

No Place Like Home

Favorite Psalms Part 29
Psalm 23:5-6 8-10-2014

We naturally think the only solution to loneliness is human friendships, but those aren't always available. This passage teaches a greater solution—and one that is always available. It also teaches how to detect God's favor when someone is hurting you.

Introduction: Loneliness	1
You Accept Me by Giving Joy	2
Fellowship and Food.....	2
Enemies.....	3
What If I Have No Enemies?	
What If You Are The Enemy?	
Mimic God.....	4
You Honor Me by Giving Refreshment	5
Refreshment.....	5
Honor.....	5
Festivity and Celebration.....	5
You Provide for Me with Abundance	6
The Cup.....	6
God's Overabundant Nature.....	6
You're Going to Need a Bigger Cup.....	7
You Pursue Me with Love	7
Goodness.....	7
Love.....	7
Follow.....	7
God's Nature.....	8
Worry.....	8
You Welcome Me in Your Home	8
Church.....	9
Conclusion	10
Just You and God.....	10
Application Questions (James 1:25).....	10

3
4

Psalm 23 A psalm of David.

1The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. **2** He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, **3** he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. **4** 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. **5** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. **6** Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Introduction: Loneliness

In Psalm 25 David cries out to God in desperation, and one of the things he says is this:

Psalm 25:16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely

Lonely? You would think a guy like David could handle something like loneliness. This is a man whose whole life was brutal, hand to hand combat. He had seen his close friends killed right in front of him on the battlefield. He had been the object of a nation-wide manhunt. Attacked by wild animals, fought a giant, captured by the Philistines and put on death row – this is a man who spent his whole life dealing with problems 100 times the size of the worst problems most of us ever face in a lifetime. And he

always seemed to be able to come out on top. This is a rugged, tough, unbreakable, powerhouse of a man. And yet this hard, tough, rough, walking war machine of a man comes to a point of utter desperation, crying out to God for help, because he's ... lonely? When you are not lonely, the problem of loneliness just does not seem like it would be a very big deal. But losing loved ones, being rejected by friends, not having the warmth of family to go home to at night – that can be one of the most crushing, agonizing, painful trials a person can endure.

Today is the final message in our study of the 23rd Psalm, which is arguably the most comforting and encouraging song ever written in the history of the world. It is just six short verses – a two- year-old can memorize it, and yet the imagery explodes with so much richness of meaning that thousands of years of study still has not exhausted the riches of this psalm. It is a list of benefits that you get if you have a sheep/shepherd kind of relationship with God. Only a tiny percentage of people have that kind of relationship with God, but anyone who is willing can, and if you do, these are some of the benefits: You get the Lord as your shepherd in life. He supplies absolutely everything you need. He gives you rest, He gives you sustenance, He gives you pleasure and satisfaction of soul, He restores and refreshes and renews your soul, He gives you guidance, and He gives you protection and hope and direction and comfort in the dark valley. All of that is in verses 1-4. Now, in the last two verses, the benefits come even faster. He has covered about seven benefits so far, then he crams five more in these last two verses rapid fire. In verses 5-6, he drops the sheep metaphor altogether, because he wants to show us some things that are too wonderful to be described by that metaphor.¹ Most commentators say that in verse 5 he switches from picturing God as a shepherd to picturing God as a gracious host, who has you over for a meal. I don't agree with that. I don't think God is being pictured here as a host of a meal, and I'll tell you why a little later. For now, let's look at verse 5.

You Accept Me by Giving Joy

Fellowship and Food

Psalm 23:5 You prepare a table before me

Lying down in green pastures already gave us the idea of pleasure and satisfaction of appetites back in verse 2. But there is another level of joy that cannot be described by that sheep metaphor because it is beyond what animals can experience. It goes beyond just food and drink. The kinds of pleasures we enjoy at a meal with family and friends is a level of enjoyment that can only be experienced by someone who bears the image of God. There is a reason why eating together and close relationships are connected. When a couple goes out on a date, what do they do? So often, they have dinner, or coffee, or ice cream – some form of eating or drinking to go along with their enjoyment of each other. We do that with close friends. We do it with family. That is how we celebrate holidays. It is interesting – when people are alone for a big holiday, they usually don't have a giant, fancy meal. Most people, when they are alone, just eat ordinary food – even if it's Thanksgiving Day. There is something about the combination of pleasures – conversation, delicious, pleasing, pleasurable tastes, laughter, satisfying hunger pangs and cravings, personal interactions – all of it mixed together just makes the food taste better and makes the friendships and love relationships progress to deeper levels.

All of that is by God's design. God created life that way so we can understand what fellowship with Him is really like. Have you ever enjoyed someone's hospitality? Whenever you do, remind yourself – hospitality exists in people in order to teach us what God is like.

This is the cure for loneliness. All these blessings we see in these closing verses – they are all personal. God does not mainly bless us with stuff. He mainly blesses us with the warmth and love and

¹ Some argue that the metaphor continues, but their efforts to support that are not convincing. They end up with a full circle, double metaphor where men are pictured as sheep, which are pictured as men. Nothing in the last two verses hints of a sheep/shepherd metaphor.

companionship of His great family. And He envelopes us with His hospitality. Do you think of God that way – as more hospitable even than the most hospitable person you know? If not, let this psalm correct your thinking about God. David comes out of the dark valley and says, “You give me the kind of joy and pleasure that comes from enjoying a tasty meal with friends and family.”

And the reference to the oil and the cup indicate that you are not just one of the people at this meal, but you are the honored guest. The whole party is being thrown for you – to honor you and to show God’s approval of you. And that is the significance of the fact that your enemies are seeing it.

Enemies

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

The word **presence** should be translated “sight.” It is not the normal Hebrew word for presence. The idea of this word is not so much about their nearness, as much as the fact that they are witnessing it – they are seeing it. God honors you with a banquet of joy and makes sure your enemies see it – just like Job’s friends at the end of the book when God honored Job. God made it crystal clear to Job’s accusers, “I accept Job and I am more pleased with him than I am with you.” So the idea here is that God is accepting you and showing your enemies that He is on your side, and that you have His approval, and they do not.

“That’s great, but who are my enemies? I don’t really have King Saul chasing after me trying to kill me, or of Philistine attacking, or anything like that.”

Enemies are just simply people who want to hurt you. They might want to physically hurt you, or they might want to embarrass you, or make you sad, or take something from you. Or maybe they are just angry with you.

“That sounds like my spouse.”

That could be. They don’t hate you or desire to destroy you, but all too often spouses behave as enemies – no question about that. All of us, at one point or another, have had people who have become angry with us and decided they wanted to hurt us in some way. Even if it is just by turning their back to you and shutting off their affections and giving you the silent treatment.

Or maybe they take it a step further and go after your reputation. One of the most painful ordeals you can go through is to have someone going around spreading lies about you that everyone believes. And you don’t have any platform to set the record straight. Another really painful thing is to have someone going around spreading gossip about you that is true. They take your sins and faults and weaknesses and put them on a flashing neon billboard and draw everyone’s attention to them, so that no one will trust you, no one will like you, relationships will fall apart, and you’ll be shunned.

Anyone who is doing that kind of thing to you is behaving as an enemy right now. And when that happens to us, our natural reaction is to place our hope in that person stopping what they are doing. Or at least that person being discredited in everyone’s eyes. But that was not where David put his hope. His hope was in God coming alongside him and making it clear that David was accepted by Him.

If you are a believer, then God is your Father and He will do this for you. He will, when the time is right, make it clear to those people that He approves of you. And He will do so by bringing you joy. It might be the joy of lavish blessing, or it might be that marvelous, unexplainable joy that God sometimes gives right in the middle of hardship, but either way – God will grant you joy, and rub it in their face. They will see it, and they will know that you have that joy and they do not. They might pretend to have joy, so when you see them they might be all smiles, but God sees them when they are up all night with anxiety or guilt, and when they can’t enjoy the simple pleasures of life, and all the various things that go along with God turning His face away. God will do that for you thousands of times in limited ways in this life, and in the ultimate way on Judgment Day.

What If I Have No Enemies?

“This isn’t all that encouraging to me, because I don’t really have any enemies. I don’t have anyone in my life doing those things to me.”

There is one reason for that. It's because God has you at the banquet table right now. Any time in your life when no one is trying to hurt you, no one is gossiping about you or trying to cause you pain, it is not that rescue from enemies is irrelevant for you at that time. The reason you have no one trying to hurt you is because you are being rescued and protected from that by God. Otherwise, don't you think Satan would have enemies all over you? So in times like that, train your soul to attribute it to God's protective hand and pour out gratitude to God.

What If You Are The Enemy?

There's one other reason why some of you might not find this all that encouraging. This is supposed to be the high point of the psalm. But for many people this is the least encouraging verse of all, because when you think about the person you are at odds with, and you hear that description of an enemy, you realize – *you're* the enemy. You are the one who is angry or holding on to a grudge. You are the one who would really like to expose the ugliness of a brother or sister in Christ. You feel like it's your job to bring some negative consequences into that person's life to teach him a lesson. God might have that person seated at His banquet table, and it galls you that the person seems to have just gotten off scot-free even though his sin caused you so much pain. It galls you because you're the enemy. That is exactly what this promise is all about – the enemy has to watch God bless His child.

Now, if the person is unrepentant, then their sin does need to be exposed – through the Matthew 18 process– taking great care not to skip any steps, and making sure that your goal is to restore that person spiritually, and doing so gently, and with love and humility, watching yourself to make sure you don't fall into sin. But if that person has repented, but you are still mad because it seems like they need to pay– they need to have some consequence so they will learn their lesson, and it just seems too soon to forgive – you are the one in sin.

It is appalling to me to see how many Christians will withhold forgiveness for a time, and they aren't even embarrassed about it. If they commit other kinds of sins, they are ashamed, and try to hide it. But people who withhold forgiveness very often seem to think what they are doing is perfectly ok. They say, "I'm not ready to forgive. I don't think the other person appreciates how much he hurt me. Therefore I'm justified in waiting."

Luke 17:4 If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

That verse does not leave any room at all for a waiting period. From the moment the person asks forgiveness until the moment you forgive from the heart, you are in unrepentant sin. This idea that, "I'll wait a week. I'll stay angry for a week, and make them feel bad for a week, then I'll forgive." That is not forgiveness. You have already taken your revenge by staying angry. And if that is the case, my message for you is very simple: repent. Repent of your anger and unforgiveness. Ask God to have mercy on you and to restore you to the godly path. And if that person is aware that you have been angry, seek that person's forgiveness.

Mimic God

So let's make sure we are not the enemy. Instead, let's strive to be like God. Let us be hospitable and refreshing to others – especially those who are being oppressed by some enemy. If they are being treated unjustly, come by their side, and speak up for them – publicly. I know some of you have done that, and it cost you. You sided with someone who was being mistreated, and it cost you your job, or your friends, or your church. Doing that is dangerous, because you become the target of those enemies. Stick up for the kid at school that everyone makes fun of, and they just start making fun of you. But that is a small price to pay to be like God. And to receive the reward God gives to people who do that.

You Honor Me by Giving Refreshment

So God accepts us, by seating us at His table – filling us up with joy. Secondly, he puts oil on us.

5 ...You anoint my head with oil

The word translated **anoint** is not the normal word for anointing. In fact, this is the only place in the whole Bible where it is translated that way. The literal meaning of this word is to make something fat, which was a Hebrew way of expressing prosperity. So the word is often translated “to prosper” or “to satisfy.” David is saying, “You satisfy or prosper my head with oil.” That is a little strange in our ears because we don’t put oil on our heads. You think of someone walking up and dumping a bunch of motor oil on your head, and that is just not your idea of prosperity. But in that culture, oil on the head was something they did for refreshment. And the oils were expensive, scented, soothing ointments – not 10W-40.

Refreshment

Matthew 6:16 When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting.

What he is saying there is that when you fast, if you are the type who is tempted to show off your spirituality by walking around looking all beleaguered and disheveled (“Oh, I’ve fasted so long I can hardly walk...”) then instead of doing that, just wash up, and anoint yourself with oil so you will look all cleaned up and refreshed and normal. So putting oil on the head was like freshening up. It was a dry, harsh place to live – hard on the skin, and these very expensive ointments or lotions would work like medicine with healing properties, and they smelled good, and, if you could afford it, it was just a really pleasant thing. To compare it to our culture - picture yourself doing yard work out in the hot sun all day, or you’ve gone camping for a couple days with no shower, and you’re all dirty and sweaty and smelly, and you finally get a chance to take a shower, get cleaned up, put on some deodorant or cologne or perfume, and then you just feel so much better.

Honor

That is the idea behind the oil – or at least part of it. Another aspect had to do with honor. Anointing someone with ointment was always a way of treating someone like a VIP. Think of it as being like a spa treatment. At the spa, they treat you like royalty. If you were an honored guest at a banquet or party, the host would get some expensive ointment and put it on you. And that happened in varying degrees, depending on how much honor was being shown. In Luke 7 a woman showed Jesus great honor by anointing Him with some very expensive oil ... on His feet! And when He was pointing out how much more she honored Him than the actual host of the dinner, here is what He told the host:

Luke 7:46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.

So anointing with oil was a way of honoring someone by offering them refreshment.

Festivity and Celebration

One other piece of this had to do with festivity and celebration.

Psalm 45:7 God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.

Oil is connected with joy. This was done at feasts and banquets and parties. When Solomon calls us to enjoy life, he says:

Ecclesiastes 9:8 Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.

They wore white to parties. Go to a lot of parties and don't scrimp on the ointment – enjoy life.² Scripture teaches that God refreshes, honors, and delights His people, and the metaphor used to describe all that is oil.

Psalm 92:10 You have exalted my horn ... fine oils have been poured upon me. ... 12 The righteous will flourish like a palm tree.

You Provide for Me with Abundance

So David says, “You accept me by giving me banquet- like joy in front of my enemies. And you honor me, with oil – by giving me refreshment.” And then this:

The Cup

5 ...my cup overflows.

What cup? Your cup is that part of you that can feel how much joy and satisfaction and happiness you have. When you cup is empty, you feel sad and empty. No motivation, no liveliness, no vigor, no real joy – that is a cup that's running on empty. You can be in the middle of a dream vacation and your cup can be empty. You can be with your favorite people in your favorite place doing your favorite thing, and it is still possible for your cup to be empty. And no matter how hard you try, you can't seem to do anything about it. And on the other hand you can be in the middle of suffering and your cup can be full, if God turns His face toward you.

So that is what the cup means, and here David says, “God, You fill my cup to overflowing.” God is providing more joy and fulfillment and satisfaction than David is even capable of taking in. We have a phrase that has a similar idea to this. We talk about “a kid in a candy store.” If you put a little kid in a giant candy store and just say, “Ok, knock yourself out. Everything is free – just take whatever,” that kid won't even hardly know where to start. And no matter how much he tries, he cannot possibly enjoy everything there is to be enjoyed in that store. He won't even make a dent in it. That is how God supplies our needs. He is the God of overabundance and oversupply.

God's Overabundant Nature

That is just His nature. When my kids were little and we went to MacDonald's, I was always really stingy. I bought less food than I thought they might eat just so I could be sure that no money would be wasted. But no one ever got full. If someone found a stray French fry down in the bottom of the bag it would be instantly devoured. God isn't like that. His style is more like making it rain Big Macs. That is just how God is. When I water my grass, I am real careful to make sure the sprinkler isn't going on the sidewalk, and all the water is going in the grass. What does God do when it's time to water the plants? He just dumps rain everywhere. It falls in the street, on your house, in lakes, in the ocean – everywhere. He supplies more beauty in this world than all of humanity can ever see. Niagara Falls runs 24/7 – even if no one is there to see it. When He sprinkles the sky with stars, a few million would be plenty to amaze us, but He creates numbers of galaxies and sizes and distances that our brains cannot even fathom. Overabundant oversupply. That's God's style.

² Now, obviously that can be abused if it is not done in fellowship with God. **Amos 6:6 You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph.**

You're Going to Need a Bigger Cup...

This is what God does for His children. He accepts you by giving you joy, He honors you by giving you refreshment, and He provides for you with unlimited, over-abundance. If God is your shepherd, there is only one thing that can limit the amount of joy you can have – and that is the capacity of your cup. There is never a time when there just is not enough joy available to fill up your cup. If you lack joy, either you are not receiving what is available, or you are receiving it but there is a limit on how much you can receive because your cup is so small. If I run after sin instead of running after God, I forfeit the joy I could have had. But sometimes I am running after God and I have joy, but it is little joy – so little that it is gone as soon as any kind of hardship comes along. And it is little, not because God isn't supplying much, but because my capacity is small. My cup is running over, but it is the size of a thimble.

Psalm 119:32 I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!

Just as starving your body will shrink your stomach physically, so starving yourself spiritually will shrink your soul. We get in the habit of trying to satisfy ourselves with cheap thrills that don't involve fellowship with God, and our soul shrivels up, and we become like little kids. Small children have very little capacity for joy. They can be experiencing the happiest moment of their life, and some little thing goes wrong and all their joy is instantly gone and they are crying. Their happiness is so superficial and so shallow and so fragile even when their cup is full, because their joy cup just isn't very deep. My goal is for my cup to become as deep as possible. And the way to do that is to enjoy deeper and deeper and more and more profound kinds of joys by drawing nearer and nearer and nearer to God. And that is always possible, because God is the God of overabundance and oversupply.

You Pursue Me with Love

You accept me by giving me joy, You honor me by giving me refreshment, You provide for me with abundant overflow, and then verse 6.

6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life

Goodness

Goodness, in this context, refers to life being like it ought to be. Prosperity, blessing, things working out well, all the various gifts that come from God.

Love

Love refers to the things someone does to benefit you motivated by a commitment to you. And when God loves us, the benefit that comes is primarily access to His presence.

Psalm 5:7 But I, by your great love, will come into your house

Follow

God's goodness and love will follow me. This word is often translated "to chase or pursue." The idea is, "No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to outrun God's goodness and love. They always catch up and overtake me."

This is such an incredibly encouraging truth, because when we only think in terms of us seeking God, that can become oppressive and discouraging. We read things like the first five verses of Psalm 23 and say, "Why don't I experience those kinds of things more?" And the answer comes back, "It's available – but you have to seek it. You have to stop running after the world and run after God." And that can be discouraging.

“Maybe I just don’t have what it takes to seek hard after God. I’m weak, I’m sinful, I’m foolish - it’s too hard for me.”

If everything depends on me seeking God, that is just really bad news for me.

Is it true that we must seek hard after God in order to receive grace from Him? Yes, but when you seek after God, what you discover is that the reason you sought after God was because He sought after you first. I love the last verse of Psalm 119.

Psalm 119:176 I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant

Scripture calls us to seek after Him, but did you know that it also teaches us to pray this way: “God, seek after me! I’m drifting God – pull me back in. I’m lost – find me. When I run the wrong way, chase me down with your goodness and love.”?

God’s Nature

That is not unreasonable to pray that way because this is God’s nature. And again, I would urge you to ask yourself, Do you think of God this way? Does this match your concept of God? Or do you have a picture of God as being miserly with His love toward you? He hides tiny little scraps of love and goodness, and if you are lucky and you look really hard you might find one once in a while. If that is the concept you have of God you need to clear that out of your head. That god you believe in does not even exist. The true, living God just simply is not like that. And believing wrong things about God is the most damaging thing you can do to yourself. God is not reluctant with His love; He is eager.

Isaiah 30:18 the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!

Worry

This is why worry is so out of place in the life of a Christian. So is pessimism. If you are a worrier, or a grumbler, or a pessimist; if your future looks dark to you, you don’t understand God’s goodness and love. You don’t know what is going to happen in the future. You don’t know how much money you’ll have, what kind of relationships you will have, your health, your job – so much you don’t know. But one thing you do know – goodness and love from God will be there. That you know for sure. Whatever happens, God’s goodness and love will be there. All your best days are still ahead of you.

So there is nothing to worry about. Worry is the assumption that God’s mercy and love will go bad in the future. God gave human beings an amazing ability that animals don’t have – the ability to reach into the future and experience the emotions of the future right now. When you choose to experience the pain of the future today, that is worry. When you choose to experience the joy of the future today, that is hope. Hope borrows tomorrow’s joy and experiences it today. Worry borrows tomorrow’s suffering and experiences it today. It is amazing that God has given us that ability. But it is even more amazing that with that ability, we so often choose the painful emotions rather than the pleasant ones? We don’t even know for sure that the painful things we fear will even happen. But we do know for sure that God will pour out His mercy and love on us.

Whenever it is windy out, I always try to use the wind to remind me of God’s goodness and love. Just as I cannot even begin to outrun the wind – it easily overtakes me and envelopes me – that is what God’s goodness and love are like. They will hunt me down all the days of my life and overtake me like the wind.

You Welcome Me in Your Home

God accepts me by giving me joy, honors me by giving me refreshment, provides for me with overflowing supply, and pursues me with His goodness and love. And that brings us to this final phrase:

6 ... and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Here we arrive at the end of our journey. We started in the green pastures, were guided in paths of righteousness, passed through the horrible valley of darkness, sat at the table of acceptance and joy and honor and supply, and now here we are at our destination: the house of the Lord.

That table He spread out for me – that was a wonderful feast and a great time. But sometimes when you have the time of your life somewhere, it's almost painful because you know it is going to come to an end. And you hate the thought of leaving and going back home. But this banquet – it is just the first of many, and you don't have to leave when it's over because this is now *your Father's house!*

I told you at the beginning that I don't think God is being pictured here as a host. The picture is not of a host – it is of a father. When you have someone over for dinner, when the evening is over, what do they do? They go home. In some cases it might seem to you like your guests are going to dwell in your house forever, but even those people will eventually realize how late it is and get up and go home. But we don't have to do that because God is not our host; He is our father. The banquet hall is our home – forever.

Church

“That sounds great Darrell, but in my life it's not the reality. When I go in and spend time alone with God in prayer, it doesn't solve my loneliness problem. I still feel just as lonely as ever.”

Here is some good news: it is impossible for the human soul to feel loneliness while having fellowship with God. So if you feel loneliness, it just means you aren't experiencing very much fellowship with God.

“How is that good news?”

It is good news because if you were having fellowship with God, and it wasn't working, you would be without hope. If fellowship with God doesn't work, nothing would work and you would be doomed to a life of loneliness and sorrow with no remedy. But if the problem is that your current prayers and time in Scripture and time at church is not resulting in soul-satisfying, joy-giving, loneliness-killing intimacy with God, then there is still hope. If the medicine doesn't work for you, then you would be without hope. But if the medicine works, and the problem is just that it hasn't gotten into your bloodstream effectively, that's great news. We just need to figure out how to get it into your bloodstream.

There is a kind of fellowship with God that really will bring you joy and take away your loneliness and satisfy the cravings of your soul. And I don't mean to imply here that it only happens in the prayer closet. God uses means. The family warmth that God gives is delivered in large measure through the church.

Mark 10:28 Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!” 29 “I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life.

The church is designed by God to replace the family joy and warmth that you lose in this world by following Christ. And so a big part of finding this fellowship with God has to do with your approach to fellowship at church. Doing things like drawing near to the presence of God by pouring yourself out to others in service and love. And understanding that when someone in the church serves you or shows you some act of kindness, that that is from God. Very often people thank me for the hours I put into study for the sermon. If that means something to you, try not to think so much about that as something I do, and focus instead on the main cause – God. Take that as God drawing near and showing you love and kindness. If someone volunteers their time to work the nursery and watch your kids, take that as a gesture of God's tender love for you – gently leading those who have young. If someone prints the bulletins or leads a prayer group or sets up chairs or cleans the toilets or pays the bills or manages the website or runs

the sound – all of that is God setting the table for the banquet and calling you to enjoy the meal. Don't miss the glorious blessings of the 23rd Psalm because you can't see past the human agents to the God who is orchestrating so many blessings for you every day.

Conclusion

Just You and God

Yes, people are involved. And yes, it is worthwhile to think about those people and what they are doing. But sometimes it is good to do what David does in this psalm and just block everything else out of your view and focus on the Lord. Just you and Him. The ancient Jewish world was much more communal and corporate than our culture of American individualism. However, there are some theologians who take that way too far. They say that the ancient Jewish mind had no concept at all of individual interaction with God. This psalm refutes that kind of thinking. In the 23rd Psalm it almost sounds like there is only one sheep in the entire fold. Just one child in the whole family – just me and God. All these others around me – they are important. Why? Because when I love them I love God. And when they love me, they are just delivering God's love in human form. Learn to think like that, and it will improve your love for others tenfold, and it will improve your ability to receive love from others tenfold.

Benediction: 2 Corinthians 13:14 May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Are there any broken relationships in your life where you might be the enemy and the other person might be the one God is honoring with joy at His table?
- 2) When people are trying to hurt you, is your main hope in them stopping what they are doing, or in God affirming His acceptance of you?
- 3) Are there any areas where God has granted you honor or love or blessing and you have held it off at arm's length because you feel unworthy to receive it?
- 4) When you look at the future, are the two most certain realities God's goodness and God's love chasing you down?
- 5) Is there anything you are doing in your life that is shrinking your cup?