

Goodness & Mercy

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[0:00] Psalm 23, goodness and mercy. So what were you made to do? What's your purpose?

I'll never forget walking into the Jerusalem Science Center for the first time with my kids and my eldest. As soon as we opened the door, seeing all the gizmos and gadgets, with wide eyes said, this is my future.

You know, the excitement resonated within me as if reminding me of living for purpose, for something great, to leave my mark, to be able to say I was made for this.

Now, a lot of us have this sense of lack. As if we're missing the mark, as if we're not walking in our calling, that we're not made for what we're doing.

Now, this feeling, of course, has been taken advantage of by Western culture that keeps us in a, you know, that consumeristic rut, which, like a drug addiction, will never satisfy.

[1:09] But you buy it, and you start feeling sorry for yourself or that, you know, for your over-medicated Oprah you. And unfortunately, this isn't isolated to the world, but it's also very alive in the Western evangelical church.

Psalm 23 for the newlyweds. Psalm 23 for the parents of toddlers. Psalm 23 for the brokenhearted. Psalm 23, the devotional.

The bookmark. The coffee mug. The t-shirt. You've all seen it, right? All you have to do is Google Psalm 23, and you'll see what I'm talking about. You notice how there's no Psalm 23, the beer mug?

Let's think about that one. Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me. Am I allowed to tell those jokes in the end? No? We didn't joke yet.

You know, actually, you're a good crowd. You laugh. The first time I spoke in St. John's, Newfoundland. I was, you know, Newfies are really, they have a good sense of humor. And so you expect that they're going to laugh.

[2:18] So I brought out some of my best material. And I'm telling you, deadpan faces the whole way through. It's because they don't laugh in church. But after church, they were howling and laughing and doing all the things. But in church, oh, forget about it.

Anyhow. Let's go back to this intro. Basically, in the West, we have the Psalm 23 type of Christianity that is marketing towards our sense of lack.

Realizing your full potential, the real you, really self-focused, the 12 steps to becoming the person that God intended you to be. An endless addiction to self.

We are made for something. But it's certainly not about you. So let's open up our text. Psalm 23, a Psalm of David.

Now, in the Hebrew, if you were to read this, you would see that a Psalm of David is a part of the text. It's not something that a translator, you know, something that made your Bible, you know, put in there as a nice division.

[3:23] Le David mismo. It's a Psalm of David. Who's David? If you've read the account of David being anointed as king, you'll remember that he was the runt of the litter chosen over his brothers.

He was the one delegated to watch the sheep, which was the bum job. Now, this isn't 21st century North America that we're talking about, but ancient Near East, patriarchal society.

And the youngest, chosen to be the greatest, just didn't happen. Simply not done. You had the right son of your right hand, your Benjamin, and you had your Ben Smo, the son of the left hand.

And the son of the right hand was the, you know, the heir apparent, and the son of the left hand was the one who did all the dirty work to make sure that the son of the right hand became the next patriarch in line. This is how society ran.

It was politics. The further you were away from being the eldest, you get the point. The lesser your experience, or even your chances of becoming, experience in ways that the world worked in.

[4:29] You were always going to be a follower. Absorb into your grandfather's, or your father's, or your elder brother's clan. You were disposable.

You were watching the sheep. And even though in history, you know, the history of the Jews, there's precedent set for the younger ones, like Joseph, we still have Samuel searching for God's anointed among Jesse's son in the only way and the only context he really knows how.

Start with the oldest. If not the oldest, then at least the strongest and burliest, just like Saul. Let's, I'm just going to read it for you here, the account, these parts of it.

1 Samuel 16, 6. When they arrived, these are Jesse's sons, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, surely the Lord's anointed stands here before me, or before the Lord.

But the Lord said to Samuel, do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.

[5:48] You see what's going on here. Samuel's deferring to the status quo. Well, God hardly ever operates there.

Sure, he's involved in the day-to-day stuff of life. But when it comes to shaping a kingdom and a movement of salvation, when it comes to shaping calling, God time and time again chooses the road less traveled, which should leave us in a posture of hands open, listening, and following God. Even if it means anointing a rosy-cheeked boy with no experience. We continue in the account in 1 Samuel 16, verses 11 through 13.

So he asked Jesse, are these all the sons you have? They're still the youngest, Jesse answered, but he is tending the sheep.

Samuel said, send him for me, send for him, we will not sit down until he arrives. So he sent and had him brought in, he was ready, with the fine appearance and handsome features.

[7:01] Then the Lord said, rise and anoint him, he is the one. So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers. And from that day on, the spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.

Samuel then went to Ramah. So we continue in our text, Psalm 23, a Psalm of David. And we read the first line, the Lord.

The Lord, the omnipotent one, the all-powerful one, the giver and taker of life, the supreme being, the creator of all things.

The one for which nothing is impossible and the one for which out of nothing is possible. The omnipresent one, the everywhere at all times and places one, the giver of the laws of physics one, the walker of the depths of the seas, the swimmer of the heavens above, the omniscient one, the all-knowing one, the giver of dreams, the reader of minds, the knower of secrets, the one before whom all of us stand naked and nothing takes him by surprise.

He is good. He is eternal. Always was, always is, and always will be. He is not limited by anything except to him being God. And he is one.

[8:19] He is not God because he is the sum of all these things, but rather because he is God, these are all his attributes. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

And that Lord, the Lord who is all these things and more, is my shepherd. That Lord is my shepherd.

And so it should follow that if the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. Or in other words, as it says in Hebrew, I will lack nothing.

I will lack nothing. Do you lack anything? No, you don't. Oprah says you do. You lack nothing.

But I haven't read the 12 steps to spiritual freedom, Jess. You lack nothing. But I haven't fulfilled the North American dream.

[9:25] You lack nothing. Ah, we're getting the point, eh? I don't have long-term security, Jess. You lack nothing.

I mean, it gets tougher to say in the face of grief. I'm recently acquainted with terrible grief. A couple years ago, my brother-in-law died. He was a missionary in Africa, teaching church history in the morning.

Agriculture in the afternoon, because he had degrees in both. And he was just helping renovate a prayer room. And his metal grinder exploded, hit him in the chest, died instantly.

And I had to fly to Zambia to bring my sister and her kids home and make sure the body got home. It's tough.

I had the pat answers before that. Well, everything happens for a reason. It's hard to say that when you actually walk through grief. Yet, somehow, the truth remains that even in the face of grief, you lack nothing.

[10:35] You see, our perfect shepherd perfectly provides for us, even when life is terrible. The Lord is my shepherd.

I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. Makes me lie down.

Leads me beside. Do you know how hard it is to come across green pastures and still waters in Israel? Our mission every weekend, my little cantaloupe clan, was to find fresh water.

We were craving for fresh water. We were sick of the Mediterranean. We wanted fresh water. We wanted forest, mountain, lake, stream, whatever, you know, however that line goes. We wanted all of that.

It's very difficult to find. It's 50% desert, and the rest of the country deals with nine months of sunshine, which seems like a good thing to a Vancouverite.

[11:36] But trust me, it's overrated. We want the rain. Trust me, Jess, it's overrated. Here's the point.

Life is tough. But God remains our shepherd when, and we lack nothing. We need to let that truth sink into us, for lack of a better term, like a mantra.

Next time you have no money to pay your bills, I lack nothing. Next time you sleep alone, I lack nothing.

Next time you fail to conceive, especially on Mother's Day, I lack nothing. Next time your heart leaps at the sight of a stranger who looks like your brother-in-law, I lack nothing.

The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing. Sure, there's pain, and sure it feels like lack, but the Lord is our shepherd, and we lack nothing.

[12:41] Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Now, I think this has to do with temptation, or sin.

You know, that dark night of the soul, that if you've been walking with the Lord for any amount of time, you know what I'm talking about. Even when I run away, when I rebel, when I'm drowning in my sin, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. His rod and his staff. Now, you probably all have this picture in your mind. I certainly do when I think of Psalm 23.

Of that picture all of our grandmas had crocheted up in their room. Of the good shepherd holding a lamb over his shoulders. But if you're familiar with Hebrews 12, you know that God disciplines those he loves.

Hebrews 12, 4 says this, In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son?

[13:54] It says, My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you. Because the Lord disciplines the ones he loves. And he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.

We used to have shepherds who would wander up the valley. We lived facing Mount Zion. It was a great house. There was nothing between us and Mount Zion except for the Valley of Hell.

You know the Hinnom Valley? That's where you get all your imagery from Hell from. And on the other side is the Kidron Valley. That was our valley, the Valley of Hell. And every once, you know, especially in the spring and the fall when the grass was green, the shepherds, the Bedouin shepherds, would herd their flock up our valley.

And more often than not, one of the sheep would end up in our backyard eating our grass. And you see what happens when a sheep wanders away.

If you have a problem sheep, what the shepherd does is he takes that sheep, breaks its legs, and then carries it over his shoulders. Did you hear that?

[15:08] God breaks legs. He breaks legs. And then carries you through until you are healed.

Carries you through, preparing you, preparing us to deal with life, to deal with the battle. Let's continue. 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.

Life is bleak. Life is difficult. Trial after trial. I was just with a friend who said, you know what? I'd just like it to have a break from the trial after trial.

Just for a moment, can I have a break? Trial after trial. You see, this is, as you're wandering through the desert in Israel, the enemies are everywhere.

[16:18] It's not just, you know, once in a while you come across an enemy. You know, there are scorpions. There are lions. There are other raiding tribes. The sheep are your economy.

You are very vulnerable walking to the desert with sheep. Enemies are surrounding you. And that's the thing for us. There are enemies.

Ephesians 5 says, For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore, put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground. And after you have done everything to stand. Or like in Hebrews 12, in your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

There's something at stake here. There's a battle going on. There's a battle going on. There's a battle going on. There's a battle going on. To steal and to kill and to destroy your life.

[17:23] And the devil comes disguised in sheep's clothing or even in shepherd's clothing. telling you that you can make a difference in you growing self-absorbed, pleasure-obsessed materially obese, empty humans hungering for more self-help materials written by self-appointed self-help gurus who have just come out with the second edition of the 12 Steps to Being the Better You all the while your eyes and your focus, your attention and your purpose are being diverted away from God your life and how you live it matters not just for you but for your kids and their kids and their kids, for your neighbors and their kids and for the kingdom we are made for this we are made for Him and He knows this

He wants this and so He disciplines He carries He leads He comforts and prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies you anoint my head with oil and my cup overflows when you press an olive you get one third oil one third water and one third pulp and the first press gives you that extra virgin olive oil the stuff that's meant for healing and cleansing and cosmetics the second press is for the lamps and for food and the third press gives you a cruddy oil that's made for lubrication and hinges and you know mechanical things in other words you heal me you clean me and you make me better you anoint my head with oil my cup runs over and as we read we'll continue reading in David's anointing we read it already so Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power not only do you heal me clean me and make me better you also empower me and fill me with the Holy Spirit

I'm not preaching prosperity gospel because God looks at the heart and just like he sees differently in choosing a king he also provides differently in preparing us for the kingdom his mandate in making your heart like David's his mandate is sorry making your heart like David's heart with hearts after Jesus and he leads and guides and heals and provides abundantly for that purpose my cup runs over this is abundance it's talking about here more than you could ever ask or imagine in other words we need to expect more we need to receive more in other words don't undersell God now I know it's Mother's Day but I also have a very good dad good father one of the things that I really lean on especially as I dare to plant an English congregation in rural Quebec one thing that I really hold on to is my dad saying

Jess if you ever fail fail big fail big like why should we be afraid of failure at least we gave it our best shot we went for it and and it was a big mistake I've tried some crazy things like leaving Jerusalem to go to Quebec to do this thing that I said and I'm telling you my dad has been my biggest cheerleader the whole way through even though I'm 37 it gives me huge confidence knowing that my dad is cheering me on and so it should be for all of us children of God it's time for us to adopt what I like to call the kingdom strut my dad's the biggest my dad's the strongest nobody messes with my dad he's the richest he's got the whole world in his hands and I can do nothing wrong with God with me you know what I'm saying where we can say with unashamed confidence that surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will sit in the presence of God forever we are the sheep and the children of God we need to start owning that knowing that letting that inform our faith we are people of favor children who will not be abandoned for he is our shepherd and we were made for this amen Sharon