

# “Soul Restoration”

1 John 3:16-24 & John 10:11-18

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Alex Evans wrote. “The whole biblical story is about—God’s people getting lost and then rescued by God, the good Shepherd.” We often find ourselves afraid, lost, not making the best decisions, limiting our love, desperately in need of rescue. God, our good Shepherd, tends to us, stays with us, cares, guides, saves, and restores us. The good Shepherd is constantly loving each person, enfolding us with joyful peace, and carrying us to new life. No one is ever alone. We live in a fallen world so plenty of nasty circumstances will bombard us; however, our good Shepherd will get us through every predicament to an everlasting life of joyful love.

Harold Kushner wrote about God restoring our soul. “A soul is what makes us human. A soul is the religious term for all the qualities that human beings have that animals don’t. The danger is that through either fatigue or apathy, we will lose touch with our souls. We will stop exemplifying the qualities that make us human and not animals—we will be content to just eat, sleep, and have sex. Every human being has the potential to be bad, and every human being has the potential to be a very good person. But if you lose your way, which is very easy, I think you need God to get you on the path again. In this sense, God represents the apex toward which humanity is trying to grow. The qualities which we ascribe to God are largely the qualities that human beings would have if they were fully realized--the compassion, the sense of justice, the reaching out, the self-restraint. When we lose those things, and our animal selves take over, I think we need the contact with God, at least the vision of God, to get us back on the path again.”

Doctors are trained to know what a healthy heart should look like then they use an EKG to look for anything that is unhealthy. Jim Ellison would like to invent a spiritual EKG that would show a printout of what is unhealthy with our soul, how our soul is not functioning properly. Jim goes on to thank God for the Holy Spirit who gives us soul checkups. For optimum physical health, we listen and follow the wisdom of doctors. For optimum spiritual health, we need to listen and follow the wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Jim has learned that he has specific symptoms that indicate when his soul is in need of restoration such as, not sleeping well, being fatigued, and finding the relationships that should fill him instead of drain him.

Some of my symptoms indicating that I need soul restoration are being hypersensitive, grumpy, wanting to be alone all the time, and immediately saying no to any unexpected idea. All of us are in continual need of soul restoration. What are your symptoms that indicate you need soul restoration?

Jim cautions us that we are tempted to try to restore our soul on our own with our own strength, to fix our souls with self-help, to take care of things ourselves. When we try soul restoration ourselves we will fail. Only our soul doctor, God, can restore our soul, which is the first verse of the Psalm. **Psalm 23:1 “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”** also translated **“I have all that I need.”** Sheep are low to the ground so from their perspective when they look out across the fence, the grass furthest away always looks the greenest. The good shepherd has a full perspective knowing exactly where the finest grass can be enjoyed to restore each sheep.

Psalm 23 was written by the shepherd David. Perhaps David's wisest insight was realizing that he was continually in need of soul restoration. Apparently sheep sometimes roll on their back, then because of the weight of their wool are unable to get back on their feet. A shepherd finds them, sets them on their feet and reorients them.

**Psalm 23:2 "God makes me lie down in green pastures."** God provides all the spiritual food we need. To be able to lie down means safety, that God provides shelter, an anchor in the storm, a solid rock to live upon.

**Psalm 23: "God leads me beside still waters"** can also be translated as "God leads me besides the waters of rest" there **Psalm 23:3 "God restores my soul."** Last week God lead me to the Wilderness Fellowship Camp, a place where every guest is prayed for before, during, and after their stay. I stayed in the Timothy Prayer Cabin, prayerful handcrafted with love in honor of Timothy, an architect who volunteered to build churches in Africa. Tim's family dedicated the use of the prayer cabin for people who want to deepen their walk with their Lord. I read the journal entries of those who experienced God's soul restoration in that cabin over the last 21 years. I savored the silence enabling me to listen to God. I went on renewing hikes, soaking in the beauty of God's creation, being serenaded by frogs. Just as I was about to fall asleep, two owls in nearby trees invigorated me with a jolt of adrenaline as they hooted. I read a book about Jesus' ministry entitled "Unclean." It was a thin place where I enjoyed our good Shepherd restoring my soul.

Make time to enjoy your good Shepherd. Find your thin places with God. Joseph Prince wrote, "When we are fearful and worried all the time, we are living as if we don't believe that we have a strong and able Shepherd who is tenderhearted toward us, who only leads us to good places, who protects us and lovingly watches over us."

We are never abandoned by God. We will go through treacherous valleys and agonizing dark times. It will feel like we are alone; yet, God is with us guiding us, carrying us to the mountain top meadows.

**Psalm 23:5 "God prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies."** I don't believe the "enemies" here is referring to people. "In the presence of" is better translated as "in contrast to." God prepares a table before me in contrast to my enemies. God nourishes us with a banquet of all we truly need restoring our soul in contrast to our enemies, our idols, our sins, our shortcomings, our thoughts, and actions that diminishes our soul. During tough times, there are things we turn to get us through, they fail, they leave us abandoned, they are enemies, in contrast to God who gets us through restoring our soul on the way.

**Psalm 23:6 "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."** Eternal abundant life in the house of the Lord forever is our future. Yet here on earth, every day God's goodness and mercy is following you. Every instant God is seeking a joyful, loving relationship with you. We live every moment in the care of our good Shepherd.

I believe God is speaking to me through the book "Unclean" that I read last week. It keeps popping up in my mind. There are probably 5 to 10 sermons in there that God wants me to hear.

When Jesus physically walked the earth there were two main approaches to living one's faith. The prophets proclaimed live, love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace. The priests strived to be clean by avoiding the unclean, so they divided everything into clean and unclean. Their initial motive was pure, to live a clean life; but, to sort out the unclean they had to judge, to label some people as unclean, leading them to exclude them, then reject them, eventually they failed to love

them, which lead to fear then hate of them. The priest thought that Jesus interaction with the unclean made him unclean rather than Jesus making the unclean, clean. The priest thought Jesus presence with the unclean diminished his soul instead of Jesus restoring the souls of the unclean. This way of thinking is an instinct which at times is helpful to our survival. It keeps us from eating unclean, contaminated food. It causes us to wash our hands after we clean up after someone who is unclean with the flu. Dividing people into unclean and clean is in sharp contrast to God's command to love everyone. In truth all of us are unclean needing the soul restoring cleansing of God. Most of us still judge ourselves and others, trying to determine who is clean and unclean, what actions are clean and unclean, what way of worship is clean and unclean, what approach to church leadership is clean and unclean.

The priests were so frustrated with Jesus because over and over again Jesus was siding with the prophets proclaiming and embodying love, mercy, forgiveness and grace. Jesus welcomed the unclean outcast. Jesus gave living water to an unclean lady who followed another religion. Jesus healed on the Sabbath. Jesus' disciples plucked grain to eat on the Sabbath. The priest declared unclean, unclean, your interaction with unclean people is making you unclean, and your actions are making you unclean. Jesus proclaimed that all of us are unclean, that God will make us all clean, that God will restore our soul.

One way to tell if your soul is in immediate need of restoration is by a love verses judgement assessment. Are you judging others or loving them? Are you more concerned about another's actions, lifestyle, or beliefs than loving them? Are you afraid of anyone? Are you disgusted, hateful, or repulsed by anyone? Do you believe that you are cleaner than another? A restored soul always loves.

First John explains, **1 John 3:16-24 "We know love by this, that Jesus laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before God whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and God knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from God whatever we ask, because we obey God's commandments and do what pleases God. And this is God's commandment, that we should believe in the name of God's Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as Jesus has commanded us. All who obey God's commandments abide in God, and God abides in them. And by this we know that God abides in us, by the Spirit that God has given us."**

Jesus out of love laid down his life for us, for everyone, even though all of us are unclean. We are commanded to do the same, to love everyone, to sacrifice for everyone, to be willing to die for anyone, even the most unclean, repulsive person. It is not our job to judge, to divide into clean or unclean, but it is our job to love everyone.

I knew I needed soul restoration, because I was becoming more concerned about getting everything perfect for worship, clean, than abounding in joyful, grateful love for God. I knew I needed soul restoration, because I was reacting more to what others were saying or doing than loving them. I knew I needed soul restoration, because I was letting myself get pulled into discussions about the right way, the clean way, to do things more than loving God, everyone and myself. I knew I needed soul restoration, because I was becoming more concerned about my family calendar, getting everyone to the right place at the proper time, than enjoying each other and sharing love. I know that I will continue to constantly need soul restoration.

**Jesus said, John 10:11-18 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away--and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father."**

A restored soul loves. In physics there is the principle of the conservation of matter. Nothing disappears; it only changes form. Perhaps it is the same in the spiritual realm, nothing is ever lost, all that is not love will change form to love, all that is broken in our soul will be restored. Even those from entirely unclean sheep folds will be brought home for everyone will belong to one flock, forever restored by our good Shepherd. God will make all that is unclean, clean. Everyone one of your dark, fearful, hateful, judging thoughts God will change to love. Love endures forever. God is restoring our souls. Amen