

Psalm 23

The Lord truly is our Shepherd

PRAYER TIME:

Psalm 23:1–6 (ESV) *1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 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. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Vs 1-3 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. 3 He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

These three verses teach us that our LORD shepherds us, leads us, and restores us. Reflect on how the Lord has cared for you, guided your path, or brought restoration into your life in recent times. Now, offer thanksgiving for these blessings:

Lord, thank you for _____.

Vs 6 *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

In Psalm 23:6, where it states, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life," the Hebrew word translated as "follow" (רָדַף, *radaph*) typically implies a more vigorous pursuit than simply following. While the English "follow" can suggest a passive trailing, *radaph* can connote pursuing, chasing, or even overtaking with intent.

What areas of your life do you need God to chase you down with His goodness and mercy?

- Emotional healing
- Spiritual restoration
- Physical health
- Forgiveness and grace
- Financial provision
- Relational reconciliation
- Direction and purpose
- Protection from harm
- Mental health
- Addiction recovery

Lord, chase me/us down with your goodness and mercy as I/we go through _____.

For our students leaving for summer camp tomorrow:

Lord chase down our kids with your goodness and mercy:

Spiritual renewal, clarity of your goodness toward them, your protection for them.

INTRO:

- We are taking the summer to go through some Psalms (Next summer we will cover some Proverbs).
- **3 reminders**
 - The book of Psalms, often called the Psalter, is a collection of prayers sung by God's people. Think of the Psalter as a hymnbook of prayers.
 - The Psalms teach us to pray, giving us godly words for our fallen nature.
 - a. Athanasius wrote that the Psalms 'have a unique place in the Bible because most of the Scripture speaks to us, while the Psalms speak *for* us.'
 - b. In Luther's *Preface to the Psalter* he wrote, 'As a teacher will compose letters or little speeches for his pupils to write to their parents, so by this book He prepares both the language and the mood in which we should address the Heavenly Father.'
 - And, all of the Psalms ultimately point to Jesus!

Today we are in Psalm 23 and it comes on the heels of Psalm 22 that starts with "My God, my God why have you forsaken me..." Then later says, **Psalm 22:16–18 (ESV) 16** *For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet— 17 I can count all my bones— they stare and gloat over me; 18 they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.*

Lk 24:44-45, "Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the **Psalms** must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

PRAYER: Open our minds to understand the Scriptures!

OPEN:

Have ya'll heard about Bryan Johnson - the successful tech entrepreneur who sold his company for hundreds of millions of dollars. And with that wealth, he's doing something no one else has tried at this scale: he's trying to cheat death. Johnson launched "Project Blueprint." He spends about two million dollars a year on his body. He has a team of more than thirty doctors, scientists, and experts who track over a hundred biomarkers—every organ, every system. He follows an extreme, data-driven regimen: precise meals measured to the gram, strict sleep schedules, endless supplements, workouts, and experimental treatments. His goal? To reverse his biological age so that his organs perform like an eighteen-year-old's. He wants to live to 150... or longer. He's even said we might be the first generation that doesn't have to die. "Don't

Die" is his mantra. "And just last week, even Bryan Johnson — the man spending millions to become biologically 18 again — announced he's been diagnosed with an incurable autoimmune disease where his own stomach is attacking itself. All the money, all the data, all the experts... and death still casts its shadow."

Bryan Johnson is still walking through the valley of the shadow of death—just like every single one of us. No amount of money, technology, or willpower can cancel the appointment we all have with mortality. The Bible is brutally honest about this.

Psalms 23 doesn't sugarcoat the journey. It says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death..."Today we're going to lean into that reality—and even better, into the hope that the Shepherd who walks with us through that valley offers something Bryan Johnson's billions can't buy: eternal life, perfect peace, hope, a satisfying joy, and a table prepared for us even in the presence of our enemy, death.

Vs 1 *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

- Notice with whom this Psalm starts with – THE LORD!
- The Lamb of God is now the shepherd of God's people
- I shall not 'be in want or need.'
- A shepherd takes care of the sheep's every need.
- Like good parents take care of their baby's every need – so does the good shepherd take care of His.
- David uses imagery he is very familiar with.

Vs 2 *He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.*

- 2 ways a person can be 'made' to do something:
Persuasion or Coercion
- God has taught us (persuasion) but if we don't rest, then out of his grace comes coercion.
- We are finite, we need rest – God provides it... He is our recovery (green numbers on whoop)
- These pastures are lush and safe – not barren and dangerous
- The word "still or quiet" in "still waters" is elsewhere translated as "rest" and used of the promised land in Psalm 95:11
- Rest NOW and eternal rest when we cross the other side.

- Sheep won't drink from running water – they weren't designed to do so. The shepherd knows the design of the sheep and leads them to the right sources for flourishing.

Vs 3 *He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

- It's HIM that restores you – no matter how much we want to restore ourselves (Bryan Johnson) ultimately it is God who does the work.
- God is for God before He is for you – not that He isn't for you, BUT His motivation of being for you is the sake of His own name.

"God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." Piper

- If God were primarily about us, He would be small, changeable, and unreliable (like us).
- Because He is first about Himself, His love for us is unbreakable — it's tied to His unchanging glory. He won't abandon us because that would stain His name.

One of the most freeing truths in the Bible is this: God is first and foremost for God. Now, that can sound cold at first—like it works against our joy. But it's actually the exact opposite. We are most satisfied in God when His name is exalted, not when ours is. Think about a family where the parents live only to make their kids happy. They remove every boundary, give in to every demand, and center the whole home around the children's feelings. What usually happens? The kids become more miserable, entitled, and anxious—not less. Why? Because we weren't designed to be worshipped. We weren't made to have everything revolve around us. Children actually thrive—and are far happier—when they live in a family with clear boundaries, loving authority, and a bigger purpose than their own momentary happiness. They flourish when they learn they're part of something greater than themselves.

That's exactly how it works with us and God. When God puts His glory and His name first—when He leads us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake—He is not being selfish. He is loving us perfectly. Making us the center would crush us. Making Him the center liberates and satisfies us. The good news of Psalm 23 is not "The Lord is my personal assistant who exists to make me comfortable."

The good news is: "The Lord is my Shepherd... and He is fiercely committed to His own glory—which means He will never abandon or short-change those who belong to Him."

Vs 4 *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.*

- Story of when we went to the valley of the shadow of death:

- For centuries this was the dangerous shortcut travelers took. Robbers hid in caves. Thieves waited for the vulnerable. Wild animals lurked. It was a place where death cast a long shadow — exactly the kind of road where Jesus set the Parable of the Good Samaritan.
- Notice what David doesn't say. He doesn't say the valley disappears. He doesn't say the shadows vanish. He says, "I will fear no evil" — not because the danger is gone, but because the Shepherd is with me.
- This whole life is the valley of the shadow of death — not just the hours before we depart. We don't have to fear at any point in our earthly life

Ancient Near Eastern shepherds carried two main tools (not one Swiss-army-knife stick):

- The Rod (Hebrew: shebet)
A short, thick club (often oak), weighted at one end, sometimes with embedded nails or studs.
 - Used as a weapon to fight off lions, bears, wolves, or bandits (see David in 1 Samuel 17:34–36 — "I struck him and killed him").
 - Also used for counting and inspecting sheep as they passed under it ("passing under the rod" = ownership and examination, Ezekiel 20:37).
 - Symbol: Power, authority, protection, and defense. God as Warrior-Shepherd who fights for His sheep.
- The Staff (Hebrew: mish'enet)
A long, slender pole (often 6–8 feet) with a curved hook at the end.
 - Used to guide the flock, gently hook a wandering lamb by the leg and pull it back, rescue sheep from holes or thickets, and lean on while walking.
 - Symbol: Guidance, comfort, correction, and intimate care. God as Gentle Shepherd who leads and rescues.
- The rod says: "No enemy will touch you while I'm here — I will fight for you."
- The staff says: "I see you. I'm guiding you step by step. I won't let you fall or wander off."

Vs 5 *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

Psalms 104:14–15 (ESV) **14** *You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth* **15** *and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.*

- There is a “table” laid up for a victory banquet. There are “enemies”—those who persist to the end in opposing God’s Son—but they cannot participate in the banquet; they can only watch in defeated frustration
- Cup of wrath exchanged for the cup of grace

Vs 6 *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

- the Hebrew word translated as "follow" (רדף, *radaph*) typically implies a more vigorous pursuit than simply following. While the English "follow" can suggest a passive trailing, *radaph* can connote pursuing, chasing, or even overtaking with intent.
- Dwell = abide

CONCLUSION

- Christ walked through death, so we only have to walk through the shadow of death

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS:

1. In verses 1–3, David says the Lord is his Shepherd who makes him lie down, leads him, restores his soul, and guides him in right paths.
How has the Lord cared for you, guided your path, or brought restoration to your life recently?
2. Psalm 23:6 says goodness and mercy will pursue (or “chase”) us all the days of our life.
In what area of your life right now do you most need God to actively chase you down with His goodness and mercy?
(You can use the list from the sermon as prompts if needed: emotional healing, spiritual restoration, relationships, direction, protection, etc.)