

Ps 23 (ESV) The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ⁽²⁾ He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. ⁽³⁾ *He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.* ⁽⁴⁾ 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. ⁽⁵⁾ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁽⁶⁾ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

1. Continuing to look at Ps. 23 – We could call this “The song of a contented sheep”

A. This week a very important verse and promise

Ps 23:3 (ESV) He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

2. We're just going to look at the thought of our shepherd restoring our soul

I. HE RESTORES MY SOUL

1. Remember David's talking about a believer in a relationship with God

A. So the first thing this tells us?

We all get into this place where we need this restoring work from our shepherd at times

1). We all get into that spiritual state – the Bible calls being “Cast down”

Listen to the words of David: Ps 42:5 (ESV) Why are you *cast down*, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation

2). He repeat that idea of being cast down again in v. 11 and also in Psalm 43

B. Cast down defined spiritually

1). To be dejected – feel defeated – overwhelmed by discouragement

2). We have gotten into such a place we are unable to pick ourselves back up again

Transition: This term “cast down” is also used for sheep

A. Let's see what happens to a cast down sheep – then we'll relate that to us

2. A “cast down” sheep is one who gets turned over on his back and cannot get up

A. A sad sight – on their back – legs flailing – frantically trying to stand up – panicked and frightened

B. Usually happens when the fleece has become long and heavy

1). Sheep like to find little hollows in the ground to lie in - comfortable - relaxing

a). But in this scooped out terrain – it is easy for them to roll over

2). And of course – being sheep – as soon as their feet can't feel the ground they panic

a). They start to paw frantically with their legs

b). As they kick their feet gases start to build up that cut off circulation to the legs

C. This is extremely dangerous – if it's hot that sheep can be dead within a few hours

1). Why shepherds regularly do a head count to make sure all the sheep are there

a). If any is missing they quickly begin to search for them – every moment counts

2). Plus – predators love cast down sheep – big meal – no work

Transition: Let's see what the good shepherd does

3. The shepherd's actions to restore a cast down sheep

A. He would diligently search for it – after finding it – he would run to it

1). Then roll it over on its side to help relieve the gases that had built up

2). Next step was to lift it to its feet – and begin to rub its legs to restore the circulation

3). All the while he would be speaking tenderly to it to relieve the panic

a). Reassuring the sheep that it was now in the care of its loving shepherd

b). That everything would be okay

B. Eventually the sheep would be restored to health and run back to join the others

Thought: Great picture of a cast down saint and the shepherd restoring their soul

- A. David who had done this many times with his sheep – recalls those times his Lord had done it with him
 - 1). How he had come to his aid when he felt so down he couldn't get back up again

Transition: I want you to see the wonderful picture of how tender our shepherd is

- A. I thought of two areas where we can become cast down – all of us
 - 1). Because of repeated sin – that besetting sin
 - 2). Because of crushing trials
 - a). I've experienced both and have been the recipient of the shepherd's tender care
Him coming to me and lifting me to my feet – how grateful I am

4. The tenderness of our shepherd towards His cast down sheep

The Struggle with Besetting Sin

- A. When we fall into **THAT** sin – the one we hate yet can't seem to get on top of
 - 1). We can feel that God is so disgusted with us – **THAT AGAIN!**
Why did I ever bring you into my flock? You've been nothing but trouble...
 - a). I am tired of you dishonoring me?
- B. We become "cast down" – I can't believe I messed up again – Lord how can you love me?"
We feel like we can't go to God at all – like He's sick of us
 - 1). But when did He choose you?
Eph 1:4 (ESV) even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...
 - a). Yet He still set His love upon you and drew you to Himself
 - 2). And isn't He omniscient?
 - 3). Then doesn't that mean He chose you with full knowledge of every sin – every struggle?
 - a). Yet He still set His love upon you and drew you to Himself

Question: But aren't you afraid of saying that? Won't people just sin it up?

- A. Of course not! Understanding how loved you are by God never promotes sin
 - 1). His love frees us up from sin – helps us face sin from the right perspective
- B. Fear can make us obey to a degree for awhile
 - 1). But it is the obedience of the slave afraid to be beaten
 - 2). But love like this will conquer our hearts – and cause us to desire to obey
 - a). Love brings delight into obedience
 - b). I want to please somebody like that – ***I obey not as the slave but as the son!***

- B. No wonder Paul prayed in Ephesians

Eph 3:16-19 (NIV) I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, (17) so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, (18) may have power, together with all the saints, ***to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, (19) and to know this love that surpasses knowledge***--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- 1). If you only understood His love for you – that would change everything!
- 2). But notice that Paul is praying that God would give them this understanding – Why?
 - a). God's love is so incredible that it is beyond us – we need the Spirit's help to understand it
 - b). I pray that for you – I pray that for me – to see how great His love for us really is
 - 1a). His agape – unmerited – unearned – love that would change our lives!

Tim Keller: You're more sinful than you ever dared believe; ***you're more loved than you ever dared hope.***

Point: The more we understand how radical His love for us is – the more radical our obedience will be

- A. As we see how great His love for us is – we will fall in love with Him

1 John 4:19 (NKJV) We love Him because He first loved us.

- 1). As we fall in love with Him – we will delight in obeying Him

Thought: Brothers and sisters – I don't know how you came in here this morning

- A. You may be fresh off a spiritual defeat – you're cast down

- 1). But if you are one of His sheep – if you have embraced Him by faith – trusting in His work
I pray you'll hear His tender whisper – "I love you. Get back up. Try it again. I will help"

Transition: Is there any example of a saint being in this condition and being lifted to his feet again

- A. Peter is our poster child here – after denying he knew the Lord three times

5. The tender shepherd and the devastated saint = triple denial

Background – the scene is the last supper where Jesus rocks Peter with some devastating news

TURN: Lk 22:31–32 (ESV) "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ⁽³²⁾ but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

- A. Before it ever happens – the shepherd is already speaking tenderly – reassuring him
"Peter you are about to be rocked. You're going to feel like your faith has failed completely. I want you to know that it won't. I have prayed and my prayer will be answered. So WHEN you turn back..."

- B. Why did Jesus allow Peter to be sifted? "Couldn't you just say 'No' Jesus?"

Jesus knew what He was doing – Peter needed this failure – it was necessary for his growth

- 1). God didn't bring the temptation (He tempts no man) He used it for good in Peter's life
- 2). Peter was cocky, arrogant and self-confident – he was unusable in that condition

See it? Lk 22:31–33 (ESV) "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ⁽³²⁾ but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." ⁽³³⁾ Peter said to him, *"Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death."*

Matthew adds these words from Peter: Mt 26:33 (ESV) Peter answered him, *"Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away."*

- a). I can see those guys falling away – deserting you – but me! Never!
- b). Wrong Peter! In a few hours you will be denying that you even know Christ 3 x's

- C. Peter had to fail like this to become usable – to become the man God wanted him to be

He had to learn how weak he was so that he would learn to rely on Christ for His strength

Lk 22:31–33 (ESV) "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, ⁽³²⁾ but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. (You are going to fall BUT) *And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."*

- 1). After this failure he could be used to strengthen his brothers
 - a). Why? He had learned where the Christians source of strength is
- 2). He could tell them from personal experience – "You must trust God not self"
"Let me tell you my story. I thought I was so strong – able to handle any thing – but I discovered I was so weak. I found out what Jesus meant when He said 'Apart from me you can do nothing.'"
- 3). He could comfort them after they had failed
"But let me tell you what God did for me. You haven't out sinned His grace. He still loves you."

Thought: Why could Peter tell them that God still loved them?

Because of his own experience of being restored – *watch this*

- A. Jesus is crucified – Peter is crushed (cast down) – How could I deny that I even knew Him?

But after the resurrection watch Jesus pick him up

- B. The women go to the tomb after Jesus was buried and meet an angel who tells them amazing news

Mk 16:5–7 (ESV) And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁽⁶⁾ And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of

Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁽⁷⁾ But go, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

- 1). The angel singles Peter out – Go tell all the disciples *and make sure you tell Peter*
- 2). Peter had failed miserably – had wept bitterly – cast down – eaten up by guilt
 “I can’t believe what I’ve done. I can’t believe I denied Him like that. Especially after saying I’d die for him. Peter you’re a coward. You blew it.”
 - a). If ever there was a cast down sheep it would have been Peter
 - b). I’m sure he thought – even if the Lord did rise again – it will never be the same
 “I’ve let Him down so badly, He’ll never be able to love me like He did. I’ll always be nothing more than a second class citizen in His kingdom. The one who will be known for his epic fail.”

C. But the news comes – Jesus has risen! And He wants us to meet Him in Galilee
 And Peter the angel said to *make sure you knew – He told us to make sure we told you*
 It’s important to Jesus that you’re there Peter.

- 1). All of a sudden everything changes! Hope again! He’s being lifted to his feet isn’t he?
 You mean He still loves me after what I did – I’m not a second class citizen in His kingdom
 I’m not useless – I’m not an utter failure in His eyes
 He told you to make sure I was there? He said that? Tell me the exact words!”

Point: That my friends is being lifted to your feet again!

A. Now watch this - What happens in the book of Acts – when the first church is beginning

- 1). Jesus gives Peter the privilege of preaching first sermon of new church – 1000’s respond

Thought: I’ve said this before but just a reminder

A. Isn’t this our history – we fall – He comes and picks us up and gets us going again
 We wander off – He chases us down and brings us back
 Our heart gets distracted – grows cold and indifferent – He reignites it

B. Can’t you relate to this wonderful hymn? *“Come thou fount of every blessing?”*

- 1). The incredible work of the Savior
 Jesus sought me when a stranger,
 Wandering from the fold of God;
 He, to rescue me from danger,
 Interposed His precious blood;
 How His kindness yet pursues me
 Mortal tongue can never tell,
 Clothed in flesh, till death shall loose me
 I cannot proclaim it well.
- 2). The struggle we still face
 O to grace how great a debtor
 Daily I’m constrained to be!
 Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
 Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
 Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
 Prone to leave the God I love;
 Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,
 Seal it for Thy courts above.

C. Here is my testimony – I have a sneaky suspicion it’s yours too:

I am a sheep – I am stupid – I have a faithful shepherd – I will end up in glory

R. Ellsworth: “Every child of God is in the grip of grace—mighty, unrelenting, stubborn, pursuing grace!”

- 1). We have a shepherd who is unrelenting – that tracks us down when we wander off!
- 2). Who picks us up again when we fall
- 3). And will continue to do that until we're safely home with Him
 - a). I am no secure because of my grip on Him – but because of His grip on me

Transition: This being cast down may not be because of sin – it may be an overwhelming trial = crushing you

Cast Down Because of an Overwhelming Trial

1. A trial that you can't get on top of – you just can't rest

- A. Never forget you have a shepherd – who is committed to restoring your soul
 - 1). Never forget what the scriptures say about Him
Ps 3:3 (ESV) But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, *and the lifter of my head.*
- B. Go to Him and honestly pour your heart out – talk to Him about your present state
 “God I want to trust you in this. I want to rest because of a faith that rests in you BUT I can't”
 - 1). He won't be mad – “After all I've done – you can't trust me – STILL!”
- C. Please screw this Scripture down into your thinking
Jn 15:5 (ESV) I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, *for apart from me you can do nothing.*
 - 1). You can't stand for Him – saw this with Peter
 But apart from Him and his strength – His grace – you cannot get up when you're cast down
 - a). You cannot rest in times of trouble
 - 2). I've told some of you – Not that long ago I was going through a trial that was crushing me
 - a). It was so big – so radical – so personal – I struggled with faith
 I would quote scriptures – I asked for prayer – I did all the things I knew – still tormented
 - 3). Finally I went to God honestly – just to talk with my Father – my shepherd
 “I can't do this. I know I should rest because of your promises. Your goodness. I mean, I'm a Pastor I should have enough faith. AND I know you've never let me down before BUT this time I just can't seem to trust you. Please help me. Give me the grace to believe your promises in this one. Give me the grace to rest”
 - a). I was cast down big time – but I learned a valuable lesson
 I can't do anything apart from Christ – I need grace to believe – grace to trust – grace to rest – grace to take hold of he promises
 - 4). At that point I started to rest – I was able to give the situation to God and leave it there
 - a). What a lesson of intimacy – just talk it over with Him – be honest – He will help
 - b). He will restore your soul – He will lift you

Transition: So the shepherd is the solution for the sheep who is cast down = comforting

- A. But being cast down is no fun – is there anything that could reduce that experience?

Things that cause the sheep to be more prone to this condition

And the things the shepherd will do to protect us

1. Sheep that always look for *comfort* are more prone to being cast down

- A. That desire for comfort causes them to lie in those hollows where it is so easy to roll over
- B. I think there is a parallel for the saint who makes comfort and ease a priority
 - 1). We need to be more Biblical in our mindset – we are called to war
 - a). We have an enemy – this is not supposed to be easy all the time
 - b). We are called to strain towards the goal – Christlikeness – advancing His kingdom

- 2). If we think Christianity calls us to comfort – we will be disappointed
 - a). Prone to discouragement – despair – to be cast down
“I didn’t sign up for trials – Christianity was supposed to make my life easy”
 - b). If you really think that – you should read the contract again
We are called soldiers because we are called to war against the kingdom of darkness
And against ourselves – to put to death the deeds of the flesh

Solution: To break this addiction to ease and comfort – the shepherd must keep the sheep on the move
Our shepherd will move us to different pastures

- A. Pastures that may be frightening – less secure – pastures you’d never choose for yourself
 - 1). It may be situations like Peter’s where we fail big time
 - 2). It may be like Paul in 2 Corinthians where he was so overwhelmed – perplexed - afraid
- B. Why? To fix our eyes back on God
 - 1). Because there we wake up from our comfort and ease
Too much comfort can cause us to slip into the deadly slumber of apathy
 - a). We take our eyes off Christ and we drift – that is deadly
- C. So our loving shepherd must move us into situations that overwhelm us – beyond our ability
 - 1). Where we are forced to look at Him
 - a). This is where we learn He is enough – His abilities are always sufficient
 - b). This is where our confidence in Him grows – and true joy is birthed in our life

2. Sheep that have **too much wool** are prone to being cast down

- A. Wool gets heavy – matted with mud – burrs...
 - 1). This sheep can get so weighed down by its own wool when it can’t get back up

Solution: Some of the wool must be taken away – the sheep must be sheared

- A. The sheep doesn’t like it – it’s uncomfortable.
The shepherd doesn’t like it. It’s really hard work.
 - 1). But when it is done both the shepherd and the sheep are relieved
 - a). The threat of the sheep becoming cast down is removed – so the shepherd can rest
 - b). The sheep is set free from that hot and heavy coat – it ends up more comfortable
- B. Same thing with us – we can get so weighed down by the things of the world
 - 1). The first problem can come from comfort – this is from abundance (look at your garage)
 - 2). If were not careful it can become a weight that slows us down
 - a). Caring for it all – the finances it all takes – how many are slaves to the debtor
- C. You can’t run with weights

Why Hebrews says: Heb 12:1 (ESV) Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, **let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely**, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

- 1). Try to run a marathon with weights – you’ll lose all your joy and eventually quit
- D. So the good shepherd sees what is weighing us down – what has slowed us down to a crawl
 - 1). For some it may be constantly on the internet – on the phone - addicted
 - 2). It may be a hobby that takes up all your time – all you think about
 - a). You used to think about Him in those quiet times – now it is something else
 - 3). The Lord sees those idols in your life and He MUST cut them away
 - a). That is painful – but if we want to grow
If we want our heart to catch fire again we must allow Him to have His way
 - 3). God doesn’t remove things for no reason – it’s always because He loves us

- a). He wants our hearts to catch fire – to be filled with joy
He's the loving father removing that which could kill the child
- 1a). The child may kick and scream and think it's unfair – but it is a necessity

3. Sheep that are **overweight** are more prone to being downcast

- A. It's more difficult for them to right themselves

Solution: The shepherd puts them on a strict diet to make them more nimble, strong, energetic
Basically he does what is necessary to get them into shape

- A. God does that with us – Paul uses the language of the gym – speaking of our spiritual shape

1 Ti 4:7–8 (ESV) Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train (discipline) yourself for godliness; ⁽⁸⁾ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Question: How do we get into fighting shape spiritually? We discipline ourselves for godliness

- A. That's what really matters – we can concentrate on physical exercise and that is good - necessary

- 1). But no matter what you do – age and gravity will always win
But if you discipline yourself for godliness that just keeps getting better and better

- 2). Paul put it this way

2 Co 4:16 (ESV) So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

- a). My outer man is wasting away – 2nd law of thermodynamics – entropy
Everything is in a state of decay – I see it happening in the mirror
- b). Playing basketball Saturday at the park – one player was a Kaiser Physician
I said “I’m with Kaiser” “Oh yeah, is it the Senior Advantage Plan” - ouch
- 1a). He obviously noticed that 2nd law of thermodynamics happening too

- B. I can't stop that – but I must stop the decay of my soul

- 1). If you have slipped into a state of apathy – no prayer – little Bible
You MUST wake up – Revelation says you're dying spiritually – fan that life back into flame

- a). Wednesday night – great falling away has begun – churches filled with unbelievers
Guard your heart – stay alert – make sure it's not you!

- 2). Read the Bible and let it move you to a renewed spiritual discipline

Transition: So let's close up this first section

Summary

1. So the Lord restores my soul – again and again and again

- A. I am in the grip of His love – His grace – He is keeping me – lifting me

2. And the Lord helps us to not get into that place where we need to be lifted

- A. Where we are walking with Him in victory – not weighed down by the things of this world

- 1). He must help us who are addicted to comfort – Christianity calls us to war
- 2). He must help us who are weighed down with abundance – Can't run with weights
- 3). He directs us to spiritual health – the conditioning of being spiritually disciplined