

THE  
**LORD**  
IS MY  
*Shepherd*



A BIBLICAL STUDY OF PSALM 23



JOHN NSAMBA

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# INTRODUCTION



*Psalm 23:1-6 (NIV) <sup>1</sup>The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup>He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. <sup>3</sup>He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness*

*For His name's sake. <sup>4</sup>Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. <sup>5</sup>You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. <sup>6</sup>Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.*

Around the world many have quoted, recited or memorized Psalm 23. You will find this Psalm inscribed on walls of Institutions, organizations and in homes. It is often recited at the dinner table, whispered on hospital beds and firmly held on at funerals. In moments of despair we turn to the words of the Psalm as a reminder of God's provision, protection and comfort.

I started attending church when I was little and in the Sunday school (Children's church), me and my friends were taught to memorize and recite this Psalm of David. We even took to re-enacting the David and Goliath scene just to drive the point home. In a way, it gave us re-assurance that the Lord was able to protect us from the dangers that surrounded us even as we embarked on the journey of life.

Recently, a story was told of a boy who was asked to recite this Psalm, and he stood up and said. "The Lord is my shepherd, that's all I need to know". Well, as funny as it sounds, he was right in a way, because once you really understand that the Lord is your Shepherd, you are set for life. For the purpose of this book, we will continue to explore this Psalm.

Beyond just a nice kid's recital, this Psalm is one of hope. Personally, my entire life I have turned to these eternal words for comfort and guidance as many others have. Those grieving staring at the casket of a departed loved one, their world seemingly coming to an end, dark clouds hanging over them, faintly have heard the shouts of the preacher, quoting this Psalm and re-assuring them that God will take care of them, the morning sunshine will surely rise again.

The soldier on the battleground, hopeless and desperate, whispers the words continually, '***the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want, Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.***' He may literally be walking in the valley of the shadow of death, but he puts his trust in the Lord.

The single mother in rural Africa, abandoned by the husband with several starving kids, with no knowledge where the next meal will come from, lifts up her head and makes a prayer to the all-seeing God, and believes Him for a miracle, because that's what it will take. Hoping against hope that surely the first verse of the Psalm will come true, she will not lack because God is her shepherd.

To the multitudes that have quoted and recited this Psalm and continue to do so, this book is a reminder that the great Shepherd is still in control, keep believing, maybe you are currently going through a great valley, depression, massive debt, divorce, life seems hopeless, you are down trodden or are dealing with unimaginable grief and loss. Maybe you feel like giving up on that wayward kid, that marriage or life itself. I encourage you to not give up, keep believing in God because this Psalm provides **comfort, consolation and hope** as it did to its author who overcame enormous odds to become one of the greatest Kings of Israel.

It is important to take a careful study of God's word, lest in the briefness of the passage we may gloss over the text and miss the richness of the Word. Join me as we take a closer look at the beautiful words of this Psalm. My prayer is that the word of God guides us in all that we do because His word is a lamp for our feet (Psalm 119:105), that after this study, we may see this Psalm in another light, just as the apostle Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus; *Ephesians 1:16-19(NKJV)* <sup>16</sup>*I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:* <sup>17</sup>*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,* <sup>18</sup>*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,* <sup>19</sup>*and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power.*

# CHAPTER ONE

## “The Lord is My Shepherd”



***Psalm 23:1(NKJV) The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.***

***Psalm 23:1(NIV) The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.***

Psalm 23 is a Psalm of David. Some believe that it was written when He was king or in the later years of his life. The important thing is that we know that David had been a shepherd before he became King. ***Psalm 78:70-72 (NKJV) <sup>70</sup> He also chose David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; <sup>71</sup> From following the ewes that had young He brought him, to shepherd Jacob His people, And Israel His inheritance. <sup>72</sup> So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.***

David understood the relationship between a Shepherd and the Sheep because he had been one. When he stood before King Saul prior to encountering Goliath, his testimonies recalled how God had saved him from the lion and the bear as he watched the sheep (1 Samuel 17:34-37) and he uses this relationship of the shepherd and the sheep to describe himself and God.

When praying, I strongly believe that we should use words that communicate who God is to us. The words ought to carry weight in our own world, not borrowed words you heard someone speak. These words should have personal application, things you can relate to and have happened in your life. For instance, in the part of the world I live in, we have only two seasons, wet and dry.

For me to sing or pray that, ***'Oh Lord I thank you because you are with me in winter, autumn, spring and summer'*** would be a misrepresentation of where I am, yet it is an accurate description for someone living in another part of the world that experiences these seasons. What would be more applicable for me is to probably just thank God for his goodness in all seasons. So many of us recite, quote and study this part of the Psalm but do we really understand what a shepherd meant to the sheep? Let's take a closer look.

There are **Three Ps** that the first verse of Psalm 23 identifies; a **place**, **position** and **possession**.

The first P is the **Place**, not geographical but in terms of time. He says that the **Lord IS**; present tense not ‘was’ or ‘will be’ but right now is. The role of the shepherd is to feed, guide and shield the sheep. *Psalm 23:1 (AMPC)* ***The Lord is my Shepherd [to feed, guide, and shield me], I shall not lack.*** The Lord as your shepherd provides for your necessities, guides you in all your ways and shields you from all trouble. *Psalm 46:1 (NIV)* ***God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.*** He is an ever present help, always there when you need Him. This is a wonderful promise in God’s word, more than anything else you have to believe that He is there with you even in the midst of the challenges. He will never leave you nor forsake you, if you have made Him the Lord of your life.

Beyond the Place, the word **LORD** has two meanings in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word can be translated as Jehovah—self-existing one and Adonay—Master, ruler, owner (Genesis 15:2, 8). This great Shepherd is not any other than the creator of the Universe, master, ruler, owner of everything. When you think about the greatness of the Lord, it gives you great confidence and comfort that you can face anything that comes your way. Imagine the Almighty and the entire Host of Heaven backing you up, you are unstoppable. You probably don’t know or feel it yet.



If we knew who is on our side, then we wouldn't fear what the enemy brings. Our prayers would mirror Prophet Elisha's prayer (2 Kings 6:17), that God would open our eyes to see and realize that those that are for us are greater than those against us.

The second P is **Position**. David says 'The Lord is **my Shepherd**' The most important question you could ever answer is. 'Is the Lord the Shepherd of my life? Have I made Jesus the Lord of my life?'

Many want the part of 'I shall not lack' of this scripture but don't want to submit to God as their shepherd. For Him to be your Shepherd you have to be a sheep. This means when dealing with God you have to take on the nature of a sheep. The nature of the sheep is foolishness, dependency, humility. Several questions come to mind, this standing out the most; "For the sake of the gospel are you willing to become a fool, totally depend on God for everything and in all ways be humble?"

If you say that the Lord is your shepherd, then you need to allow Him to take total control of your life, yielding your will to His. You just can't have it both ways. Doing everything you want and then when trouble comes you run to him, quote the words of the Psalm and hope everything falls into place. It has to be a continuous ongoing relationship between you and Him leading you every step of the way.

Position is recognizing His place in your life. Jesus says He is the Good Shepherd. ***John 10:14(NIV) “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.*** Do you know the Lord Jesus? He says apart from Him you can do nothing; ***John 15:5(NIV) “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*** Take time and think about that, apart from Him we can do nothing.

If you accepted the Lord Jesus as your Lord and savior, then you are the Lord's. You belong to Him; that's your position.

The third P is **Possession** which is in two ways. It means you are His, (my Shepherd) and He is yours. God is your shepherd on a personal level. You and I can know Him personally. We can experience His deliverance, redemption, comfort and restoration of our souls on a personal level. ***John 10:14 (NIV) “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me.*** Jesus knows each and every one of us on a personal level.

When we make Him the Lord and Savior of our lives, we become children of God (John 1:12). The enemy works over time to cause us to doubt our place, position and

possession in the Lord. Two of the three temptations of Jesus were about questioning His identity, ***‘if you are the son of God...’***. Every day we need to remind ourselves of our identity, position and possession in Christ.

### **“I shall not want/I lack nothing”**

The second part of verse 1 says that I shall not want/I lack nothing, this comes after recognizing the first part of the scripture. Many want to get to the part of not wanting or lacking without first attending to the fact that the Lord has to be your shepherd first. Because the Lord is your shepherd then you shall not want/lack.

Not wanting or lacking is in two ways. One is a declaration and the other, a decision. ***Psalm 23:1(NIV) The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*** It is a declaration that all your needs are supplied by God who is your shepherd. The declaration is not made based on what you see in your bank account or when you have settled all your bills. It is made on the account of the unchanging character of God. That He is good, he is your provider, He has good plans for you, and therefore you lack nothing. ***Psalm 84:11(NKJV) For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly.***

The second is a decision. You decide that you shall be content with what the Lord has provided for you and not be discontent, agitated, long and lust after things of this world. Contentment doesn't mean giving up on life, settling for less or not pursuing your goals. It means you are not driven by greed, competition or selfish desires.

Being content means even as you pursue your goals, you trust that God provides for you and will provide the things you need in His own timing. You look to God as your only source, not the world. ***Philippians 4:12-13(NIV)*** <sup>12</sup>*I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.* <sup>13</sup>*I can do all this through him who gives me strength.* The secular idea of “*get all you can and can all you get*” only ends up in frustration because whatever is stored on this earth is subject to rot; rust and loss—see Matthew 6:19-21.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “Lie Down in Green Pastures”



*Psalm 23:2 (NKJV) He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.*

*Psalm 23:2 (AMPC) He makes me lie down in [fresh, tender] green pastures; He leads me beside the still and restful waters.*

For a sheep, food and water are essential for its well-being. The Psalmist uses this picture of the shepherd taking the sheep to green pastures and still waters to mirror his relationship with God. There is a temptation to start our prayer time telling God our needs yet He already knows them. *Matthew 6:8 (NKJV) “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you need of before you ask Him.* Start with recognition of who He is in your life and thanksgiving, and then make your requests known.

Here we see the Lord leading/guiding the Psalmist; we ought to allow God to guide us in **ALL** our ways. God knows where the green pastures and the still waters (food, provision) are. We need to allow His guidance.

Sometimes, the Lord leads us but we resist insisting on our own way. ***Proverbs 14:12 (NKJV) There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.*** I have seen in my own life that following the Lord's ways and directions will always lead me to a peaceful state of affairs.

Recently, I was moving through a mountainous part of the country, Uganda in the South West. I enjoy travelling, especially driving outdoors. I had been moving for some time, alone in the car. I enjoy lone trips because one gets to reflect, God speaks to you in that tranquility as opposed to having a hitch hiker trying to make conversation for more than five hours.

As I went through the main town, about 4 Kilometers on the outskirts, the rolling hills gave way to a lush plain of farmlands, so I looked out and saw cattle in the green pastures. The first sight I saw was most of them lying in the green pasture, the lots separated by streams of water.

Immediately, I remembered this verse, I wondered why they would be just lying down. It was about 9:00 am, the air filled with mist. As I continued on my route, I found another farm. Its herds were feeding while standing. It occurred to me that those lying down were full, fed and satisfied. It was the hungry ones that were standing and feeding.

When the Psalmist says that He makes me lie down in green pastures, it is a position of fulfillment, satisfaction, contentment. It is therefore for us to understand that because the Lord is your shepherd, you can lie down and rest knowing that all that you need, he has already provided. Faith now translates what has already been accomplished in the spiritual to the physical. That is for what you believe God for.

We can also rest in the remembrance of what God has done in our lives. Psalm 103 says He satisfies your mouth with good things. ***Psalm 103:5 (AMPC) Who satisfies your mouth [your necessity and desire at your personal age and situation] with good so that your youth, renewed, is like the eagle's [strong, overcoming, soaring]!*** The Amplified classic version, it says “at your personal age and situation”, contentment doesn’t mean having everything. It means being at peace knowing where you are, God takes care of you. It is not about extravagance or the quantity of possessions, but the quality of life you lead.

Lastly in this verse, it says that the Lord leads us to restful waters, now on one extreme end of the pendulum are those that would say, ***‘well, I guess I just stay home, sleep on the couch, lie around and manna will drop from Heaven’*** and on the other extreme side are those that

believe that they are self-made. They've got to struggle and hustle for everything they hope to get in life.

The context is that resting doesn't mean you stop working or you just lie around, this is active rest. This is resting in work not from work. It is having a peace of mind knowing that God will fulfill what He has asked you to do. Your part is to step out in faith, trust the Lord and not worry about the progress, the numbers, and statistics but know that God is in control.

In the morning on your way to work, your prayer should be to thank God that he makes your paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6), He is opening doors of opportunity (Isaiah 58:11), whatever you shall do will profit (Psalm 1:3), He gives you power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18), He restores what the enemy stole (Joel 2:25), and He preserves your job, business and life (Psalm 31:23).



# CHAPTER THREE

## “He Restores My Soul”



*Psalm 23:3 (NKJV) He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*

### The Lord restores my Soul

The search for peace is one of the most elusive things in this world. From governments spending millions and billions of dollars to facilitate peace around the world to individuals seeking for miracles, some turn to drugs, pills, sex, food or power thinking in these things they will find peace, yet the more they yield to this, it seems like the ditch keeps growing deeper than before.

In the messianic prophecies, Isaiah the prophet tells us that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. *Isaiah 9:6 (NKJV) For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.* Maybe you have been searching, you are weary, your heart is heavy, and you feel like giving up. The solution to all the trouble, worries and anxieties of this world is found in God. There is a wonderful promise in the same book of Isaiah.

***Isaiah 26:3 (NKJV) You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.***

It is only the Lord that gives lasting peace. When we talk about peace it doesn't mean absence of challenges, storms and hardships in our lives. Peace is an attitude or a state that you can be calm and collected even when the largest storm is brewing or going through a hurricane, knowing that God's got you covered.

Only the Lord can restore your soul. In the quest to escape the challenges of life, many have turned to the world itself. Yet no amount of money, alcohol, indulgence can satisfy or fulfill a thirsty and weary soul. We read about the seemingly rich by the standards of the world ending their lives, meaning that money isn't everything.

Many have resorted to these earthly remedies yet only God can truly satisfy. ***Psalms 103:5 (AMPC) Who satisfies your mouth [your necessity and desire at your personal age and situation] with good so that your youth, renewed, is like the eagle's [strong, overcoming, soaring]!*** We see that satisfaction has nothing to do with numbers, amount or size of things and possessions. It is not about quantity as much as it is quality.

Life doesn't consist of the abundance of the things one possesses. *Luke 12:15 (AMPC) And He said to them, Guard yourselves and keep free from all covetousness (the immoderate desire for wealth, the greedy longing to have more); for a man's life does not consist in and is not derived from possessing overflowing abundance or that which is over and above his needs.* Beyond the material, life ultimately consists of the knowledge that God is your Father, shepherd and friend. It's to know that God will take care of you no matter the circumstances. He will provide for your necessity and desire at your personal age and situation.

### **Do you need to have everything to be happy?**

Sometimes we think that if we get this or that thing, a promotion, spouse, child, house or finish a course then we will be happy. That's like chasing a mirage, because the moment you get one thing, you'll probably enjoy it for a while before a better version is out or you desire something else. The standard of living we have now with all the gadgets that have made life so simple was a dream for people fifty years ago.

There will always be something better, whereas we need to seek ways to better ourselves and the things around us, sometimes we just need to relax, be content and enjoy the moment where we are, on the way to where we want to be otherwise we may never enjoy the journey at all.

God as a loving father is willing to give us our heart's desires but sometimes we aren't ready for them. Let's say you have a ten-year-old child, however much they may want a car, you won't give it to him or her even when you can afford to. It is not that you don't love them, but it's because they don't have the capacity to handle it at the time.

Some of us are like that little kid, thinking that we will get satisfaction once we get something, yet we don't have the capacity to handle it. In the end, we pray, and God says wait, then we don't understand it. But thank God He knows the beginning and the end.

We ought to trust Him in all things, especially the things we don't understand. Sometimes you need to pray for increased capacity to handle what God has prepared for you. As human beings we want to be in control and in charge; however do you know that you may never understand everything, that's where trusting in God starts surrendering the unknown to Him.

## **He leads me in the paths of righteousness**

The shepherd leads. You need to allow the Shepherd of your life to lead you. The leadership is in the paths/ways of righteousness. This is all done for His name's sake. May we never ever feel better than others to the point of judging them. The good life and good things we enjoy are not because we deserve them, no it is because God is good and has provided His grace in which we enjoy these things. We can't earn the favor of God. It is an undeserved favor all because of what Christ did for us on the cross.

Our boasting, if any, should be in the Cross, not in ourselves. There's a call to humility to recognize that without Christ we are nothing and can't do anything. This is what the Lord says; ***John 15:5 (AMPC) I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever lives in Me and I in him bears much (abundant) fruit. However, apart from Me [cut off from vital union with Me] you can do nothing.***

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *“I Will Fear No Evil”*

*Psalm 23:4 (NKJV) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

*Psalm 23:4 (AMPC) Yes, though I walk through the [deep, sunless] valley of the shadow of death, I will fear or dread no evil, for You are with me; Your rod [to protect] and Your staff [to guide], they comfort me.*

The twenty third Psalm is one of hope in the midst of turmoil and great personal challenges, and the first, fourth and fifth verses speak to that. The valley of the shadow of death can be a literal one or figurative. Nevertheless, many of us, if not all, have had situations where it felt like we were going through Death Valley.

This is life. People usually ask why bad things happen to seemingly good people. You’ve probably asked the same. About a year ago, I read of a young missionary couple from the US in their early twenties who were murdered in cold blood in a tiny Caribbean nation by gangs in a

robbery gone bad. It was hard to understand, but it's just that we live in a fallen world hence the journey of this life is not without hardships, pain and loss.

The Master reminded us of this; ***John 16:33 (AMPC) I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace and confidence. In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.]***

As I thought about that couple, several things came to me. One is whatever we've been called to do, let's do it, whole heartedly because we don't know the day we will leave this earth or when the master will return. We also know that whatever the enemy steals, God is able to raise up other willing workers in His vineyard.

Maybe you are still hesitant on the call of God upon your life, you feel shy, procrastinating and giving excuses. Remember the words of Mordecai to queen ***Esther***; ***Esther 4:14(NKJV) For if you remain completely silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?***" This verse can be

an entire sermon series but think about where God has placed you and the influence you have, it could be at the workplace, home, family or society.

Are you silent about the issues God is asking you to speak about? We all have a certain window to do what God has called us to do, otherwise getting old is inevitable and another generation will come and pick up the mantle.

The Lord Jesus wept over Jerusalem of the things that were about to happen to it Luke 19:41-44. In verse 44 it says: ***Luke 19:44 (NKJV)...and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.*** My prayer to you is to know the day of your visitation. That can be today, if you choose to accept the Lord Jesus as your savior and Lord. Moses makes a prayer in ***Psalms 90:12 (NKJV) So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.***

If one isn't careful, they can literally waste their life on things that don't matter or are perishing. We see the master reminding us as He addressed the people that



were looking for Him because He fed the thousands, ***John 6:27 (AMPC) Stop toiling and doing and producing for the food that perishes and decomposes [in the using], but strive and work and produce rather for the [lasting] food which endures [continually] unto life eternal; the Son of Man will give (furnish) you that, for God the Father has authorized and certified Him and put His seal of endorsement upon Him.***

The other inspiration I got was not asking why bad things happen to good people, but the right question is ***“what do the righteous do when bad things happen?”*** To answer that, they turn to God, their shepherd, the rock of their salvation, their comforter and the lifter of their heads.

In this verse, we have a great promise from the Lord, that even if we face trouble because we live in a fallen world, the love of God is still with us, and nothing can ever separate us from His love in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:31-39). We, therefore, can be of good cheer even when going through tough circumstances because He is with us and for us.

## Walk Through

We see the Psalmist using the words “to walk through”, walk in or into the valley of the shadow of death. This means we ought to go through pain, trouble, loss not stay in or keep in. Many people stay in their past failures, hurts and losses instead of going through.

Going through has an element of forgetting, forgiving and letting go of those that might have hurt you, caused the hurt or didn't help you when you needed them. Holding onto bitterness, resentment and anger only hurts you. This keeps you from going forward with your life when you hold onto the anger and resentment of the past.

Today evaluate your life and look at the things and the people that hurt you and make a decision to forgive and let them go. Forgiveness helps the one offering it. One time I was preaching on the Lord's Prayer and I came to the part of forgiving our debtors (those that have wronged us). ***Matthew 6:12 (AMPC) And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven (left, remitted, and let go of the debts, and have [given up resentment against] our debtors.*** I asked the audience during prayer to loudly mention the name of the person that wronged them and say that ***'I forgive you.'***

A lady later came and testified that when she mentioned the name and forgave the person, a heavy burden was lifted and she felt peace. One way of figuring out whether you still have resentment towards a person is your reaction when that person's name is mentioned or when you mention it. Just like in that church, I ask you to privately say it aloud and mention the person's name and say 'I forgive you for this you did.' That's how we walk through instead of staying in the valley of depression, anger and resentment.

### **The Valley of the Shadow of Death**

The valley has the element of a low place (depression), faced with difficulties (mountains), caged in and limited. He says 'the shadow of death', a shadow is not real. It's something that appears to be real but it is not. The enemy works by instilling fear. Someone defined fear as False Evidence Appearing Real (FEAR).

It is only a shadow, an appearance of death to try and make you confess negatively. Once you confess the negative, then you bring it to reality. So, even in the seemingly negative and limited circumstances, use your mouth as an agent of life instead of death by declaring God's word. Sometimes the duration you spend in the valley depends on what you confess.

The Israelites spent 40 years on an eleven-day journey. It was because of complaining and grumbling. ***Exodus 16:2-3(NKJV)*** <sup>2</sup> *Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.* <sup>3</sup> *And the children of Israel said to them, “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”*

***Psalm 106:24-25(NKJV)*** <sup>24</sup> *Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe His word,* <sup>25</sup> *But complained in their tents, and did not heed the voice of the Lord.*

When going through the valley avoid complaining. The one who complains thinks he is in charge of it all and sees no way out. ***Hebrews 4:2(NIV)*** *For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.*

The amplified version of the Bible puts it into two ways; when you hear the word of God, mix it with faith to receive, and then also share the same faith with others

that have obeyed the word. *Hebrews 4:2 (AMPC) For indeed we have had the glad tidings [Gospel of God] proclaimed to us just as truly as they [the Israelites of old did when the good news of deliverance from bondage came to them]; but the message they heard did not benefit them, because it was not mixed with faith (with the leaning of the entire personality on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness) by those who heard it; neither were they united in faith with the ones [Joshua and Caleb] who heard (did believe).* What is the faith we talk about here; with the leaning of the entire personality on God in absolute trust and confidence in His power, wisdom, and goodness

### **I Will Fear No Evil, For You are with Me**

The Psalmist says *‘I will fear no evil’*. “*I will*” is a decision. He made up his mind that regardless of what He was going through, he would not fear. The decision was not based on feelings but it was based on knowledge. This knowledge is the reassurance He has that the Lord is with him.

Even in our lives as we go about our business every day, we ought to ensure that before we make a decision, we

have God's approval that He is with us in it. How do we know that the Lord approves of it? It should conform to His word. Sometimes it's not so clear what to do, pray and wait for the Lord's direction.

## **The Lord is with You and in You**

The remedy for fear is to know that God is with you and because the Lord is with you, you ought not to fear. This definitely takes faith. Faith is the opposite of fear. The confidence we have even in the storm is that God is with us. Even better for the New Testament believer, God is in you through the Holy Spirit. He says He will never leave you nor forsake you—see Hebrews 13:5.

The Old Testament people including David experienced the presence of God but for us God has made His dwelling in us through the Holy Spirit. ***1 Corinthians 6:19 (NKJV) Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?*** That's a greater and better assurance of His being with and in us.

Therefore, because He is in us and for us, the believer ought not to fear. ***Psalms 118:6 (NKJV) The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*** Sometimes you need to remind yourself of who you have believed.

Situations may seem to overwhelm you. Your prayer should be, *'Lord, I don't know what is going on or what's going to happen, but I know you hold my future and your promises are to do me good so I trust in your word that all things will work out for good.'*

We have many examples in the bible where God fought and defended those that placed their trust in Him. The prophet Elisha prayed to God to open the eyes of his servant to see that those that were for them were greater than those against them—2 Kings 6:17-20. Sometimes we need to have our eyes opened, God sometimes does it when we are going through something or after we've gone through, and we remember, *'oh, it was God all along'*.

Let's look at the last part of this verse that talks about the rod and the staff of the shepherd.

***NKJV—Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.***

***AMPC—Your rod [to protect] and Your staff [to guide], they comfort me.***

Every shepherd holds a rod and or staff. These play two roles;

## Protection

The first is protection, protection from the enemy. The Lord is our protector. We should rest in this knowledge that we have a mighty protector on our side. We ought to absolutely trust in the Lord, not anything else. *Psalm 20:7-8 (NKJV) 'Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God.<sup>8</sup> They have bowed down and fallen; But we have risen and stand upright.*

A simple question to ask yourself is, who and what am I putting my trust or Plan B in? The chariots speak of man-made things, cars, houses, land, wealth and the horses speak of physical strength and attributes, power, authority, knowledge, qualifications and connections yet all these will fail. Only Christ the solid rock endures forever. (1 Corinthians 10:4)

## Guidance

The second role of the rod and the staff is guidance. A rod and or a staff are both in the form of a stick. Protection and guidance are two ends of the same stick or two sticks. What differentiates the two (protection and guidance) is onto whom it is applied and the amount of pressure



exerted when doing so. Protection is against our enemies and guidance is for us. The Lord is also our guide in all matters of life. Sometimes guidance has an element of correction, perceived delayed gratification. We should be patient and trust that God has our best interests in mind.

As we conclude this chapter, we are reminded to look to God because He is our help and salvation. ***Psalm 121:1-3 (NKJV) <sup>1</sup>I will lift up my eyes to the hills—From whence comes my help? <sup>2</sup>My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. <sup>3</sup>He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.***

You ought to remember the things He has taken you through in the past and know that this too shall pass. Remember that God is in charge and in control and will cause all things to eventually work out for good for the believer. Rejoice that the victory is already secured.

In Christ you are more than a conqueror. ***Romans 8:37 (AMPC) Yet amid all these things we are more than conquerors and gain a surpassing victory through Him Who loved us.*** If He did it before, He can do it again beyond what you think and imagine.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“He Prepares a Table Before Me”



*Psalm 23:5 (NKJV) You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.*

The Lord, the great shepherd prepares a table for you in the presence of your enemies. When we think about the word prepare, it relates to foresight, planning, thinking about something or someone and getting ready for it or them. We see that the Lord thinks about us. And the thoughts He thinks toward us are good thoughts not evil thoughts. *Jeremiah 29:11 (KJV) For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*

I want to remind you that God loves you. He is constantly thinking about you and His thoughts toward you are good thoughts. The Lord gave a message to King Asa of Judah who had allied himself with the gentile King in going to war with the King of Israel (2 Chronicles 16:1-6).

This is what the seer told Him, **2 Chronicles 16:1-9(NKJV)** *For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. In this you have done foolishly; therefore, from now on you shall have wars.*” God intentionally looks out for those He might show himself strong to.

The Psalmist says that the Lord prepares a table before him. A table speaks of banquet, bounty, food, care and provision. This table is set right in front of his enemies. The Psalmist is saying that even in the midst of trouble, opposition and difficulty, you can enjoy God’s presence, provision and peace.

Peace is not absence of trouble, but a good attitude even in the midst of trouble. The joy and peace of God is not dependent on your external circumstances but what is inside of you. It is based on the knowledge that God is in control of everything. Maybe you think, *‘oh, I will be at peace when everything works out and there are no demands on me.’* Well, newsflash! You’ll never experience peace if that’s what you are looking at.

There is a song we used to sing in the children’s church, *“With Jesus in my boat, I can smile at the storm”*. The reason for our smile is not due to the absence of the

storm but the presence of the Lord in our boat regardless of what is happening around us. That's the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

## **David's Enemies**

The Psalmist says that the Lord prepares a table before him in the presence of his enemies. When we examine the life of David, we see he was faced with interesting enemies at certain stages of his life. It is very easy for you to gloss over this and say, 'oh, he had enemies, I also have enemies.' But let's look at the enemies he had and relate them to our personal lives.

## **Goliath**

The first enemy that stands out was Goliath, a giant (physically), a champion with lots of war experience. When David offered to fight Goliath, even the King of Israel discouraged him. ***1 Samuel 17:33 (NIV) Saul replied, "You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth."***

He had to tell King Saul of the testimonies of how God delivered him from the lion and the bear. I speak to you;

I don't know what giant you might be facing right now. It could be debt, disease, depression, loss or something really strong like an addiction. Maybe you seem inadequate and helpless compared to the challenge before you, it is huge (financial), you don't have the experience, you are too young or basically you are at a disadvantage from the start (no connections).

This is what David said to the giant, ***1 Samuel 17:45 (NIV) David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. You need to speak to that giant just as David spoke to Goliath. 'I may not have all the answers, the experience, the knowledge but I come in the name of the Lord and at the mention of the Lord's name everything bows to it.'***

***Philippians 2:10 (NKJV) <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.*** What is that giant before you? If it has a name, then it must bow down to the name above all names. It doesn't matter where it is, how long it has been there or how powerful it is, there is a name that

is above every name, that is the name of Jesus. We ought to use it. Our trust should be in God because some trust in Chariots and others in horses but we should trust in the name of the Lord (Psalms 20:7).

## **King Saul**

The second enemy David faced was King Saul. The Lord takes away the kingdom from Saul and anoints David as King. He didn't ask for it, and was in fact not present when the Prophet Samuel came to Jesse's house to anoint the king. But God in His divine plan chose David as the next king while the rejected King was still alive.

The King of Israel sought to kill David on many occasions—see 1 Samuel 19. The King had the entire army at his disposal and his sole purpose was to hunt David. And even the people who tried to help David were killed by Saul (1 Samuel 22:6-19). These were priests of the Lord.

Just because God has called you and anointed you for His work doesn't mean you won't face opposition, challenges or difficulties. Here was someone called by God but having the King of the nation as his enemy and David was on top of the most wanted list in Israel.

I wonder if you have ever felt like the entire world is conspiring against you. The enemy seems to have a lot of resources at their disposal to frustrate you. You can rest assured in God that He will take care of you. For David, he had to run away from his home land into the Philistines land (1 Samuel 21:10-14). He even pretended to the Philistine king that he was insane yet in all this, God was with him. The most important thing was that God was with him. I implore us to desire the Lord's presence in our lives more than the presents/gifts.

We have to trust God's timing of things. Sometimes we are tempted to look for a short cut, an easier way, but God doesn't work like that. We see that David had an opportunity on more than two occasions to kill Saul in 1 Samuel Chapters 24 and 26. Even his men advised him to, but he trusted God's timing. When faced with enemies, don't take matters into your own hands. God says He will avenge, not you. ***Romans 12:19(NIV) Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.***

We need to trust God's timing, He makes all things beautiful in its time—see Ecclesiastes 3:11. Yes, it might seem like things are delaying. Others (your enemies) seem to get away with it, but just because everyone is

doing it doesn't make it right in the eyes of the Lord, let's wait on the Lord. Stay the course remembering that the way of the Kingdom of light is straight and narrow.

To the onlooker, company with Saul was the most logical decision to make yet God had left Saul. Siding with David was putting a mark on yourself as an enemy of the state, but the overriding difference is the presence of God, and in one day all Saul's great men fell on Mount Gilboa (1 Chronicles 10) whereas David's first recruits were not so noble, but because they followed someone who carried the anointing of the Lord they became mighty men in the land. 1 *Samuel 22:1-2 (NKJV)* ***<sup>1</sup>David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. <sup>2</sup>And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.***

We ought to be careful with whom we associate with, more so the company we keep. Many mighty men of Israel lost their lives for continuing to associate with King Saul yet the Lord had left him. What has the Lord told you to leave, disassociate yourself with, let go of immediately. Staying there might not necessarily lead you to death



as these men, but it has the potential to stagnant you, obstruct your progress and stop you from reaching your God given destiny. Learn the seasons and times and act accordingly.

Just as King Saul was anointed, there are some spaces that are for a season, and when you are in tune with the Holy Spirit, He will give you a sign that it is time to move on. The signs will include, no longer feeling peace about it, struggling to do what was easy before, strife and resentment cropping up in relationships and work, and maybe it is a sign to move on. This could be a job, relationship, calling or any other association.

## **Absalom**

For David's third enemy, I want us to look at Absalom. He was David's own son (2 Samuel 15). David could have understood the betrayal or enmity of the first two, but this was his own son. I want to ask you. Have you ever experienced opposition from within?

When David heard that the hearts of the men of Israel were with Absalom, he quickly fled (2 Samuel 15:13-14). Many times, we can prepare for opposition from the outside, but one from the inside usually gets us off-guard. Imagine betrayal from the last person you thought

would. This was someone you trusted. For the case of David, even his adviser Ahithophel went with Absalom but because the Lord was with David, He caused the advice of Ahithophel to be ignored. **2 Samuel 17: 14 (NKJV)** *So Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than the advice of Ahithophel.” For the Lord had purposed to defeat the good advice of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring disaster on Absalom.*

The enemy from within might steal your ideas, tactics, knowledge, plans and designs but they cannot defeat nor frustrate the Lord’s purpose and plans for your life. They can steal from you, say things about you, but the true blessing that lasts is because of the Lord not fancy ideas or formulae. **Proverbs 10:22 (AMPC)** *The blessing of the Lord—it makes [truly] rich, and He adds no sorrow with it [neither does toiling increase it].* That is why it is important to find out which vocation the Lord has called you to, that’s where your prosperity lies. If you do something because someone is doing it and they are prospering, you may end up toiling but not prospering in it.

Even as David fled Absalom, he turned to God and penned Psalm 3, he looked to him as the source of peace

and hope even in the midst of the enemy. Understand that because the Lord is your shepherd, you can still have joy because He is holding and taking care of you. ***Psalm 3:3 (NKJV) But You, O Lord, are a shield for me, My glory and the One who lifts up my head.***

To make matters more interesting, when David sent out his army to fight Absalom, he told them to be gentle on the boy/son (2 Samuel 18:5). That would seem like an unfair fight if you are not allowed to eliminate the enemy or hit them hard.

Just because the enemy you are facing is family or friend, you find that you cannot go all out. It is like facing a situation where it is absolutely unfair, it is you who has been wronged, robbed, falsely accused and the Lord asks you to let it go. You feel like, at least your version of events ought to be given but the Lord says, 'silence, and let it go'. You can only do that if you have a personal experience with the Lord, obeying His every command.

### **A Table in the Presence of Your Enemies**

Regardless of the nature of the enemy you might be facing, with God, you can have peace, joy and gladness even in the midst of the storm. The peace that the Lord gives is not as the world thinks. It is not absence of

conflict, opposition or challenges but calmness even in the midst of the storm. This can only be found in Christ. ***John 14:27 (AMPC) Peace I leave with you; My [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. [Stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed; and do not permit yourselves to be fearful and intimidated and cowardly and unsettled.]***

## **You Anoint My Head with Oil**

In the presence of enemies, the Lord anoints your head with oil. Oil has two purposes in this context. The first is that the oil of the Lord gives us joy and gladness. ***Isaiah 61:3 (NKJV) "To console those who mourn in Zion, To give them beauty for ashes, The oil of joy for mourning, The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; That they may be called trees of righteousness, The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."***

In the midst of trouble, you can experience joy and gladness because the Lord is your shepherd. Most times we pray rightly, that the Lord removes our challenges, but sometimes, God's care doesn't mean He will remove the challenge, but that you can experience His love and provision while you go **through** the challenges.

There are different sets of challenges we encounter in life, some we go through, others we go over and others we just need to be above them. You need to recognize which kind you are in, so that you don't jump where you are supposed to go through. An example is waiting. Very few people like waiting yet most of life's processes take time. With the anointing of God in your life, you can wait patiently and joyfully without complaining and grumbling.

The second application of the oil is its importance to the sheep. The shepherds put oil on the head of the sheep to protect them from parasites, pests and lice. When unprotected, these pests crawl through the ear of the sheep and it would bang its head against trees or rocks to get relief from the pests. The sheep could even crack its skull in a bit to get rid of these pests. In the same way the oil—joy and gladness of the Lord is the weapon against the pests of this world that would drown us in sorrows.

Nehemiah 8:10 says that the joy of the Lord is your strength. The strength to move in this dark world is found in the joy of the Lord. It is interesting that the oil is poured on the head. It is important to protect your mind from the enemy's attack. The enemy attacks you in your mind, what you think about, because this will eventually become your confession then your reality.

Thus, guard your mind with the joy of the Lord which is your strength. The Lord might prepare a table before your enemies and that table might be of increase, success, promotion and favor but the enemy might sow seeds of discouragement into your mind of how little that means, you need to have the oil of joy to thwart the enemy's lies.

### **My Cup Runs Over**

The God we serve is not a just enough God, just enough food, barely making it through, surviving by the skin of your teeth, living paycheck to paycheck and any slight bottleneck or delay ruins you financially. Instead we have a God of more than enough and abundance. He wants to bless you until there's an overflow, more than you can handle. The reason for this is that you become a blessing to others.

When God called Abram from his father's land, He made him a promise in Genesis 12. **Genesis 12:1-2 (NKJV)**  
*<sup>1</sup>Now the Lord had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; And you shall be a blessing.*

In verse two, He says, *‘I will bless you and you shall be a blessing’*. The blessing is not just for your own personal or family enrichment but to dispense that blessing to others. We ought to be like rivers, to receive and give, then we’ll ever have fresh water, unlike the Dead Sea that has no outlet, it only receives water but doesn’t give out. There is no life in the Dead Sea because it only receives but doesn’t give out.

God wants to work in and through you. One of the most powerful prayers you can ever make is to ask God to make you a conduit for his blessings. Wake up and ask, *“God, how can I be a blessing to someone today, God show me someone to be a blessing to today”*. Instead of constantly praying, ‘bless me God, bless me God,’ ask yourself the question, ‘how can I be a blessing to someone?’ It even doesn’t have to be a financial gesture but “seeing” the person that is often ignored and appreciating them, saying thank you to the janitor, security guard, house help and appreciating them for their efforts. We ought to be vessels for God’s love to be poured out to others.

One time I was seated in a restaurant by myself, I observed that one of the waitresses was on edge. I had been to this particular restaurant several times because it’s on the way to work and I just knew her by face. She seemed nervous, poured sugar on a customer’s table,

and about three people were signaling to her a little like yelling inaudibly.

My order had been delayed and when she brought it, she had mixed it up. I felt I needed to give her a word of encouragement. She told me how sorry she was for mixing my order. I told her, "It is okay, I noticed you are on edge, just calm down, everything will be fine, and whatever it is you are going through, God's got you".

She thanked me and said she needed to hear that because she had been going through some family crisis which was now affecting her work. For me that was the end of the interaction with her but I believe that word was a seed that God planted in her heart through my obedience to be a conduit for His love. Wherever you are you can do small acts of kindness.

David had more than enough. He blessed people. He even remembered Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth and brought him to the king's table, restoring to him the land of his grandfather King Saul who hadn't treated David well (2 Samuel 9:1-13). Some of us are still stagnant in life because we are vengeful and the moment the Lord lifts you, you'll step on everyone, and it will be like putting power in the wrong hands, that's why you are still barely getting by.



Some people wonder why when their colleagues get money or promotions they suddenly change. Money or promotion doesn't change people; it just reveals the true nature of the person. That person was like that all along. The money has just enabled his or her vices. I always tell my friends some people are humble because they are broke. Once they get some money, the humility disappears.

In the African churches I have preached in, most pastors have this complaint of people who come to church with literally nothing. The pastor takes them in, houses and feeds them, then when they settle and get a job, they no longer have time for church. It is worse for the educated folks who come to church to believe God for a job. Once they get the job they have prayed for, the church now becomes boring. The service is too long, it is too hot without air conditioning, the seats are uncomfortable and they look for another church where they can connect and network with the church members of the same class.

The blessing is not just for you, but others ought to be blessed through you. The Lord doesn't bless you such that you go around showing others how better or more anointed you are. The blessing is for service in the Kingdom. Let your cup overflow. Whatever God has filled you with, let it overflow to the rest.

## CHAPTER SIX

### “Goodness and Mercy Follows Me”



*Psalm 23:6 (NKJV) Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.*

After you make the Lord your shepherd, His goodness and mercy will follow you. This is not just for now but all the days of your life. The Psalm ends with the assurance of God’s presence forever for those that make Him the shepherd of their lives. At the front is the shepherd leading you and at the back goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life.

Contrary to what some might want us to think, we aren’t here by mistake or as a result of a random act millions of years ago. We are created by God in His image for a specific purpose. He has planned out our lives before we were even here. *Psalm 139:16 (AMPC) Your eyes saw my unformed substance, and in Your book all the days [of my life] were written before ever they took shape, when as yet there was none of them.*

When you choose the Lord as your shepherd, and surrender to His will, you'll live the life He planned for you beforehand, a life of victory, peace, joy and love with goodness and mercy following you every day.

## CONCLUSION

**G**od's word is powerful and also rich. I encourage you to take time to study His word and find out what He's communicating to you. It is so easy to gloss over words without really drawing meaning from them. When you deliberately set out to study, you will be surprised with what you will find.

We have seen many wonderful benefits of having a shepherd. The question is, is the Lord the Shepherd of your life? It is a personal question. He may be the shepherd of your family, but do you know Him personally? You can know the Lord on a personal level. Invite him in your life today. ***John 10:11 (NKJV) "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."***

Jesus laid down His life for you and me that we may have Life eternally. You see, He didn't have to, but because He loved you and me so much, He did die for us. ***John 10:17-18(NKJV) 17 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."***

Make the Lord your shepherd today. You do that by asking the Lord Jesus to come into your life. You can pray this prayer to accept Jesus as your Lord and savior, say *“Lord Jesus, I come to you today, thanking you for my life, I repent of sins and I thank you for dying for me on the cross and paying for my sins. I confess you as Lord and Savior of my life and I choose to live for you from today onwards. I believe I am born again. Amen.”*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



John Nsamba and his wife Daphine are the founders of Rhizoo Ministries, a bible teaching media ministry based in Kampala, Uganda. He is an itinerant gospel minister with a passion for teaching the uncompromising Word of God in a simple and relatable way. The ministry's heartbeat is to see people rooted and grounded in Christ through application of biblical truth to their everyday lives. For more information about the ministry and other teachings, kindly visit the ministry website [www.rhizooministries.org](http://www.rhizooministries.org).



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