

## Going Deeper in Prayer:

### *Psalm 23*

**The Lord Is my Shepherd I shall not want  
 In verdant pastures He gives me repose;  
 Beside restful waters He leads me; He refreshes my soul  
 He guides me in right paths for His name's sake.  
 Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for You are at my side.  
 With Your rod and Your staff that give me courage.  
 You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;  
 You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
 Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;  
 And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.**

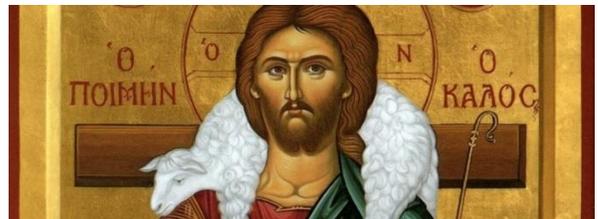
Praying Psalm 23 throughout the entire year will allow you to encounter Jesus in a deeply personal way and develop a close friendship with Him. The words of Psalm 23 will help you to understand what it means and feels like to have a relationship with Jesus. The following resources are meant to foster this process. Please pray Psalm 23 every day and occasionally, such as once a week, include one aspect from the resources to help you go deeper in your understanding of this prayer.

#### Jesus's love for you

Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me." (John 10: 14). Jesus desires that you come to know Him and accept Him as your Good Shepherd. As you spend time with Him in conversation (in prayer) you will become more aware of the incredible lessons from Psalm 23: that God is love and He loves you; God is faithful and can be trusted; and God will never let you go. Take time each day to be with Our Lord by praying Psalm 23 so that you come to know this to be true.

#### Why pray Psalm 23 each day?

- 1) To encounter the Person of Jesus on a daily basis
- 2) To develop / deepen my relationship with the Person of Jesus
- 3) To accept Jesus as my Shepherd
- 4) To grow in your awareness of Jesus' continual Presence in your life



#### Meaning of the Words

- David is the author of Psalm 23. It is fitting as David was a shepherd in his youth. (1 Samuel 16:11; 17:15, 28, 34-36).
- It is helpful to note that David wrote Psalm 23 from the vantage point of the sheep and how they are protected and provided for in every way by the shepherd.
- David was a shepherd of sheep who then became the shepherd of his people, Israel. David had to learn how to shepherd his people, which allowed him to grow in his awareness of the relationship between God, the Good Shepherd, and His people. The words of Psalm 23 will help you to understand what it means and feels like to have a relationship with God.
- Each phrase of Psalm 23 expresses how the shepherd cares for his sheep, which would have been

quite familiar to the people of David's time. This imagery is somewhat uncommon for most but our imagination does not need any assistance in order to "feel" the beauty and wonderment of the references to green pastures, restful waters and the like.

- In verse 4, the tone changes: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." Each of us face the trials and tribulations of life, which sometimes results in dying to self. Further each of us must face the fact that we will die. The incredible lesson from Psalm 23 is that God is love; God is faithful and can be trusted; and God will never let you go. The Psalm reveals these aspects of God in three stages.

### Learning the Principles

- Psalm 23 contains consoling and comforting words for all different situations of life. This is the most widely known, memorized and loved passage of Scripture.
- Psalm 23 is fulfilled in the New Testament with Jesus Himself. Jesus continually referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd.
- The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm was "written by a shepherd who became a king – because he wanted to know about a King who became a Shepherd." "With this Psalm of comfort, you can release your burdens, cast away your fears, and rest safely in the Shepherd's arms. When you have the Shepherd, you have everything that you need." (Taken from the back of "Safe in a Shepherd's Arms." See info about this book under the Activities)
- Memorizing the Psalm is good but praying the Psalm is very different when you have encountered and develop a relationship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd.
- Prayer is a vital necessity. Prayer and Christian life are inseparable. (CCC 2744-2745) In other words, when you pray with your heart, you will come to know Jesus Christ personally and deeply. As this friendship with Him grows, you will recognize more and more how much He loves you and how much you love Him. From this love, received and given, you will respond from a natural desire to be one with Him in all things, and live your life in a way that is reflective of His own. This brings much peace and joy to yourself and those around you.

### Activities for Learning the Words

(Artwork: *Jesus as the Good Shepherd*, mid-3rd century. Mural, St. Callisto catacomb Rome.)

- Pray Psalm 23 every day.
1. "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms, Hope and Encouragement from Psalm 23" by Max Lucado is a **book is highly recommended** to help understand the meaning of Psalm 23. Over a period of time you will want to read the 2-page brief chapters on each phrase of Psalm 23. **Note about "Safe in the Shepherd's Arms":** Our Jewish brothers and sisters refer to God as Yahweh. Because the name Yahweh is so holy, they do not speak this name aloud. In the first two chapters, Yahweh is used a few times. Out of respect for our Jewish brothers and sisters, if you read this book **aloud**, please replace the name Yahweh with one of the following names: Our Lord, God, Jesus, or our Savior etc.
- Commit Psalm 23 to memory - learn the verses **by heart!** In order for this to happen, you will need to be "taken in" with the meaning of the words, letting yourself be deeply touched in a personal way. This familiarity with Psalm 23 will help you to recognize your own life experiences within these words – to see yourself in it. Then you will be personally



engaged, and as a result, your heart will be open to Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The purpose of the two recommended books is to facilitate this very encounter with the Person of Jesus.

- Relate and discuss the teaching on Psalm 23 with a good Christian friend.
- Look up the corresponding Scripture passages on the Good Shepherd. A list is provided below. Identify the specific characteristics of the “Good Shepherd.”
- Make connections between the phrases of the Psalm and your own life.
- At various times, take time to journal about something that stood out for you from praying Psalm 23.
- **This book is also highly recommended:** “A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23” by Phillip Keller. As a shepherd, Phillip Keller knew what it was to protect a vulnerable flock on a daily basis. The special skills of a shepherd demanded compassion, care, and guidance. His practical experience provides a wellspring of profound spiritual insight, reflected in these timeless meditations on the most famous Psalm of all, on the relationship between the Good Shepherd and His sheep. (From the back cover of the book.)

This book is very easy to read, is excellent and can be purchased for \$3 each. The book is available from [www.Christianbook.com](http://www.Christianbook.com) or call 1-800-Christian.

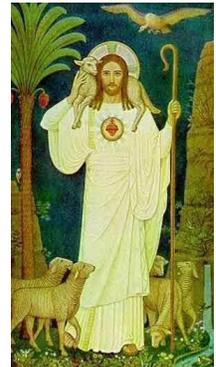
- Draw a simple picture for each phrase of Psalm 23.
- Make the connection between Psalm 23 and Jesus who is the Good Shepherd. Each year the Fourth Sunday of Easter we hear about Jesus the Good Shepherd. This Sunday has come to be known as Good Shepherd Sunday.

### Spiritual Comprehension

- Psalm 23 is the prayer that you will want to know by heart and with good understanding before you decide to go deeper with another prayer. Plan to spend an entire year praying Psalm 23 every day.

### Encountering God in Prayer

- You will want to pray with your heart in praying Psalm 23; not just rattling words. “Prayer is internalized to the extent that you become aware of Jesus ‘to whom you speak.’”
- Take some time to quiet down interiorly. Open your Bible to the Old Testament and prayerfully read *Psalm 23*. Pick out a phrase or two from the Psalm. For example: “The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want... He guides me along the right path; He is true to His name.” Close the Bible and then repeat these words over and over again slowly. Think about how these words relate to Jesus and His love and care for you. Have a heart-to-Heart conversation with Jesus about something that is weighing on your heart. This takes prayer to the next level of a deep personal encounter. Another helpful step is to write down some notes about the prayer experience to keep for future reference.
- Over time, you will come to know this in your heart: The Lord is **my** Shepherd



### Scriptural Foundation

**In the Old Testament, God Himself is represented as the shepherd of His people.**

- **Genesis 48:15** Israel begins the blessing of Joseph’s sons in this way: He blessed Joseph, and said, “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,

- **Psalm 28:9** Save Your people and bless Your inheritance; Be their shepherd also, and carry them forever.
- **Psalm 78:70-72** He also chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds; From the care of the ewes with suckling lambs He brought him to shepherd Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance. So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them with his skillful hands.



- **Psalm 79:13** So we Your people and the sheep of Your pasture will give thanks to You forever; To all generations we will tell of Your praise.
- **Psalm 95:7** For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. O that today you would listen to His voice.
- **Psalm 100:3** Know that the LORD Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
- **Psalm 119:176** I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.
- **Isaiah 40:11** The future Messiah is also described with the image of the shepherd: Like a shepherd He will tend His flock, In His arm He will gather the lambs and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead the nursing ewes.
- **Isaiah 53:6** All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.
- **Jeremiah 31:10** Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare in the coastlands afar off, And say, "He who scattered Israel will gather him and keep Him as a shepherd keeps his flock."
- **Ezekiel 34:11-16** For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land.
- **Ezekiel 34:23** "Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd.
- **Ezekiel 34:31** "As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God," declares the Lord GOD.

### In the New Testament, the ideal image of the shepherd finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

#### Jesus is the "Good Shepherd."

- **John 10:11** Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.
- **John 10: 14** Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me.
- **John 10:27-30** "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

This passage is read on Good Shepherd Sunday in Year C. It highlights two important

characteristics of Jesus' role as shepherd. The first is the mutual knowledge that the sheep and shepherd have:

The sheep remained for many years in the company of the shepherd who knew the character of each one and who named each one of them. As the Good Shepherd, so it is with Jesus and His disciples: He knows his disciples "by name," intimately. He loves them with a personal love that treats each as if they were the only one who existed for Him. There is also a second aspect of the shepherd's complete commitment in this Gospel. The shepherd gives his life to his sheep and for his sheep, and no one can take them out of His hand. Wild animals and thieves were a nightmare and constant threat for the shepherds of Israel. We see here the difference between the true shepherd who shepherds the family's flock, and the hired hand who works only for the pay he receives, who does not love, and indeed often hates, the sheep. When the mercenary is confronted with danger, he flees and leaves the sheep at the mercy of the wolf or bandits; the true shepherd courageously faces the danger to save the flock.

The sheep are far more than work and a responsibility to the Good Shepherd: they are the object of the shepherd's love and concern. Thus, the shepherd's care for them is completely unselfish; the Good Shepherd is willing to die for the sheep rather than abandon them. To the hired hand, the sheep are a commodity, to be watched over only so that he can be paid.

- **Matthew 9:36** Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" who goes in search of the lost sheep; He feels compassion for the people because He sees them "as sheep without a shepherd."  
"At the sight of the crowds, His Heart was moved with pity. They were lying prostrate from exhaustion, like sheep without a shepherd."
- **Luke 12:32** Jesus calls His disciples "the little flock." "Do not be afraid little flock for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."
- **1 Peter 2:25** Peter calls Jesus the "'the shepherd of our souls.'" "For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls."
- **Hebrews 13:20** The Letter to the Hebrews speaks of Jesus as "the great shepherd of the sheep" "Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."
- **Matthew 18:12-14** "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish."
- **Luke 15:3-7** So He told them this parable, saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
- **Matthew 2:6** 'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'



**The following are two Catholic translations of Psalm 23.**

The translation from the St. Joseph edition of the New American Bible is on the left. The translation of the New Jerusalem Bible is included to show the variation in wordage, which can provide helpful additional meaning for the words of the Psalm.

**For memorization purposes, the St. Joseph edition of the New American Bible edition should be used.**

The Lord is my Shepherd	The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want	I lack nothing.
In verdant pastures He gives me repose;	In grassy meadows He lets me lie.
Beside restful waters He leads me; He refreshes My Soul	By tranquil streams He leads me to restore my spirit.
He guides me in right paths for His name's sake.	He guides me in paths of saving justice as befits His name.
Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for You are at my side.	Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death I should fear no danger, for You are at my side.
With Your rod and Your staff that give me courage.	Your staff and your crook are there to soothe me.
You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes;	You prepare a table for me under the eyes of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.	You anoint my head with oil; my cup brims over.
Only goodness and kindness follow me all the days of my life;	Kindness and faithful love pursue me every day of my life.
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come.	I make my home in the house of the Lord for all time to come.

**St. Joseph edition of the New American Bible**

**The New Jerusalem Bible**