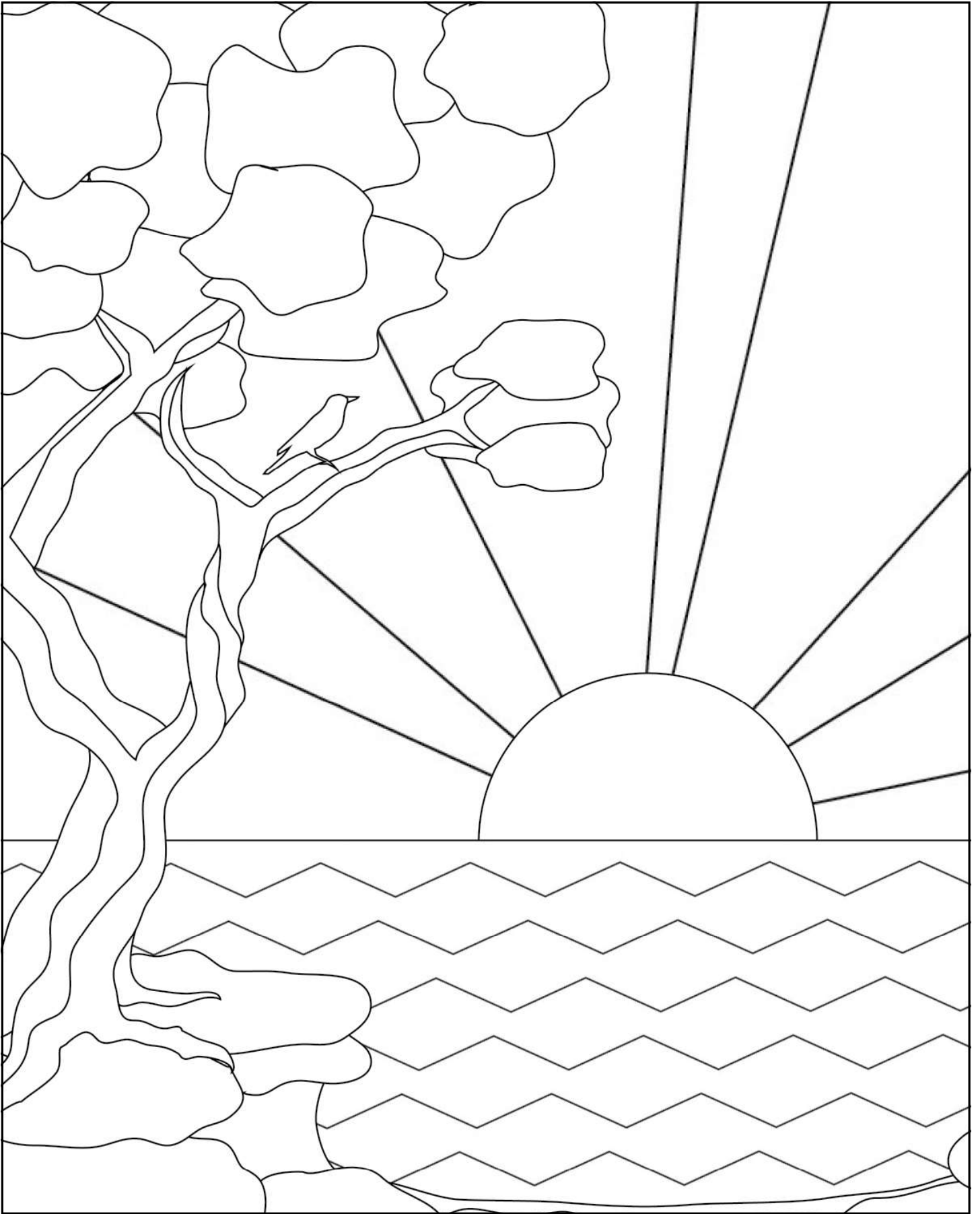


FPC
Psalm 23
Summer
Faith Challenge

Challenge Booklet



Welcome to our
Summer Faith Challenge!

This summer we're taking a break from classes, but that doesn't mean we're taking a break from growing in our faith or gathering as a church. Join us in our summer faith challenge: spend time in the Word, try some new spiritual practices, and fellowship with others!

The challenge runs from **May 19 to August 11**.

Complete as many of the challenges as you'd like to have fun, earn prizes (1 prize for every 5 challenges completed), and grow in knowing God and loving others.

Filled out **challenge sheets are due August 11** to the church office (or email to Britta). We'll celebrate and award prizes on **Back-to-School Sunday, August 18**.

Questions?

Contact Britta Wallbaum

at britta@firstpresaurora.org

What are the *Challenges?*

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Why *Psalm 23*?

We are all in a season of change. When we are uncertain of the future, it's important to remember who walks with us through every valley, who leads us beside the quiet waters, who restores our souls, and ultimately who leads us home: God, our great shepherd.

Nearly all of our summer faith challenges have something to do with Psalm 23, either interacting directly with the Word, responding to it in some way, or following the themes of remembering God's faithfulness and walking with him in prayer.

I pray this in-depth time in the psalm will be refreshing to your soul this summer, that you will connect with God in new ways, and come out with a firmer confidence in his faithfulness and presence.

Logistics

Make sure to grab one challenge sheet for each member of your household.

Cross challenges off as you complete them.

Hand your sheet into the office by August 11.

We'll celebrate together on August 18!

If you have anything you'd like to share during the challenge, email Britta at britta@firstpresaurora.org!

Memorize *Psalm 23*

God tells us to hide his Word in our heart, so let's work on memorizing Psalm 23 together this summer!

Adults, teens, and older kids should aim to memorize the whole psalm over the course of the summer. We've suggested how to break up the verses below.

Younger kids can work on smaller portions of the psalm, indicated by the bold words below.

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters.

He restores my soul.

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

May-June

Even though I walk through the valley

of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

June-July

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and **I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.**

July-August

(ESV)

Tips for Memorizing

There are many tactics for memorizing. Here are a few:

- Write the verses by hand every day.
- Repeat the verse out loud every day.
- Print or write a copy of the psalm with key words missing, and fill them in as you read it. Remove more words each day or week.
- Create motions or pictures that help you remember the words.
- Set the verses to music. There are many versions of Psalm 23 out there already - check out pages 6-7!
- Use one of our bookmarks. One side is the full text for the month, and on the other are the first letters of each word. See if you can say the whole passage looking only at the first letters.

Draw or Paint *Psalm 23*

One way of connecting with scripture and hiding it in our hearts is by interacting with it kinetically.

You may start with a blank piece of paper and draw or paint what you imagine as you read the psalm, or you may start with a printout of the psalm and illustrate around it.

However you approach this, the quality of the picture is not the point, the process is what matters. Use the time you're drawing or painting to really dwell in the words and pictures from the psalm, and use your hands to respond to what God is showing you.

Read *Psalm 23 in a Park*

God reveals himself to us through *special revelation*, his Word, and through *general revelation*, through the things he has made. I know I often experience God most clearly when I'm out in nature, enjoying his beautiful creation.

Take an hour, or a morning or afternoon, to enjoy a nature park. While you're there, read through Psalm 23 slowly, taking in the word pictures about green pastures and still waters, and experiencing the nature around you.

Bonus points (not really) if you go to a park with water! Try acting out the psalm, lying down in a green pasture, or walking beside the waters as you read.

Here are some nearby parks and forest preserves:

- Jericho Lake Park (39W365 Jericho Rd, Aurora)
Walk around the lake, or cross the bridge and lie under a tree while you read the psalm.
- Oakhurst Forest Preserve (1680 5th Ave, Aurora)
Climb the hill and sit on the rock while you read, or walk by the lake.
- Phillips Park (Howell Pl, Aurora)
Walk around Mastadon Lake, or cross the bridge and sit on a bench on the island. ADA Accessible.

Listen to a *Song based on Psalm 23*

There are many songs based on Psalm 23, which can help us memorize, connect with, and internalize God's message. Take some time to listen to one or several. Here are a few:

- *Psalm 23 (Surely Goodness, Surely Mercy)*, by Shane & Shane



- *All of My Days - Psalm 23*, by Ellie Holcomb



- *Psalm 23*, by Phil Wickham



- *The Lord is My Shepherd*, by Paul Zach

- *The Lord is My Shepherd (Psalm 23)*,
by Keith and Kristyn Getty



- *The Lord's My Shepherd*,
traditional hymn by Francis Rous



- *Psalm 23 Choral Setting*
from "This Is the Day" by Franz Schubert



Read a Book about *Psalm 23*

There are also many great books about Psalm 23.
Here are a few we recommend!

Young:

- *Psalm 23: A Colors Primer*,
by Danielle Hitchen and Jessica Blanchard
- *Found: Psalm 23*, by Sally Lloyd-Jones and Jago
- *Psalm Twenty-Three*, by Tim Ladwig

Grown:

- *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, by W. Phillip Keller
- *The Good Shepherd: A Thousand-Year Journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament*, by Kenneth Bailey
- *The Lord of Psalm 23: Jesus Our Shepherd, Companion, and Host*, by David Gibson

Read *John 10:1-21*

One of the amazing things about scripture is how it speaks to itself. Take some time to read John 10:1-21, and then re-read Psalm 23. How do these passages speak to each other and to you? Reflect, pray, and give thanks to Jesus, our Great Shepherd.

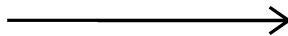
Pray *Psalm 23*

The Psalms are a prayer book for God's people in exile - that's us!

Try praying through Psalm 23 by reading one line at a time, and then adding your own words in response to it. Nothing fancy, no requirements or expectations, just talk to God, letting the psalm guide your conversation.

Here are some examples of others who have prayed Psalm 23:

- *Praying Through Psalm 23*, Gospel Coalition Blog
- *Pray Psalm 23 for Your Children and Grandchildren*, Guideposts
- *How I Started Praying the 23rd Psalm With My Kids*, Busted Halo



Pray along with *Pray As You Go*

Pray As You Go is a podcast and app that gives audio guided prayers and meditations on scripture in the Ignatian style.

Take some time to listen to this guided reflection on Psalm 23. If it helps you stay focused and engaged, you can write your thoughts and prayers in a journal, or draw them on a piece of paper as you listen.

<https://pray-as-you-go.org/player/special/4194-a-reflection-on-psalm-23>



Have a *Faith Conversation*

While a lot of these challenges have focused on the relationship between you and God, it's important to remember that our faith does not grow in isolation—we are called to community for mutual blessing and growth. Our community is filled with different perspectives and experiences, and sharing our stories can help our faith grow strong.

Find someone who is different than you—older, or younger, or of a different background—and have a conversation. Ask these questions:

- *What do you like about Psalm 23?*
- *How have you experienced God in the valleys (hard times) of your life?*
- *How do you stay connected to God through the good times and the hard times?*

Try an *Examen Prayer*

The *Prayer of Examen* has been used by Christians for a long time to help them reflect on their days and learn to notice God in their days. Try to make space for the *Examen* sometime this summer. Maybe make it a regular weekly or daily routine.

1. Make yourself comfortable and take a deep breath.
Think back over your day.
With younger children, you can actually talk through the day, recounting what you did, who you were with, etc.
2. Ask these questions:
When today did you feel close to Jesus?
When did you feel connected to Jesus, others, and yourself?
When did you notice that things were good?
3. Thank Jesus for being with you.
Thank him for the grace to notice his presence.
4. Ask these questions:
Was there a time today when you felt far away from Jesus?
When did you feel disconnected from Jesus and others?
5. Is there something you want to say to Jesus about this time?
6. Think ahead to tomorrow.
What are you planning to do?
What are you looking forward to?
What are you worried about?
7. Share with Jesus what you are thinking and feeling about tomorrow.
8. End with the Lord's Prayer or a song of blessing.

Learn the Song *King of Love*

This hymn is based on Psalm 23. Take some time to learn it!

1 The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.

2 Where streams of living water flow,
my ransomed soul he leadeth;
and where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feedeth.

Refrain: *Never-failing Ruler of my heart
Everlasting Lover of my soul
On the mountain high or in the valley low
The King of love my Shepherd is
The King of love my Shepherd is*

3 Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me;
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought me.

4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill,
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

5 Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and oh, what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

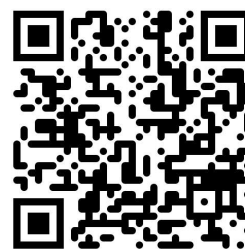
6 And so through all the length of days,
thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house forever.

Listen here:



*The King of Love
My Shepherd Is*

Traditional Version
(no refrain)



*King of Love
by I Am They*

Contemporary Version
(no verse 5)

Write your own *Psalm*

Try writing your own psalm this summer. If you search online you can find a lot of information about the technical and poetical aspects of psalm-writing, but as a starting place, just remember that psalms are prayers. Here is a simple framework you can use to write your own psalm:

1. **Record** your present feeling/emotion or situation.
(for example: O God, I'm sick and tired of having so much homework to do!)
2. **Recall** a time or times when God has helped you in the past.
(for example: You've always been there for me when I feel overwhelmed. You helped me to get through final exams last semester.)
3. **Restate** your understanding of who God is and how he helps you.
(for example: You are the God who never quits!)
4. **Resolve** to let God work through you again.
(for example: Be with me now as I tackle the mountain of homework before me and help me to not give up.)

Have a *Thanksgiving Celebration!*

Are you thankful that God is your Shepherd, and is with you through every high and low? Let's celebrate it!

Invite friends or family over, and have a Thanksgiving Celebration.

Provide food, or ask everyone to bring something, and talk together about the good things God has done in your lives, and the ways God has been with you every step of the way.

Use a *Prayer Labyrinth*

A prayer labyrinth is one way to pray with your body. As you walk or trace your finger towards the center of the labyrinth, tell God what you are thinking about. As you walk or trace your finger back out from the labyrinth, listen for what God says.

How to use a Finger Labyrinth (find one in our worship baskets!):

- Take a deep breath in. As you trace your finger towards the center of the labyrinth, tell God what you are thinking about. What worries do you have? What are you excited about? What are you happy or sad about? What do you want to ask God? When you arrive at the center of the labyrinth, pause and take a few deep breaths. Then, as you slowly move your finger back to the beginning of the labyrinth, listen for God's voice.
- Put your labyrinth in a safe, quiet place where you can go to be with God whenever you would like.

Make or visit a labyrinth. You can use anything to make a big walking labyrinth:

- Use rocks or sticks outside to outline a labyrinth.
- Take an old bedsheet and draw a labyrinth pattern on it.

Go to www.labyrinthlocator.com to find a walking labyrinth near you. There is one at Aurora University!

Go on a *Prayer Walk*

You don't need a labyrinth to pray in action. Walk around your neighborhood or city. Walk by a nearby school, or by Planned Parenthood. Talk with God about your worries for these places and these people. Intercede for them, pray scripture over them. If you can't walk easily, trace your finger over a map as you pray for the people on each street.

Invite *Someone New Over*

Think about someone new you can connect with this summer. Maybe a neighbor, or a coworker/classmate, or someone new at church. Invite them out to coffee, or over to your house for a meal or playdate, and get to know them!

Do a *Service Project*

One of the ways we show our gratitude to God is by loving others as he has loved us. Plan to serve this summer.

Here are some places you could serve:

- Food Pantry (mariewilkinsonfoodpantry.org/volunteer/)
- Hesed House (hesedhouse.org)
- Feed My Starving Children (fmsc.org)
- Youth Group Mission Trip to Louisville, KY
- Children's Ministry at First Pres - We'll be doing some projects in our children's areas this summer. Contact Britta if you can help paint walls or furniture, sand or sort wood figures, sew cloths, create art pieces, or help move things around!

Come to a *Church Picnic!*

We'll be having several all-church picnics this summer!

Come join us for a potluck lunch and fellowship after church:

- June 23 (Austin Park)
- July 21 (Lebanon Park)
- August 18 (Lebanon Park)