



river west church

Knowing God as LORD and Shepherd

Psalm 23

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There are few Psalms more loved or more powerful than Psalm 23. This Psalm is so personal, rich, and all encompassing. It is guaranteed to speak to your life, no matter what you are experiencing or where you are in your spiritual journey. That's why this is one of the first Psalms every Christian should commit to memory. Each of us should return to this Psalm on a regular basis, using it as a guide for prayer and a tool for reflection as we grow deeper in our relationship with Christ.

The LORD God

Throughout the Psalms, the focus of our prayer, worship, and trust is the LORD. This is the key to everything in the Psalms: the LORD. But what does it mean to call on, worship, or trust the LORD? Who is the LORD?

Note that the word "LORD" is in all capital letters. That's a clue that something important is going on with this word. "LORD", when it appears in all capital letters in the bible, always refers to the personal name of the God of Israel: YAHWEY. The Hebrews considered this name so holy, they would never say it out loud. Instead, they substituted the word "LORD." In our bibles, this personal name of God, YAHWEY, is not printed out, instead, the word LORD is used in all capital letters to show us that it is actually God's personal name, YAHWEY, that is used in the passage.

Who then is YAHWEY (the LORD)? What are we to think when we encounter this name, or use this name in our worship and prayer? This is the most important theme in the whole Book of Psalms. To know God in the Psalms, we must know God as YAHWEY, the LORD God of Israel.

Exodus 3 is the key chapter revealing the reality of YAHWEY, the LORD God of Israel. Just as Psalm 23 is a Psalm every Christian should know by heart, Exodus 3 is a chapter every Christian should come back to over and over again as they grow deeper in their understanding of God. Once you see the powerful, majestic, awe-inspiring vision of God revealed in Exodus 3 – YAHWEY God, that's when the incredible truth of Psalm 23 will begin to take root in your heart.

My Shepherd

In Psalm 9 we saw the LORD, YAHWEY God, in majestic sovereign power – God upon His throne. Now, in Psalm 23 we see another truth, made even more remarkable by the knowledge of God's sovereign power – God is also a shepherd. He is MY shepherd. The LORD is my shepherd!

What an astounding combination of words: LORD and shepherd. What a precious truth to cling to: the LORD is MY shepherd. Sovereign in authority and power, eternal and unchanging, the great I AM, and yet he is MY shepherd. This is the beauty and power of Psalm 23.

And it raises a question. Who or what is YOUR shepherd? Everyone looks to someone or something to give direction, strength, and meaning to their lives. That's your shepherd. So who is that for you?

Jesus

Ultimately, all the Psalms point us to Jesus. Psalm 23 is called the Shepherd Psalm. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Jesus fulfills

the truth of Psalm 23 in the most profound way. Jesus is the LORD God, the sovereign king of the universe, the great eternal "I AM." Yet He came into this world and took upon Himself the form of a man. He is God with us. He is our Good Shepherd, who walks the paths of life by our side. What precious truth! Jesus laid down His life for us. What amazing love!

When we pray, worship, and trust the LORD, this is what we hold in our hearts and minds. This is what it means to know God through the Psalms and through Jesus Christ our LORD.