

Stand

The stories and scriptures

The stories behind the
songs and the Scriptures
that gave them foundation.

By Sharon Tedford

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Three

Shepherd King

The Song:

Verse 1:

You lead me by the side of quiet waters
And gently you restore my soul
I'll stay a while here in the greenest pastures
You satisfy
And you make me whole.

Chorus:

I'll always follow
Your tender guiding
Forever I'll be
Exalting and adoring you
My Shepherd King - Jesus

Verse 2:

And even when the cold of death's dark shadow
Prevents the warmth of sun on me

I fear no evil for your hand of mercy
It holds me for eternity.

(Chorus)

Bridge:

I'm welcomed to your feast
Your joyful strength released
So I can stand against my enemies
The torrent of your grace
Engulfs me in this place
I cannot help but worship you!

(Chorus)

The Story: Shepherd King

I crafted “Shepherd King” straight out of the well-known twenty-third Psalm. Because I felt like it was so familiar to me, I wanted to spend some more time with it to see what I had missed. Even when I think I know a verse or a passage of Scripture, I can always find something new or deeper when I spend fresh and concentrated time there.

God reminds us of His constancy in Psalm 23. Using the images of a Shepherd, the water and the grass, we can hear Father whispering of His unfailing nature of nurture.

A friend of mine is a shepherdess. She has missed many family gatherings and outings because of her commitment to her flock. Her job is to feed the sheep, put them in fresh pastures, tend the lambing mothers, and look after the helpless and sometimes orphaned lambs; their overall well-being was entrusted to her. Because she has spent time with them, they know her voice and are always delighted to see her.

Jesus called Himself our Shepherd (John 10:11). He cares for our immediate needs, He cares about our general, day-to-day existence, and He cares about our life-long needs. We can completely trust Him as our Shepherd, our leader, and our provider. God loves to meet our pressing needs and will hear us when we cry out in desperation for Him.

As a mother, my primary role involves meeting my children's needs. When they are infants, they cannot feed themselves, clean themselves, or comfort themselves. That is my job—but I cannot stop there. If I only ever met the physical needs of my children, they would be starved of love and compassion. In order to raise well-rounded people, I must do more than simply feed their stomachs. I must also feed their souls.

And it's the same for Jesus the Shepherd. He desires to *nurture* us and construct us into His image. He is always with us (Matthew 28:20), and therefore, we can always follow His leading. Always. When we spend time with Him we will know His voice (John 10:27) and be able to respond to Him when He calls. He is wholly committed to making us more like Him and bringing glory to Himself as we honor who He is.

The *Good* Shepherd will meet my needs and draw me into His love.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."

(Psalm 23:2-3a)

Consider water. The water in Psalm 23 is *quiet* water. The Hebrew word in this verse is *mēnumchab*, which can also mean "the rest of God." But even quiet, resting water does

not remain motionless. It could be moving, unseen under the surface. Whether crashing, majestic waves or wandering, placid streams, water always elicits from us a profound response. The repetitive sound of movement and the assurance of its unending rhythm draws us deep into thought and contemplation. A receding tide will eventually come in. A dry river will in due time be replenished. And although the water may evaporate, it is still in its very essence, water. It is unchangeable and reliable.

Water reminds us God, too, is always moving but never changing. The way we relate to God may alter, but our God is constant. Perhaps my *feelings* about His closeness may vary, but the truth of His presence is unwavering. He is faithfully available for my refreshment and my cleansing (John 4:14, John 7:37-39).

Green pastures. Green. Healthy, ripe, well-nourished, and flourishing. In verse 2 of this Psalm, the grass is not turning yellow or brown. It's not unhealthy grass or grass entering a new season of change. It's *green* grass. This grass makes you want to kick off your shoes and experience its coolness around your toes. It is a safe and rich pasture, a place for flocks to feed, and then lie down and rest as the shepherd guards them.

This is where the Shepherd leads me; this place of great nourishment, quiet, and peace. In this pasture I can be certain of His protection and nurture. He leads me here so I can lie down and relax in His presence as He watches over me. This pasture is a place of consistent calm and stable stillness. Who knows what kind of chaos disrupts the town just over the hill? Right here, in this green pasture, there is holy harmony and tranquility.

We find this green pasture by allowing Jesus to lead us there. We must choose to lie down in the grass. Jesus will never force us to be still. He desires that we do, but it is not an obligation. And because He *leads* us there and doesn't *send* us there, we can be certain that He remains there with us and tends to us. He will bless us with His magnificent presence. All we have to do is eat, lie down, and rest. Like the *mēnunwab* of the water, this green, nourishing pasture allows me to simply enjoy the tranquil stillness of His presence, always.

Whilst this stillness needs to be an internal place of a quiet soul (as in the story for “Stand. Still.”), I encourage you to physically find this kind of tranquility every day. You may have to create an official engagement on your calendar, but give yourself the gift of rest in a “green pasture,” and allow the Shepherd to tend to you.

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...” (Psalm 23:4a)

There will come a day for all of us where we feel overwhelmed with grief. Statistically, one out of every one person will die. We all have to stare into the face of sorrow at losing someone we love at some point.

There are always valleys among hills and mountains. It is geographically impossible to have places of raised land without lower land too. They have to exist beside each other. You can't have the top of a hill without also having the bottom of a hill. And so it is with life. We have days filled with joy and excitement that feel like standing on top of the world. We often describe these as “mountain top” experiences. But the rhythm of life dictates we will also have to walk through the low seasons of life, and they can feel like dark and unending valleys.

If, as you read this, you are experiencing the depth and darkness of a valley, remember there will be an end. There may be a climb ahead of you, but I promise you the climb is worth the effort.

If you have ever done any summer hiking, you know that on a hot, sunny day there is little more lovely than finding some constant shade to walk in. Just a little shelter from the

beating sun provides much-needed refreshment and cooling. Conversely, if you've ever hiked on a cold day, there is nothing more lovely than emerging out of the shade and into the sun. The high sides of a valley afford you both of these experiences.

At some point in the day, the sun will shine down into the valley. And at some point in the day, the sun will *not* reach down into the valley. But you can guarantee the sun will shed light (even if from behind the clouds) into the depths of the valley for some portion of the day.

When we find ourselves in the cold darkness of a valley, when we feel empty and alone, the Shepherd reminds us in Psalm 23 that He is with us. His "rod and staff" are nearby to guide us because this Shepherd hasn't lost sight of us. He knows exactly where we are and where He wants to lead us. He is always present, whether in the valley or on the mountaintop.

I love what G.K. Chesterton said about valleys: "One sees great things from the valley, only small things from the peak."² Although a painfully beautiful reality, our Shepherd can teach us intricate truth about ourselves and about Him from the cold ground at the bottom of a valley. Don't miss what the Shepherd is teaching you from His position of close

comfort. He is very near, and you are not alone. Allow Him to tenderly guide you, even here.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” (Psalm 23:5a)

As I was writing this song, I had an image that helped me to see this Psalm in a different light.

Who are my enemies? Well, that is a big question! Perhaps you do have literal enemies, or maybe you don't experience a direct opposition from anyone. The Hebrew word here is *tsarar*, which obviously does translate as “enemy,” but can also mean “distress,” “bind up,” “vex,” “afflict,” “besiege,” among others.

When I began to think about people who “distress” me or make me feel inferior and “bound up,” or those who have “afflicted” me in some way (and my response to them is admittedly *my* issue and not theirs!), I get a much clearer picture. There have been people who have opposed me, making my life difficult because of my faith in Jesus and the truth that I follow. So, yes, they are my “enemies.”

However, we must remember that although our enemies sometimes appear to walk in human form, our true enemies are not of this world. Those who seemingly oppose

us act out of a place of hurt or brokenness, and it is not us but the Jesus in us whom they are against. Ephesians 6:12 reminds us

“...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

So imagine this: Those unseen, spiritual enemies revel in seeing me walk through the valley. They laugh at me as I wander in the darkness, far away from the top of the open gorge. My enemies see that I appear to be lost. Those forces who are against me delight in my low position beneath them, and they mock me from their position of apparent victory.

But they don't see the Shepherd walking beside me. They are too far away to witness how deeply in conversation He is with me. Their distant view from the top of the ledge prevents them from seeing the details I can see, and they are missing out! As I round the next bend in the valley, I come upon a table set with a gorgeous white tablecloth, candles, and flowers and absolutely *laden* with the most amazing food. This table is *enormous*. In fact, it's so big that those peering down from the side of the valley can clearly see what lies before me. But they are not invited to join me at this feast and will have to watch me enjoy it from their distant position. You see, I

am in the company of the Shepherd, but they have chosen not to follow Him. This is a position of eternal victory, and my spiritual enemy witnesses the blessings of God even in that place.

I imagine this feast from my Shepherd will give me new sustenance and vigor before we climb out of the valley together. And when my Shepherd offers me the gift of refreshment and vindication, I have only one response: worship.

He is a good Shepherd who gives rest, who sustains us, and who loves to lift us up so that His name can be glorified. Rest with Him, trust in Him, and worship Him.



*Shepherd King, thank You that You always know exactly what I need. I praise You because You have promised that You will walk with me through every season of life. Teach me how to seek Your face in the apparent darkness and how to delight in Your presence as I feast on Your truth. Thank You that You are a good Shepherd who knows my name.
Amen.*

