

Sermon Title: The LORD is my Shepherd, Psalms, Week Five

Preacher: Dustin DeJong

Date: June 21, 2026

Sermon Questions:

1. Psalm 23 begins, "The LORD is my shepherd." What does a good shepherd do for his sheep?
2. Pastor Dustin talked about the burden of "self-shepherding," which is trying to do the Shepherd's work for ourselves. Where are you most tempted to feel like, "If I don't take care of this, nobody will"?
3. Which part of Psalm 23 feels most comforting to you right now? Why?
4. Which part of Psalm 23 feels hardest to believe right now?
 - "I shall not want"
 - "He makes me lie down"
 - "He restores my soul"
 - "You are with me"
 - "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me"
 - "You prepare a table before me"
 - "Goodness and mercy shall follow me"
5. What is one way you try to find comfort or relief apart from returning to God?
6. What is one thing you can do this week to trust the Shepherd instead of trying to be the shepherd?

Transcript

So I was having a conversation with one of my kids the other day, and I don't know about you, but summer's been a little overwhelming so far. And we had a conversation. Hey, is it ever too early to watch a Christmas movie? Maybe. Is it ever too late to watch a Christmas movie?

However you want to see that. We had the conversation and the obvious answer was no. So we decided we're going to watch Home Alone. So the other day I turned on Home Alone, one of my favorite Christmas movies from when I was a kid. And it's funny when you rewatch movies that you watched when you were younger and you thought so highly of certain characters and then you rewatch it as you're an adult and you're like, oh, Kevin, that kid is a turd.

Like that kid, he's a menace. He's horrible. So I was watching the movie. Kevin McAllister is this little eight year old boy and he has it out for his whole family. To be fair, they have it out for him as well.

So he has this conversation with his mom early in the movie. They're getting ready to go to

Paris as a family over Christmas break. And he says at one point, you know, I wish I didn't have a family. I wish I was all by myself. And his mom looks down at him and says, Kevin, you be careful what you wish for, because someday you may find yourself alone.

Well, the night before they go to the airport, the power goes out. They wake up in a frenzy because they're late to the airport to make their flight overseas. And lo and behold, Kevin gets left behind. He wakes up, his family's already gone. And he realizes, I made my family disappear.

And he got exactly what he wanted. So he does anything he wants. He eats what he wants, he watches what he wants, he does what he wants. And for a few minutes, life is grand. Life is exactly what he thought it was gonna be.

He finally experienced the freedom that he was meant for. And then suddenly the fear starts to creep in. He hears the furnace in the basement and it's creaking. And he, he thinks it's gonna explode and kill him or it's gonna eat him, maybe. His next door neighbor's apparently an axe murderer.

Who's gonna get him? There's bad guys literally breaking in and vandalizing all the houses in the neighborhood. And he realizes that the very freedom that he sought after is actually not freedom, but a burden. And I wonder how often we find that to be true for ourselves as well. I wonder how often we believe the same lie that Kevin McAllister believed, that if I'm gonna be taken care of, if someone's gonna take care of me, it's gonna be me.

Cause I'm the only one who knows what I need. I'm the only one that can take care of me. I call this the burden of self shepherding. That we believe that we are the only ones who can take care of ourself. And yet, as we open our Bible today, we're gonna be, in Psalm 23, a familiar Psalm for many of you.

We're gonna be seeing how King David invites us into a relationship with, with the true shepherd, the good shepherd, the one who wants to take care of us. And as we, as we open up Psalm 23, it may be familiar for many of you. It's often cited as the most memorable, the most famous chapter of the entire Bible, certainly the most famous of the psalms. And we see in Psalm 23 an invitation of trust. We've been going through this series, going through different psalms, and we've been exploring how different psalms have different imitations.

There's different. There's Psalms of lament, there's, there's Psalms of joy, there's. There's psalms of worship, there's. There's psalms of trust. And today is that psalm of trust declaring David's trust in the ultimate shepherd.

Now, David himself was a shepherd as a boy, so he knows kind of both sides of that equation.

He knows what it means to shepherd sheep, and he also knows, as the king now of Israel, what it means to shepherd his people. But more importantly than all that, he knows what it means to be shepherded. Now, fathers, we're here today celebrating Father's Day. Congratulations, dad.

Dads, you guys are incredible. Moms, you guys are incredible. There's no dads without moms. And we can't do this alone. And yet how often do we think that the job of shepherd for us as parents is ours alone?

We are under shepherds under God, and we cannot do this on our own. And David recognizes this even though he's shepherd, even though he's a king. He recognizes that ultimately he is an under shepherd under God. And he's not much of a shepherd to the nation if he's not much of a sheep to the good shepherd. And so David invites us to trust God.

It's both a psalm of trust and a messianic psalm, meaning that it finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus himself. We also see how this psalm points us back. It invites us to look back at the history of the nation of Israel itself. As we see its fulfillment in the story of Israel wandering through the wilderness, but being shepherded by God, it also invites us to look forward at the true good shepherd that is Jesus himself. And we also see that it takes us through what starts in the wilderness, goes down into the valley, and then ultimately leads us home.

So let's read Psalm 23 and consider its invitation for us today. Psalm 23, starting in verse 1. 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 name's sake. 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. 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 shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.

So as we explore Psalm 23, I want you to do so with this question on your mind. In what ways are you attempting to self shepherd? What part of the shepherd's work are you trying to do for yourself? Because we have a good shepherd who wants to lead us, who wants to take care of us, who wants to provide for us, who wants to lead us home? And yet how often do we try to be the shepherd ourselves?

Do we try to lead our cell phone? Do we try to provide for ourselves, to take care of ourselves? What part of the shepherd's work are you trying to do for yourself? So keep that question in mind as we go back through verse by verse through the psalm, starting in verse 1. The Lord is

my shepherd, I shall not want.

If the Lord is our shepherd, then we are not. I mean, it seems like it should go without saying, but if the Lord is my shepherd, then I am not my shepherd because he's my shepherd. I don't need anything I shouldn't want. I shouldn't have any lack, because God takes care of me. As we look back in the story of Israel, we see how God led them faithfully all those years.

Deuteronomy, chapter 2, verse 7 says this. For the Lord your God has blessed you. This is the story of Israel going through the wilderness. For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He knows you're going through this great wilderness.

These 40 years the Lord your God has been with you and you have lacked nothing. For 40 years they've been going through the wilderness. A trip that should have taken them about two weeks took them 40 years. Does that sound familiar to any of you guys? Like I should have arrived by now, I should have been there by now.

Well, the Israelites don't worry, like they had the same pain. So they're going through the wilderness. They're in an area where there's no provision, there's no goodness, there's no water, there's no food. And yet God provides those things. He provides manna and quail daily.

He provides water out of rocks. Like God gives them everything that they need. They don't lack a thing. They have a shepherd who provides all that they need and because of that they should lack nothing. And yet in our self shepherding, how often do we look at the provisions that God gives us and think it's not enough?

How often do we strive for more, to provide for ourselves, to secure for ourselves that which we think we need. And all the while we don't trust what God has already given us. We self shepherd when we take things into our own hands, when we strive to provide. Even though God says, I will provide, I am your shepherd. You shall not want, you shall not need anything.

The Lord is my shepherd. I'm not abandoned to my lack. How many times have I been in need and God's come through? I mean it's crazy amounts of times. There was one time where we were struggling financially and all of a sudden like my wife and I were having a conversation, there's a knock on our front door, I go open the door, there's nobody there.

There's a check for a thousand dollars sitting in my like stuck in my door. And God's like, hey, you have needs here. Here you go. Like I could tell you story after story after story of the ways that God has come through and taken care of us when we've had difficulties, difficult times, you could as well. Because the Lord is our shepherd, we don't lack any good thing.

As we look forward then we see Jesus as the good shepherd and we see that he promises that

we'll have life and have it to the full. We will have an abundant life. And yet so often in our self shepherding we try to create that abundant life for ourselves. So my question for you is this is, where are you trying to satisfy your own lack? Where are you tempted to not trust God's provision and to try to secure it for yourself?

If the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not Want? Let's continue in verse two. 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 name's sake. I love that picture of laying down in green pastures, of being led to still waters. As we think of Israel, we think of God's provision, His provision in the wilderness, his giving them all that they need, and yet how quickly they try to provide for themselves. I mean, like, how long was Moses gone before they built the golden calf? Because apparently God was out of the building.

God just led them and out of Egypt through the ten plagues, across the Red Sea. He destroyed the entire Egyptian army. And all of a sudden, apparently, God's on vacation. Like, God's gone. And they build their own God because they think, well, he's not here anymore, so we got to take care of ourselves.

And yet God gives them everything that they need. He gives them so much that they can lay down in green pastures. Now, I don't know if you know this about sheep, but sheep don't want to lay down. Like, they don't like to lay down because they won't unless they feel safe. And they don't feel safe unless they have enough food, they have enough water.

They're completely full. They feel completely safe. There's no predators around, and so it's actually really hard to make a sheep lie down. And God says, look, you are taken care of. You are safe.

You have everything that you need. There's no bad guys around. There's nothing that's gonna happen. You can lay down, you can rest. And he leads them in that place, and David invites us to do the same, is to lay down, to rest, to find our rest in him.

That picture of going to still Waters, I don't know about you guys, but I love those nature documentaries, especially at the Predators versus Prey. In my house, the boys always go for the predators, and the girls always go for the prey. Predators usually win. All right, so here a gazelle goes up to the watering hole, and they put their neck out there, and then what comes out of the water, like a crocodile comes and eats the gazelle. It's incredible.

I love it. This picture that David's painting here is like, hey, you can put your neck out there. The crocodile's not going to come out of the water. Like, there's still waters. It's restful, it's peaceful.

You don't have to worry. You can put yourself out there. You can trust me, and I will come through for you, nothing's going to get you. He leads us beside still waters. Not only does he lead us beside still waters, he restores my soul.

How many of you guys need restoration? How many of your souls are like, feeling anguish? How many of you are like, overcome by the weight of life? Like, happy Father's Day to you guys who are out there celebrating Father's Day. Some of you guys, Father's Day.

Father's Day is hard. Like it's not a celebration. You wanted kids and you couldn't have them or you had kids and now they're gone.

How many of you are feeling the weight of life? You need the restoration of your soul. And here's David crying out to God saying, God, you restore my soul. I can't do this on my own. Will you do it for me?

And in our self shepherding, we try to restore ourselves, we try to relieve ourselves, we try to find the, the rest that we were created for, that we were created to find in Christ alone. And we go to all these other places looking for it and we can't find it. We come up short. How many of you guys try to find rest? You go on vacation and you come home.

What do you say? I'm tired. I need a vacation for my vacation. Like, obviously this isn't working for us. Finding rest on our own apart from God doesn't work.

Finding restoration apart from God is not lasting. And David is inviting us to the Good shepherd who wants to draw us back home, who wants to provide us safety, who wants to give us all that we need so that we can actually find rest in Him. We have a Good shepherd who loves us, who knows us, and he wants to give us all. John, chapter 10. Starting in verse three, we read these words to him.

The gatekeeper opens, that is to the Good Shepherd. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and he leads them out. When he has brought out all of his own, he goes before them and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. We have a Good shepherd who knows us. He knows our name, he knows our thoughts, he knows our worries, he knows our needs, and he provides all of those things for us in Himself.

We don't have to go anywhere else, we don't have to find rest anywhere else. It's right there. If we return to the shepherd, all we have to do is follow the invitation and go home. The Good shepherd has all that we need. And yet how many of us are seeking rest and restoration apart from God?

And how is it that we are what are the ways that you try to find rest and restoration apart from

God? Because those things are going to leave us thirsty, wanting more, never being satisfied. Next verse, verse four. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

What a beautiful promise that even though I go through the darkest valleys, the hardest places in life, God is with me. Now, I don't know about you. I do everything I can to avoid the valleys, to avoid the hardships. Maybe it's my personality, I don't know. Like, I don't like conflict.

And so I usually try to steer away from that. I don't like to be sad. And so I try not to grieve very often. And yet, like, grief keeps coming, the sorrow keeps coming. Maybe it's because I keep running.

The sad truth is that as long as I run from the sorrow that God's inviting me into, the hardship that God's inviting me to process through, until I actually process that, I'm never going to experience the comfort that the shepherd freely offers.

The shepherd says, I am with you. Those are David's great words of comfort, is that he doesn't have to fear evil because God is with him. The good shepherd is with him. And yet in our self-shepherding, we avoid weakness, we avoid uncertainty, we avoid hardship. Even as parents, how often do we as parents try to keep our kids from any amount of harm, any amount of hardship, any amount of uncertainty.

And so we protect our kids from everything painful, and we're not really protecting them, we're protecting ourselves because they're still going to have to endure that at some point.

We can't protect ourselves and we can't protect those that we love from hardship. It's just an un-

It's a part of life.

But you know what else is a part of life? Good shepherd is with us is that I will fear no evil because you are with me. That's what the good shepherd says. I am with you in the ultimate valley, the ultimate hardship, the ultimate thing you don't have to go through on your own. In fact, we read these words in John chapter 10.

Jesus as the good shepherd, he says this, verse 11, he says, I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays his life down for his sheep. The ultimate valley, the ultimate hardship, the ultimate thing in life is us having to account for our own sins before God. And we don't have to do that because we have a good shepherd who did it for us.

So even though I walk through the darkest valleys, I Will fear no evil, because God is with me.

Because the good shepherd's with me. Because the good shepherd, he takes. He pays the price so I don't have to. And yet how often how many of us try to protect ourselves and protect those that we love from life's valleys?

Let's continue. The second part of verse four, it says, you, rod and your staff comfort me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Now, we talked about a minute ago, Israel was in the wilderness because of their sin. So it should have taken them two weeks, but they ultimately took 40 years.

Because right as they were coming out of the. Out of Egypt and they were approaching the promised land, God had commanded Moses to send 12 spies to check out the promised land to see what it was like. And 10 of those 12 spies came back and gave a negative report saying that the people who are there are too strong, they're too big, there's too many of them. They're going to destroy us. And so most of the people in the community listened to and agreed with the report from the 10.

And they began to grumble. And God became upset, and he says, you know what? You guys don't trust me. Did you not just see the Red Sea open up? Did you not just see that the 10 plagues?

Did you not see my deliverance of bringing you out of Egypt? Like the wilderness was a season of refining, a season of correction. And that's what the rod and the staff are about, is the rod and the staff are there to. Yes, they're there to comfort us, but they're there to correct as well. The rod, if you can imagine, is like essentially a baseball bat.

The rod protects the sheep from others, from outsiders, from bandits, from predators, to basically beat them back and to protect them. But then you have the staff. The staff is much like this. The staff the shepherd would hold onto, and he would use it to protect the sheep from themselves. The sheep would run off and he would go and catch them, pull them back into the flock.

They would go and run into a ditch or into a rut, and they would get stuck. And they can't help themselves, and the other little sheep can't help them. And so they would, you know, pull them up by the crook of the staff. David's saying, your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Why your correction, God, when I run away from you?

Yeah, I imagine it probably doesn't feel great to get pulled back up by the neck. Feels a lot better than staying stuck in a rut until you die. And that's where some of us are at today, we're stuck in a rut and we need correction. We often like to think that God needs to use his rod, or maybe, hey, God, can I borrow your rod? Because we want to beat back those who are the problem, because we think the problem's out there somewhere.

And God's saying, no, no, no, the problem is right there. It's with you.

The log is in your eye. The speck is in your brother's eye. We need God's correction. Israel needed God's correction. David needed God's correction.

And so God's correction is there to comfort us, to bring us back gently to him. And God, when he corrects, he doesn't correct with contempt. He doesn't like, shove it in our face. He doesn't hold it against us. Romans 5 says that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Like God knew what he was getting in this deal, like he knew the worst of us. And he still sent Jesus to die for us. So he's not surprised at the depth of our sin. Yet he's not going to leave us there either. Romans 12:10.

Speaking of human parents, the author says, for they disciplined us for a short time as it seems best to them. But he that is God, God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant. But later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. So the purpose of God's discipline, the purpose of God's correction is for the sake of the peaceful fruit of righteousness and so that we can share in his holiness.

That's why God has the rod and the staff. That's why it's a comfort, is because we get righteousness, we get holiness out of it. Yeah, we may get like a little crink in our neck at one point, but that's for our good. God wants to draw us back to himself. He wants to help us to trust him.

He wants to correct us in love, because he loves us, because he wants the best for us. So my question for you is, where are you resisting the shepherd's correction? What areas of your life do you refuse to let God in and say, God, I don't want your correction. I don't want your advice here. God, I don't want to follow what you say.

It's too much. Just know that the Lord's correction is for your good. It's out of love. Let's continue. In verse five, you prepare a table for Me.

This is where we shift. So we went from the wilderness down into the valley, and now we're coming home. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows.

As we look at the life and the story of David, we see a boy, David, who is anointed as the next king of Israel, even though Saul was alive and well and he was king. And Samuel comes over to Jesse's house, and he looks through all of the sons of Jesse. He identifies David, the boy

shepherd, the youngest of the lot, as the next king of Israel. And he pours oil over his head and anoints him. And yet nothing changed that day.

He was still just the boy shepherd. He still went out to go shepherd the sheep. Eventually, he was called into Saul's service, and he served Saul with great distinction. And then eventually, Saul found out who he was, that he was the next anointed king, and he tried to kill him. And so here he is.

He's the anointed king of Israel who's on the run. He's anointed, but not inaugurated. And that's where we stand today, is we are in this place where God has called us his own. He's anointed us with oil. He's called us to follow him.

And we feel like we're being chased by the enemy. Like, if we stop, if we don't protect ourselves, if we don't take care of ourselves, that they're gonna catch up with us. That the badness of life, the things that we fear, that those things are gonna catch up with us to the point where we have to protect ourselves. And God's saying, no, you don't have to protect yourself. Just stop.

Stop running. Come and sit at the table. I've set the table for you. I imagine David didn't get a lot of hot meals when he was on the run. Like, he probably just grabbed.

You know, he, like, stopped a QT and did, like, the little grab and go thing.

And God is saying, David, sit down. Sit down. Enjoy a hot meal. Take your time. Oh, is your glass a little empty?

Let me. Let me pour it out. I'm just gonna keep pouring. Keep pouring. It's gonna overflow.

You're gonna be like, it's good. You're okay, guys, we're okay. We don't have to keep running. The shepherd calls us home that we can sit down and enjoy a meal with him.

He sets the table. We don't have to do that. We don't have to manage our own reputation. We don't have to manage our own worth. We don't have to try to prove anything to anybody.

The good shepherd has done all that for us, and all we have to do is sit and enjoy his fellowship.

What a beautiful thing. God gives us abundant life. John 10:10 says this. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. But I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

What a great promise of the King that we have life and life abundant. How are you attempting. How are you attempting to fill your own cup? Because we have a good shepherd who wants to

do both of those things for us. We don't have to do it for ourself.

And finally, verse six. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. What a beautiful promise.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. How many of you have a hard time relaxing? Have a hard time taking it easy? Have a hard time not looking over your shoulder, wondering what's going to happen next? Waiting for the next shoe to drop?

The mail comes in, another overdue notice, another burden, another thing you roll over at night. You can't quite fall asleep because you're just worried about this and this and this and this. How many of us are looking back in our life, looking in the rearview mirror and wondering, when is it gonna catch up with me? When are those things gonna come back and bite me?

And David, this is what he says. He says, when you look back behind you, those aren't the things that are pursuing you. Those aren't the things that are gonna catch up with you. You know what's gonna catch up with you? Goodness and mercy.

The loving kindness of God. That's what's pursuing you when you submit yourself to the shepherd, when you refuse to shepherd yourself. And you say, God, you are my shepherd. You are my provider, you are my vindication, you are my protection. All of those things.

The thing that follows you is goodness and mercy. What a beautiful promise. We don't have to live hunted by fear, shame, scarcity. We don't have to live by the fear of death, the fear of illness. Because goodness and mercy pursue us as we look forward to the good Shepherd.

I'm encouraged by these words. John 10, starting in verse 28.

The good shepherd says this. I give them eternal life. They will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of my father's hand.

How many of us are concerned about securing our own future? Of saving enough of doing enough of planning enough. When the good shepherd says, your future is already secure, Your future, the future is in the hands of my father. And no one can snatch the sheep up out of his hands. That's our destiny.

That's our future. It's been secured. We don't have to do it for ourself.

We just need to trust the shepherd to do it for us. He wants to give us eternal life. He wants to give us his goodness. He wants to invite us home that we can rest in him. So what do we do

with all of this?

I have three simple invitations. The first one is this is to look back. I want you to look back. I don't want you to look back at what's chasing you. I want you to look back at where are the ways?

What are the ways that God has taken care of me before? Because in the moment we lose all sense of perspective, we lose all sense of reality because we're just overcome by what's happening in this moment. And, and yet as we look back at the ways that God has taken care of us before, the ways that God's taken care of others in our life, we see, oh man, God is faithful. God is good. Like that's part of the beauty of reading the Bible is that we see story after story after story of God protecting and taking care of his people.

And so we look back and we consider the ways that God's taking care of us. Number two, we look around. I want you to name one of the ways, those questions at the end of each verse, One of those ways that you attempt to self shepherd. What are those ways that you're drawn to take care of yourself rather than to allow God to be your shepherd. And number three is to look forward.

I want you to ask yourself how God is calling you to come back to him. He's calling each of us home. He's calling each of us his sheep. He wants each of us to come back to him. So how is he calling you to do that?

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for the good shepherd. God, we thank you for your love and care. The ways that you provide, that you take care of us. God, God, I pray that you would help us to trust you, to trust you to take care of us.

God, that we wouldn't believe the lie that we have to take care of ourself. But God, that we would allow you, the good shepherd, to do just that.

Father, help us to identify, to have the wisdom to see the ways that we attempt to take care of ourself. And, God, I pray that you would give us the courage to lay that at your feet. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.