

## ***Thoughts Re: The 23rd Psalm***

It is sad when we hear the 23rd Psalm read at funerals and memorials of those we are quite sure were not Christians, believers in Jesus Christ as their Savior. Not only is its meaning not understood by most all those who hear it but it is not relevant to the deceased, who at so many funerals and memorials the mourners feel are going to “a better place.” The 23rd Psalm is a reassurance for the believers that the God of creation, their creator, who has shown Himself true and faithful in their lives, loving them, caring for them, providing for them and protecting them will indeed bring them to the glory He has promised them at the end of their long, *persevering, enduring life of trust in their Savior*. The following information was derived from a Men’s Bible Study at Calvary Chapel of Downey. The information is a combination of materials from the study book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* by W. Phillip Keller, my answers from the workbook and my personal thoughts regarding the subject matter. It will change forever how I look at this Psalm and I hope it might be “food for thought” and “enlightening” for others.

### ***Psalm 23 - The LORD the Shepherd of His People - A Psalm of David.***

***The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the 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; 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 runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.***

***The LORD is my Shepherd*** – Christians, those of us who have read and reflect on the life of Jesus, His power, achievements and effect on our lives through His Spirit, state proudly that “He is my Shepherd.” Given the proper perspective by the Spirit we learn to understand the blessings God bestows on His own, His care, provision, discipline and direction. In direct contrast, those who reject Him give themselves, most often unknowingly, sometimes with indifference, to Satan who cares nothing for the well-being of his – their ultimate damnation – separation from God for all eternity.

As we go through our stages of life on this earth, the shepherd must also lead his flocks through a season long trek to fresh grazing grounds, moving from one to another so as not to deplete or destroy the fields so they may be utilized in future times. Left to their own instincts the sheep would stay in the same place until there was nothing left. These treks along the way would include pastures, watering holes, valleys, highlands, along with the heat of summer and cold, wet and snow of the winter, finally arriving at their familiar home destination. These are stages in our lives that most, if not all, can relate to as we travel through life. Jesus stated in life we would have tribulation or as it says in *Job 5:7* “*Yet man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward.*” Life is not always easy, life will be tough – but as a sheep’s season long trek is difficult along the way the shepherd is in control. Being led through difficult circumstances gives us confidence we will make it through future situations also - always better for the experience.

It would depend on the shepherd’s attitude and motivation of his job as shepherd that would determine whether his flock flourished, thrived, was safe, healthy and contented or merely existed without concern

for their well-being. He could take pride in his flock by being gentle, kind, intelligently brave and selfless. When ownership is derived from paying a price, it is held with greater pride. Jesus bought us with a price—His blood – His life given for us on the cross and as our Shepherd, we are held close to His heart. He cares for us and our well-being.

Because man is made in the image of God and is given the highest place of all living creatures in his abilities, those who do not know God, or refuse to acknowledge Him, assume it is of themselves that they create and succeed. However, as creative and successful as he has been, each and every man has known his faults and shortcomings and those of each and every other man or woman he has known. In all our wisdom, those who are honest with themselves and understand the nature of sheep are amazed how alike we are to this class of livestock who need endless attention and meticulous care in order to lead a healthy, contented life.

Which man has never felt the instinctive nature to follow the crowd even at time he knew their actions were wrong or not productive? What man has not known fear, been timid or lacked courage? Who has not known in themselves, and others, stubbornness, stupidity or a foolish attitude? Have you not known yourself and heard others admit that although they knew it was in their best interest to follow a beneficial direction, they (and you) were instead drawn to the action which ultimately lead to the outcome you foresaw but hoped wouldn't happen, then regretted your decision when it did? These characteristics are the natural character of sheep and man – to follow the crowd, to be fearful and timid, to be stubborn, stupid and perverse in their actions which go against what is in their best interest.

When we know Christ as our Savior we can be thankful and proud that He is our Shepherd who chose us, bought us with His life, calls us by name, makes us His own and delights in caring for us. Our Good Shepherd: Keeps His sheep safe relieving fear, rescues His sheep from the trouble they get into and provides their needs in abundance. He gets them safely to their destinations, not by driving them, but by leading them. And it is encouraging to know He hears their sounds of distress, rescues and protects them. God does not sleep but is always watching over His own keeping them under His constant care. A hired shepherd who has no attachment or care for the flock will not be attentive to their needs which leads to neglect, disease, harm, discontent and death.

*“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. “I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me — just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father—and I lay down My life for the sheep. John 10:11-15.*

In the Old Testament, God showed that there is a price to be paid for sin. (“*the wages of sin is death*” Romans 6:23). Animals, most commonly lambs, were killed to “cover” the sins of the people for another year. This was done regularly, to remind the people of their continual sin. Jesus’ death on the cross, for you and me, was a “once for all” sacrifice for the sins, past, present and future of those who are called

and accept Him as Savior. As *John 1:29* states, speaking of John the Baptist, *The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

***I shall not want*** – To be part of God's flock is to be content because He has promised to provide all the needs of His own. And God is faithful. Under the Shepherd's care how can we not be content to be safe, our needs being abundantly met, led down the proper paths and knowing when we foolishly stray He is there to safely take us to our destination. When our needs are met we need not look elsewhere for satisfaction. Unless Jesus Christ is your Savior, your Shepherd, you cannot claim or enjoy the benefits provided by Him and are subject to: ***Hunger*** – A search for satisfaction in your life – trying to find something to fill the void in your life which only God can fill. ***No protection from the attack of the enemy*** – who seeks to destroy your life by promising that which the world sees as fulfillment but is in reality empty promises. The lure is always desirable, enticing and attractive but always hidden are the consequences, the price to be paid for impulsive actions without considering or anticipating the probable ramifications of your actions. ***Lack of contentment*** – "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" mentality. But we don't realize how high the cost of that water bill is. Most every time we seek greener pastures, we find out wherever we go a new set of problems appear.

Just as a good father here on earth delights that his children, under his care, have grown to be men and women who have become good, loving, responsible and mature adults – and as in the life of Christians as the Apostle John says in *3 John 1:4* "*I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.*" God delights that those who have surrendered to His care, by their faith and trust, will live a life of safety and contentment.

***He makes me to lie down in green pastures*** - As by their nature, sheep cannot truly rest unless they are free of fear, tension, aggravation and hunger. We all know when we are hungry it is hard to concentrate on anything else until that hunger has been satisfied. It is the same for man. Have you ever really felt you could rest when you were fearful of / or anticipating a distressing or troubling situation? Or stressed out with tension, bitterness, animosity or hostility? What about aggravations, irritations and annoyances caused by others or the resulting circumstances? God has promised to keep us safe until His job for us on earth is done. Though many can recite situations where that did not seem to be the case for a believer, at least here in this physical life, Jesus has stated that our eternal place as one of His own in heaven is secure, for once we are His He says "*no one can take them from My Father's hand.*" We know the Lord is our refuge and strength. When we feel there is no stability in our situation and trouble surrounds us we need to re-focus our perspective believing God is in control of the situation and is ready, willing and able to work all things for our good. We should be willing to trust in His ability to do so and take Him at His Word that He is always with us and will never leave us in the midst of our trials. (See Footprints)

If we would only read God's Word (the Creator's Owner Manual) and believe its truths, we would see that the aggravations, irritations and annoyances of others most always come because we do not want to accept what others feel we must or should do, especially when we feel we have the right to our point of view. Humility is God's answer to not letting these situations or people take away our peace and joy. Not insisting on what we deserve but letting go of what is really not important and instead looking for a way to benefit others. He has shown me I can always read His Word and learn of Him and the truth of His character and love for us, with the time I have, not wasting time on the insignificant.

When you are humble you are not contentious with others. You do not strive as one who feels he is “owed” something. That doesn’t mean you don’t use wisdom to plan for your life, to work to improve your lot in life. You merely learn to be content with what the Lord has provided for you and follow His lead. Our nature is to want to belong – to follow the crowd – but we know that has seldom taken us to “new greener pastures,” just travelling the same trampled path to mediocrity of those before us.

The Lord cares enough for me to prepare the “land of my life,” to provide me with green pastures that develop contentment, a quiet and restful spirit that helps keep me in the proper perspective and keeps me from striving to attain that which he is willing to provide. And when times of unease develop – His presence calms my spirit and provides renewed strength in which to accomplish what I will encounter each new day.

We are told that God has gone before us to prepare our way. He clears the way ahead and becomes a light to our path. The unrelenting effort of Christ on our behalf, because of His love for us, is why He has led us out of Egypt (our life of sin) into the Promised Land (into a life of overcoming victory). The Holy Spirit is the oil, the healing salve that brings comfort and relief from the harsh, abrasive aspects of life. He brings quietness, strength and calmness in the face of frustrations and futility. God has put so much work into preparing the green pastures for us; we need the proper perspective to realize that, appreciate it and be thankful for all He has done in that preparation.

***He leads me beside the still water*** – Leading, as in gentle persuasion. Water is the most essential element for life on this earth. Our thirst lets us know when we are lacking the vital element that keeps our body functioning properly. Those of us who are Christians understand why Christ is called the Living Water. The Father, our Creator, knows what we need and has provided the cleanest, purest, Living Water and has told us how to find it and when we do, how it can satisfy like nothing else. We who have experienced it find it hard to understand why so many people cannot see the difference between the polluted, filthy puddles that the world offers as fulfillment and the clean, pure and healthy stream of Living Water. Why can’t they see what we see? The answer may be for the same reason it has taken so long for many of us to come around, our pride and self-determination that we have the ability to successfully reach our goals on our own.

When one doesn’t know Christ, he searches for fulfillment in worldly places and philosophies that sound good, promise satisfaction but in the end are proven to be lacking by the void that still remains. Satisfaction and contentment of the soul comes only through coming to Christ to be filled. When God brings us to the still waters it is a place of rest, contentment, quietness and refreshment. When was the last time – when you had a moment to yourself – that you felt content and refreshed? If most people answered honestly they would probably say that their “quiet time” was intruded upon by the overwhelming thoughts of the cares of the world and what they needed “to do” to relieve the stresses that seem to be never ending. God loves to see me refreshed and satisfied, no longer looking to the world for fulfillment and satisfaction but to Him for the peace in my heart, soul and mind that only He can provide.

Satisfaction and refreshment of the spirit brings renewed energy for the tasks that lay ahead. That is why He invites us to come to Him, accepting the leading of the Holy Spirit that draws us to Him.

He wants us to follow Him, to know Him as the sovereign, providential Creator who knows the best path for our lives. He not only has the power to lead us but is ready, willing and more than able. When we understand God's love for us and what Jesus, God the Son, did to prove that love, we will hopefully understand that whatever God allows in our lives, no matter how tragic or unfair it may seem, He has provided the means for us to persevere, endure, trust in Him and come out the other side of our trials refreshed, and as stated before, always better for the experience.

For many of us, we are so impatient to go our own way that we become drawn to the first of the worldly distractions that seem to offer a type of satisfaction that appears so easily within our grasp. Without realizing it we are inclined to stop along the way at the first polluted puddle, where many have traveled before us and muddied the waters with religions, pagan worship, human philosophies and other aspects of life that offer to fill the void. Each person searches for one or more things in life. We may seek knowledge, whether in science or academics, or career paths that may include arts, culture, music, travel or sport. Many seek fame and fortune. However we all have heard about those in the past who have achieved one or both and ended up committing suicide. Shattered hopes, barren souls and disappointment many times lead one down other destructive paths seeking fulfillment. Maybe pleasure is your goal, seeking strange companions, sensuality, indulgence, gratification, recreation or amusement. Not all of which are sinful but many of the sinful paths may provide satisfaction but the Bible warns that the pleasures of sin are fleeting and last but for a season. Lust cannot be quenched but always demands more. Even worthy social causes can lead one to hollow, empty and unfulfilled destinations.

True satisfaction that fills our ever present void only comes only when we accept the Living Water offered by the Lord. This fresh water supply is the strength, encouragement, perseverance and endurance that sees us through our trials on earth, of which all mankind must experience. In this life He guides our life's searches and leads us along the path that produces contentment, satisfaction and fulfillment. The Lord's provision is that He provides shade for rest and refreshment so we are ready to handle what may come our way. When we accept the Lord and follow Him, He leads to a life which is nourished by a fresh, clean, pure water source with our destination being eternity in heaven.

We must remember that because God is sovereign, providential and in control of all things, He most certainly will be faithful to provide for His own as He has promised and that He will do what is necessary in our lives to bring us onto the path He has laid out for us. Although those paths leading us to His path may be fraught with what is at times seems dark, deep, dangerous and uncomfortable situations, we know the ultimate destination is one that provides rest, comfort and refreshment bringing dignity, direction, satisfaction and contentment, making the way to our destination all worthwhile.

Many times we insist on making our own way – refusing to accept God's offer to lead or outright rejection of Him, sometimes thinking because there is no immediate negative ramifications of our choices that God approves or just doesn't care. He does care and because justice is not always swift does not mean it isn't sure. I don't believe I'm the only one who has seen that there have been times that the path we led took many years to come back and affect us in ways we regret. Our discomfort is God's doing. He tracks us, thwarts our dreams, foils our best laid plans, and frustrates our hopes. He backs us into a corner, waiting until we realize that nothing will ease our pain, nothing will make life worth living except His presence. Many of us strayed very far, and for far too long, needing to end up on our knees and

calling His name, before we realized, in His patience, He had been waiting all along with an outstretched hand for just that moment. Some are young; some are older and though we never wish pain on anyone we pray the Lord will bring them to their knees, knowing they have no control to change their situation, that they will call on Him, and in doing so, through His love, grace and patience, receive forgiveness and salvation. In hearing, understanding and accepting the Gospel message we allow God's Holy Spirit to guide us, helping us to avoid what could have been many unpleasant life experiences along the way.

***He restores my soul*** – It has been said that our God is the God of the 2nd chance. In fact, He gives us innumerable chances to finally come to the conclusion that we, in our stubbornness and pride have realized we have been on the road to nowhere. One of the great joys as a Christian is coming to the conclusion in time, in my life, to stop and rest knowing I no longer have to strive to earn God's favor. Jesus has paid the price and stresses to us in so many words that He does not grade on a curve. We cannot give enough or do enough "good deeds" to earn His favor. Whether or not throughout our lives, our good deeds outweigh our bad, (on a scale we perceive), is irrelevant in God's eye. Only acceptance of the Gospel message allows us to become one of His own. Jesus said *"I am the Way, the Truth and the Life, no man comes to the Father but by Me."* As stated in the opening of this message, many, even those who do not believe in a heaven, think, or at least hope, they are going to a better place. But in all of man's history there has never been anyone who has been able to prove that. The only direct acknowledgement of heaven is in the Bible. If you accept that as truth you must also accept that the Bible states there is a requirement to get there. In addition, it states if you don't meet that requirement hell will be your destination. Hell is a decision of choice because of pride and arrogance. Heaven, by the grace of God is a free gift! If the Bible is true and you have left God out of your life, *then He is just making it permanent.* *If you feel the punishment is too great, you don't realize how great the crime of rejecting Christ is!*

Since this message regarding the 23rd Psalm is about the similarities of men and sheep and shepherds and the Lord as our Shepherd, let's get back to another example. There are times in a flock that a sheep becomes a "cast" or "cast down" sheep. Even the largest, fattest, strongest and sometimes the healthiest sheep can become cast and possibly a casualty. A cast sheep is a pathetic sight, lying on its back, its feet in the air, frantically struggling to stand up without success. This happens when a large, fat or long-fleeced sheep lies down comfortably in a depression in the ground, rolling side to side to stretch or relax, suddenly the center of gravity in the body shifts so that it turns on its back far enough that its feet cannot touch the ground. The sheep panics and frantically tries to right itself but to no avail. Depending on the weather it can die in a few hours or a couple days. It is also subject to all the predators waiting for such an event.

Many times when counting his sheep, the shepherd realizes one is missing. He will quickly go and search for that sheep for he knows time is of the essence. With this information we have a little better understanding of the following parable. *So Jesus told them this story: "If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep. In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away! Luke 15:3-7*

As one who can personally relate to being restored, having experienced seeing God lead me from the dark to the light, His Spirit quieting my spirit, eliminating worry about the future knowing He will lead and supply has taught me contentment. God's faithfulness has taught me to trust Him for my needs. I long to explain in some way to others, who have not had that experience, the gratefulness a person feels when his eyes are opened and he sees himself as he really is, as God sees him. A person whose heart is deceitfully wicked with a natural bent away from what is usually best for us which is why so many of us wrestle with our consciences so much of the time. Though God loves us, He gives us the ability to stray from the best path for our life just as the sheep does – many times to find ourselves in a type of quandary, trouble where we find ourselves in situations we cannot control or remedy. Situations that cause us to be sad, dejected, miserable, unhappy or depressed wondering 'what do we do next?' Similar to the situation the cast sheep finds itself in. Believers have God's Spirit to guide and comfort them while unbelievers have only friends, family or acquaintances to turn to for help, sympathy or empathy. Though that may be sufficient to help you through some of the time, remember, they are but fallible men (and women) having their own problems and probably not handling them all that well. When God is the anchor of your life, though you will stray, He never lets you go beyond acceptable bounds but draws you back. *"And if you leave God's paths and go astray, you will hear a voice behind you say, "No, this is the way; Walk Here. Isaiah 30:21*

Even when times are good the unbeliever living a life of self and selfishness, pride, worldly thoughts and ideas or acquiring material possessions, - finds (as can a believer) the clarity of God's truth obscured. It can be at times like these that God disciplines those He loves to get their attention. Someone who has everything loses it all, marriages and relationships (children / parents) are shattered, employment is lost. Situations you thought you had under control you now find are totally out of your control. Feeling as though you are at the bottom and that the only way is up. That is when God is waiting with His arms out, reaching down desiring for you to reach up to Him, the only One who can lift you to the place where you can be the man or woman He created you to be.

***He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake*** – When left to our own devices, we are, as are sheep, creatures of habit. It is said they will follow the same trails until they become ruts, they will graze the same pastures until the plant roots are permanently damaged and they will pollute their own ground until it is corrupt with disease and parasites. Have you ever felt you were in a rut? Have you gotten into a routine that once was comfortable but now seems as though it has a hold of you that you cannot seem to move on from? Are there sins and habits in your life that once were just things you just had to experience that now leave that dark cloud over you when you continually find yourself drawn and unable to pull back from? The young may not have the life experiences to relate to, but most of us can remember or recognize (even now) when our lives have become unproductive ruts, when we have found ourselves too stubborn to change, continually looking in all the same places, doing the same things and expecting, or hoping, for different results. It is said that that is the definition of insanity. When our lives have become polluted with our unproductive, unsatisfying, regrettable, unchanging lifestyles, most times we are to blame for the corruption of our lives. What we usually find – way, way – to late is that it is not just our lives we have negatively affected but those of our parents, siblings and if applicable, our spouses and children. Damage that most of the time cannot be remedied or restored. Just like when you've spoken those damaging, wounding, hurtful, insensitive, unkind words that

you regret as soon as they are out of your mouth. The damage has been done and you may never recover from the results. See *Reflections* below. However, the Lord specializes, yes, He is the ultimate specialist in transforming lives from any and all variations of the above circumstances we find ourselves in. He sanctifies us, sets us apart for His own. When our lives are transformed because of our hearing, understanding and accepting the Gospel message and we are seen by all who “knew us when” having been changed into a new person with a new heart and a positive purpose in life, though it may take some time for them to accept you are no longer the person you used to be, there will be no doubt that it is a work of God – to His glory! That is what we want them to see, something they cannot deny and may even envy.

It has never been, nor is it now or will it ever be easy to give up fighting to do our own thing our own way but just know that it not only hinders you from becoming a better person, having a better life, being a good positive influence on your family and those around you and seeing life as it was meant to be seen but saves you from an eternity in hell (separated from God for all eternity) and promises you life everlasting in heaven. God tells us we do not have the ability to make these changes on our own. He promised His Spirit will live in you to lead, to guide, to comfort and instruct, bringing you the Peace *of* God – *after* you have made peace *with* God.

***Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me -*** Every person who has ever lived walks through life not knowing what the future holds and everyone will encounter trials and tribulations of one kind or another – everyone. Because Jesus Christ, God incarnate as a human being, experienced the physical and spiritual trials we face, we can believe He understands our weariness. It is easy to understand why He is patient with us because He knows our trials, and the weariness they produce, are many. When panic, fear and misgivings descend on us we are told to cast our burdens on the Lord and He will sustain you. Instead of following emotional impulses, which bring fear, trusting God is an intentional decision. Because God is in control, all will work out for my (your) best. We attain this confidence accepting all our adversity with an attitude of quiet acceptance.

It is only in experiencing the darkness that we can appreciate the light. When you have nothing or are at your lowest point, then you progress forward and acquire something, even of modest substance, whether spiritual or material, you will appreciate what you have. Similarly, no matter what your situation in life, however dark your trial becomes, how dismal the disappointment or distressing the dilemma, you don't have to look too far from you to see the trials and difficulties in life others have to deal with. Your problems may be temporary or a season in your life. Some people have to deal with their situations their entire life. With the right perspective you will realize you don't really have it so bad. Yet you still have to deal with your situation. You can't go around it, you can't go over it, you have to go through it. Those of us who have lived to see our “senior years” can attest to the fact that even the worst times of our lives, to this point, are behind us and most of us cannot recall the details of those events and in some cases don't even remember other dark days we encountered because we made it “through them” and moved on. Successfully passing through these valleys of life's experiences allows for confidence that we will navigate through future situations with God on our side. God promises to lead, uphold and sustain us through life's struggles – Do you really want to carry that load by yourself? Remember, valleys always lead to higher ground. The valleys are life's learning experiences where we grow in wisdom and understanding of what life can bring our way.



If you reflect honestly on some of your life's trials you will see how you have grown and benefited from those experiences. Approach your trials knowing God has allowed them for your benefit. How do you react to them? Calmly. How do you go through them? Fearlessly. How do you cope with the calamities that come your way? Knowing it's the only way (through them) to higher ground. When you are at the bottom – the only way is up.

Put your faith and trust to practice. ***Always remember*** - Life is like an approaching storm. One day there is blue skies, it is warm and all is well at the moment. The wind then begins to blow in the dark storm clouds, the rain, thunder and lightning. It may at times seem as though it will never end. You know above the clouds up in the sky the sun is shining as it does every day, however right now it's dark dreary and depressing. Then there it is, a break in the clouds, a ray or two of sunshine and a nice breeze moving the storm on through on its due course. Before you realize it, the fleecy clouds with the silver lining break up and move on leaving the blue skies, fresh, clean air and a new appreciation for God's gift to us in nature. You have and can continue to endure through the storms of life just as the storms of nature. Endurance is the life experience that allows us to develop the understanding and knowledge that the Lord has brought us through those times and because He is faithful will see us through future trials. *"...Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward."* (Job 5: 7) *"These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation..."* (John 16:33) Disappointments and heartaches in their various degrees are an undeniable fact of life but better times are *always* just a little ways ahead just as the visible light at the end of the tunnel is soon upon us. Accept your trials as a maturing process knowing ***"it will pass."*** Someone might say, "what if it doesn't and I die? Nothing terrifies people more than the fear of death. But when we receive Christ, death in reality holds no more fear for us since it brings us into the presence of God. After conquering death, speaking of His resurrection and our eternal life, in (John 14:19) Jesus said *"Because I live you shall live also."*

Sometimes life becomes overwhelming. It can make many irrational thoughts go through our minds. Depression can set in. Sometimes a person may feel they don't know how they are going to handle the situation they find themselves in. Many have not lived long enough and experienced enough to realize that no matter how bad a situation may seem at the time it will get better, just as the storms of life that were described above. Time usually solves most problems, or at least makes them seem less severe and a little more bearable. These are the times to turn to God for guidance, help and to trust He will be faithful to see you through to better days ahead. Don't be afraid to face the unknown future. Some cannot stand the pressure of what others, especially family or friends, might say. Remember, what someone else thinks of you or says about you is just their opinion. Don't let it affect or direct your life. You grow and mature by facing problems and solving them the best way you can usually gaining confidence as you go along. Whenever possible, reach out to someone you think might be feeling overwhelmed by some event(s) in their life. You may never know how grateful they might be to have a friend to confide in and what serious problem or rash judgment you may help them avoid. In this section, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, *I will fear no evil - for You are with me*, just reiterates (restates) what Scripture says throughout the Bible.

***Your Rod and Your Staff, they comfort me*** – The rod is a weapon of defense, an extension of the owner's right arm. It's a symbol of his strength, his power and his authority, a safeguard for himself and

his flock. It is used to discipline and correct wayward sheep. This rod is a comfort to the flock for with it the shepherd protects and controls the flock. The rod represents the Word of God. *2nd Timothy 3:6,7* states that “*all Scripture is God breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness – that the man (or woman) of God may be complete and equipped for every good work.*” When Scripture speaks – God speaks. You have been given “the Mind of Christ.” It should be a comfort to have your Maker provide an authoritative, clear cut, powerful instrument by which to conduct yourself, one that keeps us from confusion and chaos, which in turn brings a great sense of quiet serenity.

The rod is also used to keep adequate count of the flock and to detect disease, wounds and other defects of the sheep. In the same way God’s word shows us our own defects of character and actions. His Word exposes all but more importantly lays out the proper direction to follow. The rod and the Word wards off predators, false teachers and other dangers and usually means the way ahead has been made safe for travel. God’s word is the weapon to use against the enticements of this world. It is God’s Word to us, to keep in our hearts for our comfort, protection, guidance and benefit. It constantly reminds us that our natural inclinations – led by self – are destructive and that we need guidance.

The shepherd’s staff is a unique instrument used for the care and management of sheep – and sheep only. No other profession carries a shepherd’s staff. It is normally a long, slender stick, often with a crook or hook at one end. Whereas the rod conveys the concept of authority, of power, of discipline, of defense against danger, the word “staff” speaks of all that is longsuffering and kind. It is for their comfort. Just as the rod is representative of the Word of God, so the staff is symbolic of the Spirit of God. The staff is used by the shepherd to reach out and catch individual sheep, young or old, to draw them close to him for intimate examination, especially when the sheep may be timid or normally tend to keep their distance from the shepherd. The staff is also used for guiding sheep, to lead them in a new direction or through dangerous, difficult routes, using close, personal, intimate contact. We are told in Scripture that the Holy Spirit was sent to be our Comforter, our Guide and to direct our paths. He draws us to Christ for a warm, personal fellowship. Christians, experiencing this belonging to Him and being in His care, would not rather be anywhere else.

***You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies*** – When the shepherd and sheep reach the highlands, the plateau, the mesa, he goes ahead to remove any dangers i.e. debris in the water, poisonous weeds and any dangerous predators he may see, in order to give the flock a safe place to graze. Usually, earlier in the season, the shepherd has already made an initial trip there to enrich the area with salt and minerals in strategic areas he will lead his flock to. When he arrives with the flock, as best as he can, the shepherd seeks to remove the current dangers and predators he may find. But since they are sly and cunning, they are still able to attack when not detected. Also, our adversary, the devil, seeks to destroy us at every opportunity we give him. Scripture tells us to be “*sober and vigilant, to resist the devil and he will flee from us.*” However, he knows our weaknesses and will be back to try again. God tells us “*do not be afraid, not to be terrified for the Lord your God is with you.*”

We as Christians, like sheep, many times feel we have to try anything that’s put in front of us. Even though as human beings, many times we know there are possible dangers, yet, to our detriment we give it a try anyway. Jesus warned Peter that Satan desired to tempt him and sift him like wheat,

but Christ pointed out that He had prayed that Peter's faith might not fail (or be eclipsed), by the difficult situations he would encounter. Our great Good Shepherd is going ahead of us in every situation, anticipating what danger we may encounter, and praying for us that in the time of temptation, we will not fall victim but use the way of escape he has made for us, if we listen to the Spirit's leading.

God loves man whom He created. Jesus totally identified Himself with humanity. He has, therefore, a care and compassion for us beyond our ability to grasp. No wonder He makes every possible provision to insure that when we have to cope with Satan, sin, or self, the contest will not be one-sided. Rather, we can be sure He has been in that situation before; He is in it now again with us, and because of this, the prospects of our preservation are excellent. It is this attitude of rest in Him, of confidence in His care, of relaxation as we realize His presence in the picture that can make the Christian's life one of calm and quiet confidence. The Christian's life can include times of sorrow and even the mountaintop experiences can have tough experiences along the route. In His care and concern for us, Christ still insures that we will have some gladness with our sadness, some delightful days as well as dark days, and sunshine as well as shadow. God is sovereign and providential and has said He will never leave us or forsake us. With faith, trust and confidence we will endure and persevere. As stated before – Do you really want to make life's journey alone?

***You anoint my head with oil*** - In the summertime as the flocks travels to graze, many different kinds of flies and other insects, who are parasites, can irritate the sheep to the point that they deliberately beat their heads against trees, rocks, posts and anything else they think will relieve the irritation. Flies, mosquitos, gnats and other winged insects get into the eyes, nose, ears and irritations can lead to infections which will cause the sheep to alter the natural behavior that helps them flourish into behavior that is detrimental and can affect much of the flock which can ultimately be devastating to the entire flock. However, the shepherd knowing this situation lies ahead in the summer, has a remedy to prevent as much of the damage as possible. He brings with him an ointment, a salve, an antidote that prevents the insects from landing and encroaching to the areas that cause so much irritation. Once the ointment is applied, the sheep's demeanor and actions change noticeably. The aggravations, irritability and frenzied restlessness are gone and peaceful contentment is restored. However, this salve must be repeatedly applied in order to keep the problem under control.

In our lives, each and every day we have so many irritations and distractions that arise that can range from petty annoyances to major disruptive events that can make us feel like beating our heads against something sometimes because we just don't know what else to do. God's Holy Spirit is represented by oil throughout the Scriptures. We are told the purpose of the Holy Spirit, in the believer's life, is to guide, comfort, teach and generally lead us to react and handle such unexpected events with an attitude and perspective directed by wisdom. As the saying goes, "you are what you eat," the same applies, that "you are what you think." Think and dwell on distresses and harmful thoughts and your mind will follow through with that type of attitude and behavior. The Apostle Paul says in *Philippians* "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. *Philippians 4:8-10*

Following this wise advice will allow you to dwell on the good and truthful aspects of life which brings with it a peace and contentment that allows you to make progress moving forward. God's Spirit and His Word is the antidote for that which is in the world, and drawn to us and us to it. God has made available to us what we need. We need to continually strive to utilize that which is available by staying in the Word and focusing on the Truth knowing Jesus has been where we are and He has promised to be with us and see us through all things.

The Lord watches over and cares for His own as a loving father. He has love and compassion and wants them to be healthy, contented and reassured that He is their protector and will guide them safely. When we have God's Spirit directing our lives, more often than not, our personality and disposition will project a peace, joy, patience and generosity in our lives toward others. Times like this, we look back on how we used to be; prideful, stubborn, selfish, intolerant, uncharitable and realize how foolish and destructive those attitudes and emotions were and the troubling results they produced that many of us may still be paying for and living with.

***My cup runs over*** – My cup, or my lot in life – all the blessings listed previously, are mine (and yours) as a child of God. Also, as stated earlier, you don't have to look too far to see the predicaments and unenviable situations others have to contend with. Take a moment to contemplate the blessing you enjoy. Where would you be without them? Sure, others may have it much better in life (in your eyes), but you don't know what brought them to that position in life – blessings of God for following His Word or their stepping on others to attain what they have. *Psalm 73* (NLT) shows that though we don't understand why the wicked prosper, they will end up facing God's wrath – an unenviable position you don't want to be in. Our cup runs over with an overcoming life, God's Spirit within us, to handle whatever comes our way, whether good or bad. We have no problem accepting the good and occasionally remembering to thank and praise God for it, but how many give God thanks when things are not so great in our lives? Even though we are told, in the long run, they are for our benefit. See "*In it after all*" below.

Under the care of a good, responsible, loving shepherd the sheep are provided for with good pastures, clean water, protection from insects and parasites and a gentle, caring guidance back from where they may stray, all with a gentle, merciful care instead of cruel, unkind discipline. They develop a calm confidence that where they are being led is safe and healthy. As stated before, sheep and man are so similar in their natural character. Under mismanagement, sheep can be extremely destructive. They can ruin and ravage land almost beyond remedy. Man, under mismanagement – himself – and his own ways – can ruin their lives, many times almost beyond remedy. Sheep can also be most beneficial when properly managed. Their manure is the best balanced of any domestic livestock. When scattered efficiently over the pastures it is of enormous benefit to the soil. Man, when guided through his life by God, can produce much good for himself, his family and others. Those who do good in this world without God can still help mankind but only temporarily for their time on earth, and it has no eternal benefit for him or those he may help. God's goodness and mercy can, and should be, a legacy in my life so that after I am gone, lives that may have been touched by me will also love God, praise and serve Him and relay the knowledge of His love, grace, mercy, compassion, justice and salvation to others. Ask yourself, will I leave behind peace in the lives of others or turmoil? Will I leave behind forgiveness or bitterness?

Do I leave behind contentment or conflict? Do I leave behind joy or frustration? Do I leave behind love or rancor (resentment, vindictiveness, malice, hatred)? Many (most?) us can look back at how we conducted our lives, and the mess(es) we have left behind us and wish we could “cover our tracks.” Since we cannot change the past, we need to forgive ourselves and move forward on a positive path. A child of God should leave behind uplifting encouragement and inspiration for others.

***Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;*** - Throughout the Bible we have been shown example after example of God working in the lives of those who knew Him and trusted Him. They knew from experience, seeing God’s goodness displayed all through their lives, seeing their faith rewarded by a God who showed Himself faithful, loving, compassionate, merciful and so gracious despite disciplining them when needed to show Himself also as a God of justice, showing the seriousness of following His ways. When we have seen God’s work in our lives and acknowledge that we could not have come as far as we have in our transformed lives without His grace and sovereign, providential work, we can move forward in life with assurance that He is in control. As we mature in our faith we see God at work all around us which gives us confidence that He has been with us and will continue to be with us, always in control of our destiny.

David was a man who, though through earlier times in his life, knew God was sovereign and in control but reverted to his own reasoning at times along the way, making serious errors in judgment. It probably wasn’t until God had placed him as King of Israel (Israel and Judah) that he could reflect back and see how “...*all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28), to those who seek God’s will and submit to His wisdom. Every experience is a training ground for our future.

When I was drawn to God and embraced Him, I can now see from where He has brought me and how He has blessed me. Knowing He has supplied my needs and directed my way when I had no clue where I was going and had nothing to fall back on - On more than one occasion – Has shown me He is faithful to supply my needs and will guide me in the way I should go.

***I will dwell in the house of the LORD (the presence of the Lord) Forever*** – As Christians, because God is our (my) Shepherd I’m thankful for the care and concern God shows to us throughout our lives, how He has provided for us and led us through the trials of life, which in reflection have strengthened us and given us wisdom. The confidence and contentment we should have in all aspects of our life should be obvious to others and we should be eager to give God all the glory. Jesus states that He is the only way of access into the family and household of God and that it is in understanding and accepting the Gospel message of Jesus as our Savior that allows us to be included. By accepting any other version that adds or detracts from the basic truths is like trying to get in through the back door – only to be rejected and eliminated from being one of God’s own. That’s where Satan wants you. Deception is his game, to distract you from the truth you have heard, to keep you from serving God, to keep you from knowing the eternal consequences of rejecting Him after all He has shown you. Don’t let those famous last words “I’m not ready yet” hang over you while paying the price – eternity separated from God. *To dwell - In the house of the LORD forever* - is only for those who put their faith and trust in Him to see

them through this life. If you don't want God in your life here on earth, or do not want to be under His care, He will not force anyone to be with Him, in His House, forever in eternity.

In conclusion, the Shepherd keeps his sheep safe, relieving our fears, rescues us from the trouble we get into, provides for our needs and takes pride in our good condition and contentment. He leads us safely through all our trials – to the other side. He sees and hears us when we call to Him. He rescues and protects us and is always in control. He is a good Father who has love and compassion for His own. He owns us because He redeemed us with His blood.

Whether you believe it or not, as a non-believer you are: In bondage to evil, the natural state of man (*Romans 3:10-12*), under divine wrath (*Romans 1:8*), spiritually dead (*Ephesians 4:17,18*), and without hope (*Ephesians 2:12*). At the time of salvation a dramatic change takes place. You become: A new creation in Christ (*2 Corinthians 5:17*), spiritually alive in Him (*Ephesians 2:5*), willingly controlled by Christ (*Romans 6:22*), and a recipient of God's divine grace (*Ephesians 2:8*). You are delivered from the domain of darkness into the kingdom light of God's beloved Son (*Colossians 1:3*), you then possess the righteousness of Christ (*2 Corinthians 5:21*) and will share in His eternal inheritance (*Romans 8:16,17*).

*"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."* (*Romans 8:1*) That is, those who are **"born again."**

Jesus Christ, the righteous and sinless Son of God, having taken upon Himself man's every sin *past, present and future*, and paying the penalty of death, (*once and for all*) in turn gave us His righteousness.

However... **"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. But now God has shown us a different way to heaven - not by 'being good enough' and trying to keep His laws, but by a new way (though not new, really, for the Scriptures told about it long ago). Now God says He will accept and acquit us - declare us 'not guilty' - if we trust Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, by coming to Christ, no matter who we are or what we have been like. Yes, all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious ideal; yet now God declares us 'not guilty' of offending Him, if we trust in Jesus Christ, who in His kindness freely takes away our sins. For God sent Christ Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to end all God's anger against us. He used Christ's blood and our faith as the means of saving us from His wrath."** (*Romans 3:22-26*)

**"For salvation that comes from trusting Christ - which is that we preach - is already within easy reach of each of us; in fact, it is as near as our own hearts and mouths. For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord, and believe in your own heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in his heart that a man becomes right with God; and with his mouth he tells others of his faith, confirming his salvation. For the Scriptures tell us that no one who believes in Christ will ever be disappointed. Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect: they have all the same Lord who generously gives His riches to all those who ask Him for them. Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."** (*Romans 10:8-13*)

## *The Gospel*

There is no entrance into heaven without the one and only proper qualification. It will be your answer to God's question "*What did you do with My son Jesus?*" There are many ways to say what you believe the gospel means. God knows the knowledge He has brought to you and He knows your heart. One type of acceptable answer would be, "*I accepted Jesus as my Savior after hearing and believing the gospel message - which is, God sent Jesus to this earth to make God known to man and for the purpose of dying, in my place, for my sins, that is - my redemption. I believe by faith that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, and God as the 2nd Person of the Trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), who came to this world in human flesh, the only sinless man, who died on the cross, shedding His blood for our sins and was resurrected from the dead to affirm who He was and to give us hope. It is my responsibility to acknowledge and confess my sins and to repent, turning away from my sins and to ask for forgiveness. Salvation is wholly of God by grace,(unmerited, undeserved favor), on the basis of our **trust** in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood on the cross, and **not** on the basis of anything we can do. More importantly, understanding that it is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that shows He conquered death and gives us the assurance that all He said is true. The redemption of man being accomplished by His death on the cross and three days later, the greatest event to ever take place on earth, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* Yes, the Resurrection. It is the reason we celebrate Easter and do so in the springtime. It is the beginning of new life. The beginning of our new life, (no matter how old we may be), when we acknowledge that He died in our place for our sins.

## ***Footprints***

*“One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord. Many scenes from my life flashed across the sky. In each scene I noticed footprints in the sand. Sometimes there were two sets of footprints, other times there was only one. This bothered me because I noted that during the low periods of my life, when I was suffering from anguish, sorrow or defeat, I could see only one set of footprints. So I said to the Lord, ‘You promised me, Lord, that if I followed You, You would walk with me always. I have noticed that during the most trying periods of my life there has been only one set of footprints in the sand. Why, when I have needed You most, have you not been there for me?’ “The Lord replied, ‘The times you have seen only one set of footprints, my child, is when I carried you.’”*

*- Margaret Fishback Powers*



***Psalm 73 - A Psalm of Asaph - From "THE BOOK" A special version of The Living Bible.***

*Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose hearts are pure.*

*"...But as for me, I came so close to stumbling. My feet were slipping and I was almost gone. For I was envious of the prosperity of the proud and wicked. Yes, all through life their road is smooth! They grow sleek and fat. They aren't always in trouble and plagued with problems like everyone else, so their pride sparkles like a jeweled necklace, and their clothing is woven of cruelty! These fat cats have everything their hearts could ever wish for! They scoff at God and threaten His people. How proudly they speak! They boast against the very heavens, and their words strut through the earth. And so God's people are dismayed and confused, and drink it all in. "Does God realize what is going on?" they ask. "Look at these men of arrogance; they never have to lift a finger – theirs is a life of ease; and all the time their riches multiply." Have I been wasting my time? Why take the trouble to be pure? All I get out of it is trouble and woe – every day and all day long! - If I had really said that, I would have been a traitor to Your people. Yet it is so hard to explain it – this prosperity of those who hate (or ignore) the Lord. Then one day I went into God's sanctuary to meditate, and thought about the future of these evil men. What a slippery path they are on – suddenly God will send them sliding over the edge of the cliff down to their destruction: an instant end to all their happiness, an eternity of terror. Their present life is only a dream! They will awaken to the truth as one awakens from a dream of things that never really were!"*

*Then I realized that my heart was bitter, and I was all torn up inside. I was so foolish and ignorant— I must have seemed like a senseless animal to You. Yet I still belong to You; You hold my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel, leading me to a glorious destiny. Whom have I in heaven but You? I desire You more than anything on earth. My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; He is mine forever. Those who desert Him will perish, for You destroy those who abandon You. But as for me, how good it is to be near God! I have made the Sovereign LORD my shelter, and I will tell everyone about the wonderful things You do.*

## *Larnelle Harris - In It After All*

WORDS & MUSIC BY DAWN THOMAS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7FzdbL1kXHQ>

SO YOU WERE IN IT AFTER ALL

ALL OF THOSE MOMENTS I SPENT CRYING  
WHEN SOMETHING INSIDE OF ME WAS DYING

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT YOU HEARD ME EACH TIME I CALLED

YOU HAD A REASON FOR THOSE TRIALS  
IT SEEMS I GREW STRONGER EVERY MILE  
NOW I KNOW YOU WERE IN IT AFTER ALL

WE'RE ALWAYS READY LORD TO TAKE THE GLORY

BUT WE'RE SELDOM WILLING TO ENDURE THE PAIN

YOU WERE WITH ME WHEN THE SUN WAS SHINING,  
AND YOU WERE STILL BESIDE ME WHEN IT RAINED

SO YOU WERE IN IT AFTER ALL

TAKING THE BLOWS THAT I'D BEEN GIVEN,  
MENDING THE WOUNDS THAT NEEDED MENDING  
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT YOU HEARD ME EACH TIME I CALLED

I GUESS IT'S EASY NOW TO SEE IT,  
I DON'T KNOW HOW I COULD HAVE MISSED IT JESUS  
BUT YOU WERE IN IT AFTER ALL

WE'RE ALWAYS READY LORD TO TAKE THE GLORY

BUT WE'RE SELDOM WILLING TO ENDURE THE PAIN

YOU WERE WITH ME WHEN THE SUN WAS SHINING  
AND YOU WERE STILL BESIDE ME WHEN IT RAINED

SO YOU WERE IN IT AFTER ALL

I GUESS IT'S EASY NOW TO SEE IT - I DON'T  
KNOW HOW I COULD HAVE MISSED IT JESUS  
BUT YOU WERE IN IT AFTER ALL

NOW I KNOW YOU WERE IN IT AFTER ALL

## *Reflections*

I was so glad Lord - when You found me

Twenty plus - something years ago.

I had been living for myself, traveling the same road

so many young men go.

You spoke to my heart, set before me Your Word to read

told why Your Son Jesus had come and died for me

and was raised to live always in my heart

molding and making me Your own piece of art.

Lord You answered my prayers with a wife I have since rarely seen equaled – and oh those children, all I could ask for, so much more than I deserved.

Had I listened Lord when convicted, seeking You for answers when I had none, looking to You for guidance – my marriage and way of life You would have preserved.

All along I knew You loved me. I thought my faith was intact.

But all along I ignored - the fact that I must act.

I took it all for granted and You watched me as I roamed.

I had my trials and tribulations; yes I had reaped what I had sown

You blessed me day after day with a wife and children who prayed

It appeared I had it all but I let it slip away.

When Your words pierced my heart, telling me how I should be

Looking back I keep asking, “how could that have been me?!”

*I realize Lord that actions count, but only when you have the chance*

For once one hurt takes an action, seldom will they change course

Lord I failed You and Lord I failed them

But like so many others You brought me back again.

My life forever altered, my perspective so vastly changed

If only they could see this heart, so totally rearranged

May this be a warning to any who may hear, your love is worth preserving while those loved ones are still near. From one who knows and will tell you, until like a wave breaking upon and overwhelming you, you will never know the depth of heartache thoughtless action or inaction can bring

So pause now and consider to which path you dare cling.

I thank you Lord for seeing me through – Your grace and mercy so full  
for without You I don't know what I would do.

With a new understanding, with Your Spirit in my heart

A burden to tell others, through grace, a new life is the best part.

When I realize the many blessings faith has brought my way  
there is contentment in my heart should I pass away.

Eternity with the Father, yes - new life through the Son

Jesus Christ our Savior - He is the only One.

**Parable of the Prodigal Son – (It’s never too late) - Luke 15:11-32**

To illustrate the point further, *Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.*

*“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’” “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.*

*“But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.*

*“Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’ “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’ “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”* -----

A compassionate God lets man live in rejection of Him because He made a plan of reconciliation and waits for man to come to Him *willingly*, of his own free will. *You have heard the message of the cross proclaimed - will you push it away??* This may be the day in your life where God’s call to you is finally acknowledged and your realization that He is drawing you to Him and that the power that has changed millions of lives is real. In your heart, surely you feel the draw of the truth.