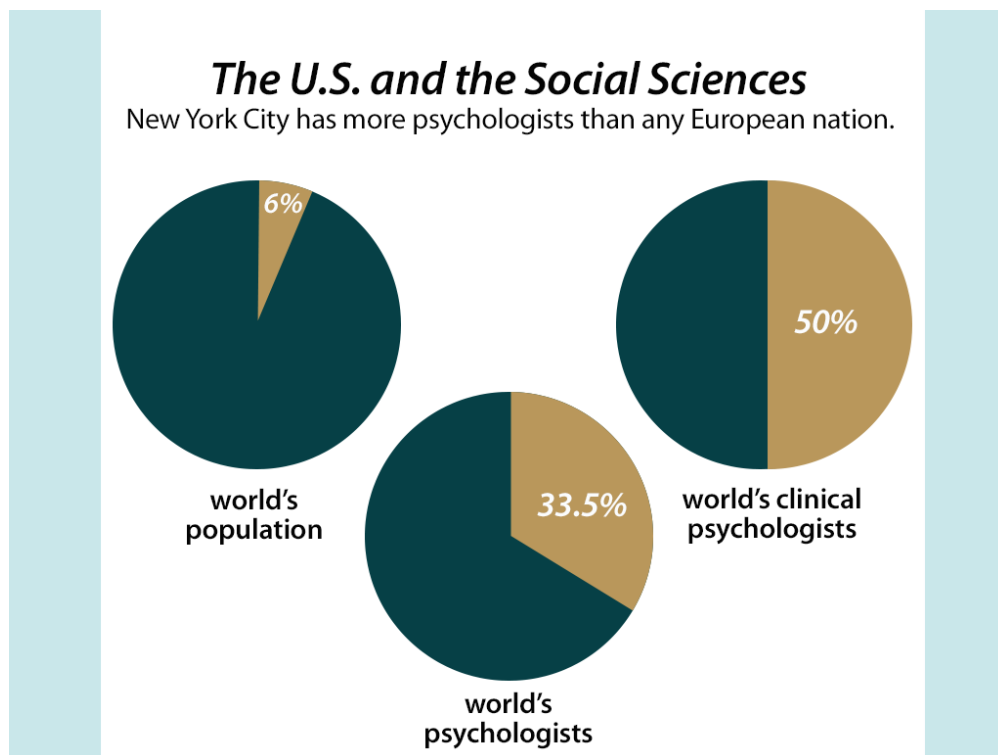


**Psalm 23**  
**A Prophetic Psalm of David**

We live in what sociologists and psychologists call the “Age of Anxiety.” The term was coined in 1947 by W. H. Auden in the aftermath of World War II to describe a sense of unfulfillment and disillusionment. The term influenced Leonard Bernstein’s “Symphony No. 2,” also called the Age of Anxiety” in 1949. The latest book, a novel with the same title, by Pete Townshend in 2019.” This sense of emotional insecurity is prevalent in young adults. ages 18-25 (a recent Pew Survey put it at 70%), 1 in 5 the general populous. Anxiety appears in children about age seven and is most prolific in 13–18-year-olds (32%). It is driven by the post pandemic trauma, sociopolitical instability, rapid shifts in technology, and the breakup of the family.



The root solution to an anxious heart is not to look within, not to look outwardly to trusted friends, but to look up to the wonder of God’s promises and provisions. David did and maybe there is some insight for us.

## Introduction

1. No consecutive six verses, 114 words, are so often quoted by Christendom.
2. Alexander McClaren said it well, “The world could spare a large book better than this sunny little psalm.
3. The theme is that of praise for God’s faithfulness addressed to God in the corporate assembly of God’s people. Personal pronouns are found 17 times (“my” 6, “me” 7x, “I” 4).
4. The circumstance of the Psalm is uncertain (a young David attending Jesse’s sheep killing a lion and a bear, David as king looking back of his life, Absalom’s rebellion and his flight, Bathsheba episode, the Shimei and Ahithophel, judgement for numbering the people).
5. The central motif, figure of speech, in the writers poetic expression is that of a shepherd.

## Structure of the Psalm

1. The poem is divided by discerning the tense of the verbs.
  - vv. 1-5, the present tense
    - v. 1, a marvelous fact
    - vv. 2-5, the cause for praise is God’s faithfulness
  - v. 6, the future tense, an assured “tomorrow”

## The Psalm explained

- v. 1 The reason for praise is stated using the poetic figure of a faithful shepherd.

The one who is our shepherd, the Great “I AM.” The name suggests covenantal faithfulness (“The Good Shepherd,” (John 10:11,14); “The Great Shepherd,” (Heb. 13:20); and “The Chief Shepherd” (I Pet. 5:4).

“I shall not want” This shepherd may not give us our *wants*, but He promises to supply our needs.

- vv. 2-5 The evidence of a faithful shepherd.
  - v. 2: “rest:” Sheep do not lie down to eat; they lie to rest. Sheep are anxious creatures; they panic at swift currents.
  - v. 3: “guidance:” God brings to us restorative mercies for, like sheep, we are wanderers. They scatter easily in panic.

The manner of His leading us with assisting mercies is to restore us to the right and righteous path.

The reason (v. 3a) for His care is for His reputation's sake. God in His covenantal faithfulness obligates Himself through Christ. Remember Moses after the breaking of the covenant at Sinai (the Golden Calf episode [Exod. 32:12,14]).

- v. 4: "protection:" Interestingly, David shifts from the third person plural to the first-person singular.

Here we find the second amazing statement, "I will fear no evil." We have all experienced "dark times," yet God will never abandon us. You may be in one now!

David tells us metaphorically what God does to secure us using a shepherd's staff. A clue here is that a shepherd carries only one staff, yet it is described in two ways. "Thy rod" is the end of the staff; it is used to ward off predators that would harm the sheep. It becomes a defensive weapon.

"Thy staff" is the upper end of the instrument; it is an offensive weapon. It functions to deliver the sheep. By it he can lift a sheep from a tickle without tearing its flesh; if it falls into a pit, he can lift it out; if a sheep is carried away by a flash flood, he can snatch it.

- v. 5: "provision:" The shepherd provides for his sheep in their physical needs. In a geography of scarcity, such as the lack of vegetation, he carries a food supply bound about his neck. In a wasteland, he sets forth a "banquet" on a piece of leather that he lays on the ground.

"his enemies" are the want of necessities (food, healing, nourishment, protection, care.

"Anoints my head with oil" means he puts ointment in his sheep noses to prevent insects from laying larvae there. He functions as a medical personage.

“my cup overflows” is a metaphor for the ancient wells that had a reservoir attached so the shepherd refreshes his sheep in an otherwise drought-given landscape.

v. 6 The conclusion, a heart full of praise and confidence.

“Surely” accentuates what is to follow.

“Goodness and mercy” repeats what he has delineated (rest, guidance, protection, provision).

“All” suggests that in every day these are the promises of the “Good Shepherd. “House” indicates the promise of divine presence with no end, forever. It suggests unbroken fellowship with God, One who will always be your shepherd

#### Thought

It is intriguing to me that Psalm 22, the suffering servant psalm (“**My God, My God why have you forsaken Me**”), precedes our Psalm today. To know God as the suffering servant is to possess the “Chief Shepherd, the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd.

Isaiah summarized the role of the coming Messiah, the promised shepherd this way:

Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,  
In His arm He will gather the lambs  
And carry *them* in His bosom;  
He will gently lead the nursing ewes (40:11).