

Why Comfort is So Important and How to Get It
Psalms: Encountering God's Heart Through His Playlist
Psalm 23

By Dave Urbanski

Quite a number of truths Pastor Scott shared in his Psalm 23 message this past Sunday hit me hard — but thankfully in good, hopeful ways. I imagine that's because I sensed so many of the points directly relating to my own life ... and my guess is that I'm not the only one at Graceway Bible Church who was left feeling that way.

We're all quite familiar with the words of Psalm 23, even its cadence, its rhythm. Perhaps to the point that maybe, just maybe, we've stopped meditating on the words and their implications for our lives. So I'm grateful Pastor Scott dug down deep and reintroduced us to the treasures in Psalm 23.

I'm in total agreement with Pastor Scott that Psalm 23 is unfairly pigeonholed as a prayer recited at funerals. Not that it shouldn't be part of such services — but again, maybe that is why we may look past Psalm 23 at times, relegating it to having meaning only when life has come to an end. May it not be so! Pastor Scott was right on the money telling us that this Psalm is ESPECIALLY for you and for me TODAY. It's a prayer for the LIVING!

And wow, do the floodgates just open up when we start applying Psalm 23 to our lives right now.

Pastor Scott returned again and again to the idea of comfort — along with related ideas such as being "at ease" ... allowing God to restore our souls ... the gift of his abundant provision ... of his close proximity and presence, which helps us deal with and push aside fear ... the Lord being our welcoming host ... that we can dispense with the need to perform for him ... that he loves us because ... well ... HE LOVES US! Certainly not because we've done this or that "for him" ... and on and on and on.

But when presented so starkly with repeated examples not only of how good God is but also how much he wants us to experience his goodness, I've found myself many times a bit hesitant to take a step in my heart toward the Lord's outstretched arms. Not because I don't believe he's eager for me to move toward him; I do believe that! But

despite my years and years as a Christian, Pastor Scott's description of God's lavish, overflowing love got me admitting that part of me STILL wants to earn God's favor! To pay admission at the gate. To merit a place at his table despite a seat waiting for me that's mine for free. Of course, I know there's nothing I can do to earn or merit God's love and forgiveness and mercy and grace ... but maybe the grind of life in a transactional, dog-eat-dog world has conditioned me in some ways to resist the wonder of a GIFT.

Can any of you relate to that? That sort of loss for words that overtakes you when someone gives you a present you weren't expecting — or the strange reaction that you need to find a way to repay it so you're back on "equal ground" with that person? Well, in this life, it's certainly possible (and a good idea) to lavish each other with gifts without keeping "score" ... but when we're in heavenly realms and are presented with Christ's sacrificial gift on the cross, there's nothing we need to do or can do. There's no "equal ground" to be found. Our only response is to thank him, praise him, and surrender ... accept ... to fall into his living waters and let them wash over us, as we "dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

In a practical sense, I appreciated Pastor Scott pointing out ways that we may seek to comfort ourselves apart from the Lord when our emotions are negatively on overdrive, whether those ways involve entertainment, shopping, overeating, or dabbling in substance abuse. Unhealthy comfort never sticks around too long, either, and we're soon seeking out our next "fix." Praise God that not only does he want more for us but also has more — much more — for us.

It would appear to start with King David's very first words: "The Lord is MY shepherd." Pastor Scott said it denotes David's vibrant, personal relationship with the living God. Indeed, the Lord is A shepherd ... and certainly as a shepherd tends a flock, he's OUR shepherd. But the best part is that the Lord is MY shepherd. He cares about all of us collectively, of course ... but he loves and cares about me just as much. In fact, Jesus said quite famously that a good shepherd will leave the 99 in order to track down the one lost sheep. That's powerful to dwell on.

I'm also reminded that given David's intimate relationship with God, it would seem the Lord is quite a bit more active in David's life simply because David WANTS the Lord there with him! Maybe that's why the Lord "makes" David "lie down in green pastures." David knows the Lord, and the Lord knows David. Therefore, there's no

"getting back on track spiritually" — the Lord already knows what David's next step should be, and David not only isn't resisting, he's going after the Lord with a hungry heart and soul. Of COURSE the Lord knows exactly what to do next ... and he makes David rest.

Do you believe you could open the door wide enough to let God in to that degree? You know you can!

I especially loved Pastor Scott's illustration about God restoring our soul. Again, it's a familiar phrase to us ... but it got me thinking about what "restore" means on a practical level. Consider the things we may be keen on restoring: an old car ... a weathered house ... a piece of antique furniture ... a vintage musical instrument. What joy we get from doing the work to bring back those things to what they looked like when they were new! Their original form. How much more joy the Lord receives when we LET HIM restore the essence of US? Our souls. That's what the Lord does. Allow him to do it!

I also love that Psalm 23 shows the Lord doing what would be impossible for us; things that we'd almost have to see to believe. Such as preparing a "table before me in the presence of my enemies." It's almost a boast or even a taunt from the Lord, isn't it? As if he's saying to us, "You keep doubting me. OK. Here's a table for you to sit at with the most delicious food and finest wine. A string quartet is over there serenading you. Now think of your worst enemies ... oh, how 'bout that! There they are, staring you down, ready to pounce on you! But guess what? You're going to go on eating and drinking and enjoying while your enemies stand around, breathing fire, and wondering why you're not scared, and why they can't do a thing to you. The reason is because I'm here and I SAID SO!" Talk about a mic drop.

But that's the kind of unmatched power and authority the Lord possesses, isn't it? And all of that is for US!

Finally Pastor Scott shared the idea of the Lord being our welcoming host. Again, I am so conditioned toward "serving the Lord" that the good intention behind that phrase can become a barrier to me experiencing the Lord as my welcoming host. But I also know the Jesus did that very thing for his disciples, washing their feet at the Last Supper. And I love that Pastor Scott reminded us that when we find our value in the Lord, something happens deep inside us ... and we can be at ease and realize that we don't need to "prove ourselves" to the Lord. HE has already proven HIMSELF.

My we go forth with our cups overflowing with the Lord's goodness and mercy ... so much that we can't wait to share the abundance with others — to those God has preordained for us to encounter and encourage.