

Six Verses to Soothe the Anxious Soul

Psalm 23

As a youngster, I spent countless hours exploring the hills, dales and creek sides of the green pastures that made up some of the acres of the farm that my father operated in Wisconsin, and rarely did I ever get bored.

There were cray fish and frogs, turtles and snakes to discover.

There were acorns and berries to collect and holes in the ground to poke sticks into.

And every once in a while, a fox, raccoon or ground hog would cross my path much to my delight.

All in all, I'd say my expeditions through the fields and pastures of my boyhood did for me what God did for David – restore his soul: *"He restores my soul"* David writes in Psalm 23:3

To restore means to revive and refresh.

In Psalm 19 David uses the same word writing, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, **reviving** the soul."*

I'm not exactly sure how this works, except to say that when we see or experience something that evokes within us a feeling of goodness and wholeness and rightness, how can this not energize and satisfy us at the deepest level of who we are? It's like gazing upon a work of art and allowing its beauty to nourish our spirit.

In Ruth 4:15, when Ruth gives birth to Obed, the women of the village pronounced a blessing on the child and his grandmother, Naomi saying, *"May he become famous throughout Israel! He will **renew** your life and sustain you in your old age."*

Earlier in the story, Naomi felt like dying because of the misfortune that befell her family. Now her strength and hope are renewed because of new life.

Does your soul need reviving today?

Does your soul need restoring?

Do you need a blessing pronounced on your life today?

I'm going to take a leap of faith and answer for you: Yes!

And why do I know your soul needs restoring?

A couple reasons: First, you're a human being. God has given you a soul and says, here you go. Here's my gift to you so that you can connect with me.

And oh, by the way, guard it, protect it, and keep it safe. It's your lifeline to me. It's the vessel that holds my Spirit. Proverbs 22:5 says, *"In the paths of the wicked lie thorns and snares, but he who guards his soul stays far from them."*

Interesting.

The Bible teaches us that if we guard our soul, pay attention to the needs of our soul, tend to our soul, and nourish our soul, our soul, in a sense, will pay us back by being our friend and keeping us connected with Him and all that is good while helping us avoid the things that can hurt and harm.

People often think of their soul as a garden, and we all know that something will grow in a garden even if it's left untended. But it's the tended and purposeful garden that produces the best fruit. God wants us to be fruitful, so we need to tend to our souls.

The second reason I know your soul needs restoring is because you're in church today. And it's no accident that you're here.

You're here because God drew you here and is working in your life to teach you and to guide you and to transform you into the likeness of His Son, and you want to discover more details about this. You want to see this fleshed out in more detail and become more tangible and real.

In other words, you're here today, because you have a heightened sense of awareness of your hunger for God and you're here to satisfy that hunger.

Your soul is responsible for this because it is interacting with and responding to God's Spirit. Psalm 42 says, *"As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."*

How many of you have ever heard of the word entropy?

You may have come across it when you studied Chemistry or Physics in high school or college. It's one of those words that we have a difficult time defining because it gets too technical too quickly especially since we typically don't use the language of science in our everyday speech.

But in general, entropy is a measurement of disorder or chaos in a closed system.

Another way to put it is the measurement of the rate of the cooling down or unwinding of the universe. Probably the best example I can give you is this: Build a brand-new house and then leave it sit untouched for 10, 20, and even 50 years. Do nothing to it.

What will it look like when you return in a few decades?

Will its condition improve, or will it look more weathered, dilapidated and run-down?

The same can be said for our souls.

Entropy is working on our souls constantly and relentlessly and unless we do something to counteract its negative influences, our souls will be unable to do what they were designed to do: Keep us connected to and in fellowship with God.

Now I know some of you might be getting a little worried right about now thinking that your pastor has gone off the deep end and has forsaken orthodox Christianity, entertaining instead the idea of salvation by works. But let me assure you I haven't.

I completely agree with what Paul writes in Ephesians 2: 8 -9: *"For it is by grace you have been saved , through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works so that no one can boast."*

But I also agree with what Paul wrote in Philippians 2:12: *"... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling."*

Salvation is just the beginning!

What I'm speaking about is not about salvation, but about our journey toward holiness and usefulness and sanctification in God's kingdom that begins immediately after God takes up residence within our souls, giving us new life and causing us to be adopted children and heirs of his eternal kingdom.

In Psalm 23, David is a believer in God, but his soul is tired and worn down and dry. It needs restoration and revival. We need it too.

Our souls need restoration because when we're in a battle on so many different levels and on different fronts.

We battle against the world, the spirit of the age that runs contrary to God's will and his principles.

Jesus talks about this battle in John 15 when he says, *"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."*

Have you ever given much thought to this?

Christians have conflicts with the world because we've turned our back on the world - its way of operating and its "me – first" philosophy.

Instead, we've embraced a new worldview that makes God the center of our lives and causes us to think about how we can minister to others and bring glory to God.

This change of allegiance has aroused the hostility of our former master.

The world wants us back under its thumb, and when we refuse to heed its beckon call, it lashes out against us to destroy us. This obviously takes a toll on our souls, doesn't it? Sapping our joy, our strength, and our resolve.

And this is but one front we face.

What about the battle that wages within each of us?

The battle of the flesh?

When God's Spirit comes to live in us - when we first believe the Good News of God's saving grace - we understand that at the core of who we are, we become a new creation. Paul makes reference to this in 2 Corinthians when he writes, *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come."*

But maybe not all of our old self is gone.

Paul reminds of the battle that remains as long as we continue to live in these bodies: He writes this in chapter 7 of Romans:

*"In my inner being, I delight in God's law – the same law that David said revives his soul – but I see another law that is at work in the members of my body, **waging war** against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin."*

So, the world battles us on one front, and our own flesh battles us on another.

But still another war wages against us. And we return to Ephesians 4 to study our third enemy:

Paul warns all believers to *"put on the full armor of God so we can take our stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

No wonder we're tired, exhausted, and ready to throw in the towel!

We're getting constantly bombarded from multiple fronts – from outside and from within. We need to be restored.

So, David writes Psalm 23 for his sake and for ours.

And one of the first things I learn from this wonderful gift of a Psalm is that God desires to and is able to do the restoration and to meet all our needs: David writes, *"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want."*

This first statement of David's is a cause-and-effect statement.

With God, all man's needs are met. Without God, none of man's needs are met. God is the independent variable here in this equation! Take God away, and you have nothing. But with God, everything!

When we think of needs, our minds immediately picture things like food, shelter, clothing, and other physical stuff, but we have other needs that are not so easily quantified like ...

emotional health

spiritual life

mental health

dignity

significance

purpose and reason.

David reminds us that God can and will meet all these human needs if we look to him by faith and in trust – if our relationship is based on us being the sheep and God being our Great Shepherd and King.

Second, I cannot help but notice all the action words in Psalm 23: This shepherd of whom David speaks ...

Leads

Restores

Guides

Comforts

Prepares

and anoints.

With the shepherd doing all this, what's left for the sheep to do? Well, I can sum this up in one word: trust.

Will we trust God that that he knows he's doing?

Does God not know where the coolest and best water is and where the greenest grass is?

Does he not know where the safest path is to walk to lead us to these good places?

Won't his staff and crook be continual reminders of his guidance, protection and presence even when the weather turns harsh and the enemies close in?

Of course, we can intellectually say a resounding yes to all these questions, but can we translate our yes's to trusting actions?

Will we lie down in green pastures, knowing that God is always watching over us both night and day? If we're able to, this unencumbered rest will surely restore our souls.

Will we drink the cool, refreshing, and restorative waters of God's word or will we continue to quench our thirst from the world's pool of contaminated water that threatens to poison our minds and nourish the old flesh?

Will we be humble enough to let God guide us for his name's sake and for his kingdom or is the pull of our agenda too powerful to overcome?

When the circumstances of life get confusing and darkness closes in, what will grip us? What will we reach for? The hand of God or the shadow of death?

It will all depend in that moment if we have trust in the Living God. If we do, then we can claim the same promises David claimed for himself:

That our Shepherd will save us from our mortal enemies.

That we will be honored at the king's banquet – this is what it means to have our heads anointed with oil.

That goodness and love will actively pursue us every day of our lives!

And that our eternal destiny will always and forever be with God.

Amen.