

Led, Not Lost

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Date: 20 August 2023

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[0 : 0 0] All right, how we doing tonight?

We good? Good? Yeah, great time. Great time of worship. Just appreciate so much your singing. If you've got a Bible, make your way to the most famous psalm in all of the psalms.

Anybody want to guess what it is? Psalm. All I heard was Psalm blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, right? Psalm 23, that's exactly right. Psalm 23 is where we're going to be this evening.

This was by far the most requested psalm. You remember we finished a series on anxiety several weeks ago, and so to kind of finish up the summer, we're just doing some summer in the psalms and looking at some of the different psalms. And I asked if you had requests to let me know what psalms you'd like to teach and to hear. And Psalm 23, again, was the most requested, and it's probably the most famous and well-known psalm of them all. And so this evening, it's our joy and privilege to focus our minds around the great truth found here in Psalm 23. So if you're ready to get after it, let's do it. Psalm 23, verse 1, please stand. If you're able to do so, as we honor the reading of God's Word. Psalm 23, Psalm of David. And David writes this, The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his namesake. And even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

[2 : 1 5] For you are with me, and your rod and your staff, they comfort me. And you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

And God's people said, Amen. Is it any wonder this is such a beloved psalm? Now let's pray and ask God to teach us what it actually means so that we can rest in this truth. So pray with me. God, come talk to us now. We are so thankful for this time during our week where we get to study your Word and we believe we believe that when your Word is opened and it is faithfully preached regardless of the preacher, that when your Word is preached, you speak to us. And I'm convinced that you want to take the truth of Psalm 23 and speak it and breathe it into our souls. So do that tonight as we gather around your Word and we look to you in Jesus' name. And God's people said, Amen. Amen. You can be seated.

Faith family, have you ever felt lost? Have you ever felt lost? Like maybe you were hiking through the woods or a mountain trail and you couldn't find your way. Maybe you were out on the ocean or out on the lake and you forgot how to get back to shore. Maybe you were walking in an unfamiliar city and you had no idea where you were. Maybe you were driving at night and you lost your sense of direction. Well, that's what happened to Dave Haney. Dave describes this in his book entitled *A Living Hope*. He talks about a time when he got lost driving in Los Angeles. And if you've ever been to Los Angeles, it's pretty easy to conclude how one might get lost there. And he describes this whole situation like this. Listen, quote, what began five hours earlier was supposed to be a one-hour trip into the hills of Los Angeles. What was supposed to be an uneventful drive turned into a tour of the Southern California's extensive freeway system and a rude lesson in gender-based navigational techniques. By the time we arrived in the area of our location, it was dark and every house looked exactly the same and some genius developer had cleverly named the streets Rosita, Casita, Conchita, and Rapita.

It was now 10 o'clock at night and the lights of Los Angeles were a distant glow on the horizon. And being neither a resident nor a regular visitor of Southern California, it would have been wise to stop and A, get directions, B, ask for help, but I chose C, none of the above. That night I drove without any directions for over 150 miles for almost five hours on streets I'd never seen, but I was never lost. Being lost is for wimps. It's imprinted upon the American male psyche like a tattoo. Heroes never get lost, period. John Wayne was never lost. Columbus didn't stop and ask for directions. He just pointed his boat and sailed off into history. No, being lost means admitting you need help. Admitting you need help is the same as admitting you can't do it yourself. Admitting you can't do it yourself is admitting weakness. And weakness is for wimps. You see, the real problem is not our reluctance to ask for directions. No, it's our reluctance to admit we're lost.

Have you ever felt lost, clueless as to the direction of your life? Maybe there was a time, and maybe that time is right now where you looked at your career, you looked at your vocation, and you just felt directionless. Maybe you looked at a specific relationship and you just felt completely clueless. Maybe you looked at your bank account and you felt completely hopeless.

[6 : 51] Maybe you looked in the mirror and you didn't even recognize the person that was staring back at you. Maybe you finally made it to retirement and when you got there, you felt like you had no purpose at all. In a very real sense, at some point in life, you have felt lost. And faith family, when you feel that way, and let me encourage you, you're going to feel that way often. Amen? There's just going to be times relationally, financially, vocationally, spiritually, you're just going to feel lost.

You're going to feel like you don't have a purpose. You don't know where you're going. You're just kind of drifting around. When you experience those moments in life, would you do me a favor? Go to Psalm 23. Go to Psalm 23 and read it over and over again. Why? Because Psalm 23, we encounter here one of the most encouraging promises in all of Scripture, and it begins with this.

Your shepherd is in control. Amen? Your shepherd is in control. And what I mean by in control, I mean in control of your life. One of the great comforts of Psalm 23 is that if you're a Christian, here's what you can rest in. Here's the promise that you can take comfort in. It's this.

I want you to listen. Your life story is being guided by a shepherd who is totally committed to your good. Your life is being guided. It's being led by a shepherd who's totally committed to your good. And you might push back on that first by saying, I'm not being guided by anybody but me.

You see, we're often foolish to think that we control our own destinies, that we're the captain of our own lives. But my dear friend, we looked just a few weeks ago at what the Bible says, for instance, in Psalm 139, verse 16. Your eyes saw my unformed substance. In your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them. Do you believe that? Listen, if you believe that, that means at a very minimum that your life has limits.

[9 : 16] That your life is limited in some way, limits set by your heavenly Father. That is, your life has a beginning, your life has an end, and that story is being written by God, your shepherd, who leads you from the beginning to the very end. And then even if you accepted that, you might push back and say, okay, well, maybe I have a shepherd who's guiding my life, but I'm not so convinced he's committed to my good. I'm not sure I'm convinced that he's really for me. I mean, how do you explain the fact that my spouse died? Or that the economy destroyed my business? Or that I went through a miscarriage?

Or that I have a loved one with dementia? Or that my parents got a divorce? Or that I've experienced so much hardship in life? Can we be honest? Don't you sometimes look at your path, the path that you're on and wonder if your heavenly Father is very heavenly? Like, is he actually committed to my good?

Because how can he be committed to my good when so much of my life isn't? So you're telling me that I have a shepherd who's guiding my life and is totally committed to my good. That is exactly what I'm telling you, because that is exactly what Psalm 23 is telling you. Psalm 23 is meant to strengthen your confidence in the love and goodness of God as he is writing and guiding your story.

In fact, if I could summarize Psalm 23 in one statement, it would be this. Notice this on the screen. The Lord, your shepherd, walks with you through the valleys of life, providing for you, protecting you, and communing with you as he leads you to your ultimate destination.

Let me read that again. The Lord, your shepherd, walks with you through the valleys of life, providing for you and protecting you and communing with you as he leads you to your ultimate destination.

[11 : 30] Do you want to know what that means? And some of you, like, you might want to push back on this, but I'm just going to tell you by the end of the sermon, there's not going to be any denying whatsoever what I'm saying. You are never lost. You're never lost. I didn't say you don't feel lost. Of course, there are times in life you feel lost, but I'm telling you that the good news, oh, the really good news of Psalm 23 is that you actually are never lost. What that means is, no matter where you are right now, no matter how you feel right now, no matter what you've done, or how many times like sheep we've gone astray, and can I just get a witness tonight that we, like sheep, have all gone astray, that no matter how much we've gone astray, you aren't lost.

You're actually always being led because God is the shepherd of your life, and he will not lose one.

Does that encourage you tonight? You're in the midst of a financial wilderness, and you don't have a clue how you're going to get out. You're in the midst of a relational desert, and you don't have a clue what direction to go, and you're going to rest in the truth of Psalm 23. You're not lost. You're being led, and you may feel lost, but you have a shepherd that will get you where you're supposed to go.

Aren't you glad your story is ultimately not guided by you, but by a shepherd? And if that's true, and I believe undoubtedly that it is true, not only in Psalm 23, but what I'm going to show you at the end of this message about three hours from now is that I'm going to prove this to you, is if this is true, namely that you're never lost, you're actually always being led, and you're always being led because the Lord is the shepherd of your life, then here's what it means that you can do. Verse one, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. That is because the Lord is in control, you can live content.

You can actually, in the midst of your directionlessness, in the midst of your feeling lost, you can actually rest and breathe and be content and confident because of God. This phrase, I shall not want, it's a phrase of contentment. It means I'm taken care of. I have my needs met. I'm not wanting. And before we proceed to look at all that the shepherd provides for you so that you can live in this state of contentment and confidence in him, let's first unpack the phrase, the Lord is my shepherd, because this really sets the theme or the tone for the rest of the Psalm. Let's break this down. First, the word shepherd. Oh my goodness, like we have done such a bad job understanding the word shepherd. We talk about a shepherd in very, very passive terms. In fact, we tend to see pictures like this of Jesus kind of holding a little lamb and it's so cute and cuddly and Jesus has like perfect hair and clean clothes and his hands are smooth because that's what a shepherd would look like. And we think about like little shepherds in a Christmas pageant or this is something I've actually heard in 25 years of ministry, churches that will say, we don't want a preacher. We want a shepherd. What they mean is we want somebody who's loving. We want somebody who's caring for the flock. We don't want a preacher. We just want someone that will love us. But that, listen, is not the biblical imagery of a shepherd. A shepherd is not some kind of passive thing. The imagery of a biblical shepherd is someone who's rugged and dirty. They've got scars.

[15 : 36] They know how to fight. They are a leader and they have been in the war. Let me prove it. Do you remember when David was interviewing for the job to fight Goliath? Remember that in your Old Testament? And Saul says to David, you can't fight him. You're young. You're a youth. He's a man of war.

What makes you think you're qualified to fight a man of war? And you remember what David said. David said, listen, I have a membership at Lifetime Fitness and I've been doing push-ups and I'm like building muscle.

I can do this. And I drink muscle milk and I learn karate. Is that what David says? No. What does David say? Here's what qualifies me to go to war with Goliath. I keep the sheep of my father.

What's he saying? He's saying, I know what it's like to fight. I know what it's like when a lion or bear or something comes after a sheep. I know what it's like to fight them off. You see, listen, biblically shepherds would never drink decaf coffee. They would never wear skinny jeans, listen to Taylor Swift or own a cat. Never. These are men, like real men. They know how to fight.

They are rugged and they are tough. That's the biblical imagery of a shepherd. Not some kind of, we just want someone who's loving and cuddly. It's, I want someone who knows how to fight.

[17 : 08] That's a shepherd. Well, who is the fighter, warrior, shepherd of Psalm 23? Answer is Yahweh.

David uses the covenant name of God. Yahweh is our shepherd. David is saying the one who led two million out of slavery and guided them across the Red Sea and protected them against the Egyptian armies and fed them in the wilderness and brought them safely into the pasture of the promised land. Don't you understand? Oh, this is an, this is a theology of God we so often fail to recognize. God is not a God with flowing blonde hair and silky smooth skin. He is a warrior who guides and fights and provides and protects for his people. God fights for his sheep. This, this shepherd, this rugged fighter is Yahweh.

It's the God above every name and the Lord above every name. This God, the God is our shepherd. And notice the word my, I mean, David does something uncommon in the Psalms. Many of the Psalms are congregational.

Let us enter into his courts with praise. Let us sing so on and so forth. But David here says, the Lord is say it, my shepherd here. Like if this doesn't blow your mind, I got nothing for you.

I got, you might want to leave early, but don't. Okay. Notice this on the screen. This blows my mind. God's not just a shepherd. He's your shepherd. He's not just a generic shepherd. He's your personal shepherd of your personal life. This fighter God, warrior God who defeats nations at a word is your personal shepherd. He's your personal shepherd guiding and authoring the story of your life.

[19 : 17] The one that led 2 million leads you. The one that fought Egyptian armies fights for you. How awesome it is that God is our shepherd. And that is why we shall not want. Does this not make sense now?

The reason why I can be content, the reason why I can breathe even though I feel lost, even though I can rest, the reason why I can rest is because with God as my shepherd, what could I possibly need that God doesn't have the resources to supply?

And so you feel financially lost, you feel relationally lost, you feel spiritually lost. Well, whatever resources you need, good news. Your shepherd is none other than God.

So breathe. Rest. I shall not want. I am content because Yahweh's in control. He is my shepherd.

And look at all the things that Psalm 23 tells us that our shepherd supplies. Look at verse 2. He makes me lay down in green pastures and He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.

[20 : 33] One of the things that your good shepherd gives you is restoration. The imagery here of green pastures, that's food, and still waters, that's drink. It's the imagery of restoring. The picture here is that of a sheep that has been going through a very long and tiring journey. Anybody relate? You know, called life?

And you get exhausted? And you're tired and weary? What does your good shepherd do? He feeds you. And He gives you drink. And He restores your soul. Anybody here tonight tired? You don't have to say it out loud. And I don't just mean physically. That's true. I mean spiritually. Because David here talks about He restores my soul. He doesn't just restore my physical being. He helps my tired and weary soul. And some of you, be honest, that's where you're at. You've got more meetings at work than you've had meetings with God this week. You've said yes to the wrong things and no to the right things.

And activity for God has replaced intimacy with God. The stresses of life have left you prayerless and passionless. And you would say, and you don't have to say it out loud, but you would say tonight, Pastor, I'm just tired. You need a shepherd. You need the shepherd. The Lord is your shepherd.

And He will, even if He has to, you stubborn sheep, make you lay down. I love how David puts that. He invites us to lay down. He asks us to lay down. No, David says, He makes us, makes me lie down. Because sheep, as you know, are stubborn. You, as you know, are stubborn. We don't like to lay down. We don't often know when we need to rest. We're often like children. You ever seen like a child yawn?

And you'd be like, oh, you're tired. You must want to go to bed. I'm not tired. I'm not tired. I feel fine. I don't want to go to bed. But good parents know that sometimes you have to make them lie down.

[22 : 45] Even if you don't want to go to bed, it is for your good. Listen, sometimes we see as interruptions to our schedule or disruptions in our life, what is simply our shepherd making us lie down in order to restore us. Your shepherd loves you so much that He will make you lie down so that He can feed you and give you drink and restore your soul. Look at verse 3. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. He not only gives restoration, He gives direction. This phrase, paths of righteousness, should actually be translated the right paths. That is, your shepherd will guide you and give you direction down the right path. I didn't say the safe path. I didn't say the easy path. I didn't say the comfortable path. But the right path. The path of righteousness. It's the picture of a sheep that needs direction from a shepherd or it's going to lose its way. Anybody ever made a wrong turn in life?

Anybody gone a wrong direction, feel like you're off track, gone somewhere you wish you hadn't? You need a shepherd. And you need to trust your shepherd as He leads you for His name's sake.

See, here's what we need to understand. This is why God is so passionate about leading us and making sure that not one of us is lost. It's because it's His name that's on the line. If a sheep is lost, it is a reflection on the shepherd, not the sheep. Of course you get lost. You're you.

You stubborn, misdirected sheep, as I am too. It's the shepherd's responsibility to make sure not one gets lost. And that is why He directs us for His name's sake. He will make sure we get where we're supposed to go. Faith family, notice this on the screen. God is committed to you, not because you're a good sheep, but because you're His sheep.

Prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. But our good shepherd guides us in the right way. Verse 4, Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, and your rod and your staff, they comfort me. He gives us restoration. He gives us direction. And thirdly, He gives us protection. This is the picture of a defenseless sheep walking through a very difficult and dark valley. It's really not so much a valley of death necessarily, though it's dangerous enough that one could die. It's really the idea of we go through dark and difficult times in life. Anybody ever been through a dark valley? Maybe you lost a spouse, you lost a child, you had a season of unemployment, or you had a divorce you didn't want. Anybody ever gone through the valley of worry? We talked about anxiety, and it's dark and difficult. Listen, you need a shepherd who will protect you in the difficult season. You know, the beauty of this shepherd is he goes through the valleys with us. He doesn't say, well, good luck. I hope it works out.

[26 : 08] He goes with us. What does the text say? Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I won't fear. Why? Because you're with me. What a good shepherd. Aren't you glad your shepherd doesn't look at you in the dark valley in life and say, you numb, numb. Get out of it yourself.

See you on the other side. No, your good shepherd goes with you through the dark days. And that ought to give us confidence. Amen? That ought to give us confidence. I don't know if you knew this, but I read about this recently, and so maybe I'm the only one in the room that didn't know this, and that's okay.

You can just play along, okay? The difference between buffalo and cows in a storm. Show of hands, how many of you knew this? Okay, I'm not alone. No one else has heard it. Good. Let me tell you the difference between buffalo and cows in the storm. When cows see a storm coming, they run from it.

And as you know, cows are not very fast. So what ends up happening is the storm catches them, and they run along with the storm because they're afraid. They're so afraid of the storm, they run away from it. The storm comes with them. They're not very fast, and so they stay in the storm, and the fear of that so much longer. But do you know what buffalo do? Buffalo run into the storm.

When they see the storm coming, they run into it, which minimizes the impact of the storm. And as I read that, I thought, well, when we realize that God is our shepherd, we don't have to run in fear for the storms of life. We can run into those storms knowing God is with us. There is nothing to fear because Yahweh is your shepherd. Verse 5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. He gives us restoration, direction, protection, and then fourthly, provision.

[28 : 29] It's a picture here of a victory feast. His head anointed, his cup overflowing, not just filled, but overflowing. Goodness and mercy are following him all the days of his life. These are words of abundance, that is, that God has given us as our shepherd. Abundant victory, abundant blessing, and abundant mercy. Notice this on the screen. Faith family. An honest inventory of your life will reveal that God has not been stingy with his grace. He has been good to you, and your cup overflows with goodness and mercy that follows you all the days of your life. Amen? He has provided abundant provision and grace for you. And here's the last one, the last part of verse 6.

And this is where I take the idea that you're never lost. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. What's the last part of this? Your shepherd gets you to your destination. He gets you where you're supposed to go. In fact, this phrase, I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever, actually reads this way in the Hebrew, I shall return to the house of the Lord all my life.

In other words, faith family, with God as your shepherd, here's what you can rest knowing. Here it is on the screen. You were never lost. You were always led. You will get where you're supposed to go.

And you say, I still really struggle with that because I know how wayward I am. What did Paul say in Philippians 1? The one that began the work in you will complete it. He's not going to lose you.

No matter how wayward you may be, how astray you may go, you are not ultimately lost. You may feel lost, but you are led by your shepherd. Is it any wonder why people love this psalm? I mean, what an amazing psalm. We have a shepherd who's in control of our lives that allows us to be content and breathe because when we need restoration, he gives it. When we need direction, he gives it.

[30 : 52] When we need protection, he gives it. When we need provision, he gives it. And when we need to finally make our way home, he will bring us home. But in order to fully understand this psalm, and many of you know me well enough by now, you know the psalm is never finished with the psalm.

It's the how does Psalm 23 relate to us? Because we will never be able to relate to all the truth of Psalm 23 if we do not see that Psalm 23 ultimately finds its fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And this one's easy. I mean, sometimes connecting the dots is difficult to do, but this one is unbelievably easy because who is the Yahweh? Who is the Lord of Psalm 23? Well, interestingly, in Ezekiel 34, when God is rebuking the shepherds of Israel because their failure to lead God's people, God actually gives them a promise of a future shepherd. Look at Ezekiel chapter 34, in verse 23. I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them and he shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God. And my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord I have spoken. So who will this shepherd be? Well, you would say it's David, right? I mean, that's clearly what the text says. The problem is David's been dead for years.

And then some will try to do theological gymnastics and say, well, it must be David sometime way off in the future. Or you could understand Psalm 23 the way the New Testament understands it. Who is the ultimate David? Who is the ultimate descendant of David? Who receives the throne of David? His name is Jesus. Jesus is the ultimate David. And the New Testament tells us that there is one who is God and also born of a descendant of David. And that is Jesus. And then what does Jesus say about himself in John 10? I'm almost done, I promise. John 10, verse 10. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it. Do you hear Psalm 23 there? My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy follows me all the days of my life. I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. I am the fulfillment of Psalm 23. And the good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. And look at verse 27. This is why I told you you're never lost, you're always led. My sheep hear my voice. I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life.

[33 : 55] And they will never perish. And look at this. No one will snatch them out of my hands.

That's good news. Listen, all the promises of Psalm 23 are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Faith family, he is the good shepherd that is ultimately provided for his sheep. How? By laying down his life. And in laying down his life. He gives us eternal life, which means we will never perish.

And no one will ever snatch us away. In other words, you can live in the confidence every day because of Jesus Christ this. You are never lost. You are always led. Because Jesus, the good shepherd, will not lose one. Not one. So if you're lost tonight, or if you feel lost, look to your shepherd.

Go to Psalm 23 and John 10 and rest in the truth that you have a shepherd and his name is Jesus. And he can restore you and guide you and protect you and give you abundant grace. And listen, I'm going to close with this. Why is Jesus? Listen, why is Jesus the good shepherd? Why is he the only and ultimate shepherd? I love this. This is the gospel. Are you ready for the gospel? Here it is. You ready? You ready?

Jesus is the good shepherd because he's the only shepherd who also became a sheep. He's the only shepherd who also became a sheep. And as a sheep, he went through the valley of death for our sins. And as a sheep, he arrived at his ultimate and final destination. And therefore offers to us, as no one else can, abundant life. Abundant life. Listen to how Revelation 7 says it and I'm done. This is beautiful.

[36 : 18] Revelation 7, 17. For the lamb, for the sheep, the lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd.

Lord, the lamb is the shepherd because the shepherd became a lamb and he will guide them in the springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And God's people said, amen, amen, amen. Let's pray.

Lord, that's the beauty of the gospel that the good shepherd became the sheep. And he is the lamb of God and also the good shepherd.

And that means there's not anything that we are going through that we can't come to our shepherd and lay before him because he is our great high priest who can sympathize with our weakness.

He's gone through the valley of the shadow of death. Lord, I pray this very moment that if we feel lost in whatever area of life it may be, maybe spiritually we actually are lost because we've never turned from our sin and looked by faith to Jesus and trusted him as our savior, our Lord, and our good shepherd.

[37 : 50] I do pray that that lost sheep would find home tonight. But minister to us by your spirit because I know there are many in this room that feel in some area of their life like they're lost.

And I just pray that the comfort of Psalm 23 would rest on them. You're not lost. You're still being led. Look to your shepherd. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.