

**Psalm 23 - A Psalm of David.**

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters,  
<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
<sup>4</sup> 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.  
<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 goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

**The LORD is my Shepherd**

**This is a message of genuine help.**

**This is a message of personal care.**

*We are all in this together. Keep your heads up. Look at the bright side. Good vibes only.* These are some examples of the mottos and maxims that we are hearing these days, just about every day. While such encouragement can be very welcome and helpful, maybe by now the novelty and effectiveness are wearing off, both on the giving end and the receiving end. What used to be a nice sentiment now seems a bit flat. Upon closer inspection, it was never quite enough, and it may be causing more harm than good.

This week I read an article in the Star Tribune that used a surprising term to describe this kind of *always positive* approach. Some psychologists actually refer to a "toxic positivity". The article went on to describe how unhelpful an overly positive outlook could be. By talking only about the bright side of things, or insisting on 'good vibes only', a person can actually be causing harm to themselves or others by ignoring the reality and severity of things like grief and distress, trauma and anxiety.

As Christians, we have a hope that makes us optimistic about eternity and we trust that God can make this all work out for the good of those who love him. But we can't pretend - nor does God ask us to act - like reality is always filled with sunshine, rainbows, and silver linings that are easy to spot. Life is tough. Life is messy. And I know that your situation is different than mine right now, and we ought to take that into account, as we look to encourage and support one another. Some of us are relatively unaffected by the disease and the shutdowns that have flipped everyday life upside down these last few months. Some of us have been moderately impacted - inconvenienced and annoyed, probably agitated, but otherwise unharmed. Others have had plans changed, missed out on milestones, have been separated from loved ones, relinquished senior seasons, and had to forego things like a normal prom or graduation. For others it is even more intense as entire livelihoods have been put in jeopardy, some have lost businesses, lost jobs, lost loved ones. My situation is not like yours and while it might be effective and good to be

positive and optimistic for some and in certain situations that same sentiment that helps one person through one particular day, might be a crushing blow to another person who is hurting and lost and can't even muster enough energy to listen to one more pep talk let alone give one even to himself.

And so what message can we give to those who concerned and bothered, who are hurting, who are confused, who are agitated and annoyed? What message can we give to those who are doing just fine, and to those who are crushed, and who are afraid, and anxious, broken down, and dying?

The words before us are certainly a good place for any one of us to go, and perhaps that is part of the reason why they are so treasured and precious. ***The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.***

Wherever we are in life, whatever our circumstance, whether in time of blessing or sorrow and everywhere in between, this is a message that gives us peace. **This is a message of genuine help. This is a message of personal care.** The Lord is with us. ***The LORD is my Shepherd.***

Of course, it is David, the sinner, the songwriter, the ruddy shepherd boy that would become king, who writes this song that has been treasured by so many throughout the centuries. While it is certainly a powerful balm in times of grief, it also a welcoming source of comfort that revives the hearts and souls of many on a daily basis, as it incorporates such a full range of emotions and scenery and circumstance. David knew that personal and gritty relationship between shepherd and sheep and by the gift of the Holy Spirit he encapsulates much more than his experience as a shepherd in these poignant words, but he also gives us a picture of God and his tireless care for his people in all circumstances of life.

And so David the Shepherd King knew the cheerful peaceful moments of bright sunny days, the green pastures of life's blessings, and the quiet waters of gratitude and contentment. He knew what it meant to be blessed and at peace with God. But he also knew the anxious and dark and dreary moments of both life and shepherding. Passing through the valley of darkness with trouble lurking in the shadows, he knew the emotional pain and the weight of uncertainty of looking for a lost sheep just as he knew the pain of stumbling into trouble himself and needing to be rescued from his sins and their consequences. He knew the physical pain and the scratches and the scars of retrieving an animal from a thicket or taking on a predator to protect his flock, and he knew what great lengths God had gone to retrieve and find him. He knew that life was not just sunshine and green pastures, but there was trickier terrain also, and challenging circumstances, and uncertain moments fraught with fear and uncertainty, sin and trouble. But with the LORD as his shepherd, David knew that whatever circumstance of life he faced - whether positive or difficult, threatening or uplifting - the LORD would care for his needs with genuine aid and personal comfort. ***The LORD is my Shepherd, he says, I shall not be in want.***

And that's the beauty of the psalm and the truth that it presents, whatever the circumstance, whatever the challenge, whatever the blessing, the Lord is there to take care of those who are precious to him. David expressed this confidence in song, drawing

from personal and professional experience he trusted, believed, he knew that the Lord was with him the whole way. Whatever would befall him, David knew with the LORD as his shepherd he would be cared for, protected, and comforted until the Lord brought him to that eternal place where he would dwell in peace forever.

And so especially at times like these, it is helpful, it is comforting to know that whatever circumstance you and I are facing, our Lord is with us, and he will supply our need. He is our Good Shepherd.

Think about that picture for a moment. The Almighty God doesn't just call out from the luxurious halls of heaven, like some celebrity speaking from his swanky bunker, as he tells us that we are all in this together and everything is going to be alright. But in his love, our God speaks to us in a way that assures us of his personal care and genuine concern. He is our Shepherd, not only that but he is our Good Shepherd. He cares, and he would go to great lengths to care for us his sheep. Consider the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd and find genuine care and personal comfort in that picture. Consider the image of the Good Shepherd – but maybe we need to adjust it a bit to consider how dirty, how demanding, and even demeaning this job was. The shepherd would daily tread through the countryside following his sheep enduring difficult terrain, watching, sleeping out in the elements to care for his flock. Certainly not a glamorous position, but one the shepherd would take on each day in his concern, even love, for the sheep. And a good shepherd would care for the needs of each one, he would lead the whole flock to still waters and green pastures, but not all of them would be just fine all the time, he would tend to those hurting, he would seek out those that were lost, he would hold near those who are young and afraid, he would even seek out find, rescue, and care for those who stumbled into trouble. He would care for and protect his flock when trouble came upon them without warning. In each situation, the shepherd would care for the sheep. They all were together. They all needed food, water, protection, and care, but each of them also had individual needs.

And so Jesus comes as the Good Shepherd for us. Read the Scriptures, see his patience and his love, his guidance, and his care, his love, and compassion on every page. Look at how he cares for his chosen people and learn of how he tends to the needs of individuals like Abraham, Moses, Ruth, David, and others. Read the Gospels and see the Good Shepherd as he walked the rugged terrain and to navigate the troubles of this earth. He came as promised to teach, to instruct, to gather and guide and care for his people, his flock, and ultimately, he came as he promised to lay down his life for the sheep.

He is not just any shepherd, he is the Good Shepherd, who came to save and rescue those who love to wander. Look at how he doesn't just tell people to keep their chins up, but he stoops down into their distress and helps and assists, comforts and consoles, heals and restores. He comes to help the hurting, the lonely, the sad, and the forgotten. He comes to give lasting joy and life to the full to those whom the Father had blessed with life on this earth. He comes to guide and care for those who are in any kind of need and in love he gathers and equips his church to spread the good news of eternal salvation that comes through him. Forgiveness and peace with God preached and given. Eternal salvation and daily bread provided. Look at his dispenses care for bodies and for souls.

Watch as the Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, even those that love to wander, so that we might live and have life to the full. And then listen to your shepherd's voice as our risen LORD promises that he will be with us to the very end of the age. He would lead us and guide us, as a shepherd cares for his sheep, he would care for each and every one of us, for he is our Good Shepherd.

Here is a picture that is a great blessing for all. We know by faith, that the Lord is the Good Shepherd who claims us as his own. What a blessing of faith that we confess, The LORD is *my Shepherd*. He comes and cares for us where we are.

For those struggling right now in a thicket of doubt and fear, stress and anxiety he comes and assures you that he is there. He will tend to your needs. He will deliver you and hold you in his promises. For those walking through that dark valley of uncertainty, underneath the chilling shadow of death's dark veil, he comes and assures us that he has power over sin and death and hell. For those who are finding the silver lining and have this renewed sense of the simple blessings God has daily provided, he is anointing your head with joy and rejoicing with you as your cup overflows. And when there are moments and days and weeks when you are all those things, having all those emotions, running through the hills and valleys, the ups and downs of life, even as we stay in place, know that the LORD is right there at your side, every step of the way.

God's Word gives us this wonderful assurance that is he willing to provide for our needs and he answers our calls for help whatever circumstance we are in. And we know this to be true for he is the Good Shepherd who would lay his life down for his sheep, he is the Shepherd who invites us to listen to his voice and to call out to Him in prayer. In his great love he cares for us, he will even reign us in when we are lost in a cloud of panic, when we are acting out in selfishness, when we are not thinking of others as we ought, he comes and rebukes and restores with his rod and staff. But there is comfort in this as well. For the Lord who saves me from fear and anxiety, from death and punishment, is the same Savior who rescues me from myself and guides me to deal compassionately with those around me as he has so compassionately dealt with me.

Yes, by faith in our risen LORD Jesus Christ we are given this beautiful claim, "the Lord is My Shepherd". And that is a message that has wonderful staying power and lasting meaning and continuing comfort for all who are facing these uncertain times. And so in a world of positive mottos and memes and maxims that often fall a bit flat, I don't know if I could do anything better to express and instill the comfort and personal peace that God gives to us through his word, than to simply read aloud these precious words of Psalm 23 once more.

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