

May 12, 2018

## Psalm 23

Praying with God:  
Praying the 23rd Psalm

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Today I'm going to do something a little **different**. I'm going to pray the **23rd Psalm**. Most of us are familiar with this Psalm. We've heard it read at **funerals**, we've seen it written on **Hallmark cards**, we've recited it in **church**, and maybe we've even heard a **sermon** or two on it. Maybe this is your **favorite** Psalm. You know it **by heart**. For others of us. We know about it, but it hasn't sunk into our hearts. Praying this Psalm will help it **sink into** our **hearts** in a way that talking about it won't.

Our sermon series is supposed to teach us how to pray the Psalms, but I would fall short as your **pastor** if I didn't take the time to **model** what this can look like. So for the next **30-35 minutes**, I'm going to read this Psalm line by line and pray through it. My prayer will have elements of **teaching** because I've studied this Psalm a lot this week, but my desire is that we will **each** walk away having a better sense of how to pray the Psalms. I hope that when you go home, you'll **open up** Psalm 23 and try praying it through on your own.

Now, you do not have to **close** your **eyes** and **clasp** your **hands** the entire time I pray. You can, but you can also **open** your **eyes** and look to **heaven** or **outside**. You can look at the **cross**. You can look at the text in your **Bible**. Some of you may fall **asleep**. That's alright. The Lord is just making you **lie down** in green pastures. But I pray most of all that you would **attune** your heart to mine. That means to listen, think about, and **hopefully agree** with what I'm praying—to **amen** it. When you whisper or think "amen" you're saying, "Let it be so, **LORD**. Let it be true." Let's pray...

### A Psalm of David. (ESV)<sup>1</sup>

Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for King David who wrote this poem. He lived **3,000 years ago** but was a man just like us (James 5:17). He was **sinful** and broken. He committed **adultery**. He **murdered**. He was **jealous** and **sinful**. And yet, you say he was "a man after [your] **own heart**" (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). Father, if David can be a man after your own heart, we can be men and women after your own heart. **Please** help us become men and women after your own heart. I think he was a man after your own heart because he continually **opened his heart** to you both when he was doing well and in his sin. He wasn't afraid to ask for **forgiveness** and to **praise** your goodness. Help us do the same.

### 1 "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Thank you God that you have revealed yourself to us. Thank you that we don't have to pray to a god of our **imagination** that hides behind the **clouds** but you have revealed yourself to us as not just as god, but **LORD**, which is the original **covenant name** of God, "**Yahweh**."

You're the God who **created** the **universe** but you invite us to call you our **shepherd**. You are our shepherd and we are your sheep. Shepherds lived lives of sacrifice and hardship to guard and watch their sheep. They had to be with the sheep **24/7**. Shepherds could never leave the sheep to themselves. We give you thanks that **Jesus** is our **good shepherd**. **John 10:11** says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptures are quoted from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

Thank you Jesus for being our good shepherd, and yet you know what it's like to be a **lamb**. You are the lamb **slain** for us (Rev 5:6). Thank you for laying your life down for us on the cross so that you will **never leave or forsake us** (Heb 13:5-6). Thank you for giving the **ultimate sacrifice**, paying the penalty for our sin so that you can be our good shepherd for all eternity.

Good shepherd, thank you for the **under-shepherds** you place in my life and have given to our **church**. Thank you for **Andy**, for **John**, and **Terry**. Thank you for our Elders. Would we together be examples to the flock. Would we shepherd your flock as 1 Peter 5:2 says, “exercising **oversight**, not under compulsion, but willingly, as [you] would have [us]” (ESV). Would you **guard** and protect your under-shepherds. Help them lead us well. Help us lead from a place of **humility** and **love**.

Father, this Psalm says “I shall not want” but I **confess** my heart looks for satisfaction in other places besides you. I look for **satisfaction** and **contentment** in food, in entertainment, in friendships, in crossfit, in the success of this church. I know we all wrestle with satisfaction and contentment too. Father, help us **appreciate** the good things you give us and find our peace and satisfaction in you.

Father I read parts of the book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23 by Phillip Keller* this week. This is a man who **meditated** on your word as he shepherded a flock of sheep. He tells about a very **beautiful** sheep he owned. She was gorgeous, the exact right **proportions**, a perfect looking sheep with a great **coat of wool**. But she had a problem. “She was **restless — discontent — a fence crawler**.”<sup>2</sup> Whenever they were in one field she was always looking to the next field. She might be in the most lush green field, but she would be sticking her head through the **fence** to try and get to the rocky and **barren** field on the other side.

Father, I'm just like her. I always want **more**. I'm not content and I have you! This is **sin**. **Forgive** me. Satisfy me. Give me contentment in my relationship with you and what you have given me instead of the field on the other side of the fence. In his book Phillip said his sheep was so discontent she began to lead others astray. The only solution was to **slaughter** her. Father, change **our restless hearts** before we lead others astray. Jesus, we thank you that you are “the **Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world!” (ESV) (John 1:29) Thank you for taking away my sin. Thank you for being slaughtered for me so that I don't have to die. Please give me greater faith and greater contentment in you.

## **2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.**

### **He leads me beside still waters.**

God we want to **praise you** for being the one who makes the **green pastures**, who makes the **white mountains**, who makes the **trees** and their **branches** and their **seasons**. We praise you for making the **ocean** and the cool waters. We praise you for hikes and sunbathing. We praise you for **swimming** and **wading** in the water. We praise you for **creation** and how it refreshes us.

Father, you give us so much that displays your **glory** and **power** and we forget to lie down and rest in you. We think it's a sin to be **bored** and to rest. Help us stop the **busyness**, **end the madness**, and rest in your **presence**. You provide a **river** of the **water of life** (Rev 22:1). Father, would we enter **your rest** (Psalm 95:11) through **Christ Jesus** (Hebrews 4:3). Would he be our rest, even in the busyness of life.

Thank you for the ways you refresh us **physically**, but also how you refresh us **spiritually**. Thank you for your **Word**, the **Scriptures**. Would you give us a **greater love** for your Word. Help us to love and **meditate** on the Scriptures. Would each of us feel **confident enough** to pray the Psalms with you. Would you lead us to your life-giving Word?

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<sup>2</sup> Page 33.

### 3a He restores my soul.

Holy Spirit, some of us are all **poured out** from life. All the busyness and stress of life has gotten to us and we have nothing left to give. We want to give to our **families**, to our **friends**, to our **coworkers**, to those who need Jesus, but we have nothing. We're out of breath. This word for "soul" is the word "**nephesh**" and it means "**breath**" or "**life**." Holy Spirit, we feel so out of breath. Would you fill our **lungs**? Would you help us catch our breath?

We **cast all our anxiety** on you because you care for us (1 Peter 5:7). Would you pour into me so that I can pour into others? Would you fill us up as a **church body**? Would we be known as a place where the Holy Spirit's **presence** is real and active and filling us up! Would you **satisfy** our souls?! We need you. Would you restore my life? Our souls?

### 3b He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Jesus, thank you for the ways you've lead **this church**. Thank you for the people and the plans you brought together. You put this **building** in our **lap**. You formed a **team**. And most importantly you brought people with gifts and talents to give to your **kingdom**. Thank you! Thank you Jesus. Help us **pick up** our **crosses daily** and **follow** after you (Luke 9:23).

Would you lead us forward in paths of righteousness? **Righteousness** means **right standing** before God. Would we experience right standing before you God through your **Son** Jesus Christ. Would we know we are walking on the right path because we're walking after him? Would he be the leader of Cornerstone, the **Chief Shepherd**, and would he lead us **forward** (1 Peter 5:4)?

Help us live lives that **honor** and **obey** you. We recognize Lord that nothing less than your **name** and **reputation** are **on the line**. I confess Father that I often live **ashamed** of Jesus, and don't live to bring him **fame**. I want to live a life that honors your reputation and brings you fame. Help me do this, and help us as a church do this.

### 4a Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;

Some of us are walking through dark valleys, LORD. We're **sick** and need your **healing**. I thank you for taking **Joe** and **Jennie** through the dark valley of **cancer**. They're almost out. Please heal Jennie completely. I pray for **Andy's** back and **Keri's** migraines, two types of shadows that **cripple**. Please heal Andy and Keri. I pray for **Diane's** chest cough and damage to her lungs. Would you give her peace and heal her? I pray for **Mark's** parents, **Doug** and **Turnice**. Please take away Doug's **seizures** and keep Turnice healthy. I thank you for providing for **Lisa's** vehicle needs. Would you continue to walk with her through the valley of care troubles? I pray for **Noah's** family. They're walking through a **very dark valley**. Please comfort them. I pray for those who are walking through dark valleys who I don't know or have not mentioned. Would you comfort them and if nobody knows would they tell someone so we can walk with them in this time?

I remember *The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan*. I remember how **Christian** has to walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death to get to the **Celestial City**. It's "A wilderness, a land of deserts and of pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of death..." It's a land of demons and Satan and unspeakable misery. Clouds of discouragement and confusion hang over the valley. Death spread its wings and hovers over it. As Christian walks through it he had to avoid a ditch on his right and a quagmire on his left.

The pathway there is so dark that when he lifts his foot to take a step forward he has to place it down entirely by faith. It was so black he can't see one step in front of the other. It's in this valley that Christian stares into the very mouth of **hell**, but instead of pulling out his sword, he **prays**. He cries, "Oh Lord, I implore you to deliver my soul!" And "I will walk in the strength of the Lord." Help us hear the **same words** Christian heard **another pilgrim** praying just ahead of him, "Though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me."

This valley is dark but **Christ is brighter**. Father, would you provide the light we need through him? Help us look to Jesus Christ, the **one who walked** through the dark valley of the shadow of death **first**. If he died and rose again, what do we have to be afraid of? If Jesus has set us free from sin and death through the **cross**, and has given us eternal life, we have nothing to fear. There's no evil that can do us any **lasting harm**. Help us look to our good shepherd as he leads us forward.

#### **4b your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

Thank you Father for your **rod**. The rod was a tool shepherds used to **protect** their flock, to beat away the **wolves**. Thank you for the ways you've spared us from dangers we **didn't know** about. Thank you for those times you've used the **rod of discipline** on me. Thank you for my parents and their **discipline**. Thank you for those other Christians who have had the **courage** to **confront** my sins. Father, would you give our **Elders** and our **Congregation** wisdom for those times when we may need to **use** the rod of discipline. Give us **humility** and **teachability** for those times we need to **receive** it.

Father, thank you for the **staff** used to rescue and lead the sheep. Thank you for the ways you've hooked me out of the brush and traps I've gotten caught in. Thank you for both your discipline and your rescue.

Your **Holy Spirit** is known as the **comforter**. Thank you for the Holy Spirit's comfort in my life. Would you Holy Spirit comfort my brothers and sisters who are sick and hurting and still in the valley of darkness. Would your Holy Spirit fill our church with peace.

#### **5a You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;**

Father, you are a God who **reconciles** enemies. Father, I think of the evils of **abortion**. It's absolutely evil, and yet the people that **ask** for abortions are **desperate** and the doctors who give them are **humans** like us, broken by sin. Father, would you provide opportunities for **pro-choice** and **pro-life** advocates to sit at the same table and share a meal? Would we be **pro-grace**? Would you end abortions in this country, but in a way that **surprises** us all, a way overflowing with grace and compassion and forgiveness. Would we become a church that provides for the needs of the **unborn**, for **foster** kids, for **children** in need?

Father, there are a lot of **racial tensions** in our country right now, especially between the **black community** and the **police**. Would you reconcile the black community and the police? Would they hear each other, and come up with longterm solutions and healing?

I **confess** Jesus that I feel like those with **different politics** often feel like enemies. And when I look at other people who think and **vote differently** than me, or just understand life through a different lens, I'm often **impatient**. Would you give me and all of us greater **grace**, greater **humility**, and **listening ears**. Would I invite them into my home and eat with them, listening to their story. Thank you for how you **reconcile** broken people, people who should be enemies and sit at separate tables. You bring us together, you give us fellowship at one table where Jesus Christ is sitting at the **head**.

**5b you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.**

I remember how the **Elders** last week prayed for and **anointed** Diane. I remember how **Terry** explained that anointing in the Bible was a special way of **consecrating priests** and **kings**. These people were anointed as a special way to say they **belonged** to God and set apart for him. So when the Elders anoint someone with oil they're **consecrating** their **body** to the Lord for healing and service. Father, this Psalm says you anoint **us**. Would you consecrate us? Would you set us apart for **service** to you? Thank you for overflowing cups. Thank you for a completed **church budget**, that we don't miss meals, and for your **abundant blessings**.

**6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
forever.**

Surely goodness and **hesed, lovingkindness**, your **covenant love**, shall follow me all the days of my life. Thank you Father that this Psalm is not really meant for **funerals**. It's meant for today. It's meant for **living Christians** who are journeying through life. It's meant for **pilgrims** like myself and **your people** here today. Would you remind us everyday of your goodness and lovingkindness? Would we find the clearest picture of these in **Jesus Christ** and what he has done for us. We look forwards to the day when we will **dwell** with him for all eternity. **Amen**.

*Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church.  
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