

The Best REST You'll Ever Possess

Series: Summer Through the Psalms # 9

Psalm 23:2&6

Introduction: When you hear the word, "JOB" what comes to mind? You might think, "I'm glad tomorrow is Labor Day – a day off!" Still others think, "Boy, am I glad I have a job." Some may say, "Sure wish I could find a job." Maybe you thought of the song the Seven Dwarves sang as they headed off to work:

"Hi...Ho...Hi...Ho, it's off to work we go!"

What's interesting is that the very first picture you have of God in the Bible is Him engaged in this joyful, exuberant activity the Bible calls WORK. In fact, after God says, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness ...," he puts Adam and Eve in a garden to work it and care for it. Work is in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world. **Work is a GIFT from God.**

In the Babylonian account of creation, work is toil. Work is a grind. It is the activity of slaves.

And then there is the myth of Pandora's Box. Zeus gives Pandora a box and says to her, "Don't open it." And what does she do? Of course, she opens it! What comes out? All the bad things that are said to be wrong with the world: death, disease, decay, and work. Work is in Pandora's Box.

The Jewish Talmud contains a riddle: Why didn't God create a bread tree if he meant for man to live on bread? Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch in their book, *The Shaping of Things to Come* say: [God] prefers to offer us grain and invites us to buy a field and plant the seed and make our own bread.

Work is a calling from God. Work is a gift from God. Our work reflects our Creator. By the seventh day, God finished HIS WORK; AND ***blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because He rested from all the work of creation.***"

You have probably seen these quotes plastered on cars.

"I Owe, I Owe, it's off to work I go."

“How can I soar with the eagles, when I work all week with turkeys?

“I’m so broke I can’t pay attention.”

There was a man applying for a job. The manager reviewing the application said, “I’m sorry I can’t hire you, there isn’t enough work to keep you busy.” The applicant replied, “You’d be surprised how little it takes to keep me busy.”

Someone else once said, “**Hard work never killed anyone, but why take the chance?**”

The Bible says that something happened to work. Sin distorted our relationship with God, and work came under a curse. Work was a Gift from God, BUT because of sin, work became a burden. But God offers the redemption of our work that comes from Sabbath REST.

Let me just say this so you can see it as we go along. Sabbath rest has many layers. It is not just physical rest, it is not about ceasing to work on a particular day of the week, it is not about what we can and can’t do on the Sabbath.

The Hebrew word '**shabbat**' means to rest, to cease, or to finish. The Jewish Sabbath was rooted in creation. God created (worked) for six days then rested or 'sabbathed' on the seventh day.

In Genesis 2, God declared, "***It is finished!***" He rested on the seventh day, not because He was tired, but because He had finished the work of creation.

God told the Jews in the 10 Commandments [commandment #4] Ex 20:8-11:
'Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.'

So, think about this: Work and rest show up at the very beginning of creation, which tells us that this rhythm of work and rest is at the very heart of what it means to be created in the image of God.

Transition: Today, we conclude our ***Summer Through the Psalms*** series with the best known and most beloved Psalm of all, the 23rd Psalm. It is memorized by more people, preached in more funerals, read in more hospitals, and written on more cards, than probably all the other Psalms put together.

In many ways, it is the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. Part of its appeal is that: It's so SIMPLE children can UNDERSTAND it. But it's also so PROFOUND that theologians can DROWN in it.

One underlining theme in the 23rd Psalm is REST.

Someone once took the 23rd Psalm to describe the problems we face with stress, strain, work, and worry.

The clock is my dictator; I shall not rest.

It makes me lie down only when exhausted; It leads me to deep depression.

It hounds my soul; It leads me in circles of frenzy for activity's sake.

Even though I run frantically from task to task; I will never get it all done.

For my "ideal" is with me, Deadlines, and my need for approval,

They drive me. They demand performance from me,

Beyond the limits of my schedule. They anoint my head with migraines.

My emails and text messages overflow.

Surely fatigue and time pressure Shall follow me all the days of my life.

And I will dwell in the bonds of frustration Forever.

That sounds how most people feel from day to day. Stress robs us of our rest and the lack of rest increases our tension and we are caught in a vicious cycle of physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue that never seems to end.

Let's look at all the 23rd Psalm, and instead of me reading it, let's watch this cute little girl quote it.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3buLQoCN6KY>

She was anxious to get to the *'surely'* part, wasn't she? We'll get to that in a minute, but first I want us to look at the second verse.

Let's PRAY

The title of Today's Message is: **The Best REST You'll Ever Possess**

I want to focus on just two verses, the second and the last. But first, did you notice how personal this Psalm is? There is no WE, US, or THEY. It's only MY, ME, I, HE, and YOU. David, a former shepherd, is writing out of an overflow of his personal experience with God.

In the second verse, we are told three things about REST that will happen *if* we follow the Good Shepherd. The very first thing the shepherd does for the sheep is, *"Makes me lie down..."* (Psalm 23:2, NIV)

I. My Shepherd Guides Me to Rest

Sheep begin to graze and feed about 4 o'clock in the morning. By ten o'clock, the sheep are hot, tired, and thirsty. Sheep can't drink while they are hot. They are filled with grass that they have not digested, so the shepherd must make them lie down and rest first.

And sheep don't like to lie down. They are like children. A shepherd is just like a parent. He knows that the sheep need to lie down, to have that time of rest.

It is interesting that the first thing the shepherd leads the sheep to do is rest. You may think to yourself, **'Wait a minute. That is what I have been doing all night.'** Yes, you have been sleeping, but that is only physical rest. What we also need is spiritual rest. Spiritual rest is when you rest in the presence of the shepherd and enjoy fellowship with Him.

The shepherd not only makes the sheep lie down, but notice where he leads them to lie down, *"He makes me lie down in green pastures..."* (Psalm 23:2, NIV)

II. My Shepherd Grows Me Through Rest

Now literally in the Hebrew language it says "***pastures of tender grass.***" He is talking about the food of the sheep, because that is what sheep eat. Our shepherd, the Lord Jesus, has also given us food to eat - HIS Word.

We are told the Bible is not just a book that you read; it is food that you eat.

The Prophet Jeremiah said this, "***When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight...***" (Jeremiah 15:16, NIV)

In another psalm, the song writer said this, "***How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!***" (Psalm 119:103, NIV)

There is another grass that is called 'Goat grass' which will give the sheep indigestion, but a good shepherd leads the sheep to the best grass.

The trouble is that many people eat too much ***tv*** grass, ***video*** game grass, ***internet surfing*** grass, ***social media*** grass, ***news*** grass. All that does is make us restless and destroy our peace.

The reason why the Good Shepherd guides us to rest is because He grows us through rest in God's word where you see **His power**, where you are reminded of **His promises**, experience **His presence**, and you rest in **His peace**.

Thirdly it says, "...he leads me beside quiet waters..." (Psalm 23:2, NIV)

The Shepherd guides us to rest, grows us through rest, and lastly

III. My Shepherd Gives Me His Rest

Israel is a rocky, dry, hot barren land. Between March and October there is virtually no rain, so the heat scorches the grass, and the waterholes dry up and the shepherd must find sources of water.

That is vitally important because the body of a sheep is seventy-percent water. They need water to maintain their body metabolism because when sheep get thirsty, they become restless.

They start wandering looking for water and if they are not properly led, they will drink from polluted holes and dirty streams and pick up parasites and germs that can make them sick or kill them.

The waters must be still and quiet because sheep will not drink from a turbulent stream.

Just as the grass speaks of the Word of God, water speaks of the Spirit of God. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be a river of living water that would flow out of the heart of a believer and that anyone who drinks that water would never thirst.

When you take time to get into the green pastures of God's word and you let the quiet waters of his Holy Spirit flow over you, speak to you, comfort you, and encourage you, when everything else is falling apart around you, you can be at perfect peace and find true rest.

That is why Jesus is called "The Good Shepherd," because he knows how to lead us to His green pastures to feed on His WORD. He knows how to get us to the rivers of living water, so we can drink from His SPIRIT.

He knows when we do that, we will be resting easily. We will experience this peace that passes all understanding.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28, "***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.***" (Matthew 11:28, NIV)

God started creation week with work, and after six days, He rested on the seventh. But notice that the first thing that Jesus wants to give you is REST.

So, on this Labor Day weekend, when many people get an extra day off, that results in a three-day weekend, I thought we'd focus on the last verse in this chapter that when **understood and applied** can bring us the **Best REST we could ever Possess.**

I'm talking about the 'surely' verse. The one the little girl couldn't wait to quote.

V6: 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.' (ESV)

That word **'surely'**. It's a word of total affirmation. It means 'certainly, completely, and exactly'.

David says, "I know with absolute certainty that my God perfectly leads me through this life and is ready to joyfully receive me in the next."

If the Lord is YOUR shepherd, you don't have to approach life with a question mark, you can face it with an exclamation point.

If there was ever a word from heaven that our worry-filled, stress-induced, anxiety-loaded culture desperately needed to mentally understand, spiritually believe, and emotionally apply it's this one.

And that's the key to understanding what David is saying, and to experiencing what he's feeling. Peace in the present and faith for the future doesn't come from YOU controlling every detail of your life; it comes from surrendering YOUR life to the only One who can control every detail of your life.

I Can Possess the Best Rest

I. WHEN I RECOGNIZE GOD'S GOODNESS PURSUES ME.

"Surely GOODNESS...shall follow me all the days of my life...". David does not mean that everything that happens in life will feel good, look good, or be good. That would contradict many other parts of Scripture.

Job 5:7: "People are born for trouble as readily as sparks fly up from a fire."

Job 14:1: "How frail is humanity! How short is life, how full of trouble!"

John 16:33: "...In this world you will have trouble..."

See, bad things don't just happen to BAD people. Bad things happen to ALL people. God only had one Child who lived in this world without sin-Jesus. But God has no children who live in this world without pain and suffering-including Jesus! Bad things happen to everyone.

Peace isn't possible only when you are pain-free or problem-free. That's when you need it most, right?

Not even David believed that everything that happens in life is good. Look back at V4:

V4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...". That's not Christian code for 'a walk in the park'! David is talking about deep, dark, and difficult days. Often the Shepherd is going to lead us to "green pastures" and "still waters". But sometimes He's going to lead us through "...the valley of the shadow of death". David is not confessing he's in the valley because he has strayed away from God, he's there because God is leading him through it.

This is confirmed because verse 3 and 4 are connected: "He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake; Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me."

Sometimes the path through the dark valley is ALSO the path of righteousness. There are times when the righteous ways of God require that He leads us through days so dark and difficult that it seems the shadow of death has eclipsed the sunshine. There are valleys I must travel through not because I'm **fleeing** from God, but because I'm **following** Him.

A sick bed can be the valley of the shadow of death.

A broken heart can be the valley of the shadow of death.

A financial loss can be the valley of the shadow of death.

An unmet need can be the valley of the shadow of death.

A wayward child can be the valley of the shadow of death.

The death of a loved-one can be the valley of the shadow of death.

David is saying he had no control over his reality. But what David did control was his response to his reality. And David chose not to be afraid. Why? Because David was not going through the valley by himself. And if you belong to God through Christ, neither are you.

So, here's a pertinent question: Why does the Shepherd insist on leading us through valley's filled with danger and death threats? He leads us through the

valley to get us to a better place. The valley isn't the destination; it's just on the way. The Shepherd knows the best route to take. **Peace in the valleys of life never comes from WHAT you have. Peace comes from WHO is with you.**

Remember, the 23rd Psalm is a shepherd's song. This is how a shepherd lovingly and skillfully leads his sheep. As NT believers, we know that the Shepherd in this psalm is the Savior in the Gospels. The Shepherd David is talking about is no ordinary Shepherd. He's the Good Shepherd.

The word '**good**' Jesus used doesn't mean nice; it means unique or one of a kind. Jesus was saying there is no one like Me, so there is no one who can take care of you like I can. There is no one who will lead you like I do. Follow Me...I'm the Good Shepherd and I'll always lead you to goodness.

Acts 10:38 describes the earthly life of Jesus: ***'God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.'*** (ESV)

What He did then, He is still doing now. The Good Shepherd is doing good for His sheep leading them to goodness.

One more thing. David says, 'Surely goodness...shall FOLLOW me all the days of my life.' That word '**follow**' doesn't mean 'to lag far behind'. It means 'to closely pursue'. The idea is that the Good Shepherd leads us through life's valley's and God's goodness is close by. Isn't it true that we usually don't see God's goodness, mercy, or love until after we get through the dark valley and we look back upon our life and then we can how clearly God blessed us, loved us, and led us?

I Can Possess the Best Rest

II. WHEN I KNOW GOD'S GRACE PROTECTS ME.

"Surely goodness and MERCY shall follow me all the days of my life..." David says that not only goodness follows the Lord's sheep, but also mercy follows us. The word 'mercy' here is 'hesed'.

It's used 246 times in the Old Testament and half of those are in the book of Psalms. It's David's favorite word to describe God's attitude toward His children.

Hesed can be rendered 'mercy' or 'loving-kindness' or 'overwhelming grace'. Mercy and grace are opposite sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. Mercy is the result of God's grace. Isaiah 60:10: ***'I will have mercy on you through My grace.'*** God's grace is the vehicle that delivers God's mercy to you.

Mercy is not getting from God what you deserve.

Grace is getting from God what you don't deserve.

So, what this says, is that God's goodness, mercy, and grace chase us down, run after us, and stays right on our heels. How long? All the days of our lives.

Shepherds don't drive sheep, they lead sheep. So, the shepherd would be out in front. But what shepherd would often have with them would be sheepdogs. Usually there would be two of them at the back of the pack. Their job was to follow behind the sheep, and if a sheep went astray or a sheep started falling behind, they would bark for the master and alert the shepherd to take care of that sheep.

David is picturing goodness and mercy (grace) like God's divine sheep dogs. They are following, nipping at your tail, keeping you in line, keeping you safe.

Goodness is for our steps; grace is for our stumbles.

God's goodness supplies me; God's grace soothes me.

Goodness helps me; grace heals me.

God's goodness provides, God's grace pardons. We absolutely need both.

Lam. 3:22-23: ***"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."*** (ESV)

Here is most of our problem: we take God's goodness and grace for granted.

Did you hear the story about the dad who was getting tired of how ungrateful his kids had gotten and how entitled they seemed to be with all the good things they

had. He decided to sit them all down for one of those fatherly talks. He said, "Kids, you don't realize how good you have it. When I was a boy, I had to get up before daylight to milk the cows and then deliver newspapers. Then I walked to school in the rain and the snow. After school I worked at a grocery store for less than \$5 a day, and we still didn't always have enough to eat.'

As you can imagine, those little kids' eyes were as big as coconuts, and they were in awe at what their dad had told them. The dad felt pretty good that his message had gotten through to them until his little four-year-old boy said, "**Gee, Dad, I bet you're glad you live with us now!**"

God's goodness and mercy will continue to follow you every day of your life without fail., one last thing.

I Can Possess the Best Rest

III. WHEN I KNOW GOD'S GLORY IS PROMISED TO ME.

"...and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." David saves the best for last. He tells us from the beginning of this Psalm that ***if God is our Shepherd...***

When we're hungry, He will lead us to green pastures.

When we're thirsty, He will lead us to still waters.

When we're lost, He will find us and lead us down the right path.

When we're experiencing the valley of the shadow of death, He will protect us.

Then he connects our days on earth with our eternity in heaven with one little word **'and'**. *Sounds a little like Enoch, he walked with God and was no more.*

David says one day he will move from the Shepherd's pasture into the Shepherd's palace. He moves from the green pastures of earth into the Master's house of heaven.

Dwelling in the house of the Lord is intended to be a picture of enjoying full communion and fellowship with God. **But David isn't fixated on the PLACE he will be in, but with the PERSON he will be with.**

His focus isn't on the luxurious banquet, but the loving host. He will be with the Lord. This was always David's desire.

Psalm 27:4: ***'One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.'*** (ESV)

Death, for Christians, is not just a transfer; it's a promotion. It's on to better things. No more problems, not more tears, no more sin, no more pain, and no more valleys. David knew the best was yet to come. David confidently says, 'When I leave this earth, I will be in the presence of the Lord forever.'

You can have peace today and confidence for tomorrow because God promises your last day on earth only begins your best days of forever.

This Psalm is a song that can only be sung if God is your Shepherd. The BEST REST we're talking about is for those of whom Jesus is your Shepherd.

CONCLUSION:

We need more than just physical rest. Our souls need rest and that is what the Good Shepherd's gives HIS sheep.

Soul-rest is rooted in faith and confidence that we're deeply and unconditionally loved, held safe in the arms of our heavenly Father.

Soul-rest comes when we trust God fully, which is different from just saying we trust God.

Soul-rest is a rest we feel in our minds, bodies and spirits. And the only place we will find this rest is Jesus.

Our Sabbath is not Saturday or Sunday, **our Sabbath is the Savior**. We do not experience it one day a week, but every day. Because of Jesus' finished work on the cross, we do not have to work for our salvation; we now work from it.

We do not work to be set free. We work because we have been set free. We rest in God's grace, and work out of gratitude, joy, and out of the Lord's power.

Christians have a Sabbath, but it is NOT a particular day. Every Christian's Sabbath is a Person. JESUS is the Christian Sabbath.

Hebrews 4:9 puts it like this: ***"And therefore, we who have believed (what Jesus did for us) enter that Sabbath rest now and there remains a rest, then, for the people of God. Anyone who enters God's rest through faith in Christ rests from his own work just as God did from his."***

That is why Jesus called to the masses in Matthew 11, ***"Come all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you REST."*** THE APPLICATION FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN: THE SABBATH IS ABOUT RESTING IN CHRIST.

In his poem, When Earth's Last Picture Is Painted, Rudyard Kipling says.

"When earth's last picture is painted, And the tubes are twisted and dried,
When the oldest colors have faded, And the youngest critic has died,
We shall rest, we shall need it, Lie down for an aeon or two,
Till the Master of all good workmen...Shall put us to work anew...
...And no one will work for the money, No one will work for the fame.
But each for the joy of the working, And each, in his separate star,
Will draw the thing as he sees it. For the God of things as they are!

STORY: There's an old story about a famous actor who once was the guest of honor at a social gathering where he received requests to recite favorite excerpts from various literary works. An old preacher was amongst the audience, and he asked the actor to recite the twenty-third Psalm. The actor agreed on the condition that the preacher would also recite it as well.

The actor stood and recited the famous Psalm, and it was everything you would expect from a polished, theatrical performer.

Then the old preacher rose. His voice was rough and broken from many years of preaching, and his diction was anything but perfect or polished. But when he finished there was not a dry eye in the room. Later, when someone asked the actor what made the difference, he replied: ***'I know the psalm...but the old preacher knows the Shepherd.'***

Do you know the Good Shepherd?

