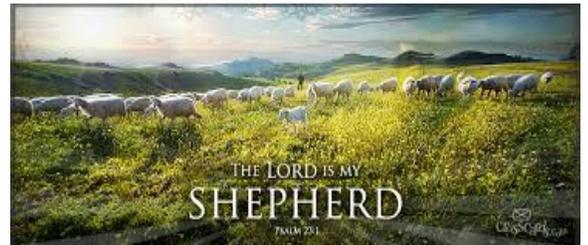


Often when we are familiar with a piece of writing, there is comfort and a feeling of coming home when reading and contemplating the words we are reading ... or remembering. So ... why paraphrase the psalms? On the other hand, sometimes when we are very familiar with a piece of writing, like certain passages of Scripture, we read or recite them without really thinking about the words, how we feel about what is being said, and what they mean for our lives today. Suddenly, we may know we love the psalms but no longer remember why.

If we notice this beginning to happen, when the words leave us flat rather than bringing us home, one of the ways we can get past this feeling is to write a paraphrase using words that mean something to us as we understand them in the text and in our lives. It can help us to wade deeper into living water. So ... let us start with the most familiar psalm of all times ☺ according to the google search engine report of 2014. Psalm 23 makes every top 10 list I found online.

How might we paraphrase Psalm 23 ... seeing the process

Step 1: Read the Psalm from a translated version.
Let's start with the version most people know ...



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.

Get a sense of the underlying feelings of the Psalmist and the worshiping listeners. What overall message is the Psalm writer trying to convey to them?

Step 2: Explore the images you find in the psalm and seek new ways of proclaiming the message of in words and phrases that translate to the situation we find in our world today. Be creative and think not in words but in ideas and give your psalm a sweeping form.

Step 3: Take up a journal ... begin writing in a stream of consciousness with new images, words, and phrases. Let the images grow and become. Let the words and phrases emerge to translate the psalm anew in your own prayer language, a new song!

Step 4: Paraphrase the Psalm with your own images in your own words, phrases, and images ...

Here is my attempt at paraphrasing Psalm 23. For a list of other paraphrases of Psalm 23, turn page over.

O God you are the tender of my soul, I have everything I truly need. You walk with me and invite me to lay down in the green green grass. You walk with me beside the cool calm streams of living water. You refresh me as I breathe all the way to my toes ... You walk with me even as the darkness stalks me in the depths of despair. And yet I have no fear with you by my side. Your Being envelopes my being and I am wrapped in your peace. You sustain me with a feast as those who do not see my value look upon our togetherness. You pour healing oil upon the wounds of my soul and the hands that serve others with your love. I am so filled with love that it flows out of me into the world. O my God, all of your blessings are mine as we walk together. I am eternally bound with you and will dwell in Your Presence, always and forever. Amen. ~Cindy Serio, April 29, 2012

Contemporary Paraphrases of Psalm 23

Lord, you are a shepherd to me, protecting, guiding, so that I need attach myself to no-thing and no-one else. I rest safe in the abundance of your sure love, wombed in the safety of your canopy, renewed as living waters wash over me. Even when the Way seems treacherous to me, on every narrow precipice, you set my feet on solid ground, true to your Rock-solid nature. And when I walk through the darkness of death, I will not fear the shadow. I trust that even then – especially then – you are closer to me than my next breath, comforting, sustaining, shaping me every step of the Way. You give me everything I need to feast on life, bread and wine that my foes know nothing about; your oil poured over me a visible sign of your choosing, your cup poured out before me a visible sign of your passion offered to me. Your generosity and sure love hound me throughout life. And your heart will be my home from now and for all time. Amen.

~Jerry Webber, Sometimes an Unknown Path: 40 Psalm Prayers in Contemplative Voice

O my Beloved, you are my shepherd, I shall not want; you bring me to green pastures for rest and lead me beside still waters renewing my spirit; you restore my soul. You lead me in the path of goodness for follow Love's way. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow and of death, I am not afraid; for you are ever with me; your rod and your staff they guide me, they give me strength and comfort. You prepare a table before me in the presence of all my fears; you bless me with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the heart of the Beloved forever. Amen.

~Nan C. Merrill, Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness

My Mother is my shepherd and I lack nothing. She lays me down in green grass and carries fresh water to me. I can rest in her watchfulness while my soul is restored. She leads me along the path to wholeness. Even when I feel lost in my own darkness, I do not give in to discouragement because I have her with me. Your shepherd's crook and cloak give me comfort, Mother. You prepare a meal for me in full sight of those who are jealous of me. You have bathed me and massaged my head with rich ointments. My cup, filled by you, flows over the brim. Goodness and love surround me and will follow me forever. I will live in your house all the years of my life. Amen. ~Barbara J. Monda, Rejoice, Beloved Woman! The Psalms Revised

God, my shepherd! I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction. Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I'm not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd's crook makes me feel secure. You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing. Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I'm back home in the house of God for the rest of my life. Amen. ~Eugene Peterson, The Message

The Lord Jesus is my Soul Shepherd who meets all my needs and makes me smile. He gets me to stop working and to relax with him in his Father's loving arms. He takes me into a quiet place to be still and know that he is God and I am loved. He heals and rejuvenates my whole being with his grace from the inside out. He holds my hand at the crossroads and walks me onto the path of life. Even though I go through dark and difficult times I don't fear anything bad because you are with me. You discipline me in love and converse patiently with me to bring out the best in me. You prepare a celebration to bless and honor me — right in front of my enemies. You anoint me with your Spirit to minister to others out of the overflow of your love to me. I can count on your generous favor and tender mercy coming to me wherever I go. I will live in the presence of Christ as his beloved in all things and at all times. Amen. ~Bill Gaultiere, SoulShepherding.org