

LESSON 10

November 3, 2024

Unit III: Psalms of Thanksgiving and Praise When the Road Is Long

DEVOTIONAL READING: John 10:1-10

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURES: Psalm 23; John 10:11-14

PRINT PASSAGE: Psalm 23:1-6

KEY VERSE

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. (Psalm 23:6, KJV)

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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. (Psalm 23:6, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Apply the attributes of a shepherd to God's care for them in 2024.
- Adopt the psalmist's sense of security in knowing God as a shepherd.
- Create a scenario in which you could experience God's "leading beside still waters" and "restoring [your] soul."

*Key Terms

Anoint(est) (verse 5)—Hebrew: *mashach* (maw-shakh'): to smear, spread oil (on); by implication, to consecrate.

Restoreth (verse 3)—Hebrew: *arukab* (ar-oo-kaw'): refers to health, recovery; repairs; perfects; "refreshes" (NIV).

Shepherd (verse 1)—Hebrew: *ra'ab* (raw-aw'): a herdsman; a keeper of a herd, especially cattle or sheep; one who "feeds" and "tends" the flock, which are the responsibilities of a shepherd; but the shepherd is also a friend to the flock.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Introduction

Eastman Johnson was a renowned American painter of the nineteenth century. He was famous for his realistic portrayals of everyday life and portraiture. One of his notable paintings was created in 1863. It depicts an African American man sitting with a Bible on his lap after President Lincoln's



The Biblical Context

Psalm 23 is an example of a personal psalm expressing an individual's trust in God. Such psalms typically arise from the author's difficult circumstances, although it may not always be clear what those circumstances were. Despite the challenges, the author had learned to lean on God. Occasionally, these psalms include a plea for assistance and a commitment to praising God, but neither of these elements is present in Psalm 23.

Psalm 23 is a cherished and profound passage in the Bible, often attributed to King David. David, who was once a shepherd, portrays God as a caring shepherd who tends to His flock by leading, protecting, and providing for them. This image reveals a God who guides, nurtures, and leads us, signifying His intimate care and provision. The serene images in this passage represent spiritual nourishment and rest. God sustains our souls and leads us to places of peace and refreshment. "He restores my soul; he guides me along the right paths for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:3). God's restoration heals our weary hearts, and His guidance ensures we walk in righteousness, honoring His name.

God's unwavering love and goodness accompany us throughout life, and our eternal home awaits in His presence. Psalm 23 speaks of trust, comfort, and the assurance that God shepherds us through life's valleys and mountaintops, reminding us that we lack nothing when the Lord is our Shepherd.

historic Emancipation Proclamation, which called for the abolition of slavery. The exact meaning of the painting at that time and for us today remains unclear. Scholars aren't sure whether the man in the painting is supposed to be a slave or a Union soldier, owing to his race and clothing. Nonetheless, both interpretations correctly reflect the place of African Americans at that time. The painting is titled *The Lord Is My Shepherd*, indicating that the man meditates on Psalm 23, perhaps as a reflection of Lincoln's Proclamation. The painting's message is that the way forward for this man, whether slave or soldier, is perilous, as the psalm reads, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil" (verse 4a). The realization of danger on the horizon must temper the celebration of freedom. Though the threats to our well-being, mental health, and status may not be as severe as they were for this man, we can all relate to the fear that comes with uncertainty. However, we can take comfort in knowing that God's rod and staff are with us, and He walks with us like a Good Shepherd. Even in the face of death and destruction, we can find solace in the hope of everlasting life, as given in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The Lord Is My Shepherd (Psalm 23:1-3)

KJV

THE LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

NIV

THE LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,

3 he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

Psalm 23 is a famous and cherished passage that begins with the statement "The LORD is my shepherd; I lack nothing" (verse 1, NIV). The psalmist elaborates on the metaphor of God as a shepherd

in the subsequent three verses. The psalmist affirmed that God would meet his needs as a shepherd does for his sheep. Four poetic lines in **verses 2-3** describe what a shepherd does for his sheep. In **verse 2**, the poet paints a vivid picture of beautiful scenery, with sheep being taken to lush pastures and quiet waters to drink. In the first line of **verse 3**, the psalmist says that God's guidance and provision refreshed his soul. The final line in this series emphasizes that God guides His people along the right path, which may be the "paths of righteousness" or simply the "right paths." Either way, the metaphor of a path is used in Wisdom Literature to represent the journey of one's life. According to wisdom, there are two possible paths: the straight path that leads to life, and the crooked path that leads to death. God guides His people to live with justice and integrity like a father guiding his children. The final line of **verse 3** states that God shepherds His people for His name's sake. In Psalm 23, the fourth verse talks about God's guidance in distress. The psalmist imagines a path that leads through a dark valley, also known as "the valley of the shadow of death." The psalmist found confidence in God's presence during difficult times and did not fear evil because of God's promise to be with him. The psalmist uses the metaphor of a shepherd and his tools, the rod and staff, to describe God's protection and guidance. The psalmist ends this section by reaffirming God's comfort in the midst of trouble.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What sometimes threatens your peace of mind or sense of security?

The Lord Is My Host (*Psalm 23:4-6*)

KJV

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

NIV

4 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.

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

6 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.

The poem's second part shifts from describing God as a shepherd to describing Him as a host. Although some people believe that the host and the shepherd are the same, the poem's primary message emphasizes that God provides what is necessary and in abundance. In this section of the poem,

God treated the psalmist as His guest, preparing food for him and filling his cup to the brim. The overflowing cup connects to the theme of the blessing or salvation, which is the opposite of the cup of judgment. Even though the psalmist hinted at trouble in **verse 4**, he expressed confidence in God while facing enemies, which he mentioned for the first time in **verse 5**. God demonstrated whose side He was on to the enemies through His presence and provision—treating the psalmist as His honored guest in the presence of his enemies (**verse 5**).

In **verse 6** of Psalm 23, God’s covenant attributes of goodness and love are personified as following the psalmist. The shepherd metaphor extends into the second stanza, where goodness and love act like sheepdogs, helping the shepherd keep the sheep going in the right direction. It is important to note that the concept of an afterlife was not fully developed when Psalm 23 was written. The idea of an afterlife was developed during the late Old Testament and intertestamental periods and blossomed in the New Testament. Therefore, reading Psalm 23 in the light of the New Testament indicates that those who trust God will live in His presence forever.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In what ways does God “restore our souls”?

A Closing Thought

Just as a shepherd tends to his flock, God lovingly tends to His children. He guides and protects us, and meets our every need. The green pastures symbolize not only physical sustenance but also spiritual nourishment. Our souls find rest, growth, and abundance in God’s presence. The still waters represent tranquility and peace. Amid life’s chaos, God offers a peace that surpasses understanding.

Your Life

Cultivate trust in God’s guidance. Just as sheep trust their shepherd, trust that God knows what’s best for you. Release control and surrender your worries, fears, and plans to Him. Acknowledge that He is in charge.

Your World!

Live your life as a testament to your unwavering faith and trust in God, just as Psalm 23 teaches us. Show kindness, patience, and optimism toward those around you, and share your experiences of how trusting in God’s voice has led you to find peace and well-being, like still waters and green pastures.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank You for providing the safety and support that acts as a shield against harm. We can always rely on You and don’t have to be afraid. Your kindness and love continually pursue us, even when we are unaware of it. Thank You for Your dependability and capability and for being our source of protection and hope. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

