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# PSALM 23: GOD'S SHEPHERD HEART

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As a Bible teacher, I'm always excited to uncover new and fresh revelations of Father's goodness. During the past of study, Father laid it on my heart to examine the book of Psalms; he's led me to key chapters and revealed His grace and love for me in beautiful ways. Not too long ago, Father directed me to Psalm 23.

Psalm 23 might perhaps be the most beloved of all biblical passages; you may be surprised to learn that I actually

Psalm 23, perhaps the most beloved passage in all Scripture, examines the tender care between us and Father.

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argued with God about studying Psalm 23. I told the Lord I didn't feel like studying it since everyone already knew it. Father told me "No, Frank, you've got to do it."

So, I began to dig into it - and I bet you can imagine what happened. I learned a lot!

### The Context for Psalm 23

It didn't take long to come across numerous scholars who believe King David, the author of the psalm, wrote it as a young shepherd. I tried to picture young David in the green hills, watching over his sheep, looking up into the heavens, and penning this beautiful poetry.

**"Psalm 23 was penned, not by a naive young shepherd, but by a man who had tasted God's provision in the midst of a broken, fallen world."**

Honestly, I just couldn't buy it - not for a minute. Something about that was off; the image just didn't sit right with me.

Then, one particular commentator, Alexander McLaren, captured the feeling I'd been struggling with,

summing it up in elegant words:

*'In this psalm, there is a tone of subdued, quiet confidence which speaks of a heart mellowed by the years, and a faith made sober through many a trial. a young man would not*



In this psalm, we discover not only incredible comfort, but also deep truths of Father's character, and a glimpse into His heart for us.

*write so calmly, and a life that was just opening could not afford material for such a record of God's guardianship in all changing circumstances of life."*<sup>1</sup>

Do you see what this writer is pointing out? See, the author who wrote this psalm was not a naive young shepherd daydreaming in the hills. No, the man who wrote this psalm had firsthand, raw experiences with a fallen world - and more importantly, David had tasted the wonder of God's sufficiency in the midst of a fallen world.

In fact, many bible scholars hold that Psalm 23 was penned during a tumultuous period in David's reign, a time chronicled in 2 Samuel 15. This passage is the record of Absalom's revolt against his father, King David.

**Psalm 23 has dried many tears and supplied the mold into which many hearts have poured their peaceful faith.**

Do you remember Absalom? Absalom was David's son. He decided he was going to be king instead of his father. He decided he would lead a revolt against his father.

If you have a Bible handy, flip to 2 Samuel 15. In it, you'll discover how David later in his reign, was ousted as king of Israel. King David, the man after God's own heart, the man who killed the giant Goliath, the man who delivered Israel from her enemies over and over again, was forced underground. He fled into the wilderness to save his life.

Now, as a pastor at Grace Life Fellowship, one of the things that I often say to my congregation in my preaching is 'Don't ever read the Bible casually. Put yourself there, in the passage.' So, my friend, as you read this chapter, imagine with me for a moment.

*How would you be feeling right now if your own son decides he knows better than you do?*

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<sup>1</sup> "The Shepherd King of Israel" by Alexander McLaren



*How would you be feeling right now if your own son tried to take everything you have and worked towards?*

*How would you be feeling right now if your son, your own flesh and blood, was trying to kill you?*

Can you begin to feel David's sense of loss and sorrow? His frustration? His hurt? His sense of betrayal? Imagine - you gave life to this boy, your son, and then you gave your *life* to this boy. For myself, I can't begin to imagine my son, Benjamin, the apple of my eye, trying to kill me.

Are you familiar with the haunting questions that arise as you move through deathly circumstances like David's? Have you asked yourself the haunting questions? Does anybody see? Does anybody care?

As you read 2 Samuel 15, my friends, take notice. David is alone - and nobody cares. Nowhere in this chapter do you see the people of Jerusalem rising up to defend their king!

My friend, we can already learn something from Psalm 23. We can see that in a crisis, is so very easy to fix your eyes fully on your circumstances, on the problems around you, on the things you can see. It's so tempting to fix our eyes on the difficult times. The book of Psalms references a worship leader named Asaph - and that's what he did.



Asaph began looking at people around him, and said ‘Wait a minute, God, they’re being blessed and I’m not being blessed. They’re getting rich, and not giving you any credit.’ Asaph becomes so consumed that he ends up saying, ‘I’ve worshipped you in vain.’ He kept his eyes on his circumstances, and felt abandoned. Have you ever felt like that?

David, though, steers clear of the trap of looking horizontal. He refuses to fall for the bait. Check out the first few lines of Psalm 23; where was David directing his focus?

### ***“The LORD is my shepherd...” (vs 1)***

Does David open his psalm in despair, crying ‘Absalom, O, Absalom?’ What are the first words he writes? David writes ‘LORD’ . Again, if your Bible is nearby where you’re reading, grab a pen and circle ‘LORD’.

**God doesn’t need anyone or anything, since Life itself is His very nature; it’s his defining characteristic.**

David addresses God as ‘Lord’, or ‘Yahweh’ in the original text. Why that name of God? There were so many other names he could have picked. Why not El Shaddai? Adonai? Jehovah Raffa?

David chose Yahweh, the name above all names. The covenant name of God. It’s how God introduces himself to Moses in Exodus 3: “I AM that I AM”. Yahweh is an inexhaustible name.

‘Yahweh’ is a name indicating complete and perpetual self-sufficiency, of lacking and needing nothing. Colossians 1 tells us that Christ is all and in all: ‘He is before all things and in Him all things consist’. The Apostle John says this as well, in what is perhaps the most fascinating verse about God in the entire Bible. ‘The Father has life in Himself.’<sup>2</sup>

What does this actually mean? Well, what John is saying - and what God’s name Yahweh explicitly implies - is that you don’t need anything or anyone if

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<sup>2</sup> John 5:26

life itself is your primary attribute, your literal nature. God doesn't need anyone or anything.

This is **glorious** - and it sure destroys a lot of sermons I heard growing up: 'God needs you to go to Africa!' No, He doesn't! He actually doesn't. God doesn't have any need at all, of anything or anyone.

It's so cool! Why? Because If God doesn't need anything, then I'm not around to be His servant! I'm there to be His kid.

That's why we go vertical! That's why David says 'This is the One. He's my shepherd!'

**In the midst of one of the most troubling times of his life,  
David responds with a vertical heart cry.**

Out of his pain and anguish comes a passionate declaration that I invite you to make your own. As you read Psalm 23, remember that David is going vertical, pointing his attention heavenward and declaring:

*'This is the One who is totally and completely able to shepherd me! He is the One who is more than sufficient to care for me, to lead me, to protect me. The one that I'm going to talk to is the living God of the universe, and in the greatness and vastness of who He is, He stoops down to make it His obligation to shepherd... me. Me.'*

Doesn't that blow your mind? Yahweh, the One who has life in Himself, has chosen to be your shepherd, and my shepherd... which makes us what? His sheep.

There is nothing in this life that will pull me away from him - no matter what I see, no matter what I feel, No matter what I experience, I'm going to go vertical, I'm not going to go horizontal.

God wants to lead everyone of us to the place where we recognize three things. First, we belong to Him. Second, He is a mighty, benevolent owner. Third, we are fully dependant on His sufficiency.

The end result? We shall not want.

### ***“I shall not want.” (vs 1)***

I read a passage written by Ray Stedman recently; I’ve come to fully agree with his view. Mind you, I *definitely* didn’t like this quite the first time I read it. He says:

*“There are only two options in life. If the Lord is my shepherd, then I shall not want. If I am in want, then it’s obvious the Lord is not my shepherd. It’s just that simple. If there is emptiness and loneliness and despair in my life, then it’s obvious the Lord is not my shepherd. When we allow someone or something else to shepherd us, we will not be satisfied. If our vocation is shepherding us, then there is going to be restlessness, feverish activity and frustration. If education is going to be my shepherd then i’m constantly going to be disillusioned. If another person is my shepherd, I will ultimately be disappointed and left empty. If alcohol or drugs are my shepherd, then no pun intended, I’m going to be wasted.”<sup>3</sup>*

Only when the Lord is my shepherd will I not want, because my God has promised to supply, hasn’t He? As David is mired in the midst of great loss, God has promised to meet his needs.

What are those needs? See, we need to keep this phrase in context. When David writes “I shall not want”, he’s going to tell us what it is that he could be wanting, so we go right to verse two.

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<sup>3</sup> The Shepherd Psalm, Ray Stedman (<http://www.raystedman.org/old-testament/psalms/the-shepherd-psalm>)

## ***“He makes me lie down in green pastures.” (vs 2)***

I tell you, this phrase has ministered to me in special ways; it’s fascinating! What does God do? He *makes* me lie down. Did you see that? Father makes me lie down in green pastures! Why does He do that?

### **Father *makes* me lie down because I’ve got to be made to do that.**

When my life goes bonkers I need to be MADE to rest. When my daughter starts having uncontrollable seizures, when my precious little one falls like she does so often, when finances don’t look good, when church people are acting stupid, nothing inside of me wants to rest. Everything inside of me wants to fix, to take upon my shoulders, to make it right.

When I look at my bank account, I need to be MADE to rest. Sometimes - ask my wife, she’ll testify - I look at my bank account and I think “How we going to do this?”

My friend, this is real for me. My wife and I have a little one who has run up 5 million dollars of medical bills over her lifetime - and we don’t owe a dime. We lost insurance for six years - and we don’t owe a dime.

In spite of all that, we’ll have something happen and I’ll say to my wife “Babe, what are we gonna do? We don’t have the money!”

Inevitably, she’ll reply “Lamb -” (*that’s my pet name... when I first met her, she called me a lamb and I was a goner!*) “- did God pay for our house?”

“Yes.”

“Does God pay the medical bills?”

“Yes.”

“Has God done this?”

“Yes.”



“Has God done that?”

“Yes.”

And folks, in spite of all God’s goodness, I can’t help but think “All that was yesterday! This is today!”

He MAKES me lie down in green pastures. Do you know that we have that kind of God? Remember Matthew 11:28? Jesus is calling everyone who is weary and heavy laden. He is beckoning to us: are you tired? Are you weary of trying to fix things in this world? Are you exhausted from trying to carry burdens you weren’t designed to carry? What does He say? “Come to me, and I will give you rest.”

‘Give you rest’ - what a miserable translation! Now, don’t you take my word for it. Go ahead, Google ‘interlinear bible’, and dig into the greek behind this verse. The literal greek translation I will REST you - the same as what David says in Psalm 23! “I will MAKE you lie down in green pastures.”

Isn’t that cool? Philip Keller, a writer who was also a shepherd, said this.

*‘Sheep don’t lie down easily. They’re very timid creatures who refuse to lie down unless they are free from fear, free from friction. If they are tormented by flies or parasites or if they feel they are in need of finding food, they will not lie down.’<sup>4</sup>*

Keller’s comments not only reveal insight about our own human tendency towards needing control, but they also point to Jesus’ strategy for caring for us. **When Jesus says “I will REST you”, He reveals his intention to prove His love and care for us to such an extent, we’re forced to trust Him.** He MAKES me lie down in green pastures.

‘Frank’, Father says, ‘I’ve got this.’

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<sup>4</sup> A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, by Phillip Keller (<http://www.amazon.com/Shepherd-Looks-Psalms-23/dp/0310274419>)

“But it doesn’t feel like You’ve got it, Lord.”

“I’ve got this! Lie down, son. Go to sleep. It’s okay. He who believes in me will never hunger, never thirst.”

What Jesus is saying - and what David is echoing - is that the turmoil of life manifests us as inadequate. Through faith we find Him adequate - and we’re able to rest.

### **“He leads me beside still waters.”(vs 2)**

As a side note, you might want to circle ‘leads’ in this verse. The original Hebrew word literally means ‘to lead gently’.

Man, I need to be led *gently*, don’t you? I mean, as soon as somebody starts telling me what to do, or pushing me into something, or forcing my hand, my resistance kicks in! I fight against it.

Do you realize that your God will never force himself on us or into our situation? He will never violate your will. He’ll shape your will - but He’ll never violate it. He’ll lead you gently.

Fast-forward to John 10, where Jesus is speaking about his sheep: ‘My sheep hear my voice, and they - ’ What do his sheep do? They follow, because His is a trusted voice.



God will never force His will upon you; He will lead you gently.

Sheep cannot be driven; did you know that? If they're driven, they scatter. Sheep have to be led, but even in that, there's danger. Sheep are eager to follow the wrong path and the wrong voice. Would you agree that there are a lot of butchers and hunters and poachers out there wanting to take advantage of God's sheep?

### ***“He restores my soul” (vs 3)***

He restores my soul. This has become so beautiful to me. Notice the specific nature of this verse. What is David saying? Is he saying God restores his spirit, or his body? No, He restores my... soul.

I'm a firm believe in the triune functionality of man. I'm being very intentional about my language here. I did not say mankind is made up of 3 parts; I don't believe that. Man is a whole being. If you divide him into parts, he ceases to be human. But, we all do have 3 areas where we have functions: body, soul, and spirit.

The body functions in our physical world. The spirit functions in world of the spiritual dimension, and the soul functions in-between. It holds our personality the part of us that's unique to every single one of us.

David writes here how God restores his soul. Your soul is different than your spirit. There is some confusion around that, but numerous places in scripture<sup>5</sup> indicate a separation between the two. God's restoration of our soul is crucial.

The key, my friend, is that the spirit part of us has been sealed. It's been sealed and will remain sealed until the day we're delivered to the kingdom<sup>6</sup>.

**Our spirit can never be touched by the Enemy.  
It is always right, always perfect, always holy,  
always loved, always accepted.**

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5 and Hebrews 4 are good examples of this: 'the Word of God is able to divide between soul and spirit.'

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 1, Ephesians 4

My spirit is safe; it's cool and will always be cool - but there's a problem. We live in a physical world, a world under a curse. This world is under the power of the evil one<sup>7</sup>, and as a result, you and I experience things we were never designed to experience. We feel things we were never designed to feel, which causes great turmoil to our souls.

Even in the face of a vicious attack, David writes how God restores his soul. Do you know what I hear behind David's words?

*'I live in a fallen world; right now my own son is trying to kill me. Death is coming at me, attacking from the outside trying to get at my soul. But Life from Father is working in me, moving from the inside, out through my Spirit - and this Life overcomes the death from Absalom.*

In the face of attack from the enemy, God restores my soul. God promises to take those emotions that scream, and He'll quiet them with the confirmation of His love and His acceptance and His working in our lives.

**'David, my son, the death that you see, it's not the end of the story!'**

Father whispers that to you as well. My friend, when we're mired down, when death and suffering happens, our mind wanders where it shouldn't go. Our mind wanders to bills. It goes to bank accounts. It goes to things others have, and what we don't have, and war, economy, and crime.

Our mind then triggers our emotions, and the fear and the envy and the hurt and the anger and the sorrow and the shame. All these wayward functions influence our Will to make bad choices. This ushers even more carnage upon our lives, and our souls get worn out. In this midst of this, David is saying

'When I choose to go vertical, and look to God as an act of my will, and transfer my allegiance from the resources of self and the resources of others to

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<sup>7</sup> 1 John 5:4

the resources of God alone, the eternal zoe-life of God<sup>8</sup> *will* overcome the natural bios-life<sup>9</sup> I experience in a fallen world.’

### **He restores my soul.**

God promised that His light shall shine out of the darkness - and when did that happen? At creation, right? But, in the **new** creation, in the creation that is constantly taking place within us, God shines His own light through us, lighting up the dark world.

In the old creation, God said, ‘Let there be light’. In the **new** creation of man, light shines inside out. We have this treasure, in us, so that the greatness of the power will be from God, and not from us.

My friend, when this is happening in the midst of our dire circumstances, 2 Corinthians 4:8 is no longer simply a passage in the scriptures. It becomes a life experience:

*“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.”*

Oh, we’re afflicted in every way, are we not? But we’re not crushed. And we’re perplexed - aren’t we perplexed? As I’ve looked at my little girl, hospital bound over these last two weeks, I was perplexed -but not despairing.

Are we ever persecuted? Yes, sometimes - but not forsaken. Cast down? Oh yes. Knocked down? Yes. Destroyed? No. Because I know this: the One who raised Jesus up from the dead will raise us also.

### **Now hear me: when Paul writes that we will be raised also, he is not talking about our eventual resurrection out of the grave.**

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<sup>8</sup> zoe vs bios - natural life vs eternal life... literal translations needed

<sup>9</sup> zoe vs bios - natural life vs eternal life... literal translations needed



See, he's arguing from greater to lesser. He's saying that if God showed up for Jesus in the worst suffering any human has ever endured, will He not show up in the midst of your suffering, and raise you up above the suffering, just like He raised Christ? Of course He will! Therefore, we don't quit.

Paul continues on in verse 16:

*'...though the outer man decays, the inner man is renewed day by day. And momentary light affliction produces an eternal weight of glory. While we look at the things that are not seen, not the things that are seen, to the things that are eternal, not the things that are temporal.'*

My friend, David's choices in Psalm 23 reflect this exactly. He doesn't spend his efforts and energy looking horizontal. He doesn't allow himself to dwell on the unfairness and injustice of his situation. He looks past the things that are seen with physical eyes, and looks to things that are eternal. And God restores his soul.

### ***"He leads me in the paths of righteousness." (vs 4)***

You might want to circle the phrase, 'paths of righteousness'. A literal translation of the original text reads 'well worn paths'. There's an interesting revelation about you and I wrapped up in this text.

If you come across a well worn path in the woods, what does it tell you? It tells you others have gone down that path. It tells you it's a proven path, it's the right path.

Also, look at the phrase that opens the verse: "He leads me..." Isn't it true friends, that we often need to be led directly to the right path? In my life, I might be able to see the right path, and I might even know it's the right path - but unless God takes me there Himself, unless He leads me there, I won't take it. Why is that?



Father leads us down the well-worn paths of righteousness.

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Well, if I'm honest with myself, I know that deep down, I still like choosing other paths. Despite that, even though I'm prone to drift off track, or be drawn to other pastures, God meets me there. He promises 'Trust me. I'm going to bring you down the right path. I'm going to lead you there myself.'

A shepherd I came across wrote about this; it's so good:

*'If God is going to be my shepherd, we need to begin recognizing that we're sheep.'*

*I frankly don't like that analogy, because I don't like sheep. Now, I come by my dislike honestly; I used to raise sheep. Now goats, I can abide goats, because they may be obnoxious, but at least they're smart.*

*'Sheep are, beyond question, the most stupid animal on the face of the earth. They are dumb, they are dirty, they are timid, defenseless, and helpless. My sheep were always getting lost, hurt, and snake-bit. They literally didn't know enough to come in out of the rain.'*

*'Quite frankly, I look back on my shepherding days with a great deal of disgust because sheep are miserable creatures. And then, to have God*

*tell me that i am one of those? Well, that hurts my feelings. But if i'm honest with myself ,I have to admit it's true. I lack wisdom. I lack strength. I'm inclined to choose the wrong path, which is the path of self-destruction.*

*'Just like the hymn writer said, I am prone to wander. Isaiah said it best, "all we like sheep have gone astray, and turned to our own way." I am a sheep. I know my tendency towards self-indulgent individualism. I know my tendency to go my own way and do my own thing. That's me. I'm a sheep, and if Jesus christ is ever going to be my shepherd, I need to start by admitting I need one.'*

It's a good word, isn't it? If Jesus Christ is ever going to be my shepherd, I need to start by admitting I need a shepherd. Powerful.

### ***"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." (vs 4)***

Do you notice how the path of righteousness, the well-worn path, takes you through the valley of the shadow of death? Exciting, right?

Have you also observed that most people use this psalm for funerals? Now, it's okay to do that, but I have to point out that this passage is not talking about dying! It's not talking about Death! This passage is for the living. It's for people who are alive - but are having death-like experiences:

David being rejected by his son.

David losing his kingdom.

David having the people not support him.

David feeling alone and helpless.

This verse is a picture of the Shepherd leading his sheep home at night. There is actually so much comfort in this image - why?

Because I'm not in this valley alone, because You art with me.

## ***“I will fear no evil...” (vs 4)***

Did you see catch the big shift? Did you see it? You’re probably thinking, ‘Frank, what are you talking about?’ Let’s put this car in park for a minute. I want you to look at verses one through three, and tell me about the pronouns David uses: He. The Lord. He. In verses one through three, we are talking **about** the Shepherd.

In verses four through six, however, it’s no longer ‘the Lord’. It’s no longer ‘He’. It’s changed to ‘You’. we talk **to** the Shepherd. Isn’t that fascinating?

We can talk about God all we want, but when you and I start to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, simply talking **about** God doesn’t cut it anymore. We need to talk **to** God. We have got to **have** God.

**When I’m in the valley of the shadow of death, I don’t need doctrine. I need power - and power only comes from a Person.**

You can’t get power from doctrine. From this point forward, this psalm shifts. For David, it’s all relationship. It’s all intimacy.

Through this Psalm, Father is asking you a question. What is it that’s scaring you today? What is it that’s causing you the experience of death today? Are you losing your kid? Did you lose your job - is that a danger? Has the economy got you scared? Is the enemy beating you up with something you did? Is it your marriage?

Look, when it’s dark out there in the valley of the shadow of death, it can be scary! I mean, just picture a little sheep walking through a canyon, surrounded by thick shadows. Who knew shadows could be so scary? And it’s not just shadows - there are real wild animals in there! And there are poachers and hunters!

## **“...for You are with me.” (vs 5)**

Our Shepherd offers His strength for our weakness, His courage for our fear, His peace for our unrest, His hope for our anxiety, His light for our darkness.

You know, I’ve been trying to form a habit. Whenever I wake up, and before I leave the house, I try to say this:

*‘Lord I’m not up to the demands of this day, but you are. Lord, I believe you, but will you help my unbelief? Because when I start to see the big old world out there, I begin seeing less and less of You.’*

Then, with my will, I choose to set my heart and mind to the vertical. I get in my car, turn the key, and drive out into a world that I don’t know what I’m going to find - and I can do that because I will fear no evil.

**This doesn’t mean I’m not going to feel fear,  
it means I’m not going to let fear control me.**

We might feel alone, but we’re never alone. We might feel unloved, but we’re never unloved. We may feel rejected, but we are never rejected, my friend! We are, 24/7, loved, accepted, significant, and we are abounding in mercy and grace, coming from the One who really matters. It’s true!

## **“Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (vs 4)**



We’ve seen this psalm quickly become about having a personal relationship with Father. Look what David writes in verse four. ‘Your rod and staff they comfort me.’

Now ‘rod’ isn’t really a good translation either. It should be translated ‘club’. So, how does a club comfort you? Because Father



has given the promise He's never going to use it on you! That club is used to fend off the wild animals, the lions, the bear, the wolf. He's going to protect you.

The staff is the walking stick with the little crook on the end of it. If you start to run off the path, He's going to use his staff to hook you, and bring you right back on the right path. It's wonderful.

My friend, the heart of God is to always to step into our lives with the provision of His life.

***“You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies.”  
(vs 5)***

In these next few verses, verses five and six, I want you to notice the language; David shifts metaphors. He changes from presenting Father as our Shepherd, to presenting Father as host of a great banquet for us. We move from the valley of the shadow of death to a feast. You, O God, prepare a table for me. You prepare a buffet.

The Hebrew David uses in this verse can be literally translated as ‘He lays out a spread’. Isn't that cool? And in the presence of enemies, too! God almost taunts your foes, saying ‘You think *you* have them, but I've got them!’ God is the original author of ‘Nyah Nyah’! Isn't that cool?

Can you imagine how David must have felt, receiving this in his mind as God spoke it to him? ‘David, I'm going to lay a spread for you - out in front of Absalom, son. He's not going to kill you! You're mine.’

***‘You anoint my head with oil, my cup runs over.’ (vs 5)***

Today, you and I don't have the cultural reference to understand this verse. Let me quote this excellent summary from The Shepherd's Psalm:

*‘Oil and wine were highly valued in the dry barren lands of the ancient east. In Palestine, where the sun shines fiercely most of the year, and*

*the temperature continually soars up into the 100s, the skin becomes cracked and broken, and throats becomes parched. Oil soothes the skin, particularly the face. Wine soothes the throat. When a guest arrives at the home of a friend, hospitality demanded that the provision of oil and wine so that the ravages of travel will be overcome.<sup>10</sup>*

What does this mean for us?

As you endure the ravages of travel in this fallen world, God has promised to provide oil, the balm, for your parched skin, and the joy of wine for the parched throat. Have you ever gone through difficult circumstances where you found you couldn't even speak? Where you felt like, 'What would I say? Nobody will understand. Nobody can understand what I'm going through.'

God wants to soothe the ravage of your travel through this fallen world. Isn't that awesome? And he says 'My cup is going to run over'.

***“Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.” (vs 6)***

For this portion of the psalm, you and I have a little more translation work to do. I encourage you - don't simply take my word for this! Track down a concordance (they're easily available online), and follow along with me here as I examine two key words in this verse.

The first word I want to examine is 'follow'. I believe is a terrible translation of the original text.. 'Goodness and mercy are going to follow me all the days of my life.'

Do you only want goodness and mercy to be *following* you around... is that what you want? Is that what you need? Can you imagine it? 'Goodness, Mercy! Come one... Come on, catch up! Follow me!' Is that what you really need? I'll tell you that this is not good enough for me!

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<sup>10</sup> The Shepherd's Psalm, by David Montgomery Boice (<http://www.alliancenet.org/tab/the-shepherds-psalm-part-three>)

The Hebrew word used here is much stronger than ‘follow’. In your Bible, circle ‘follow’, and write instead ‘**pursue**’. Pursue is the Hebrew word that’s used in this verse. Goodness and mercy are going to pursue me all the days of my life! For a moment, let’s consider goodness and mercy.

The overarching metaphor of Psalm 23 is Father as Shepherd. We’re the sheep. What happens when sheep begin to wander?

Often, that’s the moment that the shepherd whistles for his sheep-dog, and what does the dog do? It chases after the sheep, pursuing them, even nipping at their heels to keep them moving in the right direction. That’s goodness and mercy.

When we start to wander down the other paths, or are drifting away from the well-worn path of righteousness, what does God do? He whistles, “Alright, Goodness! Mercy! Come on - get after him!” He sends them chasing after us.



Goodness and Mercy will follow us, nipping at our heels. God’s kindness leads us to repentance!

After all, as you experience God's goodness and his mercy, why would you ever choose one of those other paths? Paul discusses this very thing in Romans chapter two, where he tells us that God's kindness leads us to repentance<sup>11</sup>.

**Surely, goodness and mercy will  
pursue you all the days of your life.**

Let's look more closely at the second word I want to examine with you 'Surely'. As you may have guessed, I don't think that's the best word for that either. I truly think it should read 'Only'.

At this point in his reign, David is an old king; he's looking back on his life, and he's seeing all his different struggles. He looks back and sees the valley of the shadow of death, and he sees the wrong paths he chose, but he sees them through heaven's eyes, and what does he say? 'ONLY Goodness and Mercy really pursued me; they are the threads I see winding throughout all of my experiences.'

This verse, Psalm 23:6, is the Old Testament version of Romans 8:28 - where all things ultimately work together for good for them that love God according to his purpose.

**My friend, when you and I are on the other side of eternity,  
we will finally look back at our lives with perfect clarity.**

We will see the difficult times, the valley of the shadow of death - and we will see the goodness of God, and the mercy of God. We'll see that those two things were there all along. We will see that God's purpose for us was only good.

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 2:4

I often think of the prodigal son here. He didn't choose the well worn path. He took off; he left his home for the far country. What happened ? He ended up hungry. The pigs he was caring for ate better than he did.

**Do you realize that every rumble in his tummy was the goodness of God, prompting him home?**

Every time a pig ate better than him, it was God's mercy. 'Those pigs are eating better than you are, son. Go home!'

What does the prodigal son finally do? He wakes up and realizes 'My father treats his servants better than this' He got a revelation of God. Now, it wasn't a good revelation, because he asked his father to make him a servant. How did the father respond? 'Never will you be a servant, you are my son.'

**The prodigal son got enough revelation to return to his Father - and that's what goodness and mercy will do.**

When we are on the other side of eternity, friends, all those haunting questions we have - you know the ones: Why? Why, Lord? How come? How long? Well, all those questions aren't going to bother us any more, because we're going to see for ourselves, in stunning clarity, that goodness and mercy that were nipping at our heels the entire time.

***"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (vs 6)***

How does David end? 'I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.' But that's wrong.

Any Old Testament scholar will tell you that this very, very poor historical practice. It runs directly against Old Testament Law. Let's understand this more. David is a King, and he is declaring that he will dwell in the Lord's house. This is not allowed under the law.



No king could live in the house of the Lord. No king could live in the tabernacle grounds. A king could visit for worship through the sacrifice of a lamb, but he could not dwell there.

My friend, as David closes this psalm, he sees his relationship with God through **new** covenant eyes. In the old covenant, the sheep died for the shepherd. But, in the new covenant the Shepherd dies for the sheep. And, because of the Shepherd's sacrifice, we have been made righteous through the death of the lamb.

We can now dwell in the house of the Lord; in fact, we are the house the Lord inhabits. Heaven is right here, by faith.

**The Lord leads and provides and restores and directs, and one day, you and I will be called to face-to-face intimacy and the full experience of unconditional love.**

The phrase 'I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever' makes me think of two passages, which I will close with:

*"For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them, and he will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away all tears from their eyes."*

*"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, and - I love this one - no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

Or as David put it "we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." As we close this study on Psalm 23, let's you and I pray together.

*"Father, what a beautiful psalm. We marvel, but we also want to respond. This is not just David's story, it's our story. We all have our Absaloms, and we all want to tackle them by the horns and fix the situation. But Lord, we need to be made to lie down so that you can restore us from the*

*inside out. Because as death comes in from the world, we need life coming out from our Spirit to overwhelm death.*

*Father, as we walk through this valley, we take comfort in the fact that you promise to guide us and protect us, and to provide a victory feast in the very presence of our enemies. Thank you for anointing us to heal from the ravages of our travel. We're looking forward to the day when even the likes of us dwell in your House.*

*Wow. Thank you for that Father,*

*in Jesus name.*

*Amen.*

## About the Author



**Frank Friedman is a pastor and speaker based out of Baton-Rouge, Louisiana.** He serves as Lead Pastor of Grace Life Fellowship. He has been married to his wife for twenty-eight years, and they have 4 children: Les-Leigh, Ben, Morgan and Avery.

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