

Hot coffee eventually becomes lukewarm coffee if we don't drink it. Clean rooms become messy if we don't tidy them each day. Gardens get over-ridden with weeds if we don't take time to weed the garden.

New clothes eventually fade and grow old. Faces and bodies eventually lose the beauty and strength of youth, and get wrinkled, worn, and grey.

This process of things moving from new to old, ordered to disordered, hot to cold is so common in our lives that we hardly notice it when it happens around us. In scientific terms this is called entropy and is described in part by the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

Coffee loses its heat because the energy applied to the water to heat it is removed, and the coffee eventually takes on the temperature of its surrounding environment.

In the same way, believers in Christ can slowly drift away from Christ—incrementally—in a way that's hard to notice at first. Without the energy of the Holy Spirit, they slowly become like the surrounding spiritual environment.

Bible reading and prayer becomes less and less frequent. It doesn't "seem" to make a difference so the gaps between times in the Bible and prayer become greater & greater. Soon the habit of conversation with God has turned into the habit of NO conversation with God.

Have you ever noticed that when you stop spending time with someone the relationship deteriorates?

So what do you do when your relationship with God is barely there and sin has become your constant companion instead? How do you get back to where you need to be?

Today we continue in our series on the Psalms and we come to a Psalm that is going to help us **reverse the drift away from God** and help us come back. It also happens to be the best known Psalm in the Bible—**Psalm 23**.

Please open your Bibles to **Psalm 23**. Let me read it to you.

My summary statement for our study in this Psalm is quite a bit longer than usual. It expresses how this Psalm helps us get back on track if we have lost our way. Its given as an **If -Then** Statement. Here it is:

**“..... If We Express Strong Faith in The LORD  
and If We Express This Faith to The LORD  
.....Then We Will Return Back to Our LORD”**

The first thing we notice about this Psalm is that there are no requests made. Not one. The way back to God described in this Psalm isn't through asking. Its through a different kind of communication with God. Look closely at our text. What do you see the Psalmist doing?

He's speaking out truth about God—He's speaking this truth to himself and he's speaking this truth to God himself. I like to call this kind of prayer—“**Faith Affirmations**”. We need to learn to pray this way. Many Christians never pray this way. Every one of us need to learn how to do this, so today King David is going to give us some basic training in this area.

The First Truth we learn here, is the importance of learning to....

### **I. Rehearse God's Goodness to Yourself (vs 1-3)**

Notice that David isn't speaking directly to God here. He is just speaking. Certainly to himself. Possibly for others to hear to (here we are we are listening 3000 years later!). The point is that he is stating a whole bunch of truth about God's care and provision for him.

Its a very specific type of truth-telling. **Its intensely personal**. When people wander away from God they lose the sense of a deep connection with God on a personal level. God seems far away & remote from their lives...he starts to seem largely unreal—more like an idea, than a personal being.

They forget that **of all** the good things they are pursuing in life, nothing—nothing—n-o-t-h-i-n-g—comes close to the good they have in God.

When was the last time you spoke these words to yourself? “**the Lord is MY Shepherd**”

The word shepherd comes from the word “feed”. The green pastures in **verse 1** refer to lush grass after a powerful rainfall. Have you noticed how green the grass is these days? Its because we have had so much rain. thats what this word means.

The “still waters” of **verse 2** refer to a resting place where the sheep can cleanse themselves from the long journey and drink away their thirst.

David is giving us a vivid image of **full provision** for everything we need in life because we have a shepherd who is caring for us—not giving us **just enough** to survive, but giving us enough to be restored fully.

**Verse 3** expresses the image to us. **He restores my soul.** The word “restore” here means “**to return**”—it has the idea of rebuilding, repairing, and bringing something back to its original state.

### **\*\*\*PICTURES OF RESTORATION**

I'd like you to see some pictures of restoration. Its amazing the skill some people have at restoring cars (3 seconds)...or houses (3 seconds)...or photographs (3 seconds)..or even faces (3 seconds).

We have an expert restorer in our own church—our own Steve Kamenar. He takes broken down furniture (Steve\_Before picture —3 seconds) and restores it to its original beauty (Steve\_After picture—3 seconds)

The theme continues with the words “paths of righteousness” -the paths are literally “wagon tracks” to help the shepherd find the way home safely.

A shepherds reputation depends on his ability to lead sheep in the right direction. If he lost sheep or lost way he would gain a bad reputation.

So also God leads us back home “for his names sake”. He gets glory for every wandering lost soul he brings back to the fold. Jesus said it this way:

This is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me. **John 6:39**

Do you see what David is doing here? He realizes can't get himself back home. He can't feed himself. He can't restore himself. But he has a shepherd absolutely committed to restoring him to health & getting him home.

*The journey home begins with the faith that believes God is totally committed to my complete restoration, and HE alone has the power to bring me home.*

He doesn't ask God to bring him home. He KNOWS God will bring him home if he follows his shepherd. The mark of a sheep that belongs to a shepherd is that they follow his voice. They refuse to follow the wrong voices. They love & follow the voice of the shepherd.

He has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice." **John 10:4-5**

I think the reason that the journey home begins with a Faith Affirmation about God is because those living at a distance from God have stopped true praying—certainly stopped worshipping in prayer.

So they don't want to pray. They've stopped trusting in God and only trust themselves (as a very poor god-substitute). They doubt his goodness and have started to look for goodness apart from God.

But they cannot be restored until they start praying again. So the pathway back begins not with prayer but with **believing truth about God and affirming it to oneself**. Whenever we doubt God is because another counter-belief has taken over our mind and we cannot (or will not) believe the truth about God that contradicts it (i.e. Unless God gives me what I want, He's not good etc).

*After rehearsing God's goodness to ourselves, we jump-start our trust in God's good intentions toward us, which makes us willing to pray again.*

That's exactly what David does next. He goes from speaking about God to speaking directly to God himself. Look with me at **verses 4-5**.

## **2. Reaffirm Gods Goodness to God (vs 4-5)**

The valley of the shadow of death is better translated as “the dark valley”. It refers to the ravines and steep valleys where the light of the sun disappears. Its where dangerous animals (and dangerous people) lived. It was a place of danger...and fear.

Living at a distance from God is to live in the darkness, close to enemies, and in danger. The Psalmist doesn't say that he won't fear the darkness (because difficult times are inevitable) but that he **won't fear evil** in the darkness. Why? **Because the shepherd is with him.**

David knew this from personal experience as a shepherd:

David persisted. “I have been taking care of my father's sheep and goats,” he said. “When a lion or a bear comes to steal a lamb from the flock, I go after it with a club and rescue the lamb from its mouth. **1Sam. 17:34-35**

Our shepherd not only goes down into the deep, dangerous darkness with us, but he rescues us from the wild animals mouth! He does this by laying down his life for us—that the kind of commitment he has toward rescuing us!

“I am the good shepherd. **The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.** A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.” **John 10:11-15**

The words “rod” & “staff” help us understand what having God's presence with us means. Its doesn't mean a cosy feeling of euphoria. The rod was used to wack the sheep when they stubbornly refused to follow the shepherd. The staff was used to lift them when they needed support or help.

David goes on with his prayer—“When my enemies surround me in those dark places— you lay out a feast for me—you calmly show everyone whose side you are on!”. The anointing here is the oil of welcome and refreshment that hosts showed honoured guests. So also is the overflowing cup.

This is a prayer of confidence in God made TO GOD—of trust in God’s abundant goodness—in the face of grave danger and darkness. **Its not celebrating God’s goodness in the happy times.** Its declaring God’s goodness in the darkest hour because God is with us there. **The cross assures us that God will go to the darkest places with us—and for us.**

Such affirmations to oneself & God have a remarkable effect on the soul. They call us home. They tell us its safe to return home.

### 3. Return to the God of Goodness (vs 6)

The original Hebrew in the latter part of **verse 6** reads this way:

“I shall **return** to the house of the Lord for the remaining days of my life”. If you look at the postscript at the bottom in the ESV you will see “return to dwell”.

The word return comes from the same root as the word in **verse 3** for “restore”. God is committed to returning us to our original condition, which moves us to return to him.

The return is now a slow, distracted saunter either—Its a earnest run to God because we are being chased there. The word for “follow” in **verse 6**, literally means **pursue**. Some translations render it this way:

“Goodness and faithful love will **pursue** me all the days of my life” HCS

While enemies hound him, God’s goodness also hounds him. God will never let us out of his faithful loving care. His goodness chases us into his presence.

“No matter where he went, or why, David knew God would follow him with his love. He had been pursued often in his life; but no man chased him as persistently and effectively as the Lord” **Allen Ross** p. 570

I would like us to follow this pattern today as an immediate way of putting these truths into practice.

**APPLICATION**

I would like us to affirm the truths about God out loud found in **verses 1-3**. Lets say out loud, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want”. Lets remind ourselves of who the Lord is to us. Its ok if several people repeat the same phrase. Lets do that now—out loud , saying lines from the **first 3 verses**.

Next—I would like us to pray to God using the words of **verses 4-5**. Say out loud these phrases of trust as **mini-prayers**. Say them now as prayers of trust in God.

*“Goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life and I shall return to the house of the Lord—the place of his presence, the place of worship, the place of fellowship with God—I shall return there for the remaining days of my life”. Amen.”*