



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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# **Psalm 23: Your Life and God's Certainty**

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**Psalm 23:**  
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## Psalm 23: Your Life and God's Certainty

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*Philippians 1:21-30*

*Psalm 23:5-6*

As we come near the end of this series that is following the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, I've yet to say much about the author.

Scholars are united in their beliefs that David wrote this psalm: the shepherd boy, the soldier, the musician and poet, the great king of Israel.

But let's not forget the unfaithful husband, the murderer of Bathsheba's husband, the grieving father after his baby son died, the despairing father as his older son rebelled against him.

David is saint and sinner. I like the way Eugene Peterson in his book Leap Over a Wall describes the story of David as a 'plunge into the earthiness of our humanity.'

And yet, David is known more than anything by the words of the prophet Samuel as he says, "David is a man after God's own heart", the only person in the Bible described in this way.

There's no debate as to his writing this great psalm; but interestingly enough, there is a great debate as to when he wrote it.

One scholar writes with conviction, "This psalm is David's. It belongs to the period when the future monarch was still the shepherd."

Another with equal conviction says, "It sounds as if it were the work of his later years. There is a fullness of experience with it."

Still another says, “The singer of this sweet song is one who has travelled far on life’s way, still has a way to go, and his path has not always been bright or smooth.”

You can take your pick.

I personally believe that David wrote this as he looked back on his life; that it’s a product of his perspective from many years of an intimate relationship with God, a man after God’s own heart.

As I read it, the progression of his life is clear:

- First, he describes himself as a sheep needing the shepherd’s care and protection.
- Then, he is a traveler through the shadows of life and death.
- And finally, he is a guest at a table where God is the host, and he enjoys the divine presence forever!

No matter the age of the one who wrote this psalm, the central message is that God can be trusted.

And no matter the age of the one who reads or hears this psalm; no matter what happens to us in our lives, God is sure and certain.

A friend was telling me of a funeral to which the family brought the ninety-two-year-old mother of the man who had died.

She sat in her wheelchair, silently unaware of what was going on around her, until my friend began to lead everyone in saying the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm.

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Suddenly, she began to lead the service as she recited the psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want..."

Everyone was moved that out of this frail body, from across the memories of a lifetime, a great promise of God had come alive in her awareness.

When the service was over, and they were rolling the casket by her, she said to her daughter, "Is this my boy?"  
"Yes, Momma."

"Did he make it to heaven?" "Yes, Momma, he's in heaven with Daddy."

With that assurance, she lapsed back into her world, and rode back to the nursing home without another word.

God's promise and presence had been engraved on her heart with this psalm of David, and she had never lost it, never would!

This morning, I would like to focus on that theme of "Your Life and God's Certainty," that no matter where you are in your passage through life, God's goodness and mercy is available.

A lady told me that she had been given her grandmother's Bible, and going through it, found this note by our passage: "Goodness and mercy are God's hound dogs!"

In fact, the word we have translated as "follow" is very much painted in colors of pursuit in the full meaning of the word in Hebrew.

A good way to look at it, don't you think? All your life, goodness and mercy are on your trail, at your heels, and maybe it's just we need to slow down and let it all catch up to us.

Wherever we are along this journey of life, how do we experience the presence of God?

That's what I believe David is sharing in this psalm; that this psalm is autobiographical, he is writing about his relationship with God through all the passages of his life.

So, using this psalm as a guide, as we move through life, three words seem to describe the stages of youth, middle-age, and the later years.

The first word is "Choice". Look at the psalmist: green pastures, still waters, a picture of great abundance.

For the young, life is an open road, no limitations, a time of choices. But what we don't know is where those choices will lead.

We make choices that set us on a good path, and some will scar us forever. Life is founded, for better or worse, on the foundation of our choices, and our choices are rooted in values.

And the greatest, the best choice you can make is to always remember that the Lord is your shepherd, for God to lead your life.

The second word is "Challenges". Choices for youth, challenges for the middle-aged.

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And one of the challenges of life is living with the choices we made about our relationships, vocation, education, health.

The psalmist knew it was a crucial time of challenge, describing it as a journey through the shadows....

And let me say, having been there, for so many the mid-life challenge is not in the shadows of death but living in the shadows of our mortgages and children's college tuition!

David, whose mid-life crisis was next to none, met the challenge with the confidence of God's presence, that in spite of it all, God never gave up on David.

It was never "God and I can handle anything" but always, "You are with me."

The choices of youth and the challenges of mid-life, and the third word is "Contentment".

David's contentment in the last years of his life came from an intimate, lifelong companionship with God, confident of God's goodness and mercy.

And just as he started his psalm with an affirmation of faith, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," so he ends on the same note of faith and hope and love, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

As the shadows lengthen and the busy world around us is hushed, as the weight of our years is upon us, I pray for you and me that we will know this inner peace, this last will and testament, if you will, of David's faith in God.



But even more, not only is this David's psalm about his life with God, I truly believe it is God's testament of what God believes about David, about you and me.

From the deepest secrets of your soul to the face you put forward to the world, at whatever stage of life you're at, every bit of you is meant to be the authentic and original person God made you to be.

With all that we might think about ourselves, what matters is what God believes us about us.

David knew what God believed about him as he describes his life as "anointed", an "overflowing cup..."

You see, God doesn't un-friend us because of our limitations, our quirks, our weirdness, our rantings and ravings.

The value of David's story is not that we are to be like him, but that it reminds us, you and me, that God believes in you and me as we are, that God can be at the center of an imperfect life.

That's how I see David, sometimes he followed God by a dim light, sometimes he was a shining light.

God pours strength through what we might think of as the weird, annoying, frustrating things about us.

The things we've perhaps seen as problems or struggled against for years, become the window through which the power of God can shine brightest.

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Listen to how Richard Rohr says it, *“The single and true purpose of mature religion is to lead you to ever new experiences of your True Self. If religion does not do this, it is junk religion.*

*Every sacrament, every Bible story, every church service, every sermon, every hymn, every bit of priesthood, ministry, or liturgy is for one purpose: to allow you to experience your True Self, who you are in God and who God is in you, and to live a generous and just life from that Infinite Source.”*

Your life, your whole life and everything about you is wonderful, beautiful, worthy, holy, belonging to God...your shepherd, my shepherd, we shall not want, goodness and mercy pursuing us, dwelling in the house of the Lord forever.

So, I pray for you:  
Wherever God takes you,  
    go with joy;  
whatever the task God gives you,  
    do it with joy;  
whatever the burden,  
    accept it with faith and grow;  
wherever life calls,  
    answer it.

Because I promise you that wherever God leads you, it is worth it, because God believes in you!

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!



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