

The Lord Is My Shepherd: Resting in the Peace and Power of Psalm 23 by Robert Morgan, Howard Publishing, New York, NY (2013). (46 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. We Are Too Busy.

Now more than ever, we Christians need the peace and power of Psalm 23.

Many of us are far too busy. The stresses of life are wearing us down, little by little, and the noise around us can be an unending cacophony of confusion. Our lives—with all our electronic tethers, emotional entanglements, and financial pressures—are more demanding than ever. We're simply not resting, not managing our clocks and calendars as we'd like, and as a result, we are often anxious and angry, even when we don't realize it. We're pulled in so many directions, as if we were twistable toys in the hands of a toddler. [page xii]

2. Summary of Needs and All of God's Grace.

In a hundred words (only fifty-five in the original Hebrew), Psalm 23 sums up all our needs in life and all the abundance of God's grace. It begins with "The Lord," and it ends with "forever." What could be better than that? [page xiii]

3. Microcosm of God's Grace.

Author Frederick B. Meyer called this small chapter "a microcosm of God's grace." Just as the whole sun is reflected in a single drop of dew, so we can see all the grace and the whole gospel of God reflected in Psalm 23. [page xiii]

4. God's Word's Balance and Beauty.

The Lord didn't assemble His Word haphazardly. Though written over a period of nearly one thousand five hundred years by more than forty authors on three continents and in three languages, the Bible is the most brilliantly compiled book in the world. Every part fits the next like an interlocking puzzle. The more I study Scripture—and I've been doing so for about fifty years—the more I'm awed by its balance and beauty, and by the blueprint that connects each chapter and book with the whole. [page xx]

5. God's Triad of Truth.

Tension comes in three tenses. We worry about the mistakes and misfortunes of yesterday or yesteryear; we're anxious about today with its trials and troubles; and we are apprehensive about the future, which is as uncertain as the wind.

Hence Psalm 22, Psalm 23, and Psalm 24—God's triad of truth to deal with life, whatever tense we're in. [page xxi]

6. The Privilege of Coming into His Presence.

Psalm 24 is a glorious three-part poem that focuses on the greatness of the Creator (v.1-2), the privilege of coming into His presence in worship (v.3-6), and the nearing day when the King will come to claim His Kingdom (v. 7-10). All our apprehensions will be lost in celebration, and all our sorrows will be drowned out by music accompanying the King of Glory. [page xxiii]

7. The Lovely Valley of Psalm 23.

Psalm 22 takes us to Mount Calvary. Psalm 24 centers around Mount Zion. Between them—where we are living now—is the lovely valley of Psalm 23 with its gentle pastures, sloping meadows, and dramatic canyons. [page xxiii]

8. Greatest Poem Ever Penned.

The Twenty-third Psalm is the greatest poem ever penned in any language. It reigns supreme in circles of highest culture and in the humble homes of the lowly. It sounds all the chords of human experience. – Dr. Robert C. McQuilkin. [page 2]

9. “Sheep” First Bible Animal Mentioned.

Sheep, shepherds, lambs, and flocks are mentioned nearly seven hundred times in the Bible (698 times to be exact, in 563 verses in the New King James Version). The sheep is the first animal mentioned by name in the Bible (Genesis 4:2, Amplified Bible). [page 4]

10. Preparation for Future Service.

Wherever we are today and whatever we're doing, it's simply preparation for future service. No experiences should be wasted, and a day is never lost if a lesson is learned. We all have goals and aspirations, but our primary job isn't to envision great things in the future but to tackle today's work with enthusiasm. This is true whatever our age. Our best days are always ahead of us, and our present experiences are preparing us for greater work in the future, whether on earth or in heaven. [pages 6-7]

11. Thinking Rightly about God.

Properly thinking about *Yahweh* expands our minds. It humbles our hearts, balances our thoughts, clarifies our perspectives, reassures our spirits, and strengthens our souls. As we think rightly about God, everything else assumes proper proportions.

He is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy; the Bible tells us to “mediate on these things,” as advised by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:8. Memorizing chapters such as Psalm 23 and Philippians 4, training ourselves to mull

over those passages as we get up, as we go to bed, as we drive to work, as we hike the trails—that’s a practice that transfigures and transforms us. [pages 9-10]

12. The Great Shepherd of the Sheep.

So we say with full biblical accuracy *Yeshua is my shepherd*. The book of Hebrews calls Jesus “that great shepherd of the sheep” (Hebrews 13:20), and Peter told his readers, “For you were like sheep going astray, but now have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25). He was referring to the Lord Jesus who is both God and man, both divine and human, both infinite and intimate. Revelation 7:17 says about Jesus: “The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them.” [page 11]

13. The Creator of the Universe.

Though He has neither beginning of days nor end of life, the Lord Jesus cares about all our mornings and evenings. Though He created everything and was created by no one, He intricately crafted us in our mothers’ wombs. Though He fashioned Orion with its bright stars and the Big Dipper with its angular points, His tenderness covers our wildest fears and mildest woes. His thunder rolls through the night, yet His Word whispers in our ears. He who counts the stars also heals the brokenhearted and lifts up the humble. He fills the universe, yet He is always near His children and His flock. [page 11-12]

14. God Is Personal.

Recently the headlines from London told of a famous professor, Richard Dawkins, who surprised his fellow atheists by confessing that he should probably call himself an agnostic since he can’t prove that God doesn’t exist. As the author of *The God Delusion* and a champion of Darwinist evolution, his statement stunned the audience where he was speaking and sent shock waves through atheistic circles.

I believe that Christians, on the other hand, can hold their theism with intellectual credibility based on clear logic, sound reasoning, and compelling evidence. We not only believe in God, but we also believe that by His very nature He must be personal. We have so many sheeplike qualities built into us that we can truly think of the Creator as our Lord and Shepherd. No campaign by radical atheists can shake the impregnability of that tiny word *is*. It denotes existence, even as the Bible opens with the words: *In the beginning God ...* [page 13]

15. Written in the Present Tense.

But Psalm 23:1 is written in the present tense; it’s a verb that doesn’t await fulfillment. Rather than a prediction, it’s a fact. It implies something God is doing presently. It’s not a promised to claim, but a reality to experience. Our Lord is a Shepherd whose

presence is instant, immediate, and accessible every day, every hour, every moment. Read the following Bible verses and notice the italicized verbs *is* and *are* that follow the great nouns that refer to our Lord:

- “Surely the Lord *is* in this place, and I did not know it.” – Genesis 28:16
- “The Lord *is* my strength and my song.” – Exodus 15:2
- “The eternal God *is* your refuge, and underneath *are* the everlasting arms.” – Deuteronomy 33:27
- “The Lord *is* my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord *is* the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” – Psalm 27:1
- “God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” – Psalm 46:1
- “The Lord *is* in His holy temple.”—Habakkuk 2:19
- “God *is* faithful”—1 Corinthians 1:9
- “God *is* stronger” – 1 Corinthians 1:25
- “God *is* holy” – 1 Corinthians 3:17
- “God *is* for us,”—Romans 8:31
- “God *is* able” – 2 Corinthians 9:8
- “Before Abraham was, *I AM*.”—John 8:58
- “*I am* the Bread of life ... *I am* the light of the World ... *I am* the door ... *I am* the resurrection and the life ... *I am* the good shepherd,”—John 6:35, 8:12, 10:9, 11:25, 10:11 [pages 14-15]

16. Least Understood Bible Chapter.

The Twenty-third Psalm is the best known chapter in the Bible—and the least understood. It is the best-loved chapter in the Bible and the least believed. – Dr. Robert C. McQuilkin [page 18]

17. Psalm 23 Full of Personal Pronouns.

Martin Luther once said that the heart of Christianity is seen in its personal pronouns, and Psalm 23 is full of them. [page 20]

18. A Psalm for the Individual.

All told, there are twenty-eight personal pronouns in these six verses—about 25 percent of the entire text! No wonder William Evans, a write of a hundred years ago, observed that the Twenty-third Psalm is so *universal* because it was so *individual*. [page 21]

19. Duties of a Biblical Shepherd.

Biblical shepherds ... could categorize their duties into six divisions: (1) seeking lost and straying livestock (soul-winning and evangelism); (2) feeding the sheep (teaching and

preaching); (3) guiding the flocks (leadership); (4) tending the sheep (visiting, counseling, and pastoral care); (5) protecting the herds from predators (ethics, vigilance, doctrinal purity); and, most important, (6) loving their flocks. [page 22]

20. Shepherds and Flocks.

Charles Spurgeon once observed, “There cannot be a flock without a shepherd; neither is there a shepherd truly without a flock. The two must go together ... We are Christ’s sheep. To belong to a king carries some measure of distinction. We are the sheep of the imperial pastures. [page 23]

21. We Are Sheep and Need a Shepherd.

Sheep are mentioned more than any other animal in Scripture to teach us about ourselves, but the primary lesson is this: we need a lifelong shepherd, one who loves us and whom we can love in return. The tender affection between sheep and the shepherd is a picture of our own relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. [page 28]

22. Living a Life of Victory.

To believe the Twenty-third Psalm is to live a life of victory, a life of joy and peace, a life triumphant in prayer, in Bible study, in service. – Dr. Robert C. McQuilkin [page 30]

23. Sheep Are Dependent on the Shepherd.

A sheep is the one animal that is utterly clueless and helpless without a human being nearby. A flock of sheep without a shepherd is a pathetic sight. You never hear of sheep migrating along in great flocks, fending for themselves, or surviving without external protection. They panic at the slightest sound. They have no sense of direction, little native intelligence, and no way to defend themselves. They can butt a little with their heads, but they’re bulky, bungling, and without defense equipment. They can’t fight with their hooves or teeth. They can’t run away very easily, or dig holes or climb trees. They can’t track down their own food. They can get lost even in their own pasture. Their wool, which becomes thick, matted, and tangled if not regularly sheared, can weigh them down or trap them in thorns. Insects bedevil them, and they don’t recover well from disease and injury unless treated individually. Sheep also need affection, and there’s something about them that seems to crave human care. They are utterly dependent on a shepherd. [pages 32-33]

24. Verse Text of Sermon, the Remaining Verses Explain Verse One.

In essence, the remaining five verses of the psalm are simply a list of the implications and outworkings of verse 1. This is the key to understanding Psalm 23. If it were a sermon (which it is), verse 1 would be the text; verses 2 through 6 would be the exposition.

In essence, the psalmist is saying, “Because the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not lack anything”:

- I will not lack peace, for He makes me lie down in green pastures.
- I will not lack provision, for He leads me by still waters.
- I will not lack hope and encouragement, for He restores my soul.
- I will not lack guidance, for He leads me in paths of righteousness for his Name’s sake.
- I will not lack deliverance in tough times; for even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.
- I will not lack companionship, for You are with me.
- I will not lack protection, for Your rod and staff comfort me, and You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies.
- I will not lack help and healing in all the events of life, for You anoint my head with oil.
- I will not lack an abundant life, for my cup overflows.
- I will never lack anything, for goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life.
- I will not lack an eternal, heavenly home, for I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. [pages 34-35]

25. –Ternal Needs.

All of *our* needs end with six letters: --*ternal*, and the Lord meets every one of these –*ternal* needs.

- He meets our *External* needs: food, clothing, provisions, finances, the necessities of life.
- He meets our *Eternal* needs: a relationship with God, salvation, heaven, everlasting life.
- He also meets our *Internal* needs: love, meaning, purpose, friendship, peace, reassurance, resilience, courage. [page 36]

26. Christ Is Our Shepherd.

We sheep are full of apprehensions, aren’t we? Without our Shepherd, we’re clueless. With Him, we have more than clues; we have Christ. His presence imparts reassurance at every step. [page 37]

27. All I Want.

The Lord is my shepherd; that’s all I want. – Dr. Robert McQuilkin [page 42]

28. To Live Contentedly.

The nineteenth-century clergyman William Henry Channing provided us with a great quote: “To live content with small means; to see elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion; to be worthy, not respectable; and wealthy, not rich; to listen to stars and birds, babes and sages, with open heart; to study hard; to think quietly, act frankly, talk gently, await occasions, hurry never; in a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden, and unconscious, grow up through the common—this is my symphony. [page 56]

29. Ask for Spiritual Illumination.

The correlation between God’s Word and God’s Spirit is terribly important to understand. As we feed on the Bible, we need the hydration of the Spirit to break it down in our hearts and assimilate it to every part of our being. It’s the Spirit that soaks God’s truth into our souls.

When we study the Bible, it’s always a good idea to whisper a prayer, asking God for spiritual illumination. The Bible says, “We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). After all, the Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures is the best teacher as He opens His Word to our hearts while simultaneously opening our hearts to His Word.

The psalmist prayed, “Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your law” (Psalm 119:18). Jesus promised, “The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My Name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). [pages 64-65]

30. Take Time to Lie Down in Green Pastures ...

To quote William Evans ... “There can be no spiritual strength sufficient to walk in the paths of righteousness unless time is taken to lie down in the green pastures of the divine Word by the still waters of prayer.” [page 66]

31. The Shepherd Encourages Us.

The Lord is our Shepherd ... He refreshes us when weary and encourages us when we are cast down. – Dr. Robert C. McQuilkin [page 68]

32. The Extent of God’s Forgiveness.

Nothing good comes from trawling through the waters of the red sea with a grappling hook, dredging up sins that have been previously confessed and forgiven once and for all. When Satan wants to flog us with the memories of our sins, we must envision the vast, bottomless, shoreless, endless sea of blood drawn from Immanuel’s veins and

realize our sins, once thrown into its unyielding waters, are gone forever. We lose all our guilty stains.

The Lord is so intent that we understand this that He has multiplied the metaphors about it. He wants us to imagine *visually* and *vividly* the total extent of His forgiveness. With God's forgiveness, for example, our sins are covered by a thick blanket of dazzling white snow (Isaiah 1:18). They are cast from us as far as east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). With His forgiveness, the charges against us have been erased like letters from a slate (Colossians 2:14). They've been sealed in a bag that can never be reopened (Job 14:17). God has cast all our sins behind his back (Isaiah 38:17). He has swept them away as a cloud is swept from the sky and never seen again. (Isaiah 44:22). He has cast them into the midst of the ocean of His mercy and grace (Micah 7:19).

Memorize some or all of the Bible verses indicated by the parentheses in the proper paragraph, visualize the scenes they describe, personalize the promises for yourself, and see how your soul is restored to joy, freedom, and peace. When the psalmist said, "He restores my soul," he meant, "He restores me. He restores my emotional and spiritual well-being. He restores my spirits. He restores my sense of confidence and usefulness in life. He restores the joy of my fellowship with God." [pages 72-73]

33. A Cheerful View of Death.

Hymnist Frances Ridley Havergal, who, noticing the distress of her loved ones as her condition deteriorated, told them not to worry. "It's home the faster!" she said.

Writer William Evans said that Christians should have "a cheerful view of death," citing Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:8, that we should be 'confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.' [pages 82-83]

34. School of Leadership.

Shepherding was God's school for leadership in the Bible. It was His laboratory for teaching the principles of management and stewardship. The God of Israel knew that if someone could lead sheep wisely, he might just be able to lead cities and nations and empires. [page 94]

35. God-pleasing Behavior.

Dr. J. I. Packer points out that the word *paths* in this verse (v.3) indicates more than isolated actions or individual decisions. It implies "behavior patterns that please God because they correspond to His commandments and match His moral nature." [page 95]

36. God Guides Our Walk.

Read the following verses carefully and circle the individual words that specifically relate to God's guidance. Note the variety of terms used in the Bible to assure of His direction:

- “Trust in the Lord with all our heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” – Proverbs 3:5-6.
- The Lord directs the steps of the godly. He delights in every detail of their lives. – Psalm 37:23 (NLT)
- “You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in Your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.” – Psalm 139:16 (NLT)
- “I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is good for you and leads you along the paths you should follow.” – Isaiah 48:17 (NLT)
- “I will guide you along the best pathway for our life. I will advise you and watch over you.” Psalm 32:8 (NLT).
- “For this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even to the end.” Psalm 48:14 (NIV1984).
- “The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength.” – Isaiah 58:11 (NLT).
- “You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” – Psalm 73:24. [pages 96-97]

37. God Directs Our Paths.

In his 1893 book, *The Holy Spirit in Missions*, Boston pastor A.J. Gordon told the story of Barnabas Shaw, a British missionary to South Africa. When Shaw arrived in Cape Town in 1815, intending to preach the Gospel and plant a church, he found city officials hostile to his efforts. Barnabas was banned from engaging in evangelistic work in the city. Not knowing what else to do, he bought a yoke of oxen and a cart, packed his belongings, and headed into the interior, letting the oxen lead the way. On the twenty-seventh day of the trip, he camped for the night near a party of Hottentots who were traveling through the region. The Hottentots explained they were traveling to Cape town, hoping to find a missionary to teach them the “Great Word.”

Had either group started a half day earlier or later, they would not have met. Had either traveled at a different speed or on a different road, they would have missed one another. God ordained the encounter, and His providence led Barnabas Shaw to his appointed field.

“It’s remarkable how God guides us by circumstances,” wrote another Christian of yesteryear, F.B. Meyer. “At one moment the way may seem utterly blocked, and then shortly afterward some trivial incident occurs, which might not seem much to others, but which to the keen eye faith speaks volumes. [These events] are not haphazard results of chance, but the opening up of circumstances in the direction in which we should walk.” [pages 103-104]

38. God Directs Our Thinking.

John Wesley once said, “God generally guides me by presenting reasons to my mind for acting in a certain way.” [page 105]

39. God Is Ever Present.

As Charles Spurgeon put it in one of his old sermons: “Is the Twenty-third Psalm the song of your faith? ‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.’ Have you consciously thought of God standing with you? Then it will not be difficult to perceive the presence of God. You will view it as so real that when you open your eyes in the morning, you’ll look to Him in praise. When you close them at night, it’ll be like resting under the shadow of His wings.”

Spurgeon continued: “I wish we could get back to the spirit of the old Puritans who believed in a *present* God always ... Oh, to feel God everywhere in the little as well as in the great, in our risings up and in our sittings down, in our goings forth and in our comings in. I can conceive of no life more blessed than the one who knows and feels that God is ever present.” [page 126-127]

40. God Gives Us Words to Speak at the Right Time.

Some of the worst disagreements occur at church. When I was first starting out in the ministry, I tried some things that raised the ire of some of the more conservative people in my denomination. One prominent minister told me to my face that I’d have to “fight” him on certain issues. He said we’d have to fight about one thing and another thing, that I was in for a fight, and that if I didn’t fight with him over these issues, I wasn’t much of a fighter.

The Lord gave me the words for the moment. I told him I just as much as a fighter as he was, but I was fighting the world, the flesh, and the devil. “If you want to fight with me,” I said, “you’ll have to decide which of those categories you fit into.”

He didn’t bother me much after that. [page 134]

41. Let Our Shepherd Deal with Our Adversaries.

Try to get along with your ex-spouse or your cranky neighbor or your demanding boss. If you can’t, leave it in the Lord’s hands. He knows how to set a table for you in the

wilderness in the presence of your enemies. He knows how to protect you. Offended pride, once it takes hold within us, is like having a lion prowling around in the heart. Bitterness is as nasty as an angry bear. They can shred your soul. Let the Good Shepherd handle them for you. On your knees, turn things over to him and leave room for His judgments to settle the score and even the outcome. [page 136]

42. God Protects Us.

Our Lord Jesus Christ gives us the provisions of safety and victory on life's tableland. Because of Him, we can live on the heights without fear. He spreads a table for us in the presence of our enemies. [page 139]

43. Abundant Life.

Our Shepherd gives joy unspeakable and full of glory, and the fullness of power for service ... Abundant supply of every need ... life more abundantly. – Dr. Robert C. McQuilkin [page 140]

44. In Hurts We Understand the Shepherd's Heart.

It's often during life's hurts that we come to understand the heart of the Shepherd, as we learn to accept His care and to trust His heart. As He tends us and mends us, we fall in love with Him and receive the comfort He gives. Troubles in life have a way of driving us to the Lord's tender mercies, and we bond with Him through the verses and vigor He bestows. [page 142]

45. Living Joyfully through God's Word.

This theme in the Bible has literally changed my personality. I'm aware that many psychologists tell us we can't really change our temperaments. According to modern thinking, we're born with biologically predetermined personalities and preset temperaments, and there's not a lot we can do to alter them. But I don't believe it. I'm melancholy by nature, and if I let myself, I could drift into depression like a swimmer being pulled out to sea. But by God's grace and along with many other Christian believers, I'm learning how to live joyfully by claiming the Bible verses of God's goodness toward me, His blessings to me, and the biblical reassurances of His grace in all its dimensions. He transforms us from the inside out as we discover that the joy of the Lord is the strength of our lives. [page 168]

46. God Takes Good Care of Us.

We're told that *all* things work together for good, that the hairs of our head have *all* been numbered, that if we seek first His kingdom, *all* these things will be added to us, that He is faithful and just to forgive *all* our unrighteousness, that we can cast *all* our

cares on Him, and that goodness and mercy follow *us* all the days of our lives (Romans 8:28, Matthew 10:30, Matthew 6:33, 1 John 1:9, 1 Peter 5:7, Psalm 23:6). [page 171]