

Group Study Guide

Transform.
Empower.
Advocate.
Restore.

He restores
my soul



TEAR
AUSTRALIA

TEAR Australia

**We're a Christian agency
working for a just and
compassionate world.**

We're focused in places of great need, partnering with local Christian agencies to end poverty, challenge inequality and build sustainable communities.

Together, we act with courage, tackling injustice in order that all may experience fullness of life.



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Group Study Guide

Welcome

Psalm 23 is so familiar that for many who have grown up in Christianity it exists almost as wallpaper, ever present but not often studied. Yet whether sung, read, recited, or heard at important occasions, Psalm 23 speaks to the depth of the human experience and our longing for, and hope in, a God who is with us: Emmanuel.

At its core we find an assurance that God is restoring the world to health, life and beauty by being actively immersed in the messiness and everydayness of it. From situations in life that are like clear, still waters and green pastures, to those times that are as if we are in a dark valley, grasping around to find hope and a way forward, Psalm 23 reminds us that God is with us, restoring our soul.

Psalm 23 powerfully leads us into the Easter story, reminding us that Jesus is the good shepherd who laid down his life for us on that first Easter Friday. Who, on Easter Sunday, rose again so he can be always

with us, not just “all the days of my life”, but “to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

In preparation for Easter we invited a diverse range of Christian artists, theologians, musicians and activists to provide their own reflections on Psalm 23. These have now been captured in this year’s TEAR Lent series, consisting of seven weekly prayers, reflections and artwork titled He Restores my Soul.

In addition, some of those who provided reflections have also written longer pieces, reflecting on how this psalm has spoken to them. This is where this Group Guide has

arisen, in bringing together four of those voices as they reflect on Psalm 23 and coupling this together with background on the psalm as well as questions and discussion starters for small groups and families to engage with as we journey together towards remembering the death and resurrection of Christ.

As you go through this resource, we pray and hope that your ‘soul’ is renewed anew by the Good Shepherd who is always with us.

The TEAR team

If you have any questions or need any further material visit the website www.tear.org.au or contact the team on **1800 244 986**

Cover Artist Melody Murton
Follow us online tear.org.au/lent

Contents

Group Study Guide

Getting Started	Pg. 05
Study 1	Shepherding with Sovereignty Joel Edwards Pg. 06
Study 2	Restore Share + Care Nepal Pg. 10
Study 3	Right Paths Lilian Charles Pg. 14
Study 4	All the Days Dawn Faith Pg. 17
Next Steps with TEAR	Pg. 21



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Advocate.
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Psalm 23

Group Study Guide

*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 on right paths

For his name's sake.

*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.

*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*

My whole life long.



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He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Getting Started

He Restores my Soul is designed around four sessions, each containing a reflection from one of the contributors to our Lent series. In addition, we have added to these personal reflections with some background commentary on the passage as well as a series of discussion questions to help guide your group. The studies themselves should take between 60-90 minutes, depending on your group.

Study 1 Shepherding with Sovereignty. What is the significance in the psalm of the Shepherd who leads us? What did it mean in the context it was written and how do we apply that today? Rev Joel Edwards shares with us his reflections on this passage and how the image of the Sovereign Shepherd struck him from a young age.

Study 2 Restore. What does it mean that God is restoring our soul and how do we understand the biblical idea of restoration anyway? To help us think through these questions we draw upon the voices and ideas of one of TEAR's overseas partners, Share and Care Nepal, whose work is driven towards the restoration and nurture of life for the individuals, communities and environments that they serve.

Study 3 Right Paths. Pakistan is not an easy place to navigate, especially as a female Christian leader. In this study Lilian Charles, head of TEAR's partner organisation in Pakistan, PEP, reflects on her own sense of being led by God and in so doing offers us some rich 'soil' to reflect upon our own choices and journeys.

Study 4 All the Days. At the very heart of this psalm, both numerically and conceptually, is the understanding that 'you' (God) is with me (vs.4). Here, South African singer, author and activist Dawn Faith reflects on her own experience of grief and loss and how, in the midst of that, Psalm 23 has spoken to her in a new and powerful way.

Note to Group Leaders

Please read through the material carefully before your group meeting, and ensure that the discussion questions are appropriate and adjust accordingly. Also, each of these reflections is paired with a beautiful piece of artwork and so we would encourage you to have on hand enough copies of the cards.

Next Steps with TEAR

Find a list of steps you and your group can take in deepening your faith and your commitment to justice.

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Study 1

Shepherding with Sovereignty – Joel Edwards

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. (v 1)

Read through Psalm 23 a few times. If possible try to read a few different translations of the text.

Discussion starter – When do you first remember engaging with this psalm? What is your first memory of it? Take some time to share, and reflect too on what aspects of the psalm most resonate with you.

Reflection by Joel Edwards

The first time that Psalm 23 really struck me was when I was 19, at the start of my public ministry. I was given a platform to share at our local church and for some reason this psalm jumped out at me and took hold of me for about 3 months. No other passage of scripture has ever possessed me in such a profound way. A bit like going through the matrix, I would see different angles, variables, and textures and light: it seemed inexhaustible as an idea.

I suppose the abiding memory from that experience was of a very deep relationship with God, for the benefit of others, that sense of renewing. That 'The LORD is my shepherd'. I remember in my preaching that I had to say it 3 times, 'The Lord, The Lord, The Lord is my shepherd'. Good Pentecostals had to repeat things 3 times!

But it was just that fascination, looking at myself at that time, being a 19-year-old, black Britisher, racism all around me, ... struggling in school as one of 2-3 Christians in a school of 1500 students, All of the sense of being alone, in different circumstances, even if sometimes you are in church you can be alone, but the LORD is my shepherd. So, I had a sense of intense reality, but it wasn't possessive. God possessed me, but I didn't possess him, because he belonged to me but also to everyone else. Just a sense of the Lord being my shepherd and dealing with my spiritual and emotional needs, at the very deepest level.

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Study 1

Historical Context

Scholars have done excellent work explaining the ancient Near Eastern context of the psalm and it is important for grasping the psalm's meaning in its original context to know that both Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures used the shepherd image for their kings, their gods, or both. The epilogue to the famous Code of Hammurabi has that king state: "I made the people lie down in safe pastures, I did not allow anyone to frighten them".¹ Or in regard to the image of the banquet (vv 5-6), there is the goddess Anat who "arranges seats for the warriors, arranges tables for the soldiers".²

The biblical psalmist, being well aware of this broad cultural background, is thus making an affirmation of faith: The Lord, not a foreign god or king, is the only true shepherd of each and every Israelite. We now hear this psalm not merely as a message of comfort on life's journey but a theological creed spoken in the midst of our own culture with all of its earthly leaders and "gods" that can never be the Shepherd-King of Psalm 23.

¹See the study by Beth Tanner, "King Yahweh as the Good Shepherd: Taking another look at the Image of God in Psalm 23," in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J.J.M. Roberts*, eds. B Batto and K. Roberts (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 273-274.

²Ibid, 281.

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Study 1

Shepherding with Sovereignty – Joel Edwards

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. (v 1)

Joel Edwards – This Psalm is about the Majesty of God. This isn't your common garden shepherd, with a rod and staff. This is the shepherd of shepherds. This is the shepherd who is aware of the political problems in the world. This is the shepherd who is aware of starvation. This is the shepherd who is aware of people who live under totalitarian situations. This is the shepherd who still shepherds the needy in desperate economic and political realities. This is shepherding with sovereignty. I think the biggest deal is – here is a Shepherd who is sovereign, who then is able to respond to the diversity and complexity of wants and needs in all their variety.

Discuss:

- Firstly, what are the characteristics of a good shepherd? How have you experienced God's shepherding in your life?
- Secondly, as you consider that Jesus is the good shepherd of Psalm 23 and reflect on what he has done for us, what aspects of this Psalm take on fresh meaning for you? Where do you see parallels with Jesus or even possible fulfilments in Jesus?

Joel Edwards – This is a shepherd who gives people the chance of rest, gives people a break, in the middle of foolishness, in the middle of evil. I'm still amazed as I travel that when I'm in a very

poor and destitute area and see people who have met this shepherd who are happier than me... and I don't get that. But they have met this sovereign shepherd who somehow is able to sustain them, over an open sewer or on Smokey Mountain. That's an incredible situation. So, it's the Sovereignty of God, all-encompassing ability to meet human need and still in those situations give those people a sense of rest.

Even back then when I was 19, I never felt that this "He makes me lie down in green pastures" was an idyllic removal from the oppression and the problems of the world. In the middle of all of that, "He creates a pasture... in the presence of my enemies" - there it is! This isn't peace in

the absence of opposition. It is the grand sovereign shepherd who dispenses rest in restless situations.

Discuss – How do you relate to Joel's reflections of meeting people who are living in hard places or in hard situations, who are sustained through meeting this shepherd? How and where do you find rest?

Prayer – finish your time together in praying through Joel's prayer

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide



Joel Edwards

Rev Joel Edwards is a freelance broadcaster with the BBC, a writer, coach and international speaker on a wide range of areas including bible teaching, issues of justice, leadership, faith and society. He is currently a doctoral student with St John's College, Durham where he is also a Visiting Fellow.

Joel's wide range of experiences include 11 years as general director of the Evangelical Alliance UK

and 10 years' leadership in Micah Challenge International – a global faith-based response to extreme poverty.

Currently, he is an honorary Canon at St Paul's Cathedral, and Visiting Fellow at Spurgeon's College. Joel has been awarded three honorary doctorates including St Andrews University.

He is married to Carol and they have two children and five grandchildren.



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He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Study 2

Restore – Share + Care Nepal

*He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. (vs 2-3)*

R is for Restore! Recently at TEAR we changed our acronym's R from Relief to Restore to better reflect both the work we do and our understanding of the biblical values that drives our work. So now we are TEAR: Transform, Empower, Advocate and Restore.

But that begs the question, what do we mean by restore and how does it relate to the work we do?

Discussion starter – start by taking some time to discuss what the word restore means for each of you. Share some examples of where you see restoration occurring on a day-to-day level. You may also want to think of some key passages that pick up the theme of restoration, both of individuals and of communities and the wider creation.

Biblical Context

A couple of brief points about the biblical idea of restoration are important here. Firstly, in Psalm 23:3, the Psalmist testifies that the Lord, the 'Good Shepherd' "restores my soul" (Hebrew: nepes – soul, life) (v 3a). The Israelites used the word nepes to mean breath, the animating force that gives the creature life. Therefore, when God breathed the breath of life into the first human's (adam) nostrils, "the man became a living being" (nepes) (Genesis 2:7). The restoration then of the 'soul' is far beyond the spiritualised idea that many of us today associate with this word. Instead, Jesus words in John 10:10 more adequately reflect the intent of the restoration – "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly".

Secondly, while many of us will connect this psalm with the shepherd images elsewhere in the Bible (e.g. Jeremiah 23, Ezekiel 34, John 10), few of us tend to identify the echoes of Israel's national journey of deliverance, wilderness, and emergence in the land (see especially Psalm 78:52-55). Therefore, this most precious of personal psalms is about both our individual journeys and the journey of the people of God in finding restoration and a place to dwell.

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Study 2

Restore – Share + Care Nepal

*He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. (vs 2-3)*

Share + Care Nepal

TEAR works through our local Christian partners around the world to restore life. Partners like Share + Care are who for more than a decade have been bringing restoration to communities in Nepal struggling to overcome the burdens of poverty, natural disasters and marginalisation.

What does restoration begin to look like for a disabled Nepali farmer who's struggling to grow enough produce to merely provide for his only family's needs and dealing with the after effects of Nepal's devastating earthquake? For Punya Prasad, it meant

being selected by TEAR partner Share + Care staff to undertake business and farming training courses as well as being informed and empowered to access his rights as a Nepali citizen living with a disability.

Now, when our team visited him and his family recently on a stunningly beautiful, but very steep hillside location, what we saw were signs of new life and restoration abounding. A new home has been built after the old one collapsed in the earthquake. Goats are thriving and integrated into the wider farming system and Punya is now using organic farming techniques, which are cheaper, better for

the environment, and the vegetables taste better. Fresh water and food are now bountiful and Punya's banana crop is producing wonderfully well and selling well in the market.

Punya has also become an advocate for the other people with disabilities in the village. Having discovered through Share + Care that there are pensions and support available from the government for those living with disability, he's helped an extraordinary 135 people access their entitlements.

“In spite of me being disabled, I am capable. I want to make it as myself and I wish that people will remember me by my work.” **Punya Prasad**

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Study 2

Restore – Share + Care Nepal

*He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. (vs 2-3)*

As TEAR staff member Phil Lindsay noted during our visit;

Central to their work, and something that humbled and challenged me in the time spent with them, is the role of Share + Care's Christian staff. They're so committed to being there and being part of the community to share their lives. They lived alongside the community during the catastrophic 2015 earthquake and all along have shared their joys and sorrows, the struggles, the celebrations, and the gift that they really bring into this work is that they are present, they are understanding the people, they understand what is going on and what needs to happen to bring about deep and lasting change.

Share + Care's work speaks to the nature of God who is actively working in the midst of the realities of our world today. Working in and through groups like Share + Care, walking alongside us – down into valleys and up to the mountains. He's committed to us, to understanding us and to offering hope and freedom to our world.

Watch the full video of Share and Care's work in Nepal

www.tear.org.au/release

Discuss – What struck you about the work of Share + Care in Nepal? Where did you see signs of restoration and healing?

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide



Share + Care Nepal

TEAR works through our local Christian partners around the world to restore life.

Partners like Share + Care who, for more than a decade, have been bringing restoration to communities in Nepal struggling to overcome the burdens of poverty, natural disasters and marginalisation.

Pictured is Punya Prasad



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Group Study Guide

Study 3

Right Paths – Lilian Charles

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:3c)

Biblical Context – The NRSV and NIV accurately translate the King James Version's "paths of righteousness" as "right paths" (verse 3), connecting this psalm to a deeper biblical understanding of justice. In so doing, the Psalmist's sense of protection from the enemies (verse 5) moves toward a richer understanding of reconciliation through the good shepherd who tells us to love and forgive them (Matthew 5:44; Luke 22:34).

Discussion starter – As we journey towards Easter, it is timely to again reflect on the 'paths' that we have chosen. Are these paths leading deeper into God and God's justice? Take some time to share how each of you have experienced God's leading in your lives.

Lilian Charles – I was born into a poor family, yet I received many blessings from God. I think this Psalm has taught me that God has not entrusted in me to become rich or for me to become a person with all the resources, but has instead entrusted me a journey of faith. When I say journey of faith, I mean that on an everyday basis I have seen and experienced God's provision in my life, from the time of my schooling and now at my workplace,

I'm the youngest in my family, but I'm now supporting my whole family. I have 8 nieces and nephews and my parents, who are living with me, and my brothers living me. It is not an easy task for me being a

woman in Pakistan and leading a family and providing all their needs as well as running our organisation. I personally believe that without faith, I couldn't have reached where I am. Looking at God's hand every day in my life that has been a very important and crucial thing for me.

Discuss – Lilian's words here provide the opportune time to reflect on 'God's hand in our own lives'. What has been our experience? What can we give thanks to God for?

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Study 3

Right Paths – Lillian Charles

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. (Psalm 23:3c)

Lillian Charles – Living in Pakistan, when we read this passage we receive hope. We receive understanding that whatever the conditions are, even though we are a minority in Pakistan, we know that God is taking care of us in every situation. It does not mean that we will not have problems, that we will not face difficulties. But it means that whatever the situation would be, that God will provide his support and his help. Which is only possible through him, because we should not be relying on any human strength, but only on His strength.

Prayer – Take time to pray for one another. For God's leading and call to be made known. Pray too for the courage to follow in hope, through both the green pastures and the dark valleys.

“Living in Pakistan, when we read this passage we receive hope. We receive understanding that whatever the conditions are, even though we are a minority in Pakistan, we know that God is taking care of us in every situation.” **Lillian Charles**

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide



Lilian Charles

Lilian is the director of TEAR's Pakistan partner PEP (Primary Education Project) run by the Church of Pakistan, Diocese of Hyderabad. The project currently has 77 community-established and managed schools, working to meet some of the needs of marginalised communities in rural Sindh. The project also engages with women in communities, who become

champions for girls' access to education. The team work with women to build an understanding of the importance of education, their own literacy skills, and participate in groups where they save and access loans that benefit their families.



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Group Study Guide

Study 4

All the Days – Dawn Faith

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me,
all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house
of the Lord my whole life long (vs 6)*

This is Art!

The basic facts about the psalm preach an eloquent message by themselves. There are fifty-five Hebrew words in this psalm, and unlike many psalms, there are almost no repetitions.³ Only the Hebrew words for “Lord” (verses 1, 6), “day” (verse 6, twice), and possibly “restore/return” (verses 3, 6, NRSV “dwell”)⁴ are repeated. It’s as if the psalmist were given a list of some fifty words and told to write the most memorable poem in human history. Moreover, a total of fifty-five words creates a precise centre (the 28th word), namely, “you,” in reference to the Lord. Thus, the thought at the very centre of the psalm is the phrase, “you are with me” (verse 4).⁵

Combine that insight with the closure created by the use of “Lord” in the psalm’s opening and closing phrases, and we see the portrait of the divine shepherd who is there at the beginning, the middle, and the end of our journey. By virtue of its literary artistry alone, therefore, this psalm declares that God enfolds his people so that we all are part of the flock; and yet this shepherd intimately knows the sheep in all their distinction and difference. Each one of us is throughout his or her life a unique and precious possession of God.

Discuss – What words or images are we able to share with one another that speak to God’s constant presence with us, even in the midst of grief and darkness?

(Please ensure that the environment for this sharing is a safe and nurturing one and that those attending are not pressured into sharing.)

³ I am counting the actual lexical units in Hebrew, not separating out the so-called inseparable prepositions and conjunctions.

⁴ A. E. Arterbury and W. H. Bellinger, “‘Returning’ to the Hospitality of the Lord: A Reconsideration of Psalm 23,5-6,” *Biblica* 86 (2008): 387-395.

⁵ This is a key focus in Rolf Jacobson’s commentary on the passage: “Psalm 23: You are with Me,” in *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 238-246.

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Study 4

All the Days – Dawn Faith

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me,
all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house
of the Lord my whole life long (vs 6)*

Dawn Faith – I wrote the book, ‘*Dear God*’ to reflect on our experience of losing our first child. It was about being able to say to God, “yes I felt hurt by what has happened to me and yes, I know what it says in Romans 8:28 and yes it might work out all right eventually for me, but right now, I don’t see the good”.

So, it was really good [the tour and book] to feel that, as scary as it was, I could share so much of myself and to see the number of women come up and say, “pray with me, because I want to fix my relationship with God because I can’t get over this grief”.

It was crazy too because I didn’t realise that grief was grief, and it very soon became clear to me, as people came up and shared with me during my book tour. Women who had lost husbands or who actually had gone through a divorce, would come and share with me their experience, many having this

same sense of being in a deep, dark, well that I’d gone through. That you have to dive into, to sort out the emotions and confront the fear. You don’t know where the bottom is, it just keeps going, and what does that look like? So, it was really amazing to hear these women’s stories and to experience that loss is loss, no matter how it shows up in your life.

I had one woman come up to me and say, “I feel really stupid to say this but I just lost a job and I really loved my job and I really saw myself growing in it and know it is gone and I feel so lost and I don’t know what to do and I was like ‘but that’s it’”. We are all living lives, and we think we are in isolation and we all go through loss. So, for me, from that point it was like “Boom, I want to do more to help people share their stories and to know that they’re not alone in their experience...”.

Psalm 23 was one of my favourite scriptures at this time. I used to recite it ... I’d say it and say it again. One of the things through all this that my husband Nick and I talk a lot about is how scripture has become real to us. We now know that, “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil for you are with me”.

The psalm ends with this reassurance “All the days of my life”. Not some of the days. All the days. But that is at the end. Once you have gone through the valley, once you have acknowledged and accepted that He has walked with you. Once you have found the space in yourself to rest in the darkness, to find peace in the darkness, you can know that He is always there with you. I love it.

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide

Study 4

All the Days – Dawn Faith

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me,
all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house
of the Lord my whole life long* (vs 6)

Discuss – The Psalmist speaks about God being with you “all the days of my life”, however Jesus words to his disciples go beyond that promising to be with them “to the end of the age”. How are Jesus words part of God’s ultimate restoration in Christ?

Prayer – Give thanks for the ways we experience God’s constant goodness. You may like to explore a creative way of doing this in the group.

“Once you have gone through the valley, once you have acknowledged and accepted that He has walked with you. Once you have found the space in yourself to rest in the darkness, to find peace in the darkness, you can know that He is always there with you.” Dawn Faith

He Restores My Soul

Group Study Guide



Dawn Faith

Dawn Faith is a woman whose voice has the power to quite literally change the world. She is a recording artist, speaker, author, social activist and the host of her own TV show “Deep & Meaningful”.

Dawn’s love of singing began in her grandmother’s church in the South African township of KwaMashu, where Dawn herself grew up. At a young age, Dawn witnessed the power of music to create change, as it formed the soundtrack for the anti-apartheid movement.

Influenced by her upbringing and a deep desire to make a difference, Dawn has dedicated much of her life to inspiring others to rise above their circumstances. She has helped start some of the world’s largest civil society organisations, working with the likes of Nelson Mandela’s 46664.

She relocated to Australia in 2009 and expanded her pursuit of social justice to empower disadvantaged youth and recent immigrants. She returned to South Africa in 2016 to write and release her first book, ‘Dear God’, which tells the story of her daughter’s death and how Dawn found her way back to life and hope.



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Next Steps with TEAR Australia

More Small Group resources – TEAR has a great range of Small Group resources that are designed to be adapted to suit a range of group needs. Find out more by visiting www.tear.org.au/resources

Stay connected – Find out about the latest TEAR news, events and resources by signing up to our e-newsletter, TEAR update www.tear.org.au/get-involved#tear-update

Supporting TEAR's work – The single best way to support the work of TEAR and our partners like Share and Care is by becoming a TEAR Regular Giver www.tear.org.au/love

By becoming a TEAR Regular Giver you partner with this work and help TEAR provide certainty to our international partners as together we seek to see a world where everyone has the opportunity to reach their God-given potential.

Psalm 23

(Aboriginal Style)

My big fella boss up in the sky is like the father emu.

He will always look after me and take me to green grass, And lead me to where the water holes are full and fresh all the time.

He leads me away from the thick scrub

and helps me keep safe from the hunters, dingoes and eagles.

At night time when I'm very lonely and sad,

I will not be afraid, for my Father covers me with His feathers like a father emu.

His spear and shield will always protect me.

My big fella boss always gives me a good feed in the middle of my enemies.

In hot times he makes me sit down in a cool shade and rest.

He gives me plenty of love and care all of my life through.

Then I will live with my big fella boss like a father emu, that cares for his chickens in good country full of peace and safety,

Forevermore and evermore.

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