

# Psalm 23:3

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[ 0 : 00 ] God doesn't just give you consolation, but restoration.! God will cherish you by changing you.

! I know I quoted him last time, but Spurgeon, he thinks of it, he says, imagine the scene when you're walking down the street and it's winter time. I'd hoped it would be a little colder than this for this illustration, but he says, imagine a winter London street, maybe think of a Victorian London street scene and it's freezing cold outside, and David opens his heart. And as he does that, it's as if a door on a house opens on the street, and inside there is this glowing warmth, there is a kind of glowing light and a heat, there's a fire roaring, there's music, there are children singing, there's a table laden with food, and it's just a place you want to be. It just calls you in from the cold. That's this psalm, he says. And we felt its warmth a few evenings ago, didn't we? The beautiful life of God's people. It began with the intimate picture David paints, the lovely image of the Lord as a shepherd, as a shepherd, tending his sheep, of a settled rest in the guarantee of God's provision in green pastures. I shall not want, he says. The Lord is God the shepherd. And then something more of the Lord tonight, something more of the good shepherd's plan for his life, he is God the restorer. So I want to focus on verse 3 tonight. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. First of all, the shepherd's work is restoration.

God is in the business of restoring. As he cherishes you, he changes you. David says he restores my soul.

Now in earlier times of English Bibles, to restore a soul maybe had a slightly different feel than it does for us today. We think of a soul, don't we, as the sort of ethereal part of a person, like a kind of spiritual bit. But the soul covers more than that. My soul is about my life, myself, everything about me. And people actually used to use that word in that way, didn't they?

Save our souls, S-O-S, didn't mean just sort of save the spiritual bit. It meant, no, come and rescue the whole of me. When the ship went down, there were ten souls on board. It's language that speaks of all of life. He's talking here about what makes me, me, my being. And God is in the business of restoring that, physical and spiritual. God is renewing and renovating the whole of me.

[ 3 : 52 ] But the implication is that before the shepherd comes to restore, David's soul needs restoring.

His soul is in ruins. If you've been in this church for a while, you might remember that before those amazing flats next door were built, there was a building next door that stood empty for quite a few years. It was in disrepair. The fabric of the building was falling apart.

All of the windows were kind of smashed or boarded up. The walls were rotten. There was graffiti everywhere. Cracks appearing as if it was slowly being eroded away by the elements of Drayton Green. It used to be something glorious. It was the Chinese embassy. But it was crumbling.

And that is a picture of the human self as David sees it. He is derelict. And he knows it.

My soul, my self needs restoring. That's the implication of verse 3. The rot began, didn't it, when our first ancestors turned away from God. The building thought they could defy the architect.

[ 5 : 14 ] And our inclination has always been the same, to serve ourselves, not God. It's what the Bible calls sin. As Martin Luther said, by nature man is curved in on himself. The walls of the building are bowing inwards, collapsing under self-obsession. But that is just not how we think about ourselves. If each of us was a building, we kind of fudge the truth about ourselves.

We as a family, we're looking forward to moving back to Wheeling in a couple of weeks. And the whole process of kind of looking for flats to rent, it's quite stressful. And most estate agents are good. Some are slightly sharkish. And you've got to learn estate agents speak.

They kind of put things in a better light, don't they, so they can sell more properties. Compact, translation, glorified cupboard. Easily maintained garden, translation, concrete as far as the eye can see. Quirky, translation, nothing matches and all the doors are four foot high. No photo available, translation, the stuff of nightmares. But that's what we do with ourselves.

Isn't it? We fudge things. I'm not a bad person really. Not as bad as them. But David knows.

And Jesus tells us how it is too, doesn't he? Mark chapter 7. For from within, out of the heart of man come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within. And they defile a person. Our souls, our self, is rotten to the core, Jesus says, from within. The fabric of our being is defiled. So we can't do anything about that. We can't restore our own souls, can we? A lick of paint won't sort of do the trick. We can't fudge it before God. But David says, my shepherd, the Lord, he restores my soul. That is his work. God will cherish me as he changes me. The original word is used in lots of ways. Restore, to turn back, to return, to revive, even from death. It's a total reversal. It's a sort of resurrection. God is taking the collapsed material of my life and he is remaking it. He is restoring it. But how is he doing it?

[ 8 : 21 ] The shepherd's work is to restore. Secondly, the shepherd's way is righteousness. The shepherd's way is righteousness. And the shepherd Lord, he says, restores my soul and he does that by leading me in paths of righteousness. The shepherd's restoration is in his navigation of life on paths.

Now just get out of kind of English countryside shepherd mode for a moment. Forget tractors and border collies. Think eastern shepherds in the wilderness. Israelite sheep followed the shepherd. Lots of travelling involved to find pasture and water. So the shepherd would know the right route to give the sheep life, to restore them. And journeying with the shepherd, it turns out for David, takes him off the beaten track. The shepherd takes his sheep off the well-trodden path of life to an unknown place. Into paths that without the shepherd we would never know them.

Into unnatural habitat. Because the well-trodden paths of life are not God's paths, are they? But my paths. By nature we walk on the paths of selfishness. We like to imagine that we can walk on a path where God is not watching. Secret paths. Think of the things that we used to do before we knew God as our shepherd and things that we attempted to do now. We love the path of self-gratification. We love the path of pride. We all know the path of hidden resentment and of unfaithfulness. The path of revenge. The path of easy riches. The path of restless worry. The path of self-pity. Basically my path isn't it? My path is the best path. Not his. We're naturally unrighteous pathfinders. We love the appearance of the smooth tarmac of the motorway of selfishness and of sinfulness. Looks so good. It looks so easy. And it does offer some fleeting pleasure doesn't it? But it's so hard to get off that road. It's impossible actually on our own. Jesus says anyone who sins is a slave to sin. So this road is not a road that we ordinarily think to walk on. We might ask ourselves am I successful? Am I happy? Am I rich? But do we ever ask am I right? Am I living rightly? Am I on the right path? Honestly. And we're lost in ourselves to find the right path. The righteous path. But David says the shepherd he knows these paths like the back of his hand. He knows the right path. He knows the path of righteousness. Stuck in a traffic jam. Stereotypically men are like this. We love a good shortcut. I'll just whip around here.

Please. Will you just follow the sat-nav? Please. No, no, it's fine. We'll chop ten minutes off the journey. Ten minutes later you're in a kind of cul-de-sac. You've got to turn around and go backwards. I made it. At times this path of righteousness feels like that. We say I'm just following my nose. And it feels like sometimes God is doing that, doesn't it? The path of righteousness feels unnerving. We look at our lives and we wonder, is the shepherd lost? But we are in uncharted territory, not him. The paths of righteousness are strange to us, not him. They may seem totally inexplicable to us, actually, marked with suffering and frustration, confusion. Confusion. The path, doesn't it, even if we read on in the psalm, leads to the valley of shadows. The valley of the shadow of death. And we might feel like the shepherd has lost his way. But these are his paths, not ours. George Bernard Shaw said that there are two tragedies in life. One is to lose your heart's desire and the other is to gain it.

[ 12 : 55 ] The road is designed to change us. To not always give us what we want. And sometimes God refuses our heart's desire to save us from tragedy. To save us from our own ruin. As he cherishes us, he seeks to change us. And the shepherd sometimes has to just get hold of the sheep, doesn't he? And say, you do not know the way. Turn here. I know the path. You must come

down here.

And it's his discipline at times. He might bring certain things into life. Illness or opposition or frustration. He even allows periods of wandering, doesn't he? To show us the true rot within. That discipline, in the end though, it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who've been trained by it, says the writer to the Hebrews. As he cherishes us, he changes us. Restoring the very fabric of our being, of our affections and of our desires. It doesn't just change our lot in life, just the external things. But he transforms us from the inside.

One writer said, it's no good being led to still waters if you've got a turbulent spirit. He doesn't want to just bring us to the still waters, but to give us a still spirit.

To quieten the turmoil and the disorder within our own hearts. To transform our character. To write his law on our hearts. Making us more holy. Because the ruin lies within.

[14:40] So he won't stop at simply consoling us. He must be restoring us. Paul says in Romans, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance.

Endurance, character and character, hope. And hope doesn't put us to shame. The righteous path may be rocky, but it's always good with the shepherds.

The Christian life is not always easy, but it is always good. I think part of the paths of righteousness are living out God's law, aren't they?

He leads us in paths of purity. In ethical purity. In holy living. And it turns out that as we walk on that path, we see that that path is the way to true enjoyment.

And to restoration of the pieces and bits of our lives. To keep us from falling in on ourselves. Just take an example of the Bible's teaching on sexual purity.

[15:45] Just as an example. That marriage is held in such a high view in the Bible. And the teaching is clear in the Bible. Sexual activity.

Anywhere else apart from between a man and a woman in marriage. It is sinful. That is not on the path of righteousness. There was a time when people thought that the Bible's teaching on things like that was just weird.

Just out of touch. The Christians are a bit kooky, aren't they? Just weird. But now it feels as though the Christians are evil, doesn't it? That the paths of righteousness are bad.

And are evil. Biblical holiness is seen as a blight on humanity. As a prison sentence. It ruins life, people think. But this is an unfamiliar path to the world.

Where holiness and happiness work together. Holiness is happiness. So marriage has been dubbed as patriarchal where men control women.

[16:57] And that does happen, doesn't it? It happens the other way around too. But in Christian marriage, when done rightly, both the man and the woman make vows. There is equality of commitment.

There is a covenant promise from both sides. It's really interesting at the moment. There's an article doing the rounds. Called, it's not marriage that's patriarchal.

It's cohabitation. It's not a catchy title. But you get the point. Harry Benson of the Marriage Foundation writes, Power in a relationship rests with the person who is least committed.

The person who has least to lose will be least constrained in his or her attitude and behaviour. The person who has most to lose will be willing to put up with more.

It leads to an asymmetry of commitment. Which is far more likely to happen in a cohabiting relationship than in a marriage.

[17:58] He goes on to say, Studies show that the weak link is often with the man. Christian marriage, done properly, it protects, doesn't it, from sinful patriarchy.

Rather than causing it. It keeps the man or the woman from taking advantage of a lack of commitment. On their own part.

God's paths, his paths of righteousness, are happy paths. Holiness is happiness, the paths of his law. David says, doesn't he, that the law of the law is perfect, reviving the soul.

Well it's the same word, to restore. The scriptures to the person who is really struggling, that cracks are appearing in their life.

That something below the surface is niggling away and they're almost falling apart. And they've just been battered by the elements for too long. And they need restoration.

[19:02] And God's law, God's paths of righteousness. His scriptures get under the foundations of life. They get beneath the real problems.

They restore us. They restore our souls. His paths of rest and grace. The paths of righteousness aren't different from the way to the still waters.

In verses 1 and 2, are they? They are the means of restoration. The Lord's ways are the only ways for this.

One way with him. To come under his rule and his lordship. To follow him. And the good shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

He continues this work, doesn't he? Restoring his people through his rule over every situation in our lives. Through his word and his spirit.

[ 20 : 05 ] He continues to apply his redemption to us. Weakening our sinful lusts over time. There are so many imperfections in us, of course.

And yet, he does this work slowly. His work is restoration on his ways of righteousness. Thirdly, and lastly, for his name's sake.

For his name's sake. Are you the kind of person who likes a project? If you buy a house, you can, I don't know, you can buy a new house, can't you?

Or a kind of new build. And it's just easy. You just move straight in. Everything's lovely. It's perfectly finished. A kind of pre-fabricated house.

Or you can find a doer-upper. Or, in a state agent's speech, you can put your own stamp on it. Translation, it's half built. But it needs restoring.

[ 21 : 08 ] And I don't know which one of those two you prefer. But there is something glorious about a restoration project, isn't there? Of renewal. There's something wonderful about taking a thing that is run down and transforming it.

And God is in the business of restoration. Why? For the sake of his own name. And I think part of that is because it's just more impressive, isn't it?

To see restoration done beautifully than a squeaky clean new build. The Lord, the shepherd, he wants projects, not prefabs.

And it's a pattern we see throughout the whole of the Bible, isn't it? God taking a broken world, taking a wicked people and restoring them.

Taking a fallen world and remaking it. Taking his enemies, humanity in all of its depravity, a derelict building, a run down building and transforming it.

[ 22 : 15 ] That his grace might be seen for the sake of his name. For his reputation in restoration. The good shepherd is not looking for prefabs.

He's not looking for people who can't see their inner spiritual rot. The doctor did not come to heal the well, but the sick. He came for lepers.

Luther again said, the love of God does not find but create that which is pleasing to it. Rather than seeking its own good, the love of God flows forth and bestows good.

Therefore, sinners are attractive because they are loved. They are not loved because they are attractive. God loves ruined people.

That he might restore them for the sake of his name. Just picture the person who is suffering from the ruination of their soul. They are like most other self-orientated people in the world.

[ 23 : 19 ] But as the shepherd takes hold of them and begins to restore that person, we see it, don't we? That work going on. We see the change.

We see the power of God that he has on them. When you meet a person that comes under the shepherd's care. And we see that and we think of their shepherd and we think, I'd like him to restore my soul.

That guy, that girl used to be so selfish. What power has transformed him into this human being? Is this the good shepherd Jesus?

I must know him. His name is honoured, isn't it? And praised as he restores his sheep for the sake of his name. I think there's more to this as well though.

Because a name stands for a lot. It stands for who you are. And the Lord, as we saw a few weeks ago, is his name Yahweh. The name tied to his character, revealed to his people, revealed to Moses as he passed by him in Exodus.

[ 24 : 32 ] The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Keeping steadfast love for thousands.

Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. But who will by no means clear the guilty. So the Lord is our shepherd. He restores my soul, leading me in paths of righteousness.

Because this is who the Lord is. His name, his character, means he is by definition gracious. He is by definition compassionate. The good shepherd lays his life down for the sheep. And bad sheep will not stop him from being a good shepherd. They will not stop him from being who he is. His name, his character defines how he behaves. For the sake of his name.

[ 25 : 33 ] And he is entirely unchanging. His response to his sheep is entirely predictable in a way. It's all about him, isn't it?

He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness. For his name's sake. The whole thing is his initiative. His work and his glory.

And so the weight behind our restoration and sanctification and growth. The force behind that is nothing less than the name of almighty God.

Bad sheep cannot stop him from being a good shepherd. David has opened the door for a little longer tonight.

And I hope we can feel the warmth again of the good shepherd. As he cherishes you. And as he changes you.

[ 26 : 32 ] Let's pray. Let's pray.