for their cattle. In our countries this is unknown, for there is enough water everywhere. David has looked at his land and cites it as a special blessing that he is under the protection of the Lord, who not only feeds him in a green pasture but during the heat also leads him to the fresh water. (Luther)

In brief, he wishes to say this: As little as one can come to the knowledge of God and the truth and to the right faith without the Word of God, just so little can one find comfort and peace of conscience without it. The world has its comfort and joy, too, but these last only a moment; when anxiety and distress and especially the last hour comes, then it is as Solomon says (Prov. 14:13): "After laughter the heart is sad; and after joy comes grief." But those who drink of this fresh and living water may indeed suffer affliction and distress in the world, but they will never lack genuine comfort. Especially when the moment of crisis comes, the page turns for them to the place where it says: "After brief weeping comes eternal laughter; after a small sorrow comes glorious joy" (2 Cor. 4:17). For they shall not weep and be sorrowful both here and there, but it will be as Christ says (Luke 6:21): "Blessed are you that weep here, for you shall laugh." (Luther)

Luther: "That is, in all kinds of afflictions, anxieties, and distresses - spiritual and physical - when I cannot find help and comfort anywhere, I cling to the Word of grace. There alone, and nowhere else, do I find the right comfort and refreshment - and find it richly" (LW 12:163).

The Good Shepherd gives his people rest when he delivers them from the burden of sin and from futile efforts to save themselves by their own works. He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). His Word revives their souls whenever the assurance of forgiveness brings peace and joy to their hearts. (PBC)

In addition to rest, also an ample water supply is to be found. (Leupold)

You find me quiet pools to drink from. (Message)

Although sheep thrive in dry, semi-arid country, they still require water. They are not like some of the African gazelles which can survive fairly well on the modest amount of moisture found in natural forage. The body of an animal such as a sheep is composed of about 70 percent water on an average. This fluid is used to maintain normal body metabolism; it is a portion of every cell, contributing to its turgidity (normal fullness) and normal life functions. Water determines the vitality, strength and vigor of the sheep and is essential to its health and general well-being. Now, just as the physical body has a capacity and need for water, so

Scripture points out to us clearly that the human personality, the human soul has a capacity and need for the water of the Spirit of the eternal God. Generally speaking, water for the sheep came from three main sources...dew on the grass...deep wells... or springs and streams. Most people are not aware that sheep can go for months on end, especially if the weather is not too hot, without actually drinking, if there is heavy dew on the grass each morning. Sheep, by habit, rise just before dawn and start to feed. Or if there is bright moonlight they will graze at night. The early hours are when the vegetation is drenched with dew, and sheep can keep fir on the amount of water taken in with their forage when they graze just before and after dawn. In the Christian life it is of more than passing significance to observe that those who are often the most serene, most confident and able to cope with life's complexities are those who rise early each day to feed on God's Word. It is in the quiet, early hours of the morning that they are led beside the quiet, still waters where they imbibe the very life of Christ for the day. Unfortunately too often people try to satisfy their spiritual thirst with learning, knowledge, achievements, arts literary forms, travel or hobbies. (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

He leadeth me beside the still waters—Margin, “waters of quietness.” Not stagnant waters, but waters not tempestuous and stormy; waters so calm, gentle, and still, as to suggest the idea of repose, and such as prompt to repose. As applied to the people of God, this denotes the calmness—the peace—the repose of the soul, when salvation flows as in a gently running stream; when there is no apprehension of want; when the heart is at peace with God. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

From Revelation 21:1 – NO LONGER ANY SEA – To ancient people the sea held a terror especially when its boiling waves threatened and often destroyed human life (e.g, Ps 107:23-30). In the early stage of creations the waters were associated with the darkness and the primeval formlessness and chaos (Gen. 1:2). The sea is the home to the evil serpent (Amos 9:3), Leviathan. In the earthly ministry of Jesus too, the sea was a threat to the apostles, a threat which Jesus conquered (e.g., Mt. 8:24-27; 14:24-33). The sea is the primeval ocean, symbol of chaos; its disappearance is assurance of God's total victory. The absence of the sea from the new heaven and earth in the context of 21:1-8 suggests not the absence of water in the geo-physically renewed earth, but an absence of any fear of water and terror that the sea evoked, especially the absence of any painful reminder that God's saints had once been separated from him. (CC pp. 593, 595)

23:3 *restores my soul.* Revives me, refreshes my spirit (see 19:7; Ru 4:15; Pr 25:13; La 1:16). (CSB)

“Restore” (hobed, to call back, bring back into the former state of health, to renovate with new life. By this remark the Psalmist refers back to what has just

been said. The Lord nourishes His own, gives them drink, bestows upon them His peace, and so revitalizes their soul with confidence and hope. (Stoeckhardt)

A shepherd protected his sheep and kept them alive by care. The Good Shepherd does even more. He cares for every human need. Ultimately, Christ alone restores our soul as He sacrifices His life for His sheep (John10:11).

Here the prophet himself explains what kind of pasture and fresh water he has been discussing, namely, that kind by which the soul is strengthened and restored. That, however, can be nothing else than God's Word. But because our Lord God has a twofold Word, the Law and the Gospel, the prophet makes it sufficiently clear that he is speaking here not of the Law but of the Gospel when he says, "He restores my soul." The Law cannot restore the soul, for it is a Word that makes demands on us and commands us that we shall love God with all our hearts, etc., and our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:37, 39). It damns him that does otherwise and pronounces this sentence upon him (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26): "Cursed be everyone who does not do all the things written in the Book of the Law." Now, it is certain that nobody on earth does that; therefore the Law comes in due time with its sentence and only grieves and frightens the souls. Where no help is provided, it presses them so that they must despair and be lost forever. St. Paul therefore says (Rom. 3:20): "By the Law comes only knowledge of sin," and (Rom. 4:15): "The Law brings only wrath." (Luther)

The Gospel, however, is a blessed Word. It demands nothing of us, but announces everything that is good, namely, that God has given us poor sinners His only Son and that He is to be our Shepherd; He will seek us famished and scattered sheep and give His life for us, to redeem us from sin, from eternal death, and from the power of the devil. That is the green grass and the fresh water with which the Lord restores our souls. Thus we are rid of our bad consciences and sad thoughts. More of that in the fourth verse. (Luther)

Luther: "But because our Lord God has a twofold Word, the Law and the Gospel, the prophet makes is sufficiently clear that he is speaking here not of the Law but of the Gospel. The Law cannot restore the should for it is a Word that makes demands on us and commands us that we shall love God with all our hearts, etc., and our neighbors (Mt. 22:37, 39). It damns him that does otherwise and pronounces this sentence upon him (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26)... The Gospel, however, is a blessed Word. It demands nothing of us, but announces everything that is good, namely, that God has given us poor sinners His only Son and that he is to be our Shepherd; he will seek us famished and scattered sheep and give his life for us, to redeem us from sin, from eternal death, and from the power of the devil. That is the green grass and the fresh water with which the Lord restores our souls. Thus we are rid of our bad consciences and sad thoughts" (LW 12:164)

He does this to the level of what sheep can experience. Nephesh can also mean "life," and so arrive at the meaning: He revives me or my life. One must allow for deeper values and not insist on purely mechanical procedures. (Leupold)

Jesus restores our hope by giving us himself. He doesn't reform; restores. He doesn't camouflage the old; he restores the new. The jungle is still a jungle. It hasn't changed, but you have. You have changed because you have hope. And you have hope because you have met someone who can lead you out. Your Shepherd knows that you are not made for this place. He knows you are not equipped for this place. So he has come to guide you out. He has come to restore your soul. Jesus doesn't give hope by changing the jungle; he restores our hope by giving us himself. And he has promised to stay until the very end. (Matthew 28:20) (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

True to your word, you let me catch my breath. (Message)

Even David, the author of the Psalm, who was much loved of God, knew what it was to be cast down and dejected. In Psalm 42:11 he cries out, Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God..." Cast down is an old English shepherd's term for a sheep that has turned over on its back and cannot get up again by itself. A "cast" sheep is a very pathetic sight. Lying on its back, its feet in the air, it flays away frantically struggling to stand up, without success. Sometimes it will bleats a little for help, but generally it lies there lashing about in frightened frustration. If the owner does not arrive on the scene within a reasonably short time, the sheep will die. The way this happens is this. A heavy, fat, or long-fleeced sheep will lie down comfortably in some little hollow or depression in the ground. It may roll on its side slightly to stretch out or relax. Suddenly the center of gravity in the body shifts so that it turns on its back far enough that the feet no longer touch the ground. It may feel a sense of panic and start to paw frantically. Frequently this only makes things worse. It rolls over even further. Now it is quite impossible for it to regain its feet. Many people have the idea that when a child of God falls, when he is frustrated and helpless in a spiritual dilemma, God becomes disgusted, fed up and even furious with him. This simply is not so. One of the great revelations of the heart of God given to us by Christ is that of Himself as our Shepherd. He has the same identical sensations of anxiety, concern and compassion for the cast men and women as a shepherd has for a cast sheep. In Psalm 56:13 we are given an accurate commentary on this aspect of the Christian's life in these words, "...thou has delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living." We have to be realistic about the life of the child of God and face facts as they really are. Most of us, though we belong to Christ and desire to be under His control and endeavor to allow ourselves to be led by Him, do on occasion find ourselves cast down. We discover that often when we are most sure of ourselves we stumble and fall. Sometimes when we appear to be flourishing in our faith we find ourselves in a situation of utter frustration and futility. Paul

writing to the Christians in Corinth warned them of this danger in 1 Cor 10:12. (A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23 – Keller)

He restoreth my soul—literally, “He causes my life to return.” DeWette, “He quickens me,” or causes me to live. The word soul” here means life, or spirit, and not the soul in the strict sense in which the term is now used. It refers to the spirit when exhausted, weary, or sad; and the meaning is, that God quickens or vivifies the spirit when thus exhausted. The reference is not to the soul as wandering or backsliding from God, but to the life or spirit as exhausted, wearied, troubled, anxious, worn down with care and toil. the heart, thus exhausted, He re-animates. He brings back its vigor. He encourages it; excites it to new effort; fills it with new joy. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

guides me in paths of righteousness. As a shepherd leads his sheep (see 77:20; 78:72) in paths that offer safety and well-being, so David’s Shepherd-King guides him in ways that cause him to be secure and prosperous. For this meaning of “righteousness” see Pr 8:18 (“prosperity”); 21:21 (“prosperity”); Isa 48:18; see also Pr 8:20–21. It is also possible that “paths of righteousness” refers to the paths that conform to God’s moral will. (CSB)

Or, “the right path.” Shepherds lead sheep along safe paths, on the proper destination. Jesus Himself is the way, the righteous path (John 14:6). (TLSB)

These are the paths which are right, paths which lead to the proper goal and destination. The Lord has various ways in which He leads His own. Though these ways to us may appear mysterious at times, they nevertheless are right, and lead to a glorious end. The Lord directs all the destinies of His believers in His hands. (Stoeckhardt)

Hebrew is “tsadaq,” which means “proved right” or “in good order.” It is used to describe a person in a right relationship with God, trusting God’s promised salvation and living by the covenant promise. The Psalms describe how the wicked plot against the righteous, but the Lord watches over the righteous and delivers them. God is righteous because He faithfully and justly keeps His Word. (TLSB)

The Lord,” he says, “does not stop with feeding me in a green pasture and leading me to the fresh water and thus restoring my soul. He also leads me in the right paths so that I may not go astray, get into the wilderness, and thus perish. That is, He keeps me in pure doctrine, that I may not be misled by false spirits nor fall away from it because of temptation or offense; that I may know how I am to walk and live outwardly and not take offense at the holiness and the strict lives of hypocrites; and that I may also know what is the right doctrine, faith, and worship.” (Luther)

Another fine fruit and power of the clear Word is this: those who cling to it firmly not only receive from it strength and comfort for their souls, but are also protected against false doctrine and false holiness. Many, it is true, receive this treasure but without being able to keep it. For when a man becomes smug and presumptuous and thinks he is safe, he will soon be lost; before he can look about, he has been led astray. The devil can also assume holiness and disguise himself, as St. Paul says (2 Cor. 11:14), as “an angel of light.” His servants, then, pretend to be preachers of righteousness and enter the flock of Christ in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15). Therefore we should watch and pray, as the prophet does in the last verse, that our Shepherd would keep us true to the treasure He has given us. Those who fail in this surely lose the treasure, and, as Christ says (Luke 11:26), their last state becomes worse than the first. For later they become the most venomous foes of Christianity and do much more harm with their false doctrine than the tyrants do with the sword. St. Paul indeed learned this from the false prophets who led his Corinthians and Galatians astray for a time and later carried off all of Asia (2 Tim. 1:15). In our days we see this, too, in the Anabaptists and other schismatic spirits. (Luther)

Luther: “He keeps in pure doctrine, that I may not be misled by false spirits not fall away from it because of temptation or offense; that I may know how I am to walk and live outwardly and not take offense at the holiness and the strict lives of hypocrites; and that I may also know what is the right doctrine, faith, and worship” (LW 12:165)

These paths lead to eternal life. They are paths of gospel righteousness and are not our own righteousness and good works, but the way to eternal life opened by Christ’s righteousness. (PBC)

He faithfully fulfils the demands that his covenant obligations to his people impose on him. The larger thought plainly includes the much lesser thought that the individual will then always be guided on the right path. (Leupold)

The path of righteousness is a narrow, winding trail up a steep hill. At the top of the hill is a cross. Eighty percent of Jesus’ listeners made their living off of the land. Many were shepherds. They lived on the mesa with the sheep. No flock ever grazed without a shepherd, and no shepherd was ever off duty. Sheep aren’t smart. They tend to wander into running creeks for water, then their wool grows heavy and they drown. They need a shepherd to lead them to “calm water” (23:2). They have no natural defense – no claws, no horns, no fangs. They are helpless. They have no sense of direction. They need someone to lead them. We have one. One who knows us by name. (Safe in the Shepherd’s Arms - Max Lucado)

He sets the direction for our lives as He guides us step by step on the path of life. We are right with God by faith in Jesus. (LL)

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness—In right paths, or right ways. He conducts me in the straight path that leads to Himself; He does not permit me to wander in ways that would lead to ruin. In reference to His people it is true:

- (a) that He leads them in the path by which they BECOME righteous, or by which they are “justified” before him; and
- (b) that He leads them in the way of “uprightness” and “truth.” He guides them in the way to heaven; His constant care is evinced that they “may” walk in that path. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

for his name’s sake. The prosperity of the Lord’s servant brings honor to the Lord’s name (see 1Ki 8:41–42; Isa 48:9; Jer 14:21; Eze 20:9, 14, 22).

He wants to be known, glorified, and honored by these means; and, according to the First Commandment, He will also reveal Himself to us exactly as He has men preach of Him (Ex. 20:5, 6). Thus, without ceasing, He strengthens and restores our souls spiritually and keeps us from falling into error, and also feeds us bodily and wards off all misfortune. But only those who cling to His Word, and who believe and confess boldly that all the gifts and possessions of body and soul that they own, they have received from God purely out of grace and kindness, that is, solely for His name’s sake and not because of their own deeds and merits—only they give Him the honor of being exactly as we have just been told. They thank Him for His blessings and also proclaim these blessings to others. No haughty saints, such as heretics and schismatic spirits or enemies and blasphemers of the Word of God, can give Him this honor, for they glorify not His name but their own. (Luther)

Luther: “The name of God is the preaching of God, by which he is glorified and made known as the gracious, merciful, patient, truthful, and faithful one; although we are the children of wrath (Eph 2:3) and are guilty of eternal death, he forgives us all our sins and receives us as his children and heirs. That is his name, and that name he causes to be proclaimed through the Word” (LW 12:166).

Since “name” is the equivalent of “character” or “reputation,” this beautiful little phrase means: He does all this because he has a reputation among his saints for faithful dealings with them, a reputation which must be cautiously upheld. (Leupold)

If you want to touch God’s heart, use the name he loves to hear. Call him Father. God is the shepherd who guides, the Lord provides, the voice who brings peace in the storm, the physician who heals the sick, and the banner that guides the soldier. (Safe in the Shepherd’s Arms - Max Lucado)

For his name’s sake—For His own sake; or, that His name may be honored. It is not primarily on their account; it is not solely that they may be saved. It is that He may be honored:

- (a) in their being saved at all;

- (b) in the manner in which it is done;
- (c) in the influence of their whole life, under His guidance, as making known His own character and perfections.

Compare Isa. 43:25; 48:9; 66:5; Jer. 14:7. The feeling expressed in this verse is that of confidence in God; an assurance that he would always lead his people in the path in which they should go. Compare Ps. 25:9. This he will always do if people will follow the directions of His word, the teachings of His Spirit, and the guidance of His providence. No one who submits to Him in this way will ever go astray! (Barnes Notes on the OT)

His “name” is His Word of grace. (Stoekhardt)

23:4 VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH – It may be translated “the darkest valley.” This verse may, therefore, refer to all the dangers a Christian faces, not only death. (PBC)

O, “very deep shadow of death.” Even in life’s most frightening situation, we can be confident of God’s guiding presence. Indeed, when God is with us, the valley of the shadow of death is one of the “paths of righteousness.” (TLSB)

Here the emphasis lies on the fact that the Lord leads and guides His own on their way of life. He always leads them the right way. This way often leads through dark valleys, but the believer is always confident. He says in his confidence: “Even though I walk through a dark way, I am not afraid, I fear no evil. (Stoekhardt)

“Valley of darkness or dark valley” in Hebrew is expressed by (gajeh zalmavet). (Zalmavet is not a composite noun, consisting of zal and mavet, “shadow of death,” but is a noun with feminine ending, meaning “darkness.” The stem is derived from “zalmah,” to be dark.” Valley of darkness” is a figurative expression for seasons of trials and afflictions. The Lord often leads His believers into dark valleys of suffering, want, and privation (lack of basic necessities or comforts of life), affecting both body and soul. Outward suffering often brings on inward darkness and gloom. The last dark valley for the believer to cross is the valley of death which is also the last evil to be expected. (Stoekhardt)

Until now the prophet has shown that those who have and love God’s Word do not want, for the Lord is their Shepherd. This Shepherd not only feeds them in a green pasture and leads them to the fresh water so that they may become quite fat and strong and restored spiritually and physically; He also keeps them from becoming weary of the good pasture and the fresh water and from leaving the green pasture and straying from the right path, into the desert. That is the first part of this psalm. Now he goes on to teach that those who are this Lord’s sheep are surrounded by much danger and misfortune. But the Lord, he says, not only

protects them but also saves them from all temptations and distresses; for He is with them. He also shows beautifully in what way He is with them. (Luther)

Here you can see that as soon as the Word is preached and as soon as there are people that accept and confess it, the devil quickly appears with all his angels and arouses the world with all its might against this Word, to stifle it and completely destroy those that have and confess it. Whatever our Lord God says or does, must be swept clean and pass through the fire. It is very important for Christians to know this, else they may become perplexed and think: "How can this be harmonized? The prophet has said above, 'The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want,' and here he says the very opposite: that he must walk through the valley of the shadow, and in the following verse he admits that he has enemies. With these words he surely lets us know well enough that he does want—too much, yes, practically everything. For he who has enemies and wanders through the valley of the shadow can see no light, that is, he has neither comfort nor hope but is forsaken by everybody, and everything is black and dark before his eyes, even the beautiful, bright sun. How, then, can it be true that he does not want?" (Luther)

Luther: "It is as if he would say: 'As for me, I am indeed weak, sad, anxious, and surrounded by all kinds of danger and misfortune. Because of my sin, my heart and my conscience are not satisfied either. I experience such horrible terrors of death and hell that I almost despair. Yet though the whole world and also the gates of hell (Mt. 16:18) should oppose me, that will not dismay me. Yes, I will not be afraid of all the evil and sorrow that they may be able to lay on me; for the Lord is with me. The Lord is my counselor, comforter, protector, and helper - the Lord, I say, who has created heaven and earth and everything that is in it all out of nothing. To him all creation is subject: angels, devil, men, sin, death, etc., in brief, he has everything in his power. And therefor I fear no evil" (LW 12:168-169).

The Hebrew word used contains no reference to death as such but does refer to all dark and bitter experiences, one of which may be death. So in the common use of the passage that thought of death need not be excluded, but the reference is certainly much broader. (Leupold)

He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. The path is dangerous. Poisonous plants can infect the flock. Wild animals can attack the flock. There are narrow trails and dark valleys. He will lead us to the high country. When the pasture is bare down here, God will lead us up there. (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

Even death itself is only a shadow. Our circumstances may look dark and fearsome, and yet we need fear no evil. Our Good Shepherd – the one who walked into death in our place on the cross and who emerged victorious from it – this Shepherd always walks beside us. (LL)

Even when the way goes through Death Valley. (Message)

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death—The meaning of this in the connection in which it occurs is this: “God will lead and guide me in the path of righteousness, even though that path lies through the darkest and most gloomy vale—through deep and dismal shades—in regions where there is no light, as if death had cast his dark and baleful shadow there. It is still a right path; it is a path of safety; and it will conduct me to bright regions beyond. In that dark and gloomy valley, though I could not guide myself, I will not be alarmed; I will not be afraid of wandering or of being lost; I will not fear any enemies there—for my Shepherd is there to guide me still.” On the word here rendered “shadow of death”—*úâ†îÈìÀöÇ tsalmaðveth*—see Job 3:5, note; and Isa. 9:2, note. The word occurs besides only in the following places, in all of which it is rendered “shadow of death.” Job 10:21-22; 12:22; 16:16; 24:17 (*twice*); 28:3; 34:22; 38:17; Ps. 44:19; 107:10, 14; Jer. 2:6; 13:16; Amos 5:8. The idea is that of death casting his gloomy shadow over that valley—the valley of the dead. Hence, the word is applicable to any path of gloom or sadness; any scene of trouble or sorrow; any dark and dangerous way. Thus understood, it is applicable not merely to death itself—though it embraces that—but to any or all the dark, the dangerous, and the gloomy paths which we tread in life: to ways of sadness, solitude, and sorrow. All along those paths God will be a safe and certain guide. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

FEAR NO EVIL – When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. How could David make such a claim? Because he knew where to look. Don’t measure the size of the mountain; talk to the One who can move it. Instead of carrying the world on your shoulders, talk to the One who holds the universe on his. Hope is a look away. (Safe in the Shepherd’s Arms - Max Lucado)

Even in the face of death the believer remains intrepid. The worst troubles that can arise for the believer can bring no real harm to his soul. Death indeed may lay the body prostrate and bed it in the grave. There, however, it will dwell in safety and rest until the great Day. The soul meanwhile proceeds immediately upon death to the Lord to dwell in joy and glory. What gives a believer such confidence and assurance? Just this, that he knows and believes: “Thou art with me.” The Lord, the Good Shepherd takes care of His sheep in life and in death. He ever holds His protecting hand over His own. Nothing can bring the sheep of Jesus any harm. (Stoeckhardt)

It is as if he would say: “As for me, I am indeed weak, sad, anxious, and surrounded by all kinds of danger and misfortune. Because of my sin, my heart and my conscience are not satisfied either. I experience such horrible terrors of death and hell that I almost despair. Yet though the whole world and also the gates of hell (Matt. 16:18) should oppose me, that will not dismay me. Yes, I will not be afraid of all the evil and sorrow that they maybe able to lay on me; for the

Lord is with me. The Lord is my counselor, comforter, protector, and helper—the Lord, I say, who has created heaven and earth and everything that is in it out of a more trifling thing than a speck of dust, that is, out of nothing. To Him all creation is subject: angels, devils, men, sin, death, etc.; in brief, He has everything in His power. And therefore I fear no evil.” (Luther)

Our circumstances may look dark and fearsome, and yet we need fear no evil.
(LL)

I am not afraid. (Message)

I will fear no evil—Dark, cheerless, dismal as it seems, I will dread nothing. The true friend of God HAS nothing to fear in that dark valley. His great Shepherd will accompany him there, and can lead him safely through, however dark it may appear. The true believer has nothing to fear in the most gloomy scenes of life; he has nothing to fear in the valley of death; he has nothing to fear in the grave; he has nothing to fear in the world beyond. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

with me. See 16:8 and note; see also Dt 31:6, 8; Mt 28:20. (CSB)

The Good Shepherd does not send His sheep into places He will not go; He leads and is with us always (Matthew 28:20). (TLSB)

Asaph also speaks thus in the Seventy-third Psalm. There he comforts the Christians because of the great offense that the wicked prosper so greatly on earth, while the dear saints of God are constantly tormented, and says (Ps. 73:23): “If only I have Thee, Lord, I will ask nothing of heaven and earth. Even though my body and soul should fail, Thou, O God, art the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Luther)

when you walk at my side. (Message)

I will not leave you. “What great nation has a god as near to them as the Lord our God is near to us” (Deut. 4:7 NLT). Since the Lord is near, everything is different. Underline these words: You are not alone. (Safe in the Shepherd’s Arms - Max Lucado)

For thou art with me—Thou wilt be with me. Though invisible, thou wilt attend me. I shall not go alone; I shall not be alone. The psalmist felt assured that if God was with him he had nothing to dread there. God would be his companion, his comforter, his protector, his guide. How applicable is this to death! The dying man SEEMS to go into the dark valley alone. His friends accompany him as far as they can, and then they must give him the parting hand. They cheer him with their voice until he becomes deaf to all sounds; they cheer him with their looks until his eye becomes dim, and he can see no more; they cheer him with the fond embrace until he becomes insensible to every expression of earthly affection,

and then he seems to be alone. But the dying believer is NOT alone. His Savior God is with him in that valley, and will never leave him. Upon His arm he can lean, and by His presence he will be comforted, until he emerges from the gloom into the bright world beyond. All that is needful to dissipate the terrors of the valley of death is to be able to say, "Thou art with me." (Barnes Notes on the OT)

rod. Instrument of authority (as in 2:9; 45:6; Ex 21:20; 2Sa 7:14; Job 9:34); used also by shepherds for counting, guiding, rescuing and protecting sheep (see Lev 27:32; Eze 20:37). (CSB)

A club c 2 feet long. (TLSB)

"The Lord," he says, "is with me, but not bodily so that I might see or hear Him. This presence of the Lord of which I am speaking is not to be grasped by the five senses. But faith sees it and believes surely that the Lord is nearer to us than we are to ourselves." How? Through His Word. He says therefore, "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me." It is as though he would say: "In all of my anxieties and troubles I find nothing on earth that might help to satisfy me. But then God's Word is my rod and my staff. To that Word I will cling, and by it I raise myself up again. I will also learn for sure that the Lord is with me and that He not only strengthens and comforts me with this same Word in all distresses and temptations, but that He also redeems me from all my enemies contrary to the will of the devil and the world." (Luther)

With the words "Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me" he returns to the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep and would speak thus: "Even as a bodily shepherd guides his sheep with his rod or staff and leads them to fresh water where they find food and drink and protects them with his staff against all danger; so the Lord, the real Shepherd, leads and guides me also with His staff, that is, with His Word, so that I may walk before Him with a good faith and a happy conscience, remain in the right path, and be able to protect myself against false doctrine and fictitious holiness. He also protects me against all danger and evil of spirit and of body and saves me from all my enemies with His staff. That is, with the same Word He strengthens and comforts me so richly that no evil can be so great, be it of spirit or body, that I cannot endure and overcome it." (Luther)

You see, then, that the prophet is not speaking here of any human help, protection, and comfort. He does not draw a sword. Everything is done here in a hidden and mysterious manner through the Word, so that no one becomes aware of any protection and comfort but the believers alone. Here David lays down a common rule for all Christians, and it is to be well noted: that there is no other way or counsel on earth to get rid of all kinds of temptation than this, that a man cast all his cares upon God, take Him at His Word of grace, hold fast to it, and not let it be taken from him in any way. Whoever does that can be satisfied,

whether he prospers or fails, whether he lives or dies. And in the end he can also stand and must succeed against all devils, the world, and evil. That is the way, I feel, to magnify the dear Word and to credit it with much greater power than the power of all angels and men. And that is the way in which also St. Paul magnifies it (Rom. 1:16): “The Gospel,” he says, “is a power of God that saves all who believe in it.” (Luther)

But with the words “Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me” the prophet wishes to say something special. It is as though he would say: “Moses is also a shepherd and also has a rod and a staff. But he does nothing with them but drive and plague and burden his sheep with an unbearable burden. (Acts 15:10; Is. 9:3.) Therefore he is a terrible, horrible shepherd, whom the sheep only fear and from whom they flee. But Thou, O Lord, dost not drive and frighten Thy sheep with Thy rod and Thy staff, nor dost Thou burden them, but dost only comfort them.” (Luther)

The shepherd’s rod looks like a club. It was used by the shepherd to defend himself and his sheep. The rod could be thrown at animals that attacked. It could also be thrown ahead of a wandering sheep to startle it back from the brink of danger. (LL)

Sheep passed under the rod so the shepherd could examine each one as it went into the sheepfold each night. The shepherd could then separate his own sheep from those that belonged to other shepherds. (LL)

staff. Instrument of support (as in Ex 21:19; Jdg 6:21; 2Ki 4:29; Zec 8:4). (CSB)

A long straight walking stick used to guide the sheep and pull down leafy branches for them. (TLSB)

Your trusty shepherd’s crook makes me feel secure. (Message)

A shepherd used his staff to draw his sheep back together. By laying the tip of his staff gently on a sheep’s side, the shepherd could guide his animal where it needed to go. Sometimes a shepherd even laid his staff gently on the side of a sheep to keep in touch with the animal, like walking hand-in-hand with a friend. (LL)

Thy rod and thy staff—It may not be easy to mark the difference between these two words; but they would seem probably to refer, the latter to the “staff” which the shepherd used in walking, and the former to the “crook” which a shepherd used for guiding his flock. The image is that of a shepherd in attendance on his flock, with a staff on which he leans with one hand; in the other hand the “crook” or rod which was the symbol of his office. Either of these also might be used to guard the flock, or to drive off the enemies of the flock. The

“crook” is said (see Rosenmüller, *in loc.*) to have been used to seize the legs of the sheep or goats when they were disposed to run away, and thus to keep them with the flock. “The shepherd invariably carries a rod or staff with him when he goes forth to feed his flock. It is often bent or hooked at one end, which gave rise to the shepherd’s crook in the hand of the Christian bishop. With this staff he rules and guides the flock to their green pastures, and defends them from their enemies. With it also he corrects them when disobedient, and brings them back when wandering.” (The land and the book, vol. i., p. 305.) (Barnes Notes on the OT)

for you ... comfort me. The very center of the psalm; see introductory note above. (CSB)

“you” . . . “your.” Note the shift that takes place between vv 1–3 and vv 4–5. The first section speaks of God in the third person, while later this becomes the second person, as if to shift from what the writer speaks of to what he personally has experienced. The more intimate second person begins when the path becomes most threatening—through the valley of the shadow of death. The Lord is especially near in times of trouble! (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

comfort me. Reassure me (as in 71:21; 86:17; Ru 2:13; Isa 12:1; 40:1; 49:13). (CSB)

This God who shepherds his people offers no fairy-tale journey with its expected happy ending. It is in the face of death’s threat and the presence of the enemies that God’s people face up to life’s honest reality. Nowhere does this Shepherd promise to remove these afflictions, but instead insists that he is present in them and will lead his people through their dark valley to his everlasting life and light. Note how this implies the Immanuel of Isaiah’s promise (“You are with me . . .”), and this becomes the solid hope of his people—not the blind hope that something will work out or that troubles will disappear, but that God is with us, and where God is, there is all we need. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

They comfort me—The sight of them consoles me. They show that the Shepherd is there. As significant of his presence and his office, they impart confidence, showing that he will not leave me alone, and that he will defend me. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

23:5-6 As if to prove his power, the Good Shepherd sets a banquet table while the enemies watch—taunted by his generosity and might. This Shepherd provides not enough but more than enough; his lavish grace anoints the head and overflows the cup. The future lies not with the enemy but with the Shepherd, whose goodness and mercy never departs from his flock and leads them to dwell in the comfort, safety, and rich grace of his eternal house forevermore. The final

section (v 6) has an unmistakable worship character. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 22, Part 2)

23:5 PREPARE A TABLE IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES – Luther:
“Here you shall hear how highly David exalts and praises the dear Word, namely, by telling us that by means of it the believers gain the victory over the devil, the world, and the flesh, sin conscience, and death. When one has the Word and in faith clings to it firmly, these enemies, who otherwise are invincible, must all yield and let themselves be taken captive. It is, however, a wonderful victory and power, also a very proud and haughty boast on the part of the believers, that they may compel and conquer all of these horrible and, as it were almighty enemies - not by raging, biting, resisting, striking back, but by eating, drinking, rejoicing, sitting, being happy, and resting. All of this, as we have said, is accomplished through the Word. For in Scripture ‘eating and drinking’ means believing and clinging firmly to the Word; and from this proceed peace, joy, comfort, strength, and the like” (LW 12:172-173).

Emblem of hospitality and trust. In Christ, God gives us not only ordinary food but also the gift of Christ’ body and blood in the Lord’s Supper. (TLSB)

The most natural and intimate way of expressing common fellowship is at the table through a meal. In the ancient world, the meal itself was always prepared for with “table talk.” (Heaven on Earth – The Gift of Christ in the Divine Service – Just p. 72)

In the OT ritual meals created a natural context for instruction in the Word of God, that reconciles and unifies. The various people and cultures in the ancient Near East saw table fellowship as a high level of friendship and unity, and Israelites were no exception. (Heaven on Earth – The Gift of Christ in the Divine Service p. 73)

In the NT, Jesus’ meals sent a clear message to His contemporaries of His desire for God’s reconciling action in Him to be extended to all people because Jesus ate with people of every class. (Heaven on Earth – The Gift of Christ in the Divine Service p. 73)

At the Last Supper, Jesus is still present locally, however, in a miraculous and mysterious way He is also present sacramentally in, with, and under bread and wine. (Heaven on Earth – The Gift of Christ in the Divine Service p. 82)

The picture now changes to represent a host, who prepares for his guests a delicious banquet. This is a high occasion. The Lord, earlier presented as the Good Shepherd, here appears as the generous Host. He receives His own right royally, anointing their head with oil, as they enter the guest chamber. It was customary so to receive high and honored guests. So the Lord thinks of His believers. (Stoeckhardt)

David, like all of God's people, experienced God's providential care even when facing adversity. (TLSB)

The heavenly Shepherd-King receives David at his table as his vassal king and takes him under his protection. In the ancient Near East, covenants were often concluded with a meal expressive of the bond of friendship (see 41:9; Ge 31:54; Ob 7); in the case of vassal treaties or covenants, the vassal was present as the guest of the overlord (see Ex 24:8–12). (CSB)

Here the prophet confesses frankly that he has enemies. He says, however, that he defends himself against them and drives them back in this way, that the Lord has prepared a table before him against these same enemies of his. Is not that a wonderful protector? I should think He would prepare before him a mighty wall, a strong rampart, a deep moat, an armor, and other arms and weapons that have to do with battle, through which he might be safe from his enemies or put them to flight. But He prepares a table before him, at which he is to eat and to drink and in this way to defeat his enemies. I, too, would like to wage war if, without any danger, care, trouble, and work, one could conquer one's enemies by doing nothing more than sitting at a table and eating, drinking, and making merry. (Luther)

By means of these words, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies," the prophet wishes to indicate the great, splendid, and wonderful power of the dear Word. It is as though he would say: "Thou, O Lord, dost offer me so many good things and feed me so splendidly and richly at the table that Thou hast prepared for me. That is, Thou dost overwhelm me so greatly with the boundless knowledge of Thy dear Word, that through this Word I not only have rich comfort inwardly, in my heart, despite my guilty conscience, despite sin, fear, the terror of death, and God's wrath and judgment; through it I also become outwardly so courageous and invincible a hero that all my enemies cannot prevail against me. The more raging and raving and insane they are toward me, the less I worry about them; yes, instead, I am secure, happy, and cheerful. And that is true only because I have Thy Word. It gives me such strength and comfort in the presence of all my enemies, so that even when they rage and rave most violently, I feel more at ease than when I am sitting at a table and have all that my heart desires: food, drink, joy, pleasures, music, and the like." (Luther)

Here you shall hear how highly blessed David exalts and praises the dear Word, namely, by telling us that by means of it the believers gain the victory over the devil, the world, the flesh, sin, conscience, and death. When one has the Word and in faith clings to it firmly, these enemies, who otherwise are invincible, must all yield and let themselves be taken captive. It is, however, a wonderful victory and power, also a very proud and haughty boast on the part of the believers, that they may compel and conquer all of these horrible and, as it were, almighty enemies—not by raging, biting, resisting, striking back, avenging, seeking

counsel and help here and there, but by eating, drinking, rejoicing, sitting, being happy, and resting. All of this, as we have said, is accomplished through the Word. For in Scripture “eating and drinking” means believing and clinging firmly to the Word; and from this proceed peace, joy, comfort, strength, and the like. (Luther)

Reason cannot accommodate itself to this wonderful victory of the believers. Here everything happens in a contradictory way. The world always persecutes and murders the Christians as the most harmful people on earth. When reason sees that, it must think that the Christians are succumbing and their enemies are supreme and victorious. Thus the Jews dealt with Christ, the Apostles, and the believers, and executed them. When they had murdered or at least exiled them, they cried: “On to victory! Those who have done us harm no longer can confound us. Now we shall act according to our own pleasure.” But when they felt most secure, our Lord sent the Romans against them, who treated them so horribly that it frightens one to hear it. Several hundred and more years later He also gave the Romans their reward, who had killed many thousands of martyrs throughout the Roman Empire. He had the city of Rome conquered by the Goths and Wends four times within a few years, and finally had it burned down and leveled, and let the empire perish. Who was victorious now? The Jews and the Romans, who had shed the blood of the dear saints like water? Or the poor Christians, who had been killed like sheep led to the slaughter, and had no other defense and weapons than the dear Word? (Luther)

David is not speaking here only about his own person, but by means of these words he shows how the holy Christian Church fares. He gives it the proper coloration and paints a fine picture of it. Before God it is a pleasant green meadow, on which there is grass and water in abundance. That is, it is God’s paradise and pleasure garden, adorned with all His gifts, and it has His inexpressible treasure: the holy Sacraments, the dear Word, with which it instructs, governs, restores, and comforts His flock. To the world, however, it has a different appearance. It is a black, gloomy valley, where neither joy nor pleasure is to be seen, but only distress, anxiety, and trouble. The devil assails it with all his might because of its treasure. Inwardly he tortures it with his venomous, fiery arrows (Eph. 6:16); outwardly he separates it with schisms and offenses (Rom. 16:17). And he also incites his bride, the world,⁷ against it, which imposes upon it all misery and heartache through persecution, slander, blasphemy, damnation, and murder. It would not be surprising, therefore, if the dear Christian Church were completely destroyed in a moments time through the great craft and might of both the devil and the world. For it cannot defend itself against its enemies: they are much too strong, crafty, and powerful for it. So it is, as the prophet depicts it here, an innocent, simple, defenseless lamb, which neither will nor can do anyone any harm, but at all times is ready not only to do good but to receive evil in return. (Luther)

How, then, does it happen that Christendom, which is so weak, can withstand the craft and the tyranny of the devil and the world? The Lord is its Shepherd; therefore it does not want. He feeds and restores it spiritually and physically; He keeps it in the right path; He also gives it His rod and His staff as a sword. It does not, however, wield this sword with its hand but with its mouth. With it, it not only comforts the sad but also puts the devil and all his apostles to flight, no matter how craftily and shrewdly they may defend themselves. Moreover, the Lord has prepared a table or paschal lamb before it, in order to destroy its enemies completely when they rage greatly, gnash their teeth against it, become mad, insane, raging, and raving, and call to their aid all their craft, strength, and power. Thus the dear bride of Christ can sit down at the table of her Lord, eat of the paschal lamb, drink of the fresh water, be happy and sing: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." These are her weapons and guns, with which she has defeated and conquered all her foes until now. With these she will also retain the victory until Judgment Day. The more the devil and the world plague and torture her, the better she fares. For her betterment and growth come in persecution, suffering, and dying. Therefore one of the old fathers has said: "The blood of the martyrs is a seed." Where one is executed, a hundred others rise again. Of this wonderful victory several psalms sing; for example, the ninth, the tenth, and others. (Luther)

In this way I also have been preserved by the grace of God the past eighteen years. I have let my enemies rage, threaten, slander, and damn me, take counsel against me without ceasing, invent many evil devices, and practice many a piece of knavery. I have let them worry anxiously how they might kill me and destroy my teaching, or rather God's. Moreover, I have been happy and of good cheer—at one time better than at another—have not worried greatly about their raving and raging, but have clung to the staff of comfort and found my way to the Lord's table. That is, I have committed my cares to our Lord God, into which He had led me absolutely without my will or counsel; and meanwhile I spoke an Our Father or a psalm. That is all of the armor with which until now I have not only held off all my enemies, but by the grace of God have also accomplished so much that, when I look behind me and consider how matters stand in the papacy, I really must be surprised that things have gone so far. I should never have dared to imagine that even one tenth of what is now evident would happen. He that has begun the good work will also bring it to completion (Phil. 1:6), even though nine more hells and worlds were gathered together in a heap. Therefore let every Christian thoroughly learn this art: to cling to this rod and this staff, and to find his way to this table when sorrow or other misfortune appears. Then he will surely gain strength and comfort for everything that worries him. (Luther)

The scene shifts again, and we find ourselves in a great King's banquet hall, God fills our lives with such a smorgasbord of blessings that our enemies cannot miss seeing them! (LL)

Thou preparest a table—The image is now changed, though expressing the general idea which is indicated in the first verse of the psalm, “I shall not want.” The evidence or proof of this in the previous verses is, that God was a shepherd, and would provide for him as a shepherd does for his flock; the evidence here is that God had provided a table, or a feast, for him in the very presence of his enemies, and had filled his cup with joy. The word “table” here is synonymous with “feast;” and the meaning is, “thou providedest for my wants.” There “may” be an allusion here to some particular period of the life of the psalmist, when he was in want, and when he perhaps felt an apprehension that he would perish, and when God had unexpectedly provided for his wants; but it is impossible now to determine to what occasion he thus refers. There were numerous occasions in the life of David which would be well represented by this language, “as if” God had provided a meal for him in the very “presence” of his foes, and in SPITE of them. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

Before me—For me. It is spread in my presence, and FOR me. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

In the presence of mine enemies—That is, in spite of them, or so that they could not prevent it. They were compelled to look on and see how God provided for him. It was manifest that this was from God; it was a proof of the divine favor; it furnished an assurance that he who had done this would never leave him to want. The friends of God are made to triumph in the very presence of their foes. Their enemies are compelled to see how He interposes in their behalf, how He provides for them, and how He defends them. Their final triumph in the day of judgment will be in the very presence of all their assembled enemies, for in their very presence He will pronounce the sentence which will make their eternal happiness sure, Matt. 25:31-36. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

In the Ancient Near East kings were often called the shepherds of their people. A king invited his most honored associates (Wal-Mart) to live in his palace. Such a king spread out rich banquet tables at which the members of his court could feast. (PBC)

The “enemies” are introduced for the moment as looking on helplessly while the guest enjoys the sanctity of the home of the host even as at an Oriental banquet onlookers were often permitted to observe everything from without. (Leupold)

The shepherd must prepare the pasture. This is new land, so the shepherd must be careful. The shepherd searches for poisonous plants and ample water. He looks for signs of wolves, coyotes, and bears. Of special concern to the shepherd is the adder, a small brown snake that lives underground. Adders are known to pop out of their holes and nip the sheep on the nose. The bite infects and can even kill. As defense against the snake the shepherd pours a circle of oil at the top of each adder’s hole. He also applies the oil to the noses of the

animals. The oil on the snake's hole lubricates the exit, preventing the snake from climbing out. The smell of the oil on the sheep's nose drives the serpent away. When we take our place next to the other sinners-made-saints...we share in God's glory. A partial list of what awaits you follows: (1) You are beyond condemnation (Rom. 8:1). (2) You are delivered from the law (Rom. 7:6). (3) You are near God (Eph. 2:13). (4) You are delivered from the power of evil (Col. 1:13). (5) You are a member of his kingdom (Col. 1:13). (6) You are justified (Rom. 4:1). (7) You have access to God at any moment (Eph. 2:18). (8) You will never be abandoned (Heb. 13:5). (9) You possess every spiritual blessing possible (Eph. 1:3). (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

This table is prepared "before my enemies." While the Lord dines His own, their enemies look on and cannot prevent nor disturb their joy and good fortune. Heretofore the enemies vexed and tormented the godly, being the cause of most of their tribulations. Now to the enemies dismay and chagrin they see the Lord turn to His oppressed and mistreated followers and shower upon them His bounty and love. (Compare Luke 16:23) (Stoeckhardt)

You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. (Message)

anoint my head with oil. Customary treatment of an honored guest at a banquet (see Lk 7:46; see also 2Sa 12:20; Ecc 9:8; Da 10:3). (CSB)

A banquet guest might be given oil to put on his head as a sign of hospitality. The oil acted like lotion, soothing the skin. Shepherds carried such oil in cattle- or ram- horn containers. (TLSB)

The second metaphor is that of the oil, which is often employed in Holy Writ. It was, however, a precious oil, such as a balsam or other sweet-smelling liquid. The priests and the kings were customarily anointed with it. Furthermore, when the Jews had their festivals and wished to be happy, they would anoint or sprinkle themselves with such precious oil, as Jesus also mentions (Matt. 6:17) when He says: "When you fast, anoint your head, and wash your face." This custom, then, of using oil was common among these people when they wanted to be merry and happy (John 12:3). Magdalene (Luke 7:38) also wished to make the Lord happy when she poured precious ointment of pure perfume on His head, for she saw that He was sad. The third metaphor is that of a cup, which they used in their worship when they brought drink offerings and rejoiced before the Lord. (Luther)

In like manner shepherds are still known to carry a little flask of oil to anoint the scratched face of the sheep that was obliged to seek its food among thorns and brambles. (Leupold)

Oriental kings welcomed their guests by providing fragrant oil for their heads. Perhaps we would compare this to rare and expensive perfume or cologne today. (LL)

Shepherds used oil for three purposes: to repel insects, to prevent conflicts, and to heal wounds. Bugs bug people, but they can kill sheep. Consider nose flies. If they succeed in depositing their eggs into the soft membrane of the sheep's nose, the eggs become worm-like larvae which drive the sheep insane. They forget to eat. They aren't able to sleep. Ewes stop milking, and lambs stop growing. Oil acts like a repellent. The fragrance keeps the insects at bay and the flock at peace. The sheep may be at peace until mating season. Two rams lower their heads and an old-fashioned head butt breaks out. To prevent injury, the shepherd anoints the rams. He smears a slippery, greasy substance over the nose and head. This lubricant causes them to glance off rather than crash into each other. They still tend to get hurt, however. And these wounds are the third reason the shepherd anoints the sheep. (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

You revive my drooping head. (Message)

Thou anointest my head with oil—Margin, as in Hebrew, “makest fat.” That is, thou dost pour oil on my head so abundantly that it seems to be made fat with it. The expression indicates abundance. The allusion is to the custom of anointing the head on festival occasions, as an indication of prosperity and rejoicing (see Matt. 6:17, note; Luke 7:46, note), and the whole is indicative of the divine favor, of prosperity, and of joy. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

Cup. Of the Lord's banquet (see note on 16:5). (CSB)

“My cup” here means, my portion meted out to me at the banquet. This cup overflows. The Lord here apportions to His own eternal abundance. The guests are all well filled. They are happy and of good cheer. This feast is a picture of the rapture and bliss which those enjoy who come into eternal glory with the Lord. The way through the dark valley ends in glory and everlasting happiness. After a short season of suffering and sorrow, the Lord refreshes His own with heavenly viands for everlasting joy. Already in this life, joy follows upon sorrow for the believers according to the will of the Lord. This is indicated by the picture of the banquet which the Lord prepares for His honored guests. Above all, however, the banquet feast of heaven, which awaits all those who are faithful to their Lord, is held out here for the believers' encouragement, as they walk through the dark valley of suffering and sorrow. (Stoekhardt)

He fills my cup to overflowing so that at once I may drink, be happy and of good cheer, and get drunk. The prepared table, accordingly, is my armor, the precious balm my helmet, the overflowing cup my sword; and with these I shall conquer all my enemies.” But is that not a wonderful armor and an even more wonderful victory? (Luther)

David wishes to say this: “Lord, Thy guests, who are sitting at Thy table, the believers, not only become strong and bold giants in the presence of all their enemies, but they also become happy and drunk. That is due to the fact that Thou dost treat them well, as a rich man usually treats his guests. Thou dost feed them splendidly, make them happy and gay, and serve them so well with wine that they get drunk.” All of that is done through the Word of grace. Through it the Lord, our Shepherd, feeds and strengthens the hearts of His believers, so that they defy all of their enemies and say with the prophet: “I am not afraid of the many hundreds of thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about” (Ps. 3:6). And above, in the fourth verse, he said: “I fear no evil; for Thou, Lord, art with me.” He accordingly gives them the Holy Spirit together with the Word, yes, through this same Word. The Holy Spirit makes them not only courageous and bold, but also so secure and happy that they get drunk with a great and boundless joy. (Luther)

David is thus speaking here of spiritual power, joy, and intoxication—the power of God (Rom. 1:16); and a joy in the Holy Spirit, as St. Paul calls it (Rom. 14:17); and a blessed intoxication, in which the people are filled not with wine, for that is debauchery, but with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). And this is the armor and the weapons with which our Lord God equips His believers against the devil and the world; that is, He puts the Word into their mouths and puts courage, that is, the Holy Spirit, into their hearts. Unafraid and cheerful, they attack all their enemies with that equipment. They smite and conquer them despite all their power, wisdom, and holiness. Such warriors were the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1 ff.). They stood up in Jerusalem against the command of the emperor and the high priest and acted as though they were veritable gods and all the others mere locusts, and they pressed forward with all strength and joy, as though they were intoxicated, as some actually mocked them and said they were filled with new wine. But St. Peter showed from the prophet Joel that they were not filled with wine but with the Holy Spirit. Afterward he flays about with his sword; that is, he opens his mouth and preaches, and with one stroke he rescues three thousand souls from the devil. (Luther)

But such power, joy, and blissful intoxication are manifested in the believers not only when they prosper and have peace, but also when they suffer and die. When the council at Jerusalem, therefore, had the Apostles flogged, they rejoiced that they had been counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ (Acts 5:41). And in Rom. 5:3 St. Paul says: “We also rejoice in our sufferings.” Later on many martyrs, men and women, went to their deaths with happy hearts and laughing mouths as though they were going to a happy festival or dance. So we read of St. Agnes and St. Agatha,⁹ who were virgins of thirteen or fourteen years, and of many others. They not only boldly and confidently conquered the devil and the world through their deaths, but were also cheerful with all their hearts, just as if they had been drunk with great joy. And it does vex the devil beyond measure when one can so confidently despise his great might

and guile. In our times, too, many have died cheerfully because they have confessed Christ. Similarly we learn that many die in their beds with a fine understanding and faith and say with Simeon, "With peace and joy I now depart,"¹⁰ so that it is a pleasure to behold, as I myself have often beheld it. And all this because, as the prophet says, they are anointed with the oil which the Forty-fifth Psalm (Ps. 45:7) calls an oil of gladness and have drunk from the overflowing cup which the Lord has filled. (Luther)

Good!" you say, "but I do not yet find myself sufficiently well equipped to die cheerfully." That does not matter. As mentioned earlier, David did not always have the ability either; indeed, at times he complained that he had been cast away from the presence of God. Nor did other saints at all times have full confidence in God and an eternal pleasure and patience in their distresses and afflictions. St. Paul at times trusted so securely and surely in Christ that he would not have bothered even to stand up because of the Law, sin, death, and the devil. "It is no longer I who live," he says (Gal. 2:20), "but Christ who lives in me." And (Phil. 1:23): "My desire is to depart and to be with Christ." And (Rom. 8:32, 35): "Who shall separate us from the love of God? He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all. Will He not also give us all things with Him? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or the sword separate us from Him?" When he speaks here of death, the devil, and all misfortune, he is as sure as though he were the strongest and greatest saint, for whom death would be pure joy. Elsewhere, then, he speaks as though he were the weakest and greatest sinner on earth. 1 Corinthians 2:3: "I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling." Romans 7:14: "I am carnal, sold under sin," which brings me into captivity. Romans 7:24: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" And in Galatians 5:17, he teaches that in the saints there is an eternal struggle of the flesh against the spirit. Therefore you ought not despair so soon, though you find yourself weak and fainthearted, but pray diligently that you might remain with the Word and grow in the faith and knowledge of Christ. (Luther)

Like cups filled till the liquid flows over the top, our lives overflow with blessings into the lives of others. (LL)

A metaphor referring to what the host offers his guests to drink. To the godly the Lord offers a cup of blessings (see 23:5) or salvation (see 116:13); he makes the wicked drink from a cup of wrath.). – Luther: "You fill my cup brimful." (Leupold)

According to David, our hearts are not large enough to contain the blessings that God wants to give. Hosts in the ancient East used it to send a message to the guest. As long as the cup was kept full, the guest knew he was welcome. But when the cup sat empty, the host was hinting that the hour was late. On those occasions, however, when the host really enjoyed the company of the person, he filled the cup to overflowing. (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

my cup brims with blessing, (Message)

My cup runneth over—It is not merely “full;” it runs over. This, too, indicates abundance; and from the abundance of the favors thus bestowed, the psalmist infers that God would always provide for him, and that He would never leave him to want. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

23:6 *goodness and love*. Both frequently refer to covenant benefits (see note on 6:4 – the Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel (see Dt 7:9, 12) as well as to David and his dynasty.); here they are personified (see 25:21; 43:3; 79:8; 89:14). (CSB)

Standing as it were at the end of life, the believer here is retrospectively declares: “All over I see that goodness, only goodness has followed me step by step.” What else but good can a person expect of God? Even that which at first sight appears to be evil turns out to be a blessing. (The Hebrew “ak” may be taken as “surely, certainly,” since it is also used as an affirmative interjection). “Surely I have received from the Lord nothing but good all the days of my life!” (Stoekhardt)

Luther: “We, then, who surely must be considered as nothing at all in comparison with David and who, besides, live at the end of the world - and that, as Christ and the Apostles tell us, is a horrible and dangerous time - ought much more to awake and to pray with all earnestness and diligence that we may remain in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, that is, that we may hear God’s Word, through it receive the many kinds of blessings and fruit that were shown us above, and endure therein unto the end. May Christ, our only Shepherd and Savior, grant us this! Amen” (LW 12:179).

Because the devil never stops tormenting the believers—inwardly with terror, outwardly with the wiles of false teachers and the power of the tyrants—the prophet here at the end earnestly asks that God, who has given him this treasure, would also keep him in it to the end. He says: “Oh, may the dear God grant His grace that goodness and mercy might follow me all the days of my life and that He might soon make manifest what He calls goodness and mercy,” that is, that he might dwell in the house of the Lord forever. It is as though he would say: “Lord, Thou hast begun the matter. Thou hast given me Thy holy Word and received me among those who are Thy people, who know Thee, praise and magnify Thee. Continue to give Thy grace, that I may remain with the Word and nevermore be separated from Thy holy Christendom.” Thus he also prays in the Twenty-seventh Psalm (Ps. 27:4): “One thing,” he says, “I ask of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beautiful worship of the Lord, and to visit His temple.” (Luther)

Goodness to supply every want. Mercy to forgive every sin. Goodness to provide. Mercy to pardon. Our moods may shift, but God's doesn't. Our minds may change, but God's doesn't. Our devotion may falter, but God's never does. Even if we are faithless, he is faithful, for he cannot betray himself (2 Tim. 2:13). (Safe in the Shepherd's Arms - Max Lucado)

follow. Lit. "pursue." (CSB)

God does not give His blessings once; His goodness and mercy are continually given to His children. (TLSB)

Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. (Message)

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me—God will bestow them upon me. This is the "result" of what is stated in the previous verses. The effect of God's merciful dealings with him had been to lead his mind to the assurance that God would always be his shepherd and friend; that He would never leave him to want. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

All the days of my life—Through all its changes; in every variety of situation; until I reach its close. Life indeed would end, and he does not venture to conjecture when that would be; but as long as life should continue, he felt confidently assured that everything needful for him would be bestowed upon him. The language is the utterance of a heart overflowing with joy and gratitude in the recollection of the past, and full of glad anticipation (as derived from the experience of the past) in regard to the future. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

dwell in the house of the LORD. See note on 15:1 (Not as a priest but as God's guest in his holy, royal house, the temple.). (CSB)

More than worship in the tabernacle. God's people not only know His blessings in this life but will live with Him in heaven forever. (TLSB)

"I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for the length of time." Literally: "My dwelling shall be in" etc., (an infinitive of *shabat* with suffix). The believer is confident that he will finally reach his home, his everlasting home. The Godly is aware that during his life the Lord, the Good Shepherd, has well provided for him, has protected him on the way, and has not forsaken him in the dark valley of suffering and sorrow. The end of his journey, though, is even better: He shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. He knew his Lord was with him in the green pastures, the springs of fresh waters, even in the dark valley, but all the fairest experiences of his life are put into the shade by the joy of eternally dwelling in the house of the Lord! The house of the Lord is there where God pleases to manifest Himself in a particular way to His believers. To dwell in the house of the Lord means to enjoy the most intimate union and communion with God. Here on earth the Lord is near to His own, but complete communion with

God begins only after this course of life has been run. This is what the faithful here is looking forward to. Moreover, in this blissful relationship the believer is certain to remain for “the length of time,” (orek, jamim). This is contrasted with the earlier “all” (kol). “all the days of my life.” The meaning is that even in this earthly life we experience much good. When once this life is ended, however, we enter into everlasting life. The joy of everlasting life consists essentially in complete communion with God, the Good Shepherd. When even here on earth we rejoice to be in the company of the Good Shepherd, what shall it be there, when He shall fill our cup of joy to overflowing? (Stoeckhardt)

hus the prophet here teaches and admonishes all believers by his example not to become smug, proud, or presumptuous, but to fear and pray that they may not lose their treasure. Such an earnest admonition, however, should truly arouse us and awake us to pray diligently. Blessed David, a prophet enlightened with all kinds of divine wisdom and knowledge and endowed with so many kinds of great and splendid gifts of God, prayed often and very earnestly that he might remain in possession of the blessings of God. We, then, who surely must be considered as nothing at all in comparison with David and who, besides, live at the end of the world—and that, as Christ and the Apostles tell us, is a horrible and dangerous time—ought much more to awake and to pray with all earnestness and diligence that we may remain in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, that is, that we may hear God’s Word, through it receive the many kinds of blessings and fruit that were shown us above, and endure therein unto the end. May Christ, our only Shepherd and Savior, grant us this! Amen. (Luther)

All of these scenes were common in royal courts of the ancient Near East, but in this psalm the palace is heaven, and the feasting and celebrating represent the joys of eternal life. In heaven we will feast in safety forever because we will be secure from Satan and all our enemies. No one will be able to deprive us of the joys of eternal life, which can never be interrupted or lost. (PBC)

This isn’t just any house. It is our Father’s house.

We will dwell “in His house” – very close to Him – as His children and heirs throughout this life and on into the next. (LL)

I’m back home in the house of God for the rest of my life. (Message)

forever. The Hebrew for this word suggests “throughout the years.” But see also notes on 11:7; 16:9–11. (CSB)

We will dwell in His house – very close to Him – as His children and heirs throughout this life and on into the next. (LL)

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever—Margin, as in Hebrew: “to length of days.” The expression, I think, does not refer to eternity or to heaven,

but it is parallel with the former expression “All the days of my life;” that is, he would dwell in the house of the Lord as long as he lived—with the idea added here, which was not in the former member of the sentence, that his life **WOULD BE** long, or that he hoped and anticipated that he would live long on the earth. The phrase used here, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord,” is one that is several times employed in the Psalms as indicative of the wish of the psalmist. Thus, in Ps. 27:4, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” Ps. 26:8, “lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honor dwelleth.” Ps. 65:4, “blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts.” (Barnes Notes on the OT)

Ps. 84:4, “blessed are they that dwell in thy house.” (Compare also Ps. 84:1, 3, 10). The “language” here is obviously taken from the employment of those who had their habitation near the tabernacle, and afterward the temple, whose business it was to attend constantly on the service of God, and to minister in his courts. We are not to suppose of David that he anticipated such a residence in or near the tabernacle or the house of God; but the meaning is, that he anticipated and desired a life **AS IF** he dwelt there, and **AS IF** he was constantly engaged in holy occupations. His life would be spent **AS IF** in the constant service of God; his joy and peace in religion would be **AS IF** he were always within the immediate dwelling-place of the Most High. This expresses the desire of a true child of God. He wishes to live **AS IF** he were always engaged in solemn acts of worship, and occupied in holy things; he desires peace and joy in religion **AS IF** he were constantly in the place where God makes his abode, and allowed to partake of his smiles and friendship. In a very important sense it is his privilege so to live even on earth; it **WILL** certainly be his privilege so to live in heaven: and, full of grateful exultation and joy, every child of God may adopt this language as his own, and say confidently, “Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life here, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever,” for heaven, where God dwells, will be his eternal home. (Barnes Notes on the OT)

Ps 23 In faith, David declares that since Yahweh is his shepherd, he “shall not want” (v 1). Our Good Shepherd lovingly provides everything that we need in this life, but we often fail to recognize that these gifts come from Him. Instead, we focus on things that we want, but do not need. How wonderful that our Shepherd does not withhold His blessings from us, but still cares for these needs and more: He gives us His own Son! • Good Shepherd, open our eyes to see Your blessing. Open our ears to hear Your voice. Open our hearts that we may love You. Amen. (TLSB)