

Our Shepherd After Us

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[0 : 00] You may be seated, kids. You are now excused to your King's Kids class.! He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He settles me down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

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.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Surely, surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me, shall pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Amen and amen. Name that movie. Imagine a farm boy tumbling down a hill saying, As you wish.

[1 : 39] Princess Bride nailed it. And we all know that as you wish is code for, I love you, Princess Buttercup. Okay. So, the Princess Bride begins with the kidnapping of Princess Buttercup by three characters.

Vizzini, the Sicilian with a keen wit. Inigo Montoya, a skilled sourceman with a daddy wound. And Fezzik, a giant brute with a gentle spirit.

They are escaping, having kidnapped Princess Buttercup, and they are escaping by boat, and then they start to realize that they are being tracked. They are being stalked, relentlessly pursued by a mysterious masked man, all in black.

The masked man eventually catches up to the three and overcomes Fezzik's brute strength. He outskills Inigo Montoya's swordsmanship, and he outwits the Sicilian Vizzini.

What is driving this masked man's relentless pursuit of Princess Buttercup is true love. Spoiler alert. For the man in black is no other than the farm boy, Wesley.

[2 : 52] The true love of Princess Buttercup, as you wish. We come to the last two verses of Psalm 23.

I preached the first two verses a couple weeks ago. Our shepherd before us. He goes before us. 9-14. I preached on the next two verses. Our shepherd with us.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. And today, we're looking at the last two verses, 5 and 6. Our shepherd after us. Our shepherd who comes after us.

Our shepherd who pursues us. And so here's what I want to convince you of. Christian, your God loves you. Your God loves you. He lovingly provides for you, and he lovingly pursues you.

And so I'm going to make two points. Point number one is God is our loving super host. And the second point is God is our loving super pursuer.

[3 : 57] God loves you. He graciously provides for you. He relentlessly pursues you. So let's look at this first point from verse 5. Our loving super host.

Psalm 23.5 says, It's a bit of a surprise. It's a little bit of a twist. Because up until this point, there's been one emphasis in the way that God is being described.

Verse 1, The Lord, Yahweh, the great I am, is my shepherd. Right? Verse 2, He settles me to green pastures and leads me beside still waters.

That's shepherd stuff. Verse 3, He leads me in paths of righteousness. A shepherd leads sheep on paths. Verse 4, Even though I walk through the valley, even though our good shepherd leads us on his paths of righteousness through the valley of the shadow of darkness, of death, even though he does that, we fear no evil for he is with us.

His rod and his staff, they comfort us. That's shepherd talk. And then in verse 5, the picture changes from shepherd to host. You prepare a table before me.

[5 : 17] A host in the world of the ancient Near East was known for the way he treated his guests. In fact, showing hospitality to guests was and remains a high cultural value in the Middle East.

It's something that we've somewhat lost here in the West. A host took responsibility for his guests, for their well-being.

And so when we read, you prepare a table before me, you've got to be thinking like holiday feast. I don't know about you. Thanksgiving's coming. Do I have an amen?

It's the Thanksgiving in the Savadi household. Here's what happens. There is so much goodness, one table can't handle it. So we've got our table filled, and then we use another table for the goodness overflow to kind of experience the goodness of.

It is a table set, full, overflowing goodness. What we're seeing here is God set a table for David.

[6 : 27] Now, shepherds don't set tables for the sheep. Sheep don't come to the table. Hosts set tables for their guests. And so what we're seeing here is God is being portrayed as a host who sets up a feast.

We also read, you anoint my head with oil. This is another ancient Near Eastern custom. If you show up at a host's house, he would anoint your head with a fragrant oil.

You might be a little smelly. But it was also to communicate blessing and that he would take care of you. Has anybody been on a long international flight?

When you're coming in kind of descent, oftentimes flight attendants will hand out these kind of warm, moist cloth towels to kind of wipe your face and to freshen up so you're smelling kind of good when you leave the plane.

It's a similar thought. It's this attentiveness to detail of blessing, of caring for people entrusted to your oversight. In fact, in Luke chapter 7, Jesus has gone to Simon the Pharisee's house sitting at table with Simon and in walks this woman of the city, a prostitute, and she is just over the top and showing her affection for Jesus.

[8 : 00] He's forgiven her much. In verse 46, Jesus turns to Simon the Pharisee and he says, you did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Point being, for our point, for our case, even in Jesus' day, they're anointing heads with oil. And could you imagine that? The incarnate God of the universe is a guest in your house and you don't show him kindness.

Boy, has he been hospitable to us though. My cup overflows. Maybe even better understood, it's you cause my cup to overflow.

We're still talking about God as host causing your cup to overflow. By the way, shepherds don't anoint their sheep's heads and shepherds don't fill their sheep's cups to overflowing.

Hosts do. You fill my cup to overflowing. Have you ever been to a restaurant or have you ever been to someone's house and that host is so attentive to your drinking needs that there's not a single time where your cup is half empty.

[9 : 16] It's always to the top. In fact, there's a little puddle at the bottom of your cup because they're so generous with whatever you're drinking. It's overflowing. It's a picture of overflowing goodness.

It's a picture of attentiveness. Verse 5 is picturing God as a hospitable, attentive, generous host. When Jenny and I travel, we tend to stay in Airbnbs and when you go to an Airbnb, you deal usually with the property's host.

But not all Airbnb hosts are equally hospitable. Those Airbnb hosts who have like a pile of five-star ratings, they are designated a super host known for their exceptional attention to detail.

They are the creme de la creme of hospitable people. Super hosts are known for going the extra mile. Your God is the ultimate super host.

He has promised to supply all of your needs. We're not to be anxious about any of the basics, Matthew 6. But God has gone the extra mile as well.

[10 : 34] He has addressed in full our greatest need, the need for salvation. And the way that Jesus talks about it in the book of John is, he'll talk about, I am the bread of life.

You eat of me and you will hunger no more. You drink of the water I give, you will be thirsty no more. It's like we are completely satisfied in Jesus alone. He is our super host.

But there is another surprise in verse five. Did you see where this super host is setting the table?

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. We don't know exactly David's situation in writing Psalm 23.

Maybe it was when he was being pursued by Saul or maybe when he was ousted from Jerusalem because of Absalom. But he was obviously feeling threatened. To be talking about your enemies means that you are aware of someone who is not out for your good, but they're out to seek your harm.

[11 : 45] And here we see David writing that in the presence of his enemies, his super host God has set a huge feast for him.

Attending to all the details. Or maybe to mix metaphors a little bit from verse four, your super host, he serves up a feast in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death.

We are provided for in abundance by our God. Maybe you're familiar with the Wendy's commercial from 1984.

The old lady who asks a question, where's the beef? Maybe you are in a situation right now, it's hard, you feel threatened.

Maybe it's your kids. I don't know what my kids are doing. Maybe it's your health. There's this kind of like, I don't know what's going to happen to me. Maybe it's our country. What's going to happen next?

[12 : 56] And you're asking, not where's the beast, you're asking, where's the feast? God, where's the feast? Where is this table set before me in the presence of my enemies?

I'll tell you where the feast is. Here's the feast. This book, God's word, it fills your soul.

He restores us daily. It provides all the necessary, essential, spiritual nutrients for you today. This is good for you.

Always, always providing. And if you are feeling threatened, you turn to your super host and say, feed me, Lord. Feed me from this book. When we gather together on Sundays, it is a corporate feast in the word.

And there's coming a day when we will gather with our King Jesus for the supper, final supper of the Lamb. Boy, is he good or what?

[14 : 03] He gives us feasts in times of difficulty. This is where our souls feast, this book.

And you know what? You know what's behind our super host? You know what's driving that? Do you know why he would set all this up? It's because he loves you.

He knows your circumstances. He wants you to thrive in your circumstances. And so he's like, I'll set a feast for you. Just come to me. Just open my book and feast your soul.

He has what you need. Where's the feast? It's at your fingertips. Open God's word and open your heart.

Open your mouth and drink your fill. Eat your fill. So the first thing that we see here, this evidence of God's love is he is our super host, our loving super host.

[15 : 15] And we move from loving super host in verse five to loving super pursuer in verse six. As you wish. In verse six, we read, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Verse six has something really special in it. And I think what David is doing in verse six is actually moving back from a host image of God to back to a shepherding image of God.

It's the good shepherd following him all the days of his life. And you may wonder why would he switch back? Why would he even stop in verse five and switch these kind of pictures of who God is? Well, I think in verse five, he's emphasizing God's loving care for us when we're in the valley. But here, in verse six, David is emphasizing God's loving, relentless pursuit of us.

The God of the universe, the great incarnate I am, is relentlessly pursuing you to do you good because he loves you.

[16 : 32] You're being stalked. You're being tracked by the God of the universe. He's our loving super pursuer.

First thing I want you to notice is what it means that he's following us. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. I just want to heighten something in that word follow.

You might, when you hear the word follow, you may inadvertently bring to it this idea of kind of follow from a distance like Peter was following Jesus from a distance when Jesus was arrested. Kind of like hands off from a distance. Passive. that's not what we're being talked about here.

Maybe a better word would be pursue.

Surely goodness and mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life. It carries the sense of purposefulness.

[17 : 34] This carries the sense of intention and intensity that God is actively pursuing us relentlessly all the days of our lives.

Like Wesley pursuing Princess Buttercup relentlessly because she is his true love.

in Psalm 119 176 it's the last verse of Psalm 119 the writer says I have gone astray like a lost sheep seek your servant pursue your servant track me down this is a pursuit of us just like Jesus the bridegroom who gave himself for his bride he pursues us the church relentlessly pursues us he's our shepherd groom Philippians 1 6 the good work that he's began in us he will carry it unto completion all the way until the day of Christ Jesus he is he is purposefully relentlessly lovingly pursuing us I think many of us needs to hear that today

I think you came in here many of you thinking there's a God there's a God who's relentlessly lovingly pursuing you and that's what I want you to see next who it is that is pursuing you surely goodness and mercy shall pursue me all the days of my life this isn't this isn't a goodness and mercy from the universe this is the goodness and mercy of God this is God's pursuit of his own God pursuing you in his goodness and mercy all the days of my life we read in Psalm 119 68 God is good and does good and when we read about God's good pursuit of us to do us good we've got to understand the idea of good in a particular way it's to bless us to do us good but it is a holy good he's seeking our holy good h-o-l-y good in Romans 8 28 and 29 we read this and we know that for those who love God all things work together for good what kind of good for those who are called according to his purpose what purpose is that for those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son that's the good

God's pursuit of you his holy good is to conform you to the holy good image of Jesus to make you like Christ that you would be holy in a Christ like way that you would bear all the fruit of the spirit love joy peace patience kindness goodness gentleness faithfulness and self control it's a profile of Jesus God is pursuing you for your good why why would he do that why does God care why would God want us to be like Christ in how we live out our lives that's the next word mercy and it's the Hebrew word chesed it's commonly translated God's steadfast love his covenant making covenant keeping love love and so if you're hearing it right you're hearing this surely

[21 : 41] God's holy love is pursuing me all the days of my life for my holy good out of his love he is purposed to do you good all the days of your life you're being pursued you're being stalked by the God of the universe he wants to do you good because he loves you you can't stop him this steadfast unrelenting love for you it's unconditional and we have a tendency to fall back into old ways of thinking so I just want to remind you God's love for you he doesn't love you because you've earned it God loves you not because you deserve it

God doesn't love you because you're so lovable God's love for you does not depend upon your obedience to him his love for us this unrelenting love love that pursues you is unconditional God's love for you depends solely on God we love because he first loves us and we know that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever his relentless pursuit of you is tied to his very character unchanging eternal set he shed his blood for you how much will he also give you supply you everything you need you're being tracked you're being pursued and it's good news because God's never going to let you go your God he's pursuing you in a holy love how do you respond to that

David says in verse six the first word surely it's it's like confident assured no doubt yes and amen my God his goodness and his loving kindness is pursuing me all the days of my life it's it's it's not something he's wondering about it's a declaration surely surely his his goodness and his love pursue me you see this this is the result of of God's promise his covenant he had made to David and and and we have an even better covenant that God has made to us through Christ a new covenant that was established through the shedding of Jesus blood that he will never leave us nor forsake us and that he will supply everything that we need to overcome and see it all the way to the end he will supply what we need what he began he will complete or maybe maybe you need to hear this for I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ

Jesus our Lord amen so we respond with a surely surely nothing can separate me from your love surely because of Christ's blood that surely of David is now your surely could you imagine that lie on your bed at three in the morning in anxious toil your health your job your family what there's so much and you put your head down on your pillow with a surely surely your goodness and your love

will pursue me all the days of my life see how that works you you lay claim to the promise in Christ surely

God's goodness in his unrelenting love shall pursue you all the days regardless of what you're facing so you can be assured yourself and he gets the glory there's one more thing I want you to notice in verse six it's where he is pursuing us to and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever it's more confidence surely I'm being pursued by the God of the universe in his unrelenting love and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever I will dwell in his presence forever the presence the house of the great I am Yahweh he's going to relentlessly pursue us all the way to the end to his eternal dwelling place he secured your eternity and will relentlessly pursue you until you walk into the new

[27 : 50] Jerusalem upon the new earth and you will behold him and his ravishing glory and with new eyes when you have new resurrection body eyes he is pursuing you all the way there until you are with God with his people in his place fully finally and forever that's that's that's your loving super pursuer today when you woke up God was operating out of the surely when you go to sleep tonight he's pursuing you when you wake up tomorrow morning he's pursuing you when you're 10 and when you're 20 and when you're 30 and 40 and 50 when you're single and when you're married he's pursuing you all the way to the end all the days of your life we're one day closer to the house of the

Lord forever God is quite a God and he loves you so much he generously provides for you even when things are difficult he provides he loves he pursues God is our super host spreads a feast before you in the presence of your enemies God is our super pursuer he relentlessly pursues us for our holy good because he loves us be assured from Psalm 23 our shepherd goes before us our shepherd goes with us and our shepherd comes after us I'm going to close with a poem this is a risky poem to read because it's old English I'm not going to read all of it it was written in 1890 by a man named

Francis Thompson he was an opium addict and this is called the hound of heaven the poem goes in between Francis speaking and his imagined God speaking to him him imagining God speaking to him I Francis Thompson fled him God I fled him down the nights and down the days I fled him down the arches of the years I fled him down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind in the midst of tears I hid from him in under running laughter a down titanic glooms of chasm fear from those strong feet that followed followed after but with unhurrying chase in unperturbed pace deliberate speed majestic instancy they beat and a voice beat more instant than the feet all things betray thee who betrayest me fear wist not to evade as love wist to pursue still with unhurrying chase in unperturbed pace deliberate speed majestic instancy came on the following feet and a voice above their beat nothing shelters thee who will not shelter me deliberate speed majestic instancy in the past those noised feet a voice comes yet more fleet lo nothing contents thee who contentest not me how hast thou merited

God speaks of all man's clotted cling the dingiest clot a lack thou knowest not how little worthy of any love thou art whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee save me save only me all which I took from thee I did not but take not for thy harms but just that thou mightest seek it in my arms all which thy child's mistake fancies as lost I have stored for thee at home rise clasp my hand and come halts by me that footfall is my gloom after all shade of his hand outstretched caressingly and he closes with this God speaking ah fondest blindest weakest I am he whom thou seekest thou drove away love from yourself who drove away me surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life surely

God is like a hound of heaven pursuing you waiting pursuing even causing you to find dissatisfaction in the things that you are looking for life so that you would come to him or in the words of Wesley as you wish let's pray great God in heaven we are so amazed by your love for us that you would provide for us in the midst of our enemies that you would feed us and anoint us and fill our cup to overflowing day after day supplying our spiritual needs God thank you God would you give us a renewed desire to feast upon your word and to commune with you through your word and [34 : 20] God we are so grateful that you are a loving pursuer a super pursuer you have pursued us even when we turned our back on you you keep pursuing you don't stop you are a good shepherd who tracks down his sheep his wandering sheep God I pray that by your spirit you would fall afresh on us your people and that by your spirit you would cause Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith and we as your people both individually and corporately we would know with all the saints the

height and breadth and depth and width of your love for us in Christ Jesus and you would fill us with the fullness of God your fullness your loving kindness for those in the room who have been running from you

God would you would you lovingly bring them back and for those of us in the room who have been seeking to walk joyfully and faithfully with you in paths of righteousness you've laid out for us God would you convince us once again of your love for us this morning God we are very aware of the circumstances surrounding us and instead of distracted by threats and unknowns we trust you you are our good shepherd lead on in Jesus name amen!

Amen