

Psalm 23

The Message

23 ¹⁻³ GOD, my shepherd!

I don't need a thing.

You have bedded me down in lush meadows,

you find me quiet pools to drink from.

True to your word,

you let me catch my breath

and send me in the right direction.

⁴ Even when the way goes through

Death Valley,

I'm not afraid

when you walk at my side.

Your trusty shepherd's crook

makes me feel secure.

⁵ You serve me a six-course dinner

right in front of my enemies.

You revive my drooping head;

my cup brims with blessing.

⁶ Your beauty and love chase after me

every day of my life.

I'm back home in the house of GOD

for the rest of my life.

Stuart Townend Hymn

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,

For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

The Lord's My Shepherd (Crimond)

English source: [Traditional](#)

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
in pastures green; he leadeth me
the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again,
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
e'en for his own name's sake.

Yea, though I walk in death's dark vale,
yet will I fear no ill,
for thou art with me and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.

Goodness and mercy all my life
Shall surely follow me;
And in God's house forever more
My dwelling place shall be.

Text - *_Scottish Psalter_ (1650) [So much for "English"!]*
- William Whittingham & anon., based on Psalm 23

Pearl Shangkuan: Ten Favorite Choral Settings on Psalm 23 *{Illustrating the musical range}*

1. “The Lord Is My Shepherd” by Randall Thompson

Randall Thompson (1899–1985) was an American composer who spent much of his career composing choral music. His heart-stirring setting of “Alleluia” is his most well-known work.

2. “Adonai ro-I” from ***Chichester Psalms*** by Leonard Bernstein

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990) was one of the first American-born conductors to achieve worldwide fame. This is the second of his three-movement work *Chichester Psalms*, in which Bernstein juxtaposes Psalm 23 and Psalm 2

3.. “Psalm 23” by Paul Basler

Paul Basler (b. 1963) is a professor at the University of Florida, where he teaches horn and undergraduate composition courses. This setting of Psalm 23 is from a multi-movement work entitled *Songs of Faith*.

4. “The Lord Is My Shepherd” from ***Requiem*** by John Rutter

John Rutter (b. 1945) is a British composer renowned for his sacred choral works and for founding and directing the Cambridge Singers in numerous recordings and performances. This Psalm 23 movement is from his large-scale work *Requiem*, written in 1985

5. “Ta cao chang de yang (The Sheep of His Pasture)” from ***Jubilate Deo*** by Dan Forrest This setting of Psalm 23 is the third movement of Dan Forrest’s seven-movement *Jubilate Deo (O Be Joyful in the Lord)*

6. “My Shepherd Will Supply My Need,” arr. Virgil Thomson

Virgil Thomson (1896–1989) was an American composer, conductor, and music critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*. This setting is his arrangement of Psalm 23 with text by Isaac Watts (1674–1748) and music from William Walker’s *Southern Harmony*, 1835.

7. “The Lord Is My Shepherd” by Franz Schubert

This setting of Psalm 23 by Austrian composer Franz Schubert (1797–1828) is more often sung in the original German, “Gott ist mein Hirt.” An important bridge of the classical and romantic music eras,

8. “Psalm 23” from ***Psalm Trilogy*** by Srul Glick

Srul Glick (1934–2002) was a prominent and prolific Canadian composer who wrote in all major forms and is celebrated for his liturgical music as well. This trilogy for

children's choir and piano or string orchestra was written in 2000.

9. "The Lord Is My Shepherd" by Allen Pote

Known for his sacred music, American composer Allen Pote (b. 1945) is a frequent clinician for festivals and workshops.

10. "Psalm 23" by Z. Randall Stroope

Randall Stroope (b. 1953) is a renowned American composer and conductor whose music is performed all over the world. A professor at Oklahoma State University, he is also highly sought after as a guest conductor and clinician across the country and internationally. This treble setting is scored for piano, flute, and oboe, here performed under the composer's baton.

Michael Hawn: Ten Favorite Hymns on Psalm 23

1. "The Lord's My Shepherd, I'll Not Want" (***Scottish Psalter***, 1650)

Listen

This venerable versification of the Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible (1611), now often ascribed to Cornish nobleman Francis Rous (1580–1659), appeared only four decades after the KJV and remains one of the most assuring versions of Psalm 23 nearly four centuries later away any aspect of the scripture. CRIMOND, a tune by Jesse Seymour Irvine (1836–1887), is one of many tunes used with this text, though it is by far the most enduring.

2. "The King of Love My Shepherd Is" (Henry Baker, 1868)

Anglican clergyman William Henry Baker (1821–1877) provided another metrical version of Psalm 23 about two centuries after the famous paraphrase in the *Scottish Psalter* (1650). Though at first it seems quite similar in that it follows the entire psalm verse by verse, there are some significant differences. Baker's description of the pastoral setting is more vivid, perhaps drawing upon experiences in England's famed Lake District; the translation of the scripture upon which the metrical paraphrase is based is not the KJV, but the translation by Miles Coverdale (1488–1569), used in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and thus beloved by many. Some phrases were taken directly from this translation. Baker's paraphrase incorporates New Testament images such as the cross, "unction grace" (anointing grace, 1 John 2:27), and a "pure chalice," a symbol of communion. Several tunes have been paired with this text, including DOMINUS REGIT ME (the Latin title for Psalm 23) by John Bacchus Dykes (1823–1876) and ST. COLUMBA, an Irish melody first paired with this text by the famous English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958).

3. "My Shepherd Is the Lord" (Joseph Gelineau, ***Grail Psalter***, 1963)

The Grail Psalter (1963) was a collection of English psalm translations designed to be both faithful to the originals and more natural in speech patterns. Jesuit priest Joseph Gelineau

(1920–2008) developed responsorial settings based on the concept of “sprung rhythm,” musical settings that respond to the natural flow of speech rather than falling into regular metrical poetic patterns. Fr. Gelineau’s setting

of Psalm 23 is his most beloved and has been sung by congregations whenever this psalm appears in the lectionary as well as at times when comfort is needed.

4. “Shepherd Me, O God” (Marty Haugen, 1986)

Listen

Composed in the mid-1980s at Holden Village, a retreat center in the Northern Cascades of Washington state, this responsorial paraphrase of Psalm 23 composed by Marty Haugen (b. 1950) is imbued with comforting metaphors: “rest in the meadows of faithfulness and love” (st. 1); “heal my weary soul” (st. 2); “My spirit shall sing the music of your name” (st. 3), “Your rod and your staff, my comfort and my hope” (st. 4); “You [crown] me with love beyond my power to hold” (st. 5). The refrain invites God to gently “shepherd” us “from death into life.”

Hymns that Allude to Verses in Psalm 23

5. “Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us” (Attr. Dorothea Ann Thrupp, 1836)

6. “He Leadeth Me” (Joseph Gilmore, 1862)

7. “We Shall Walk Through the Valley in Peace” (African American)

8. I Want Jesus to Walk with Me” (African American Spiritual)

9. “Lead Me, Guide me” (Doris Akers, 1953)

10. “Nada te turbe” (Teresa de Ávila)

Listen

A meditation was found in the breviary (prayer book) of the Spanish noblewoman Teresa de Ávila (1515–1582) that centers on the word *nada* (nothing). American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882) offers a poetic translation:

Nada te turbe, nada te espante;
todo se pasa, Dios no se muda.
La paciencia todo alcanza.
Quien a Dios tiene nada le falta;
solo Dios basta.

Let nothing disturb thee, nothing affright thee;
all things are passing, God never changeth.
Patience endureth, attendeth to all things.
Who God possesseth in nothing is wanting;
alone God sufficeth.

Notes: Question first: Did the psalm attract the outstanding tunes; or have the tunes made this psalm top of the pops? P.S. Which is your “must have” 23rd Psalm tune?

I never tire of saying that I taught in Sunday School someone who went on to be a Shepherd(ess): Susan Rowe, who lived in Orchard Way. I’m guessing most people have never met a shepherd. In Bible times, shepherds were very familiar – though their responsibilities for 24 hour protection of roving sheep against numerous enemies made them outsiders in some ways. Numerous Bible stars were shepherds, including:

- Abel, the second son of Adam and Eve and the first shepherd mentioned in the Bible.
- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the patriarchs of Israel who were shepherds in the land of Canaan.
- Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob who tended their father Laban's flocks.
- Joseph, the son of Jacob who was a shepherd before he was sold into slavery by his brothers.
- Moses, the prophet and leader of Israel who was a shepherd in Midian before God called him to deliver his people from Egypt.
- David, the king of Israel who was a shepherd boy before he was anointed by Samuel.
- Amos, the prophet who was a shepherd in Tekoa and spoke against the injustice and idolatry of Israel and Judah.
- Jesus, the Son of God who called himself the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

A vicar or minister is a “pastor” = shepherd. A Bishop carries a shepherd’s crook. We all have a pastoral ministry. The Gospels emphasise sheep and shepherd, e.g. parable of the lost sheep. John’s Gospel has only one parable: it is a shepherd/sheep parable. Jesus to Peter: “Feed my sheep”.

God as Shepherd, God as Host. Note switch from God as “He” to God as “You” when things get sticky. “Comfort” means Courage not cosiness. Banquet in the face of my enemies should be understood as sacrificial meal strengthening in difficult times, not as stuffing yourself while gloating as enemies go hungry. Normally in Old Testament, focus on sheep collectively (People of Israel) rather than individually.

If you want to be awkward: Is the description of human beings as a flock of sheep really a good picture? (In opera, recall: “Like a flock of silly sheep”!) Can you find a better parallel. Bible sheep were kept to be eaten...and sacrificed in huge numbers!

Do read the Paula Gooder section on Psalm 23.