

McGee's Paraphrase of Psalm 23

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Dag Hammarskjold, who presided over the United Nations for many years* once said, "Explosive power lies not in the flame, nor the oil, but in their meeting." The power of the 23rd Psalm lies not in the words or language of the text but in your openness, your readiness to allow God's Spirit to breathe into them what you need in the very moment of your reading. That is exactly what I hope you will do today as I share first this Psalm of Comfort in the classic words of King James in 1611, and finally in a paraphrase I have written, with apologies to theologians.

Psalm 23 (KJV)

1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want
2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 23 (McGee Paraphrase)

1. When my shepherd is the God of creation I lack absolutely nothing, and will never be without resources.
2. Because of his love for me he insists that I rest quietly in green pastures and safely beside still waters,
3. in order that he may restore my soul. He even guides my thoughts so that my actions will reflect his nature and his character.

*Note that at this point the psalmist moves from speaking **about** this Shepherd to speaking **to** Him. The psalmist continues:*

4. And as I walk through the dark valley of grief, it is You who take away all of my fears. And just as the shepherd comforts his sheep with his rod and staff, You place resources all around me that I may feel the security of your shepherding presence.
5. Just as certainly as there will be those around me who wish me no good, much like the gracious host at a banquet dinner, You will honor me in their very presence—so much so that my cup will overflow with joy.
6. Just as surely as you have promised that goodness and mercy will shadow me every day of my life, You will empower me to be the instrument of goodness and mercy to others. You have promised that upon my departure from this life You will welcome me with open arms into your eternal family of faith where, among my loved ones gone before, I will live with you forever.

*Dag Hammarskjold, Secretary-General, United Nations, 1953-1961

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