



L I F E C H A N G E B O O K S

GOD is more than ENOUGH



TONY EVANS

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Introduction



THE ATTACK

There is not a single need you could possibly have that isn't addressed by the words of Psalm 23.

Not one.

No matter what inadequacy or hardship you're facing and how deeply you're facing it, no matter how problematic or distressful or exacting it may be—if the Lord is your Shepherd, He can meet all of your needs. The Twenty-third Psalm was David's way of saying God is more than enough to meet whatever lack or constraint or extremity or impossibility you might ever encounter.

And that's why, although this immortal psalm is one of the most evocative and poetic passages ever written either inside the Bible or out, it is so much more than a

sweet-sounding set of verses to console your heart in tough times. It is magnificent and enrapturing as a literary masterpiece, yet its depth goes far beyond.

Beautiful as it is, this psalm is an *attack*.

It's an attack on our debilitating lack of trust in God and the great trauma of insecurity that's brought on by such doubts and disbelief. Most Christians do not actually believe that God is more than enough. Too often, God is the last one that we appeal to. And so we wind up becoming spiritually emaciated, unable to handle the ups and downs of life.

This profound psalm is an attack on our chronic inclination to look for fulfillment in all the wrong places. So many Christians are living lives of profound dissatisfaction. We go hungrily from one table to the next, experiencing one disappointment after another, and we're *just not satisfied*. We all discover, once we've lived long enough, that there's no friendship, no relationship, no ownership, no championship, no scholarship, no fellowship that can fully satisfy our wants. Psalm 23, however, offers us a vastly different approach to the question of satisfaction in life. At the heart of it we find what we could call, in popular terms, the secret to a happy life.

Furthermore, this psalm is an attack on our very serious sin of self-sufficiency—the stubborn independence that

makes us determined to deal with our own needs in our own way. Of all the sins a person can commit, at the top of the list is self-sufficiency, for it is fundamentally the sin of pride. It's thinking, *I can function independently of God; I'm all I need to take care of myself.* But what we're actually able to do for ourselves is utterly infinitesimal compared to what God can do for us, and that's why He designed us to live in utter dependence on Him. So the result of our foolish self-focus is that we narrow our existence to an uncomfortably restricted dimension.

Years ago I took my children on a certain attraction at Walt Disney World. As our floating vessel cruised along a winding stream, we were taken alongside elaborately staged representations of different cultures with different children dressed in different ways, all of them singing the same song in different languages: "It's a small world after all, it's a small world after all..."

The first time I heard the song, it was okay. The second time was tolerable. The third time, it started getting on my nerves. On the fourth time through I wanted to jump in the water and swim out of there! This small world, being endlessly sung about by small people, was becoming acutely irritating.

We're each of us so small, after all, and the world of our own resources is so pitifully insufficient. When you try living

within those confines it can only mean a cramped existence, and eventually you can't help wanting something more. You're like a plane circling in a holding pattern—every time you look down, the ground looks oh so familiar, and you want something else, somewhere new, something more. You can't help wanting to break out and see what's different and wider and better, to see life unfold as you believe it ought to, as you so deeply desire it to.

That's God's desire for you as well, and the kind of relationship with Him that Psalm 23 portrays is the pathway to get you there.

As we move, alertly and reflectively, through this tender psalm, you'll soon see that my driving message in this book is simple, not deep; you don't have to be a theologian or a Bible scholar or have a set of commentaries nearby to quickly understand where I'm headed. The good news of the Twenty-third Psalm boils down to one essential point: *If the Lord is your Shepherd, He will meet all your needs.* By allowing Him to freely do this for us, we can rest assured that whatever possible need arises, our Good Shepherd is sure to be there.

Chapter One



THE BASIC QUESTION

Just Who Is Your Shepherd?

Right there in the opening line of Psalm 23, we find the essence and climax and consummation of what the whole psalm is about: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

But immediately a problem reveals itself in our reaction to these well-known words from David. While everybody likes part two of the verse—naturally we want our wants and needs provided for—many of us would just as soon skip part one, the bothersome part about making the Lord our Shepherd.

So my simple question for you is this: I’m assuming the

Lord is your Savior, but is He also your Shepherd? In other words, do you want the promise of the second half of verse 1 bad enough to get the first half right?

I assure you that you'll be better prepared to answer that question after we take a closer look at each word in this brief opening phrase of this most famous psalm and we experience the deep and true encouragement to be found there.

“THE LORD...”

First of all, David identifies his Shepherd as “the Lord.” What does David really mean by that name?

The Hebrew word for “Lord” in this verse is *Yahweh*. That's God's formal name, and it takes us back to Exodus 3, where God was leading Moses into a tough situation that was too big for him to handle. On that occasion, God revealed to Moses that His name is “I Am That I Am.” That's *Yahweh*, the same “Lord” that David talks about.

What kind of name is this? If *Yahweh* the Lord is the one who meets all our needs, we really do need to know and understand His name.

“I Am That I Am” conveys first of all God's *self-existence*. He's the eternally existent One. God exists because God exists. He isn't defined by anything outside Himself.

His existence is wrapped up in His existence; the total circumference of who God is within God Himself.

Therefore God is also *self-sufficient*. He depends on nothing outside Himself in order to be God. He is sustained by Himself, which means He is of necessity consistent with Himself.

When I'm cold, I need a coat. When I'm hungry, I need food. When I'm sick, I need a doctor. I have to go outside myself to have my needs met. But not God, because all that He requires, He is. What this means practically is that God has what no one in all creation has: an eternally unchangeable nature. God will always be as He is now and as He reveals Himself to be, because "I Am That I Am." God is the same yesterday and today and tomorrow. His essential nature does not change because it *cannot* change, because it's defined by His own internal reality that needs nothing outside Himself.

You and I, on the other hand, live in an atmosphere of constant change. The weather changes, our health changes, our mood changes, our level of knowledge changes. We constantly fluctuate and oscillate and deviate as we find ourselves in varying circumstances.

But God never changes. What He was, He is. What He is, He will always be.

That means God is the most consistent thing in your

life. The most dependable thing you have going for you is not your family or your friends or your bank account or

your life's work. The best and the

most consistent thing you have going

for you is your God, and we see that

even in His name. "I Am That I Am,"

He says. There is constancy with God.

When you're in

trouble, where do

you go first?

When it came to meeting his

needs and overcoming his struggles

in life, David knew he needed some-

one consistent and steadfast to lean

on. He didn't want a Shepherd who

would only be there sometimes. He needed a Shepherd he could bank on 24/7. And only the Lord God can be that.

And because of who He is, God already possesses all that it takes to fully satisfy us. All the raw materials necessary to address our deepest needs are already built into His identity. He doesn't have to go look for it or buy it or borrow it. He *has* it, because I Am That I Am. He's a one-stop shop.

So you want to make sure your Shepherd is not some cheap god, but the unchanging Yahweh, the Lord, the only God. The Bible is His résumé, and it's a thick one. He's got all the qualifications, all the capacity required to handle the job. He's managing the lives of billions of people all at the

same time. And while He's taking care of that, He keeps the earth's rivers flowing and the breezes blowing and the fields and the flowers and the trees all growing. Meanwhile, He keeps our planet rotating on its axis and revolving around the sun, even as he manages the affairs of stars and galaxies that only He can ever know the number of.

That's why David tells the Lord, "*You* are my shepherd; I'm looking only to *You*."

Is the Lord your Shepherd, too? It's easy to answer yes, but how do you know if it's something real for you or if you're just saying the words?

Let me give you a simple test. When you're challenged or tested or stretched, when you need help, where do you go first? Where do you look? Who do you turn to first? Most folks go to God only after they've tried everything else—when nothing else is working, *then* they try praying.

Think about your last crisis. Whatever or whoever you went to first for help in that crisis, *that* is your shepherd.

A man on a trip into the African rainforest was following a guide. As they pushed onward into deeper and darker jungle, the guide with his machete was whacking away at the thick green growth that rose like a wall everywhere before them.

"How do you know where to go?" the man asked. "Where's the path?"

The guide replied, “*I am* the path.”

It’s a jungle out there, and we need a guide who knows where he’s going and what he’s doing. God is that guide, because He is the great I Am.

“...Is...”

David didn’t say, “The Lord *was* my shepherd.” He didn’t say, “The Lord *will be* my shepherd.” He said, “The Lord *is* my shepherd.” Right now. In this very moment. It’s a present-tense relationship, which it must be, since God’s name is I Am, and that name also reveals His *eternal* nature.

When God says, “I Am That I Am,” He’s saying, “I am always in the present tense.” Everything for God is *now*. God has never experienced a yesterday. Nor does He have a tomorrow, so God never has to use the words *I hope...*

Why is it important to know this about God? Because when I have a need, my need is in the *now*. When I have a struggle, my struggle is in the *now*. When I have a hurt, my hurt is in the *now*. And God tells us, “I am the Eternal Now. I can meet you in your present experience.”

Then there are those of us that are worried and upset and even popping pills because we’re thinking about *tomorrow*. But God shepherds us one day at a time—He makes sure we have enough grace to cover the troubles of today.

God says, “Don’t worry. When you get to tomorrow, I’ll be there. Just deal with today. Just let Me be your Shepherd, and I will take care of you. Receive My grace for this moment. And if you take time to thank Me for the present, you won’t have time to worry about tomorrow.”

God meets today’s needs today. He’ll meet tomorrow’s needs tomorrow.

When the people of Israel journeyed through the wilderness, God rained down a certain food for them every morning from on high, like cornflakes from the sky, and the people gathered it up from the ground for that day’s sustenance. He gave them each morning only a day’s supply of these flakes, except on the sixth day of the week, when He gave them twice as much so they could rest on the Sabbath and not have to gather their food.

It was always enough, but *only* enough, to supply each day’s need.

God wanted His people to recognize Him as their *daily* provider. He wanted them to *constantly* look to Him for their provision.

That’s why God isn’t satisfied with our go-to-church-on-Sunday-and-I’m-good-for-the-week approach to the Christian life. Once you hit Monday, Sunday’s over. It’s “was,” not “is.” God wants a moment-by-moment, day-by-day relationship with each of us, not a once-a-week “refresher.”

“...MY...”

“The Lord is *my* shepherd.” This is an individual situation, a personal relationship. It wasn’t enough for David that the Lord is *a* shepherd or even *the* Shepherd. He knew he had to be able to say that the great I Am is *my* Shepherd, to say that the Lord is the one I’m depending on for *my* needs and *my* salvation.

Sometimes at a crowded restaurant, when you’re waiting for a table and your name is on the waiting list, the hostess will give you a pager to hold. When it’s time for you and your party to be seated, the pager will vibrate. The restaurant staff has your name, and they’re preparing a table just for you. And once it’s ready, if you’re still patiently waiting and holding on to that pager, it will let you know.

Now some people wonder why their spirituality is so lifeless and nothing’s vibrating. It’s because they’re not holding on to God’s pager and patiently seeking and awaiting their Shepherd’s personal instructions just for them. So they miss the table He’s prepared for them.

I have shirts that are monogrammed with the letters *T. E.* They’re not just off-the-rack shirts; they’re personalized. A lot of Christians want an off-the-rack God, but what God wants with us is a monogrammed relationship. He has your initials inscribed on His heart—and He want His Son’s initials inscribed on yours.

God gave you a unique personality, a unique orientation, a unique purpose, a unique calling. And He has to be your personal Shepherd in order for you to know His unique will for you. He wants a relationship with you that's unlike what He has with anybody else.

You may think I'm going too far by saying that, but if you read in Revelation, in Christ's messages to the seven churches, you will find this promise regarding the believer who's committed to Him:

"And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it."

R E V E L A T I O N 2 : 1 7

The Lord is saying, "I will give you a private name that only the two of us know." God is going to monogram you, to mark the most intimately personal relationship possible. And He's nurturing that relationship with you even now.

Some things, of course, apply equally to each and every Christian. The promises and commands and standards of Scripture are for us all. But just like your fingerprints are unique and different, so also is God's interaction with you unique and different, because *you* are unique and different. And that's why you need to learn to hear God's voice to know when He's speaking specifically to you, and how He's

particularly leading you in the application (or the *illumination*—that’s the theological word) of the Scriptures to your life.

“...SHEPHERD.”

“The Lord is my *shepherd*.” A shepherd’s job is to look after the comprehensive well-being of the sheep. And for that job, there’s certainly nothing better than someone who can actually meet those comprehensive needs.

In Jeremiah 23:4, God describes the role of a shepherd as one who feeds his flock in such a way that “they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking.” In Ezekiel 34:2–4, God lists all that He expects a shepherd to do: feed the flock, strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring back the strays, seek the lost.

That’s what being a shepherd means to God.

And there’s more: “The good shepherd *gives His life* for the sheep” (John 10:11). The superior shepherd is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice—he puts it all on the line for the sheep.

And so when selecting a shepherd for your own life, the proof of a good one is whether that shepherd has given his life for you. And you have that proof. *This is exactly what*

Jesus has done for you. You know He loves you as no one else possibly can.

But in order for Him to be your Shepherd, you must first recognize yourself as a sheep. Shepherds don't tend wolves or dogs; shepherds shepherd sheep. And if you don't think of yourself as a sheep, you're not qualified to receive Him as your Shepherd.

That's why many of us aren't seeing God meet our needs. We haven't decided yet that we are sheep. We resist what that implies. We resist it because fully recognizing yourself as a sheep will mean humbling yourself and identifying with a sheep in at least three ways.

First of all, sheep are *dumb*. Have you ever been to the circus and seen sheep performing to the commands of a sheep trainer? Have you ever seen a farmer teach his sheep to do tricks? No, because sheep are too dumb. And to ask the Lord to be your Shepherd means realizing and admitting how limited your intelligence really is.

We've all said to ourselves, *How could I be so stupid?* Because sheep are dumb, they regularly wander and stray. Stupid as they are, they regularly think they know best what



*Do you think of
yourself as
a sheep?*

to do and where to go. Isaiah 53:6 says, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (NIV). What does that say about us? That we’re dumb.

Second, sheep are *defenseless*. They have no fangs, no stingers, no claws, and they don’t gallop or fly or swim. That’s why we don’t have professional sports teams named after them—no such thing as the Dallas Sheep, the Chicago Sheep, the San Francisco Sheep. That’s also why we don’t use sheep for protection; we don’t have guard sheep. You never hear anyone shout, “Sic ’em, sheep!” Sheep need protection themselves, or else they get eaten up by an animal that is armed with fangs. To want the Lord as your Shepherd means realizing how vulnerable you are.

Finally, sheep are also *dirty*. Cats and birds and most other animals will clean themselves, but sheep will stay dirty forever unless the shepherd gives them a bath. And to have the Lord as your Shepherd means being willing to admit you need Him to wash you and make you clean.

Unless you understand that you have these limitations and undesirable traits, you’ll never recognize your comprehensive and constant need for a Shepherd. You’ll want a Shepherd for emergencies only.

But if you accept the truth as David did, then you can call the Lord Himself your Shepherd. For even though we’re dumb, defenseless, dirty sheep, God still takes care of

us because we're *His* sheep. And the beauty of a Good Shepherd is, he's so knowledgeable about our foolishness and our frailty and our filthiness that He knows exactly how to address all of it, even when we hardly begin to recognize what's wrong with us.

GOD'S FULL SERVICE

There are two ways to get gasoline for your car.


In the first method, you pull up to the self-service pump. You get out of your car, open the tiny door that covers the gas tank, and unscrew the gas cap. You turn to the pump and slip your credit card in the slot and punch the appropriate buttons. You take the nozzle from the pump and insert it into your tank.

You stand there until the nozzle clicks, and then you click some more to squeeze in all the gasoline you can. You put the nozzle away, screw on your gas cap, and close the tiny door. Then you open your car door, get in, and drive off.

Now if the weather is cold, you get cold while doing all this. If the weather's hot, you get hot. If it's raining, you get wet. But at least you're able to say, "I did it myself."

But there's another way to get gasoline. You drive up to the full-service pumps, and you remain comfortably seated.

Someone comes out to you, takes your credit card, and runs it through the slot for you. He opens the little door back there, unscrews the gas cap, and inserts the nozzle for you. And while it's filling up, he washes your front windows and your side windows. If you ask, he'll even check the air in your tires. He'll lift the hood and check your oil. And when the gas nozzle clicks, he'll take it out, screw the cap back on, and close the little door for you. And after all of that, he'll thank *you* for using their services.


*Why do we insist
 on living self-
 service lives?*

Meanwhile, the wind hasn't messed up your hair, and you don't have the smell of gasoline on your hands. It may be cold outside, but you're still warm in your car. If it's raining, you're still dry. If it's hot outside, you're still cool. All because there was somebody at the station whose job it was to provide you full service.

The reason so many of us cannot sincerely pray, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," is that we're still living self-service lives. We're saying, "I'm going to pull it off. I'm going to make it happen. I'm going to cut the deal. I'm going to reverse this situation." And we get out and try it, and we wind up all sweaty and sore and dirty and frustrated.

But God is running a full-service station. And if you'll just pull up and rest, He'll come out and not only do what you came for, but He'll take care of some stuff you never asked for—clean your dirty windows, check for low oil. He's going to take care of *all* of your needs.

It all comes down to this: If the Lord is your Shepherd, if you will be His sheep, He'll take care of everything—your spiritual needs, your directional needs, your emotional needs, your physical needs, your eternal needs. He'll satisfy them all.

And all His sheep say, "Amen."



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