



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Summer Playlist

### The Secret to My Success

### Psalm 23:1–6

**Tim Badal | August 16, 2020**



Turn to Psalm 23 this morning—a well-known Psalm. We're in a series we've entitled "Summer Playlist," in which we've been

going through different Psalms. The Psalms have a unique place in the canon of Scripture because they address a myriad of situations and emotions. Like any good album, there are fast songs and slow songs. There are songs of lament and sorrow; there are songs of joy. God's playlist is filled with all kinds of music genres. We've now come to what may be the most beloved Psalm, maybe even the most beloved chapter in all of Scripture.

Psalm 23, the Psalm of the Good Shepherd, is known not only by Christians but also by non-believers. If you've been on this earth for any amount of time, you've probably heard it. Perhaps you've read it or heard it recited in a funeral service. People love this Psalm because it shares words that are so true of our experience in this world.

If you don't already know this, David was the author of this Psalm. He was a shepherd himself, so he knew what it was like to be a shepherd. He understood how the God of the universe can be our Shepherd—the One Who protects us from harm. David well knew how much sheep needed a shepherd. Sheep are by nature dumb animals. If they're not led, they are easily destroyed. They're basically helpless creature. David uses the image of a shepherd keeping his flock to tell us how God relates to us as people. I wonder if it was after a long day of shepherding, in the cool of the evening, as he looked out over the flock—his father's flock—that he began to write these words that eventually became a song:

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

<sup>3</sup> He restores my soul.

He leads 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 mercy shall follow me

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD

forever.

It's always difficult to preach a passage that is so well-known. No doubt if you've followed Jesus for any amount of time, you've heard a preacher preach on this, probably way better than I will today. But I want to walk through this passage with a couple things in mind. First, I want us to renew our commitment to the Shepherd God has put over us. Second, I want us to recognize how we at times choose to go our own way, seeking the greener pastures we've been promised, but doing it on our own.

I want you to focus on a certain phrase in this Psalm, something we as Americans especially need to hear. "The Lord is my shepherd...I shall not want." What do you want this morning? The idea of wanting leads us to striving or pursuing. It's a desire or dream. What in this world are you longing for? The Psalmist says, "If I had the Lord as my Shepherd, then I have no other wants in this world. I have no other needs. If the first part of that statement is true, that the Lord is my Shepherd, then I have all I need."

One of the great litmus tests this Psalm gives is to see if we're being properly shepherded by God. In other words, are we following our Shepherd? Are we fully content? You should wake up each day and be able to say, "The Lord is my Shepherd today, just like He was yesterday, so I need nothing else besides Him in my life."

Sadly, that's not true for so many of us. We want lots of things. But what the Psalmist is telling us is that we will find success in this life only when we're connected to the Shepherd. We want success in many areas. We want success in our marriages and parenting. There are students going back to school who want success in their studies. Athletes want success in their sports. We want success in our finances. We want success in life. We're always looking for the secret to success that advertisers are promising. But God's Word tells us success is found in a vibrant and healthy relationship with the Shepherd. He will take care of our needs and minister to us in the good, the bad and the ugly parts of life. However, we tend to go after success our own way.

The Apostle Paul told Timothy that he had learned the secret to success, which was contentment in all circumstances (1 Timothy 6:6-8). Paul had been beaten and abused, and at that point was in prison for the cause of Christ. How could he say he was content? Because he knew what David knew—the Lord was his Shepherd. Therefore, whether he was in plenty or in lack, whether the times were good or bad, he had all he needed.

Can you say that this morning? *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."* Who is this Lord Who, through a relationship with Him, can cause us not to want or need anything? If you were to look in your Bible, you would see the word "LORD" in capital letters. That represents the personal name of God, Yahweh. "Yahweh is my Shepherd." The Scriptures actually contain a lot of different names for God. Yahweh, however, is kind of His chief title. It was such a revered and sacred name that the Jewish people wouldn't even say it out loud. They would write it simply using the consonants YHWH. What Yahweh meant for the David and the other Jewish people in the Old Testament was that He is the God of the universe, the supreme Being. He is the beginning and the end. He is everything.

When David said, "Yahweh is my Shepherd," he was talking about the God Who created the world and Who holds time in His hands. He is the God Who deals with everything seen and unseen. David says, "This is the God Who is in relationship with me, therefore because He is so great and infinite in His wisdom and power, I have nothing to want. I no longer have to strive for things in this world. I have all I need."

Let that sink. In the middle of a COVID world, where delays, disruptions and disappointments rule our day, can we as followers of Jesus Christ—Who is our great Shepherd—say, "I shall not want"? David said the Shepherd is enough. He's everything we need. But what are our needs that this Shepherd takes care of? Here are three things He does for us.

## **Our Shepherd sets us in the right direction.**

When we say, "The Lord is my Shepherd," notice that this phrase is possessive. There are a lot of shepherds out there, so we have to make a decision about which one to follow. Some of you are your own shepherd. You're the captain of your vessel. What you dream and long for is what you pursue. You set the direction of your life.

For others who are younger, maybe your mom and dad are setting the direction of your life. Or maybe it's your boss. Maybe your pursuit of money is directing your life. We need to make the decision, "I'm not going to pursue those things. What I want to possess is 'my' Shepherd. He will lead me He will feed me. He will be the One Who determines the direction I'll go."

## He calls me to rest.

What does this Shepherd do? First, He calls me to something. David wrote, *"He makes me lie down in green pastures."* Notice the words *"makes me..."* He doesn't ask me if I want to lie down. He doesn't offer options. It says clearly, *"He makes me..."* It's a command. To have God as your Shepherd means you have to listen to His command to start resting and stop striving. You quit trying to live life on your own, to be the shepherd of your life, and you allow yourself to be led.

That's a great difficulty for so many of us. We don't want to rest. We want to take our lives in our own hands. That's why this COVID chapter of our lives is so difficult. It's out of our hands. It's so much bigger than we are. God is saying, "You need to let Me tell you what to do. Stop striving."

I want you to notice that you cannot have green pastures (food) or still waters (drink), without doing what God says. So many of us want God's benefits yet are unwilling to obey Him. To enjoy His shepherding requires that we listen to Him which involves faith and trust. So often we think we know where the green pastures are. We think we know where the still waters are. But a true follower of God can say, "God, You know better than I do. Even though I don't always see or understand what You're doing, I'm going to trust that You can lead me and care for me better than I can myself."

Parents, we get this. We watch our children and realize we know more than they do about what's good for them. But our kids would disagree. I've watched my children makes decisions, but I know there's a better decision and I want to lead them to that. Sometimes they're willing to follow me and sometimes they're not, but that was true of me when I was a kid myself and it's probably true of you as well.

Often, what seems so natural and right to a child may be exactly opposite to the direction they should go. Likewise, we need to trust that where God leads us is the better choice for us.

## He calls me to refreshment.

God leads us to green pastures and still waters—food and drink—in order to restore us. But for refreshment to take place, the shepherd has to make sure the sheep are not afraid. Sheep are afraid of everything, so the shepherd has to lead them to a place where they can feel safe.

Also, when sheep are hungry, they will eat anything, so the shepherd has to make sure they're led to the right kind of food. A vet in Turkey once did an autopsy on a lamb that had died after wandering from the fold. When he opened the lamb's stomach, he found plastic, steel and iron. Sheep will eat anything when they're hungry.

That's true for us as humans as well. God offers us green pastures and still waters, but when we're left to our own devices, we will consume anything to fill the hunger we feel. Instead of listening to Him and receiving His refreshment, we eat garbage. In Jeremiah 2:13, God tells Israel He has two things against them. First, they refuse to drink His pure water that He puts before them, and second, they choose instead to drink out of their own impure cisterns. Israel had been given clean water to drink, but they chose to turn away from that. Instead, what it says in this verse is that they were drinking from the sewer.

The world offers us a lot of things and promises they will take care of our needs. But often that's like drinking from a sewer. Yet all the while God is offering us true refreshment that will restore our souls. That literally means He causes life to return to us. When we follow the true Shepherd, He cares for us.

David wrote, *"He leads me in paths of righteousness."* If you follow the Shepherd, He will lead you to a specific spot called righteousness. Our job is to follow Him. How do we do that? In John 10 we read that Jesus is the Great Shepherd of the sheep. How do we follow Him here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**First, we follow Him through His Word.** The Word is a light to my path (Psalm 119:105). It allows me to know where to go and what to do. In my 44 years, I'm thankful for the Word of God, because it has led me and has never let me down. Even when I've strayed from it, it has told me what would happen. Truth be told, every time I've strayed from the Scriptures, they have been true regarding the consequences I would receive.

In addition to the Scriptures, **we follow Him by following His walk.** He didn't just write down directions regarding where to go and what to do. Rather, Jesus Christ became a man of flesh and lived life with us. He was tempted in every way and yet without sin to show us the way to go (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Years ago we had a big blizzard, so Joshua and I were out shoveling our driveway. Then Josh wanted to go out to the backyard and play on the swing set during the storm. He was probably four years old, and because he a little guy and was all bundled up, it was hard to walk with the snow up to his waist. So I told him, "Josh, I'll make a path and you follow me." As long as he stayed in the path made by his very large father, he was okay. But when he would try to go his own way, he would end up deep in the snow.

God's Word and the example of Jesus will lead us on the paths of righteousness, but it's up to us to decide whether we'll stay on that path or veer to the left or right. The Bible gives us many examples of people, some of whom stayed on the Shepherd's path and others who veered left or right. We have lots of stories of what happened to those people who left the righteous path God had provided for them. Why does God do all these things for His sheep? We might think it's because we're really special.

I've found a helpful book called [Cat & Dog Theology](#). The idea is that if we have dog theology, then our thought process goes like this: "You feed me, you walk me, you care for me, you give me all I need. You must be God." The dog knows he's lost without his master. That's why he will meet you at the front door and is always excited to see you. On the other hand, the cat says, "You feed me, you care for me, you give me all I need. I must be God." Some of you are cats, but you need to realize the reason God does everything He does for you is not because you're the greatest lamb in the world, but because His renown is at stake.

As we go out into the world, we will find people who are like emaciated lambs, striving for things they need. They'll see how well-fed you are and how at peace you are. When they ask you about this, you could say, "Well, look at the life I've put together for myself. I'm a really smart and successful individual." But sheep who know the Shepherd won't respond that way. Rather, they'll say, "It's not that I'm great, but let me tell you how awesome my Shepherd is. It's all about Him."

He's the Good Shepherd. We're not good sheep. In fact, we're told in the Bible that just like sheep, we've all gone our own way and have ended up in disaster (Isaiah 53:6). We not only have what we need, but we've been given so much more than we could ask for because we have a great Shepherd Who deserves all the glory and praise.

So what does that mean for us? When we begin to live out the decision to follow our Shepherd in the right direction, there are two specific results.

## **Our Shepherd will settle us in times of despair.**

David wrote in Psalm 23:4, *"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..."* Wait a minute. You might ask, "I thought I had a good shepherd. I thought I had a shepherd who leads to righteousness. If I'm part of this flock that God leads, feeds, cares for and tends to, why in the world am I in the valley of the shadow of death?" Great question. It's the question of why there's evil in the world. Why is it that, even though we're followers of the Good Shepherd, we still might experience difficulties? As a side note, there are a couple reasons why this may be the case.

First, you may be going through a time of suffering because of your own sin. The blame should go no farther than your two shoulders. You may be in the situation you're in because you have wandered away from God. Instead of following in His paths of righteousness, you have followed your own paths of unrighteousness. The consequences of this are given to us in the parable of the wandering sheep (Luke 15:1-7).

Maybe you find yourself in the snare of a predator, or in a place of struggle or disappointment, because you are out of step with the Lord. The Bible tells us, however, that if we confess our sin, our great Shepherd will forgive us and then will cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

The valley of the shadow of death could refer to one of two places. It's the place where you feel like you're going to die or it's the place where all you want is to die. In either case, it's a dark place. If it's not because of your sin, why are you there? It might be something God has sovereignly allowed for His purposes. Sometimes He intentionally takes you through trials.

My in-laws live in Galena, in the northwest corner of the state. When my kids were younger, they would always say, "Galena is up in the hills." When we would go to Galena, which is probably a couple hundred feet higher than where we live on the Illinois plains, you would think the trip would be a straight uphill drive. But if you've ever driven Route 20, there are a lot of ups and downs.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the road that leads to heaven is not a straight path. It is filled with ups and downs. We see this in the stories of the patriarchs and prophets. We see this with the apostles and early church. There will be difficulties and struggles, but the valleys make the peaks all the more sweet. They also cause us to long for our Shepherd. If everything always goes well for us, we would have no reason to have a Shepherd. It's in the valley of the shadow of death that we are able to respond like David did. When troubles come, we are able to fear no evil. The book of James tells us that when trials come, we are to consider them pure joy (James 1:2-4). Peter told the church not to be surprised when trials come (1 Peter 4:12).

The Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:37 that when trials come, we need to remember that we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. We have nothing to worry about in troubled times. We don't have to worry about the future. Why? Because the Lord is our Shepherd and we shall not want.

David Livingston, the great missionary, put it this way: "God, You can send me anywhere, lay any burden upon me. I only ask that You sustain me. Sever any tie in my heart, except the tie that binds my heart to Yours." In a nutshell, David Livingston said, "The Lord is my shepherd. No matter what happens, I'm not going to worry or fret, because the tie that binds my heart to His is strong."

What is it that connects us? Look at what David says next in Psalm 23: *"I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*

Years ago when my children were young, from time to time they were afraid of the boogey man. I remember a time when Luke was about three or four and his older brothers had scared the daylights out of him. He came to me and said, "Dad, the boogey man is in my room." I said, "Well, tell me about him." Luke said, "He's big and ugly and mean!" I told him, "You've got a bigger, uglier and meaner friend—your dad." "How do you know that, Dad?" I said, "When Dad comes in the room, where is the boogey man?" "He's gone!" "That's right. I'm bigger and badder than any boogey man. You have a relationship with me, so any time the boogie man comes, you call me and I'll come running. You don't have to worry. When Dad is here, the boogey man is gone." He thought about that. "Dad, you're right."

Let me tell you, friends, the boogey man—which is the fear of this world and the fear of the devil—is scary when we're by ourselves. But we've got a great Father in heaven Who is bigger than any boogey man. That Father in heaven says to us, "When you call Me, I come running." Do you know what happens when God comes running to us? The devil flees from us, so we can be sustained through whatever comes our way. His rod and staff comfort us. Even in the middle of our struggles and circumstances, we can know God has set a table before us in the presence of our enemies. As the battle is raging on for your life—in the good, the bad and the ugly of life—you are able to be at peace because God is with you.

I know these days are difficult. I've said over and over again that God wants you, as the sheep of His flock, to not simply survive but to thrive in this. That's what Psalm 23 is saying. Even in the valley of the shadow of death, you and I can thrive because He is with us, His rod and staff comfort us and He places before us the greatest meal in the presence of our enemies.

## **Our Shepherd will satisfy our desires.**

This leads us to one final thing. Not only does the Shepherd set us in the right direction, not only does He settle us in times of despair, but He also will satisfy our desires. Isn't that what we want? "The Lord is my Shepherd—I want some things." How does He satisfy what we desire? David wrote in Psalm 23:6, *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* The final way the Lord brings contentment is by addressing our desires. We want some things and the Lord is going to satisfy us.

### **He satisfies our desire for acceptance.**

Students, you're headed back to school and all kinds of pressures are going to be facing you again, including the desire to be accepted. You're going to play the game of doing what others want because you want your so-called friends to accept you. Listen,

this doesn't end in junior high and high school. People who are a whole lot older than you still want to be accepted. We go through all kinds of games ourselves. But God is telling us, "I accept you just as you are. I accept you as one of My sheep."

David wrote, "You anoint my head with oil." In the Old Testament, there were two reasons why a person would be anointed with oil. First, oil was used medicinally to treat a wound. Second, oil was used to set a person apart as royalty. These are both great pictures. When our heads are anointed with oil, it's because we are hurting. When Jesus looked at the crowds in Jerusalem, He saw a flock of people who were like hurt and harassed sheep without a shepherd. He came to them, took care of them and bound up their wounds. Then He told them, "You will become My children. And I'm not just a Shepherd—I'm also a King." He takes us from being paupers and makes us princes. We are given a place of acceptance.

### **He satisfies our desire for possessions.**

We are also given wonderful possessions. David says goodness and mercy will follow us. The world wants these things, so they strive after these all the days of their lives. As a follower of Jesus Christ, you don't have to go looking for goodness and mercy. They follow you. They come after you. I'll be honest, I'd rather have goodness and mercy coming after me than me striving on my own to try to find something I'll never get.

### **He satisfies our desire for proximity.**

Finally, David says we will " *dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* " We'll have a new position. We will possess all we need and now we will have proximity, intimacy and closeness with the Almighty. When David wrote this, there were only a handful of people in all Israel who could get close to God in the Holy of Holies. But David was saying, "When I'm in His flock, I am close to the King. I can be close with Yahweh."

There's a lot more we could say about Psalm 23, but my time has come to an end. So let me ask are you following the Great Shepherd of the sheep? Maybe this is the first time you've heard anything like this. Becoming part of the flock of God is done by openly confessing your need for Him. You need to say, "No longer am I going to try to do this on my own. Now I'm going to let You lead me, feed me and teach me as the Great Shepherd of the sheep."

For those of you who have been part of the flock for a while, perhaps you've wandered away some. Why do you continue to strive and toil for things you'll never get in this world, when all the while you've been promised by the ever-faithful Shepherd that He will supply all you need? Confess your wandering and return to the fold where there is forgiveness, intimacy and love.

During these difficult days, brothers and sisters, we have the God of the universe Who welcomes us into a relationship with Him. That relationship means we no longer have to strive or toil for the things we want, because goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives.

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