

7-SESSION BIBLE STUDY

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Psalm 23

THE SHEPHERD WITH ME

JENNIFER ROTHSCHILD



Psalm 23

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JENNIFER ROTHSCHILD

Lifeway Press® Brentwood, Tennessee

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ISBN: 978-1-4300-9326-8 • Item: 005847319

Dewey decimal classification: 223.2

Subject headings: BIBLE. O.T. PSALMS 23--STUDY AND TEACHING / WOMEN / SELF-CONFIDENCE

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Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing • Lifeway Resources • 200 Powell Place, Suite 100 • Brentwood, TN 37027

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Psalm 23: The Shepherd with Me is Jennifer's sixth video-based Bible study with Lifeway. It follows her popular Bible studies, *Hosea: Unfailing Love Changes Everything*; *Missing Pieces: Real Hope When Life Doesn't Make Sense*; and *Me, Myself, and Lies: A Thought-Closet Makeover*.

Jennifer became blind when she was fifteen years old and has experienced firsthand how God's companionship gives her comfort and confidence in every season of her life. Now more than thirty years later, as an author and speaker, she boldly and compassionately teaches women how to trust God in every season too.

Known for her substance, signature wit, and down-to-earth style, Jennifer weaves together relatable stories with biblical truths to help women know and live for Christ. She has shared her practical and inspiring messages to audiences across the country and through media outlets including *The Dr. Phil Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Life Today*, and *The Billy Graham Television Special*.

She is the featured teacher and founder of Fresh Grounded Faith Conferences and publisher of the popular online resource for women in ministry called womensministry.net.

Jennifer and her husband, whom she calls her "very own Dr. Phil," live in Missouri, and have two sons, Connor and Clayton, and a lovely daughter-in-law, Caroline. In 2017, she became a GiGi to her first grandbaby, and that's her favorite name of all!

Besides walking—or being walked by—her little dog, Lucy, Jennifer enjoys riding a bicycle built for two with her husband. She is also an avid listener of audio books, a C. S. Lewis junkie, and loves dark chocolate and robust coffee—especially when shared with a friend.

Connect with Jennifer at JenniferRothschild.com/Psalm23.

INTRODUCTION

Hey, girl! Thanks for spending the next few weeks with me walking through each verse of Psalm 23. You will be blown away by how much big truth is packed in this little psalm. I sure was. I still am.

Psalm 23 changed my whole understanding of God's love and care for me, and it's giving me such confidence and setting me free to be a sheep—a needy, vulnerable, devoted sheep! I want that for you too.

You'll discover that Psalm 23 is a spiritual lullaby that your Shepherd sings over you in every season of your life. And it's not just a psalm that gives you comfort in death. Sister, it is a psalm designed to give you confidence in life.

So, here's how we'll do this thing: you spend time with your Shepherd during the week doing the daily work. There are only four structured days. The fifth day is a Green Pasture Day—you will love it. Your group will gather seven times. At each session, you'll say hey to your Bible study buddies, your leader will welcome you, and you'll begin with prayer. Then you'll let me join you through the video.

I hope our time together will challenge you, comfort you, and clarify something about God or yourself that will help you know Him better and love Him more. After the video, your group will talk through what you've discovered in your week of private study. You'll find suggested questions on the group guide for each week. If you are the awesome woman leading this group, you'll find hints and helps in the back of this book.

OK, last two things just for you. I put together a *Psalm 23* playlist you will want to listen to as you go through this psalm. It is at JenniferRothschild.com/Psalm23. While you're there, you will also find my weekly video teaching summaries. That way, if you miss a video, you won't miss out on any part of this *Psalm 23* experience.

Sister, you have been on my heart the whole time I have been writing this study. I'm honored to share these truths I've learned (and am still learning) with you, and I'm praying you and your Shepherd will grow even closer as you spend time in this psalm.

Well, that's all from me! Let's do this, sister!

Love,



GROUP SESSION 1

Rather than a formal leader guide in the back, we've provided what we hope is a simple and functional group plan on these pages with an additional word to leaders in the back. Each week will begin with a two-page group guide like this. I suggest that you divide your group time into three parts: 1. Welcome and prayer; 2. Watch the video; 3. Group discussion of the personal study for the past week and the video you've just watched.

Your Bible study book comes with access to the videos that accompany this study. You'll find detailed information for how to stream the video teaching sessions on the card inserted in the back of your book.

The session guide for this first meeting is for us to get to know each other. Then we'll each go do our personal study. (It will be fun, I promise.) Each day, plan to spend a few minutes with that day's study. Don't worry if some days you don't get it all. This isn't a race, and you can come back later. When we meet next group session, we'll have this week's study to discuss. Now let's get to know each other, and I'll join you by way of video.

BEFORE THE VIDEO

Welcome and Prayer

VIDEO NOTES

David, the shepherd who became a king, wrote this psalm about the King who was his _____.

Most scholars believe David wrote Psalm 23 when he was _____.

Psalm 23 was written because we are like _____ and _____ need a _____.

David knew in every season he was _____ with his Shepherd.

It is with our Shepherd where we _____ our _____.

Four Fears Jesus Knows We May Have

1. We may not fear death itself because of our faith, but we still can _____ the _____. We may fear people who _____ us.
2. We may fear being _____, _____, or _____.
3. We may fear we won't have _____ _____. We may worry about _____ things.
4. We may fear we are not _____ and _____ by God.
God's goodness toward us has _____ to do with our greatness.

CONVERSATION GUIDE

Video 1 and Getting to Know Each Other

What is one thing you want this group to know about you?

What drew you to this study of Psalm 23?

What emotions, memories, or thoughts come to mind when you read Psalm 23?

Are there times in your life when you don't feel safe, physically or emotionally? Explain.

Do you currently feel safe with your Shepherd? Why or why not?

What do you hope to gain from this study?

Would you like to read my written summary of this video teaching?
Just go to jenniferrothschild.com/psalm23.



TO ACCESS THE VIDEO TEACHING SESSIONS, USE THE
INSTRUCTIONS IN THE BACK OF YOUR BIBLE STUDY BOOK.

WEEK 1

*YOUR SHEPHERD'S
GOT YOUR BACK*



The LORD is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

PSALM 23:1

#PSALM23STUDY

DAY 1

I'm sitting here with my coffee thinking of you.

I wonder where you are right now as you open this book. I wonder how your heart is. I've written several Bible studies, but there is something that feels so uniquely personal, so intimate, about this one. I feel like we're walking the same paths, dealing with the same challenges, fighting the same fears, and holding on to the same hope.

I imagine you sitting at my kitchen table with me as I write this and sip my coffee—as if we're talking it through, learning from each other. By the way, I'm sure my table has the remains of breakfast stuck to it, so just wipe it with your sleeve. I won't notice, promise!

Oh yeah, I guess I should clarify something right up front. I won't see you wipe away the sticky stuff from my table because I'm blind. If this is the first time we've done Bible study together, you may not know I lost most of my sight as a teenager because of a disease called retinitis pigmentosa. It's a degenerative disease. It started with legal blindness and just got darker and darker from there. Now over thirty years later, I've lived in physical darkness longer than I lived in physical light.

So I'm typing this on a laptop that talks, and I'm thankful for the sighted people who will clean this up, edit it, and make it easier for you to read. Girl, it may sound good, but it sure doesn't look pretty when I'm done with it. Blindness has helped me lean hard on the Lord. And, the older I get, the more I understand how much I need to lean on Him, my Shepherd.

Check page 204 in the back of the book to find a list of resources for studying the Bible, including some of my online favorites.

So pour your coffee, tea, or Diet Coke®, open your Bible, and let's get started.

Read Psalm 23 out loud. You can use whichever Bible translation you prefer. You can also go to your favorite Bible website and read it from several versions.

Beautiful, isn't it?

Now before we even study the Scripture, let's study our hearts.

Do any special memories come up when you read, hear, or think of Psalm 23?

What kinds of feelings stir in your heart when you read this passage? Write down some adjectives (*comforted, grateful, lacking, or lonely, for example*).

This passage stirs up all sorts of emotions, doesn't it? Most of us have some memory of Psalm 23 in our past. Maybe it was Granny's favorite psalm. Maybe it was read at the funeral of someone you love. Or maybe you saw it on a plaque or memorized it as a child.

Psalm 23 is personal. It's not an arm's-length, past-tense, wouldn't-it-be-nice kind of passage.

Psalm 23 is a right here, right now, up close passage about you and your Shepherd.

So let's personalize it! Fill in our adapted Psalm 23 below with your name, and then read it out loud again. Once you've filled in each blank, consider taking a picture of it with your phone so you can be reminded all day long that your Shepherd is with you (because most of us have our phones with us all the time).

PSALM 23

The LORD is _____ shepherd;

she shall not want.

He makes _____ to lie down in green pastures;

He leads _____ beside the still waters.

He restores _____ soul;

He leads _____ in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

Yea, though _____ walks through the valley
of the shadow of death,

she will fear no evil;

For her Shepherd is with her;

His rod and His staff, they comfort _____.

The shepherd prepares a table before _____
in the presence of her enemies;

He anoints _____ head with oil;

her cup runs over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow _____

All the days of her life;

And _____ will dwell in the house of the LORD

Forever.

Psalm 23

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

OK, now let's study the Scripture.

The first four words of Psalm 23 are the perfect launching pad for understanding this psalm. David, who wrote this psalm, tells us "The LORD is my ...," and then he finishes with "shepherd." But "shepherd" is just one way to illustrate God's character.

There are many verses in the Bible that describe who God is. Go to your favorite online Bible study resource or to Google®, and search the Bible for the first four words in this verse—*The LORD is my*. Then, list some of the verses you found below, and fill in the blank with the description. I've included a few Scripture starters to get you going.

- Psalm 16:5 The LORD is my _____.
- Psalm 18:2 The LORD is my _____.
- Psalm 27:1 The LORD is my _____.
- Psalm 28:7 The LORD is my _____.
- _____ The LORD is my _____.
- _____ The LORD is my _____.
- _____ The LORD is my _____.
- _____ The LORD is my _____.

God is so many things to us: our portion, our cup of blessing, our rock and fortress, to name just a few.

But the word *our* isn't in any of those verses, is it? Think about the word *my*. The verse doesn't say that the Lord is *a* shepherd or *our* shepherd. It says He is *my* shepherd just as the other Scriptures you found state that He is *my* portion, *my* rock, and so forth.

What does the word *my* in this context mean to you?

To me, *my* means personal possession. Just ask any toddler. *My* means that toy belongs to *me*. It is covered with my drool, practically crushed in my little fist, and treasured and valued as if it is the only toy in the toy box. It is my personal possession.

When Scripture tells you that the LORD is your portion, your cup of blessing, your shepherd, your rock, your salvation, and your fortress—Scripture is shouting the truth with the intensity of a 3-year-old—*the LORD is mine!* My light, my rock, my portion, my shepherd. Mine.

I love that. **Who He is, is personal to you.**

David talks about God as if God belonged to him and he belonged to God. In other words, the relationship is intimate, safe, and permanent.

Do you, like David, talk about God as if He belongs to you and you belong to Him? Is God personal to you? How do you describe your relationship with God?

If you wouldn't describe your relationship as intimate, safe, and permanent, like David did, sister, my prayer for you is that by the time we've walked this path together, you will. The truth is, if you know Christ, you are your Beloved's and He is yours (Song of Sol. 6:3).

In David's day and culture, it was all about community. Individualism was not the thing like it is here in this day and age. Sheep were never in the pasture alone. They were always in a flock. So for David to write this psalm in his culture and day, as a singular individual when comparing himself to a sheep, spoke to his great value. It speaks to your great value and my great value also.

Put down your pen for just a minute and ponder that. Picture that.

It's like being on a crowded dance floor and the only person you are aware of, the only one who exists at that very moment, is the one who holds you in his arms, the partner who dances with you. That is how it is with your Shepherd. In this crowded world where you're pulled back and forth, caught in the bustle, hearing competing voices, your Shepherd has you. He has your back. He holds you. He guides you. He will not let you go.

He is with you.

I know this may sound weird, but even though I'm blind, I remember and understand concepts better as pictures. When it comes to this psalm, I see in my mind's eye a strong shepherd and a little lamb. But to really personalize it, I imagine a strong and gentle dance partner who leads me each step. As I follow him, I can relax and enjoy the music. I feel free and safe.

Can you think of another picture that may help you really get the feel of how personal and intimate this psalm is? If so, jot it down. Or if you're artsy, draw it!

Review the list of Scriptures describing who God is that you completed earlier (see p. 13). Consider and jot down how those qualities of God's character are personal to you.

How does each quality of God's character show up in your life?
How do these qualities make you feel safe? How do they affirm that you are not alone?

Oh sister, when I think of God as my rock, I think of how He stabilizes me and grounds me when life feels so shaky. When I consider how the LORD is my portion, I see in all the areas of my life where I feel insufficient or weak, He is enough, all I need. And when I think of the LORD as my Shepherd, I feel safe with Him. I see how He has guided me through green pastures and dark valleys. To be honest, when I really lean on Him as my Shepherd, I feel the freedom to be as needy and dependent as a sheep. I want that for you, too, my friend.

Well, I'm out of coffee, and I guess I should clean the table! We'll stop right here. Just spend the rest of your day meditating on the Lord as your Shepherd. Be needy. Be vulnerable. Be carried. Be loved. Be led.

Be you. And He will be your Shepherd.

DAY 2

Hey, girl! After your study yesterday, did you experience a deeper awareness of your Shepherd's presence? Was it more personal to you? Did you sense that He was truly with you? I hope so. That's been one of the sweetest blessings for me as I've studied Psalm 23.

Sometimes our lives can feel lonely. Not always because we're alone but because we feel isolated in our own situations. We feel left on our own when it comes to carrying our burdens or navigating the demands of our world.

Loneliness is one of the hardest parts of blindness. It's not because I don't have people! Girl, I've got my people! I love my friends and family who make my life so rich. And, look, now you are one of them, you're right here doing this study with me!

No, this loneliness comes from living in my darkness by myself, being isolated in its invisible, impenetrable walls. Blindness sequesters me from the intimacy of reading a million words in my husband's eyes, sharing the wonder of viewing a mountain range with other tourists, or experiencing the intuitive knowing that comes from a facial expression.

I'm sure you've got your thing that can make you feel alone too. It might be anxiety or divorce or illness or fear. Regardless of your situation, the Shepherd knows and enters in fully present with you.

We are not alone because He is our very own.

Before we study the Scripture, let's study our hearts.

Is there an area of your life in which you feel alone? Feel free to write it into a prayer. If you don't want to write it out, just sit with your Shepherd and tell Him. Ask Him to enter into your lonely place and reassure you of His presence.

THE WHO, WHEN, AND WHY OF PSALM 23

The shepherd who became king wrote this psalm about the King who was his Shepherd.

David grew up a shepherd and became a giant-slaying singer and songwriter. He was called “a man after [God’s] own heart (1 Sam. 13:14).

Around 1005 BC, David became the king of Judah (2 Sam. 2:4; 5:3) and died around 965 BC.¹ Most scholars think he wrote Psalm 23 near the end of his life. After all, it does have a “looking back” feel. He had experienced times of peace and rest (Ps. 23:2). He’d been through some dark, life-threatening times (v. 4). He had lived long enough to make a few enemies (v. 5), and he’d also enjoyed plenty of prosperity (v. 6).

In fact, some scholars believe David wrote Psalm 23 when he was on the run, held up at Mahanaim (2 Sam. 17:24) during the civil war brought on by his son Absalom’s rebellion (2 Sam. 15–17).

We don’t know exactly when or where the psalm was written. But we do know “whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4, NASB).

MY SHEPHERD

Now, let’s study the Scripture. Pour your coffee or tea, if you haven’t yet. (I’m on my second cup.) Here we go!

Since David sets up this whole psalm based on God being our Shepherd, let’s make sure we understand the nature and job of a shepherd.

Search your Bible concordance or online resource to discover if God is referred to as a shepherd anywhere else in the Old Testament. Check in the New Testament, too, to see if Jesus is called a Shepherd. You’ll discover that prophets, overseers, and the coming Messiah are also called shepherds.

Based on what you find, use the two columns on the opposite page to jot down what each verse suggests about the actions of a shepherd. I’ve included some Scripture starters again for you.

REFERENCE	THE SHEPHERD'S ACTIONS
Psalm 28:9	
Psalm 80:1	
Isaiah 40:11	
Jeremiah 31:10	
Micah 7:14	
John 10:11-15	
1 Peter 2:25	
1 Peter 5:4	

Read through the actions of a shepherd that you listed in the second column.

What do those actions suggest about a shepherd's character? Here's a fun way to answer. Pretend you and I just had coffee with a local shepherd. (Not likely, but go with it.) Describe him to our imaginary single girlfriend who has been searching on "SingleShepherd.com" for just the right guy!

If I were to help you and our shepherd friend out by writing a profile for him on “SingleShepherd.com,” it would read:

Strong but gentle man who isn't afraid to fight bears and lions. Prone to patience with a protective nature. Observant with great management skills and an excellent provider. Willing to sacrifice and serve. Gets great satisfaction from helping, blessing, and guiding others. Faithful to the end.

OK, what woman wouldn't want all that?

You have all that, and more, in your Shepherd.

The Lord is your Shepherd. That means, your Shepherd tends to your needs.

He carries you when you can't carry on. He stands with you and stands up for you when enemies stand against you. He protects you when you're unsure or feel unsafe.

He leads you when you don't know which way to go. He saves you from your sin and yourself.

He keeps you close to Him, and He is faithful to you forever.

Want to borrow one of my favorite psalms of thanksgiving? Here are three that I reference and pray often:

Psalm 100 • Psalm 107 • Psalm 138

I think we just need to stop and thank Him for being our Shepherd, don't you? Let's lay down our mugs and pens and fears and worries and anything else that is in our hands or on our hearts and sit with our Shepherd.

Tell Him how grateful we are that He is with us and for us. Select a psalm of thanksgiving to pray to Him.

Take your time, sister. Linger and breathe. Rest in His presence.

Now, back to our study! When David wrote Psalm 23, he knew exactly the character and nature of a shepherd because he had been one. He knew what kind of man it took to manage sheep in the countryside of Israel.

Early in the morning, he would have led the flock out from the fold, guiding the sheep to pasture. He would have watched and tended them all day, making sure no sheep wandered off and that each sheep was safe from predators. And, if one of the little flock got lost, he would diligently seek that sheep until she was found. Under the blistering sun, he'd lead the sheep to water—but not just any water. He would lead them to still waters since sheep won't drink if the water moves too fast.

At night, he would bring the whole flock back home to the fold, counting each one as she passed under his rod. Then he had to stay alert to guard the sheep from wild animals who had an appetite for lamb chops! That's just a city girl summary of a shepherd's day.

But with that in mind, look at what Scripture tells us about our Shepherd—our Good Shepherd, Jesus. Read John 10:1-15. Jot down the reference or write out the verse that corresponds with each quality of a shepherd listed below. Then, finish the "My Shepherd" sentence below each quality, to describe how the Shepherd has acted in this way on your behalf.

The shepherd names his sheep. Reference: _____

My Shepherd gives me a name; He calls me _____.

The shepherd leads his sheep. Reference: _____

My Shepherd leads me to _____.

The shepherd gives his life for his sheep. Reference: _____

My Shepherd has sacrificed for me by _____.

The shepherd protects his sheep. Reference: _____

My Shepherd protects me from _____.

The shepherd knows his sheep. Reference: _____

My Shepherd knows me; He knows I _____.

Oh my friend, the Lord is your Shepherd who leads you, provides for you, and protects you. Jesus is your Good Shepherd who gives His very life for you, His sheep.

Well, I guess we need to quit for now since our mugs are empty and our hearts are full!

Find one statement or Scripture from today that ministered to you and write it on a sticky note, index card, or type it into your phone. Think about it throughout your day as you walk with your Shepherd.

DAY 3

I'm so glad you're back, I saved you a seat at my table because I want to start with a fun question. What animal are you most like? Or, if you could pick an animal to be, which one would you choose and why?

If you're on Twitter®, I'd love for you to let me know your answer! (I'm @JennRothschild!)

I know, I should have warned you that we were starting a little differently today. But I've done some thinking about this. If I could be any animal, I would be an elephant. Why? Well, they have really big brains, and they never forget anything. (I could use both of those qualities about now.) Also, they are loyal to their herds.

They like to play. They are gentle but can take care of themselves. And, when you're an elephant, being all leathery and wrinkled and gaining weight are just no big deal!

But the animal I am most like? I wouldn't have answered this way before I studied Psalm 23, but now I know. I am most like a sheep.

You are too. We have a lot in common with those woolly, wonderful creatures.

THE NATURE OF A SHEEP

So let's open the Word and see what it says about us being sheep. Pour your coffee, open your concordance, or go online to your favorite Bible resource to find references in the Bible that compare us to sheep. I've listed some Scripture starters to get you going.

Next to each reference note what the verse says or suggests about the nature of sheep.

SHEEP SCRIPTURES	SHEEP NATURE
Psalm 79:13	
Psalm 95:7	
Psalm 100:3	
Isaiah 53:6	
John 10:1-16	
Hebrews 13:20	

Use the verses above, or find more verses in both the Old and New Testaments that confirm the following descriptions of sheep. Write the references in the appropriate categories on the next page.

THE RÉSUMÉ OF A SHEEP

1. SHEEP GO ASTRAY.

2. SHEEP NEED GUIDANCE.

3. SHEEP ARE VULNERABLE.

4. SHEEP ARE VALUABLE.

Do any of those qualities of sheep feel familiar to you? Oh girl, that could be my own résumé, especially the first three. I easily stray from the grace of the Lord and try to do things on my own. I'm desperate for guidance. Without God's Word and His people, I can easily start to think I know the way, the only way—my way, the best way!

I am far more emotionally vulnerable than I want to admit, and I'm still learning that I really am valuable to God. I am so like a sheep, as are you. So make this résumé your own.

1. SHEEP GO ASTRAY.

Times I have gone astray:

No matter where you've strayed, your Shepherd says to you what He said to Israel so many years ago. Read Deuteronomy 30:3-10, and notice how many times God uses words such as *bring back* or *restore*. Sister, you never go so far that your Shepherd won't restore you and return you to His Side.

2. SHEEP NEED GUIDANCE.

Situations in which I needed guidance:

You can ask your Shepherd for guidance just like the psalmists did. Pray Psalm 25:4-5 and Psalm 143:8-10. Your Shepherd will always lovingly lead you.

3. SHEEP ARE VULNERABLE.

Seasons or circumstances when I felt vulnerable:

When you feel unsafe and need protection, use Psalm 71 to declare that your Shepherd has your back—because He does and always will.

4. SHEEP ARE VALUABLE.

What makes me feel valued and valuable to my Shepherd:

When you feel overlooked or undervalued, see your value through your Shepherd's eyes by meditating on Psalm 139.

OK girl, what do you think? What animal are you most like? Do sheep now rank right up there at the top of your list? Are you OK with being a sheep?

Sometimes we don't like to think of ourselves as sheep because we don't like to admit we're vulnerable, needy, or capable of straying. Is that you? Or maybe you haven't been able to admit you are like a sheep because you just can't grasp how valuable you are to the Shepherd—that He would leave the ninety-nine just to come find you and bring you to His side (Luke 15:1-7).

Take a minute to pause and reflect on this. You won't experience all the Lord can be and wants to be as your Shepherd if you aren't willing to be a sheep.

Read 1 Peter 5:7, and do these three things:

1. **BELIEVE WHAT IT SAYS!** Trust the truth that He cares for you. He doesn't just care about you as one puny sheep in a big flock. He actually cares specifically for you. Just as a shepherd takes care of his sheep, your Shepherd wants to take care of you. Can you trust that truth today?
2. **DO WHAT IT SAYS!** Seriously, cast your cares upon your Shepherd. He tells you to. He wants you to. What would that look like in your life if you really did that today? If you truly cast your cares on Him? Think of just one care or concern. Imagine it in your hands. Name it. Then, imagine shifting it from your hands to your Shepherd's shoulders. Now, leave it there. He can carry it better than you. That's what sheep do—they trust the shepherd and expect him to care for them and about them.
3. **PRAY WHAT IT SAYS!** Based on 1 Peter 5:7, write a prayer to your Shepherd asking Him to reveal His care for you in ways you can recognize. Ask Him to help you cast (and keep casting) your cares on Him. Thank Him for caring about what you care about. What matters to you matters to your Shepherd.

I'm so grateful God cares about and for us, His sheep, aren't you? We really do have so much in common with woolly animals. But you know, there is one thing that we do not have in common with sheep—well, besides the fact that we don't eat grass, we have larger vocabularies, and our hair isn't nearly as itchy—we aren't always honest.

Sheep are honest creatures. If they are lost and afraid, they don't fake it. They bleat and shiver with fear, waiting for their shepherd to rescue them. If sheep feel unsafe or vulnerable, they don't puff their little chests out and act tough. No, they get closer to each other and the shepherd because they know they can't defend themselves. They don't try to be something they're not. Do you?

I'm learning how much I really am like a sheep, and I'm OK with that. Even though I try to have it all together, to always be strong and brave, at times, in the deepest part of me I'm fearful, vulnerable, and weak. I long for someone to be stronger and smarter than me. I wish I really felt as confident as I sometimes seem. Deep down, I just want to relax into whatever I face knowing I don't face it alone and I don't have to be in charge. I really don't want to have to hold it all together. Deep down, I just want to be held. How about you?

Oh my friend, it is OK to be a sheep. Of all the comparisons God could have made, He chose the image of a needy sheep and a strong, gentle shepherd. He's OK with you being a sheep. He loves you just the way you are.

He created you to need Him and to have your needs met by Him.

And He created you to need other sheep. So if you're studying this with a group (and I sure hope you are), be real with your Bible study buddies. You aren't the only one who feels the way you do. I promise.

Before I studied Psalm 23—or really, before Psalm 23 studied me—I thought I needed to be in control, when I actually needed to be cared for by my Shepherd. I thought I needed to be brave, when I really needed most to be held.

You may think you need to be in control, when what you really need is to be under God's care.

Do you recognize your true nature and admit your true needs?

Think about that today as you walk with your Shepherd. Tomorrow we'll see that when we admit we have nothing, we see we lack nothing.

DAY 4

Hey, my fellow lamb! I'm thinking about my day as I sit at my computer writing this. My mind wanders to all I need to get done today, and I'm trying to plan how I will fit it all in! You know how that goes, right? I know you do.

But as I was thinking about my list, I then thought, *Sheep don't have daily planners. Sheep have daily needs.* Hmmmm.

Sheep wake up in the morning with probably just a few things on their simple minds. First, food! Second, who will get me food? Third? Ah yes, the shepherd. He will make sure I have food. Right?

So as we sit here together now, I'm trashing my to-do list and focusing on my Shepherd, not my needs.

Can you do that too? He cares about us and for us so we can cast our cares on Him right here, right now. If you need to pause and do that, take a minute to refocus in prayer.

Lord, help us to focus on You. Show us truth today. In Jesus' name, amen.

I SHALL NOT WANT

Let's go back to the sheep's daily needs for a moment. Sheep learn to associate the shepherd with their needs being met. When that happens, the shepherd becomes their focus, not their needs. They "shall not want"—not because they have an all-you-can-eat buffet set before them, but because they have their shepherd with them.

It is the same with us. **We shall not want because we have all we need in our Shepherd.**

So let's study this! Go to your favorite Bible study reference or online resource and find parallel versions of Psalm 23:1. Write below the different ways "I shall not want" is translated.

The Message paraphrases “I shall not want” into “I don’t need a thing.” I love that. The New International Version translates it as, “I lack nothing.” That word *lack* shows up in other places in Scripture too.

Google, search on an online Bible study resource, or look in your concordance for instances where *lack* appears in Scripture. In the chart below, jot down the references that you find. Beside each reference, write how *lack* or *lacking nothing* is used in the passage and how it applies to you. (You may need to look at different translations of each reference to find the actual word *lack*. Some translations will use a synonym.)

WHAT IS A PARALLEL VERSION?

It is a different translation of the same text. For example, the New King James Version translates Psalm 23:1b as “I shall not want.” While the Christian Standard Bible translates it as “I have what I need.” You can find parallel versions in a parallel Bible, on a Bible app such as YouVersion, or in an online resource like Biblehub.com.

REFERENCES	HOW <i>LACK</i> OR <i>LACKING NOTHING</i> IMPACTS ME
Deuteronomy 2:7	
Psalm 34:9-10	
Proverbs 11:14	
Proverbs 15:22	
Hosea 4:6	

Some Scriptures tell us what happens when we lack knowledge, judgment, or wisdom. And girl, it ain't pretty! Other passages describe how we lack nothing when we seek God or follow Him. And that is beautiful.

With these Scriptures on your heart, journal your thoughts about what you may lack or think you lack and how it affects your life. Settle back to spend some time with your Shepherd, and listen to His voice.

I think I lack:

I live as if I lack:

I wish I had:

If I only had:

I act like I lack:

I need:

I lack:

Sister, there are no right answers to these journal prompts. We're all going to view this differently based on our current circumstances, our hopes and dreams, and our walks with the Lord. You may even want to use these as prayer prompts.

Sometimes when we think of *lack*, our minds race to physical things such as a car that runs well or a mate (or a mate who behaves well!). And other times, when we think of what we lack, we may think of emotional or spiritual qualities such as wisdom or self-control.

Let's sit on a Judean hill with David and try to get into his shepherd brain to discover what he may have been referencing as he wrote "I lack nothing" (NIV). Read Psalm 23 in its entirety as if David is writing it from a sheep's perspective. As you read, list the need or needs he is likely referring to in each verse.

"The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want ... "

Verse 2

Verse 3

Verse 4

Verse 5

Verse 6

The psalm lists the following needs that the sheep will not lack: food and drink, tranquility, rescue, guidance, freedom from fear, protection, and the shepherd's presence all the days of their lives. Funny that things like stuff and status didn't make the list. Sister, we may experience lack in this life, but we will only lack what we don't need. We will never lack what we do need.

When our oldest son was about two years old, he'd sprawl his little legs over the armrests of his car seat and call from the back seat of the car, "I need! I need! Mommy, I neeeeeed!" He never finished the sentence though. When I asked, "What do you need," he would just repeat, "I neeeeeed!" That's kind of how we are too. We call to our Shepherd, "I need!" And if He asks, "What do you need that I am not supplying?" We just pause and call out, "I need!"

Like children, like sheep, we aren't always tuned in to our real needs. Here's a prayer I pray often: *Lord, clarify what my needs are so I can see how You meet them.*

Do you need to pause and pray that prayer too? Or maybe you need to jot it on a sticky note and place it somewhere to help hone your spiritual radar.

Read Philippians 4:19. How does God meet our needs? Through whom or what?

Look back over the journal prompts you listed earlier. Keeping in mind that all we truly need is met in and through Christ, our Good Shepherd, and understanding that Fort Knox is like a child's piggy bank compared to His infinite supply, how does Christ Himself meet your needs through His glorious riches or through and in Himself? (If your prompts included spiritual or emotional qualities like wisdom or self-control, find Scriptures that prove how those spiritual needs are met in Christ.)

Girl, we really do lack nothing. Zero. Nada. Nothing! That's a whole lot not to lack, isn't it?

When you looked up *lack*, did you find any New Testament verses where Jesus used the word? If not, go to Google or your Bible resource and search for the word *lack* used with the phrase *one thing*. Write the references you find below.

To whom did Jesus say, "one thing you lack"? (Find Mark 10:17, and look at the subhead or title in your Bible if you need a hint.)

Several Bible versions call the man Jesus encountered "the rich young ruler." I love that. He gets two great adjectives to identify him—rich and young. Wow! For more than two thousand years, he's been rich and young!

You've got some adjectives that identify you too. What are they? Pause for a moment and think about that. Brave, smart mom? Grateful, kind woman? Hardworking, fun wife? Loving, compassionate friend?

Now do more than think about it! Jot down some adjectives below that describe you. And note: you are not allowed to write negative words that reflect your weaknesses. These adjectives must reflect your best, your strengths.

You see, sister, we've got to know our adjectives, what identifies us. Because even though we can pull out some negative words that are true about our weaknesses, there are far more positive words that indicate what we have—our assets, our strengths. When it comes to our strengths, we must be aware of this paradox: our strengths can be the breeding ground for our vulnerabilities.

It can often be our strengths that keep us lacking what we need most.

One of my adjectives is *self-reliant*. It's a good adjective. With my blindness, I developed a relentless can-do attitude which grew into fierce independence. And I guess, because I do have to depend on others so much, being able to pull from my own resources and depend on myself became really important.

So *self-reliant* is truly one of my adjectives. Great strength. But great strengths may put us at great risk.

I've learned that my self-reliance can keep me from being honest and vulnerable. It can cause me to lack humility and build a wall of isolation if I'm not careful.

So if Jesus said to me, "one thing you lack," well, probably, I would think, *Really? Just one thing?* But it would take me back and make me think.

What if Jesus said those words to you?

Ask yourself again, in light of your adjectives, "What do I lack?" Stop, put down your pen, and really ask yourself that question.

What the rich young ruler lacked was directly linked to what he had. Think about what Jesus saw.

Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

MARK 10:21, NIV

This junior Rockefeller clearly didn't lack money. He didn't lack the desire to do the right things and be the right kind of guy. But what Jesus told him to do exposed what he did lack. He lacked the willingness to let go of his own safety net, his position, and his strengths to depend totally on Jesus for his security and status.

Now, let me make sure I'm clear right here. You don't get treasure in heaven by giving away your TV or tennis shoes.

You get treasure in heaven by making heaven your treasure.

You make Jesus all you need, and then all you need is found in Jesus. In other words, like sheep, you pay more attention to the Shepherd who supplies your needs than you do to the needs themselves. You want your Shepherd more than you want what you want! You put your daily agenda under your Shepherd's authority. You stay with Him, go where He leads, do what He says, and experience "I shall not want" every single day of your life.

Oh girl, I want that so badly, don't you?

Last item for today—"one thing" we lack is important to really consider. But there are four other "one thing" Scriptures that help me see what I have and can have in my Shepherd.

They're found in Psalm 27:4; Luke 10:41-42; John 9:25; and Philippians 3:13. Look each one up, read the verse in its context, and then place each reference under the correct heading below. Then, personalize each verse by declaring it as a prayer, a praise, or a confession to your Shepherd.

"One thing is necessary."

Reference:	Prayer:

“One thing I ask.”

Reference:	Prayer:
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“One thing I do.”

Reference:	Prayer:
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“One thing I know.”

Reference:	Prayer:
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We really do lack nothing. However, sometimes we focus on other things or the wrong things, and our misaligned focus keeps us from seeing that we have everything.

David, in Psalm 27, shows us that there is no thing more satisfying than the “one thing” of being with and knowing our Shepherd.

Martha, in Luke 10, reminds us that urgent things are never more important than the “one thing” of just being with, sitting with, our Shepherd.

Paul, in Philippians 3, encourages us that the “one thing” of knowing our Shepherd will always exceed all the awesome things we accomplish in our lives.

And finally, the blind man, in John 9, illustrates that we don’t need to understand everything, we just need to know the “one thing” that “though I was blind, now I see!” (v. 25).

Hallelujah!

See sister? We truly lack nothing. Even me, with these blind eyes, I can see that I lack nothing.

Oh Jesus, thank You for being our Shepherd. We shall not want.

WHAT IS A GREEN PASTURE DAY?

When sheep are in a lush pasture, they'll chew their cud and graze for hours, overeating if the shepherd lets them. So the shepherd makes them lie down in the green pasture so they can digest what they've eaten. A green pasture is the place sheep rest and digest.

Psalm 23 is a lush pasture of wisdom and practical truth. We need time to rest in it and digest all we've taken in.

So for each verse (and each week), we will enjoy a Green Pasture Day—a day to just rest and digest.

OK, wow. My heart is full. There's so much to take in from this short verse in Psalm 23. So tomorrow we will have a Green Pasture Day. The sheep needed it and so do we. I'm closing the laptop and going to look at my to-do list. If I forget something important, I'll just explain that I was with you and sheep don't wear watches.

See you in the green pasture, friend!

DAY 5

GREEN PASTURE DAY: A DAY TO REST AND DIGEST

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

PSALM 23:1

Remember those adjectives that you used to describe yourself yesterday? I bet yours were different from your Bible study buddy's adjectives. It's a great reminder that we are all unique—which means that “rest and digest” may look differently for each one of us. On Green Pasture Days, you'll find a few different options for digesting what you've learned during the week. I'll provide several prompts below, and then you pick and choose what works best for you.

OK, sister, it's time for you to just be with your Shepherd. Use this time to do what you most like to do when you want to remember what God is teaching you. Journal. Draw. Write. Sing. Meditate. Thank the Lord for being your Shepherd.

Here are some things to consider as you rest and digest:

What I loved about Psalm 23:1:

What I learned about my Shepherd from Psalm 23:1:

What I learned about myself from Psalm 23:1:

How I'll live based on what I learned in Psalm 23:1:

Scriptures I want to remember from this week:

Quotes I liked from this week:

Thank You, Lord, for being my Shepherd. I lack nothing.

To help you meditate on the truths of Psalm 23, I've put together a playlist for each verse of the psalm. You'll find it at jenniferrothschild.com/psalm23. Don't worry, it's free! As you listen to the lyrics of the different songs each week, let them give voice to your prayers and draw you closer to your Shepherd.