

GPS-23

GOD'S PATHWAY
FOR
SURVIVAL PSALM 23

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SURVIVAL PSALM 23

Johnny A. Palmer Jr.



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FOREWORD



I suppose, next to John 3:16, that the Twenty-Third Psalm is one of the most loved and quoted Scriptures in all the Bible. There have been countless sermons preached on this Psalm and it has been used as the main text for a multitude of funerals. For many, it is the first passage of Scripture they ever memorize; over the centuries, many more have found comfort through the words of this great Psalm of David.

My good friend Pastor Johnny Palmer has done an exceptional job with *GPS-23*, an exposition of Psalm 23. His diligent study and analysis of each verse and word along with the insightful illustrations, will take you back to the day, time, and culture in which the Psalm was written and will help you grasp the full meaning of this tremendous passage of Scripture! *GPS- 23* helps bring out of the Psalm all what I believe the psalmist put it! With the author's practical approach to Psalm 23, you will be able to make an application to everyday life. The greatest thing about this book is that it will cause you to encounter the One whom this Psalm is all about, "the Great Shepherd!"

GPS-23: GOD'S PATHWAY FOR SURVIVAL PSALM 23

As you read this book, I would encourage you to read it slowly and prayerfully with an ink pen or highlighter in your hand. There will be so many gems and nuggets that you will want to come back to. Let it take you to the green pastures and lead you beside the still waters, and you will find strength and comfort for your souls. Let the Shepherd prepare a table for you, anoint your head with oil, and fill your cup to overflowing. See how the Shepherd will allow goodness and mercy to follow you all the days of your life, and best of all, to dwell in the house of the LORD forever!

GPS-23 is refreshing to me! It's written by a man who has been a shepherd of a local flock, a congregation of believers, for over thirty years. I believe after reading this book you will have some insights to this beloved Psalm, perhaps unlike you have ever had before.

Most importantly, I believe you will find yourself wanting to draw closer to the Great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ!

Sam Moore, Evangelist
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Psalm 23: King James Version

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

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.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

INTRODUCTION



My son gave me one of those GPS things; it's a navigational system—a global positioning system to be exact. It can be used in our cars or smartphones, though I don't have a smartphone. I still use the old-fashioned dumbphone. My son thought it might help me find where people live. Wrong! I still haven't figured out how to hook it up. I am one of those people who lack any sense of direction. The three churches I have pastored in all had what's called church parsonages, and they were all right next door to the churches. It's a good thing, because it enabled me to find those churches. For some reason it's been easier for me to find God's will than to find Willow Street. Frankly that doesn't bother me much, because finding God's will is everything, and finding Willow street means next to nothing.

One of those awesome maps that help us find our way around is Psalm 23. I call it my GPS-23—God's pathway for survival as found in Psalm 23. And it's already hooked up! I figure if some manmade thing can guide us through a satellite system to observe the entire landscape of this planet,

the one who created, sustains, sees and knows everything can give us guidance as we journey through this life. And what a journey it is!

Without a doubt, we face a long, dangerous journey. The world that I grew up in no longer exists; I feel like a stranger in my own home town. Militant Muslims are on the march, Russia is reverting back to her old expansionist ways, we are waiting for the other shoe to drop as Iran will no doubt announce that they have nuclear weapons ready to go, and we could add Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, and Libya to our list of danger spots. And the woes go on and on. We see our world in freefall, heading for Armageddon; racism is rearing its ugly head, even where no racism actually exists; William Devane is shoveling gold into his safe like it was snow, while the rest of us are afraid to go to the dentist knowing we cannot afford that gold crown we are in need of; Marie Osmond is constantly rubbing it in that we are beginning to look like the Pillsbury Doughboy as she tries to convince us that all would be well if we just would lose a few pounds; America, the land of the free and home of the brave, seems to have lost her nerve to fight the real enemy, while in the name of some vague climate change, our freedoms are slowly being taken away; and frankly the only hope that any nation has is often scorned and persecuted, as the church has become all but obsolete. It's all enough to make you dust off that old record, "Their coming to take me away!" Well, as I used to tell my grandkids, "Stop it! Just stop it! Enough already!"

There is a God, and He offers real, honest, lasting hope. No, it's not just any old god or every god but the one and true living God as found in the Bible. He is the one who is desperately needed, the truth that anyone can encounter through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He can get us through this life and eventually out of it, all the way to

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infinity and beyond—a nutty saying that Buzz Lightyear taught us—but in reality there is nothing beyond infinity.

It's time to dust off our Bibles and appropriate something that's better than gold, or controlling the climate, or thin is in, or even taking back the White House with a Ronald Regan lookalike. The Bible is the real deal! It is solid, it works, and most of all it glorifies God. How do I know? Because God's Word is true and trustworthy, and less important, I have seen these truths transform my own personal life for over forty years. I came to know the Lord Jesus Christ on May 7, 1974 and have been studying God's Word ever since. I have been a pastor for over thirty years, and I can tell you I have seen it work in the lives of many people through those years. Yes, it is real, not only for me, but for anyone who will seek God.

Where to begin? If you're lost, now is the time to get saved. Not interested? Frankly that is a choice that is open to you, a choice that will leave you empty and hopeless. God loves you, but if you reject that love, you will one day face His holy wrath. Like those in the crowd who, after hearing Jesus, turned away and walked no more with him—so can you (John 6:66). And let's be clear, if you turn down Christ, there will be no threats from Christians to lob your head off—no stones thrown your way. We will have only a sense of sadness and a real grief at your hard and unresponsive heart.

But there are some who will be touched and moved by God's Spirit to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. Even as you read this you may find your heart being stirred. If so, I encourage you to go to chapter three of this book, and read it carefully.

Now for those of us who are already Christians, we begin by reading Psalm 23 over and over again. In fact it is imperative that you memorize this Psalm. Many already have, and many think they have but find when they actually

try to say it from memory, their memory fails them. I don't know if this will help you, but I learned to memorize by using the principle of association. I have a sort of a prayer-stand in my back yard; it is about fifteen feet high and is used as a place for prayer. I have a chair up there, and as I sit there, I think, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Down below is the lawn; it reminds me of, "He makes me lie down in green pastures." Off to the left there is a plastic container that holds water, reminding me that, "He leads me beside the still waters. Above it is a deer feeder that is broken, reminding me that, "He restores my soul." And from that to a nearby tree, I imagine a rope that one could walk across that speaks of, "He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Behind that is a fence, and over the fence is a field that toward the evening, gets dark. It reminds me of, "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." I look to my right, and not to be unkind, I have neighbors who appear to be in some sort of cult, which reminds me of, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." I then come full circle back to me, and I put my hand on my head reminding me, "You anoint my head with oil." Then look down and think of a bowl on my lap: "My cup runs over." The rest just comes easy because there is just one line left, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

I don't know if that helped or not, but for me, using that association makes it is easy to quote the Psalm accurately and in good order. Try it. You are welcome to come sit in my prayer stand, but if it doesn't help that's alright, just memorize it anyway you can.

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Psalm 23: The North American Plains Indian Version

The Great Father above is a shepherd Chief.

I am His and with Him I want not.

He throws out to me a rope and the name of the rope is love and He draws me to where the grass is green and the water not dangerous, and I eat and lie down and am satisfied.

Sometimes my heart is very weak and falls down, but He lifts me up again and draws me into a good road.

His name is WONDERFUL.

Sometime, it may be very soon, it may be a long, long time, He will draw me into a valley.

It is dark there, but I'll be afraid not, for it is in between those mountains that the Shepherd Christ will meet me, and the hunger that I have in my heart all through this life will be satisfied.

He gives me a staff to lean upon.

He spreads a table before me with all kinds of foods.

He puts His hand upon my head and all the "tired" is gone.

My cup He fills till it runs over.

What I tell is true.

I lie not.

These roads that are "away ahead" will stay with me through this life and after; and afterwards I will go to live in the great house and sit down with the Shepherd Chief forever.¹

CHAPTER 1

THE PHENOMENAL

The LORD



Roy Angell was parked in front of a big city hospital in Miami, and he recognized a physician who was coming down the steps heading for his car. Roy noticed that he was moving his lips as if talking. As the physician walked by his car, Roy said, “Bascom, you are too young to be talking to yourself.”

Dr. Bascom smiled and said, “I wasn’t talking to myself. I was saying the twenty-third Psalm. I just came from the room of a little old saint on the fourth floor who can’t live much longer. She asked me if I knew the twenty-third Psalm. When I told her I claimed it as my very own and that I leaned on it every day, she replied, ‘Let’s say it together. This twenty-third Psalm has been enshrined on a marble pedestal too long. We need to take it down and break it up and use it. It’s something to live with and live by.’”²

How true! Someone rightly said familiarity breeds contempt; we are so familiar with this Psalm that we have allowed it to slip into useless obscurity. So let’s unbury this divine treasure and dig in.

Notice we begin with the LORD. When you find it in all capital letters it means *Yahweh* in Hebrew. *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*, that's where any and all help always begins. Just open your Bible, and the first thing you see is, "In the beginning, God." Everything not only begins with God, it continues with God until we dwell in the house of the LORD forever. He is our alpha and omega, the beginning and the end (Rev. 1:8).

We have something far better than a bucket list: You know, fulfilling a list of things that we want to do before we kick the bucket. There is only one thing, or should I say, one person who should permeate that list (Ps. 73:25). That is the Lord.

Rebecca Mead writes at *The New Yorker* that the bucket list: "[P]artakes of a commodification of cultural experience, in which every expedition made and every artwork encountered is reduced to an item on a checklist to be got through, rather than being worthy of repeated or extended engagement. Dropping by Stonehenge for ten minutes and then announcing you've crossed it off your bucket list suggests that seeing Stonehenge—or beholding the Taj Mahal, or visiting the Louvre, or observing a pride of lions slumbering under a tree in the Maasai Mara—is something that, having been done, can be considered done with." An alternative? She suggests "enduring wonder"—the acknowledgment that the most powerful things in life require commitment, something bigger than a checkmark on a proverbial list.³

The only enduring wonder is God Himself! So let us always begin everything with the wonder of wonders. This Psalm begins with "The LORD." What a phenomenal name it is. It speaks of someone who is awesome to behold. The word *phenomenal* means: something amazing – Syn. marvel, wonder, miracle, sensational . . ."⁴ Phrases like highly extraordinary, remarkably awesome, and amazingly unprecedented come to my mind. God is the most fascinating and

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interesting person there is and so stupendous that we would have no hope of knowing Him unless He were to stoop down to reveal Himself to us—and He has (John 1:1,14)! By giving us His various names, He has put the cookies on the bottom shelf. The name *LORD* is Jehovah or Yahweh, one among many names that God has given us, and that name has many different forms:

Compounds with the Name

1. *Yahweh Jireh*, the Lord will provide (Gen. 22:14). After the angel of the Lord pointed to a ram to use as a substitute for Isaac, Abraham named the place, The Lord Will Provide.
2. *Yahweh Nissi*, the Lord is my banner” (Ex. 17:15). After the defeat of the Amalekites, Moses erected an altar and called it Yahweh Nissi.
3. *Yahweh Shalom*, the Lord is peace (Judg. 6:24).
4. *Yahweh Sabaoth*, the Lord of hosts (1 Sam. 1:3). This is a military figure that pictures Yahweh as the commander of the angelic armies of heaven as well as the armies of Israel (1 Sam. 17:45). The title reveals the sovereignty and omnipotence of God and was used often by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah to remind the people during times of national crisis that God was their leader and protector.
5. *Yahweh Maccaddeshcem*, the Lord who sanctifies you (Ex. 31:13).
6. *Yahweh Roi*, the Lord is my shepherd (Ps. 23:1).
7. *Yahweh Tsidkenu*, the Lord our righteousness (Jer. 23:6).
8. *Yahweh Shammah*, the Lord is there (Ezek. 48:35).
9. *Yahweh Elohim Israel*, the Lord, the God of Israel (Judg. 5:3; Isa. 17:6).

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Strictly speaking, these compounds are not additional names of God, but designations or titles that often grew out of commemorative events. However, they do reveal additional facets of the character of God.⁵

Yahweh or Jehovah is what this Psalm is all about from beginning to end. Realizing that our life is all about knowing this eternal one is the key that unlocks every door. Focusing on Him is the first step toward healing as we journey through this life. Until we get our eyes off ourselves, we will never survive the brutal barbarians that often force themselves upon us. The worst thing about them being within us is that we are living with a monster—and it's not your wife, it's the self-monster! This Psalm continually confronts and comforts us with the LORD:

The LORD: Psalm 23:1

Twice He: vs. 2

Three times He: vs. 3

Three times You: vs. 4

Twice You: vs. 5

The LORD: vs. 6

Now it will seem to the misinformed that we are spending an inordinate amount of time on this first point, but it must be understood that it is the LORD who permeates this entire Psalm. Without understanding who He is, we study this entire passage in vain. It is the LORD who makes this Psalm so beautiful, wonderful, and profitable. I like the way A. W. Tozer put it:

That's why Psalm 23 is so beautiful—because it honors God. And so it is with the whole Bible itself; it is a shining, beautiful book. It is lovely whether bound in the cheapest paper or the most expensive leather, whether printed on newsprint or the finest Indian paper. It is a beautiful book.

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Theology itself is a beautiful thing, beautiful because it is the mind reasoning about God. It is the mind down on its knees in a state of breathless devotion, reasoning about God—or it should be.⁶

Before we get to this particular title, let us say a word to our lost friends who may have joined us in our study so far. You may be questioning the fact of God's existence altogether. For many of us who grew up in America in the 50s, God's existence was a given. We never had to plow through diverse gods but understood, as the Bible clearly declares, that there is but one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19, notice that *name* is singular).

Sadly, this scriptural truth is no longer a normal, accepted truth. And when God is left out, stupidity is let in! We open the door to perverted thinking, such as, we are in control of the planet's climate, and we begin to embrace such crazy thoughts like the universe just created itself or evolved through an evolutionary process. This thinking is atheistic or agnostic at best.

While faith is always needed and we certainly cannot prove God's existence in a scientific lab, this bold claim that God does not exist is indefensible. I want to ask such a person if he knows everything there is to know. Even the most brazen among us would have to admit that they have no such knowledge. We might continue in our questioning with, "Do you even know half of everything there is to know." No doubt only a few would dare to presume to know half of all the knowledge there is. Well then, is it not a fair question to ask if God could be in that half you know nothing about? Just because one has no knowledge of something, does not mean it does not exist. I'm sure our missionary friends could testify to the difficulty in trying to

describe ice to the natives living in the equator region. Ice is water so hard that you could actually walk upon it must have had them rolling in the aisles. But the reality remains that ice does exist and so does God.

If we reject God, what are we left with to explain the universe? Is all of this stuff unreal—just an illusion? I guess if you go that route, it doesn't really matter, since the one coming up with this nonsense might be an illusion themselves!

Others say everything came from nil (short for nothing), just a sort of spontaneous generation, or to say it plainly, something came from nothing. You know the drill: chance + time and space = universe. Sounds spacey to me! It, in effect, tells us that the creation is self-created. But if the creation was there, how could it be said to be—and not be—at the same time? If it's already there why would it need to create itself?

Just thinking out loud here. If thinking people have trouble with the universe being unreal or coming from nil, how about saying the universe is eternal. Kind of a Big Bang theory where everything was in an eternal state of existence and then *bang*, instead of blowing everything to smithereens, everything is blown into a well-ordered system. Huh? I wonder if you dropped a bomb out in the Sierra Desert if you would come up with Disneyland. I wonder where this eternal unexploded stuff came from in the first place. What caused this stuff to just explode? You will forgive me if I sound skeptical, but mama didn't raise no fools in our family.

This little book does not have the space or desire to get side tracked on such matters, but I just wanted to give you a few nuggets to think about—a little food for thought. Why not check our brains back in and realize that the only sane explanation for the universe is a personal and powerful, eternal God who created it all. The cosmological argument

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says every effect must have an adequate cause, but the only adequate cause for the universe's existence would be a self-existent God. When I was a kid, which seems like a billion years ago, we went to Mount Rushmore. Nobody in their right mind would think that those clearly defined presidents just happened based on erosion and wind! The effect demands a cause. And we're not talking about a self-caused God, but a self-existent being. God did not have to create Himself, which is an impossibility, because He is not an effect. He is the uncaused cause of all things who is the eternal being (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:20).

We could add to this the teleological argument that since the universe shows order and design, there must be an intelligent designer behind it all. If I am walking down the street and find a watch I must assume there is a watchmaker. A watch is far too complicated to have just come together by itself.

To these we could add the anthropological argument. Since there are moral and intelligent, living beings, there must be a moral and intelligent supreme being who created them. The Creator cannot be an impersonal being since we see before us the existence of persons. I can imagine creating a pulpit but I cannot for the life of me, imagine a pulpit creating me!

Still not convinced? Well, it is not really in my job description to convince you. Let me just leave it with the theological argument: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). You can either take it or leave it, but I just thought you should at least think about it.

Now back to our Psalm and to those of us who, by God's grace and work, not only believe but gladly believe and know that we know, that God not only exists, but that we have entered into an intimacy with Him that makes life worth living.

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Well, we come to the phenomenal, the LORD, which is a proper name for God. Notice it is not *a* lord but *the* LORD. Keep in mind that David wrote this when there was thought to be a plurality of gods. But David knew that there was only one LORD, one eternal God in existence. Since David wrote this Psalm under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16–17), we will continually take a peek back at his life. The LORD was with David (1 Sam. 16:18; 18:12). The LORD was David's deliverer and constant source of encouragement. Just to look at one example of this let us turn to 1 Samuel 30:1–6, NAS:

Then it happened when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had made a raid on the Negev and on Ziklag, and had overthrown Ziklag and burned it with fire; and they took captive the women *and all* who were in it, both small and great, without killing anyone, and carried *them* off and went their way. When David and his men came to the city, behold, it was burned with fire, and their wives and their sons and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted their voices and wept until there was no strength in them to weep. Now David's two wives had been taken captive, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. Moreover David was greatly distressed because the people spoke of stoning him, for all the people were embittered, each one because of his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

This illustrates that the LORD is enough! Stepping back, we should consider the entire context, which is 1 Samuel 29–30. We might outline it like this:

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- I. David's rejection, 1 Samuel 29:1–10
 - A. The inspection, vss. 1–2
 - B. The indignation, vss. 3–5
 - C. The interaction between Achish and David, vss. 6–10
 1. Achish praise of David, vss. 6–7
 2. David's protest to Achish, vss. 8–10
- II. David's return to Ziklag, vs. 11
- III. David's ruin, 1 Samuel 30:1–6
 - A. His city is trashed, vs. 1
 - B. His wives were taken, vss. 2–5
 - C. His life was threatened, vs. 6a
- IV. David's reaction, 1 Samuel 30:6b–10
 - A. He focused on God's presence, vs. 6b
 - B. He found one of God's promises, vss. 7–10

Notice that he “strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” Here he is, without family, city, or prosperity, and yet he could say that the LORD was his God. What a blessed reduction! He was brought to the place where there was nobody to rely upon but the LORD!

One of my favorite books to read and reread is *The Pursuit of God* by A. W. Tozer. He writes:

The evil habit of seeking *God and* effectively prevents us from finding God in full revelation. In the *and* lies our great woe. If we omit the *and* we shall soon find God, and in Him we shall find that for which we have all our lives been secretly longing. We need not fear that in seeking God only we may narrow our lives or restrict the motions of our expanding hearts. The opposite is true. We can well afford to make God our All, to concentrate, to sacrifice the many for the One . . . The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One.⁷

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Dan Crawford was the successor to David Livingstone, and after his death they found a well-used Bible in his pocket. In the front were the words: "I cannot do it alone! The waves dash fast and high: the fog comes chill around, and the light goes out in the sky. But I know that we two shall win in the end—Jesus and I. Coward and wayward and weak, I change with the changing sky; today so strong and brave, tomorrow too weak to fly. But He never gives up, so we two shall win—Jesus and I."⁸

That was David, not really exceptional but tied into the phenomenal LORD. Is that not true of us also. I have often been called a nut, and I just smile and say, "Yea, but I'm on the right bolt!"

So who is this Yahweh? We could spend the rest of this book just looking at that awesome name, but here is a good summary by Tony Evans:

The four consonants in this self-revealing name of God form what is called the tetragrammaton. In fact, the literal translation of the word "tetragrammaton" is simply "the four letters." They are the letters *yud*, *hay*, *vay*, and *hay*. The combination of these consonants is derived from a word that means "to be." Because all four letters are consonants, the vowels from the Hebrew word for *Adonai* were later added in order to help us pronounce the name . . . YHWH, meaning "I am the existing one."⁹

Its exact pronunciation is debated. This use of the word, I'm told, occurs 6,828 times. The word appears in every period of biblical Hebrew. God chose it as His personal name by which He related it specifically to His chosen or covenant people, Israel. The compound names of Jehovah or Yahweh in the Old Testament reflect the contents of this Psalm:

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- “I shall not want”—Jehovah-Jireh, “the Lord will provide” (Gen. 22:14)
- “still waters”—Jehovah-Shalom, “the Lord our peace” (Judg. 6:24)
- “restores my soul”—Jehovah-Rophe, “the Lord who heals” (Ex. 15:26)
- “paths of righteousness”—Jehovah-Tsidkenu, “the Lord our righteousness” (Jer. 33:16)
- “you are with me”—Jehovah-Shammah, “the Lord is there” (Ezek. 48:35)
- “presence of my enemies”—Jehovah-Nissi, “the Lord our banner” (Ex. 17:15)
- “anoint my head”—Jehovah-M’Kaddesh, “the Lord who sanctifies” (Lev. 20:8)

There is none like Him! He is the eternal self-existent one, in a class all by Himself. This is the concept of transcendence. Think of it! It was told to Moses that the LORD is the, I AM THAT I AM (Ex. 3:13–14). I AM_____. (Fill in the blank!) I AM before, over, and above all else. I AM your resource, power source, and recourse! I AM outside of time and inside of you to be your sufficiency. I AM your GPS to get you through life. Talk about surviving! That’s the understatement of the year. God is so beyond our capacity that we may just sit before Him in stunned loving wonder at this Supreme Being who is the one who sits in solitude. It takes a lifetime to even scratch the surface of the timeless God who inhabits eternity. But it is an investment of our time, time well spent, that beats anything the stock market might offer. Such thoughts stir our heart to praise the LORD! Just in this one name alone, we see holiness, eternity, self-existence, and thus self-sufficiency. In 1791, John Wesley lay on his deathbed at the age of eighty-eight. Despite Wesley’s extreme weakness, he began singing the hymn, “I’ll Praise

My Maker While I've Breath.”¹⁰ As we journey through life, we do it with a phenomenal LORD, who is praiseworthy (Ps. 34:1–3; 61:8; 71:8; 119:164; 147:1).

George Fredrick Handel at fifty-seven years old was hopelessly in debt and deeply depressed. He was visited by Charles Jennens who gave him a collection of biblical excerpts under the title of *A Sacred Oratorio*. As Handel began to read through it, God touched his heart, and he began to think in terms of Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. He began to write and compose. He remained in seclusion for twenty-four days! He came out with the musical masterpiece, *The Messiah*. He later said, “I think I did see all heaven before me, and the great God Himself.”¹¹

If we would just get our eyes off ourselves and onto our phenomenal LORD, life would take on new meaning. The French philosopher Marcel Proust had it right when he said, “The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.”¹² This is what we need, new eyes to see God with, something every believer has but needs to learn to use (2 Kings 6:17; Eph. 1:18). We are talking about learning to perceive the manifested presence of God, something I wrote about in my book, *Spiritual Survivor Man*.

Thoughts about God should dominate our thinking; it is this rich meditation that is often missing in our lives. No we cannot take it all in, but what we can take in will give us far more zing than a V8! I might take my little bucket, you know the one with the list in it, down to the ocean and fill it full; it does not contain the entire ocean, but all that it contains of the ocean will cause it to be overwhelmed. Oh how God will cause our midget brains to be overwhelmed and overflowing with joy unspeakable and full of glory! He is the only real thing we can count on in this roller coaster world.

THE PHENOMENAL

Lloyd Douglas author of *The Robe* lived in a boarding-house in his old age. Each morning he would ask his teacher the same question, “Well, what’s the good news?”

The teacher would tap his tuning fork and say, “That’s middle C! It was middle C yesterday; it will be middle C tomorrow; it will be middle C a thousand years from now.”¹³

He is the only one sure constant in our lives, everything else changes and usually not for the good. These days watching the daily news is like watching the *Late Show*, sort of scary. Max Lucado said it well:

God—our Shepherd—doesn’t check the weather; He makes it. He doesn’t defy gravity; He created it . . . Since no act brought Him forth, no act can take Him out. Does He fear an earthquake? Does He tremble at a tornado? Hardly . . . You don’t need what Dorothy found. Remember her discovery in the Wonderful Wizard of Oz? She and her trio followed the yellow brick road only to discover that the wizard was a wimp!¹⁴

God is anything but a wimp, and He is more wonderful than words could ever express. If we would just learn to look “unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2) we would find goose bumps big enough to hang a hat on them!

I’m reminded of the movie, *City Slickers*. It was about three unsatisfied city slickers who headed out to the Wild West in search of some meaning to life. They meet a rugged old cowboy named Curly. He tells them the secret to life is to find the “one thing.” He never really tells us what that one thing is—but I can! And it is not something different for each of us. That one thing is a personal relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ! We were made by God and for God and as Augustine put it, “You have

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made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”¹⁵ That one thing is not to be found in sex, success, schooling, or silver and gold. Time to stop searching and start finding, but only God will fill the bill. David Roper writes:

Why do we keep on seeking? Simply put: we have to. Our seeking is a stirring of absolute need, one that must be satisfied—our eternal need for God. Every desire, every aspiration, every hunger and thirst, every longing of our nature is nothing less than desire for God. As G. K. Chesterton said, even when men knock on the door of a brothel they are looking for God. We were born for His love and we cannot live without it. He is that “one thing” for which we have been looking all our lives.¹⁶

What is leaving us so empty and unfulfilled is that we are preoccupied with froth and cotton candy substance. All the while, God is waiting for us to acknowledge and enter into His presence. He stands at the door and knocks, wanting to enter into a fellowship that will give us inner peace and satisfaction (Rev. 3:20). But often we were just not listening and paying attention to Him. Pastor David Shelley shares a personal story that illustrates the problem. He writes:

My amazingly faithful wife, Lorie, married an introvert. She did not know all that she was getting into, but she experienced something strange early on in our marriage. Often she would ask a question, and she would not get an immediate response. This had to be awkward for her, and she shows, to this day, extraordinary patience with me. The question might be simple. I am sitting at the table and reading. She has set food before me. She opens the refrigerator door and asks, “What would you like to drink?” She expects an immediate, one-word answer, such as “tea.” What she gets is silence and a puzzled

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expression. What she did not know at first was that, as an introvert, I do not automatically move her question to the front of the line. I am preoccupied with another important train of thought, and her question has not even registered, to say nothing of checking in and phoning home. As an introvert, an inner conversation is already going on inside of me, and the giver of sustenance is put on hold. She may give me a drink of her own choice, or she may give me nothing, because I am not responsive to her words. Like my wife, God speaks, but we are too preoccupied with ourselves to respond. Are we aware that the one giving us sustenance at this very moment has spoken? The source of every good gives us life and everything necessary to live it in relation with him. He speaks that we might be sustained and refreshed in our knowledge of him. The most offensive thing we can do is refuse to enter the conversation.¹⁷

Let's determine to enter into a conversation with God. And how is that even possible? Are we to hear voices from beyond? Enter some sort of twilight zone? No, God has and is speaking to us through His Word, the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16–17). Get into it, and it will get into you! And when we do, we will find that the author is an eternal, self-existent LORD who is always there for you. As we study this Psalm we will find:

I shall not lack rest or provision. Why? He makes me lie down in green pastures.

I shall not lack peace. Why? He leads me beside quiet waters.

I shall not lack restoration or encouragement when I faint, fail, or fall. Why? He restores my soul.

I shall not lack guidance or fellowship. Why? He guides me in the paths of righteousness.

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I shall not lack courage when my way is dark. Why? Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil.

I shall not lack companionship. Why? You are with me. I shall not lack comfort. Why? Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

I shall not lack protection and honor. Why? You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

I shall not lack power. Why? You have anointed my head with oil.

I shall not lack abundance. Why? My cup overflows.

I shall not lack God's perpetual presence. Why? Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

I shall not lack security. Why? I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.¹⁸

Psalm 23: Children's Version

The Lord is my Shepherd,
I will have all I need.

A good shepherd takes care of his sheep.

He brings them to rest
in green meadows,
and he leads them to drink
cool water from quiet streams.

God takes care of me just as well.

He shows me the right way to go,
so all the world will see
that God is good.

A good shepherd watches over his sheep.

He reaches out with his staff
and pulls them out of trouble,
and with his rod
he protects them from danger.

So even when things look dark and scary,
I will not be afraid,
because God is with me.

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When trouble seems to be all around,
God prepares a feast for me.
I am his special guest,
and his blessings overflow.

God's goodness and forgiveness
will be with me all of my life,
and I will live with him forever.¹⁹