

The Shepherd's Promise

November 26 - December 2, 2023



MAIN POINT

The ultimate hope of our Christian faith is to dwell with God forever, and that is a promise for those who belong to his flock.

HEAD, HEART AND LIFE CHANGE

- To know that even in difficult days, God is giving us his goodness and mercy.
- To feel strengthened by the truth that God's mercy can overcome any and all of our sin.
- To pursue God's presence as the solution to our longings rather than freedom from our temporary circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

When you look back over your walk with God, what aspect of his character has been the most encouraging to you? In what ways has knowing that aspect of his character helped you grow?

We can always know God better. In this series, we've unpacked several aspects of his character—his love, presence, provision, strength, and righteousness. This final session wraps up the series and examines God's goodness and mercy towards us.

READ [PSALM 23:1-6](#).

Show Session 6: Psalm 23:6 (13 minutes).

DISCUSSION

We have spent the last six weeks slowing down and working through a very familiar psalm in the hopes of seeing it anew. As Matt said in session one, when biblical truth becomes commonplace, it can be easy for us to overlook its significance—even taking it for granted at times. But despite its brevity, Psalm 23 delivers some astounding truths about our God and what it means to belong to him. So let's start off this week by reflecting on where we have come. In week one, you listed two or three ways you hoped the Lord would help you grow as you worked through this series. How has God answered your prayers for growth? In what ways has he met you as you have studied Psalm 23?

How has your understanding of God grown throughout this study?

How has your understanding of yourself grown over the last few sessions?

Matt has challenged each week our tendency to view God incorrectly. All too often, we fall into the trap of believing that he is a distant God, constantly observing our moral efforts and ready to punish us when we go wrong. But that simply is not the image of God we receive in the Bible and we are going to close out our study by challenging that misunderstanding one last time.

READ [PSALM 23:6](#).

Matt said that if we could distill all sixty-six books of the Bible in to a single phrase, it would be “God with us.” When you think of that phrase, what are some examples that come to mind of God being present with his people?

We have wrestled with this question previously, but what makes it difficult to believe that God desires to be with you? How has your perspective on God’s presence changed as you have worked through this study?

This final verse of Psalm 23 presents us with two ideas, the first being that goodness and mercy follow those who call the Lord their shepherd. The Bible contains plenty of commands that we are expected to incorporate into our lives for the sake of obedience.

How do you tend to respond to being told what to do? Specifically, when it comes to the commands of the Bible, how do you respond to the ways in which it calls you to obedience?

As Matt pointed out, part of misunderstanding the character of God is also misunderstanding his intention for our obedience. He is not looking for begrudging submission. Rather, his commands are intended to bring us joy because they bring him glory and help us live in the way he designed the world to function.

When you think about obedience, is “goodness” something that you imagine it leading you toward? What situations make it difficult to believe that God wants good things for you?

Inevitably, no matter how faithfully we pursue obedience, there will be times in which we fail. That’s true in every area of life. We will come up short before God, in our marriages, in our jobs, in our friendships, and so on. That’s why the second characteristic that chases after those who follow the Lord is so significant.

What is mercy? How would you define it?

How do you tend to respond to your own failures? In what ways do you find it difficult to believe that God would respond to them with mercy rather than punishment?

Matt argued that we misunderstand mercy “following” us because we don’t truly understand the righteousness of God given to us through faith in Christ. Where are you in need of mercy today? How should the truth that God’s mercy follows you through faith in Christ meet you in that need?

If you belong to Christ, it does not matter where you find yourself today—if you have given in to temptation, missed a deadline at work, spoken careless words to your spouse, or failed in any other way, goodness and mercy still follow you. Even more, God has extended to you the invitation to dwell with him forever, which is the ultimate hope of our faith.

READ [PSALM 27:3-4](#); [42:1-2](#); [63:1-7](#)

What is David’s consistent request in each of these passages?

What does it say about his perspective in difficult times?

How should David’s example in these verses change the way you pray when facing suffering? Clearly, David longs to dwell in the presence of God. More than deliverance from his temporary circumstances, David pleads to be with God. In what ways do you crave to be near God like David? How is that craving reflected in your prayer life?

Based on what you have learned from this study, what could you do to be more intentional about pursuing God’s presence in the days ahead?

As we draw this series to a close, we’ll do so by considering the two questions Matt ended the session with. Throughout these past six weeks, we’ve seen that when the Lord is our shepherd we lack nothing. He provides us with rest, righteousness, protection, comfort, feasting, goodness, mercy, and an eternal dwelling in his presence. All other shepherds are little more than thieves seeking to kill and destroy (John 10:10).

Which shepherd are you following? Are you listening to the voice of the good shepherd? Or are you being drawn astray by another?

How are you orienting your life around the presence of God? What can you do to find spaces throughout your day to make yourself aware of his presence? To soak up his Word and spend time in prayer with him?

LAST WORD

What a thought: when we belong to God, his goodness and mercy chase after us all the days of our lives. No other shepherd offers such a promise. So the crucial question we have to ask ourselves is which shepherd are we following?

The world is filled with shepherds, but only the Lord can provide what we need. Following him requires intentionality. We have to seek his presence throughout our day, but he has made himself more than available to us. And he has made us righteous through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Take heart today. You belong to the flock of a loving shepherd, one who loves you, delights over you, and will one day bring you into your eternal home with him.

LIVE IT OUT

MEMORIZE: Continue working on memorizing Psalm 23. This week, focus on verse six reciting it to yourself over the next few days.

PRAY: Each morning this week, before you start your day, take a moment to invite God into whatever you have planned (work, errands, school, etc.). Ask him to help you sense his presence as you go about your day.

JOURNAL: Set aside some time this week to evaluate your spiritual life. Consider whether you are orienting your life around God's presence, like Matt said. After doing so, make a plan with practical steps toward a more intentional pursuit of the Lord in the days ahead.