

A Hymn for Life and the Workplace

Once upon a time, a prosperous farming family had eight sons. Seven sons were *muy macho* - high profile and popular. The eighth was the youngest and runt of the litter. He was sent into the hills to look after the sheep.

One day, a prophet came to the village, near the farm. He said to the father, *God wants someone, perhaps, one of your sons, to be king*. He interviewed seven sons, but was not impressed. He asked the father if he had any other sons. With some hesitation, he presented his youngest son. The prophet crowned him, King of Israel.

We know the eighth son as King David, one of history's greatest monarchs. During his forty year reign, he united Israel's factious regions into a peaceful, secure and prosperous nation. He fought and won numerous wars, and survived several political misadventures.

In his personal life, David endured family breakups, the death of his best friend, and the death of children - one of whom had led a national rebellion against him. David was a ladies' man, with a lustful appetite. When an inconvenient husband got in the way, David quietly arranged for an 'occupational accident.' Not surprisingly, David experienced many faith struggles and crises.

As David's workplace and personal adventures multiplied, so did his understanding of God's presence in his life. He shares this with us in one of history's greatest, literary masterpieces, the 23rd Psalm. Its theme is: *You name it. I've been there. Here's what I learned in my experiences with God.*

David's psalm begins by calling the Lord a shepherd. As a former shepherd, and then a king, David understood these words. Lords have power of life and death over their subjects. In David's day, lords usually led by force and coercion. By contrast, shepherds led with persuasion and service. Where lords could be capricious in providing for their subjects, shepherds were dependable in providing for their flocks' needs and wants. Calling God a shepherd defines the leadership model which David experienced in God.

The psalm continues, (God) *makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters*. This is comforting imagery, especially for people in hot, dry regions of the Middle East. But, its meaning goes deeper than comfort. God wants us to be still. In stillness, God revives our souls. From what we know of his work and life, David struggled with learning to be still. But, as he persevered, God helped him succeed. His commitment to being still opened his spirit to God's presence and blessing.

He guides me along right pathways for his name's sake. God gives our lives a sense of direction. God guides us to mountains of joy and success, and through dark valleys of workplace and life troubles. Nothing David did, including murder, changed God's commitment to David. Commitment is who and what God is.

You are with me. David recognized that he was never alone. God never abandoned him, no matter what he did. God is with us by God's choice, not in response to our deeds.

Your rod and staff comfort me. 'Comfort' means 'strengthen.' As a seasoned commander, David knew what it meant to fight in close quarters with an enemy. He appreciated how faithful and dependable God is in protecting God's people.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me...and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord (forever) summarizes David's experiences with God. Whatever David did; whatever happened to him, and wherever he went, he always felt at home in God's presence. He experienced God as his companion. But, he never took God for granted. For all his faults, David was committed to loving and serving God, as best he could. Moreover, he enjoyed being with God!

More than great literature from the past, Psalm 23 can be our hymn of encouragement for our work and lives. Its credibility comes from personal experience. Its good news comes from God's faithfulness and ministry.

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