

37. The Book of Psalms 23:3a

The Great Shepherd-Part 5

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

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This morning I want to draw your attention once again to Psalm 23.

Psalm 23:1–3a (NKJV)

¹ The Lord *is* my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. ³ **He restores my soul...**

When we read the beginning part of verse 3—it doesn't seem to make sense, in fact it almost sounds contradictory to the whole premise of this psalm. I mean if the Lord is my Shepherd, my owner, the One who's in charge of and controlling my life—why should my soul ever need to be restored?

The Hebrew word translated '**restores**' means "*to turn around, to be brought back—to repent.*"

We've got to remember that David is writing this from a sheep's perspective, likening himself to a sheep and applying certain character traits of a sheep to his own character—and then likening the Lord to a Shepherd who cared for him as a Shepherd does His sheep.

One of the character traits of sheep is that they are prone to wander. They are also prone to get lost very quickly—even when the shepherd happened to be just out of their sight. When sheep wandered away from the protection of the shepherd, they were immediately in danger from predators as well as from dangerous terrain.

It was the shepherd who would have to go out looking for a lost sheep because the sheep wouldn't be able to find its way back to the flock on its own. You see, sheep have a very poor sense of direction and need the shepherd to come looking for them, and to restore them to the flock.

As we relate this analogy to ourselves, it becomes a picture of our own wandering heart and how the Lord will search us out and bring us to repentance—or in other words, to "**restore our soul**" (bring us back to Himself).

V. He Restores My Soul—verse 3a

Before we actually look at how the Lord does this—I think it's a beautiful thing to realize that it is He that restores our souls. It is He who is out looking for lost sheep—those who have wandered away and have gotten into trouble.

It is He who, when He finds these sheep no matter what kind of trouble or mess they've gotten themselves into—He rejoices at having found them and in being able to restore them to His fold!

Luke 15:4–7 (NLT)

⁴ "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he

will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. ⁶ When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

Whenever one of His sheep wanders from Him, He never writes them off or gives up on them. That means if you are a 'wayward' sheep who has wandered from Him—He is actively involved in your life trying to restore your soul.

But listen, the Lord can't restore you to His fold (that place of fellowship, blessing, provision and protection) until you have first come to repentance—and so in that regard, repentance is the gateway to restoration! First of all, the word 'repentance' means to turn around—a 180-degree turn from the direction you're currently headed in (away from Him).

So, with that in mind, there are 5 things mentioned in Scripture that God will use to bring us to repentance—5 things He'll use to kind of prod our hearts and turn us around from the path we're on so He can fully restore our souls (hearts) to Him.

1. The knowledge of His Word

God has revealed many things to us in His Word that pertain to His will for our lives.

There are times (especially for the young Christian), when we find ourselves involved in things that are unpleasing to God yet we're not aware of it—the Bible calls these '*sins of ignorance*.' These are sins we commit that we don't realize are sins—in other words, they are not deliberate acts of *willful* rebellion against God—we're just ignorant to what God has said on the subject.

But as we read God's Word—suddenly we come face to face with a verse or a passage that labels our actions as sinful in the eyes of God—I didn't realize how God felt about it but now I do. If our hearts are right and wanting to be obedient to God—that knowledge should lead us to repentance.

If I refuse to change then we move into *willful rebellion* and now I become guilty of a *transgression*. A transgression is far more serious than is a sin of ignorance.

God's Word has been given to us so that we might know His will and walk in obedience to His Word—which means sometimes it will bring us to repentance—even as Paul said many centuries later—"...for by the law is the knowledge of sin." (Romans 3:20)

2. Sorrow for sin

The Bible teaches us that God has written His laws on our heart—in other words, He has created every man and woman with an inherent knowledge of right and wrong. God has also provided with us an '*alarm system*' that begins to sound when I break one of God's laws (commands)—that alarm system is called our *conscience*.

When I do something that violates God's laws (think primarily of the 10 Commandments), my conscience lets me know it by making me feel guilty.

There are many so-called ‘experts’ today who are trying to tell us that all guilt is bad. But listen, it’s possible to so ignore your conscience in the face of repeated sin that you actually *‘short-circuit’* it and render it inoperative.

The Bible calls this *“searing your conscience as with a hot iron”*—which basically means it becomes like burned scare tissue—totally desensitized to the warning of your conscience.

At that point a person becomes the total slave of sin, totally insensitive to some of the most gross forms of sin (the murder of innocent children in their mother’s womb; the murder of a health care CEO in cold blood; the slaughter of 6-million Jews under Hitler; or the murder of a man of God like Charlie Kirk who dared to stand up and call sin, sin, etc.).

For those who haven’t gotten to that point, who do feel guilty when they violate something that God said is sin the guilt brings about sorrow and sorrow can lead us to repentance—but not always.

You see, many people believe that just because they *feel* sorry for their sin—that God has forgiven them.

But God doesn’t work through *sorrow*, He works through repentance.

- Being sorry or expressing regret or remorse for our sin is not repentance.
- All repentance stems from sorrow, but not all sorrow leads to repentance.
- A person can be as sorry as they can be over their sin yet not be repentant and therefore not be forgiven by God.

Paul the Apostle addressed this very issue in 2Corinthians 7 calling remorse or regret *“worldly sorrow”* if no change takes place—

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance [change]. For you were made sorry in a godly manner...¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

It’s important to understand that ‘sorrow’ is often based on the consequence of what your sin has brought into your life.

Every convict in prison is sorry—sorry they got caught and now have to deal with the consequences of their actions. However, based on the recidivism rate of repeat offenders, their sorrow hasn’t moved them to change their behavior.

Which means they’re sorry they got caught and now have to deal with the consequences of their actions (sin) but they’re really not sorry for what they did (that it violated God’s commands) and if given the opportunity would probably commit the same crime again!

Only godly sorrow will lead to repentance and only then to restoration.

3. The goodness of God

Romans 2:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

God is so good and He loves us so much that many times, when we find ourselves backslidden (involved in sin of some kind)—He still pours His blessings upon us and we can't understand why—It's because He wants us to know He still loves us and that by continuing to bless our lives, His goodness toward us will cause us to repent and allow Him to restore us back to Him.

Now there's a danger of *misunderstanding* what God is trying to do as He continues to bless us even when we're not walking rightly with Him.

Some are prone to think—“*Maybe God doesn't care*” or even worse “*Maybe He approves!*”

The Apostle Paul warned in Galatians 6:7— “*Don't be deceived, God is not mocked whatever a person sows that they will eventually reap..*”

4. Chastisement

Revelation 3:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.

When the knowledge of the Word doesn't bring us to repentance, or guilt, or the goodness of God—then the Lord has to resort to chastisement (discipline). But understand that chastisement is not the same as punishment—God *punishes* the wicked, He *disciplines* His children.

The first is *punitive* whereas the second (discipline) is corrective.

When a sheep wandered away, it immediately put itself in real danger, and the shepherd would have to act quickly to bring it back to the fold before it fell down a ravine or was attacked by a predator. Now if there was a young sheep (a lamb) that was constantly wandering away from the shepherd and putting itself in danger—the shepherd would have to take extreme measures to ensure its future safety.

So, the shepherd would take that little sheep and—break one of its legs! He would then set the leg and carry that little lamb in his arm (close to his heart) everywhere he went until the leg was healed.

But during the time he was carrying this little lamb it would begin to get use to being close to its shepherd—and become attached to him. So much so that when the leg was eventually healed and he put the lamb down, that little lamb would follow closely after the shepherd—it was no longer prone to wander!

Could this be the very thing David had in mind when he said—

Psalm 51:8 (NKJV)

⁸ Make me hear joy and gladness, *That* the bones You have broken may rejoice.

Paraphrase—“*I was prone to wander from You, but You broke my bones and now I rejoice that I desire to stay close to You!*”

Psalm 119:67–68 (NKJV)

⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word. ⁶⁸ You *are* good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes.

I just hear PETA screaming, “*That's cruel!*”

What's more cruel, causing a little pain to the sheep now in the hopes of keeping them from danger—or pampering them by letting the lamb wander wherever it wants until they fall down a jagged ravine or are torn apart by a hungry wolf or some other wild animal?

Sometimes God's chastening might seem cruel or harsh at times—but it's always done out of love to hopefully keep you from wandering away from Him where you could really suffer harm at the hands of Satan.

One pastor—

“Are you prone to wander? Is your heart unwilling to follow Him? If so, then Jesus wants to restore you soul and sometimes that means bringing something into your life that may cause some pain now but is designed to make you totally dependent on Him in the future, so that you learn to trust Him and when it's all over to cause you to follow closely after Him. But understand that it's all out of love that He does it. The shepherd never wants to break a lamb's leg—but he will if he has to for its own good because of his love for the sheep. The same is true with regard to our good and great Shepherd Jesus Christ!”

Look, Satan isn't playing games—he's playing for real and for keeps! And drastic times call for drastic measures—all in the name of God's great love for His sheep!

So, God will use the knowledge of His Word; sorrow for our sin; His continued loving kindness and goodness toward us even when we've gotten into sin; and chastisement—all as a means of prodding our hearts and turn us around from the path we're on so He can fully restore our souls (hearts) to Him.

I'll give you one more—

5. Final judgment

Acts 17:30–31 (NKJV)

³⁰ Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness...”

God has designed the final judgment in hell and the preaching of it to lead rebellious people to repentance (this is what God used in my life to bring me to Jesus!).

Many people get really turned off (even visibly angry) at the slightest implication of judgment being a reality for them living lives of rebellion against God's *holy* commandments. All they want to hear about is God's love and acceptance of the way they're living.

We are living at a time when people don't want a God Who is holy and takes sin seriously—so they 'get rid' of the true God, the God of the Bible in favor of a more tolerant version of God! A god that 'embraces' people no matter how they're living because He's a god of love—and love accepts!

These people reject thoroughly a God that judges sin—if they even believe in sin at all.

The reason that people usually reject the God of the Bible in favor of a god that is kinder, gentler and non-judgmental is because—they love their sin and can't handle a God who says that certain behaviors are unrighteous and perverted and therefore are forbidden by Him.

That leaves them with one of two choices:

1. *They can get right with God by repenting and obeying Him.*

OR

2. *They can get rid of God by becoming an atheist or replacing Him with a god that is like themselves.*

By that I mean—if they're soft on sin, they invent a god that is tolerant and soft on sin (or doesn't believe in sin at all). If they don't want to think about going to hell—they create a god that is all love and kindness and would never judge and send anyone to a horrible place called hell (if they even believe it exists at all!).

This then opens the door to unbridled sin as they promote and practice the very things God has forbidden (homosexuality, killing the innocent through abortion, immorality of all different kinds—even murder!) and in the process many of them think of themselves as wonderful, tolerant, open-minded people—even as Christians!

Look, Jesus talked about hell more than anyone else—in fact, He talked about it more than He talked about heaven or even love—because He didn't want anyone to go there!

And so, David said, **“The Lord is my Shepherd...He restores my soul!”**

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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