

“Steadfast Love My Whole Life Long”

Psalm 23

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May 12, 2019

How do you unslump yourself? For when you are in a slump you are not in for much fun, for unslumping yourself is not easily done.

Many times, God inspires a sermon in the pastor that the pastor needs to strive to live themselves. This is one of those sermons. I am in a slump. Much is out of control. I am uncertain what to do and how to do it. Some things I know what to do, but I am distracted and undisciplined in doing them. Thankfully, God is the ultimate unslumper. Unslumping is a journey that involves awareness, processing, forgiving, learning, feeling, a deliberant shift in thoughts and healing.

God has unslumped me numerous times through Psalm 23 and Dr. Seuss’ “Oh, the Places You’ll Go!”.

Psalm 23 was prayed, sung, played musically, written, retraced, and lived by David. If we were to read Psalm 23 in Hebrew, it would rhyme and have a rhythm of two short beats followed by a long one (da da DUM). The beat is soothing, stimulates movement, and transforms us from brokenness to wholeness. Psalm 23 has couplets, phrases paired together to reveal a healing truth.

David wrote in a Hebrew language that was fluid with each word having a full, robust array of meaning. The word order and phrases reveal fresh insights as they are rearranged. Psalm 23 is living word with a breadth and depth that conveys unique insights to every season of your life and to every person. Psalm 23 has precisely what you need to hear to live abundant life at this moment. What I need to hear is probably different, so spend some time today contemplating to perceive God’s unique healing for you.

Psalm 23:6 NRSV “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.”

God and God’s love, joy, grace, and peace are with you, in you, surrounding you, your whole life long. Take a deep breath, a step back, a bird’s eye view, and you will perceive God’s loving. God is with you your whole life long. There is nothing you can do to break your relationship with God. Nothing can ever separate you from God’s love. There are seasons when we might not sense God’s love, yet God is always loving us. God will never leave or forsake us. Goliath is out there, but with God with you and your resourcefulness great things can happen.

“Congratulations! Today is your day. You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away! You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You’ll get mixed up, of course, as you already know. And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.) YOU’LL MOVE MOUNTAINS! You’re off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So... get on your way!

Psalm 23:6 NLT “Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.”

Goodness pursues you. All the order, wonder, and grandeur of creation pursues you to bring life to every moment. Mercy pursues you. You will mess up, make mistakes, fail miserably, get sick, burnout, become anxious, get depressed, and sin. Mercy pursues you. God forgives every sin and mistake. God is already with you to pick you up after every failure. God wipes away every tear, redeems every thought, and heals every wound. God is putting a new and right spirit within you. God offers an eternity of moments, all of them a fresh start. Immediate and unconditional forgiveness is pursuing you. Goodness, unfailing love, mercy, grace, beauty, peace, joy is pursuing you. God is constantly loving you to perfect and complete you all the days of your life. Every day God has, is, and will forever give you life.

David had a difficult life. David was the runt of his family, committed horrible crimes, was tormented by guilt, ravaged by depression, devastated by family crisis. Through it all he prayerful sung. **Psalm 23:6 NLT “Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the house of the LORD forever.”**

Retracing is the process of going back into your symptoms and conditions, and into your fears and anger, handing your burdens to God to heal and transform. One might say it is reframing yourself. Retracing is

reading, pondering, feeling, living the 23rd Psalm over and over so you can forgive yourself, let go, let come, and become fully alive.

Psalm 23:6 MSG “Your beauty and love chase after me every day of my life. I’m back home in the house of God for the rest of my life.”

Through all the ups and downs, twists and turns, through every difficulty, struggle, tear, and disturbance our God is caring for us with steadfast grace. Emmanuel, God is with us.

Psalm 23:5 NRSV “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”

God is a gracious host. God delights in serving you. In the ancient Near East, the obligations of hospitality included protecting a guest from enemies. God is aware of your enemies and renders them harmless. Jesus lived God’s hospitality. Jesus reconciles enemies and offers life. Jesus healed, forgave, and welcomed all. Jesus feasted with all. Jesus prepares, serves, and nourishes through the Lord’s Supper.

Psalm 23:5 NLT “You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings.

God redeems relationships with others and our self. Sometimes the enemy is our self. “Oh, the places you’ll go! There is fun to be done! There are points to be scored. There are games to be won. Except when they don’t. Because, sometimes they won’t.

I’m afraid that sometimes you’ll play lonely games too. Games you can’t win ‘because you’ll play against you. There’s a very good chance you’ll meet things that scare you right out of your pants. There are some, down the road between hither and yon, that can scare you so much you won’t want to go on. But on you will go though the weather be foul. On you will go though your enemies prowl. On you will go though the Hakken-Kraks howl. Onward up many a frightening creek, though your arms may get sore and your sneakers may leak. On and on you will hike, And I know you’ll hike far and face up to your problems whatever they are. You will come to a place where the streets are not marked. Some windows are lighted. But mostly they’re dark. A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin! Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in? How much can you lose? How much can you win? And IF you go in, should you turn left or right...or right-and-three-quarters? Or, maybe, not quite? Or go around back and sneak in from behind? Simple it’s not, I’m afraid you will find, for a mind-maker-upper to make up their mind. You can get so confused that you’ll start in to race down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace and grind on for miles cross weirdish wild space, headed, I fear, toward a most useless place. The Waiting Place... Somehow, you’ll escape all that waiting and staying. You’ll find the bright places where Boom Bands are playing. With banner flip-flapping, once more you’ll ride high! Ready for anything under the sky.”

Psalm 23:5 MSG “You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies. You revive my drooping head; my cup brims with blessing.

Whatever your enemy, whether a disease, crisis, anxiety, guilt, overthinking or broken relationships. God is constantly preparing a feast for you where relationships are more than healed, they’re deepened and abundant with delights. However, you are numb, grey, and dreary. God is serving you robust feelings, vibrant color, and vigorous energy. You will feast on grace, kindness, compassion, peace, rest, joy, and deep breaths of the Holy Spirit. God abundantly showers you with blessings, more that you can ever savor for your cup runneth over. You are loved more than you deserve. You are loved more than you need and want. You are anointed with joy and gladness. You are honored, dignified, and proclaimed to be a beloved heir of God.

David is imagining the joy of feasting with Saul, a great relationship that got so messed up that Saul hunted David to kill him for years ending in tragedy. David is imaging his vigor being restored after he devastated himself with horrible choices. You will much more than survive your enemies, you will thrive with them and celebrate with them.

Psalm 23:4 NRSV “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me.

Even in the most life-threatening situations. God’s provision is enough. Your "darkest valley" might be a terminal illness. A betrayal by a friend. A marital problem. The loss of a job. A failure in a college course or a business venture. Whatever your darkest valley, your shepherd God is with you, offering you the comfort of a rod and a staff. This rod is the scepter of a shepherd king with power over anything that can hurt you.

Psalm 23:4 MSG “Even when the way goes through Death Valley, I’m not afraid when you walk at my side. Your trusty shepherd’s crook makes me feel secure.”

Resurrection life triumphs over every form of death, dissolving our fear, enabling us to navigate through every form of darkness to light, life, joy, and love. No matter your predicament, crisis, or heartache, God will get you through to abundant life. God prods, pushes, pulls, and carries you through your difficult times.

Psalm 23:4 NLT “Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

The deep darkness reminds us of the Israelites crying out from the burdens of their slavery. God through Moses guided them to the Promised Land. God frees us from all that diminishes life to a way of being where all nourishes life. God is sovereign and will get you through everything.

Psalm 23:2-3 NLT “God lets me rest in green meadows; God leads me beside peaceful streams. God renews my strength. God guides me along right paths, bringing honor to God’s name.

Sheep need food, water, exercise, and rest that is green meadows and peaceful streams. God provides all we need. God provides, sustains, and preserves life. God provides, sustains, and preserves joy. God provides, sustains, and preserves love.

Psalm 23:2-3 MSG “You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from. True to your word, you let me catch my breath and send me in the right direction.”

“Wherever you fly, you’ll be best of the best. Wherever you go, you will top all the rest. Except when you don’t. Because, sometimes, you won’t. I’m sorry to say so but, sadly, it’s true that Bang-ups and Hang-ups can happen to you. You can get all hung up in a prickly perch. And your gang will fly on. You’ll be left in a Lurch. You’ll come down from the Lurch with an unpleasant bump. And the chances are, then, that you’ll be in a Slump. And when you’re in a Slump, you’re not in for much fun. Un-slumping yourself is not easily done.” After several laps through this psalm, you are ready to be unslumped for your life to be restored.

Psalm 23:2-3 NRSV “God makes me lie down in green pastures; God leads me beside still waters; God restores my soul. God leads me in right paths for God’s name’s sake.

This psalm propels us to live fully alive. Our eating, drinking, seeking, thinking feeling, loving, and rejoicing is guided by God. The spiral keeps turning to make us whole, to perfect and glorify us. God transforms, restores, renews, and invigorates us. We came into being by the breadth of God. The Holy Spirit sustains our life through every breath. God is breathing passion into us, a thirst for living water, an appetite for the bread of life, a yearning for love, a journey for completeness, a quest for joy.

God restores your soul no part of you is ever lost, discarded, or broken beyond repair. When you are in a slump. You are not in for much fun. Unslumping yourself is not easily done. There are difficult seasons in our life where we get stuck. Thankfully we have a shepherd that will provide all we need.

Psalm 23 NRSV and NLT blended “The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need. God lets me rest in green meadows; God leads me beside peaceful streams. God restores my soul. God leads me in right paths for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.” Amen