

# STORM SHELTER

## A STUDY IN PSALMS

### THE SHELTER OF GOD'S PRESENCE

**BIG IDEA:** God is with me no matter what I'm facing.

**DATE:** August 17, 2025

**SCRIPTURE:** Psalm 23:1-6

### OPENING QUESTION

Think about bad weather you have experienced—thunderstorms, tornadoes, snow storms, hurricanes. What's the worst storm you've ever been in? Are you the kind of person who likes to watch the storm out the window or go straight to the inside bathroom and seek shelter?

The question about facing storms in life is not if, but when. We will all have times of trouble whether it be financial, health, relational, spiritual, or something else. As we start this study in the Book of Psalms, we will reflect on the promises of God to his people in the Old Testament when they faced times of trouble. Psalms is the worship book of the Jewish people. Many of the Psalms are lyrics to songs of worship used in the Jewish faith. God's character does not change from what He promised thousands of years ago to today. We can still find shelter in the character of God during the storms we face today.

*Has God used any passages in the Psalms to bring you comfort or encouragement during troubling times in your life?*

### THE SETTING

David apparently composed this psalm in the midst of or reflecting back on a time when his enemies were close at hand and the outcome of the conflict was far from certain. The situation was severe enough that David could have feared for his life; instead, God's presence and goodness allowed him to say, "I fear no danger" (v. 4). This former shepherd could plainly see how the Great Shepherd guided, cared, and provided for him.

### SCRIPTURE READING

PSALM 23:1-6 (NIV)

The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, <sup>3</sup> he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

## DISCUSSION

Psalms 23 has been a Christian favorite for centuries seen on bookmarks, tumblers, pillows and wall art. It is often read at funerals, but it is really a psalm about *life* and how to stay on the right path during the storms in our lives. Don't let your familiarity with these verses allow you to miss the vital truths they communicate. Specifically, David opens this psalm with by reminding us of three things God does for us as our Shepherd:

**1. He guides us.** Sheep aren't smart. They often wander aimlessly into one problem after another. That's why a shepherd's staff has a hook on one end – to haul sheep out of holes and ravines when they fall in. Likewise, God desires to help you navigate the tough places of life. When we're pulled off course or wander away, His presence guides us back onto "the right paths." The Shepherd isn't just interested in our rescue, but also our restoration.

**2. He provides for us.** A shepherd does more than just keep the sheep out of trouble; he also provides for their needs. God does the same for us. Because He is such a good Shepherd, we will lack nothing. In the midst of life's needs, sorrows, and grief, God provides perfectly for us.

**3. He renews us.** The psalm refers to green pastures (a place of rest) and still waters (a source of refreshment). It's only through God's presence in our lives that we can reach and enjoy these places of refreshment.

### OUR SHEPHERD GUIDES, PROVIDES AND RENEWS

READ: Psalm 23:1-3

- ° What's your initial reaction to these verses?
- ° How have these verses encouraged you in the past?
- ° Which one of the shepherd's actions means the most to you right now? Why?

God is our shepherd, which means we must submit to His care. When we try to take control, we only get ourselves deeper into trouble. God's presence brings about freedom, joy, and release from our struggle. When we decide to stop struggling and start trusting, we experience the relief and renewal we need.

### OUR SHEPHERD PROTECTS, COMFORTS AND ENCOURAGES

READ: Psalm 23:4-5

As we move deeper into Psalm 23, we see that **God protects us as our Shepherd**. Because we know our weaknesses, it's easy to imagine ourselves as defenseless sheep wandering alone at midnight. We can't see the predators lurking in the shadows, but we sense their presence. We feel helpless and hopeless. It's in these circumstances we need to remember the reality of God's

protection. The shepherd's rod can be used to defend the sheep – and even as an offensive weapon. The staff can also be used to protect from harm. These images remind us that God is strong enough to protect us from any storm.

In addition to protecting us, **God's presence gives us comfort**. As the Scriptures say: "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. 8:31). God Himself is the one who uses His power on our behalf when we face darkness and the predatory nature of this world.

Finally, **God's presence brings about courage**. Consider the dark valleys of life you must pass through. In many circumstances, there's really very little you can do to make things better. It's through prayer – through connecting with the presence of God in our lives – that we gain courage.

- ° What sometimes keeps us from recognizing God's presence?
- ° What helps you recognize God's presence in your life?
- ° How has God's presence in your life made you braver than you would be otherwise?
- ° Verse 4 is about facing the darkest times in our lives. Verse 5 is about a celebration. How do these two fit together? Why are they right next to each other in this Psalm?

The imagery in verse 5 points to celebration. Specifically, the enemy is forced to watch as we celebrate. A huge banquet table is set before us. It's a time to feast and be glad because God is with us. We are the honored guests, and God has set us apart unto Himself. When we dine with the King, our cup will overflow with more of God's abundance than we can ever consume.

Sheep can be pretty defenseless. But these verses remind us our shepherd is always close by. Not only does he protect us with his rod and staff, he abundantly provides for us in the midst of danger.

## OUR SHEPHERD PURSUES

READ: Psalm 23:6

David taught us through his psalm that God's goodness and faithful love will come after us – that they will be there for the rest of our lives. He was confident that God's "goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life." When we feel like temptation is pursuing us, God is more determined to win our hearts. When sorrows seem to be around every corner, the Lord is present to wipe our tears and win our hearts. When life is just plain hard and we don't know if we can overcome the pain, the Shepherd is present to guide us toward His love.

- The Hebrew word for "follow" is even stronger as it holds the connotation of pursuit. How does that change the way you understand this verse?
- What does this communicate to you about God and his character?
- When have you felt God pursuing you with His love and goodness?

As long as you have breath in your lungs and a beating heart, you have the opportunity to embrace the love that longs to embrace you. God has a great desire for you: that you will live with Him. That's why He pursues you. God desires to become your Shepherd and protect you in the deep, dark valleys of life.

It's by His presence that you gain a sense of hope and courage. It's by His goodness that you dine at the King's table. Forever.

Psalm 23 is comforting because of what it tells us about God and what He will do on our behalf. For many people, though, the real question is not "What will God do for me?" but "Will God love

me?” David ends this Psalm by reminding us that God’s goodness and faithful love will come after us—that they will be there for the rest of our lives.

## SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE

We’ve all experienced the pain of an unexpected crisis. But no matter what we face, God is present. He is our shelter. Spend some time this week thinking back over times in your life when you have known this to be true. Consider journaling about those experiences so you can be easily reminded of them in times of doubt. In the unexpected moments of life, God’s loving presence has been and always will be available to us.

**Live it Out:** Consider the following suggestions for living in the reality of God’s presence and care.

- **Evaluate**—Identify circumstances in your life where you need protection, comfort, or care. Pray that God will help you be more sensitive to His presence in those situations.
- **Memorize**—Commit Psalm 23 to memory as an internal reminder of God’s presence in your life.
- **Share**—Who do you know that is facing a storm right now? Share the 23rd Psalm with them in a card, text, or email.

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## COMMENTARY

### VERSE 1

David grew up tending the flocks of his father, Jesse (1 Sam. 16:10-13). Psalm 23, a favorite of many Christians the world over, uses this shepherd imagery to proclaim profound truth about God’s loving presence and care for His people no matter what challenges they face.

David’s opening affirmation that the Lord is my Shepherd sets the foundation for the psalm. First, David described the personal aspect of his relationship with God by using the word my. The Lord was David’s shepherd and thus took responsibility for caring for and guiding David. Second, David affirmed he was not in charge of his life. God was! Sheep follow shepherds, not the other way around.

David believed God would provide for his needs, just as a shepherd provides for his sheep. David affirmed God’s presence and provision through the words there is nothing I lack. With God as his Shepherd, David lacked nothing he really needed; he could follow God content with what God provided. God’s presence also meant God’s protection. In ancient Israel, people who cared for the animals of others were responsible to the owners for those animals (Ex. 22:10-13). God would protect David just as shepherds protected sheep.

### VERSE 2

The expression He lets me lie down stresses the Shepherd’s leadership. The sheep only lie down where the shepherd directs. Their safety and well-being are always his concern, and he knows what is best for them. Green pastures literally mean “pastures of vegetation,” perhaps an area of relative plenty in the wilderness. In the wilderness during much of the year, vegetation is scarce. Good shepherds, however, know where to find food and water for their sheep. Quiet waters again stress the shepherd’s care. Rushing waters would prove dangerous to sheep that are clumsy by

nature. The shepherd would either lead them to gently flowing waters or dam up a faster stream with stones to provide a pool for the sheep to drink from without fear.

### VERSE 3

David's testimony He renews my life affirmed God's refreshing of David along David's life journey. God always knew what was coming next for David and provided for him accordingly. Seeing God's faithfulness again and again refreshed David like food and water refreshed sheep in the wilderness. The words right paths can be translated "paths of righteousness." Just as a shepherd led his sheep along the proper paths, so the Lord led David along the right paths. He knew where David needed to travel to fulfill the purpose He had prepared for him. Moreover, God led David for His name's sake. The shepherd's reputation was at stake in the care and safety of the sheep under his charge. As David reflected on his relationship with the Lord, he knew God put His reputation at stake as He cared for David. The Lord had promised to care for His people, and He would make good on His word.

### VERSE 4

The phrase even when I go through the darkest valley reveals David's understanding that life isn't easy. Darkest valley can literally be translated "the ravine of the shadow of death." The words denote a tight, narrow ravine of the kind that are common in Judah's wilderness. The wilderness is quite dark at night, and thus ravines are extremely dangerous for a variety of reasons. Despite these potential dangers, David knew that sometimes a dark valley contained the right path. God's presence did not preclude difficulty. Nevertheless, David affirmed I fear no danger as he went through life. His Shepherd was guiding him, and nothing would take God by surprise. The phrase You are with me provides the key to David's lack of fear. God's enduring presence and action on his behalf assured him all would be well. God would be with David, and nothing lay beyond His sovereign supervision.

The Hebrew word translated rod can refer to a club, an instrument of protection. Wild animals saw sheep as easy prey, and shepherds had to fend them off with some kind of weapon. A shepherd's staff typically was made of wood and provided him something to lean on for support and to guide his sheep as he led them through the wilderness. The staff also often had a hook—a bend in one end—to enable the shepherd to lift a sheep out of a crevice or pit. Just as a shepherd's protection and care would comfort sheep, so God's loving care and protection comforted David.

### VERSE 5

At this point in the psalm, the metaphor moves away from sheep and Shepherd to a picture of even greater intimacy— one of close fellowship as David and God enjoyed a meal together. The Lord hosted the meal and would prepare a table so He and David could enjoy their company. Such an arrangement presupposed a good level of security, though being in the presence of my enemies may not appear to suggest it. God, who was with David at every turn and who guided David's life, would protect him in every circumstance. Even David's greatest adversaries dared not approach as he dined with the King of kings.

Summer temperatures in the Judean wilderness exceed 100 degrees. The humidity is quite low and one's skin can easily become dry. Even today, a host might anoint a guest's skin with oil. Combined with a gentle breeze, this would cool David's head and refresh him. Moreover, anointing David with perfumed oil would signify God was treating David as His special guest (Luke 7:46).

My cup overflows indicates David had plenty to eat and drink. God treated David to a wonderful banquet that more than satisfied his appetite. It suggests the abundance of God's blessing beyond



the basics. In the Lord, David had all he would ever need, including complete security. God was with him all the time, no matter what David faced.

## VERSE 6

As David concluded the psalm, he continued to express confidence in his relationship with God. The opening word only also means “surely.” David’s words sound certain and extra affirming. Again, David wasn’t implying that he would never see hardship during his life. However, he knew he would always have the comfort of God’s sustaining presence. David counted on God’s goodness at life’s every turn. The Good Shepherd would always be good, even during difficult situations.

The Hebrew word translated faithful love is a rich theological term. It describes all the blessings that come to us because we are God’s children. In other contexts it is translated as “mercy,” “faithfulness,” “covenant love,” “loyalty,” or “grace.” Goodness and faithful love are wonderful gifts of God. They would actively pursue David, just as they pursue believers today. God takes active steps in our lives so we will know His goodness and faithful love in every situation.

The phrase all the days of my life reflects David’s confidence—he could count on God’s presence and protection as long as he lived. He had begun a relationship with the Lord early in his life; he believed God would never abandon him or cease to provide for Him. The goodness and faithful love that pursued David all his days came from God and denoted God’s active presence in David’s life.

David testified, I will dwell in the house of the Lord, which was a vivid picture of a deep relationship between close friends. The phrase House of the Lord does not describe the temple; David’s son Solomon built that after David’s death (1 Kings 6–7). However, David had arranged for the ark of the Lord, the symbol of God’s presence, to dwell in Jerusalem; he worshiped God there (2 Sam. 6:1-19). It’s likely that David didn’t intend a specific place; rather, he used the term metaphorically to mean he would enjoy God’s presence forever. In Psalm 27:4, David affirmed that close fellowship with the Lord was the one thing he desired more than anything else. Indeed, God’s presence is what makes heaven heaven (Rev. 21:3-4).

The phrase “as long as I live” literally means “length of days.” The phrase doesn’t specifically refer to eternity, but God’s covenant and commitment to us has no end. Some interpreters, therefore, suggest the last phrase of the psalm speaks of God’s love and grace beyond this life into eternity itself. Indeed, the Bible teaches that eternal life begins when we come to know the Lord (John 17:3; Eph. 1:13), so such an interpretation makes sense. For David, and for believers of all ages, dwelling in God’s loving presence can be a constant in our lives even now—and in eternity our relationship with God will surpass anything we have ever known in this life (Rev. 21:1-4).