

SO, WHAT'S GOOD?

Home Group Series

September - November 2018



FGA MELBOURNE
LEADER'S GUIDE

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OVERVIEW

How do you choose what's good?

Series passage:

*¹Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever. Psalm 23:6 (ESV)*

A. INTRODUCTION TO "SO, WHAT'S GOOD?"

Our final series for 2018 "So, What's Good?", continues our Pastoral theme (Appendix I). The question we ask in this series is how to make GOOD decisions in life? We have so many choices in life and sometimes the stakes are high. When the result of our decision impacts a long-term commitment or is not readily reversible it is hard to make the best choice.

To make good choices, we often put considerable effort into seeking other's opinions, consuming product reviews, consulting experts, recommendations and following what's popular. Whether that be complex decisions like buying a house, choosing a school for our children, or simpler ones as finding a great cafe, we often go to great lengths to get it right! We need to be aware that the lowest form of knowledge is an opinion, it doesn't need anything to ground it and anyone can have one. So, what's a good measuring stick? How do we do good comparisons?

Scripture is the ultimate source to draw from when making decisions of significance. It is constant and unchanging. It is objective and has deep insights into the heart and struggles of mankind. This series is to inspire us to be the people of God he created us to be. It all starts with making good choices.

For 2018, our theme is "BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING" and we will spend the year focused on the Pastoral and being "Intimate Relationally"

Psalm 23

The scripture that will anchor this life-giving series is Psalm 23. The Psalms are a collection of poems written by people of God. Psalm 23 is one of the great treasures of the Bible. It is ingrained in our culture. It is probably the best-known psalm in the secular world often showing up in movies and books. This Psalm is one of the most loved and memorised portions of scripture, often the only scripture read at a funeral. However, it is not a psalm about death or for the dead, but it's a psalm for the living. It can teach us how to live well and make good choices.

It may seem like a surprise choice to some, but as you will discover it contains insights that lead to a quality of life that we all desire. It reveals God's goodness in unique ways as it unveils our utter dependence on our Good Shepherd. Once we receive these truths into our spirit it can bring healing to anxiety and fears that so often beset us, sometimes on a daily basis. Here are some of the gems of a life under Christ will have the opportunity to explore how we can receive...

- Satisfaction and contentment
- Peace in everyday living
- Paths of righteousness (i.e. make good choices)
- The house of the Lord (living in God's presence)

The series is not so much about what is good but about who is good.

B. NEW SESSION STRUCTURE

We are changing the regular home group format so that each member has the opportunity to look into the meaning of the scripture. Allowing members to dig into the scriptures themselves aims to help people take home more from the home group and will also help them to learn how to study scripture for themselves.

This should be a lot of fun, and quite doable, as we will provide links to sufficient resources for people to access for each session. Of course, our reference material is just suggestions and people are welcome to refer to their own resources as well. In some sessions, it may be best to divide the group into two, so that it takes less time. We will study the meaning of the text using a number of approaches. Depending on how keen your group are to study the word, **choose one or more of these approaches to study the passage in the suggested time:**

1. Researching the metaphors used: natural understanding and using scripture
2. Reading around the text by looking up similar verses (scripture helps interpret scripture)
3. Exploring the meaning of Hebrew keywords
4. Reading commentaries
5. Personal inspiration

For leaders, you may need to allow for 1-2 hours to prepare for each session. We encourage you to practice the study as if you were part of the group (an easy way is to use the Members Notes before referring to the Leaders Guide). This way you will also pick up the areas where people may need more coaching.

We still watch session video and cover the main point as usual, but the word study will come before the discussion questions. We hope that this will lead to more interesting and greater depth of discussion focussed on the goodness of scripture, not just listening to people's opinions.

Here is the new suggested format for your home group:

SESSION ACTIVITY	TIME
Worship / Opening Prayer	5-20 mins
Welcome and Session Introduction	10 mins
Read Psalm 23 (try to recite it from memory)	10 mins
Watch Session Video and read Main Point	10 mins
Study the key passage	20 mins
Discuss one or more of the Questions	15 mins
Respond to the Application	5 mins
Pray for needs / Closing prayer	5-10 mins
Total time	80-100 mins

C. MAIN POINTS

Psalm 23 contains six verses. We will study the entire psalm over five sessions. In addition, we have mapped each of the verses to our core values as a Household of Faith, using the F.A.I.T.H acronym (Appendix II).

Here is how we will cover five points for how to So, What's Good? (Sessions 1-5):

SESSION	TITLE	FOCUS	SCRIPTURE	F.A.I.T.H. POINT
Session 1	Our wants	We don't know what's good for us	¹ "The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want."	F – Faithful to the mission
Session 2	We must lie down	God causes us to rest well	² "He makes me lie down in green pastures he leads me beside still waters."	A – Active & Personally involved
Session 3	God is with us	You are with me	^{3-4a} "He restores my soul. He leads me in path of righteousness for his namesake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me."	I – Intimate relationally
Session 4	Discipline is comforting	Those that God loves he disciplines	^{4b-5a} "Your rod and your staff shall comfort me. You will spread a table before me in the presence of my enemies."	T – Teachable in discipleship
Session 5	Choose God	Dwell with God	^{5b-6} "You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell on the house of the Lord forever."	H – Holy & set apart

D. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE

The "So, What's Good?" MP4 videos are available from the church office on a USB stick. Also, video streaming, and copies of the Leader's Guide and Member's Notes are available for download at <http://fgam.org.au/media/homegroup-materials>. If you are unable to access the files or need assistance with printing notes, please let us know by contacting Megan Griffith (0422 284 404, megan.griffith@fgam.org.au) or Ps. YC Goh (0425 799 576, yc.goh@fgam.org.au). The "So, What's Good? Series" will be augmented by:

The So, What's Good? Sunday preaching series will be our first at our new Lexton home for 6 weeks from 7 October to 11 November 2018. Sermons will be available online in video (<http://fgam.org.au/media/video-sermons>) or audio (<http://fgam.org.au/media/audio-sermons>) format or via the FGAM App (available for free download for Android/Tablet or iPhone/iPad).

Leaders Podcast available at <http://fgam.org.au/media/leadership-podcast> or through iTunes, on Psalm 23, 5 July 2018 and "2018 Update" Blessed to be a blessing by Ps. Chris Ong

Keywords: Choices • Psalm 23 • Good • Shepherd • Comfort • FAITH

F.A.I.T.H. emphasis: FAITH Spectrum

Session 1: Our Wants

We don't know what's good for us

Key passage: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want" Psalm 23:1

A. INTRODUCTION

God knows what is good. Genesis says God is good. God made the world and it was good, then he made mankind and it was very good! Adam and Eve were surrounded by choices, but like ignorant sheep they saw what looked good and chose that way, despite God's word warning them beforehand. Their decision had eternal repercussions, for all humanity. This series is to inspire us to be the people of God he created us to be. It all starts with making good choices.

At its core, this series is about a good God. God's goodness runs so deep it cannot simply be observed or learnt by reading a good book, even the Bible. It can only be understood by experience. We experience God as we go through the ups and downs of life and find that he is really there for us, shepherding us and helping us to navigate the wilderness and the predators to find good pasture and still waters. It is only when we experience God first hand that we begin to comprehend the depths of his goodness. It's from these time, even difficult ones, that we get to know our Good Shepherd and our trust and faith naturally grows. This series is one where we see just how skilfully and lovingly God takes care of us, as the Good Shepherd, he cares tenderly for his sheep.

God is our Good Shepherd and He takes good care of us.

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Psalm 23)

Have everyone read the psalm aloud. Next, all should close their eyes and try to read it from memory. The leader can follow the text and prompt when necessary.

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

*²He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.^[a]*

³He restores my soul.

*He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.*

*⁴Even 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.*

*⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.*

C. SESSION VIDEO - MAIN POINT

Trust grows when experience God with us.

Did you know that every adult makes around 35,000 decisions a day? We strive to make each one right. Often, we go to great lengths to make good choices, consulting reviews, asking our friends, doing lots of research, discovering what's popular. Scripture has much to say on how we make decisions. This series will take a close look at Psalm 23 as a guide for life, by asking the question how can we learn what's really good? It's only six verses but it's oh so powerful.

One of the key points from today's passage (Ps 23:1) is to understand our limitations and the extent of God's good care for us. God is fully trustworthy. As we study the verse we will discover the many truths contained in the metaphor of the sheep and the shepherd. David, who wrote this Psalm, was able to speak from first-hand experience, both as a shepherd tending flocks and as a sheep cared for by a good shepherd.

While it is reassuring likening God to a shepherd, comparing ourselves to sheep is not a particularly flattering. It can make us uncomfortable as we prefer to think more highly of ourselves. We may prefer to view God as a co-pilot assisting us to achieve our goals rather than a Shepherd guiding us daily. David, however, paints a picture of us being fully dependent and at God's abundant mercy. Like the mountainous terrain of Israel, life is often a wilderness and we need a shepherd to lead, provide, guide and protect us. When we truly trust and closely follow the Good Shepherd we find he has so much more than just provision, there is intimacy and overflow.

When we make choices that align us with the Good Shepard we discover his abundant provision

D. KEY VERSE STUDY (Psalm 23:1)

For the "So, What's Good" series we will be discovering for ourselves the meaning of the scripture through study. We will do this through relating to the symbols in the parable, looking up related verses, discovering the meaning of key Hebrew words, reading concordances and gleaming from our own inspiration.

Choose one or more of the following options to study the key scripture:

1. Relating to the Parable

We suggest that you divide into two groups to study the two main aspects of the parable: Shepherd and the sheep.

Group 1. Note down key characteristics and responsibilities of Shepherds (you can search online if you like).

Answer guide: Shepherding job is not glamorous, it is hard work with round the clock responsibilities. They are required to look after every need of the sheep, feeding, watering, providing protection so they can rest safely, guiding them often along narrow and rocky paths. Sometimes putting themselves in danger. The Shepherd assumes responsibility for the welfare of the flock.

Group 2. Note down the characteristics of sheep (you can search online if you like)

Answer guide: Sheep are helpless and defenceless, they can only see 10 meters in front of them, unlike other herd animals that survive well, sheep they are completely dependent on the shepherd, if they only follow other sheep they can all end up in a pickle.

2. Understanding the Parable

One of the keys to interpreting Scripture correctly is to look at other passages that use the same or similar metaphors.

Group 1. Read scriptures that relate to Shepherds and God as our shepherd (e.g. John 10:11, Genesis 48:15, Psalm 80:1, Isaiah 40:11, Ezekiel 34:11, John 21:16-17, Acts:20-28, 1 Peter 5:1-4). What did you discover?

Answer guide: Scripture is clear that God is a shepherd. Also, people of responsibility were also referred to as Shepherds, this includes Kings of the Old Testament and Pastors in the New Testament. Is

Group 2. Write down key points that relate to the people of God as his sheep (e.g. Ps 100:3, Mark 6:34, John 10:14). What did you discover?

Answer guide: Sheep without a shepherd are lost and wondering. They are vulnerable to attack and have a propensity to wander away. Sheep need tending and feeding. They need overseeing. They need quality leaders.

3. Understanding the Verse

Look up an inter-linear Bible online (e.g. <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/psalms/23-1.htm>).

What is the meaning of the following Hebrew keywords in this verse?

English	Hebrew	Strong's Hebrew word	Meanings
The Lord	Yah-weh	3068	<i>God almighty</i>
Shepherd	ra'ah	7462	<i>figurative of ruler, and teacher,</i>
Not be in want	'eh-sār	2637	<i>(Not cause) to lack or fail, diminish</i>

4. Research using commentaries/blogs

Read key commentaries on this key verse – see Appendix III or https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/spurgeon_charles/tod/ps023.cfm?a=501001

Answer guide:

- Familiarity of the psalm presents a challenge to bringing it alive.
- Can quickly pass over it
- Trust motif predominates
- Two metaphors
 - The Lord as Shepherd" versus 1-4
 - The Lord as Host versus 5-6
- Shepherd is a royal metaphor. In that culture Kings were portrayed as shepherds.
- Pastors are also portrayed as shepherds.
- Sheep commonly pasture in the wilderness (little rainfall to sustain a resident population)
- From God being his shepherd David infers that he shall not want anything that is good for him
- The grand cosmic God who can control the rise and fall of kings, also cares for and shepherds the individual.

Note any personal insights

E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does God give us?

Answer Guide: Allow people to answer freely. Some people measure life in terms of what they lack and not what they have. As we think of things we have already been given, and give thanks for them, it helps us to enjoy them more and we find ourselves more content.

As Chris pointed out in the video, the story by Max Lucado well illustrates the fact that life is not defined by what we have but by the gift of our salvation (Luke 12:15). All of this world will pass away, either when we leave the earth or when Jesus comes back. While this may seem like a cliché, we need to keep reminding ourselves of this fundamental truth or we find that we wander off the path, lured in by the fake greenery the world offers.

2. How do we decide what is good?

Answer Guide: Try to get realistic answers from your Home Group, and not just what they think they should do. For example, if someone says, "I pray", a good follow up will be, "How has that affected a recent decision?". Often people decide what's good based on friends, their own emotions, marketing tricks (like sales) or expert reviews.

Take time to get to the BALANCE between our own due diligence and work (with wisdom) and having God direct. God needs to be able to OVERRULE, CORRECT and DETERMINE our decisions. We need to form our view of what's good based on His word.

We often use external references to know what is good. Adam and Eve did that when they took the forbidden fruit. It looked good to the eyes, because it looked good they took it, despite the warning from God. Listening to people's opinion even what's popular can be dangerous. We need to always go back to what the Bible says, as only God know what's truly good for us.

Hebrews 5:14 says that we graduate from feeding from milk to solid food when we are trained to discern good from evil. This is about constantly making good choices. As we repeatedly choose the right way we are entrusted with deeper things spiritually, and by consequence will bear good fruit in our lives.

FAITH Emphasis - Faithful to the Mission

The ultimate response to the gospel is trust. Psalm 23 verse 1 is a declaration of implicit trust in the Saviour as a good shepherd.

F. APPLICATION

Say a prayer of thanks for the things that God has given you. If you feel that you are worrying about certain things in life, make a commitment to trust God again in each of those areas.

If you do not know the Saviour, Jesus Christ, or have wandered away from him, consider dedicating your life to him. It is simple just say a prayer of faith from your heart. You are trusting in a Good shepherd. The following prayer of repentance and turning to God is based on Psalm 51.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to Your unfailing love;
according to Your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against You, You only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in Your sight,

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so that You are proved right when You speak
and justified when You judge.

Surely I have been a sinner from birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me...
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me and I will be whiter than snow...
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from Your presence
or take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.
Then will I teach transgressors Your ways,
and sinners will turn back to You.

In Jesus name, Amen

G. LOOKING FORWARD

In the next session, we will look at activity in our lives and how that can rob us of God's goodness.

Session 2: We Must Lie Down God causes us to rest well

Key passage: "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters." Psalm 23:2 (ESV)

A. INTRODUCTION

We experience God as we go through the ups and downs of life and find that he is truly there for us, shepherding us and leading us to find good pasture and still waters. To lie down and rest we need to be secure in our trust of the shepherd. While we are overly active and roaming from one place to another we will not find the rest that God intends for us to have. We enter that rest by faith as we trust God to lead us. As we continue to trust, God's faithfulness is revealed. We are then able to share our experiences with others so they too can experience the rest and shelter our Good Shepherd provides.

To lie down and rest we need to be secure in our trust of the shepherd.

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Psalm 23)

Have everyone read the psalm aloud. Now try to recite it from memory with one person following the text and prompting when necessary.

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.^[a]

³He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴Even 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.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

C. MAIN POINT - SESSION VIDEO

God knows rest is good for us

If you have ever organised an event, you will know just how hard it is to get everyone together. People are so very busy, we seem to be constantly active and busyness is a way of life. Have you ever stopped to think why we push ourselves so hard, even to the point of exhaustion? What are we doing to our kids?

Hyperactivity isn't new to our generation, it is a trait of humanity. We know because God instituted the Sabbath rest day when he first brought Israel out of Egypt's slavery (where they had no rest). God also rested on the seventh day of creation. Rest is important to God, and he knows it's necessary for us. If God is truly your shepherd and leading you every day, even in the most challenging seasons of life, you will find still waters and green pastures. That is his promise.

Sheep are surprisingly similar to us. They are constantly looking for food, wandering around, are unable to see well and are easily startled. Unlike other domesticated animals, they have trouble sleeping. Conditions need to be just right. They need to be free from the threat of predators, pests and diseases. They need to have their hunger and thirst satisfied. Only then will they lie down. Also, sheep tend to bite and bully each other when they are agitated. Sound familiar?

So how do we rest with so many demands? How can we tell if we are doing things with the right motives? How do we know what are wise choices? With God as our shepherd we are given the grace and strength when it is him calling us to do it. As we spend time in his word, and yield to the still small voice directing our choices and our paths daily, we also find he leads us to rest. Rest without guilt, restoration without penalty.

We often have so many good options to choose from, but when we don't follow the shepherd often we are left feeling dry.

D. KEY VERSE STUDY (Psalm 23:2)

For the "So, What's Good" series we will be discovering for ourselves the meaning of the scripture through study. We will do this through relating to the symbols in the parable, looking up related verses, discovering the meaning of key Hebrew words, reading concordances and gleaming from our own inspiration.

Choose one or more of the following options to study the key scripture:

1. Relating to the Parable

We suggest that you divide into two groups to answer this section.

Group 1. Consider this about Shepherds

What is the job of a shepherd?

Answer guide: Be fully responsible for the sheep. Food, water, protection, shelter, health

How do Shepherds help sheep to drink?

Answer guide: They create pools of still water, create the perfect conditions or sheep will not drink.

How do Shepherds help sheep to rest?

Answer guide: They ensure that all the sheep's needs are met of food, shelter and safety.

Group 2. Consider this about Sheep:

How do they drink?

Answer guide: drink only from still waters. Sheep wont drink from running water even if they are very thirsty.

When do they rest/ Lie down?

Answer guide: When all the sheep's needs are met of food, shelter and safety. They need to be totally secure.

2. Understanding the Parable

One of the keys to interpreting Scripture correctly is to look at other passages that use the same or similar metaphors.

What are the key points that relate to Rest and still water in these verses:

Proverbs 3:24; Job 34:29; Isaiah 8:6; Isaiah 40:31; 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

3. Understanding the Verse

Look up an interlinear Bible online (e.g. <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/psalms/23-2.htm>).

What is the meaning of the following Hebrew keywords in this verse?

English	Hebrew	Strong's Hebrew word	Meanings
He makes me lie down	hirbits	7257	<i>stretch oneself out, lie down, lie stretched out</i>
Still	menuchah	4496	<i>Rest, comfort, quiet, resting place</i>

4. Research using commentaries/blogs

Read key commentaries on this key verse – see Appendix III or

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/spurgeon_charles/tod/ps023.cfm?a=501001

Answer Guide:

- *What follows the opening statement “the Lord is my shepherd” is a commentary describing the Lords actions.*
- *“Makes me lie down” is better translated as the shepherd seeking out an environment in which the sheep may thrive (cv. Ezekiel 34:15).*
- *The best lands of Israel are sparse wilderness with tough dry grass. Water sources are few and seasonal*
- *The shepherd is a leader, provider, causer of rest*
- *The characteristics of sheep are similar to humans. They are always looking for food, wandering around, are unable to see well and are easily startled. They refuse to rest unless they feel secure.*
- *As Ps 23 talks about green pastures, it takes on a new relevance when we understand the terrain that David would have been used too. No rolling green hills in the movies. Grass in the middle East is much harder as its just small patches in the wilderness. You have to search for them But the Shepherd knows where they are.*
- *It's a bit like today, we have 1000 options of where to go, but when we don't follow the shepherd often we are left feeling dry. We become wearied by our lifestyles and we need rest.*
-

Notes on your personal insights

E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do green pastures and still waters look like for you?

Answer Guide: This question could be reworded to ask, do you recharge? We need to know what things strengthen and renew you. There is no right or wrong answer... This could be eating out with friends, quality time with your spouse or family, getting outdoors for a picnic or bushwalk, pursuing a hobby. These are the things that enjoy. Perhaps the real question is how much time do we spend doing those things? We often know what does recharge us, but do we make sufficient time?

What about spending time with the Shepherd? How do we make time in our schedule to prioritise accessing our green pastures and communion with him? What changes do we need to make?

2. How does God **make** you lie down?

Answer Guide: How does God draw you to a place of rest? How does God draw you back to him when you wander away? Let the group share their experiences. Try to focus on CONCRETE examples of when God has CAUSED you to lie down. What has that been like?

Perhaps he has used other people to speak into your life? Perhaps he used your own body and physical effects to get you to lie down?

After some time of discussion, it would be good to focus the group on the Holy Spirit, and being able to listen to the voice of God (the Holy Spirit) who prompts us, leads and guides us in life. Perhaps by bringing a particular devotional verse into greater focus, or through the small still voice.

Be reassured that even in times of the most challenging seasons of your life, God is there for you. He has peace and tranquillity you can access, to renew your strength.

FAITH Emphasis - Active & personally involved

Faith without works is dead (James 2:14), but works done in fear or for approval is also wrong. The things we do and the choices we make should reflect the life of Faith we live.

F. APPLICATION

Read Matthew 11:28. If you are not experiencing peace on a daily basis, think about the activities you do. Choose one thing you can change in order to give more time to God or finding your still waters.

Make a list of things that God uses to revitalise you. Ask God which green pasture he is leading you to at the moment. Surrender each day to him and let the great Shepherd faithfully lead you.

G. LOOKING FORWARD

In the next session, we will look at the way God leads us to make good choices.

Session 3: God is with us

“You are with me”

Key passage: “He restores my soul. He leads me in path of righteousness for his namesake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me.” Psalms 23:3-4a (ESV)

A. INTRODUCTION

This series is about a good God who helps us to make good decision. The focal passage for this session is about understanding how God pastors us skilfully. This is especially evident in times of trial and difficulty. Often in the darkness is when we feel he is the closest.

On the other hand, we can be tempted to become stuck in our circumstances. They can be so challenging that we stop trusting or believing God is good and he provides a way out. When that happens, we need to make the choice to trust again.

Following his lead means that he **promises** to find paths of righteousness. There is a way forward. His righteousness means demonstrating his good character to a watching world.

Paths of righteousness represent good choices that give us meaning and purpose, a future and a hope.

B. READING PSALM 23

Try to read the psalm from memory. The leader should prompt where necessary.

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.^{1a}

³He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴Even 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.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

C. MAIN POINT/ SESSION VIDEO

Paths of righteousness represent good choices that give God glory.

As we progress through Psalm 23, the Shepherd and sheep analogy becomes more intimate and personal. In verse 3 psalmist talks about the Lord restoring his soul. The Hebrew word used refers to awakening life as if bringing back from the dead. His life in us is what leads us in paths of righteousness. Paths of righteousness in the Hebrew comes from the root word meaning "return". There is a sense that in our life experience we wander off, but we return to God's path for us. This is the path that represents good choices that give us meaning and purpose. They reflect God's good character.

As sheep have limited vision of between 10-15 meters, it makes them vulnerable to straying away and to predators. It's imperative they be led by a shepherd with good vision or they simply won't survive. Similarly, we are often short sighted and are unable to see ahead. But our Shepherd, who has unlimited vision, guides us skilfully, even along the narrowest of paths. We only need to keep our shepherd within our close-range vision to be safely led.

As we look at the pastoral focus this session we see the exact midpoint of the Psalm are the words "you are with me". The language changes from being about God, to directly talking to him. This is the greatest reassurance of all. It is only because God is with us that we do not need to fear, even in our darkest times. We just need to keep choosing God and not remaining in our bitterness and anger because of our circumstances. As we follow him God will lead us to higher ground, green pastures and beside still waters. It is the Lord's presence that keeps us at all time.

It is only because God is with us that we do not need to fear, even in our darkest times.

D. KEY VERSE STUDY (Psalm 23:4b-5a)

For the "So, What's Good" series we will be discovering for ourselves the meaning of the scripture through study. We will do this through relating to the symbols in the parable, looking up related verses, discovering the meaning of key Hebrew words, reading concordances and gleaning from our own inspiration.

Choose one or more of the following options to study the key scripture:

1. Relating to the Parable

In the interests of time, divide into two groups. Each group can share with the whole group.

Group 1. Describe in your own words what are paths of righteousness.

Answer guide: While these should be the words of each member, paths of righteousness are not about religious duties. They are about making choices that reflect the character and nature of God. Incorporating values that are important God part of our daily life. Jesus had a lot to say in this area (see sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7, for example), on following the values of the Father. It was an area that he was particularly tough on the Pharisees and scribes who were more keen on privilege, power and religious observance.

Group 2. What is the valley of the shadow of death represent to you?

Answer guide: This can be a very personal question. For some it will be deep darkness resulting from death or loss. For some it will be a physical or mental illness. Everyone will go through dark valleys at

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times of life. Recognising them as such will help us to understand we do not have to be alone in our darkness. Others are there and most importantly God is there in the darkness with you too.

2. Understanding the Parable

One of the keys to interpreting Scripture correctly is to look at other passages that use the same or similar metaphors.

Look at the texts that relate to Paths of Righteousness and note down the Lord's promises or intentions for us:

Psalm 20:1, 25:10, 40:11; Proverbs 2:9, 4:11, 4:26-27; Isaiah 26:7; Jeremiah 50:6.

3. Understanding the Verse

Look up the interlinear bible online <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/psalms/23-3.htm>

What is the meaning of the following Hebrew keywords in this verse?

English	Hebrew	Strong's Hebrew word	Meanings
Restore	shub	7725	Verb meaning to turn back or return, including revival from death
Soul	nephesh	5315	It means "breath of life" or "life". Suggests restoration and revival
Righteousness	še-deq	6664	Paths of faithfulness. fairly, just, just cause, justice, righteousness, rightly, what is right

4. Research using commentaries/blogs

Read key commentaries on this key verse – see Appendix III or https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/spurgeon_charles/tod/ps023.cfm?a=501001

Answer Guide:

- *Picture of someone who has almost stopped breathing and is brought back to life.*
- *"He restores (shub) my life" sums up the restorative help of life-giving water, sense of returning to God in repentance for purpose of being restored.*
- *Yahweh restores my life (nephesh = person), suggests revival*
- *Ps 25:10 All the paths of the Lord are hesead and truth*
- *"For your name's sake" implies you are calling on the unchanging character of God's faithfulness as the shepherd to meet your need. God's nature is to be faithful. It is a claim on God's name and character.*
- *Incl. Right paths that lead to right places*
- *God is not afraid of walking through canyons even very dark ones*
- *The Lord is present in green pastures, beside still waters, and along paths of righteousness but he is also present in the sign of the opposite (Darkest valley)*
- *God is leading with commitment and faithfulness*
- *God's actions towards us demonstrate his character*

Notes on your personal insights

E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do we think of God when bad things happen to good people?

Answer Guide: Sometimes the unfairness of life can become a stumbling block. With our limited vision we are unable to see or fathom why a good God can let terrible things happen to good people. Struggling to come to terms with it is a very natural response. The Bible encourages us to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15), but it also calls us to trust even in the darkest times.

When we are struggling to see God's goodness, we need to come back to the cross. How would the disciples have felt about God seeing his son crucified? They didn't realise the resurrection and the power to follow, that would bring salvation to all of humanity. In their limited vision and understanding, they were not able to see ahead. At the time, they could only see the defeat, shame and humiliation. They felt defeated and went back to their life before Christ. But God restored them, he brought them back and they responded to his call. It was through this they had unshakable testimony and a faith that literally changed the world.

2. What does "Fear no evil" look like?

Answer Guide: Fear can be a very paralysing emotion. But did you know that it is actually a choice. 365 times in the Bible God tells us "Do not fear" – enough for each day of the year!

Fear is a choice because we have the choice to believe God or to give into our emotion. David says "I will not fear for you are with me" is his declaration that he is choosing not to be afraid. He does this by referring to God personally. "Because YOU are with me". In our darkest times we are encouraged to become very personal with God.

It may help to read James 1:2-6. Here we see that trials are used by God to bring us to maturity. Again, we see in verse 6 that we have a choice "do not doubt", which can also mean "do not fear". We need to keep choosing the good path for life, trust can trump fear any day of the week.

F. APPLICATION

Meditate on the words "you are with me". Allow time for people to reflect and wait on the Lord for their current circumstances.

Pray especially for those going through dark valleys at this time. Maybe ask them to declare to God themselves as David did, by reading Psalm 23:3 "you are with me".

FAITH Emphasis – Intimate relationally

"When you are walking with the Shepherd, the dark valleys always lead to higher ground" Steve May

G. LOOKING FORWARD

In the next session, we will look at how skilfully God leads and disciplines us.

Session 4: Discipline is comforting

Those that God loves he disciplines

Key passage: "Your rod and your staff shall comfort me. You will spread a table before me in the presence of my enemies." Psalm 23:4b-5a (ESV)

A. INTRODUCTION

Discipline is necessary if we want to grow up. In the natural, as children we expected to be disciplined by our parents when we did wrong. They showed us the way they thought was best, for the most part our parents had good intentions. We need to recognise the discipline of the heavenly Father, allowing it to shape and course correct us. He does not intend shame or harm for us, but he skilfully uses our enemies to bring good to us.

Consider this from Hebrews 12:7-11

"Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

God always disciplines us for our good, that we can share in his holiness.

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Psalm 23)

See if someone in your group can memorise the psalm. Try reciting it from memory together.

¹*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*

²*He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.^{1a}*

³*He restores my soul.*

*He leads 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 mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.*

C. MAIN POINT - SESSION VIDEO

The shepherds two tools are a rod and a staff. They both provide comfort, but in different ways.

In David's time, shepherds carried two pieces of equipment, a rod and a staff. The shepherd's presence makes itself felt by rod or staff. The rod was made of solid wood and had three main uses. Firstly, it fended off predators or animals that threatened the sheep. It was also used to check the health condition of the sheep as it could get under the wool. Thirdly, when necessary, the rod was used to discipline sheep if they went out of line and did not respond to the master's voice.

The staff was leaner and longer than the rod. As well as guiding the sheep (they could feel it, even in the dark) it brought sheep back into line when they wandered off course or rescued them when they fell down a gully or caught somewhere.

At the very core of our walk with God is our need to respond to guidance and even correction when necessary. When left to themselves sheep naturally wander off and it's necessary for the shepherd to bring them back. We are pretty similar. So, let's bear in mind, that correction doesn't mean punishment. It does however mean changing direction to be following the shepherd once again. If we refused to respond to the correction we can cause ourselves even more pain. Remember, God only corrects us for our good.

As we receive correction we grow, it is like having a constant source of food. Plentiful nourishment even as we face our enemies. We grow a new strength of character and build much needed resilience. Let us not be discouraged by our enemies but focus on the feast that God has for us to enjoy.

Sometimes we travel long narrow paths where we can slip and fall, or predators lie in wait. But do not fear, our Shepherd is courageous and tough.

C. KEY VERSE STUDY (Psalm 23:4b-5a)

For the "So, What's Good" series we will be discovering for ourselves the meaning of the scripture through study. We will do this through relating to the symbols in the parable, looking up related verses, discovering the meaning of key Hebrew words, reading concordances and gleaning from our own inspiration.

Choose one or more of the following options to study the key scripture.

1. Relating to the Parable

What risks do shepherds take in defending and course correcting the sheep?

Answer guide: Shepherds put themselves at risk in defending the sheep from predators, as well as less intentional enemies such as snakes, poisonous plants, thornbushes and rough vegetation. They also lacked sleep in order to protect the sheep. They put themselves in danger when rescuing sheep from fallen cliffs of ravines. They carried the weight of injured animals, bringing them safely home.

2. Understanding the Parable

One of the keys to interpreting Scripture correctly is to look at other passages that use the same or similar metaphors.

Read other texts that relate to correction or trials:

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Revelation 3:19; Hebrews 12:5–6; Proverbs 3:11–12; Psalm 43:3 (also written in the context of the enemy perusing the worshiper), Matthew 6:13; 2 Timothy 4:18, 2 Thessalonians 3:3.

3. Understanding the Verse

Look up the meaning of the following Hebrew keywords <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/psalms/23-4.htm>

English	Hebrew	Strong's Hebrew word	Meanings
Shadow of death	tsalmaveth	6757	black gloom, dark, deep darkness, deep shadow, shadow of death, thick darkness
Evil	ra'	7451	Adversity, bad, evil, giving pain, unhappiness, misery
Anoint	diš-šan-tā	1978	anointed, become greasy, become prosperous, find your acceptable, made fat, prosper, prosperous, puts fat, removing its ashes, sated, take away, take away the ashes.

4. Research using commentaries/blogs

Read key commentaries on this key verse – see Appendix III or https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/spurgeon_charles/tod/ps023.cfm?a=501001

Answer guide:

- Most of the water and green grass is found in canyons but these are places of great danger
- Narrow paths where you can slip and fall, or predators waiting to attack
- The shepherd is courageous and tough. He is committed to take on whatever threatens the flock
- Shepherd has to be brave (David fighting lion and bear, 1 Samuel 17:34-36)
- Lord's goodness and he does not pursue the psalmist with relentless grace.
- The shepherd's presence makes itself felt by rod or staff
- A rod as a weapon, short and heavier than the staff, attached to the belt
- Staff as a guide, or assistance to the sheep.
- Two objects comfort in different ways
- Verse 5 sees a shift in the analogy
- The psalm doesn't refer to an act of deliverance but the Lord becoming a gracious host
- Host provides perfumed oil for the head
- A generous king may do that for his servants
- Double commitment. If wild enemies pursue us, good and commitment do also.

Notes on your personal insights

E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you been corrected by God?

Answer Guide: God corrects us in many different ways. Usually it is personal as God treats us all individually and he knows how we respond to his voice. For some it is a revelation of areas where we

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need to repent. Sometimes it comes upon reflection after we get into difficult circumstances. Sometimes the circumstances are so tough it forces us to give up fighting on our own, we know we can't do it anymore. Our lack of strength in the face of our enemies forces us to surrender and trust God to take over. He is the warrior in our battles and will fight for us.

2. Correction in the body of Christ. What's a good way?

Answer Guide: No one likes to be corrected, let alone publicly. However, Paul speaks a lot about correction and how it can be done well. Matthew 18:15-17 speaks about disagreements and offence in the body of Christ, and provides practical solutions. It involves reasonable, unemotive conversation with a third party (or one or two people) that can assist and mediate where necessary. The best way to resolve disputes should not be done by looking at the other person and their faults, but by taking an honest look at our actions and motivations. Why did we want a particular outcome? Sometimes it is not just the objective, but it is the way we try to get the outcome we want. James 4:1 aptly reminds us "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?". When we drill down, we see a lot of our need for correction stems from pursuing our own wants and desires in an unhealthy way. It is times like these we need to review and make good choices.

F. APPLICATION

How has your decision making been lately? Have you recently made choices you regret or are unsure about? If you are concerned about a decision you are currently making or have recently made, surrender it to God now. Even if you have made a mistake, God is able to turn it around for Good. We just need to trust him to solve the problem and to give advice and wisdom to us when we turn to him (James 1:2-3).

FAITH Emphasis – Teachable in discipleship

When we drill down, we see a lot of our need for correction stems from pursuing our own wants and desires in an unhealthy way. It is times like these we need to review our motives to be able to make good choices.

G. LOOKING FORWARD

In the next session, we will look at dwelling in the presence of God.

Session 5: Choose God

Dwell with God

Key passage: " You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell on the house of the Lord forever." Psalm 23:5b-6 (ESV)

A. INTRODUCTION

As we have been studying what is good, we find that it is not so much what is Good, but WHO is good. It is God who is good and the life he offers us reflects his generous and merciful character. Psalm 23 gives us a glimpse of what a life with God is like – one of peace, contentment, purpose, confidence, abundance and finally expectation. This final verse is one where we can expect God to dwell with God. As sheep we are prone to wander but a loving shepherd is tending us, and his goodness and mercy will bring us back to the fold. We can expect a life of a good future and blessed eternity only because God is our shepherd.

It is now we see that life is not so much about what is good but who is good.

B. SCRIPTURE READING (Psalm 23)

Have everyone try to recite the psalm from memory as a group. Some in the group should know it off by heart and will be able to prompt others

¹The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.^[a]

³He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.

⁴Even 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.

⁵You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.

C. MAIN POINT - SESSION VIDEO

The final verse of Psalm 23 shows that we can live our lives with certainty.

Psalm 23 is a declaration of the character and promises of a good God. When taken to heart, this promise enables us to live with a true sense of certainty. We have every reason view life with an optimistic lens.

Reviewing the flow of the psalm, we saw how we started with the promise that we will not be in want because the Lord is our Shepherd. As we progress and follow him, we see how he provides and skillfully leads us to rest, guarding us from our enemies and disciplining us so we can make good choices. By journeying close to the Shepherd, we discover it's not just a life without lack, but where we can experience a life of abundance. Jesus reminded us of this promise in John 10:10 when he said "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*"

It is the goodness and mercy of the Good Shepherd, Christ, that follows us. Even when we wander away, his goodness pursues us to draw us back to him and back into the fold. Whether we stay in God's house or we wander off, we know that God's intention is to ultimately draw us back to dwell where God's presence is. This is not just a promise of eternity, but one that we can experience during our lifetime.

D. KEY VERSE STUDY (Psalm 23:5b-6)

For the "So, What's Good" series we will be discovering for ourselves the meaning of the scripture through study. We will do this through relating to the symbols in the parable, looking up related verses, discovering the meaning of key Hebrew words, reading concordances and gleaning from our own inspiration.

Choose one or more of the following options to study the key scripture:

1. Relating to the Parable

What makes a generous host?

Answer guide: Think about those things that makes some hosts stand out from another. They may mean they are very open and welcoming to have people into their home, not discriminating standards and classes, going above and beyond to provide the needs, making them feel spoilt etc. A generous host is not just providing the necessities, it is about going the extra mile to make the person feel welcomed and abundantly cared for.

2. Understanding the Parable

One of the keys to interpreting Scripture correctly is to look at other passages that use the same or similar metaphors. If you are short on time, divide up the scripture references between two groups.

Group 1: Texts that relate to being a host

Deut 2:7; Psalm 30:11-12, 27:4, 61:4, 2, 73:24; Peter 1:11

Group 2: Texts that relate to goodness and mercy

Ps 16:11, 17:15, 103:17; Luke 12:32; Heb 4:16, 11:16.

3. Understanding the Verse

Refer to the interlinear Bible online <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/psalms/23-6.htm>

Look up the meaning of the following Hebrew keywords

English	Hebrew	Strong's Hebrew word	Meanings
Goodness	hesed	2617	<i>Kindness towards men, especially as extended to the lowly, needy and miserable, of lovely appearance, redemption from enemies and troubles, abundant and plenteous.</i>
Follow	Radaph	7291	<i>Chase, follow, pursue, hunt.</i>

4. Research using commentaries/blogs

Read key commentaries on this key verse – see Appendix III or https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/spurgeon_charles/tod/ps023.cfm?a=501001

Answer guide:

- Describes Yaweh's care from a different angle
- Translations are debated for sub (return) and yasab (dwell). It doesn't matter which path you follow (through repentance or remaining), the destination of the shepherd ends up coming to the house of the Lord which is God himself, harried on by God's pursuing checed and goodness.
- Yaweh's is committed to ensure we get to his house
- Dwell in also implies return to, meaning there is a recurrent coming to God
- Ongoing cycle of danger, deliverance, and dwelling
- Viewpoint is in here and now not eschatologically speaking (post our earthly life).
- "Radap" traditionally translated as follow. Normally it's the enemies that pursue in order to inflict harm (e.g. Ps 7:5, 31:15, 35:3, 71:11, 109:16). Here the Lord pursues in order to give blessing.
- Host provides a cup of wine that well satisfies
- Radap means more than follow but implies active pursuit, follow with energy.
- The forces will not rest until they have tracked down and provided a safe harbour for the endangered psalmist.

Notes on your personal insights

E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is your life an overflowing cup? What spills out?

Answer Guide: Take time to talk about what flows from our intimacy with God. When we dwell in the House of the Lord, what is that like?

As a cup is a container, we are vessels for the Holy Spirit. What overflows actually reveals what is going on inside of us, and is indicative of our internal state. When what overflows from our lives is not good, we know it is time to take stock. If we can't see ourselves, ask people close to you. How are you impacting others?

2. Review the whole passage of Psalms 23, in your life, how does God guide you as a Shepherd as you determine What's Good?

Answer Guide: By DWELLING with GOD

Spend time talking about the whole series and how we can recall Psalms 23 in our everyday lives.

Dwelling in the House of the Lord means that you're living where He is. It's like living in a country, you're surrounded by the culture of the land. In God's house, he is in charge. All decisions are made not just on his principles and rules, but rather as an overflow of our relationship with him.

Psalms 23 reminds us that one important aspect of this relationship is: He is our Shepherd

F. APPLICATION

It's a mistake to measure life's abundance by simply things we own or possess. Write down areas of abundance in your life. Take time to thank God for them.

If you struggle to be content with what you have, perhaps in the coming week reflect on what the scripture means when it says "Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honoured them. And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field" (James 1:9-11). Think about how that relates to the promises of Psalm 23.

FAITH Emphasis – Holy & Set apart

Dwelling in the house of the Lord means we are holy and set apart. We enjoy him but even more we are set apart so others can see God's goodness.

APPENDIX I

2018 VISION: PASTORAL BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING

Key passage: “And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.” Genesis 22:18

2018 are focussing on the book of Genesis. It is a highly honest, relational book that traces a household of FAITH as they live out God’s plans for them. God’s people (all of us) were created and blessed to be a blessing to the world around them. We were made to reflect the very image of God.

However, it’s so easy to lose sight of our calling because of the everyday issues that crop up in our lives. Sin complicates and infects everything it touches, and we (if we’re honest) struggle to walk fully in obedience with God. Yet despite our multiple failings, Genesis shows us that God is ever faithful, that even though Satan bruises our heel, Victory is the Lords!

*Our one line for the year is “Blessed to be a Blessing” and our key verse is taken from Genesis 22:8, which says:
“And in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice”*

Bless is the most used word in Genesis. Adam was blessed, so was every human being that was given breath and life. Yet time and time again, in the book of Genesis, we see how humanity grabs for blessing (taking matters into their own hands, building towers, living for their own pleasure, lying, cheating and even killing). The book ends with Joseph (the capstone example of our one-liner for the year), who despite the many afflictions in his life, obeyed God’s voice, and in doing so, ultimately was able to be a blessing to his own family and the many nations around him. Joseph knew who he was, and what his life was ultimately going to do. Things that others intended for evil, God had intended for good, and for the saving of many lives.

Let’s take a close look at our lives. It’s a Pastoral focussed year, and we will pour through Genesis with its raw honesty, and ask questions like, “How did we get here”, “Why are we here” and “What are we to do”? We need to see ourselves the way God (our creator) sees us, and we need to align ourselves with his vision and purposes. In Biblical terms, that’s called “obedience”, and that’s how we shall be a blessing to all the nations of the Earth.

For 2018, our theme will be “BLESSED TO BE A BLESSING” as we spend the year focused on the Pastoral and being “Intimate Relationally”

APPENDIX II

FIVE CORE VALUES OF FGAM

Evangelistic • Apostolic • Pastoral • Teaching • Prophetic

The five core values of FGAM have been broken down into the 5-letter acronym for F.A.I.T.H.

FAITHFUL TO THE MISSION (F):

Faithful has been chosen as opposed to Excellence (which we used to have in our values statement). Excellence is not up there as part of our vision for how to serve because in order for things to be excellent, you have to devote all your resources to it and everything drops on the side to make that one thing excellent. A lot of people nowadays are pursuing excellence (six sigma, zero tolerance through a whole bunch of excellence processes) but the thing is ... a lot of guys die on the way to excellence. Excellence is a bit of commodity everyone is pushing for it in spurts and with very tightly defined boundaries.

Faithful is the new spectacular. As for me I just want to be a faithful pastor and if I can really be honest with you now, when I was younger, I wanted to be an excellent pastor but now I have seen so many guys fall and I just want to be the real thing I want to finish my days serving the Lord and be a faithful pastor to the mission that God has for me and I want to be a faithful husband, a faithful father and I tell you with today lack of loyalty, faithful is the new spectacular. It is spectacular to find the guy who will serve the Lord with joy, it is spectacular to find the person with one wife the whole time and his family survived the whole thing. I was just thinking faithful to the mission for me and excellent also has this problem of our own achievement and if I have done excellent it is my own doing, faithfulness removes that away so I sow the seeds, I water it and God brings the excellence so we are not saying let's be terrible and I think faithfulness reaps excellence whereas I think you can short cut a lot of things and get excellence, in today world there are a lot of shortcuts to get excellence and I am not keen on these so that is off for us and you are going to hear us talk about that a lot from us but I am giving you the short version.

ACTIVE AND PERSONALLY INVOLVED (A):

Active sits against conceptual. How are we going to serve the Lord, what does serving look like? What is the vision when you close your eyes – serving is being faithful is it serving every day or serving the lord but not being active because today we live in a generation that is big on intentions and ideas – let's solve world poverty and go for a rock concert and that's about it, we buy all these brands, promote love, climb the highest mountain for you on my T-shirt, they big on their ideas but they are not doing it. I have just finished a book called, "Love Does". For us it has to be active or the word that we discussed is incarnate it has to be involved us in the flesh and so if we are serving then not just pay money for someone to serve the Lord, we don't want that e.g. P&W team can't pay people to come and play for us or pay a missionary so we are doing the stuff but not active in it.

INTIMATE RELATIONALLY (I):

I is intimate. We are going to do our relationship intimately. We tossed between using the word intimate and the word love. Love is a more technically appropriate word to use, however, the problem with the word Love in this day and age is that I can say "I can love my coffee, I love my car, I love all kinds of

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things". It is really hard and for it to be the distinctive of FGA. For it means that Ps. Quentin is going to get involved with your children's life, finding out their grades/home life. It's like being an interfering parent all over the place almost like an Asian way to be a lot more intimate with the relationship. So how are we going to serve? We are going to serve intimately which involves getting to know people, understanding the differences between each of us and the kind of conflict that comes with a close-knit relationship. Intimate sits against clean and neat. That is why there will be a lot not dead set written down yet will be some but not a lot to allow the intimacy to occur which is quite a Hebrew way.

TEACHABLE IN DISCIPLESHIP (T):

How are we going to serve? With a teachable spirit. That is the entire discipleship model we are also going to have the orientation of teaching – I catch myself how often how I get irritated with my kids for not learning things fast enough or I get irritated with some people that I teach the computers but I have to understand that people are learning – I have practiced a thousand times but my kids are learning to control their emotions, growing up and learning how to build their characters to tell the truth so a few times they will lie, throw tantrums but if we remember how we serve is in this whole model of teaching and being teachable as discipleship then we account for all those thing – part of it was inspired by people that had inspired me. As for intimate, Roger has inspired me during the holiday we go together and for teachable Quentin and his team has really inspired me for that as Quentin takes these really young guys in their raw format and Quentin has the patience to teach them, disciple and groom them and then they graduated into our main ministry. A lot of our ministries are powered by people that come out of the pipeline of other ministries. That is a good model for us to have a teachable discipling type model. Teachable sits against Expert. We are always a learner, there usually an expert service model so when you talk about serving- you always go and get the expert but what I want is to get the learners.

HOLY AND SET APART FOR GOD (H):

Holy (H) used to be something that was judged based on appearance or outside so e.g. he is a holy person, he does not smoke and drink, does not do this or that etc... holiness for us from the biblical meaning means set apart (on purpose). A good analogy for holy is water. Water can be used for all kind of things. You can wash your car, your dog can drink it, you can wash your dirty boots, you can bathe with your water, you can swim in it or boat ride on the water but then water in the temple of God becomes holy water. It looks exactly the same and I reckon the molecular composition is exactly the same as water used for watering your garden. God can use things solely for his purposes. Holy is there for us so that when we go off and do normal things we remember that its purposes are for God - so that God's name get glorified. If anyone looks at our activities, it looks like a dance competition and looks like water. Holy water. We make sure that people know its purposes and our lives are like that too. That means as Christians, Raymond, you should look like an accountant except that you are a holy accountant because everything in your life exists for the purpose of God. That is the concept of Holy. So the holy for purpose sits opposed to looking holy. I think in our past we have a whole bunch of things that just look holy so people serve to look holy which is what we don't want.

APPENDIX III

Commentary on Psalm 23

Charles Spurgeon Commentary

See https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/spurgeon_charles/tod/ps023.cfm?a=501001

Exposition

Verse 1. "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" What condescension is this, that the infinite Lord assumes towards his people the office and character of a Shepherd! It should be the subject of grateful admiration that the great God allows himself to be compared to anything which will set forth his great love and care for his own people. David had himself been a keeper of sheep, and understood both the needs of the sheep and the many cares of a shepherd. He compares himself to a creature weak, defenceless, and foolish, and he takes God to be his Provider, Preserver, Director, and, indeed, his everything. No man has a right to consider himself the Lord's sheep unless his nature has been renewed for the scriptural description of unconverted men does not picture them as sheep, but as wolves or goats. A sheep is an object of property, not a wild animal; its owner sets great store by it, and frequently it is bought with a great price. It is well to know, as certainly David did, that we belong to the Lord. There is a noble tone of confidence about this sentence. There is no "if" nor "but," nor even "I hope so;" but he says, "The Lord is my shepherd." We must cultivate the spirit of assured dependence upon our heavenly Father. The sweetest word of the whole is that monosyllable, "My." He does not say, "The Lord is the shepherd of the world at large, and leadeth forth the multitude as his flock," but "The Lord is *my* shepherd;" if he be a Shepherd to no one else, he is a Shepherd to *me*; he cares for *me*, watches over *me*, and preserves *me*. The words are in the present tense. Whatever be the believer's position, he is even now under the pastoral care of Jehovah.

The next words are a sort of inference from the first statement—they are sententious and positive—"I shall not want." I might want otherwise, but when the Lord is my Shepherd he is able to supply my needs, and he is certainly willing to do so, for his heart is full of love, and therefore "I shall not want." I shall not lack for *temporal things*. Does he not feed the ravens, and cause the lilies to grow? How, then, can he leave his children to starve? I shall not want for *spirituals*, I know that his grace will be sufficient for me. Resting in him he will say to me, "As thy day so shall thy strength be." I may not possess all that I wish for, but "I shall not want." Others, far wealthier and wiser than I, may want, but "I shall not." "The young lions *do* lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." It is not only "I do not want," but "I shall not want." Come what may, if famine should devastate the land, or calamity destroy the city, "I shall not want." Old age with its feebleness shall not bring me any lack, and even death with its gloom shall not find me destitute. I have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have skill and wit with which to win my bread, but because "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" The wicked always want, but the righteous never; a sinner's heart is far from satisfaction, but a gracious spirit dwells in the palace of content.

Verse 2. "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.*" The Christian life has two elements in it, the contemplative and the active, and both of these are richly provided for. First, the contemplative. "*He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.*" What are these "*green pastures*" but the Scriptures of truth—always fresh, always rich, and never exhausted? There is no fear of biting the bare ground where the grass is long enough for the flock to lie down in it. Sweet and full are the doctrines of the gospel; fit food for souls, as tender grass is natural nutriment for sheep. When by faith we are enabled to find rest in the promises, we are like the sheep that lie down in the midst of the pasture; we find at the same moment both provender and peace, rest and refreshment, serenity and satisfaction. But observe: "*He maketh me to lie down.*" It is the Lord who graciously enables us to perceive the preciousness of his truth, and to feed upon it. How grateful ought we to be for the power to appropriate the promises! There are some distracted souls who would give worlds if they could but do this. They know the blessedness of it, but they cannot say that this blessedness is theirs. They know the "*green pastures*," but they are not made to "*lie down*" in them. Those believers who have for years enjoyed a "full assurance of faith" should greatly bless their gracious God.

The second part of a vigorous Christian's life consists in gracious activity. We not only think, but we act. We are not always lying down to feed, but are journeying onward toward perfection; hence we read, "*he leadeth me beside the still waters.*" What are these "still waters" but the influences and graces of his blessed Spirit? His Spirit attends us in various operations, like waters—in the plural—to cleanse, to refresh, to fertilise, to cherish. They are "*still waters,*" for the Holy Ghost loves peace, and sounds no trumpet of ostentation in his operations. He may flow into our soul, but not into our neighbour's, and therefore our neighbour may not perceive the divine presence; and though the blessed Spirit may be pouring his floods into one heart, yet he that sitteth next to the favoured one may know nothing of it.

In sacred silence of the mind, My heaven, and there my God I find.

Still waters run deep. Nothing more noisy than an empty drum. That silence is golden indeed in which the Holy Spirit meets with the souls of his saints. Not to raging waves of strife, but to peaceful streams of holy love does the Spirit of God conduct the chosen sheep. He is a dove, not an eagle; the dew, not the hurricane. Our Lord leads us beside these "*still waters;*" we could not go there of ourselves, we need his guidance, therefore it is said, "*he leadeth me.*" He does not drive us. Moses drives us by the law, but Jesus leads us by his example, and the gentle drawing of his love.

Verse 3. "*He restoreth my soul.*" When the soul grows sorrowful he revives it; when it is sinful he sanctifies it; when it is weak he strengthens it. "*He*" does it. His ministers could not do it if he did not. His Word would not avail by itself. "*He restoreth my soul.*" Are any of us low in grace? Do we feel that our spirituality is at its lowest ebb? He who turns the ebb into the flood can soon restore our soul. Pray to him, then, for the blessing—"Restore thou me, thou Shepherd of my soul!"

"*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*" The Christian delights to be obedient, but it is the obedience of love, to which he is constrained by the example of his Master.

"*He leadeth me.*" The Christian is not obedient to some commandments and neglectful of others; he does not pick and choose, but yields to all. Observe, that the plural is used—"the *paths* of righteousness." Whatever God may give us to do we would do it, led by his love. Some Christians overlook the blessing of sanctification, and yet to a thoroughly renewed heart this is one of the sweetest gifts of the covenant. If we could be saved from wrath, and yet remain unregenerate, impenitent sinners, we should not be saved as we desire, for we mainly and chiefly pant to be saved *from* sin and led in the way of holiness. All this is done out of pure free grace; "*for his name's sake.*" It is to the honour of our great Shepherd that we should be a holy people, walking in the narrow way of righteousness. If we be so led and guided we must not fail to adore our heavenly Shepherd's care.

Verse 4. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" This unspeakably delightful verse has been sung on many a dying bed, and has helped to make the dark valley bright times out of mind. Every word in it has a wealth of meaning. "Yea, though I walk," as if the believer did not quicken his pace when he came to die, but still calmly *walked* with God. To walk indicates the steady advance of a soul which knows its road, knows its end, resolves to follow the path, feels quite safe, and is therefore perfectly calm and composed. The dying saint is not in a flurry, he does not run as though he were alarmed, nor stand still as though he would go no further, he is not confounded nor ashamed, and therefore keeps to his old pace. Observe that it is not walking *in* the valley, but *through* the valley. We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. We do not die, we do but sleep to wake in glory. Death is not the house but the porch, not the goal but the passage to it. The dying article is called a *valley*. The storm breaks on the mountain, but the valley is the place of quietude, and thus full often the last days of the Christian are the most peaceful of his whole career; the mountain is bleak and bare, but the valley is rich with golden sheaves, and many a saint has reaped more joy and knowledge when he came to die than he ever knew while he lived. And, then, it is not "the valley of death," but "the valley of the shadow of death," for death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Some one has said that when there is a shadow there must be light somewhere, and so there is. Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path; let us then rejoice that there is a light beyond. Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not, therefore, be afraid. "*I will fear no evil.*" He does not say there shall not be any evil; he had got beyond even that high assurance, and knew that Jesus had put all evil away; but "*I will fear no evil;*" as if even his fears, those shadows of evil, were gone for ever. The worst evils of life are those which do not exist except in our imagination. If we had no troubles but real troubles, we should not have a tenth part of our

present sorrows. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, but the psalmist was cured of the disease of fearing. "I will fear *no evil*," not even the Evil One himself; I will not dread the last enemy, I will look upon him as a conquered foe, an enemy to be destroyed, "*For thou art with me*." This is the joy of the Christian! "*Thou art with me*." The little child out at sea in the storm is not frightened like all the other passengers on board the vessel, it sleeps in its mother's bosom; it is enough for it that its mother is with it; and it should be enough for the believer to know that Christ is with him. "*Thou art with me*; I have, in having thee, all that I can crave: I have perfect comfort and absolute security, *for thou art with me*." "*Thy rod and thy staff*," by which thou governest and rulest thy flock, the ensigns of thy sovereignty and of thy gracious care—"they comfort me." I will believe that thou reignest still. The rod of Jesse shall still be over me as the sovereign succour of my soul.

Many persons profess to receive much comfort from the hope that they shall not die. Certainly there will be some who will be "alive and remain" at the coming of the Lord, but is there so very much of advantage in such an escape from death as to make it the object of Christian desire? A wise man might prefer of the two to die, for those who shall not die, but who "shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air," will be losers rather than gainers. They will lose that actual fellowship with Christ in the tomb which dying saints will have, and we are expressly told that they shall have no preference beyond those who are asleep. Let us be of Paul's mind when he said that "To die is gain," and think of "departing to be with Christ, which is far better." This twenty-third psalm is not worn out, and it is as sweet in a believer's ear now as it was in David's time, let novelty-hunters say what they will.

Verse 5. "*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies*." The good man has his enemies. He would not be like his Lord if he had not. If we were without enemies we might fear that we were not the friends of God, for the friendship of the world is enmity to God. Yet see the quietude of the godly man in spite of, and in the sight of, his enemies. How refreshing is his calm bravery! "*Thou preparest a table before me*." When a soldier is in the presence of his enemies, if he eats at all he snatches a hasty meal, and away he hastens to the fight. But observe: "*Thou preparest a table*," just as a servant does when she unfolds the damask cloth and displays the ornaments of the feast on an ordinary peaceful occasion. Nothing is hurried, there is no confusion, no disturbance, the enemy is at the door, and yet God prepares a table, and the Christian sits down and eats as if everything were in perfect peace. Oh! the peace which Jehovah gives to his people, even in the midst of the most trying circumstances!

Let earth be all in arms abroad, They dwell in perfect peace.

"*Thou anointest my head with oil*." May we live in the daily enjoyment of this blessing, receiving a fresh anointing for every day's duties. Every Christian is a priest, but he cannot execute the priestly office without unction, and hence we must go day by day to God the Holy Ghost, that we may have our heads anointed with oil. A priest without oil misses the chief qualification for his office, and the Christian priest lacks his chief fitness for service when he is devoid of new grace from on high. "*My cup runneth over*." He had not only enough, a cup full, but more than enough, a cup which overflowed. A poor man may say this as well as those in higher circumstances. "What, all this, and Jesus Christ too?" said a poor cottager as she broke a piece of bread and filled a glass with cold water. Whereas a man may be ever so wealthy, but if he be discontented his cup cannot run over; it is cracked and leaks. Content is the philosopher's stone which turns all it touches into gold; happy is he who has found it. Content is more than a kingdom, it is another word for happiness.

Verse 6. "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*." This is a fact as indisputable as it is encouraging, and therefore a heavenly *verily*, or "*surely*" is set as a seal upon it. This sentence may be read, "*only goodness and mercy*," for there shall be unmingled mercy in our history. These twin guardian angels will always be with me at my back and my beck. Just as when great princes go abroad they must not go unattended, so it is with the believer. Goodness and mercy follow him always—"all the days of his life"—the black days as well as the bright days, the days of fasting as well as the days of feasting, the dreary days of winter as well as the bright days of summer. Goodness supplies our needs, and mercy blots out our sins. "*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever*." "A servant abideth not in the house for ever, but the son abideth ever." While I am here I will be a child at home with my God; the whole world shall be his house to me; and when I ascend into the upper chamber, I shall not change my company, nor even change the house; I shall only go to dwell in the upper storey of the house of the Lord for ever.

May God grant us grace to dwell in the serene atmosphere of this most blessed Psalm!

APPENDIX IV

Charles Inglis: Psalm 23

PSALM 23

POSSESSION My Shepherd
PROVISION Not want
POSITION Lie down
PASTURES Green grass
PROGRESS Walk
PLACE Valley
PRESENCE With Me
PROTECTION Rod and Staff
PREPARATION Preparest, etc.
PLENTY Running over
PURSUING (Heb.) Shall Pursue
PROSPECT House of the Lord for ever

WITH me The Lord
BENEATH me Green pastures
BESIDE me Still waters
BEFORE me A table
AROUND me Mine enemies
AFTER me Goodness and Mercy
BEYOND me House of the Lord

Perfect SATISFACTION "Shall not want."
Perfect REST "Lying down."
Perfect PEACE "Waters of quietness." (mar).
Perfect WALK "Paths of righteousness."
Perfect CONFIDENCE "Will fear no evil."
Perfect POWER "Anointest my head."
Perfect JOY "My cup runneth over."

Reference:

https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/inglis_charles/pegs-for-preachers/psalm_23.cfm?a=501001

NOTES: