

No Room to Breathe Study Guide

Wednesday September 16, 2026

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PRIMARY TEXT

Psalm 23

LESSON TRUTH

God gives us room to breathe in the middle of pressure through His presence, His provision, and His promise. Biblical rest is received by faith and practiced as an act of trust.

KEY STATEMENT

Rest does not always have to wait for resolution.

Core Scriptures

- Psalm 23
- Exodus 20:8 - 11
- Matthew 11:28 - 30
- Hebrews 4:1 - 11

Opening Question

When you feel overwhelmed, what is your usual first response: move faster, try to control more, withdraw, ask for help, pray, or something else?

Review from Sunday

Sunday's sermon asked a pressing question: How do we catch our breath when the circumstances around us have not changed? Psalm 23 answers by directing our attention to the Shepherd who is present in the valley, provides in the presence of enemies, and promises goodness and covenant love for every day.

Fill In the Blanks

1. Rest was part of God's _____ before exhaustion existed (Exodus 20:8-11).
2. The source of our rest is not the absence of trouble but the _____ of our Shepherd.
3. We rest in His _____, His _____, and His _____.

Read Psalm 23

Identify every action attributed to the LORD.

Observe the Movement

The psalm moves from pasture to valley to table to home.

- Verses 1 through 3 describe the Shepherd's provision, guidance, and restoration.
- Verse 4 moves into the dark valley. David changes from speaking about God as He to speaking directly to God as You.
- Verse 5 changes the image from shepherd and sheep to host and honored guest.
- Verse 6 looks beyond the immediate danger to a lifetime under God's goodness and covenant love.

Fill In the Blanks

1. In the valley, David moves from talking about God to talking _____ God.
2. In verse 5, the dominant picture shifts from Shepherd to gracious _____.

Reflection Questions

Which image speaks most directly to your present season: pasture, valley, table, or home? Why?

Psalm 23:1 - 3

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need.

2 He lets me rest in green meadows;

He leads me beside peaceful streams.

3 He renews my strength.

He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name.

These verses establish the foundation for trusting God in the valley. The LORD personally cares for His people, supplies nourishment and rest, renews their lives, and leads them in ways consistent with His character.

LORD names the God of the covenant

LORD in capitals or small capitals normally represents YHWH.

Self-existent One

God's personal name, traditionally rendered Jehovah and commonly represented as Yahweh.

This differs from the title Lord.

Exodus 3:14–15 connects this name with God's declaration "I AM THAT I AM" and identifies Him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The passage joins His enduring existence with His commitment to His people.

Thus, David's confession names the faithful God of Israel as his own Shepherd.

"My shepherd" expresses personal dependence. David entrusts himself to the One who tends and guides him.

"Want" means lack. David confesses confidence in God's provision. This is not a guarantee of wealth or exemption from hardship; the valley and enemies remain in verses 4–5.

The Shepherd's care is the ground of his confidence.

Reflection question: How does knowing that the holy, covenant God is your Shepherd change the way you bring your concerns to Him?

Receiving rest while life is overwhelming

We can acknowledge exhaustion and receive help. Trust does not require pretending that every circumstance is good or that unmet physical needs are unreal. God's care can reach us through the practical love of His people. Providing a meal, sharing a responsibility, or helping someone find safety can express that care.

Reflection question: What keeps you from receiving rest?

His name is the reason for our confidence

“For his name’s sake” means for the sake of His name, involving His character and reputation. David rests his confidence in who God is. The name introduced in verse 1 returns in verse 3 as the reason for His faithful guidance.

God’s care displays His faithfulness.

His direction calls us to live in ways that honor Him.

Jesus identifies Himself as the good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

Reflection question: Where do you need renewal, and what next step of obedience might the Shepherd be calling you to take?

Psalm 23:4 *New Living Translation*

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

Teaching Focus

David does not locate rest in the absence of a valley. He locates courage in the presence of the Shepherd. The repeated first-person language makes the confession personal: I walk, I will not fear, You are with me.

Overwhelm tells us to sprint, control, and solve everything immediately. The psalm gives us permission to walk at the Shepherd's pace.

The rod and staff show that God's presence is active. The rod represents authority, protection, and correction; the staff represents support and guidance. David is comforted because his Shepherd has what is needed for the path.

Fill In the Blanks

1. I do not have to _____ through every season; I can move at the pace of my Shepherd.
2. Biblical rest is not denial of the valley. It is confidence in God's _____ within it.

Reflection Questions

1. What pressure is tempting you to move faster than wisdom, grace, or your present capacity allows?

2. Which aspect of the Shepherd's care do you need most right now: guidance, correction, protection, or support? Why?

Psalm 23:5 *New Living Translation*

You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.

Teaching Focus

The scene changes from a shepherd in a valley to a host at a banquet. God prepares the table while the enemies remain present. The text does not promise that peace must wait until every conflict disappears. It reveals God's ability to sustain, refresh, and honor His people in the middle of unresolved pressure.

A feast must be received. David has to stop long enough to sit at the table. Being overwhelmed often keeps us running even when God is providing what we need.

Rest includes receiving from God instead of acting as if everything depends on our effort.

Fill In the Blanks

1. God does not have to clear the _____ to give me room to _____.
2. Rest does not always have to wait for _____.
3. The enemy may be present, but the enemy is not the _____.

Reflection Questions

1. What unresolved matter have you been using as the condition for when you will finally rest?

2. Where can you already see God's provision even though the pressure has not disappeared?

3. What must you stop doing long enough to receive what God is providing?

Psalm 23:6 *New Living Translation*

Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.

Teaching Focus

David reaches a settled conclusion from the Shepherd's proven character.

Surely expresses confidence, not wishful thinking.

Goodness and unfailing love pursue him all his days, including valley days and enemy days.

His future rests in God's faithful commitment rather than in predictable circumstances.

The psalm ends at home. The deepest gift is not merely what comes from God's hand but fellowship with God Himself.

Teaching Statements

- Based on what I know about my Shepherd, I can trust Him with what I do not know about tomorrow.
- The pressures pursuing me are not the only things on my trail. God's goodness and covenant love pursue me too.
- My circumstances may change, but my relationship with my Shepherd does not.

Fill In the Blanks

1. Goodness and mercy do not merely trail behind me; they _____ me.
2. Psalm 23 begins with a Shepherd and ends at _____.

Reflection Questions

1. What feels as if it is chasing you right now?

2. Which past expression of God's faithfulness can strengthen your confidence about tomorrow?

Challenge

Block out one uninterrupted hour this week. This is not a test of spirituality. It is a concrete way to receive God's gift of rest, release self-reliance, and make room to enjoy His presence.

Plan the Hour

Decision	My Plan
Date and time	_____
Place	_____
Normal work I will stop	_____
Screens I will silence	_____
How I will rest and worship	_____
Person I need to inform	_____
Likely obstacle	_____
My response to that obstacle	_____

A Simple Rhythm

1. Stop. Put away work, email, social media, and anything that pulls you back into performance.
2. Receive. Read Psalm 23 slowly and thank the Shepherd for one evidence of His care.
3. Rest. Sit quietly, take a walk, enjoy music, or share unhurried time with someone without trying to accomplish anything.
4. Listen. Ask Lord what are You teaching me about trust, limits, and Your presence.

5. Respond. Write one sentence of obedience or gratitude before the hour ends.

Breath Prayer

Inhale slowly and pray You are with me. Exhale slowly and pray I will not fear. Repeat several times, not as a formula, but as a way to bring your attention back to the truth of Psalm 23:4.

After the Hour

What did I notice about God, myself, or the pace I have been keeping?

What boundary or practice do I want to carry into next week?

Closing Prayer

Lord our Shepherd, teach us to receive Your rest. Make us aware of Your presence, provision, and promise. As we come to Jesus and learn His way, free us from self-reliance and give us grace to stop, worship, and trust. In Jesus' name. Amen.