



Discussion Guide

Date: 6/7/2026

Sermon Title: Why is life so hard?

Scripture: Psalm 23

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God, you are our Shepherd, our guide, and our refuge. In moments of peace and in seasons of struggle, remind us that we are never alone. Open our hearts and minds as we reflect on your Word together. Help us trust your presence in every valley and recognize the grace you prepare before us. Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

OPENING QUESTIONS: (Choose one to start with)

1. What is one scripture, song, or prayer that has brought you comfort during difficult seasons?
2. When you hear Psalm 23, what words or phrases immediately stand out to you?
3. Why do you think Psalm 23 is often used during funerals or memorial services?

INTRODUCTION:

Psalm 23 is often read at memorial services, but this psalm is not primarily about death. It is about God's presence in the middle of life. The psalm reminds us that the valley is not where the deceased remains it is where we walk. We know grief, fear, uncertainty, suffering, exhaustion, disappointment, and struggle. Yet even there, the Good Shepherd is with us.

DIGGING INTO PSALM 23: Read Psalm 23 and use the questions for conversation or reflection.

Psalm 23:1 "The Lord is my shepherd..."

1. What images or emotions come to mind when you hear the word "shepherd"?
2. How is God different from other "shepherds" or voices that try to guide our lives?
3. What does it mean personally to say "The Lord is my shepherd"?

Supporting Scripture: John 10, Isaiah 40

Psalm 23:4 "Even though I walk through the darkest valley..."

1. Notice the psalm says we walk through the valley, not remain there. Why is that important?
2. What kinds of valleys do people experience today?
3. How does suffering challenge or deepen faith?
4. Where have you experienced God's presence in difficult seasons?

Supporting Scripture: Romans 8; 2 Corinthians 1; Matthew 11

Psalm 23:4b “Your rod and your staff — they comfort me.”

1. Why might guidance and correction both be forms of comfort?
2. When has God redirected your life in a helpful way?
3. What spiritual practices help you stay connected to God during hard times?

Supporting Scripture: Hebrews 12; Proverbs 3

The Table Prepared Before Us

Psalm 23:5 “You prepare a table before me...”

1. This verse connects beautifully with Holy Communion. What does a table symbolize?
2. Why is it significant that God prepares a table “in the presence of my enemies”?
3. How does Communion strengthen us for difficult seasons?
4. When have you experienced the church community as a place of nourishment and grace?

Supporting Scripture: Luke 22; 1 Corinthians 11; Revelation 19

Methodist Theology & Liturgy:

In the United Methodist Book of Worship, Communion is described as “a holy meal of the community of faith.” Methodists believe Communion is not merely symbolic remembrance but a real means of grace where Christ meets us, nourishes us, and strengthens us. Charles Wesley emphasized Communion as a place where believers encounter the living Christ and are transformed by grace.

1. How can Holy Communion sustain people emotionally and spiritually?
2. Why do we need grace repeatedly, not just once?

Psalm 23:6 “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me...”

1. What does it mean that mercy “follows” us?
2. How does grace continue pursuing us even after failure or hardship?
3. Where do you see signs of God’s goodness today?

Supporting Scripture: Lamentations 3; Philippians 1

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION:

1. Which verse of Psalm 23 speaks most directly to your life right now?
2. Where do you most need the Shepherd’s guidance today?
3. What valleys are you currently walking through?
4. What practices help you remember God is with you?
5. How might God be inviting you to extend comfort or grace to someone else?

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. What shepherds have you chosen to follow in your life besides God, such as money, power, or the approval of others, and how have those choices affected your sense of security and peace?
2. When you find yourself in a valley of darkness or despair, what practices help you remember that God is walking through it with you rather than leaving you alone?
3. The psalm speaks of walking through the valley, not staying in it. What does it mean to you that difficult seasons are temporary rather than permanent destinations?

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4. In what ways have you experienced the pattern of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation in your own spiritual journey?
5. What does it mean to you personally that God desires communion and fellowship with you, not just obedience or worship from a distance?

SERMON REFLECTION:

1. We must choose who our shepherd will be - many people inadvertently choose money, power, status, approval, worry, or themselves instead of God
2. Psalm 23 reveals the nature of God as a shepherd who always seeks the welfare of the sheep, providing green pastures, still waters, and right paths
3. The "valley of the shadow of death" represents life's disorienting moments of grief, despair, and darkness where we wonder if life will ever be good again
4. God doesn't just meet us in the valley but walks us through it - our difficult moments are temporary, not permanent
5. Communion represents God's desire to dine with us, to commune with us, and to be in relationship with us through all seasons of life

CLOSING PRAYER:

Good Shepherd, thank you for walking beside us through every valley of life. When we are weary, remind us that your grace is enough. When fear overwhelms us, help us trust your presence. Prepare your table before us again and nourish us through the gift of Holy Communion. Fill us with goodness, mercy, hope, and peace so that we may reflect your love to others. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Shepherd and Savior, Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. Journal about the other types of shepherds you may be choosing to guide your daily life and explore WHY you are choosing them? Is it to feel safe? Is it a historical pattern? Did you learn to do this from society, friends, and/or cultural norms?
2. Reach out to a friend who you know is going through a difficult time. Let them know they are not alone. You don't need to fix anything for them, but you can offer a listening ear with no advice and/or sit with them quietly.