

*(Devotional #5) Psalm 23: The Secret to a Happy Eternity*  
*The Psalm of the Great Shepherd*

**Opening Scripture Reading:**

*Behold, the LORD God will come with a strong hand,  
and His arm shall rule for Him;  
Behold, His reward is with Him,  
and His work before Him.  
He shall feed his flock like a shepherd;  
He shall gather the lambs with His arm,  
and carry them in His bosom; and  
He shall gently lead those that are with young – **Isaiah 40:10-11***

*I am the good shepherd;  
the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.*

*I am the good shepherd,  
and I know my own, and my own know Me.*

*I have other sheep, which are not of this fold,  
I must bring them also, and they will hear my voice,  
and they will become one flock with one shepherd.*

*No one has taken my life away from me,  
but I lay down my life of my own initiative.  
I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.*

*This commandment I received from My Father – **John 10:11, 14, 16, 18***

*John Phillips described Psalm 23 as providing answers to three difficult questions: How to find **the Secret of a Happy Life**, how to discover **the Secret of a Happy Death**, and how to know for certain **the Secret of a Happy Eternity**. It is to this last question that we turn our attention today, as we examine the final verse of Psalm 23. As in our previous devotionals, we will follow the main theme of Psalm 23: **Yahweh, the Great Shepherd, Directs the Lives of His People**.*

*Verse 6 – “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”*

David said with confidence: *‘I know goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.’* He doesn’t say *maybe*; he doesn’t say *possibly or perhaps*; he doesn’t say *hopefully*; nor does he say *I have a hunch*. He could have used any of those terms, but he didn’t. He says *surely* or *I know*– It is a matter of **Biblical Certainty**.

There’s no guesswork here ... no doubts, no wondering, no hesitation no question marks ... just certainty. David is certain that goodness and mercy will be his daily portion, forever and ever. No matter what comes, he is sure that goodness and mercy will characterize God’s treatment of him.

Some of the worst theology ever expressed lies in the expression, “*God helps those, who help themselves.*” Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact is, “*God helps those, who have no possibility of helping themselves!*” God helps the helpless. And he does so actively, not passively. In every aspect of our lives, God is pursuing us, looking for opportunities to bless us.

The word *'follow'* is not sufficient to communicate the strength and vitality of the Hebrew text. The word translated *'follow'* means, *'to pursue with vigor.'* The Hebrew word in question is *'radaph.'* The goodness and mercy of God do not follow us like a puppy follows its master. They gallop after us like a celestial stallion. They chase us down labyrinthine paths like the hounds of heaven. They stay hot on our heels. The goodness and mercy of our Shepherd 'RAPAPH US' all the way to heaven's gate and into the arms of our Father.

David envisions God as ACTIVE. Dare we do the same? Can you envision God pursuing you, charging after you, tracking you down in order to bless you with goodness and mercy all your days? Even during pandemic days, stormy days, and uncertain days, God remains active, un-sequestered. God is not simply following along behind, watching us do well at times, while failing at other times. He is in hot pursuit, committed to showering us with goodness and mercy all the days of our lives.

C.H. Spurgeon called *goodness and mercy, 'God's Footmen.'* They pursue us throughout the course of our lives.

- *'Goodness'* guides our steps – God's goodness is his favor towards us; it is much like grace. It includes all the benefits that accrue from God to you. It is all his acts of kindness toward you. Now this doesn't mean everything that happens to us is good. But all things do work together for good – *Romans 8:28.*

A gourmet cook may combine many ingredients that by themselves might not taste so good; but in the hand of this cook, they are blended together into a delicious meal. So in like manner, our Great Shepherd orders the events of our lives so that we become what He wants us to be.

- *'Mercy'* covers our many stumbles – Frequently in Scripture, mercy is called, *'loving-kindness.'* It is the Hebrew word is *hesed*, and it is one of the richest words in the Hebrew language. It speaks of God's loyal-love, His covenant-love, His unending commitment to us. It means that the Great Shepherd is committed to us unconditionally. There are no *'if's.'* On your best day, He is committed to you; on your worst day, He is committed to you.

It is this God, who seeks us out, who follows after us with goodness and mercy. Have you sensed Him following you? Perhaps in the beauty of a sunset? The commitment of a spouse? The smile of a stranger? The touch of a friend? A whispered prayer on your behalf?

God's Footmen are with you every day of your life. God always is at your side. Even in these days of quarantine, God is by your side. Goodness and mercy are following you – not on some days, not on most days – but all the days of your life. God's pursuit of us is not sporadic or temporary; it is constant. David says, *'God's blessings have pursued me ALL the days of my life.'* What I have seen as a fact in the past is what also will govern my future. God has been faithful to me all the days of my life, and He will continue to be faithful in all the days that make up my future. *(And here David is looking not just to an earthly future, but to a future beyond his remaining years.)*

The last line of the Psalm looks past our earthly life into Eternity: *"I will dwell in the House of the LORD forever."* David cannot be referring to the Temple because his son, Solomon, will build the Temple. It is possible he may have in mind the Tent of the Tabernacle, but He says He will dwell there *'forever.'* For David, the House of the LORD meant *'his relationship with God.'*

It is an idiom for Fellowship. It is a fellowship that begins in life and continues into Eternity ... *'forever.'*

The story is told of three adopted children, who for a number of years, lived in foster homes, where they were well cared for, but when they were adopted, the oldest child said of his new home – *This is my forever home*. Birthdays remind us of how temporary life can be ... how fragile it can be. Pandemics, disease, and death remind us that this is not our permanent home; really, we are just passing through. Birthdays are one of the ways God keeps us heading home-ward.

At times of uncertainty and even fear, we can be certain of our future, for we have the promise of a permanent home with our Shepherd in glory. It is as certain as God's goodness and mercy that pursue us daily, so we can live with peace in the present.

David's view of life and his relationship with the Lord was not different in any measurable way from the notes written by John Phillips' Mother in the margin of her Bible, a story I mentioned briefly in our first devotional on Psalm 23. David viewed his relationship with God as the foundation for *'a happy life, a happy death and a happy eternity.'*

The same should be true for all Christians in the Church Age. If we ignore the Word of God and do not tend to our relationship with the Great Shepherd, we will suffer spiritually, and the details of this life will overwhelm us. But by consistently and persistently taking in the Word of God and applying it – our journeys will be guided by the Shepherd – and why would anyone want anything more than this?

Have you noticed how the Presence of the Shepherd transcends Life's circumstances?

- When we are weary, the Shepherd gives us rest in Green Pastures;
- When we are thirsty, the Shepherd leads us to drink from the still waters;
- When we have spiritual needs, the Shepherd restores our souls;
- When we struggle with sin, the Shepherd leads us down paths of righteousness;
- When circumstances – and even DEATH overshadow us – the Shepherd walks beside us through the Dark Valleys;
- When we need comforting, the Shepherd comforts us with his Staff;
- When we need protection, the Shepherd protects us with his Rod;
- When we are hungry, the Shepherd feeds us the Meal of a King, *banquet-style*;
- When we are weary, the Shepherd anoints us with oil;
- When trouble surrounds us, goodness and mercy are our footmen, sent by order of our gracious Lord, to bring us through the every dark valley;
- And when at the end of our days, death appears to be an end unto itself, we have the promise of our shepherd that we will dwell in the House of the Lord ... *forever!*

Despite ourselves or our circumstances – in the Person of the Great Shepherd, God is faithful, and we will dwell in His house forever. *'Our cup of blessings runneth over'* ... forever.