

John August Swanson, *Psalm 23 Poster* [1]

Visio divina means "divine seeing." Like *lectio divina*, the ancient practice of praying with Scripture, it invites us to slow down, notice what draws our attention, and allow God to speak through what we see.

When praying with John August Swanson's *Psalm 23*, you can hold together the familiar words of the psalm and the rich visual world of the artwork. Rather than trying to figure out what the artist intended, let the image become a place of encounter with God.

[1] John August Swanson, *Psalm 23 Poster*, 2024, offset lithograph, 18 × 24 in., https://johnaugustswanson.com/catalog/2024psalm23poster/.

1. Become still

Settle into a comfortable position. Take a few slow breaths. Become aware of God's presence—not as something you need to achieve, but as somewhere you already are. Relinquish anything that could hinder your availability to God.

2. Gaze at the image

Look at Swanson's *Psalm 23* without reading the psalm or trying to interpret the artwork.

Allow your eyes to wander. Notice colors, figures, movement, expressions, patterns, and the relationships between the shepherd, the sheep, and the surrounding landscape.

Don't rush to decide what it all means.

Stay with the image for two or three minutes.

3. Notice what draws you

Look at the image again, this time more slowly.

What catches your attention?

Swanson describes the two figures as moving forward barefoot and without fear through a valley transformed by their faith. He also speaks of the stars illuminating the darkness and of a world where lions and lambs dwell together peacefully.

Consider these questions:

- **What part of the image draws you in?**
- **What do you find yourself looking at again and again?**
- **Is there anything in the image that surprises, unsettles, comforts, or challenges you?**
- **If you could step into one part of this image, where would you go?**

4. Let the image meet you

Read Psalm 23 slowly, allowing the words to interact with the image. You might find yourself lingering over one particular phrase:

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Where am I being invited to trust God's care rather than secure everything for myself?

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."

What valley am I walking through now? What changes when I consider that I do not walk through it alone?

5. Listen for God's invitation

Return to the part of the image that first drew your attention.

Imagine yourself there. Notice where you are in relation to the shepherd, the other figures, and the landscape.

Then become quiet.

Is there something God is inviting to trust, release, or embrace?

Wait in silence for a few minutes. See what emerges.

6. Respond in prayer

Speak to God in your own words. What do you choose to believe about God or about yourself at this moment? Share your gratitude, your longings, your fears, and your questions. Ask God to help you respond to His invitations to embrace His presence, abundance, guidance, and provision.