

PATHS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

*Psalm 23 in the Lives of Faithful Missionaries
& Witnesses for Christ*



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Preface

Psalm 23 is the most recognized and beloved Psalm in all of Scripture. David, the author, was himself a shepherd, and later became known as the “Shepherd King” of Israel. But Psalm 23 is about David’s experience not as a shepherd, but as a well-cared-for sheep in the flock of God.

In this short poem, David boasts in the character of the shepherd. It’s almost as if he’s saying, “Look who my shepherd is!” He understood the well-being of the flock depended on the type of shepherd who owned them. Some shepherds were kind, brave, and selfless, devoting themselves to the care of their flock. Other shepherd-owners were indifferent, uncaring, and the sheep languished and starved under their careless leadership.

Psalm 23 paints a picture of the flourishing environment sheep experience under the loving care, faithful provision, and watchful protection with the Lord as their shepherd. Let’s read Psalm 23 and be reminded of this beautiful relationship of a shepherd to his sheep. David says...

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

He leads 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 shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

It's clear from these six verses, David was thrilled that he belonged to the Lord. He knew that under the Lord's loving leadership, he would flourish and thrive no matter what dark valleys he had to travel. Saints throughout history have experienced this same tender, protective, and merciful care in the flock of God.

Paths of the Righteous looks at the lives of missionaries and faithful witnesses of Christ, and how they experienced the Good Shepherd's rest, protection, provision, comfort, and hope. We'll walk alongside the well-worn paths of these righteous saints, as they navigated through dark and shadowy valleys, and experienced the Lord's care.

How to Use This Book

Paths of the Righteous is short enough to be enjoyed in one sitting. However, you'll receive the most benefit from slowing down and considering one story per day. You'll be reacquainted with some famous saints you may already know, and hopefully, a few you'll want to learn more about. You can expand your study by looking up the additional verses and journaling through the questions provided at the end. By studying the paths of these righteous saints, you'll also see your life's story reflected in the gracious care of your shepherd.

Inside you'll discover how...

- A disabling fall threatened to undo Amy Carmichael's ministry. She learned being made to lie down to rest, gave her plenty of time to expand her writing ministry.
- The grandfather of global missions, Hudson Taylor, experienced the life-changing results of learning to rest in the character of the shepherd.
- Corrie and Betsie ten Boom felt the comfort and presence of walking with Jesus through a literal valley of death.
- Little 4'10" Gladys Alyward had no business breaking up a prison riot and yet she did, and God miraculously protected her.
- In the middle of a war zone, Lillian Trasher trusted in God's provision for the nearly 1,000 orphans in her care, and how God miraculously filled her cup to overflowing.
- The brutal murder of five Christian missionaries in Ecuador, looked to the outside world, to be a senseless tragedy. But God used their suffering to redeem many lives, including the ones who thrust the fatal blows.

Paths of the Righteous is not about perfect Christians who always rested in the character of their shepherd. On the contrary. These stories may belong to 'Giants of the Faith,' but they were just ordinary people who, through extraordinary circumstances learned to rest in the care of their shepherd. Now their stories belong to us so we can proclaim them to the next generation.

May we join with the Shepherd King, David, Amy, Hudson, Corrie, Gladys, Lillian, Nate, and Mincaye, that through our own trials and dark valleys, we have nothing to fear, for "The Lord is *our* shepherd."

Day 1: Amy Carmichael

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. (Psalm 23:1-2, ESV)

Amy Carmichael was an Irish-born missionary who served in India from 1897 until her death in 1951. One night, a seven-year-old girl named Preena escaped from a nearby Hindu temple and made her way to Amy's house. Through Preena, Amy uncovered one of the darkest secrets of India and realized this was why God had sent her there. In order to earn favor with their gods, parents would often sell their young children into a life of unspeakable horrors as temple prostitutes.



Amy courageously protected any who came to her, which often landed her in trouble with the law. At one point, she was in danger of serving seven years for “kidnapping” children away from the temple and she was often threatened with arrest. While Amy's work often put her in harm's way, she mostly battled for the children in prayer.

Over the course of her ministry, she cared for over 1,000 children. When the children were asked what drew them to Amy, they most often replied, “Amma (Tamil for ‘mother’) loved us.”

But in 1931, at the age of 63, Amy suffered a serious fall. At first, it was thought she had broken a few bones, but over time the extent of her injury became clearer. She had permanently damaged her spine and would be bedridden the rest of her life. The reality of these new limitations was difficult for her to accept. The caregiver had now become the care receiver.

He Makes Me Lie Down

For the last 20 years of Amy's life, she was confined to her bedroom that she referred to as the Room of Peace. The rest she initially resisted, opened new ways for Amy to extend her ministry through writing. From the Room of Peace, she wrote 35 books, countless poems, devotionals, and stories. Though she is now at rest with the Lord, her work and her words live on.

The shepherd provides his beloved sheep with rest. In our lives, our shepherd provides times of refreshment next to green pastures and still waters, and sometimes he makes us lie down and rest. Amy Carmichael reminds us that when he makes us lie down, we can still be useful. With our shepherd, we lack nothing and find true contentment in his care.

Additional Verses: Matthew 11:28-30, Psalm 46:10, Psalm 23:1-2

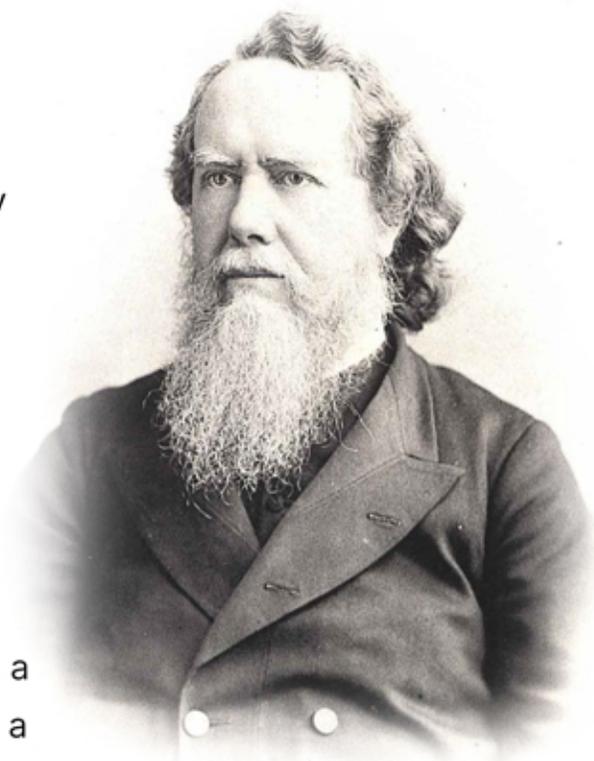
Questions to Consider:

- Psalm 23:1-2 reminds us of the contentment the Lord's sheep have in his presence. How are you experiencing contentment with your walk with the Lord right now? If you're lacking contentment, where in your life do you need to refocus your attention on your shepherd?
- Has the Lord ever made you rest when you didn't want to? How did you respond?
- Amy's room, which could've been a symbol of her confinement, became her Room of Peace. How can you find peace and contentment in your current situation?

Day 2: Hudson Taylor

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:3, ESV)

Hudson Taylor was the first Christian missionary to go into the interior of mainland China. Many believers in China today can trace their spiritual heritage back to his ministry. His work established a Christian presence in the country before the Communist takeover in the early 1900s. His ministry produced over 125,000 converts and 800 hundred missionaries who scattered over all the provinces of China. But as a young man, he was skeptical and thought being a Christian meant his life would be dull and boring.



One day, at age 17, he was home alone and looking for something to read and found a track in his father's study. While he was reading, he was struck by the phrase, "the finished work of Christ." Immediately, he recalled Jesus' words, "It is finished!" He realized no amount of striving or good works could save him, but his debt had been paid in full at the cross. It was at that moment he surrendered his life to Christ.

One hundred miles away at the exact same time, his mother, who was visiting a friend, had gone into her room to pray for Hudson's salvation. For hours she prayed until she felt her prayers were answered. Two weeks later when she returned home, Hudson met her at the door with the happy news. She hugged him and said, "I know my boy, I've been rejoicing for a fortnight."

He Restores Souls that Rest in Him

Many years later in China, Hudson struggled to find joy under the weight and never-ending strain of his work. One day, he received a letter from a friend and fellow missionary, John McCarthy, who shared a recent revelation he had about abiding in Christ and finding spiritual rest.

As he read the letter Hudson said, "I saw it all. I looked to Jesus, and when I saw it oh, how joy flowed!" It was such a pivotal moment in his life that his co-laborers noticed a difference and said of him, "Mr. Taylor went out, a new man in a new world, to tell what the Lord had done for his soul."

Finding rest comes from understanding the relationship of the sheep to the Shepherd. When Hudson Taylor fully grasped this truth, it transformed his life and his work.

If you're striving to find spiritual rest today, consider afresh the character of your Shepherd, Jesus. To know him is to trust him, and to trust him is to love him. He is the longing of our hearts, and in him, our souls find true rest.

Additional Verses: John 15:1-17, Galatians 2:20, Psalm 23:3

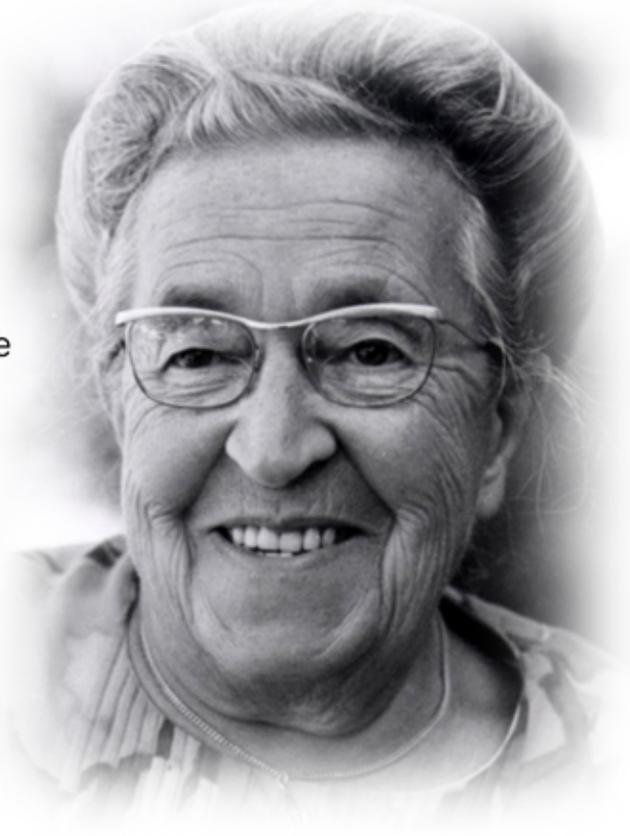
Questions to Consider:

- Hudson Taylor's mother is an example of perseverance in prayer for the salvation of her son. It's hard to fathom what the world would have lost if Hudson had not come to Christ. Be encouraged today to keep praying for your loved ones to know Christ.
- Are you feeling crushed by the burdens of work? Hudson Taylor understood this well. He wrote to his sister, "As to work, mine has never been so plentiful, so responsible, or so difficult; but the weight and strain are all gone. How must I get my faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One." Turn your eyes to the Faithful One and unburden your heart to him today!

Day 3: Corrie Ten Boom

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; (Psalm 23:4a, ESV)

Corrie ten Boom lived in Holland with her family during World War II. As Christians, they were horrified by the atrocities being carried out by the Nazis and began to quietly acquire food ration cards and help hide Jews in their home. In Corrie's bedroom, they built a hidden room no bigger than a small wardrobe closet, to hide the Jews when the Gestapo came to the door. The hidden room helped an estimated 800 Jews hide and escape from certain death. However, Corrie, her sister, Betsie, and her father, were eventually caught and sent to the German concentration camp, Ravensbruck.



Even living through the horrors inside the concentration camp, God's presence was tangible to Corrie and Betsie. One bitterly cold morning, their cruel taskmaster ordered the women outside for roll call an hour earlier than usual. Corrie and Betsie walked hand-in-hand by a different route to the square. On their right, were the outlines of the barracks, crematorium, and gas chamber, and on their left, the guards paced along the watchtowers with machine guns drawn.

In a true valley of the shadow of death, they prayed. Corrie recounted, "We were three as we walked with the Lord and talked with him. Betsie spoke. Then I spoke. Then the Lord spoke. How? I do not know. But both of us understood."

"Isn't this a bit of Heaven?" Betsie said. "Lord, one day we'll talk with you face-to-face, but even now you are giving us the joy of walking and talking with you."

Walking Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Betsie died in Ravensbruck. But Corrie was later released due to a “clerical error” and went on to share her story with millions worldwide. Corrie and Betsie literally walked through the valley of the shadow of death and yet experienced a little slice of heaven communing with God. The world cannot understand, nor experience this kind of peace. It is reserved for those who belong to the Shepherd. Whatever valley you are going through today, be reminded that he is there with you, and if that is true, you have nothing to fear.

Additional Verses: Psalm 32:7, Daniel 6, Psalm 23:4

Questions to Consider:

- Valleys and shadows of death are the things fear is made up of. It’s natural and human to fear the darkness. But Psalm 23:4 reminds us of the powerful truth that God is with us in those times of darkness. Where have you seen/felt/experienced God’s presence as you’ve walked through valleys and shadows of death?
- How can you focus your attention away from the valleys and shadows and set your focus on your shepherd?
- What are some of your favorite scriptures to go to when you’re feeling fearful? How does memorizing scripture help you battle fear in the midst of trials?

Day 4: Gladys Aylward

your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

(Psalm 23:4b, ESV)

Gladys Aylward was a British-born missionary who served in Yangcheng, China from 1932 until her death in 1970. As a young missionary, she endeared herself to the Chinese people by her warm hospitality, her care for orphans, and helping end the cruel practice of foot binding.

One day, she received a summons from the mandarin to go assist the prison warden to stop a riot. Fear and dread instantly overwhelmed her. What could she, a small, foreign woman possibly do to help stop a prison riot? The warden

reasoned that the only one who could stop the men from killing each other was the woman from the village who told everyone the living God was inside of her. Gladys felt sick to her stomach. The harder she tried to back out, the more insistent the warden became that the men wouldn't kill her.

She knew that if she refused to go, word would spread that there was no living God inside Gladys. But if she agreed...there was no telling what would happen. Little 4'10" Gladys was the last person on earth who should have gone in to stop a prison riot, but God was indeed living inside of her. His reputation was as much on the line, as was her life. She knew she had to go.

As Gladys made her way through the tunnel into the prison she prayed, "Oh God, protect and comfort me now. I can only do this if you go before me." The scene at the other end was worse than she had imagined. Dead bodies and blood were everywhere, and a man was running toward her waving a machete. Without thinking, Gladys stepped forward and yelled, "Stop at once, and give me that machete!"



He Makes Me Lie Down

As if an invisible hand held back his arm, the crazed man froze with his machete in mid-air and dropped it to the ground. The unusual scene caught the attention of the other prisoners, and they stopped fighting to watch the little foreign woman bring order to the chaos.

Psalm 23:4 introduces us to the shepherd's tools. With a rod, he beats off predators, and with his staff pulls his sheep away from danger. Gladys experienced the Shepherd's invisible rod that day, as she was divinely protected. Whatever valley you may be facing, be reminded that his protection and discipline are for those that belong to him, and that gives us comfort to walk through the fiercest and darkest valleys.

Additional Verses: John 10:1-21, Psalm 34, Psalm 23:4

Questions to Consider:

- We don't always see all the ways God is protecting us. How have you experienced the shepherd's rod in your life? Do you see the rod as a loving instrument? Why or why not?
- The staff is used to pull back an erring sheep from danger. How has God pulled you back from sin or danger in your life? Do you see the staff as a loving instrument? Why or why not?
- If you had been in Gladys' shoes, how would you have responded to the warden's request to go break up the riot?

Day 5: Lillian Trasher

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (Psalm 23:5, ESV)

Lillian Trasher was an American-born missionary who founded the first orphanage in Egypt in the early 1900s. "Mama Lillian" as she was known, cared for over 10,000 orphans in her lifetime, and the orphanage she began is still in operation today.

By the 1940s the orphanage was home to over 900 children. World War II was shifting in favor of the Allies in the region, but inflation made the operational costs impossible to maintain.

The children's clothes were in tatters, and they were starving, eating only half a cup of lentils each day. Lillian pursued every normal avenue for help, but the entire country was suffering. One night at supper she announced that all schoolwork and chores would be suspended for 24-hours so everyone could pray for God's provision.

The next morning, Lillian received a telegram from the American ambassador to Egypt requesting to see her immediately. She had no idea what the dignitary would have to do with her, so she boarded a train for Cairo. Once there, the ambassador was bursting with news. He explained that Greece had fallen to the Germans, and a Red Cross ship carrying relief supplies intended for Greece was ordered to return to harbor in Alexandria. The ship was at risk for attack, and they were ordered to dump their supplies and head out to sea immediately.

But onboard was a young Scottish sailor, whose mother prayed for Lillian's orphans every day, and who had himself supported Lillian's work in the past.



Knowing their cargo would help the orphans, he begged the captain to unload the cargo instead of dumping it at sea. The sailor was adamant and unrelenting, and finally, the captain agreed.

The ambassador leaned in, "This is why I asked you to come here today. Miss Trasher, do you have the need for food and clothing at this time? We have 2,600 dresses, 1,900 sweaters, 1,900 pairs of pants, 3,800 blankets, 1,100 towels, 700 kegs of powdered milk, 1,200 sacks of rice..." and the list went on and on. Lillian burst into tears. God had heard her prayers and those of the orphans. In the middle of a war, God had prepared a banqueting table overflowing with his divine supply.

My Cup Overflows

Yesterday, Psalm 23:4 reminded us that our Shepherd is an able protector, and today verse 5 shows us he is an abundant provider. Even in the midst of war, and inside enemy territory, the Lord knows the needs of his children and delights to fill their cups to overflowing. Trust him today with the needs that are pressing in your life. He is an abundant provider!

Additional Verses: Matthew 14:13-21, Philippians 4:19, 2 Corinthians 9:8

Questions to Consider:

- Psalm 23:5 reminds us that the Lord makes every possible provision for his sheep. He goes before his sheep even amid danger, war, and enemy territory. He honors them by anointing them with oil. His care is attentive, personal, and generous (it even overflows!). How have you experienced the Lord's abundance in your life?
- Sometimes, like Lillian, we must wait until what feels like the very last minute for his provision to arrive. How have you experienced his timely provision in your life?
- What needs do you have that are pressing on you right now? You can take those needs to him in prayer, and trust that he will provide and take care of all you need.

Day 6: Nate Saint & Mincaye

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23:6, ESV)

On January 8, 1956, five American missionaries were speared to death by a violent tribe of warriors on a sandbar in the heart of the Ecuadorian jungle. These five men, Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, Pete Fleming, and Nate Saint were trying to reach the Waodani Indians with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The missionaries had spent several weeks dropping gifts into the village from a piper airplane piloted by Nate Saint. Encouraged by the friendly connection they thought they were building; the missionaries landed their plane on the beach on that fateful day. But the violent Waodani distrusted the foreigners and speared them all to death.

The tragic news captured worldwide attention. Why would God allow such a tragedy to befall those who loved and served him? It seemed so senseless and sad. That might be true if the story ended there.

Two years after their deaths, Elisabeth (Jim's widow) with her 3-year-old daughter, and Rachel Saint (Nate's sister), went to live among Waodani and resume the unfinished business the men had begun. For three years, the women lived among the people, learned their language, and shared the Gospel. Over the next several years, most of the villagers decided to "walk a new trail" and converted to Christ. Among the new trail-walkers were six men from the murder party, including their brutal leader, Mincaye. He had thrust the final spear into Nate Saint.



Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow

This story of reconciliation and redemption spans over 65 years, but its legacy will live well past that. In an act of reconciliation, only the Lord could orchestrate, Mincaye and Steve (Nate's son) reconciled and Mincaye was adopted as "Grandfather" into Steve's family. Mincaye completed his trail and walked straight into heaven in April 2020.

The senseless tragedy turned into a redemptive story that inspired millions and prompted countless others to go into mission work. God's goodness and mercy are at work in a million different ways in your life too. Until you've completed your trail, pray for eyes to see all the ways his goodness and mercy are chasing after you.

Additional Verses: Psalm 145:4, Genesis 50:20, Lamentations 3:22-23

Questions to Consider:

- David concludes this Psalm by proclaiming that his life both now and in the future will be marked by the goodness and mercy of God. How are you experiencing goodness and mercy right now from God?
- Sometimes we don't see the big picture of all the ways God is working goodness and mercy through the hardships and losses we experience in this life. Be reminded, the story we just read took over 65 years to realize all the ways God was at work. It's still producing fruit today and will in the future. How does this encourage you in your current season of hardship and loss?
- Jim Elliot famously said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Knowing this, do you think the deaths of the missionaries were tragic? Why or why not?
- Psalm 23:6 affirms this truth, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." How does the thought of 'forever' shift your perspective of what's happening in your life today?

Conclusion

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” Hebrews 12:1

Hebrews 11 is known as the Bible’s “Hall of Faith.” In it, we read the mighty acts of faith done by Abel, Abraham, Noah, Moses, and even a prostitute named Rahab. These saints, and many others, make up the great cloud of witnesses that encourage us to run the race set before us with endurance. I have no doubt that the saints I’ve highlighted in this book have joined the ranks of these biblical giants. Their lives, and acts of faith, are meant to encourage us and spur us on to walk in paths of righteousness as well.

Their stories remind us that we too are participating in the greater story of God’s redemption plan. Our lives are being lived out publicly so that our acts of faith, our learning to rest, our walks through dark valleys can point the next generation to know and trust the Good Shepherd. Your life may not end up in the history books, but you can know that the Lord is leading you through paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. He’s your shepherd. Bless his name forever.



About the Author

Cara writes to encourage others to see their walk with the Lord not as a box to check off each day, but as a pursuit of holy leisure. She and her husband run a website and consulting business, Avocado Toast marketing, and they live with their four kids, and two dogs in sunny Gilbert, Arizona. Cara is a contributing author on You Version Bible App, Medium's publication Koinonia, as well as her personal blog.

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