

Psalm 23: when I feel something is missing

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When we suffer, especially when suffering is chronic, it is easy to feel despair. Pain or grief or worry cause us to question everything and drain our capacity to function.

Psalm 23 speaks into the weary, the abused, the worried, the grieving. This may be the most familiar Psalm, but every time I meditate on it I see more. It's about what it means to have the the Lord shepherding me so that I'm not missing something.

Verse 1

The Lord's Shepherding means I am not missing anything.

In Hebrew, this verse consists of only four words:

1. I Am (the name of the one true God who reveals himself in the Bible);
2. is my shepherd (is in the role of caring for me);
3. Nothing
4. is missing (because the I Am is my shepherd, I lack nothing).

That sounds to me like a very important thing to understand. I don't feel as if I lack nothing. I feel woefully needy. So how can this Psalm change the way I think and feel? If this is true, it should affect how i view everything else. If the I Am is my shepherd in such a way that I lack nothing, what does that mean for me?

Verse one is the main idea of the poem. The remaining verses flesh out this statement.

Verse 2

My shepherd sees to it that i get rest where my hunger and thirst are satisfied.

He actually makes me rest where I will be nourished.

He leads me where my dry soul will be relieved.

This is what he is doing, whether I am enjoying it or fighting it, whether i am aware or it or ignorant of it.

I can argue with him about it, but that is what he is doing.

This isn't about how hard he works me, but about how he meets the needs of my soul.

What does it mean for him to be my shepherd?

It means I lack nothing because he takes me where i get rested and nourished.

It isn't about what I do for him, but about what he does for me.

Verse 3

He refreshes my soul--not only by taking me where i get rested and nourished, but also by leading me in the direction of justice.

We usually translate this "paths of righteousness," but it means justice.

Justice, in the Hebrew sense, means getting the good that the Creator meant us to have, not getting the abuse and neglect that our dehumanizing society dishes out.

He's not talking about an abstract morality of self-righteous posturing.

He's committed to life that's good and not bad, healthy and not corrupt, a benefit and not a ripoff.

It is his character to be good for us, and that is why the way he takes me is good.

He restores my soul by leading me in that way for the sake of his name!

"For his name's sake" means

He does this so I can know his true character.

This isn't about my virtues; it's about his!

Verses 3-5

These three verses together are about the justice he provides. I lack nothing in this way:

3: **His name gets me justice that restores my soul.** (That's what Jesus accomplishes by dying for my sin and rising to raise me out of the path of sin and death. Consider Romans 4:25.)

4: **His presence and protection banish fear even in the darkest times.** (That's what his Holy Spirit does by reminding me of the salvation that Jesus accomplished. Consider Romans 8:15.)

5: **My enemy sees that the shepherd is my provider,** that he raises me to victorious honors, that he serves a feast and drink that endlessly fills me. (That's what living with my Heavenly Father forever means. Consider the image of the Father in Luke 15.)

He does all that, so I am not missing any piece of it.

I don't lack justice. Jesus gives me justice and leads me to walk in it.

I don't lack comfort. The Spirit is with me in the darkest times, seeing that I get through them.

I don't lack fulfillment. The Father has a feast ready when I get home.

He will dress me and honor me as his own son.

My enemy, Satan, knows this.

Even when Satan lies to me about my shepherd's provision, all this remains true.

Satan sees the feast better than I do.

Satan lost that feast when he tried to steal the Son's position.

Because I am in Christ, I get the anointing that Satan wanted.

That's how I get a feast within sight of my enemy.

Satan's strategy is to make me forget the truth about the shepherd, so that I am tormented by injustice, discomfort, and unfulfilled desires.

The poem isn't lying about the torment we experience. It is confronting it with eternal truth.

It is telling me what I need to remember in the dark valley.

Verse 6

I lack nothing, because his **goodness and mercy never abandon me for a single day.**

And I won't spend one minute in purgatory. My eternal home is with him!

I will dwell in his house forever!