

# **The Good Shepherd**

Psalm 23

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May 7, 2017

Something interesting about the Psalms that you may not know is that when you pick up a Bible, and you open it right in the middle, you will usually find yourself in the Psalms. If you know this handy trick, it is pretty easy to flip right to that book when you feel you might need it. But if you haven't spent much time in the book of Psalms you may not have any idea why you might need this trick at all.

Although we don't know for sure who originally wrote the Psalms, they are traditionally attributed to King David, the same David who defeated Goliath as a child by flinging a rock at his giant head. And they were written to be sung. Many congregations, Jewish and Christian, still make the singing of Psalms a regular part of their worship.

But what makes the Psalms so special? The Psalms are basically a series of conversations with God. There are Psalms of lament and sadness, as well as praise and thanksgiving. They represent the whole of human emotion, poured out before God.

They are the kinds of conversations you might have with a parent. One moment you are thrilled with what's on the table for dinner... "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth." (Psalm 100) And then after dinner you are asked to do the dishes, take out the trash, and finish your homework before bed... "In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me. Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul." (Psalm 142).

And the best part? The conversation just continues. God doesn't get tired of our complaining. God doesn't require more praise. And the writer of the Psalms is also committed to the conversation. Psalm after Psalm, asking God for guidance, forgiveness, mercy, and praising God for blessings.

The Psalms are a testament to the type of relationship we should have with God. We should be able to bring our whole, broken selves in front of our Maker. It is ok to be mad with God. God can take it. The problem comes when we end the conversation, turn our backs, and walk away.

You know, the conversation doesn't have to take one form...hands clasped, head bowed, kneeling at the foot of our bed or sitting in a pew. Conversations with God can happen while meeting with a friend over coffee and listening about his health troubles...while in the car and driving past an accident on the side of the road...while sitting in the waiting room at DMV and seeing a single mom struggling to keep two wiggly children occupied. We pray with our hands, our ears, our feet, our eyes, and our hearts.

Psalm 23 is often read at funerals and memorial services. It offers comfort in times of hardship and grief...“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you, God, are with me.” It recognizes the difficulties in life and acknowledges God's presence in those moments. It compares God to a shepherd caring for his sheep, providing food and water and protection. Living in the Silicon Valley in the year 2017 we don't have as much experience with shepherds as someone in biblical times would have. So, this morning we are going to rewrite the Psalm as a congregation to better meet our needs as people living in this time and place, right here, right now.

## Fill-in-the-Blank Congregational Psalm

God, you are my (a person who cares for you) \_\_\_\_\_, I have everything I need.

You make me rest in (a peaceful place) \_\_\_\_\_;

You lead me beside still waters; you restore my (something needing restoration) \_\_\_\_\_.

You lead me in right paths for your name's sake.

Even though I walk through (difficult circumstances) \_\_\_\_\_, I fear no evil;

for you are with me; your (God's protection) \_\_\_\_\_ — they comfort me.

You prepare a feast before me in the presence of (my enemies) \_\_\_\_\_;

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows with (blessings) \_\_\_\_\_.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall (something you do when you are happy) \_\_\_\_\_

in the house of the Lord my whole life long.