**Psalm 23 - Part 1**

The opening verse of [Psalm 23](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ps+23) establishes the theme for all the rest of the psalm; and, the entire psalm is an expression of confidence and trust in the LORD

The 23rd Psalm is one of the best known scriptures in the entire Bible. Next to [John 3:16](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Jn+3%3A16), [Psalm 23](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ps+23) is the best-known and probably most-beloved passage in all the Word of God.

Much has been written devotionally on this Psalm. Hundreds of books have been published, but it has never been exhausted nor will it ever be.

The Great nineteenth-century preacher Charles Spurgeon entitled it “the pearl of the Psalms.” It is the psalm people turn to in life’s most difficult times. For centuries it has given comfort, peace, and hope to those who read it.

Many families who have a family Bible on display in their homes, have the family Bible permanently open to the 23rd Psalm and prominently displayed on the cocktail table.

Sadly, however, although this psalm is greatly loved by many, it perhaps is one of the least believed, based on how many Christians behave in the face of adversity and uncertainty. In the face of opposition and trials, there is often little evidence in some Christians, that they truly believe the truth espoused by this psalm.

As we study these short 6 verses, we will find in them, a beautiful description of God's care over his people. This care is shown in the form of two allegories, in which God is depicted in two ways:

1. First, as a Shepherd – In describing God as a Shepherd, David vividly describes his own sense of the fullness of God’s care for him. David who was, himself a shepherd, in his early years, was well acquainted with sheep’s dependence upon their shepherd, as he reflected back on the provisions and protection he gave his own sheep. In tending his own sheep, David no doubt remembered his first priority was to supply his sheep with all they needed for their well-being.

In being the “guardian of the flock”, which is another name for shepherd, David remembered how he watched over the flock, as a whole, and over each sheep, separately. Shepherds were so familiar with each individual sheep, and its particular needs, until as Jesus described in John 10:3, the Shepherd knew each sheep by name.

**John 10:2-3 (NLT)**   
2  But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.   
3  The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Those who are true shepherds, claim they can recognize their sheep individually, just like we can recognize each other’s faces here in the church.

1. The second allegory we will see in this psalm is God being portrayed as a most generous, kind, and liberal Host of a great feast

When we look at the heading of Psalm 23, as provided by many Bible publishers, the headings simply read, “A Psalm of David.” This simple heading indicates that David is the writer, but it gives no details about the time or circumstances in David’s life that inspired him to write this psalm.

Nevertheless, the wording and imagery used, suggests that David was likely in the late stages of his life when he wrote this psalm. This seems evident by the maturity and strength expressed in the poem. The depth of the meaning of the poem seems incompatible with the tenderness of a younger David. The confidence expressed is more like that of a man who has walked with God and experienced deliverance for a long time.

Last week, the LORD had us to finish our discussion of the 22nd Psalm, which was referred to as the Psalm of the Cross. In that psalm, we frequently saw David’s prophetic description of the passion of Christ as it related to His crucifixion.

Without that 22nd psalm, it may be argued that there could be no 23rd Psalm. While the 22nd Psalm revealed Christ as the good Shepherd, who gives His life for His sheep, this 23rd Psalm shows Christ as the Great Shepherd of His sheep, whom the God has brought again from the dead, through the blood of the everlasting covenant. And, anyone who denies or rejects the substitutional work of Christ, has no claim upon the assurance and comfort of this Psalm:

Notice what the writer of Hebrews says about Christ being our Great Shepherd…

**Hebrews 13:20-21 (NKJV)**   
20  Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, **that great Shepherd of the sheep,** through the blood of the everlasting covenant,   
21  make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

With this as our introduction, let us begin our journey into Psalm 23.

**Psalm 23:1 (NKJV)   
1  The LORD *is* my shepherd;…**

**AMP -** 1  THE LORD is my Shepherd [to feed, guide, and shield me], …

Right in the beginning, we see the Shepherd being introduced. The Shepherd, in this psalm, is the LORD, who is the main figure. He is the essential One.

As the Shepherd, the LORD is the cornerstone or bedrock upon which the balance of the psalm rests. In the absence of the LORD being the Shepherd, there is no comfort to be found in the words of the psalm, which would merely be hollow words with no substance to them.

Observe the personal way in which David introduces the Shepherd. He says, “The LORD is my Shepherd.” The word “my” is key to the experience expressed in this psalm.

There are many people today who want the “blessing” of the psalm but not the “Blesser” in the psalm. Certainly, they want the goodness and mercy to follow them all their days and to dwell in the house of God forever, but, they don’t want the Shepherd Who makes all of this possible. Only if Jesus Christ is our Shepherd can you claim the promises of these 6 verses.

Unless we can say as David said, that “The LORD is MY Shepherd”, then claim this psalm for ourselves, no matter how much world-wide popularity the psalm may have.

Yes, it is true that the Good Shepherd died for all of mankind, but only those who actually RECEIVE Him, through faith, can truly call themselves on of His sheep. Jesus’ saving work is *sufficient* for all, but it is *effective* only for those who actually believe on Him as their only means of salvation, apart from any merit or worthiness of their own.

Unless He is *my* Shepherd, rest of the Psalm does not belong to me. On the other hand, if He is really mine and I am really His, then I have everything in Him!

For David, who himself attended sheep, at one time, this comparison of the care which God extends to His people was very natural.

In Psalm 80, David even refers to God as, “The Shepherd of Israel.”

**Psalm 80:1-2 (NLT)**   
1  Please listen, O **Shepherd of Israel**, you who lead Joseph’s descendants like a flock. O God, enthroned above the cherubim, display your radiant glory   
2  to Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh. Show us your mighty power. Come to rescue us!

In addition to David, other Old Testament figures described God’s care of His people like that of a shepherd. In Genesis 49, Jacob in his old age, before he was called home by God, called all his sons together to confer individual blessings upon them. In blessing Joseph, Jacob refers to God as the **Shepherd, the Rock of Israel:**

**Genesis 49:22-24 (NCV)**   
22  “Joseph is like a grapevine that produces much fruit, a healthy vine watered by a spring, whose branches grow over the wall.   
23  Archers attack him violently and shoot at him angrily,   
24  but he aims his bow well. His arms are made strong. He gets his power from the Mighty God of Jacob and his strength from **the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.**

In the Book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah offers encouragement to his fellowmen by referring to God as a Shepherd who feeds His flock:

**Isaiah 40:8-11 (NLT)**   
8  The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever.”   
9  O Zion, messenger of good news, shout from the mountaintops! Shout it louder, O Jerusalem. Shout, and do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah, “Your God is coming!”   
10  Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in power. He will rule with a powerful arm. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes.   
11  He will **feed his flock like a shepherd.** He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

And then, in the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as the Shepherd:

**John 10:10-16 (NKJV)**   
10  The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.   
11  I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd **gives His life** for the sheep. **(This is a reference to Psalm 22: The Psalm of the Cross)**12  But a hireling, *he who is* not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them.   
13  The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep.   
14  I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep,* and am known by My own.   
15  As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.   
16  And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd.

In Jesus’ description of the “Shepherd” verses the “Hireling”, the difference between the two is not in their job descriptions but in their hearts.

And then, The Apostle Peter, describes Jesus as the “Great Shepherd”:

**1 Peter 5:1-4 (NLT)**   
1  And now, a word to you who are elders in the churches. I, too, am an elder and a witness to the sufferings of Christ. And I, too, will share in his glory when he is revealed to the whole world. As a fellow elder, I appeal to you:   
2  Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God.   
3  Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example.   
4  And when **the Great Shepherd** appears, you will receive a crown of never-ending glory and honor.

When we consider the nature of sheep, sheep represent all the things we don’t want to be, although we sometimes are:

* dumb
* stubborn
* defenseless
* without a sense of direction
* prone to wander
* slow to recognize danger
* nervous and uneasy
* easily excitable and frightened

Given the nature of sheep, there is one thing we can certain about them: if left to themselves, they will perish. In Matthew 9:35-36, we read of Jesus’ compassion for people whom He compared to lost sheep.

**Matthew 9:35-36 (NIV)**   
35  Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.   
36  When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, **like sheep without a shepherd.**

When we think of what David say about himself, in Psalm 23, David certainly is not flattering himself by referring to God as his Shepherd. Instead, David is acknowledging and admitting his own sheep-like nature, and desperate need to depend upon the LORD, for every need and in every circumstance.

David goes on to say in part B of verse 1…

**Psalm 23:1 (NKJV)   
1  … ; I shall not want.**

**NIV -** 1  … , I shall not be in want.

**NLT -** 1  … ; I have all that I need.

**AMP -** 1  … , I shall not lack.

**NCV -** 1  … ; I have everything I need.

The statement or clause, “The LORD is my Shepherd” followed by a comma or a semi colon, and then the statement, “I shall not want” almost screams for the comma or semi colon to be erased and replaced with a big “THEREFORE”.

If this were done, it would force the verse to read…

**The LORD is my Shepherd (therefore) I shall not want.**

Meaning, the reason *I shall not want*; the reason *I rest in already having everything I need;* the security I have in knowing *I shall not lack, is because* I know the *LORD, My Shepherd, takes care of me.*

Because God is David’s Great Shepherd, David says he does not and will not lack any good thing. Because God is David’s Shepherd, David is confident the LORD will provide for all of his needs.

If we claim the LORD as our Shepherd, then how can we want? If we say God is our Shepherd, it should be done with the understanding that He who has all power in heaven and earth, is the One who has taken on the responsibility for protecting and providing for me.

The silver and gold are His, and the cattle on a thousand hills are His; finally, the hills themselves, are His. With Him owning silver, gold, cattle, and hills, He is well equipped and able to sustain me, as one of His sheep.

He has everything I need and His heart is full of love and compassion. Once I understand and embrace this truth, then I also understand that there is no good thing that He will withhold from me. If there is a need that I feel I’m lacking, then it’s because He has decided that desire that I have is not good for me, at this time, and maybe never.

When David writes, *"I shall not want"* , he is describing his confidence in the present as well as his confidence in God for the future. All of David’s present needs are being met, and all of his future need will be met, by the same Shepherd.

When the LORD is our Shepherd, our desires change. As we delight ourselves in the LORD, His desires for us become our desires for ourselves.

Psalm 34 reminds us that when we seek the LORD, as our highest aim, then He provides all we need:

**Psalm 34:9-10 (ESV)**   
9  Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!   
10  The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

**Psalm 84:10-11 (ESV)**   
10  For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.   
11  For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.

Psalm 23, in its entirety, reveals to us the many ways in which God shows His loving-kindness and protecting power to those who put their trust in Him. This is showed as part of God’s message of Grace, in which the LORD freely bestows His unmerited and undeserved favor upon His people.

David, in his old age wrote…

**Psalm 37:25 (ASV)**   
25  I have been young, and now am old; Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his seed begging bread.

**Psalm 37:25 (NIV)**   
25  I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

**Psalm 23 – Part 2**

**Psalm 23:2-3 (NKJV)   
2  He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.   
3  He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.**

**Psalm 23** opened with David proclaiming the LORD as his Shepherd. Because the LORD (*is)* his Shepherd, David confesses that the LORD has and will supply all that David needs. As a sheep of the LORD’s flock, David expresses confidence in the Shepherd’s care, guidance, protection, and provisions for him. David, in drawing upon is own personal experience of having been a Shepherd, is well acquainted with how a Shepherd supplies all the needs of his flock.

David’s confidence in The LORD (the) self-Existent, *Eternal* One, is expressed in David’s usage of the phrase, “*I shall not want.”* Or, as the NLT has it, *“I have all that I need.”*

After his opening statement of confidence in the LORD being his Shepherd, David then begins to unpack for his readers, in more details, what *He* means by this statement. And so, in verses 2 and 3, David gives us four metaphors of God, as his Shepherd. In each of these four metaphors, David tells us what the LORD does for him, personally, as his Shepherd.

Observe **the first thing David says the Shepherd does for him…**

In **Psalm 23:2 (NKJV)….**

David says…

1. **2  He makes me to lie down in green pastures;…**

**Young’s Literal Translation -** 2  In pastures of tender grass He causeth me to lie down, …

**AMP -** 2  He makes me lie down in [fresh, tender] green pastures…

The Shepherd’s unselfish love for His sheep is seen not only in the *fact* that He provides for His sheep but also in the *way* that He provides for them.

Notice that the pastures are *Green.* This means the meadows are green with newly sprouted grass. Green pastures were not abundant in ancient Palestine, and so a shepherd had to work tirelessly to find a place where the grass was lush.

The full relevance of the effort the shepherd would put forth to find green pastures, can best be understood in comparing the shepherd’s efforts to the efforts of a hireling or uncaring shepherd. A hireling or uncaring shepherd would rarely go out of his way to find green pastures. Instead, they would heartlessly force the sheep to rest on the dry desert weeds. Ultimately, the sheep would not rest at all because the dry weeds were so uncomfortable.

Sheep, unlike goats who are quite independent, are totally dependent upon their shepherd to find pastures and water for them. Without the shepherd, they are helpless.

Although *green* pastures are a great place for flock to feed, the absence of David referencing eating in this verse, suggest that David’s primary intend here, is to describe the green pastures as a place of rest.

*Green* pastures are the best place for sheep to lie down and rest. The green grass is cooler and softer than anywhere else, where the grass may be dried, scorched, and prickly due to the hot desert sun. Because green grass contains moisture, it serves as a cooling agent, and is therefore, an ideal place for sheep to lie down, particularly in the hot summer when they have been out in the fields.

The image David paints for us is an image of calmness and peacefulness. As we envision tired sheep reclining in cool, lush, green grass, it’s almost as if we could imaging ourselves relaxing in plush, freshly sprouted blades of cool and luxuriant grass.

Although not specifically mentioned by David, in this verse, we can safely assume the flock has been “fully fed” and “satisfied.” Surrounded by abundance, and having all their wants completely met and satisfied, for the moment, the sheep can now comfortably rest.

As it applies to us, today, when we understand, and truly embrace and believe, the LORD as our Shepherd, then we too can rest in His abundant provisions. As children of God, Christ would have us to know that to the degree we are willing to submit to His Lordship, all the wants of our soul can be met and satisfied in Him, This abundance is revealed in the quality of our fellowship with Christ. It is not a materialistic abundance, but a spiritual abundance that enhances our quality of life, here on earth, and in eternity.

Let us now look again at the first part of Psalm 23:2, where David writes, “*He makes me to lie down.”* The operative word here is that He makes me lie down.

God has created us with a need for rest. He did not make us machines that could run for weeks and months without stopping to rest. And sometimes, like foolish sheep, we do not rest like we should. And, there are a multitude of reasons for this:

* One reason could be because of responsibilities that weigh us down and cause us to feel that if we take time off, to rest, we will only get further behind. And, getting further behind only increases the pressure we already we’re under.
* Another reason for not getting adequate rest could be because we have over-committed ourselves and have gotten involved in too many unnecessary activities. Our priorities can get out of order and we spend our days wasting time, then having to stay up late or get up early to get the things done that are really important.
* Procrastination can be another contributing factor to us not getting enough rest. If we find ourselves procrastinating on doing something, that we know is important, then it can lead to us being restless and sleepless, as we spend more time worrying about doing a task than we do actually completing a task.

Ultimately, the lack of rest will wear us down; and wear us out. When this happens, some of break down, emotionally, or get sick. Unfortunately, in our modern life, with technology, many people seem to have lost their awareness of the importance of proper relaxation, for the purpose of allowing the body to recuperate. Feeling the need to constantly be digitally connected makes it difficult for some person to rest.

If mental exhaustion, emotional drainage and physical fatigue are not enough for us to take notice of our need for rest, then our loving and caring LORD will sometimes allow us to come to the point where our bodies force us to lie down and rest. For some people, the *green* pastures they are led to may be a *white* hospital bed.

Oh how our loving and caring Great Shepherd longs to take restless sheep in the presence of His arms, comfort and calm us, and give us rest.

**Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV)**   
28  Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.   
29  Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.   
30  For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

**Proverbs 3:24 (NKJV)**   
24  When you lie down, you will not be afraid; Yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.

In causing the prophet Ezekiel to reprimand the shepherds (or leaders) of Israel, for their mistreatment and abuse of God’s people, God had Ezekiel to tell the leaders how God himself would be their Shepherd:

**Ezekiel 34:11-15 (AMP)**   
11  For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I Myself, will search for My sheep and will seek them out.   
12  As a shepherd seeks out his sheep in the day that he is among his flock that are scattered, so will I seek out My sheep; and I will rescue them out of all places where they have been scattered in the day of clouds and thick darkness.   
13  And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and will bring them to their own land; and I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited places of the country.   
**14  I will feed them with good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be; there shall they lie down in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.   
15  I will feed My sheep and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord God.**

**The second metaphor David uses to describe what the LORD his Shepherd does for him is:**

1. **2  … He leads me beside the still waters.**

**NLT -** 2  … he leads me beside peaceful streams.

**AMP -** 2  …; He leads me beside the still *and* restful waters.

The Hebrew translation of this phrase is, “to waters of rest He leads me”

The still, peaceful, restful waters are in contrast to turbulent waters on the one hand, and stagnant, offensive waters on the other hand.

Few things can so refresh us as a cool drink of water on a hot day. On hot days, after being in the fields, sheep need water like any other animal or person. However, sheep are sheepishly afraid of swift and noisy waters, and will not drink from waters that are fast moving.

The wise and caring shepherd knows this and seeks for quiet (“still”, but not “stagnant”) streams. If the shepherd is unable to locate calm waters, then the shepherd will build a small reservoir to catch the water so it is quiet and still for the sheep to drink from without fear.

Again, the relevance of this is best understood in contrast to a hireling or an uncaring shepherd. Neither a hireling nor an uncaring shepherd would take the time to search for quiet waters or build a damn to catch the water where the sheep could drink, freely. Instead, they would unsympathetically allowed the sheep to suffer thirst until they came upon still drinking water.

**The 3rd metaphor David uses to describe what the LORD his Shepherd does for him, is found in Part A of verse 3:**

1. **Psalm 23:3 - 3  He restores my soul;…**

**NLT -** 3  He renews my strength….

**YLT -** 3  My soul He refresheth,

In verse 2, David showed us a picture of beauty and peaceful rest. Now, in verse three, he reminds us of the purpose for which the shepherd gives the sheep rest. It is also the purpose for which God has designed us for rest… and that is, so our souls can be refreshed, renewed, and strengthened.

But, notice: rest is not an end in itself. Rest is a means to an end. In other words, God gives us rest for the purpose of renewing our strength so we can move from rest to doing something else. Once He has restored our souls through rest, the journey or pilgrimage is to continue. Life is designed by God to be forward movement and not backwards movement or stagnation.

Green pastures and still waters are necessary, but they do not afford us a permanent dwelling place. As relaxing and as refreshing as green pastures and still waters are, there is the danger of becoming too content in that one spot.

For us, God is always moving us forward and revealing Himself to us in new ways.

**Isaiah 40:29-31 (NKJV)**   
29  He gives power to the weak, And to *those who have* no might He increases strength.   
30  Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall,   
31  But those who wait on the LORD Shall **renew *their* strength**; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.

The new energy the LORD gives us is to be spent, always under His continued leading.

And so, **the 4th metaphor Davis uses to describe what the LORD his Shepherd does for him is in Part B of verse 3:**

1. **3  … leads me in the paths of righteousness…**

**NLT -** 3  … He guides me along right paths,…

**NCV -** 3  … He leads me on paths that are right…

The role of the shepherd is not to feed and water the flock, but to also lead and guide them.

Our greatest and lasting contentment, as Christians, comes as we allow the LORD, our Great Shepherd to lead and guide us. When discontentment comes, as a result of us choosing to walk contrary to God’s guidance and directions, we have no one to blame but ourselves. God’s loving care and protection leads us in paths that are right and wholesome.

As our Shepherd, He knows where the “green pastures” and “peaceful waters” are that will restore our soul. And, because we are like sheep, we will only reach these places by following Him, and being in submission to His leading. When we rebel against the Shepherd’s leading, we actually rebel against our own best interest.

Our constant desire should be for us to be led by the LORD. In every decision needing to be made, we should always consult the LORD, and ask Him to help us be sensitive to what He wants. This seeking the LORD’s guidance should not be reserved only for major decisions, but should be employed in every decision, no matter how small it may seem to be to us. By God mercy, grace, and indwelling presence, He makes himself available for consultation 24/7.

**Psalm 139:23-24 (NKJV)**   
23  Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties;   
24  And see if *there is any* wicked way in me, **And lead me in the way everlasting.**

**Isaiah 40:11 (NKJV)**   
11  He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry *them* in His bosom, *And* gently **lead** those who are with young.

**Proverbs 4:10-12 (NKJV)**   
10  Hear, my son, and receive my sayings, And the years of your life will be many.   
11  I have taught you in the way of wisdom; **I have led you in right paths.**12  When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, And when you run, you will not stumble.

Finally, this 4th metaphor ends by stating the LORD’s motive for

1. Making us to lie down in green pastures
2. Leading us beside still waters
3. Restoring our souls
4. Leading us in right paths

All of this is done, not because we’ve deserved for it to be done. Not because we have earned His favor….. but it is all done for…

**3  … For His name's sake.**

God functions as the Shepherd of His people, not for their own sake, but for the glory of His own name.

**NLT -** 3  …, bringing honor to his name.

We find throughout the scriptures, that God’s number 1 and ultimate motivation for everything He does, is for the sake of His own name and His own Glory:

**Psalm 143:10-11 (NKJV)**   
10  Teach me to do Your will, For You *are* my God; Your Spirit *is* good. Lead me in the land of uprightness.   
11  Revive me, O LORD, **for Your name's sake!** For Your righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.

**Psalm 25:10-11 (NKJV)**   
10  All the paths of the LORD *are* mercy and truth, To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.   
11  **For Your name's sake,** O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it *is* great.

**Psalm 31:3 (NKJV)**   
3  For You *are* my rock and my fortress; Therefore, **for Your name's sake,** Lead me and guide me.

**Psalm 79:9 (NKJV)**   
9  Help us, O God of our salvation, **For the glory of Your name**; And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, **For Your name's sake!**

**Ezekiel 20:13-14 (NKJV)**   
13  Yet the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness; they did not walk in My statutes; they despised My judgments, 'which, *if* a man does, he shall live by them'; and they greatly defiled My Sabbaths. Then I said I would pour out My fury on them in the wilderness, to consume them.   
14  But **I acted for My name's sake,** that it should not be profaned before the Gentiles, in whose sight I had brought them out.

**Psalm 23 – Part 3**

**Psalm 23:4 (NKJV)   
4  Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death…**

**NLT -** 4  Even when I walk through the darkest valley…

David’s reference here, is still to himself as one of the sheep of the LORD’s flock. The point is that although David as a sheep, may have to sometimes walk through the most dismal valley, in the darkness of night, while potentially being exposed to pitfalls, cliff edges, and devouring beasts, he will have no fear. David confesses that the reason he will fear no evil, is not because there is an absence of danger, but because he is confident the Shepherd will lead and guide him in the right paths, and protect him from all dangers.

The phrase, “shadow of death” is a reoccurring them in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for “shadow of death” is one word, not three. It is the word **tsall-MAH-veth** (salmawet). The first of the word, “**tsall**” (sal) simply means shade or shadow. By itself, the word “shadow” or “shade” conveys a positive meaning.

Shade provides protection and defense from the heat of the day. Even the shade from a boulder gives some relief from the sun’s hot rays, especially for a slave. We see this positive usage of the word shadow in Job 7:1-2. In these verses, Job compares his longing for relief from his personal suffering to the longing a slave has for relief from the hot sun:

**Job 7:1-3 (AMP)**   
1  IS THERE not an [appointed] warfare *and* hard labor to man upon earth? And are not his days like the days of a hireling?   
**2  As a servant earnestly longs for the shade *and* the evening shadows, and as a hireling who looks for the reward of his work,**3  So am I allotted months of futile [suffering], and [long] nights of misery are appointed to me.

Another example, in which the word shadow is used to describe the protection it provides, is found in Genesis 19. There we see the word used to indicate the head of the household providing protection for his guest. The scene is of Lot, in Sodom, pleading with the men of the city to not drag the two male guests of his house into the streets so they could rape them. Genesis 19:8 is Lot’s response to the men of the city who were standing outside the door of his house, threatening to barge in and take the two guests by force:

**Genesis 19:8 (NKJV)**   
8  See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the **shadow of my roof."**

So, when the word shade or shadow is combined with the word **MAH-veth** (mawet), meaning death or calamity, we get the word, **tsall-MAH-veth** (salmawet), which means, shadow of “deep darkness”, “thick darkness”, or “thick gloom.” Figuratively, the phrase paints a picture of any very deep sorrowful experience a person may be going through.

We see an example of this from Job, when he was overwhelmed with grief after God permitted Satan to attack Job’s character, his possessions, his family, and then his health. In his state of tremendous grief, Job’s three friend came and sat quietly with him for seven consecutive days and nights, in an attempt to comfort him. At the end of those seven days, Job was still not comforted and he began to condemn the day of his own birth. In cursing the day he was born, Job references the *“shadow of death.”*

**Job 3:1-5 (NKJV)**   
1  After this Job opened his mouth and **cursed the day of his *birth.***2  And Job spoke, and said:   
3  "May the day perish on which I was born, And the night *in which* it was said, 'A male child is conceived.'   
4  May that day be **darkness**; May God above not seek it, Nor the light shine upon it.   
**5  May darkness and the shadow of death claim it; May a cloud settle on it; May the blackness of the day terrify it.**

Job continues his bitter plea with God, for God to explain to him why this great calamity has come upon him, in Job 10:18-22:

**Job 10:18-22 (NKJV)**   
18  'Why then have You brought me out of the womb? Oh, that I had perished and no eye had seen me!   
19  I would have been as though I had not been. I would have been carried from the womb to the grave.   
20  Are not my days few? Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort,   
**21  Before I go *to the place from which* I shall not return, To the land of darkness and the shadow of death,   
22  A land as dark as darkness *itself,* As the shadow of death, without any order, *Where* even the light *is* like darkness.' "**

Observe the words, Job uses:

* “as dark as darkness itself”

**NLT** – a land as dark as midnight

**AMP** – The land of sunless gloom as intense darkness.

**ESV** – of gloom like thick darkness

**NASB** – The Land of utter gloom as darkness itself

* “without any order”

**NLT** – a land of gloom and confusion

**ESV** – like a deep shadow without any order

**NIV** – of deep shadow and disorder

Each of these descriptions help us to get a fuller picture of what David means when he is inspired to write, *“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death…”*

**NCV** – Even though I walk through a very dark valley

**NLT** – Even when I walk through the darkest valley

Granted, this verses is often read and quoted when someone is facing the deep dark valley of the shadow of “physical” death, but the verse is not exclusive to physical death. Its meaning may be applied to any situation in life in which tests and trials seem to be overwhelming. It could be paths of:

* gloom or sadness;
* scenes of troubles and sorrows;
* Severe illness or disease
* A serious accident
* Violent criminal attack
* Famine or extreme poverty
* Sudden loss of income
* Or, any dark and dangerous way

No matter what the circumstances are, as Christians, we have assurance that God will safely guide us through the valley.

For many people, the word *valley* paints an image of a flat, green grassy expanse lying peacefully between mountains, perhaps with a stream of mountain water running through it. However, this is not what the word *valley* means in Old Testament language.

In Old Testament times, a valley was a deep ravine or canyon. It was narrow, dark, and damp, usually with steep stone wall on both sides. The structure of the valley made it virtually inescapable from trouble. With snakes, wild beasts, and criminals lurking in the darkness, a valley was an extremely dangerous place.

As this relates to David, sheep and the Shepherd, David knew that in Palestine, grass grew during a very short season. After the short growing season, it became difficult for a shepherd to find food for his flock for the rest of the year. This made it necessary, at times, for the shepherd to have to lead his sheep through the narrow, dark, and dangerous valleys, in order to find food for them on the other side of the valley.

Despite the danger, David expresses awareness of the Shepherd’s ability to protect the sheep. He was well acquainted with the extent to which he himself went to protect his sheep; and he has even greater confidence in God as a Shepherd being able to protect those who are His sheep.

A loving and a caring shepherd knows all the narrow passes, the hidden pits, and dangerous ledges along the dark path through the valley. For this reason, the sheep can rest assured that their shepherd will guide them around and through these many pitfalls.

This is why, when faced with actual and figuratively deep dark valleys in his own personal life, David could Say, “Even though I walk through the valley, I will fear no evil.”

Notice what he says in the 2nd and 3rd part of verse 4:

**4  …, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with me;…**

**NLT -**  I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me

David does not say that **there will be** “*no evil”*, which would suggest the removal of all evil; but instead he says, *“he will fear no evil.”*  This means that although evil may be present, David will have no fear of its presence.

When David says he will not be afraid, because the Shepherd is with him, David is perhaps remembering some of the most dangerous events in his life.

In reflecting on those events, whether they were when the LORD protected him and his sheep from a lion and a bear; or whether it was when he was being pursued unjustly by Saul; or when he was a fugitive father fleeing from his son Absalom, David recalled God’s faithful protection.

These first-hand experiences of God’s intervention in past times of danger are the very same experiences that give David the bold confidence to know that whatever dangers that may be in his future, He will fear no evil. The same LORD that defended him and provided a shadow of protection for him in the past, is the same LORD who will defend and provide a shadow of protection for him in the future, no matter how deep the darkness of the valley may be.

Notice, David’s confession of confidence is not a confession that the LORD will prevent him from going through the dark valley of the shadow of death, but *that in going through the valley*, he has the assurance of the LORD’s presence. David’s affirmation reveals God not as One who alters the circumstances so that His people are delivered from valleys, but rather as One who walks with His children through the valley.

So often, we want to be delivered *from* the trials, but God’s will and perfect plan is to deliver us *in* the trial. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshack, and Abed-Nego are prominent example of times in which God chose to be with his faithful servants in the valley, and not lead them around the valley.

And, lest we forget what the LORD inspired David to write in Psalm 23:3… God leads His sheep in paths that He has determined are beneficial for His own Glory and name’s sake.

As a result of God being by the three Hebrew boy’s side during their *shadow of death* in the fiery furnace, and by Daniel’s side in *shadow of death* in the Lion’s Den, God was ultimately glorified by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, and the Mede King Darius.

The Prophet Isaiah also reminds us of God sustain grace in times of deep darkness and gloom:

**Isaiah 43:1-2 (NIV)**   
1  But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; **you are mine.**   
2  **When** you pass through the waters, **I will be with you;** and **when** you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. **When** you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

Since this 4th verse of the 23rd Psalm is so often applied and used to comfort those who are facing “physical” death, no discussion of the verse would be completed with considering its application on one’s death bed.

For many people, eminent physical death casts a terrifyingly dark shadow over them because in that moment they are entirely helpless in its presence. The doctors, surgeons, and specialist have done all they can do and have concluded there is nothing more they can do. There is no additional medical procedure they can try; nor is there any medicine they can prescribe to improve the person’s health. The best they can do now is give them medicine to ease the pain.

For some this can be frightening news. During our lifetime, we have learned to struggle with our enemies. We’ve struggled through pain, suffering, disease, and injuries—but all the strength and courage in the world cannot overcome death, when the LORD has determined it’s our time. When the LORD gives His final word, no loving family member or friend can walk us through the valley.

Only one person can walk with us through death’s dark valley and bring us safely to the other side – and that is Jesus, and Him alone. Jesus, our Great Shepherd is the only one who can walk with us and give us eternal comfort.

For us, as Christians, there is no need for us to be afraid of passing from this earthly life. Our great Shepherd, Jesus Christ, passed through death’s valley and came through it triumphantly on the other side.

Because He knows the way, and has Himself walked through the valley, He is now able to guide of safely through that same valley, and without any fear. Just as our Shepherd did, we have the faith to believe that we too will walk through the dark narrow valley and emerge into the light of immortality on the other side.

For us, the world’s definition of death does not apply to us, for we do not “die” as the world defines “dying.” Before receiving Christ, we were already dead, spiritually. After receiving Him, we are now made alive, forevermore. For us, the bible describes our passage through the valley as sleep.

For the Christian, our last moments here on earth ought to be our most peaceful. For us, the valley is truly a valley of the “**shadow**” of death. No one has a valid reason to be afraid of a shadow. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us.

Our Great Shepherd has gone before us and removed the sting of our greatest enemy, which is death.

**1 Corinthians 15:50-55 (NKJV)**   
50  Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.   
51  Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed--   
52  in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.   
53  For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.   
54  So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: *"Death is swallowed up in victory."*   
55  *"O Death, where is your sting?* *O Hades, where is your victory?"*

The worst day in a believer’s life, according to the world, is the best day in the believer’s life according to God.

**2 Corinthians 5:1-8 (NKJV)**   
1  For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.   
2  For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,   
3  if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.   
4  For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.   
5  Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.   
6  So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.   
7  For we walk by faith, not by sight.   
8  We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

**Psalm 23 – Part 4**

**Psalm 23:5 (NKJV)**

Psalm 23:5 begins the second metaphor (something used, or regarded as being used, to represent something else; an emblem or a symbol).

The first 4 verses were the first metaphor, in which God is described as a Shepherd providing for, and protecting, His sheep. In this second metaphor, God is being described as a wealthy, generous, and benevolent host.

The scene is of a banquet hall where a gracious host provides lavish hospitality. It appears David uses this metaphor to give a richer expression to the warm intimacy of his relationship with the LORD.

**5  You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;**

**NLT -** 5  You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.

For a person to prepare a table, means the person has devoted care and time toward making sure things are arranged with excellency. We can probably all agree that a prepared meal is much better than an unprepared meal that is thrown together, in a hurry at the last minute.

It’s one thing to grab leftovers out the refrigerator and “reheat” them in the microwave; it’s another thing to prepare a “feast”. Preparing a feast requires much more advanced planning and energy.

We also see in this feast preparation, that the LORD is not skimpy in His provisions. He supplies food and nourishment in abundance.

For us as Christians, the vast and plentiful supply of food, spread on the table, may be symbolic of the many spiritual blessings we have in Christ. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul gives us no less than 13 blessing we get to enjoy at the LORDs banquet table.

**Ephesians 1:3-14 (NKJV)**   
3  Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,**   
4  just as He **chose us** in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,   
5  having **predestined us to adoption** as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,   
6  to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.   
7  In Him we have **redemption through His blood,** the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace   
8  which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,   
9  having **made known to us the mystery of His will,** according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself,   
10  that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth--in Him.   
11  In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being **predestined** according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will,   
12  that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.   
13  In Him you also *trusted,* after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were **sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,**   
14  who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

These blessing from which we get to feast, are ones which can enjoy even though the Satan is there in an attempt to distract us and do us harm.

For David, he pictures himself as a guest under the protection of the divine host. **In the East a man who was hunted by enemies only needed to enter into or even touch the tent of the person in who he was seeking refuge.** Once this was done, the refugee was assured safety and gracious hospitality. His enemies might stand and glare outside the tent door, but they could do no more; they were restrained from doing the guest any harm.

The LORD shared with us, last week, about how shade formed from shadows were a protection from the hot desert sun. We also saw how the word shadow was used to express protection in the home of a host. This was the case with Lot’s protection of his guest in Sodom:

**Genesis 19:4-8 (NKJV)**   
4  Now before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both old and young, all the people from every quarter, surrounded the house.   
5  And they called to Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them *carnally."*   
6  So Lot went out to them through the doorway, shut the door behind him,   
7  and said, "Please, my brethren, do not do so wickedly!   
8  See now, I have two daughters who have not known a man; please, let me bring them out to you, and you may do to them as you wish; only do nothing to these men, since this is the reason they have come under the shadow of my roof."

**NLT -** 8  … But please, leave these men alone, for they are my guests and are under my protection.”

For David, God the Divine Host, has exceeded the bare requirements of hospitality, and has extended to him a feast of plentiful food. And, because the host has the power to protect him, David is able to sit confidently and peacefully at the banquet table and feast, despite being surrounded by his enemies. In the presence of the Host, David relaxes in perfect security. In the meantime, his enemies are forced to witness David’s enjoyment, while they themselves are powerless to harm or disturb him.

Oh, how much more joyous our Christians lives would be if we were more conscious of the feast of spiritual blessings that have already been prepared for us; and the peace and security with which we can enjoy those blessings, knowing that the Devil can do us no harm.

God, in His Scriptures has left the Israelites in the wilderness as an example for us. In the wilderness, God spread a table in the Tabernacle. He provided them a bountiful feast of manna and quail that carpeted the desert sands. And, this table God used to nourish and sustain them on their journey home to the Promised Land. One they reached the Promise Land, their enemies watched God protect them time after time, as their enemies came against them.

**5  …; You anoint my head with oil;**

The ancient Hebrew custom, in the east, was for the host to pour perfumed oil on the heads of distinguished guests, when at a feasts where great important people were gathered.

The oil was intended to refresh the guests and provide them soothing relief. In the hot Middle Eastern climate, oil preserved the person’s complexion. The oil on the guests’ forehead would give a sheen to the guests’ countenance and add fragrance to them and the room.

In the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we read where an immoral woman attending such a gathering, anointed Jesus’ head with oil, after the host of the feast had failed to follow the customary protocol:

**Matthew 26:6-9 (NLT)**   
6  Meanwhile, Jesus was in Bethany at the home of Simon, a man who had previously had leprosy.   
7  While he was eating, a woman came in with a beautiful alabaster jar of expensive perfume and poured it over his head.   
8  The disciples were indignant when they saw this. “What a waste of money,” they said.   
9  “It could have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor.”

Luke tells us Jesus’ response to the outraged disciples and to the negligent host, Simon, who was a Pharisee:

**Luke 7:44-47 (NLT)**   
44  Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn’t offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair.   
45  You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet.   
46  You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.   
47  “I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love.”

**5  …; My cup runs over.**

**NLT -** 5  … My cup overflows with blessings.

**AMP -** 5  …; my [brimming] cup runs over.

The LORD, as the host, in addition to giving David an abundance of food, has filled David’s cup to overflowing with the best wine. David describes it as not simply enough (a cup full), but more than enough (a cup which overflowed). No point of hospitality was neglected.

The story is told of a poor woman who lived in a small cottage. As she sat in her humble home, and broke a small piece of bread and filled a glass with cold water. In gratitude, she thanked God for His provisions as she joyously proclaimed, “What, all this, and Jesus Christ too?”

What a reminder this is to us of the importance of being content with God’s provisions. A person who is not appreciative and content with what the LORD has provided, can never experience the joy of an overflowing cup. For them, they are never satisfied with what’s already in their cup, and therefore, they perceive that their cup always has room for more; and they won’t be happy as long as they believe they are entitled to receive more in their cup.

The image of the overflowing cup is designed to express the joy God gives His people, in terms of spiritual blessings. The world’s joy in material things is **limited** and temporary. God’s joy in spiritual things is **limitless** and eternal.

His love has no limit,

His grace has no measure,

His power has no boundary known unto men:

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus

He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

—*Annie Johnson Flint*

**Psalm 23 – Part 5**

**Psalm 23:6 (NKJV)**

**6  Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life;**

**ASV -** 6  … goodness and lovingkindness shall follow me…

**NIV -** 6  … goodness and love will follow me

**NLT -** 6  … **your** goodness and unfailing love will pursue me…

This last verse of the 23rd Psalm again expresses David’s confidence in the LORD as his Shepherd. David then expresses his thankfulness by proclaiming he will praise dwell in the House of the Lord, forever.

In verse 3 we saw where David said the LORD leads him in paths that are right. These paths that are right, are the paths of God’s love. And, the reason behind the LORD leading David in paths that are righteous, is for the LORD’s own name sake and honor.

Now, in verse 6, we see that as the Shepherd is leading from the front, He has two assistants (sheep dogs, if you would) who are following and protecting from the rear. These two assistants are referred to as “Goodness” and “Mercy” or “Lovingkindness”, or Unfailing Love, who are following David.

These two traits of God, David says will follow him

**6  … All the days of my**(his) **life;…**

David says that God’s blessings will be with him all the days of his life. These blessings of “goodness” and “unfailing love” will be with David wherever he goes and no matter what the circumstances are. These divine and never-ending blessings are from the Shepherd.

Observe, God’s blessings that follow David are not physical or material; but spiritual:

One of the blessings is called “Goodness.” Over and over again, David make reference to God’s goodness as he meditates on God, and attempts to express this attribute of God in other inspired Psalms:

**Psalm 27:11-13 (NIV)**   
11  Teach me your way, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.   
12  Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, breathing out violence.   
**13  I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.**

**Psalm 31:17-19 (NIV)**   
17  Let me not be put to shame, O LORD, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave.   
18  Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous.   
**19  How great is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you, which you bestow in the sight of men on those who take refuge in you.**

**Psalm 69:14-16 (NIV)**   
14  Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters.   
15  Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me.   
**16  Answer me, O LORD, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me.**

**Psalm 109:20-21 (NIV)**   
20  May this be the LORD's payment to my accusers, to those who speak evil of me.   
**21  But you, O Sovereign LORD, deal well with me for your name's sake; out of the goodness of your love, deliver me.**

**Psalm 145:4-7 (NIV)**   
4  One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.   
5  They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works.   
6  They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds.   
**7  They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness.**

The other spiritual blessing that follows David is “Mercy”, or “Love”, “Unfailing Love”, or “Loving-kindness.” The original Hebrew word is the word **KHEY**-seed (hesed).

In Hebrew, **KHEY**-seed, includes the meaning of three other words, and these three words all interact to express the deepest meaning of **KHEY**-seed. The three interacting words are:

* Strength, Steadfastness, and Love

To exclude either of these words from the meaning of “mercy” would be to water down its meaning.

* “**Love**”, by itself would easily become emotional and sentimental; and would not include covenant commitment. *(This is why “love” alone is insufficient for a lasting marriage. A lasting marriage requires love and covenant. When the emotions of worldly love is not felt, then the marriage is support by the covenant agreement the couple made to each other, in the presence of God and witnesses.)*
* On the other hand, “**Strength**” or “**Steadfastness**”, without “**Love**” or emotion, suggest simply fulfilling a legal requirement or obligation. *(Again, in looking at a healthy marriage: fulfilling a legal obligation, without having any feelings, is not a good recipe for a healthy marriage.*

When applied to the relationship between God and Man, the word Mercy or **KHEY**-seed (hesed), describes a relationship in which the weaker party (man) seeks the protection and blessing of the stronger party (God). However, in seeking protection or favor from the stronger party, the weaker party may not lay claim to, nor **demand**, protection from the stronger party.

The stronger part remains committed to His promise or covenant, but retains His freedom in the way in which He chooses to fulfil His promise.

Given this meaning of the word “mercy” or “steadfast-love” we can begin to see that the word implies a personal involvement, not just an external commitment to a legal obligation.

This is why a marriage relationship is related to the word “steadfast-love.” Although a legal marriage is a legal matter, a healthy marriage goes far beyond simply fulfilling a legal obligation. There has to be an emotional and personal connection.

In fact, the word **KHEY**-seed, or lovingkindness, is the same word the Prophet Hosea used to teach Israel about God’s relationship and covenant toward Israel:

**Hosea 2:19-20 (NKJV)**   
19  "I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy;   
20  I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD.

**Hosea 2:19-20 (NLT)**   
19  I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion.   
20  I will be faithful to you and make you mine, and you will finally know me as the LORD.

God’s “Goodness” extends to us, the positive that we don’t deserve, as it supplies our needs; and His “Mercy” withholds from us, and blots out the punishment for our sins that we do deserve.

As David looked back on all the events of his life, he could see the faithfulness of his Shepherd. The Lord’s constant care filled David with great assurance and hope for the future. This was why David could say, “*Surely*.” When David says *surely goodness and mercy shall follow him*, David is not thinking they “probably” will follow him; but, he’s thinking they “certainly” will follow him.

In other words, David could face the rest of life boldly, knowing with confidence that his Shepherd would provide for all his needs. Not just his current needs, but his needs for *All the days of his life.*

When we look at David’s life, his ups and his downs, we see that David had experienced enough of life to know that **God is good all of the time.** In every circumstance God’s goodness had flowed out to David:

* In battles against Goliath and the Philistines, David experienced God’s goodness and mercy
* In false accusations, David experienced God’s goodness and mercy
* While fleeing as a fugitive, David experienced God’s goodness and mercy
* In the death of his child, born to Bathsheba, David experienced God’s goodness and mercy
* In the heart-rending problems within his dysfunctional family, David experienced the goodness and mercy of God.
* This same goodness and mercy was experienced even after David’s horrific sin involving Bathsheba and the assassination hit on her husband Uriah.

In all these situations, David recognized God’s goodness and mercy toward him. In all of David’s many times of distress, David had repeatedly called out to God for *mercy* to preserve him, and God had shown His *steadfast, covenant love toward David.*

God had a proven track record of covenant love, and David was confident that this unfailing love would *surely* continue toward him throughout the rest of his life.

David then concludes this psalm by expressing a deep gratitude and appreciation for God’s *goodness* and *mercy*:

**6  …; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.**

This phrase is the climax of the whole psalm. It is the eternal destiny of all those who have Jesus Christ as their Savior/Shepherd. Without the LORD being our Shepherd, we cannot truthfully claim this promise. *“Dwelling”* in the house of the LORD is not the same as frequently visiting the house of the LORD.

We, today, frequently attend Bible Studies, worship services, men breakfasts, women breakfasts, Family Fun Nights, and other worship opportunities, but we leave those and return to our homes. We don’t live or dwell at those places.

So we David talks about *“dwelling”,* his point is that he will live in a place, eternally, where he never plans to, or has to, leave. As children; sons and daughters of God, we too have that blessed assurance that we will dwell forever in the place where Jesus abides. In fact, it is because we have been adopted into God’s family that we get do dwell in His house forever. The writer of the Gospel of John reminds us:

**John 8:35-36 (NKJV)**   
35  And a slave does not abide in the house forever, *but* a son abides forever.   
36  Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

And, this place in which we get to dwell forever, is a place that Jesus has gone to prepare for us, and one day, He will return to receive us and to transport us to His home.

**John 14:1-3 (NASB)**   
1  "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.   
2  "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.   
3  "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.

How amazing it is, that Jesus, our Great Shepherd, not only leads us in the paths of righteousness, but He then follows us with His goodness and mercy. From front to back, we are protected and provided for by our Shepherd.

When we consider how this Psalm began, with “The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want; and we conclude with forever dwelling in His presence, perhaps a good way to read and summarize the psalm would be to ask the question, “What shall I not want?”

The answer would be…. I shall not want:

* Rest—for He makes me to lie down in green pastures.
* Drink—for He leads me beside the still waters.
* Forgiveness—for He restores my soul.
* Guidance—for He leads me in the paths of righteousness.
* Companionship—for He is with me.
* Comfort—for His rod and His staff comfort me.
* Food—for He prepares a table before me.
* Victory—He protects me from my enemies who are present and all around me.
* Joy—He anoints my head with the oil of joy.
* A shortage of joy - for my cup runs over.
* Protection from my blind side or the enemy sneaking up behind me from the rear—for goodness and mercy shall follow me.
* A permanent home—for I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

I’m reminded of the words of Paul to the church at Corinth:

**2 Corinthians 5:1 (NKJV)**   
1  For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Finally, I believe the LORD would leave us with this story about John Knox, the 16th Century Scottish Minister, theologian, and writer, who was a leader of Scotland’s Reformation. John died in 1572, and as he lay dying, his friends gathered around him. A poet friend of his asked John if all was well as he prepared to cross the river of death. And if so, then please give them a sign.

In that moment John gave them a sign, which was later written into a poem:

Grim in his deep death anguish the stern old champion **lay**,

And the locks upon his pillow were floating thin and **gray**:

And visionless and voiceless, with quick and labored **breath**

He waited for his exit through life's dark portal **death**.

"Hast thou the hope of glory?" They bow to catch the **thrill**,

That through some languid token might be responsive **still**;

Nor watched they long nor waited for some obscure **reply**,

He raised a clay-cold finger and pointed to the **sky**.

Thus the death angel found him, what time his bow he **bent**

To give the struggling spirit its last **enfranchisement**;

Thus the death angel left him, what time earth's bonds were **riv'n,**

The cold, stark, stiffening finger *still pointing up to* ***Heaven****.*