

**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 love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

The LORD is my shepherd. My comfort. My protector. My master.
The LORD chose me. Chose us. Chose humanity.
Chooses me. Chooses us. Chooses humanity.

Our story begins with YHVH.

The LORD called us and calls us by name, as a community. *Wits' End*, he says.
*I am your God. I am your true father. Your true mother. You are my children. My sheep.
You are the ones for which I gave up everything, and I call you my own. I call you. I call you. I am calling
you. Do you hear me? Are you listening to my voice? Are you listening for my voice?*

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. But I want. *Oh*, do I want. I want so much, so desperately, so deeply. I have so much need. So much desire. I am always searching for more, searching for safety beyond myself: money, shelter, possessions, people, cars, bars, the stars beyond my reach. When is enough? Who is enough? Do you provide?

You provide. Yes, we confess in our obsession of possession that you provide what we need, even though we do not see. You give us more than enough. When have we gone without food? When have we lived without shelter? You nourish our bodies and cover our heads. Warm beds. Food that keeps us fed.

And yet we want. We have so much and still we want for more.

God, our king, our shepherd, open our eyes to what we have and open our hands to give to others. We have enough, more than enough, so much so that you have enabled us to give to our neighbors, our friends, the stranger and the foreigner. What we want is a new desire to give and give and give and give and give and give and give until we think we can give no more...and then you give again, that we may give again.

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He makes me lie down in green pastures**

Without you, there are no green pastures. Without you, our anxiety and fear would prevent us from ever resting, ever nesting, ever laying down in the vast expanse of calm that you provide. You are a God who

stays up through the night, constantly keeping watch on all of your children. We may rest because you do not.

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You quench our thirst in the most subtle of ways. When we wake up in the morning, dew covers the ground. In the mid-day in our rainiest of cities, water falls from the heavens. If we walk to the east we are confronted with the lake. If we walk to the west we are overtaken by the sound. You, God, quench our thirst. To our right and to our left, above us and below us, in front of us and behind us. The water is so constant that we forget that it is there. May it not be so. May the water remind us of you, of your calm presence like the persistent drizzle and of your mighty presence like a roaring storm.

You have restored our souls. You restore our souls. You will restore our souls.

You are always working towards the restoration of all things, the renewal of all things. As you restore us you call us into the same work. You restore so that we may restore. God make us into a redemptive community. Heal our hearts, our wounds, our broken bodies, so much so that we are able to break our bodies and pour out our blood for the people that we interact with every day, in the office, on the bus, in the market and in our homes.

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It is for your sake that we live. Your paths are true. Your paths are righteous.
Lead us down paths of loving others more than we love ourselves.
Lead us to lay down our needs for the needs of others.
Lead us to be least, to be lowly.
Lead us to be light in the dark.
Lead us to be healers in a broken land.
Lead us to be humble men and women.
Lead us to give out of what we have.
Lead us to see what you see and hear what you hear.
Lead us into goodness, truth, love, and redemption.
Lead us towards kindness, grace, peace and patience.

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Friday, Saturday, & Sunday. Death, grief, and new life.

They are inevitable. Unavoidable. These valleys, these low points, low ground, low places, the depths without faces. Where are you, God? Where have the days gone when you were so easily seen? So intimately felt? Where is your provision and protection? We cannot see. The darkness is all around us. We cannot even *walk* through the valley. We crawl, one hand in front of the other, trying desperately to move forward.

But we know, we believe, that death is not the end of the story. You do not let us stay stagnate. You are there, in the depths, with a staff to help us along. You hold a rod in your hand to fend off evil and protect us from harm. No, I will not fear evil, because you have triumphed over evil. You broke the cycle of sin and death when you rose from the grave, forever changing the course of history. Your Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Sunday comforts us.

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You anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

You provide. May it always be on our tongues. May we never grow tired of remembering and repeating and repeating and repeating that *you provide*. You give a daily anointing of oil on our heads. The cool balm slowly runs over our faces, creating a layer of protection and comfort. We have more than enough. We will say it again: We have more than enough.

We have enough food. Enough clothing. Enough space. Enough time. Enough land. Our cups overflow with what you have given. We acknowledge that communally.

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You go before us, but what do we leave behind?
Do we leave behind a blessing or a curse?
Do we leave behind peace or war?
Do we leave behind forgiveness or resentment?
Do we leave behind mercy or vengeance?

May we be a people who leave goodness and love in our paths.
May we be a church that leaves light where there once was darkness, healing where there was wounds, abundance where there was emptiness, and peace where there was war.

And yes, we will dwell in your house, your family forever. The story of humanity begins with YHWH and ends with YHWH. You are the beginning and the end.

May we be a people of your story.
May we be a people of your provision.
May we be a people of your healing.
May we be a people of your giving.
May we be a people who leave goodness and love in our paths.
And may we be a people who dwell with you, in the kingdom now and in the age to come.

Amen.