

An oil painting of a shepherd with a flock of sheep in a mountain valley. The shepherd, seen from behind, wears a dark coat and a hat, walking along a path. A large flock of white sheep follows him across a grassy field. In the background, majestic snow-capped mountains rise against a sky filled with soft, white clouds. The lighting suggests a bright day, with strong shadows and highlights on the landscape.

Beginning with rest

Following the
Shepherd's roadmap

BY JENNIFER GINN

*"The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want..."*

SOMEWHERE ALONG MY WAY as a pastor, I fell out of love with the 23rd Psalm. Maybe it was that year of leading so many memorial services for which families requested this well-known psalm. But in recent months, hoping to recapture its wonder and beauty, I've read this psalm regularly during my morning quiet time. Once it eased its way into my morning rhythm, I began noticing a pattern of holy accompaniment—one that filled me with energy and hope. Psalm 23 has come back to life for me!

When have you experienced a “coming back to life” moment? Some people are blessed with a refreshing feeling when they spend time with Jesus’ words in the gospels, listen warmly to a friend’s expression of faith, or wake up well-rested after a good night’s sleep. A good night’s sleep, however, is no guarantee for any of us, despite compelling offers from mattress companies. In the 23rd Psalm, the Shepherd offers not a perfect mattress, but a different kind of rest: one that will renew us on the inside, no matter how well we’ve slept the night before.

Though I often don’t (sleep well, that is), still my body clock wakes me early. Yours may alarm even earlier than mine, reminding you to make breakfast and pack lunch for kids about to catch an early school bus or carpool. After they’re off and you’ve poured your morning coffee, maybe you’ll find a moment to

sit and breathe deeply, turning your heart to the Shepherd. Not an early riser? Whenever your day begins, take a few minutes to be still. Read a devotion and journal your response, recall a favorite scripture story, or sit in silence with a candle lit, open to the Spirit.

That’s when I turn to the 23rd Psalm. Even if rest hasn’t found me through the night, in these early morning times God does, breathing a calming rhythm into my spirit—a different sort of rest.

HE MAKES ME LIE DOWN

First thing in the morning? Really? After a night of rest or, for some, frustrating hours of tossing and turning? What sense does it make at the day’s beginning to focus on MORE rest? Honestly, none! But God is forever upsetting my logic! Logical or not, according to the psalmist green pastures and still waters are in fact where the Shepherd leads first. Can I trust that this is the place I need most to be in the morning, no matter how well I’ve slept in the night? Believe it or not, ‘God rest’ is indeed better than bed rest.

HE LEADS ME IN RIGHT PATHS

Psalm 23 next assures us of a fruitful day and a reliable roadmap for it. Once refreshed and restored, we’re ready to follow that roadmap. From rest, the Shepherd leads us to right pathways or, as an alternate translation of this verse reads, “paths

of righteousness.” What those paths are to be, we may not know. But the psalmist invites us to rely on the Shepherd’s wisdom. Challenging or comforting, joyful or pain-filled, those paths carry the promise of the Shepherd’s presence.

THROUGH THE DARKEST VALLEY

These next words may serve as a steady rudder for families feeling the turbulence of death and grief. They remind those in danger that though enemies might pursue, still the Shepherd provides a table of rich food, a full cup and an anointing that affirms his love and presence—blessings all along the way. In every path, whether certain or uncertain of the way and the danger, the psalmist gives thanks for the Shepherd’s comfort and provision. We can, too.

GOODNESS AND MERCY

Continuing to follow the roadmap builds our awareness of the Holy Shepherd’s presence. Each step—of a day or a life—is enabled and strengthened by the very first one—resting in the Shepherd’s goodness and mercy. Finally, the psalmist, confident and joyful, claims the promise of “forever rest” in God’s arms, at home with the Lord.

WILL YOU TRUST THE ROADMAP?

Try following this roadmap for a few days, paying attention to the changes in your patterns and attitude. As you follow it, do you feel closer to the divine Shepherd?

1. Rest with the Shepherd—not nightly rest, but a “beginning of the day” rest.
2. Follow the Shepherd into “right paths,” confident in his guidance.
3. Notice the Shepherd’s comfort and abundant blessings, despite your fear.
4. Rest once more in the Shepherd’s promise—goodness, mercy and a place in God’s house.

BUT WHAT IF?

What if you stop following? What if you stray? You won’t be alone in those detours—I take them too. Even God’s earliest faithful followers strayed. The prophet Isaiah describes God’s grief when the ancient Hebrews choose to seek protection from Egypt’s Pharaoh against the enemies pursuing them. God lets them go their own way, while warning

that their choice will backfire. Your strength, God insists, is not in seeking allies likely to betray you; rather, “in returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and trust shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:15). They will suffer mightily in turning away from God’s provision. But still the Lord will be gracious when they cry out. God will call them back, saying, “This is the way; walk in it” (v. 21). And God the Shepherd will once again lead them to safe rest, in green pastures and beside still waters.

You and I may never face such dangers, but we may well struggle with resting in God. If we listen with our hearts, however, we will hear the Shepherd’s call—back to rest and refreshment.

Will we hear it? Will we listen with our hearts? Will we accept the challenge to begin every day resting in the Shepherd? Despite

the rush of morning routines and daily schedules, will we dare to pause and honor the God who at the beginning of all things gave us life, who even now promises to lead us and love us through every step we take?

Child of God, will you dare to begin with holy rest? 🌿

WANT TO DIG DEEPER?

- Read Psalm 23 in several different versions of the Bible. Note the differences. How does seeing the various translations enrich the psalm’s meaning for you? What questions does it raise?
- Read Isaiah, chapter 30. In verse 15, how does God’s promise remind you of the psalmist’s words in Psalm 23? Despite the Hebrew people’s fear and failure, what is God’s ultimate action toward them? How is that action good news for you?
- Read John 15: 1-11, where Jesus invites his disciples to abide in him. The Greek word translated as “abide” carries the same meaning as the Hebrew word for “dwell,” found in the final line of Psalm 23. It seems that the psalmist, writing many generations before Jesus spoke, feels confident of that very bond Jesus later describes. What does the psalmist’s confidence mean for your life?