

SCRIPTURE | *Journaling The Bible*

Many would say the Bible is the biggest composite picture we have, about who God is and what God's heart is like.

Because of that, interacting with Scripture is like a 'superfood' of spiritual growth. And yet as we build the habit of reading scripture into our rhythms – which is excellent – we can start to speed over parts of the story that we've heard over and over again. And so sometimes what's right in front of us can become invisible, because we're so used to it.

Today we're going to throw in a speed bump, and engage scripture in a more creative way by taking a passage of the Bible and journaling it into our own words, in the hopes we can encounter God in a fresh way.

We're going to practice with Psalm 23, which describes God's relationship with us like that of a shepherd with his sheep.

Now we tend to read this Psalm from the perspective of the one ***being taken care of***. In our me-centered view. But see if you can to make a slight shift, and try to focus instead on the image and the activity of the shepherd, not the sheep

The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23)

Now you'll need a pen and paper for this exercise, so you can pause the video to grab that, or just use a Notes App in your phone. We're going to go through the Psalm a little at a time. With each section, I want you to pause and really think about it – maybe like you've never thought about it before.

What is the writer *actually* trying to say? This passage is very metaphor-rich (a lot of the Bible is!) But try to take the shepherd/sheep metaphor, that would've made a lot of sense to this author (who was a shepherd!) and reimagine it with language and imagery that describes ***your*** world – your work life, home life, or even stage of life. Your experience of God caring for you. This is David's Psalm 23. What does ***your*** version sound like?

You can be fun and lighthearted, be deep and thoughtful, be poetic, be literal, put it into pirate-speak, I don't care! Maybe you don't even want to use words but you're going to sketch it out as we go along. The point is to pull it apart and try to hear it – and then express it – in a fresh, new way. This ***will*** do good things in you – even though it will be tricky at first to get the hang of it!

1. **The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.**

- Now, for starters, neither Lord nor Shepherd are words we use much outside of religious contexts. And you're not a sheep! So what does this verse mean to you, in everyday terms?
- Take a shot at your journal-version of this short line first.

2. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.

- Now again, trying to focus on the activity of God in here.
- What do green pastures and quiet waters mean? How does God lead you to them?
- What does a restored soul look like? Can you describe it?

*** * *** **Now we're not going to do every verse right now**, you can go back and finish them up at home later (I hope you will!) So let's skip down to v.4

3. Even 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.

- Now remember, the focus here shouldn't be primarily on the valley of the shadow of death, or the fear or the evil, or even the "I" walking through it – we want to keep pulling our focus back to the Shepherd. To what GOD is doing in the midst of it all.
- *"Even when I'm walking into this room full of people I don't know, even though I'm heading into this meeting where I feel like I'm only going to fail, even though I got hurt so badly in this relationship before, I feel such a sense of God's love in me and for me and through me, I know I'm held tight by a Saviour who's good and who's true, and I can hold my heart wide open because God has ways of working things out that I haven't even begun to imagine."*

4. Now let's jump down again to the final verse: Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

- What does a life overflowing with the goodness and mercy of God actually look like, to you? What would that version of you be like?
- What does dwelling in the house of the Lord forever mean to you?

Now let's worship together again – this song, like many others, is a great example of musicians taking scripture and journaling it into their own words, and could be a great rendition of our final verse: Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.