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Help, I'm In Despair

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Psalm 23



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Well it's a joy to see you. Those of you that call Providence home, I want you to know that it's always, it's a joy is what it is. As I think about all the folks in the world and the places I could be I just can't think of a place that I would rather be than here with you. And so it's a joy to see you once again, to sing with you. If you're new with us we're glad that you are our guests. And I just want you to know just a little bit about us. We are a people who love Jesus. It's a simple answer, but we're in love with Jesus because he has redeemed us. He has reconciled us. He's forgiven us. He's the shepherd over our life.

And so we think of Christ, not like a nice addition to a nearly completed life, okay? So it's not that we see Christ like this rev throw pillow that just accents our family room perfectly. It's already there. He is our life. He is our hope. He is the treasure in the field. And his word becomes life to us. As a people, we regard him as Lord. We regard his word, and we believe that he is holy. And he has claim over our life. And so everything about us is about Jesus Christ. That we love to sing to him. That we love to look at his word, which is what we're going to do now, and seek to bend our will, our emotions. Seek to even bend our confusions about how to apply his word to our life.

And so, as we open up the bible now, I just pray that this time will be encouraging to you, and that, if nothing else, if you don't know Christ as Savior, and perhaps you're simply here exploring what is Christianity, and who is this Jesus, is that during this time is that you're going to have a little clearer picture of who he is from his word. We're in a series called Overwhelmed. And every single one of us, we know that the world is broken, and yet we would all confess that the brokenness splashes up on us a little bit differently. Some people get overwhelmed with fear, other people with guilt. Some people with the feeling of being forsaken, some people with anxiety.

And what we want to look at here today is this tidal wave that touches so many of us. It plagues so many of our lives just in different varying scales. And that's the feeling of despair. So if you have a bible, if you want to turn with me to Psalm, chapter 23. Most of us, we've read Psalm 23. It's been read to us. You may have a pillow with these words cross stitched in it. I don't know. But this is probably the most famous, the most well known Psalm in the entire bible. Psalm 23. And it deals with this feeling of hopelessness. And that's what really, when we say, "Help, I'm in despair." It's what we're really talking about.

It's the feeling of hopelessness. It's the feeling of darkness, or the feeling of gloom. It's the anguish within our heart that leads our mouth to say something like, "My soul is full of troubles." That we find in Psalm 88, verse three. You notice he says, my soul, not the world. The world is full of troubles, but what he's saying here is this. It's not just that I live in a broken world. He says, my very soul. My inner person. The deepest most sincere part of who I am. The determining factor of my life. The deepest part of who I am is full of troubles. And the word full, there, is not simply... It contains some troubles. What it means is it's like when you have a cup and you fill it with water and now it's full. And what that mean is, there's no room left in that cup for anything else.

The feeling of despair is the feeling that our soul is so full of troubles that there's no room left for light, or for hope, or for joy. And this is where so many people live. And the fact that even though we can't see despair with our eyes, you can't go buy it, or sell it. You can't get rid of it, you can't throw it away. It is incredibly dangerous to our life. And the reason is because when we feel hopeless, when we feel despair, it leads us, or it tempts us to settle, or to sin, or for some people, to self harm in order to make things right or in order to find relief.

You see, when we feel helpless, many of us in the room know the feeling when we feel helpless, that we compromise our own convictions. We know something's wrong. Whether it's stealing, or lying, and yet in that moment, because these circumstances are so bleak we would simply settle. We would trade in our convictions. Those deepest parts of what we believe that we really are, and what we really believe. We say that in this moment, it's so bleak and hopeless I must do what I know is wrong. Many of us know what that's like. Many of us, when we feel hopeless, we engage in self numbing behaviors. And we do so knowing that these things to be dangerous to us, and even harmful to us.

And so some of us, we engage in endless TV watching, endless social media, endless video games. We over-eat, we over drink, we over shop. And all of these things are intended to numb the pain. If I could just distract myself from feeling so bad, because I can't find a solution to not feel so many troubles in my soul, will maybe just intoxicate myself, numb myself with something in the world, and maybe that's a better way. And then still others among us would even engage in self harm. Now, self harm is a fascinating thing, and it's scalable. Meaning we would know that suicide would fit into the big category of self harm. And it would be its most fierce example. Its most fatal and final example.

But isn't also true that many of us, when we feel hopeless, we engage in less permanent, physically damaging ways to self harm in that we self loathe. We criticize ourself. We humiliate ourself. In fact, when you think about most of the forms of self harm, whereas suicide attempts to end life, many of the forms of self harm, including cutting, burning, afflicting, hitting, breaking. It's not an attempt to end life, but actually an attempt to improve life by trying to cover the emotional and relational pain and trauma with physical pain that we can control.

In other words, many people who, when they engage in self harm, and they're asked why, doesn't it hurt? They would say, "Yes, it hurts. But it's the one pain I can control." In other words, self harm is a form of self therapy. It's just a confused form. For in that moment, however brief it is, the physical pain and the rush of endorphins provide a temporary escape from the anguish within our soul.

And what I want you to know is this. I've thought about this now for two weeks. And as I've researched and I just look, I don't know all the stats. It's hard to know what to believe. But the most conservative stat that I actually read in terms of how dominant is it among every day people today is that 18% of people in America, at some point in their life, will engage in self harming behaviors that intend to inflict pain, and yet not take

their life. And when I think about that, and I try to personify that, it becomes more oppressive as a pastor, because I start thinking about, if we just added up however many people in this room, and then we took 18% and we said, “Those 18% stand up.” Now all of a sudden it’s not a stat.

It’s that those numbers now have a face, and they have body, and they have a heart, and a soul, and a future, and a purpose. God created them and they’re a part of our family. And suddenly that reality becomes so much more significant, and so much more painful. And this is the reality even at Providence. This is taking place. We want you to know that we want to help. We want to help. That even more significant than our desire to help is God Almighty, your creator, wants to help. So let’s talk to him, and then we’ll read from his word.

Father in heaven, would you be gracious to us, and give us an understanding into things that, for many of us, is very confusing. I pray for those, Father, who think about harming themselves, who engage in harming themselves in an attempt to cover up emotional pain in their life. I just pray, God, for those that are hopeless. For however that hopelessness would manifest itself, whether it’s in sin, or self harm, whether it’s compromising their own convictions, God would you instill hope, would you grow hope within our heart. And God, please, for those who are battling in the valley of the shadow of death, would you protect them. Would you help us, as a church family, to care for one another well. To know one another well. To know what we’re battling together. And so, would you give hope as we read from your word. And we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

Psalm 23 is a Psalm of David, and this is what it says. ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. 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. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.’

This Psalm that is perhaps the most famous well known Psalm of all, that has sustained and fed believers for thousands of years is meant to give hope to those who are in the valley of deep darkness. You notice that at the very beginning, the first three verses, David is speaking to either himself or someone else about God. And so he uses the pronoun he. In other words, he’s saying, the Lord is my shepherd, and he. He’s describing someone else. He’s telling someone, maybe his own heart, this is what God does.

But then you notice, when you get to verse four, and he identifies the setting that he’s in. The valley of the shadow of death. Those words are actually, the valley of deep darkness. It’s the valley of gloom. It’s the valley of hopelessness. And suddenly, because he’s still focusing on the Lord, you notice the change in the rest of Psalm is no longer talking about God, he’s talking to God. He says, you are with me. He’s not saying he is doing this. He’s saying, you are doing this. Your rod and staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table, you anoint my head with oil.

And what we find in this Psalm is if we apply it to our life, just as David did, that even if you happen to be in the valley of the shadow of death, with enemies surrounding you in an evil world, is that there is hope. There's hope that can keep you. So the first thing that I want you to see is that God is our shepherd. He is our shepherd. This is more significant than you and I could possibly know. And the reason is, because our heart demands a shepherd. You see, when we have the need of hope, when we feel despair, hope feels like it's trapped in the can, and we don't have a can opener. So we beat on it, and we try to pry it open. We try to do everything that we can in order to generate hope when we feel despair. And yet, there's nothing that we can do, seemingly.

What can we do? And this is the truth of what you find in Psalm 23. When we align our heart to the reality of God's shepherding care over our life, it becomes the can opener of hope. Aligning our heart, our trust, to the reality of God's shepherding care over our life becomes the can opener of that hope. And that's why David said, in verse one, "The Lord is my shepherd." Even if you have Psalm 23, it's opened, and yet you still feel hopeless, there're two things you need to ask yourself and demand an answer from the scriptures, that are both given to us to remind you, that can generate hope in your life.

The first is this. Who is this Lord? Who is he? There's this thing, or person, called the Lord, and he is my shepherd. But we should know his capacities. We should know his abilities. We should know his promises. Maybe if we don't know those things we might find out a whole lot about him, and it would change the way that we would begin thinking about our life. And so, when you start opening the scriptures this is what we find of who this Lord is. Isaiah 40 says, 'The Lord is the everlasting God. The creator of the ends of the earth.' Psalm 147 says that, 'He covers the heavens with clouds. He prepares rain for the earth. And he makes grass grow on the hills.' This is his sustaining and powerful presence on the earth.

You get to Psalm 46 and he says this. 'That he, the Lord, is our refuge and strength. The very present help in trouble.' You keep reading through the scriptures and you find that he has all authority in heaven and earth. You find at the very end, even that picture of heaven, and there it says that in heaven, people, angels, people, the redeemed who have gone before us, they're singing to him, worthy is the lamb who is slain. And he's worthy of all praise and all glory, and all honor. This Lord of ours is eternally strong and entirely sincere. He is the sovereign. He is omnipotent. He is omniscient, he's omnipresent. He is the Lord of glory, he is the Lord of Lords, he's the king of kings.

This shepherd of ours goes to great effort within his word to tell us that he loves to forgive his people, and heal his people, to protect his people. Defend his people, serve his people, and save his people. So the first thing you need to ask, if you feel absolutely hopeless, and you say, "Yeah, I know. The Lord is my shepherd. I've heard it a billion times. I've got a pillow with it on it." You should pause, and you should spend some time within the word, and ask the question, "Who is this Lord? Who is he?"

And the second question you need to ask yourself is this. Who does he shepherd? You see, if there's this great shepherd who takes care of people, and yet he doesn't shepherd you, well what good is it to you? And that's why it's so incredibly important for you to get to that second question. And this is where David eventually made it. You see it throughout. He says, "The Lord is my shepherd." He's not just a shepherd, he's my shepherd. He's not just our shepherd, he's my shepherd.

And then you keep reading, and you keep reading the pronoun he. Notice in verse two, "He makes me lie down. He leads me beside still waters. He leads me in paths of righteousness. He restores my soul. You're with me. Your rod and staff, they comfort me. You prepared a table for me. You anoint my head with oil." Now what effect does this have? Meaning, if you pause in that moment of hopelessness, and there you remember, and you get a picture of the sovereignty of God. The all powerful, all knowing. The wise, the loving, the gracious, the shepherding king. And then you notice, and you see within scripture that all of who he is, is directed to benefit who we are. What effect does that have?

Well, David tells us that effect in verse one. He says, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Here's the deal. When we are in seasons of despair, God seems far, and all we feel is want. We want protection, we want money, we want reconciliation in our home, we want good health. We just want. When we feel despair, when it feels like our soul is full of troubles, the only thing we feel is want when it doesn't feel like God is near. And when the true shepherd of our soul feels like he's not near our instinct is to create a functional shepherd.

Do you remember when Moses leads Israel out of Egypt, they're in the wilderness, and God says, "I want you to leave the people at the bottom and I want you to come up to the mountain. I want you to bring two tablets, and I'm going to write the law upon those commandments. I'm drawing near my people. I'm giving you instructions on how to live so that you can remain in a relationship with me." So God is drawing near. The shepherding, good care of God is moving to the people. And yet the people, if you remember, Moses went up on the mountain, and where were the people? They were in the valley.

And so you get to Exodus, chapter 32, verse one, and this is what it says. It says of the people, "When the people saw that Moses was delayed they gathered themselves together to Aaron and said, 'Make us Gods.'" Notice what it says. It's the role of a shepherd. "To go before us." If he won't do it, and if the God who let us out won't do it, we still need somebody to do it. To protect us, and cover us, and lead us, and provide for us, because this world is scary, and there's shame in my heart. And so they took off their adornments, their gold, and they melted it down and they made a golden calf to go before them.

Why do we do this? Why do we create these functional shepherds to go before us? And the reason is because when we sin against God we feel guilt. And that guilt causes two things to happen. Number one is, it makes the world a terrifying place to live. An unsafe place to live. You see, one of the reasons that sheep like a shepherd is because sheep know this place is scary. Who's taking care of me? But then, there's another reason. It's not just that the world becomes a dangerous place to live, our heart becomes a place that is full of shame. It's

full of shame.

And when we feel fearful in the world, and when we feel ashamed in our heart because of the guilt of our own sin we look for a shepherd. We look for someone who will cover us. We look for someone who will take away our shame. And so the first man and woman, sinned against God, Adam and Eve, what did they do? They said, “We need a shepherd. He feels far away. We still need a shepherd.” So what did they do? They needed a covering, and so they hid in the bushes. And many of us still hide in the bushes until we find out the bushes are insufficient to actually cover and take away our shame.

So what did they do next? They went to accusations. They’re saying, “This person. God, you’re the one who brought her here.” And suddenly they found out that the accusations were insufficient to cover. And so then they went to anger. And the reason they went to anger, this is really important, is because anger can become so intense that we temporarily forget about our shame. And ever since, people in need of a shepherd, have either turned their anger towards other people and destroyed relationships, or they have turned their anger on themselves to destroy their body.

The centerpiece of despair is needing a shepherd and feeling like we don’t have one. And so God knew that we needed one, and he knew that we would seek one, and so he sent a prophet. And he told us where the shepherd would be born. Matthew, chapter two, we’re told, ‘Oh, Bethlehem. From you shall come a ruler who shall shepherd my people Israel.’ Jesus came to the earth. He was born. The son of God was born on the earth as a baby. He grew up and he lived. And suddenly Jesus begins a ministry. And it tells us that when he begins interacting with people, it says, he felt our risk. He felt that we needed a shepherd.

Matthew nine says, ‘When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like a sheep without a shepherd.’ And then all of a sudden he had these amazing opportunities to teach people, and to show the authority he had as the son of God. And one of the things that he spoke to was not only our need, but also who he was to meet that need. And so, in John, chapter 10, what did Jesus say? He said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.”

You see, Jesus did just that. There was a day, a real day, in time and space, on this earth where Jesus says that he’s set his face to Jerusalem. He began walking to Jerusalem with his disciples for the very last time. And we’re told there that Jesus, on three different occasions on this one trip, he paused and he says, “Guys, I want you to listen to me. We are going to Jerusalem, and this is what you can expect. The son of man is going to be bound, he’s going to be falsely accused, he’s going to be condemned, he’s going to be flogged, and then he’s going to be crucified. But then he’s going to rise from the dead.” Three times.

And suddenly they arrive in Jerusalem, and do you know what happened? He was bound, he was arrested, he was falsely accused, he was condemned, he was flogged, he was crucified. He went to a cross. He had no sin of his own, and yet he bore our sin. He took our sin upon himself. He took our sin. And then you took the wrath

of God that was directed towards our sin, and he absorbed both of them on the cross. And there, he died for our sin. And because he promised it would happen, and because he is the son of God with all authority, and because he is the sovereign shepherd over heaven and earth he rose from the dead.

And when he rose from the dead he didn't just rise from the dead and leave, he rose from the dead and he extended to us an invitation, and that was that if we would admit that we have a spiritual need before God, that we have a debt before him that we cannot pay, that we who are sinful are trying to restore a relationship with a holy God. To admit that we cannot do that, and yet to believe, and confess our belief that Jesus was able. That he did come to remove our sins, our guilt, and our shame. To confess him as Lord of all.

Jesus said, "If you will admit, believe, and confess I will be your shepherd forever. Not a functional shepherd that does you harm, that cannot help you, but a shepherd that protects, and defends, and provides, and covers, and removes your shame. And this is what is available for you and for me today. So let me encourage you. When feeling despair, trust Christ, and then go on trusting Christ.

Some of you, I know, you may be here and you say, "I have never heard this." Or, "I have never trusted Christ." You can look into your history right now and you can see all kinds of functional saviors, functional shepherds in your life, and you say, "You know what? There's something wrong with the world, there's something wrong with me. I feel this guilt, I feel this shame. I need something that can take it away." And so you can look into your history as well as I, and you can see a graveyard full of functional shepherds that could not carry the weight.

There is only one true good shepherd. His name is Jesus. And I urge you to trust him now, and you can trust him now. You can pray to him right now. You don't need me, you don't need a priest. You can talk directly to Jesus because the bible says he's now our great high priest. We talk directly to him. And you can say, "Christ, this is the reality. I believe what you have said. I admit that I am a sinner. I admit I cannot save myself. I believe in you. I believe in what you accomplished in your death and resurrection. And I confess you as Lord of my life, as shepherd of my soul." And Jesus says, "I'll forgive you." You can do that now, and I urge you to do so.

For many of us, we've already trusted Christ, and you say, "Well, what's the hope for me. I still feel helpless today, and yet I believe in Jesus?" Well, the bible will tell you to continue to align your mind, your heart, and your trust with the reality that Jesus is the good shepherd over you. To remember who he is, and to remember who he is is directed at you." The second thing I want you to see is that Christ is our good shepherd. He's our good shepherd, meaning that all of who he is manifests itself in benefits for his flock. And yet, this is a very difficult thing for many of us, because the collision of God's good shepherding and life's tragic happenings is a bitter mystery for every one of us. And yet it's a reality that you see within the scriptures.

David affirmed that here. You notice, Psalm 23 is his affirmation of how the Lord is his shepherd. And how the Lord takes care, and how the Lord provides, and protects, and he does all these amazing things. And yet, notice the realities that David is enduring. It says in verse four, it says that even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. So he's still walking through a valley of the shadow of death. He's still feeling the darkness. The deep darkness. He's also feeling and seeing evil all around. He's surrounded. He's living in a fallen world. The good shepherd hasn't removed him from the brokenness of the world.

And not only that, people don't like him. He had enemies. Some people think, if God is good, and he's our good shepherd, then I won't ever feel hopeless. He's going to remove me from all presence of evil, and everyone's going to like me. And that's just not the case. David says, you know what? It is very possible for him to be your shepherd, and to be a really good one, at that, and yet for you to continue to live in a fallen world, where people don't like you, and you feel emotionally weighted down by it.

But that's not all that's true. For David had learned other things. And what else has he learned? Well, in verse two he's learned, he makes me lie down in green pastures. Meaning, even though there is enemies, and evil, and there is a valley of the shadow of death, in that environment this shepherd of mine continues to make me lie down in green pastures. These green pastures are the rich nutritious words of the bible. His word. And what he's saying is this. That over my life I have noticed this. That God has repeatedly fed me with the scriptures. But not only that. He says that he makes me lie down in them.

Why would he say that? Why would he say, 'makes me lie down?' I realize there're a lot of us who say, "Well, a shepherd, sometimes the sheep aren't so smart, so he makes them lie down." What David is saying is this. Is that, just like he, every one of us have this inclination that many of us, we wake up and when we need a word, when we need nutrition for the soul the very last place we look, instinctively, is this book. We'll look to anything and anyone before we will look to God. And so what he's saying is this. Is that God, because he loves us so much, when he says he makes us lie down, what he means is this. Is that he creates within us an awareness that everywhere else we look for instruction, and hope, and promise is a dead end.

And so finally we open this and we go, "God, just speak to my heart." And he does. Not only that, he says that he's learned that this shepherd of his leads him beside still waters, and he restores his soul. In other words, David has found that God repeatedly led him to peace by restoring his guilty soul, or his anxious soul, or his listless soul. And the idea here is this. Is that because he's now made to read God's word, these green pastures, and because he does have a guilty heart, a guilty soul, just like all the rest of us, is that there're some times when we're reading the scriptures, just like he was, and suddenly we come upon a promise of God that says something like, if you confess your sin he's faithful and just to forgive you of your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

And the instinct we have is this. God, does that promise right there apply to me? Could I be forgiven? And so, not only is there the word of God, but the peace that he's speaking about here is that the Holy Spirit takes the word of God, confirms it in our heart, and he says, "Yes. I'm speaking to you. I will be with you." And suddenly what happens is, this creates peace within our heart. He goes on and he says, 'He leads me in paths of righteousness for his names' sake.' In other words, David has found that God repeatedly was giving him new desires for holiness. There's one reason listed in the text, and there's one reason that's listed in the bible.

The one in the text is this. He does this for his names' sake. In other words, God knows that when we attach ourself to him, how we behave influences his reputation in the eyes and the lives of people who observe our life. And so he says, he is training me to develop a hunger for holiness and righteousness for his glory and honor. But that's not the only reason he does so.

You turn to the New Testament, and what you find there is this. It says this. It says that the lust that we engage in, it says that they wage war against our soul. In other words, when we give ourself over to unrighteous desires, what it does is it turns all of the tanks, and all of the missiles, all of the guns upon our own soul. In other words, we are inflicting, and afflicting our own soul. And as a result of that, many of us, because we give ourself in moments of hopelessness over to sin, what happens is, our heart becomes a battleground that's absolutely full of blood, and where the air is absolutely full of smoke.

And so he says one of kindnesses he shows me is this. Is that, over my life, even though I live in a world that's surrounded by evil, is he's inclining my heart towards righteousness and towards holiness, not only for his glory, but to turn the battleground of my heart into a place of peace. He goes on and he says, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil. For you are with me.' David has found that God will not leave him in life or death. And then he goes on and he says, 'Your rod.' Which was the tool the shepherd used to discipline and inspect the flock. 'And your staff.' Which was the tool the shepherd used to protect his flock, or her flock, from other predators. It says that, 'They comfort me.'

How could a rod of discipline be a comfort? Because, over a long period of time David found that God repeatedly used both for good. Remember what we looked at last week? Psalm 51, where David sinned, and so God sent Nathan, a prophet, to go and confront him? Now, how many of you love Nathan in your own life? That friend, that spouse, that somebody in your life that when they see you, and suddenly they come to you and they say, "Hey." That's the rod of God. And this is what he's saying. He says, I've learned is this. I don't necessarily love the feeling of the rod, is that it is used all the time for my best interest. And so I have come to even invite it and to recognize its goodness in my life. It comforts me to know that God is going to convict me of sin in order to bring me back.

And he says, 'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, and my cup overflows.' In other words, David has repeatedly found that while enemies were outside the door God was blessing, and sitting him down, and feeding him. And we don't necessarily anoint one another with oil

when they come over to our home, but this was a sign, in this culture, of genuine respect and affection. You came into someone's house, and if you knew you were genuinely welcome, they would literally dab a little oil, expensive oil, on you as simply a blessing. Say, "I'm glad that you're here."

And that's what he's saying. In the presence of enemies. They're right outside the door. God shuts the door, he blesses me, he welcomes me, and he sits me down and he feeds me. He cares for me. You see, in this broken world, where we have to live without perfect sight of God's good hands, the only hope that we have is to trust God's good heart. A good heart that was perfectly demonstrated at the cross. And I can just confess to you. As a pastor, this place, for over 20 years, it's amazing what happens. You just see people and what they go through. And it is a devastating thing to try to internalize, even for myself, some of the pains that some of you have had to go through.

And sometimes when I simply cannot see it, and I say, "God, you would permit that?" It's hard to understand. And in those moments what the bible teaches us to lean upon when we cannot see his good hands is to trust his good heart, that we've seen historically working through history. Through time and space. People's lives. Never has this been demonstrated more clearly than at the cross. For there at the cross we find that God is willing to allow his own son, his children, to experience tremendous hurt when it brings about eternal redemptive ends. It's never aimless, it's never reckless. His permissions for us to experience hard things, they always have a purpose. And that purpose is always eternal.

So let me encourage you with a few things here. When feeling despair keep running to Christ. Keep running to Christ. David could have easily run away and created a functional shepherd in his life. Instead, he drew near to God. And the reason he did so is that he knew that denying God's rule over the storms of life only creates a bigger storm. He is the sovereign shepherd over heaven and earth. And so, in David's dark place, instead of looking in, God, I need to make a shepherd, I need to be a shepherd, he says, "No, I can't look in. I have to look up."

And so let me encourage you to continue to read the bible when you feel despair. It's one of the hardest things to do, to be totally honest with you. You'd say, "Is it gratifying?" I would say, "No, it's not." Often times, just be honest, sometimes for me, when I feel despair, when I feel hopeless, I open up this book, I'm like, "I need to find one of those places, because I feel pretty low." It's one of those really bright places. So let me turn to Psalm 23. I could read Psalm 23 when I feel hopeless and be unmoved. And so can you. Sometimes God's word, it feels like a mouth full of saltines with no hope of water. And yet, when we read the scriptures, even when we're dry, it's like planting seeds that one day will germinate, one day will harvest, one day there will be fruit. And so we continue to run to Christ.

Second, when feeling despair, keep running to Godly people. Don't isolate yourself. But let me encourage you to be careful here. Do no isolate, but be very careful who you run to. You see, when you go to the dentist and they give you a shot to numb your mouth, at that moment in time it becomes very important to have a

good dentist, because once your mouth is numb a bad dentist can do tremendous harm, and a good dentist can do tremendous good, without you knowing. My point is this. Despair is like lidocaine for the soul. And many a people, when their soul and heart were numb because their soul was full of troubles, they surrounded them a number of people who serve like a bad dentist that did all kinds of harm, unknowingly to them, giving bad advice, and sinful advice, and then suddenly, when the numbness went away they were damaged because of it.

Don't isolate, but get near some Godly people who are going to remind you of the bible. Who are going to remind you that he is your shepherd. And if you are here and considering thinking or practicing any kind of self harm, let me encourage you to run to a Godly trained counselor who can help. We can help you. We can point you to one if you need help.

Third is when feeling despair keep running to redemptive activity. Keep working, keep cleaning, fix something, play something that's healthy, exercise, serve other people. Serve anyone. Continue to come to worship. When you come, take notes. When the music's playing, sing. Bless someone, invite someone, share the Gospel with someone. Participate in City Serve. You see, all of these activities, what they do is they take our focus, which is on ourself when we feel hopeless, and it turns on someone else.

You remember Ruth, from the bible. Ruth was a widow, just like her mother-in-law, and yet Ruth, instead of Naomi, went out and showed initiative to go and work, and as a result of that it was her initiative to do redemptive activity that led to a brighter day. You see, redemptive activity is like a backup generator when the lights go out in our soul. Keep doing noble things. Sacrificial things.

That last truth, before we sing two songs is this, is that Christ is our shepherd forever. This is the great news. That if our best days were behind us we would have every right to despair. And the fact is, is that for those in the world today, who are apart from Christ, this world is all the heaven they will ever know. If you don't know Christ, then you have no solutions for shame and guilt, and the wrath of God is directed to you. You need to make it your life purpose to find that solution. Not to cover your shame, but to take it away. It's only one, and it's Jesus Christ.

But for those of us who have trusted Jesus, I want you to know that our best days are not now, they are coming. But they include tomorrow. This is why David says, 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' Like twin ducklings following mom, mercy and grace follow us all our days. His grace supplying our needs. His mercy forgiving our sin. How long will he do this? 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.' He's going to take care of us. He's going to shepherd us forever. That's why he says, 'The lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

So let me encourage you, last thing, is when feeling despair consider what awaits us in heaven. When you feel low on the earth, when you feel hopeless on the earth, think about seeing Jesus' face. Think about seeing those hands with holes. Think about heaven. Think about a place where you're going to live forever, where there's no capacity to sin, no shame, no guilt, no fear, no anxiety. No depression, no strife, no cancer, no disease, no funerals, no grief. No injustice, no elections, no politics. Jesus will rule forever in righteousness, equity, and peace. Peter says, "Set your hope fully on this. Your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

So there's one last thing I want to answer, and it's this. Why do we do the series? This is the last sermon in the series. We did it in 2019. We looked at six things. And this time we looked at five things. Why do we do this series? You say, "Well, you've told us before. It's to help us to understand that it's okay not to be okay." And that's true. But that's not the main reason that we did this series. You see, we should be really clear on something, and it's this. That our life is not the point of life. And what I mean by that is this. I'm not saying your life is not the point of my life. I mean your life is not the point of your life. We're not the point of life. Jesus is the point of life. That's what you get to be when you arise from the dead. The point of life.

You create life, you save life, you redeem life, you reconcile life, and you judge life. You're the point of life. Jesus is the point of life. And Jesus, the last thing he told us to do, is to make disciples. And yet, isn't it true that when we are overwhelmed with despair, or with grief, or with guilt. When we're overwhelmed with fear, or anxiety, one of the last things we feel a motivation to do is the very thing that the point of life told us to do. To go and make disciples. And so while I genuinely hope this liberates our joy, I pray that it liberates us ultimately from the bondage that keeps us from our life mission, because if you wait to be totally whole and healed on this earth, before you make a disciple, you'll never make one. You'll never go, you'll never tell if you have to wait.

But the hope of the Gospel is this, is that people who are still in progress, still under construction, can tell other people who is reconstructing us. It's the Gospel. And to stove this fire next week we're going to begin a series called In Our Place, that simply examines the remarkable difficulties that Jesus endured in order to save us, and send us to make disciples in the world. So I hope you can join us.

And we pray, Father in heaven we love you. We thank you that you love us. We thank you that we can sing to you, we thank you that you're our sovereign shepherd, we thank you that you are a good shepherd, and we thank you that you'll be our shepherd forever. I pray, Father, for those who are feeling despair, who are feeling hopeless right now, that you would renew a sense of hope in their heart. Help us to help one another point people to you. God, I ask now that as we sing to you, even if we don't feel like singing, that we would engage in this redemptive activity of reminding ourselves and others near us that even when we feel pain it's still well with our soul. It is because of Jesus. So we pray this in your perfect name, Christ. Amen.



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