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# Psalm 23

## Phase 1: ORAL



### Step 1: Listen

Listening to a guide translation and versions of the psalm

Listen well to the poem (notice content, emotions and interesting use of language). There are two guide translations in Appendix A:

1. **Hebrew-mirror** - copied from the Exegetical Layout and adjusted for minimal readability,
2. **Guide translation** - the literal, type 1 corresponding (but more readable) translation, exegetically the same as Hebrew-mirror.

**Activity:** Read the Hebrew-mirror and the Hebrew tight version in Appendix A. One reader per translation or one reader for all translations (as skills permit). Others to listen with closed books. Consider 'how to listen' – posture? With responses? In silence?



### Step 2: Familiarise

Explaining and discussing the meaning and beauty of the psalm

Get an overview of the poem (the big picture) - what's the main message? Who is involved? A poem must be understood as 'a whole' (unlike a story).

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PSALM

After listening to the guide translations, please respond to any of the following questions:

- What do you like about the psalm?
- What do you find difficult?
- How does the psalm make you feel?
- Which verse do you find particularly important in this psalm?
- What does this psalm teach you about the LORD? What is the LORD like?
- Are there any noticeable repetitions in this psalm?





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## CREATIVE RESPONSES

- Blessedness, wellness, fulness, state of bliss, abundance, total satisfaction, and so on, are all very high ideas and something very desirable.

**Creative Activity:** Discuss among yourselves what you would think to be the most blissful experience you can imagine.

### **Discuss:**

- The concept of shepherding differs from language to language and culture to culture. The Shepherd. Who does it? Is this position respected? Have you ever met a shepherd?

Shepherding in ancient cultures was a metaphor for good kingship. This Psalm isn't just about being cared for. It's about what it's like to have a good king. Yahweh is Israel's king. This psalm is about YAHWEH (Christ) the Shepherd-king of David, and about YHWH (The Father) the Shepherd-king of Christ Jesus our Lord. Then also as Jesus the Good Shepherd of us individually and as a flock.

**Creative Activity:** how would a shepherd in your culture really protects, leads and makes things well for a flock of sheep? Could the shepherd image be used for royalty or chieftom in your culture?

- What other stories and passages in the Bible talk about shepherds that could help us to understand this metaphor and personification of God? Also notice the connection between shepherding and kingship in 2 Sam 7:8 and Ezek 34:23.

There are New Testament references to shepherding as well: **(see Step 3 Activity 2)**

- John 10:11
- Matthew 18:12-14 & Luke 15:3-7
- Hebrews 13:20
- Isaiah 40:11

## ENGAGING WITH THE WHOLE PSALM

**Facilitator:** address the following topics:

- *The participants in the psalm, the different “speakers” and “audiences”*
- *The historical background and the context of the psalm, the story behind the psalm, if relevant*
- *The theme of the psalm*
- *The flow of the psalm*
- *The potential big picture obstacles*
- *Emotion map*
- *The peak or peaks of the psalm*
- *The genre and purpose of the psalm*
- *Highly important poetic device(s) related to understanding the big picture*
- *How does the psalm point to Christ?*



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**Discuss:**

- Who are the participants in the wider context of this psalm?

**Activity:** Discuss who is speaking to whom in Psalm 23. Who is speaking in Psalm 23? Are there more than one speaker? To whom is he speaking?

- Who are the participants within the poem? Who is being referred to, major as well as minor participants? Who is doing what? Who is speaking in this Psalm?
- Who do you think the poet is addressing? Trace the 2nd- and 3rd-person switches.

**Discuss:**

- What is the psalm about?

**Activity:** Look at verse 1, “The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not lack”. Discuss the feelings these confident words evoke in you.

- What type of song or prayer is this Psalm? Do you have something similar in your language?
- Which one of these peaks or high points is the highest, the most important, in your opinion?
- What message does the psalmist want the hearer to take away with them?
- Make a list of all the things the psalmist is not lacking. There are 12 of them.

**Discuss:** Scene 1

- How can you describe the pleasant scene in vv.1-3a?
- What is the setting for these tranquil images?
- What do the images represent? What are the sheep doing?
- How do the images intensify?

**Discuss:** Scene 2

- How can you describe the dangerous scene in vv.3b-4? What is the setting for fear?
- Why does v.4 follow directly from v.3b?
- What is the most important thing the psalmist is saying, in your opinion? (Hint: why should the sheep, and by extension the poet, not fear?)
- What is the shepherds’ role in this scene? What is the importance of the “rod and staff” imagery? (Hint: a thick rod or long thick stick was used to attack predators (protecting the sheep), a staff was used to pull sheep back into the group and rescue them from thorny bushes or cliff edges (guidance and protection). These images are also royal symbols in the Ancient Near East.

**Discuss:** Scene 3

- What is the setting of v.5? The poet was likely in the desert or a dry area with limited pasture. (Hint: Where does one normally find a table, oil for a guest, and a cup?) Is it the same area of vv. 2-3a?
- What is the psalmist, the guest, doing?
- What are the enemies doing? This is an oxymoron – something that wouldn’t happen in real life.
- What is the host doing?
- How do the images intensify?



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#### Discuss: Scene 4

- Where is the setting in v.6? In verse 6, “*sitting*” or “*staying in the house of the YHWH*” implies dwelling there.
- What does that mean? There seems to be some implied permanence. It is not some temporary passage somewhere or sometime, like the sheep at quiet waters, through the dark ravine, or at a feast. “House” of Yahweh is standard language for the tabernacle and the temple.
- Discuss as a group what this contrast means and why the psalmist has used it.

#### Theme and Flow

There are four scenes, or settings, presented in this psalm, found in stanzas 2, 3, 4, and 5. Use pictures to help the team visualise each scene.

It is almost impenetrable to modern readers, but the Psalm’s metaphor is the same throughout. It does not change from v.4 with the banquet metaphor. Shepherding is a metaphor for kingship in the ANE. It is common across all ANE cultures - kings are shepherds of people. Preparing a banquet and guarding against enemies are also common motifs of kingship. This whole Psalm is about kingship, rather than tender care. Of course, tender care is included, but it is not the primary theme.

- Scene 1 – the sheep are settled in an oasis in the dry area, with fresh food and clean water to drink, where they can be restored. The text doesn’t say it is necessarily a desert area, but it can be inferred as a possibility. It can also be the rolling hills of Judah or Ephraim, with ample pasture and water
- Scene 2 – the sheep are being led through a dark ravine, with dangers all around, but with the shepherd with them for protection and guidance.
- Scene 3 – the feast, where the psalmist is provided for, honoured and restored as a special guest by the host. But this is still the same shepherd imagery. This may be immaterial to modern cultures that do not share these connections. It will feel like a strong shift in metaphor at this point.
- Scene 4 – the house of the Lord (possibly where the feast was hosted).

#### What is the flow of thought?

- Verse 1 contains a very confident statement that frames the whole psalm and sets the scene for what follows.
- Verses 1 and 6 form a frame, and a frame has two ends, so there is a link between verses 1 and 6. Both have key ideas and contain the covenant name of God, namely Yahweh or YHWH.
- In verse 4b, “for you are with me”, is the phrase that is right in the middle of the psalm. Often such middle lines or phrases carry great prominence. In this case it seems to be something of a peak, a high point, if not the highest point of the whole psalm.



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### Theme, peak, and climax

This psalm is very artistic in that it has a theme statement in the beginning (verse 1, The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want), a peak statement right in the middle (verse 3, for you are with me), and a final climactic statement to which everything builds up at the end (verse 6, I will dwell in the house of the LORD all my days).

### The story behind the psalm

What is the story behind the psalm? When and where was it composed? And when and where was it used? We don't really fully know, but we know that David was a shepherd and a musician-poet, and he composed it to reflect on the Shepherd-king, the LORD himself.

All we can now know it was certainly used as one of the psalms sung during the sacrifices and later in the temple service in Jerusalem.

Psalm 23 is also part of the **five royal psalms** from **Psalm 20 to 24**. That is why we can with certainty say the theme of the poem is about the rule of the king, and shepherd if used is a picture for a king.

### The deeper and higher meaning of Psalm 23

Why has the psalmist composed this psalm? Is there maybe a deeper or higher meaning to it? In verse 6 David refers to dwelling in the House of the LORD forever. At that point in history, 3000 years ago, before the coming of Jesus, the people of Israel didn't have a very clear view of life after death, so this statement sounds like an exaggeration. Also, David, from the tribe of Judah, was not allowed to serve in the sanctuary, much less even allowed to dwell there. This verse 6 is therefore an instance of a **prophecy** of David's Son Jesus Christ, who came as the Good Shepherd-king and who now dwells in the temple in heaven with his Father and the multitudes of angels for ever and ever. It is a messianic prophecy that refers to more than just king David.

### UNLOCKING SOME OF THE BIG PICTURE OBSTACLES TO THE PSALM

- How is a shepherd viewed in your culture? Is he a valued person? Or the opposite, despised? Or is it only a chore for young boys? In many cultures, shepherds are not really valued, with the job often being done by women or even boys. Again, in many cultures, shepherds are not viewed as royal or very important, but that is the case in Psalm 23.
- What do you think is this "valley of deep shadow"? Is it just a dark and scary canyon, or is there something scary or even deadly hiding in it? It probably refers to both the unpleasant darkness and shadiness as well as potential danger lurking in it.
- In verse 4 the psalmist mentions "my enemies". This is always something negative. Who could they be? This is the only reference to an "enemy", but verse 3 also refers to some danger, the "valley of deep shadow", and that he will not fear "evil".



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- Also, “enemies” are not normally present at a banquet of the victorious person. The reference to the enemies here is not that they physically are present but that they know about king David’s vindication.
- What does the “house of YHWH” in verse 5 refer to? If David was the poet, it refers to the “tabernacle” at Shilo at the time. But how could one “stay” or “dwell” in the “house of the YHWH”? Not even the priests of the tribe of Levi actually “stayed” in the tabernacle in David’s time, but there are other Psalms that yearn for it, e.g. 27:4, 84:10, 92:13, 116:19. Perhaps the psalmist was thinking of the entire temple complex with all its adjunct areas? But this didn’t exist in David’s time. So he might even be reflecting on the temple in heaven - e.g. Ps 103:19. Furthermore, David is of the tribe of Judah, a tribe not allowed to do the priestly temple service. It is probably meant to be symbolic, and hyperbole; but the best interpretation is that it is prophetic of Christ in the temple of heaven in the presence of the Father, and related to that, the Christian life in the New Testament era. Discuss it as a group.

## SEGMENTATION OF THE PSALM

### **v.1 The opening frame, thematic statement:**

- **Yahweh** is my Shepherd-king, I shall not lack anything

### **vv.2-3 The settled pastoral scene, provision:**

- The shepherd brings satisfaction, fullness, rest, refreshment, and guidance

### **v.4 The pastoral scene, peak statement:**

- As He leads me, I will not fear because He is with me

### **v.5 The settled banquet scene, provision:**

- Victory over enemies; refreshment and honour; abundance

### **v.6 The closing frame, climactic statement:**

- **Yahweh’s** goodness pursues me always, and the final settling in the House of YHWH for all my days

## FINAL SUMMING UP

To summarise the Psalm, discuss the following questions:

- What is the main point or message of the psalm?  
*The LORD as the Shepherd-king is sufficient. David as king lacked nothing because God is always with him as my shepherd. Christ lacked nothing because the Father is always with him and dwells in heaven with him forever. Consequently, we do not need to fear, we can enjoy abundance, and I now already partly live in his House, and one day will fully live with Jesus forever.*
- What does this Psalm teach you about the LORD?





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*He is all-powerful, abundant in giving blessings, protecting and leading, and treating us as honoured guests. There is nothing more than the ultimate best he gave David, Jesus his Son-King, and us his flock and his children.*

- How can you or your church use this psalm?  
*This psalm is much more than the Good Shepherd giving me nice things like food, rest, health, guidance and protection. Our focus, and the church's focus should be on the Shepherd-king, Jesus the Good Shepherd who promised us abundant life (John 10:x).*
- What heading or title would the group suggest for this psalm?  
*"The good Shepherd" or "The Shepherd-king"*



### Step 3: Internalise

Absorbing the big picture of the psalm

'Get the poem inside yourself' (feel the emotions and be able to recall the main ideas).

Look at the whole psalm so that you can experience it and retell the message. This is not an attempt to memorize the psalm, but to be able to understand the whole message and to express it in the target language. Aim to do at least the first two activities.

### CREATIVE RESPONSES

First, do Internalisation Activities 1-5 as a whole group

**Internalisation Activity:** Listen to Psalm X being read again. Note all the words you hear which speak of God's power, or which are very intense/extreme language.

**Internalisation Activity:** Say each line of the psalm in the right order, as a group. Use your own words; there's no need to have it precisely right. Then let one or two persons say each line of the psalm, again in the right order

**Internalisation Activity:** Then, as a group, make gestures for each line and again say all the lines in order, but this time with gestures. Use mime/gestures to show the emotion and action.

**Internalisation Activity:** Lastly, as a whole group, use the popcorn method. Each line, in the right order, is said by a different person. Do this a second time to further reinforce.

**Internalisation Activity (optional):** The storyboard method: draw pictures of each event in the psalm as they unfold.

Then divide the group into two or three groups





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**Internalisation Activity: Skits**—act out what’s happening in each of the lines. Make a little drama. Encourage them to use facial expressions, body language, motions, and movement to try to experience the emotions and the sequence of events. This psalm lends itself well to a skit.

**Internalisation Activity:** Memory song, chant or memory aid to help remember the psalm. Consider making a short poem of the song in the local language or Language of Wider Communication to help you remember the different actions in order. This song is only to help everyone remember each stanza in sequence (and the lines in sequence if it is a short psalm)

For instance:

LORD my shepherd  
No lack  
Green grass  
Quiet waters  
Restore  
Right paths  
Dark valley  
No fear  
You with me  
Club and staff  
Prepare feast  
Oil on my face  
Cup full  
Goodness pursuing me  
Dwell in your House

Other options

**Internalisation Activity: The key word method** - give a key word or a macroword, or maybe a short phrase, for each verse line or each parallelism. Then try to recite all the key words in order. Do it as a group first, each one calling out what they remember. Then let one or two people recite the list, in order.



## Step 4: Explore and compose

Explore the Hebrew and local poetry and compose a song

### EXPLORING HEBREW AND LOCAL POETRY

**For the facilitator:** in this step, address the following topics to explore in Hebrew poetry:

- 1) *Repetition of words, images, and sounds*
- 2) *Handling the Hebrew parallelisms*
- 3) *Figures of speech, like metaphors, personification*





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4) *Rhythm, verse length, beat*

5) *Word order, clause order*

6) *Poetic devices that emphasize and mark something as important*

Once the artist-translators have sufficiently internalised and drafted the psalm in the workshop setting, compose a song, poem, rap, chant, or prayer to capture as much of the psalm as possible.

### 1. Picture language

Psalm 23 has abundant picture language, pictures like metaphors that enrich the meaning of each line by evoking richer thoughts and deeper feelings than simply unpacking the expressions. They are called metaphors, simile, personifications, and so on.

**Activity:** count all these pictures in Psalm 23 (you should find about 13 or 14 of them)

Here is a list of them, and their meanings:

- a. **Shepherd** – protector, leader, owner, deliverer, provider, carer, companion
- b. **Green pastures** – abundant provision for life
- c. **Lie down** – after feeding, the sheep are satisfied and lie down in the grass. It is a picture of satisfaction
- d. **Quiet or restful waters** – the abundant emotional satisfaction that calm waters can bring
- e. **Right paths** – providing precise direction, leading along the best ways to get to the right places of salvation and blessing
- f. **Dark and dangerous valley** – safety in the midst of unknown danger
- g. **Club and staff** – strong protection against dangerous animals and bandits
- h. **Comfort me** – give me a sense of safety, making me feel secure
- i. **Table** – the place for the abundant food, not necessarily a literal table. Not all cultures use tables
- j. **Feast** – event of extravagant joy and overflowing food for the guest
- k. **In sight of my enemies** – not literally there, but they know about the banquet
- l. **Smear oil on my face** – the custom of the host to honor the special guest
- m. **Cup filled to the top** – there cannot be anything added, the blessings are full to the brim (an echo of “I shall not need anything” of v.1)
- n. **Goodness and loyal love pursuing me** – personification of actually the LORD virogously coming after me; there is no escape from his goodness
- o. **Dwelling in the House of the LORD** – to live in the eternal presence of the LORD

### 2. Rhythm

Study a poem in your language. How is rhythm maintained? This is often happening very intuitively.

### 3. Word-order

**Activity:** Have a look in the poems of your language and look for instances where there is a strange word-order, not the usual. Sometimes it would work to use some unusual word-order in your





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language as well. Experiment a bit with different word-orders and see what sounds the most beautiful, the most poetic.

Go to the Hebrew-Mirror in Appendix A. In verse 2, there are three verselines with elements of the line put first, before the verb. This is to put them in special focus. It is called “fronting”.

**In green pastures**, you let me lie down  
**Beside restful waters**, you escort me  
**My whole being**, you refresh

Verse 3 as well:

**Your rod and your staff**, they comfort me

How does your language handles this type of special focus? It may not be fronting, but maybe by some other means and word-order. Do explore this.

## COMPOSING A SONG

**For the facilitator:** several considerations, like the big question when to start doing the song

- 1) *When to start composing a song? The guide writer and facilitator have some freedom when. Either at the end of step 4, or after step 5. There are pro's and con's to each option. One advantage of doing it in Step 4 (before the detailed exegesis) is that the team starts to think about poetry. They only start to think about poetry once they start composing a song. The risk is that when they compose something early, before step 5, that they settle on a melody they like, but need to change it or even abandon it after getting the more detailed exegetical insights. The advantage*
- 2) *Some other considerations: what about memory aid, the poem or song made at the end of Step 3?*
- 3) *Another option is to only compose a nice tune and song on one stanza with not any serious exegetical issues. That tune can then be used for the rest of the psalm at the end of Step 5. Experience with shorter sections, like one or two stanzas at a time, to compose.*
- 4) *The team needs to learn some song-writing skills.*
- 5) *It is not necessary to use the same tune for every stanza. Sometimes 3-4 tunes can be used for long psalms.*

Note the poetic devices used in the Hebrew mirror or in the Flower Garden (Appendix C). What is the psalmist trying to achieve? Consider what poetic devices are used in the local language to achieve the same functions.

**Activity: NOW, COMPOSE A SONG!** Participants are to choose a style or genre that is relevant for the psalm, and to set the whole psalm or sections to a rhythm or music. The song needs to cover all the main stanzas, but doesn't need to be correct in every detail (that comes later in Step 5)



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**Activity:** Make a recording of the composition(s).



## Step 5: Draft

### Translating stanza-by-stanza

Listen to the poem again. Orally create stanza-by-stanza a first draft of the psalm in the target language, trying to capture the poetic elements and essential details of the meaning. To take full advantage of the oral form, avoid reverting to written Biblical text at this point.

**Activity:** Divide into smaller groups and let one in each group read through guide translation #2: Hebrew-tight (or play a recording) while others translate. The oral draft can at that point be recorded and/or immediately written down (Step 6 merged with Step 5).

### STANZA-SPECIFIC INFORMATION

Often it speeds the work to have different groups do different stanzas. If you do this, make sure you all hear the psalm from top to bottom and to make suggestions to other groups when you come together...

**Stanza 1: Verse 1** The introduction to the psalm, sets the theme and provides a frame.

Psalm to David.

YHWH (is) my shepherd;

I shall not lack.

A Psalm of David.

1 The LORD is my shepherd;

I shall not lack anything.

#### Discuss:

- The shepherd is a metaphor. How will the shepherd metaphor work in your language?
- I will not lack means. I will not lack anything; I will have everything I need, and there will be nothing I want. This is a very strong statement. Think about how you will express this in your language. The rest of the psalm develops the theme of not lacking anything.

**Creative activity:** Make a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it. But click on pause when done, so that the rest of the psalm can be recorded under **Steps 5-6 – Draft**.

### Stanza 2: Verses 2-3

2 In pastures of green he makes me lie down,  
beside waters of rest he escorts me.

3 my soul/life he restores.

2 In green pastures He makes me lie down,  
By restful waters He leads me,

3 My whole being He refreshes.





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He leads me in paths of righteousness  
for the sake of his name.

He leads me in the right paths  
for the sake of his name.

This stanza starts giving meaning to the “not lacking anything”, here with a pastoral imagery of sheep at pasture. The scene is settled, not in motion, albeit only temporarily.

**Discuss:**

- What is the most intense experience in this stanza, between the three experiences? How does it build?
- Discuss how scenes and images from nature are used in your own poetry. Maybe look at a few examples of the poetry in your language. What are you seeing?
- How best can you express the images of a rare oasis, of being fed, watered, and restored?

**Creative activity:** click on the pause in Step 5-6 Draft and continue making a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

**Stanza 3: Verses 4**

4 Even though I may walk  
in the valley of shadow of death,  
I will not fear evil,  
For you will be with me;  
**your rod and your staff,**  
**they will comfort me.**

4 Even though I walk  
through the dark valley of dangers,  
I will fear no evil,  
because you are with me.  
Your club and your staff,  
they make me feel safe.

Instead of the sheep resting at some pleasant place, in verses 3b-4 the sheep are on the move with the shepherd.

**Discuss:**

- Two words for movement are being used here: leading and going. Make a list of different words for movement in your language. You will be surprised by the great number of them! Which words of movement will capture best this movement of sheep with the shepherd?
- The phrase “through the valley of deep darkness” sounds ominous, inducing fear. Make a list of three or four expressions in your language for places that are really scary and fearful.
- But then there is a statement of not fearing. Discuss how this fearlessness can be brought about. How is it that the speaker does not fear? What is the basis of his lack of fear?
- How would you poetically express the high point of this stanza, right in the middle of the stanza and right in the middle of the poem, “for you are with me”?

**Creative activity:** click on the pause in Step 5-6 Draft and continue making a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.



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#### Stanza 4: Verse 5

5 You prepare before me a table  
in front of my enemies;  
You smeared my head with the oil;  
my cup is filled to the brim.

5 You get ready a feast before me  
with my enemies watching on;  
you smeared my forehead with oil;  
**my cup** is completely full.

Verse 5 is around a table, maybe a feast. The enemies stand and watch, presumably close to the table, but this is picture language.

#### Discuss:

- What is the most intense experience in this stanza, between the three experiences? How does it build?
- The “table” is literally in the Hebrew, but the meaning is a banquet, a banqueting table laden with delicious food. How is a feast best portrayed in your culture? Not all cultures will refer to a “table” for a feast.
- “In the presence of my enemies” means in clear sight of my enemies, my enemies looking on.
- Notice the smearing of oil, not anointing with oil as in many versions. How do you welcome and honour guests in your culture? Not all cultures smear the head with oil. The smearing of the head with oil is a symbolic action of hospitality. It is not the same word as to anoint a king or priest. It refers to rubbing a guest's head with fragrant olive oil. The purpose is to refresh and honour a special guest. A good host welcomed his guests in this way.
- Notice my cup is filled to the brim, is completely full. Overflowing, as most of the versions have it, is not altogether correct. A cup is a metaphor of **reward**, either a cup of blessing and well-being or a cup of wrath and punishment.

**Creative activity:** click on the pause in Step 5-6 Draft and continue making a poetic oral translation of these verses and record it.

#### Stanza 5: Verse 6

6 Surely goodness and covenant loyalty shall  
chase me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of YHWH  
for the length of my days.

6 Indeed, goodness and loyal love will strongly  
pursue me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
for as long as I live.

Verse 6 moves to be inside a “house”, the House of the LORD. This could also be where the feast is held, but it is not clear.

#### Discuss:

- Be careful with how to translate the transition word at the beginning of the stanza. It can mean “indeed” or “surely”. It is a prominence marker, it shows some emphasis.



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- To be pursued by goodness and loyal love is an example of personification\*. It means that the LORD is pursuing them, chasing hard after them because of his goodness and love. Think of a few examples in your language where personification\* is used.
- Discuss among each other the meaning of “dwelling in the house of the LORD”. What does this mean and imply?
- “and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” is the final, climactic line of this psalm. Try to translate it in three or four different ways, each time changing the order of the words and using different words. Then choose the one that most powerfully and beautifully expresses this climax of the psalm.

**Creative activity:** continue the poetic oral translation of these verses after clicking the pause button on AVTT under **Step 5-6 Draft** and record it.

## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

### **Activities:**

- 1) Listen again to the recordings of each verse or section.
- 2) Think about how to include relevant parts from previous steps and to use ideas from the previous creative activities.
- 3) Put everything together to make a poetic oral representation of the complete psalm, and then record it.



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## Phase 2: TEXT



### Step 6: Transcribe

Make a written draft

**Activity:** Transcribe the recording/s of the oral draft onto paper or a computer.

Before moving on to the checking steps, check the transcribed draft for the following. This should be done as a whole group, looking at the psalm projected onto a screen or wall. Doing this now will help the exegetical and poetical checks that follow to stay focused on essential matters.

1. **Versification:** put the verse numbers into the psalm.
2. Check that the number of the psalm, and any **superscription**, are in place at the top. (Superscriptions are often left out completely according to team policy, but they are recommended to be put in the written text but not the song.)
3. Put in the **stanza breaks** (blank lines usually).
4. Correct the **punctuation**, in particular finding out where the sentences should end. Different groups use different approaches. Our recommendation is to use capital letters only for the beginning of sentences, not for the beginning of each poetic line.
5. Correct the **spelling**. You may find that there is a lot of discussion over this. The group needs to have consistency but also needs to abide by any government guidelines.
6. Raise any questions you have about the **back translation** at this point. The back translation just needs to be comprehensible; it does not need spell checks etc. You, the facilitator, are the only person who needs it. However, without a good back translation you cannot understand what is going on. As a bonus, at least a couple of exegetical questions you've prepared usually turn out to be unnecessary after this step.
7. Check the **line divisions** (this refers to how the power is broken up into lines and where to make those breaks).



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## Step 7: Contents Refinement

### Checking exegetical faithfulness

Check the exegesis of the oral translation. Consider whether the correct meaning has been translated and if the wording used can be improved. The purpose of this step is to check the content of your draft for faithfulness and trustworthiness.

**Activity:** Review the draft translation in detail, using the oral recording of Step 5 or the transcription of Step 6. Do an exegetical check by comparing the draft with the guide translations given in Appendix A and the exegetical layout in Appendix B and adjust the text as necessary.

### EXEGETICAL CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- The key terms HESED, and house of the LORD
- The poetic images: the pastoral images, the images of movement through a dark and dangerous valley, the banquet, and all the images related to shepherding.
- Verse 3 the refreshment or restoration of his soul. Soul, NEPHESH, means whole being or whole life.
- Leading in paths of righteousness: this refers to the best paths, the right paths out of a choice of many. It could also refer to be led to conduct a righteous life, a godly life.
- The valley of shadow of death can mean several things. Look again at the notes in Step 5 and in Appendix B, the exegetical layout.
- “The LORD is with me” is an idiom. It means I am in his presence, He is not far from me.
- The rod and the staff of verse 4: look at the notes again.
- The smearing with oil of verse 4.
- The cup completely full, and not overflowing of verse 4.
- The “pursuing, chasing after” of verse 5



## Step 8: Poetry Refinement

### Compare and weigh the poetic features

Check if the Hebrew poetry is all accounted for in the translation through equivalent poetic features in the target language. Consider if the poetry of the translation can be improved, for example, look at the length of lines and the use of rhythm and ideophones.

**Activity:** Consider the poetic features of your translation. Do they reflect the purpose of the Hebrew poetic features, drawing attention to the correct parts? Experiment a bit with different word-orders and see what sounds the most beautiful, the most poetic.



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## POETIC CHECKLIST

Give special attention to:

- Does this translation incorporate the poetic features of the lament genre of your language?
- Did you keep the synonymous words and lines in the parallelisms?
- How did the figures of speech like metaphors come out in the translation?
- Did you consider exclamations\* and ideophones\*?
- Evaluate appropriate word order changes for marked word-order\* constructions in the original.
- Does the psalm translation have rhythm at every line? Do check the syllable count, that there are not verselines with too many syllables.
- Were you able to use enjambment where necessary?



### Step 9: Finalise

Preparing the final version of an authenticated translation

Prepare the final version which will serve as an authorized translation, that in turn will serve as the basis for performing the psalm in the community (audio, visual and written).

**Activity:** Re-check the spelling of your transcription, the punctuation, in-setting, and the layout of paragraphs to represent stanza segmentation.

**Activity:** Re-check the essential accuracy of the back translation (not worrying about spelling).

**Activity:** In AVTT, ensure that the final text of your psalm is uploaded with a back translation, check that the recordings from different steps are in the correct place, and do a final audio recording.

**Activity:** If possible, copy the final written text into Paratext.



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## Phase 3: PERFORMANCE



### Step 10: Perform

Performing the psalm in your community

Convert text into performance (dramatic reading/song/chant) to both perform and share this psalm, ensuring the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible).

You now want to convert your written translation into a performance (song or chant) so that you can share it with your community. You need to make sure that the main message comes through in content and style (the same emotional mood as the original poem in the Bible). The genre - lament or praise or thanksgiving or other - should be similar to songs of the same genre in your culture.

#### Psalm-specific ideas:

- This psalm has been very popular throughout the ages. Much can be done with it in performance. Maybe there are already songs based on Psalm 23 in your language. Listen to them.
- Singing the complete psalm will not be too difficult, because the poem is not very long.

**Activity:** Identify any relevant genres or styles or performance and put the psalm to music. You can put the whole psalm to music, word-for-word, or you can use creative licence to adapt the psalm for the performance.

**Activity:** Complete a transcript and back translation for the lyrics of any song created by the team to be checked before recording.

### FINAL CHECKLIST

In the end of each psalm, there should ideally be four products:

1. Transcription: An authorized, authenticated, or officially written draft in AVTT and Paratext.
2. Dramatic Reading: A recording of a dramatic reading or recitation of the whole psalm, using the authenticated version word-for-word, recorded in AVTT.
3. Whole Psalm Performance: A recording of a performance of the whole psalm, using the entire authenticated version but with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance, including poetic and dramatic features beyond the authenticated version, recorded in AVTT.
4. Song or Hymn: A recording of a performance of part of the psalm including the main idea of the psalm, in the form of a song, hymn or chorus, with or without drama, with freedom to adapt it for authentic performance and to make it easy to sing and remember, recorded in AVTT. An improved version of the Step 4 composition could be used here.





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## Appendix A: Guide Translations

Hebrew-mirror	Guide Translation
<p>Psalm to David.</p> <p>1 YHWH (is) my shepherd; I shall not lack.</p> <p><b>2 In pastures of green</b> he makes me lie down, <b>beside the waters of rest,</b> he escorts me, <b>3 My whole being</b> he restores. He leads me in paths of righteousness for the sake of his name.</p> <p>4 Even though I may walk in the valley of death shadows, I will not fear evil, for you will be with me; <b>your rod and your staff,</b> <b>they</b> will comfort me.</p> <p>5 You prepare before me a table in front of my enemies; You smeared my head with the oil; <b>my cup</b> is filled to the brim.</p> <p>6 Surely, goodness and covenant loyalty shall pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of YHWH for the length of my days.</p>	<p>A Psalm of David.</p> <p>1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not lack anything.</p> <p>2 In green pastures he makes me lie down, By still waters He leads me, 3 My life He refreshes, He leads me in the right paths for the sake of his name.</p> <p>4 Even though I walk through the dark valley of dangers, I will fear no evil, because you are with me, Your club and your staff, they make me feel safe.</p> <p>5 You prepare a feast before me in the presence of my enemies; You smeared my head with oil; my cup is completely full.</p> <p>6 Indeed, goodness and faithful love will chase me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live.</p>





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## Appendix B: Exegetical Layout

Psalm 23 is a Psalm of confidence. David expresses the closeness and protection of the YHWH in metaphors of the shepherd and his sheep, and the host with his guests, building up to the climax of always staying with YHWH in his “house”.

### SUGGESTED HEADING

“The LORD is my shepherd” is traditional and very appropriate, in spite of the fact that the shepherd image may only be up to verse 4 or 5.

#### Coding for TAM Verbs and Hebrew features:

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qatal perfective = blue</li> <li>• Yiqtol imperfective = red</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infinitive construct = purple</li> <li>• Wayyiqtol waw+imperfective = pink</li> <li>• Jussive/cohortative = light brown</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imperative = brown</li> <li>• Participle = green</li> <li>• Weqatal = navy</li> </ul> |
|--|---|--|

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד <sup>1</sup>	A.Psalm of.David.
יְהוָה רֹעִי	YHWH (is) my.shepherd;
לֹא אֶחְסֵר:	not I.shall.lack (anything) <sup>1</sup> .
בְּנֵאֻת דְּשֵׂא יִרְבֵּיצְנִי <sup>2</sup>	In.pastures.of lushness <sup>2</sup> he.makes.me.lie.down <sup>3</sup> ,

<sup>1</sup> “I shall not lack anything”: There are various ways to render this: I will not lack anything; there is nothing else I need; I will not be short of anything. But keep the rendering as short and compact as possible.

<sup>2</sup> The “grass” refers to lush pastures, not green in terms of colour. It could refer to the rare green patches in a dry, mountainous desert landscape, but just as well to the lush pastures in the fertile parts of Israel. Keep the translation as literal as possible here, to allow for both interpretations.

<sup>3</sup> “make me lie down” refers to the lying down of the sheep after they have grazed, when they are full and satisfied. This translation is following standard English versions, translating this yiqtol as customary (non-specific) action... making me lie down is just the sort of thing God does. In this Psalm, it’s not completely impossible to continue the irrealis sense used in verse 1... “he shall make me lie down”



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עֲלֵמֵי מְנוּחֹת יְנַהֲלֵנִי:	beside-waters.of rests <sup>4</sup> he.escorts.me.
נַפְשִׁי יְשׁוּבָב <sup>3</sup>	my.whole.being <sup>5 6</sup> he.restores.
יְנַחֲנֵנִי בְּמַעְגְּלֵי-צֶדֶק לְמַעַן שְׁמוֹ:	He.leads.me in.paths.of-TSEDEQ <sup>7</sup> for.the.sake.of his.name <sup>8</sup> .
גַּם כִּי-אֵלֶּד <sup>4</sup> בְּגֵיאַ צְלֻמּוֹת	Even though-I.may.walk in.the.valley.of dangerous.darkness <sup>9</sup> ,
לֹא-אֵירָא יָרֵעַ כִּי-אַתָּה עִמָּדִי	Not-I.will.fear evil, for-you (will be) with.me <sup>10</sup> ;

<sup>4</sup> Literally “waters of rests” does not refer to dangerous, still-standing water full of diseases, but rather refers to fresh rainwater pools or to springs where the sheep can rest. Water places, like springs, are oases, places of rest, with nice shade and grazing.

<sup>5</sup> NEPESH refers to ‘my whole being, my total life’. This includes ‘my soul’, but is not exclusively ‘soul’ as rendered in many versions. The verb means “to restore, renovate, revitalize, refresh”.

<sup>6</sup> Fronting of NEPESH at the end of first stanza, after two other fronted constructions, mark the end of the stanza. In your translation, try to reflect this with some marked word-order variation.

<sup>7</sup> “Paths of TSEDEQ”. TSEDEQ here either means ‘right paths, tracks’, the best, the most appropriate paths or trails to pasture and water sources only the shepherd knows. Or it can mean ‘righteous paths, tracks’, paths that are according to the standard of the LORD’s will. Since an עגל is a calf, this word refers to the tracks made by wagons. They are well packed, clear, and firm. So not “narrow footpaths”. Not roads either though. The use of such an important and even loaded key concept like “righteousness” here may have a double entendre and a deeper meaning, making the second interpretation more likely, but that is not very clear exegetically. It could be that there is a link between righteousness and “for the sake of his name”, but interpretations abound and inconclusive.

<sup>8</sup> ‘For sake of his name’ means that the purpose of the shepherding by YHWH, and for all the needs to be met, is about YHWH and his glory, that his Name can be praised.

<sup>9</sup> Literally ‘valley of deep darkness’ means a ravine with steep sides which can be darkish even in day-time. In these ravines many dangers can lurk, like wild animals. It can be rendered as ‘very dark ravines’ or ‘ravines with dark shadows’, or even ‘ravines of dangerous shadows’. Other versions have “darkest valley” (NIV). The word is probably more foreboding than a literally dark valley. One cannot escape from the possibility that the word includes danger and even death. It is comprised of two parts - צל shadow, and מות death (hence the more traditional KJV “shadow of death”). But there are lots of places where the word is used in this metaphoric foreboding sense - Job 38:17 (quite often in job), Isaiah 9:1, Jer 13:16. There aren’t any places where it just means literally “very dark”. Maybe Amos 5:8, but even there it seems to refer to a special kind of darkness.

<sup>10</sup> ‘you are with me’ forms the central peak of this psalm. It is right in the middle of the psalm. How would you highlight a peak like this in a song in your language?



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שִׁבְטֶךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתֶּךָ הִמָּה יִנְחַמְנִי:	<b>your.rod and.your.staff</b> <sup>11</sup> , <b>they</b> <sup>12</sup> will.comfort.me <sup>13</sup> .
תַּעֲרֹךְ לְפָנַי שִׁלְחֹן נִגְדַד צָרָי 5	You.prepare before.me a.table <sup>14</sup> in.front.of my.enemies <sup>15</sup> ;
דִּשְׁנַת בַּשֶּׁמֶן רֵאשִׁי	You.smeared with.the.oil my.head;
כּוֹסִי מְלֵא:	<b>my.cup</b> is.filled.to.the.brim <sup>16</sup> .

<sup>11</sup> ‘Your rod and your staff’: these instruments refer to the tools the shepherd uses to guide and prod the sheep. First, the staff, sometimes with a hook at the end to pull a sheep by the neck out of a thorn-bush, and second, a thicker stick to protect them from danger and enemies. The shepherd uses the stick to ward off predatory animals. That the “rod” (Hebrew *shebet*) is used to beat to discipline the sheep is likely an over-extension of the meaning of rod in this context, or even an unwanted interference from English. Discipline is not what is in focus here. The focus is on protection and comfort. The shepherd may have used only one of the two instruments at a time, there is no clear evidence that they always walked around with both. Motyer argues that the two instruments “form an idiom of reduplication to express completeness, comprehensive protection against danger.”

<sup>12</sup> Left-dislocation of ‘your rod and your staff’ is a marked word-order\* construction and marks the end of another stanza. It is called a left-dislocation. Try to maintain such marked constructions if appropriate in the poetry of your language.

<sup>13</sup> The shepherd in verse 3 is said to have two instruments, a *rod* and a *staff*. But how can these two instruments actually “comfort”? The meaning is that the shepherd protects and guides the sheep with these instruments. But can the shepherd carry them both simultaneously? How will that be understood in your culture? In your translation, make sure these issues are not misunderstood.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Table’ here implies a feast, a banquet, or at least a meal. It also signals closeness to some dwelling, maybe on a verandah, or upon a rooftop or a terrace. The metaphor changes here to a host and his guest. Food is normally laid out on the table. The preparing of the table is the getting ready and serving of the food by the host.

<sup>15</sup> ‘in full view of’ or ‘openly before my enemies’ instead of ‘in the presence of my enemies’. The same preposition occurs twice in 2 Samuel 12:12, where it contrasts with ‘in secret’: You did it in secret, but I will do this thing openly before all Israel and openly before the sun. What does it mean? Is it a way for shaming the enemies – that the Lord has undertook for David and there’s nothing that the enemies can do, because David is with his Lord who protects. But you might want to explain how you understand this metaphor. (For example, it seems to imply a kind of triumph over enemies plus underlining how the Lord protects his own against foes). It is an example of an oxymoron. Feasting in front of enemies just doesn’t happen in the real world.

<sup>16</sup> ‘My cup is filled to the brim’: Overflowing cups in dry and desert areas with severe water shortages are unheard of. The word seems to mean being filled to maximum capacity, to the brim. Motyer translates “my cup is more than full”, the Hebrew literally means “my cup of saturation”. The drinking of wine in antiquity is often the highpoint of a banquet (see for example Jesus turning the water into wine, John 2). The wine cup here is also the last of the three features of the banquet, so we can discern some development here from preparing the food to preparing the guest to the high point of the banquet.



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<p>אֵד טוֹב וְחֶסֶד יִרְדְּפוּנִי<sup>6</sup> כָּל-יְמֵי חַיִּי</p>	<p>Surely<sup>17</sup> goodness and HESED shall pursue me<sup>18</sup> all-the.days.of my.life,</p>
<p>וְשָׁבְתִי בְּבֵית-יְהוָה לְאָרְךָ יָמִים:</p>	<p>and.I.shall.dwell in.the.house.of-YHWH for.(the).length.of (my.)days<sup>19</sup>.</p>

<sup>17</sup> The connective\* ACH means ‘indeed, surely’, a particle that strengthens and highlights what follows. Here it introduced the final and climactic stanza. How would you signal this poetically in your language?

<sup>18</sup> Some theologians say the shepherd metaphor is continued here, but here “goodness and covenant loyal love” is pursuing him like a shepherd. YHWH is still the shepherd, the goodness and love image is an instance of personification of the shepherd. Be careful how you deal with this personification in your own language.

<sup>19</sup> Does “length of days” refer to eternity or only the span of his life? Literally, it says “for prolongation of days” (Motyer). In Old Testament theology, there was not yet a well-developed doctrine of eternal life after death. The primary meaning here and with “all the days of my life” in the previous line refer to the full span of life on earth. Translate it as such. But a higher reading of eternity with the New Testament perspective is certainly justified, but the translation needs not explicitly reflect that. It would be permissible to add a footnote to explain this briefly in one short sentence.



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## Appendix C: Flower Garden

The repetitions and patterns below are placed upon guide translation. Read the commentary at the end of this Appendix which explains insights into these patterns. *See the commentary below concerning the themes, colours, and patterns in this section.*

A Psalm of David

1 The LORD is my shepherd;  
I shall not lack.

2 In green pastures He makes me lie down,  
By calming waters He leads me,  
3 My soul/life He refreshes,  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
for the sake of his name.

4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
because you are with me.  
Your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you smear my head with oil;  
my cup is completely full.

6 Indeed, goodness and covenant love will chase me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD  
for length of days.

