

What Motivates the Lord to Save, Sustain, and Shepherd Me? (Psalm 23:3)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on June 13, 2010

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Psalm 23 (NKJV) *A Psalm of David.* ¹ *The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.* ² *He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.* ³ ***He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.***

Flow: David moves from that the Lord *is* for him (v. 1) to what the Lord *does* for him. The emphasis of v. 2-3 is not on me and what I do, but on what He does for me and in me. “**He makes me lie down ... He leads me ... He restores my soul ... He guides me ... for His sake.**” It’s not “*I lie down, I walk beside*”; focus is the Shepherd. Having a God-centered theology is the critical foundation of Ps 23 and life before you walk through dark valleys (v. 4 next week), a high view of God as Shepherd & low view of self as needy sheep. The verbs “lie down” (v. 2) and “guide” (v. 3) in the grammar are causative, i.e., the Lord *causes* me to lie down and to be guided to right paths. The word for “lead/guide” in v. 3 is stronger than the word in v. 2. He leads effectually, mightily making sure I stay near

I don’t on my own tend to do these things; shepherds must cause stupid sheep to do what they need. Rather than be brought down, better to stay down, humbly yield our will to the shepherd, admit our insufficiency and dependence upon God, confess our need to let Him lead us all the way as Shepherd. To whatever degree that occurs, we give God all the credit and glory for what His grace has caused in us, irresistible love that overcomes our resistant hearts so that we become willing to follow our merciful Shepherd’s voice.

OUTLINE: 1. What does the shepherd do for his sheep in v. 3?
 2. *Why* does the shepherd do all these things *for us*?

We began to look at the first part of the verse last week, but taking the whole verse together, *He restores my soul*, and then *He leads / guides me in paths of righteousness / right paths*. Sheep tend to get off the right paths, to think the grass is greener on the other side of where the Shepherd is leading them, and to make their own paths.

The word here for *paths* was used in other places for the ‘tracks made by the frequent use of wagons ... paths or tracks which are clearly defined and safe; or, in the case of this verse, those tracks or paths which are morally correct ... [not necessarily] flat, smooth areas as opposed to rugged places ... David is not promising that the Lord will lead us only through the smooth places.’¹ (see v. 4)

The Shepherd restores our souls to the right paths, righteous ways. His way is not the easy route or broad road leading to destruction. He doesn’t leave us to our own ways, our own will, our free will. Whenever Scripture talks about us going our own way, it’s going astray. The American way of “doing it your own way, being your own man way” seem right to a man, but its end leads to death. We all like sheep go astray, Isaiah 53 says, there is none who seeks after God, Romans 3 says, no not one. The Shepherd must seek us!

That's not just true at conversion, that's true for mature believers:
Ps 119:176 *I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant*

God is the seeker and Savior. 1 Peter 2:25 *For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*

The word "restore" in Psalm 23:3 is often translated "return." He causes us to return, He turns us back, He brings us back Himself. Doesn't man have a part in this, you ask? Yes. We get lost. We go astray. We're prone to wander, to get into dangerous situations away from the flock and shepherd, to fall, and to be unable to rise.

The word "restore" in v. 3 can have the idea of turn, turn over, to return to its proper upright state, like an overturned "cast" sheep.

Douglas Macmillan spent many years as a shepherd and explains how sheep become "cast (down)" - an old English expression for turned over on their back and cannot turn themselves back upright:

'A sheep can very easily lie down and get into a position where it simply cannot regain its feet without the help of the shepherd ... there were two things that would make a sheep a cast sheep. One was this: it chose the nicest, softest hollow to lie in. The sheep that wanted an easy bed was always in danger, because she would lie down and sometimes stretch her legs, and then the balance of equilibrium would be lost and she could not get her feet back on the ground ... The longer she lay there, the greater her danger. Gases would build up, causing tension, making the sheep blow out and cutting of the blood supply, especially to the place where she needed it most - her legs. You know what it is like to have a bad stomach; well the sheep had three of them to contend with ...!

You see this in Christians too - the Christian who is out for the easy option, who wants the soft number in life. The shepherd who becomes wise to the fact that the sheep looks for a soft hollow chases her out of it, and Christ will do the same. He will not allow you to have a soft option; he knows the danger this is to you.

There was something else that made a sheep become a cast sheep, and that was when a sheep's fleece got too heavy for it ... This would happen especially the month before the shearing was due ... When I had a sheep that was day after day getting turned over on its back and unable to get up, I would say there was nothing else for it but to shear it ...

Our Shepherd has to do the same kind of thing [stripping away, shearing away our wooliness, worldliness, extra fluff that brings us down and incapacitates]. He will not allow you to destroy your soul, nor his work, and he will take you and shear you. He will take away, perhaps, a sense of his own presence and comfort and blessing, and leave you with nothing until he brings you back to himself.² [Recognize His love in it all, though it hurts]

Sometimes He has to make us lie down on our backs to look up. Look to your Shepherd in those times and His purpose in trials. It's His grace at times that makes us shed extra things that we realize we didn't really need and that we have all we need in Christ (v. 1). Foolish sheep don't understand it all, but trust the Good Shepherd. When earthly comforts are stripped, Christ's comfort clothes us.

The Shepherd has preventative grace, preventing future danger
 The Shepherd has protective grace, protecting in present danger
 The Shepherd has pursuing grace, when in the past we wander off or are lost, His goodness and mercy follow / pursue all of our lives

Another former shepherd Phillip Keller explains how he had ‘to look over his flock every day, counting them to see that all are able to be up and on their feet. If one or two are missing, often the first thought to flash into his mind is, *One of my sheep is cast somewhere. I must go in search and set it on its feet again* ... predators ... dogs, coyotes and cougars all know that a cast sheep is easy prey and death is not far off ... any “cast” sheep is helpless, close to death and vulnerable to attack [which] makes the whole problem of cast sheep serious ... [even without an attack] If the weather is very hot and sunny a cast sheep can die in a few hours ... [he remembers as a shepherd constantly] keeping a count of my flock and repeatedly saving and restoring cast sheep.

It is not easy to convey on paper the sense of this ever present danger. Often I would go out early and merely cast my eye across the sky. If I saw the black-winged buzzards circling overhead ... leaving everything else I would immediately go out into the rough wild pastures and count the flock to make sure every one was well and fit and able to be on its feet ... I would spend hours searching for a single sheep that was missing. Then more often than not I would see it at a distance, down on its back, lying helpless. At once I would start to run toward it – hurrying as fast as I could – for every minute was critical. Within me there was a mingled sense of fear and joy: fear it might be too late; joy that it was found at all.

... Tenderly I would roll the sheep over on its side. This would relieve the pressure of gases in the rumen. If she had been down for long I would have to lift her onto her feet. Then straddling the sheep with my legs I would hold her [upright], rubbing her limbs to restore the circulation to her legs. This often took quite a little time. When the sheep started to walk again she often just stumbled, staggered and collapsed in a heap once more.

All the time I worked on the cast sheep I would talk to it gently, “When are you going to learn to stand on your own feet?” – “I’m so glad I found you in time – you rascal!” And so the conversation would go. Always couched in language that combines tenderness and rebuke, compassion and correction.

Little by little the sheep would regain its equilibrium. It would start to walk steadily and surely ... All of this pageantry is conveyed to my heart and mind when I repeat the simple statement [of Psalm 23:3] “*He restoreth my soul.*”³

As you think of a “cast down” sheep, think of yourself spiritually. Psalm 42 says 3x *why are you cast down, O my soul...hope in God*

Lamentations 1:16 uses the same phrase as Psalm 23:3 and defines “*one who restores my soul*” as a “*comforter.*” In the same chapter, the same word for soul is translated *strength* and *life* (v. 19, 11).

Proverbs 25:13 uses the same Hebrew phrase and translates it as “*refreshes the soul.*” Psalm 19:7 has “*converts the soul*” (NKJV).

1 Kings 17 uses the same Hebrew words Elijah prays over the widow’s dead son, and v. 22 says: “*The LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the **life** of the child **returned** to him and he **revived.**”*

Someone gave me a book last Sunday that tells the story of a mom of 6 kids who also raised sheep. One mother-sheep lost her lambs:

‘Molly was bleeding and dragging remnants of afterbirth behind her – but where were her lambs? ... There they were. Two frozen newborn lambs half-covered with bloodstained snow. Their blue-gray frozen tongues were protruding from their mouths ... [we] scooped up the frozen bodies. As we ran the two hundred feet back to the house, I wondered if what I had read in *The Shepherd* magazine to revive cold lambs would work for lambs that were frozen solid. It didn’t matter. It was the only thing I knew to do.

“Jane [she says to her daughter], if we move fast enough, you won’t miss your [school] bus. What we’re going to do is fill the laundry tub with warm water, immerse the lambs, except their noses, and slowly add hot water until our hands can’t stand it.” ...

“Mom ... this isn’t working!” [as they thawed but no life]

“We can do it, Jane! Hang on to her! Keep the nose out ...

Let’s give them a few more minutes. Turn the hot water on again! Keep her underwater!” ...

Then I felt my lamb take on substance. What an incredible feeling ... life. About the same time, Jane yelled out, “Mom! I think this lamb is alive!”

At once their lifeless, slippery limbs began to feel muscular and in the right proportions. Then they began kicking like crazy as they were taking in deep breaths and expelling accumulated mucus rapidly. “Mom, they’re choking!”

Just as fear was creeping up my back, both lambs started breathing normally. My right hand was holding the lamb right where her heart was, and ... I could feel her heart beating so fast I thought it would jump right out of her chest. At the same time her eyes opened, startled ... both lambs were alive!

We didn’t have time to revel in the moment. We pulled them out of the water, wrapped them in big, fluffy towels, leaving their noses exposed, and deposited them in front of the heat register in the kitchen ... Jane ran up the stairs, taking two steps at a time. Her sisters were already screaming, “The bus is almost here [for school]! Hurry! Hurry!” Jane made a quick check in the kitchen before flying out the front door, and at that very moment, one of the lambs spoke: “Baa”

Jane looked up at me; our eyes met; words unnecessary’⁴

There’s more to that story, but the greatest joy was restoring the lost lamb to its mother. Jesus also told a story of a lost son restored

Lk 15:24 *‘this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate ...*

... ³² *‘But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’*

That’s the culmination of 3 lost-and-found stories, gospel pictures, in 3 parables Jesus told spiritually dead Pharisees, starting in v. 4 with the picture of rescuing / restoring a cast sheep / lost sheep: *“What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?”*⁵ *“When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”*⁶ *“And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’”*

The Lord as Shepherd seeks the lost. He doesn't wait for them to seek Him (thank goodness). He pursues His sheep and brings back. I love the picture of the Father in v. 20, not waiting for prodigals to crawl home, but running to meet them (like Keller's lost sheep).

²⁰ "So he got up and came to his father. **But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.** ²¹ "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² "But the father said to his slaves, '**Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand ...**'"

The Lord who gives us a ring and treats us like a son of the king, who clothes us in robes of righteousness and leads us in paths of righteousness, who rescues sinful stubborn sheep like us in our lost and hopeless state, it's not by us doing half the work and God doing His half and together we make it. Jesus does it all, paid it all, leads me all the way, and still left to myself I would go my own way and be a cast sheep and perish without Him so He picks me up and puts me on His shoulders and carries me.

Why does He do all this for someone like me of all people? What could possibly motivate Him to keep restoring us and rescuing us who are so undeserving and often so unthankful when He does it? This is the question I want to close with – what motivates the Lord to save, sustain, and shepherd me? How do I know He will keep doing so and won't abandon me if I keep wandering off again? If it is to any degree up to me, or about me, I'm in trouble (so are you). Prone to wander, scatter, get lost, spiritually sick, weak, gloomy, and I don't and won't come back on my own, but He comes to me!

Ezekiel 34:11 *For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, **I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out.*** ¹² "As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, **so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day.** ¹³ "I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them ... ¹⁴ "I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken and strengthen the sick ..."

Why does the shepherd do all these things for us?

What's amazing, and potentially life-changing is the 4 little words at the end of Psalm 23:3, that you may have never paid attention to but they're perhaps the key phrase of the Psalm: *for His name sake*. Just about everyone in this room has that verse memorized but have you ever really let yourself be mesmerized by what it says? God doesn't rescue or restore our soul or lead us in righteousness paths for *our sake* – what does it say again? *For his name sake*. It's not ultimately for us, or about us, or dependent on us, even though it benefits us, and that's actually very good news for us. The motive of my Shepherd-Lord is not me, it's His own name / glory!

This is how it's been all the way through biblical history. Why did God continue to preserve and pursue Israel for so many years of apostasy, idolatry, wandering, rebellion, sinfulness, stubbornness?

Ezekiel 36:18 *Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had shed on the land, because they had defiled it with their idols.* ¹⁹ *“Also I scattered them among the nations and they were dispersed throughout the lands. According to their ways and their deeds I judged them.”* ²⁰ *“When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name, because it was said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD; yet they have come out of His land.’”* ²¹ ***“But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.”*** ²² *“Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.”* ²³ ***“I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD,” declares the Lord GOD, “when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.”*** ²⁴ *“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.”* ²⁵ *“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.”* ²⁶ *“Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”* ²⁷ *“I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”* ²⁸ *“You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.”* ³² ***“I am not doing this for your sake,” declares the Lord GOD, “let it be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel!”***

Ezekiel 20:8 *“they rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them **in the midst of the land of Egypt.** [Israel was idolatrous before they left Egypt, and God rightly and justly should have wiped them out in Egypt]”* ⁹ ***“But I acted for the sake of My name*** [i.e., He wasn’t gracious for their sake, but for His own sake, for His name, it wasn’t about them. He led them out of Egypt in paths of righteousness for His name sake, for the honor of His name, His glory, His reputation] ¹³ *“But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. ...”* ¹⁴ ***“But I acted for the sake of My name*** [the only reason Israel wasn’t wiped out then at the end of v. 13, the only reason it’s never been wiped out is God’s great name, Israel has never deserved it] ²¹ *“But **the children rebelled** against Me; they did not walk in My statutes, nor were they careful to observe My ordinances, by which, if a man observes them, he will live; they profaned My sabbaths. So I resolved to pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness.”* ²² ***“But I withdrew My hand and acted for the sake of My name*** [again what motivates and moves His hand of mercy is His own name] ³⁹ *“As for you, O house of Israel,” thus says the Lord GOD, “Go, serve everyone his idols; but later you will surely listen to Me, and **My holy name you will profane no longer**[day is coming]”* ⁴¹ ***“As a soothing aroma I will accept you when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I will prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations.”*** ⁴² *“And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers. [Isaiah 60:21 explains this is not to honor or glorify Israel but the name of the Lord. God says in Isa 60:21 “They will possess the land forever ... That I may be glorified.” – that’s why this matters, why God does anything – for His glory]*

... ⁴⁴ “Then you will know that **I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name’s sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel**”

Ps 106:6 *We have sinned like our fathers, We have committed iniquity, we have behaved wickedly.* ⁷ *Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; They did not remember Your abundant kindnesses, But rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea.* ⁸ *Nevertheless **He saved them for the sake of His name**, That He might make His power known ...* [it’s about His glory not our goodness, PTL]

... ⁴⁷ *Save us, O LORD our God, And gather us from among the nations, To give thanks to Your holy name And glory ...*

This is very good news for very sinful sheep like us! This is what motivates our Lord to save, sustain, and shepherd people like us! If it was up to us, or based on us, or dependent on us, we wouldn’t be saved or keep ourselves saved. I know I wouldn’t and couldn’t, and if you don’t think of yourself more highly than you ought, you know the same is true of all of you. We all like sheep go astray, God’s Word declares, but praise the LORD that something higher than us drives Him as Shepherd. He is more committed to His name than He is to us. And that’s good for us, because we are not worthy, but His name is worthy. It’s not based on our faithfulness but on His, not our greatness but the greatness of His name/glory. It’s not based on our changing and often failing state, but on His unchangeable and unfailing name and nature and character.

If you understand it’s all about God’s name, it’s not about you, and that what He does is for His sake not yours; that big view of God must affect how you think and live and pray.

Psalm 143:11 *For the sake of Your name, O LORD, revive me. In Your righteousness bring my soul out of trouble.*

Ps 109:21 *But You, O GOD, the Lord, deal kindly with me for Your name’s sake; Because Your lovingkindness is good, deliver me;*

Psalm 25:11 *For Your name’s sake, O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.*

Psalm 23:3 *He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness **for His name sake.***

Psalm 31:3 *For You are my rock and my fortress; **For Your name’s sake You will lead me and guide me.***

Lord preserve us, not because we deserve it, but your name does.

160 years ago this summer, a 15-year-old new believer began to write a diary of his experiences with the Good Shepherd Jesus, and so much of it really illustrates the truths from Psalm 23:3:

April 11 [1850] Have had sweet thoughts upon, “I am the good Shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine.” How can one of His sheep be lost if He knows all His own? ... Heard Mr. S. [preach from Ps today]. I love to hear him give all the honor of our salvation to God. Shepherd of Israel, guide Thy flock into all truth! Quicken me, and make me love you more and more!

April 12. — Earthly things have engaged too much of my thoughts this day. I have not been able to fix my attention entirely upon my Savior. Yet, even yet, the Lord has not hidden His face from me. Though tempted, I am not cast down; tried, but not overcome; truly it is of the Lord's sovereign mercy ... O God ... keep me down, and then I need fear no fall! [pretty mature prayer by a 15-year old for God to keep him low and humble so he won't fall!]

April 13. —Blessed be the Shepherd, I walk now beside the still waters ... Trust in Him, my soul; follow hard after Him.

April 17. ... I am a living miracle, a walking wonder of grace that I am alive at all; much more, following on. May I from this time live nearer to Him, and honor His name more!

April 19. — I do not live near enough to God. I have to lament my coldness and indifference in the ways of the Lord. O God of restoring grace, visit your servant in the midst of the days!

April 20. —... I have not prayed, or studied my Bible as I ought. I confess mine iniquity, and my sin is ever before me ... I can do nothing. Weak and sinful worm am I.

April 21. —No merit in me, I am sure; vilest of the vile, for so long shutting mine eyes to this great salvation ...

April 22. The Lord has not forsaken me ... [I'm] more enchanted with that Savior who is the life of all my joy. Faith is the precious gift of God, and love is His gift; it is all of God from first to last.

April 27. — Fear, begone! Doubts, fall back! In the name of the Lord of hosts I would set up my banner. Come on, ye demons of the pit, my Captain is more than a match for you; in His name, armed with His weapons, and in His strength, I dare defy you all. How glorious 'twould be to die by the side of such a Leader! I am a worm, and no man, a vanity, a nothing; yet ... He set His love upon me, and why should I tremble or fear?

May 3. [this entry on his baptism date really exemplifies the end of Psalm 23:3 "*for His name sake*"] in your strength I now devote myself to your service forever; never may I shrink from owning your name! ... I vow to glory alone in Jesus and His cross, and to spend my life in the extension of His cause, in whatsoever way He pleases. I desire to be sincere in this solemn profession, having but one object in view, and that to glorify God. Blessing upon your name that you hast supported me through the day ...

May 5. "***His honor is engaged to save The meanest of His sheep.***"

May 6. —Lord, save me from pride and from sloth, my two great enemies; keep me, oh, keep and preserve me! I am an erring sheep. It is in your power that I trust, upon your strength I rely; I am less than nothing, hold me by Thine own right hand!

May 7. — I have again to confess my lukewarmness; I fear I am losing my first love. Coldness and deadness seem to be natural to me; I have no inward warmth, it all comes from the Sun of righteousness, by rich, free, and sovereign grace. What a mercy that I have not been altogether frozen to death, and left to perish in my sinful distance from God! Lord, help me to follow you, and may your right hand uphold me! Strength, O Lord, I need!

May 9. [Pastor] has resigned. Well, we have a better [Shepherd], who cannot, who will not leave us. Truly, I have sunk very low; my lamp seems going out in obscurity. Lord, fan it, keep it burning yet! I know that I can never perish; yet be pleased, my God, to visit me again, to revive and uphold me, so that I may honor you more

May 10. — Blessed be the name of the Lord, He has not left His servant, or turned away from His chosen! Though I have often sinned, and neglected the sweet privilege of prayer, yet He hath not deserted me ...

May 11 ... My own soul is encouraged, my life is revived ...

May 12. [Sunday morning sermon] was upon 1 Corinthians 4:7. Truly, I have nothing which I have not received; I can boast of no inherent righteousness. Had the Lord not chosen me, I should not have chosen Him. Grace! Grace! Grace! 'Tis all of grace. I can do nothing, I am less than nothing; yet what a difference, — once a slave of hell, now the son of the God of Heaven! Help me to walk worthy of my lofty and exalted vocation! Afternoon, Psalm 48:14, "This God is *my* God for ever and ever; HE WILL be *my* Guide even unto death." I can wish for no better Guide, or more lasting Friend; He shall lead me in His own way.

May 15. — How feeble I am! I am not able to keep myself near to God. I am compelled to acknowledge my own deadness. I confess how greatly I have strayed from you, you great Fountain of living waters; but, —

"Since I've not forgot your law, Restore your wandering sheep."

Revive me in the midst of the years, and make your face to shine upon me! How much do I deserve eternal damnation! But salvation is not of [what's fair or deserved], but of free grace ...

May 16. — Went to chapel. Sermon on Psalm 23:3. How much do I need this restoration! If the Lord does not do it, I cannot ... restore unto me the joy of your salvation! I am in a low condition, yet I am eternally safe. He will lead me.

May 21 ... Lord, how can I leave you? To whom, or whither should I go? you center of my love, all glorious names in one, you brightest, sweetest, fairest One, that eyes have seen or angels known, I trust you for salvation; without you, I can do nothing. I am utter weakness, you must do it all, or I shall perish! Love of loves, all love excelling, fix my wandering heart on you!

May 23. Went to chapel, very few there. "He restoreth my soul." The same subject again! How true is this, how has He revived me! Short, but glorious, are the days of my refreshing... let not my first love chill and grow cold! Keep me and preserve in your hands!

May 25. Free grace, sovereign love, eternal security are my safeguards... "None shall pluck them out of [the Shepherd's] hand."

June 4 ... Lord, help me now to mount my watch-tower against pride and sloth! Keep me always upon the look-out, lest an enemy should come unawares; forgive me, if I have ever had high thoughts of myself! you make me to feel my weakness in every part; may I now trust and rely upon the arm of Omnipotence, the mercies of the Lord! Give strength, Lord, strength!

June 5. — Awake, my soul, record the mercies of the Lord! ...

Mercy, I breathe Another's air, I am a tenant of this earth at my Master's will; sovereign grace has kept me hitherto, upon sovereign grace I now rely. What sweet moments have I had in answer to prayer; blessed be the Lord for His rich mercy ...

June 9 ... Felt rather hurt by Mr. C., he does not act quite rightly; but I hereby forgive him. I desire to look alone to Jesus, and regard His glory only. I am too proud, I am weak in every point; keep me, for I have no strength! I would look up to you, — the Strong ...

June 11. — Prayer seems like labor to me, the chariot wheels drag heavily; yet they are not taken off. I will still rely upon almighty strength; and, helpless, throw myself into the arms of my Redeemer ... yet see His beautiful face. He loved me before the foundations of the earth, before I was created or called by grace.

June 19. — My birthday. Sixteen years have I lived upon this earth, and yet I am only — scarcely six months old! I am very young in grace. Yet how much time have I wasted, dead in trespasses and sins, without life, without God, in the world! What a mercy that I did not perish in my sin! How glorious is my calling, how exalted my election, born of the Lord ... may I love it and prize it under all circumstances!⁵

That's the last entry in the diary of the young Charles Spurgeon, this very week, 160 years ago, perhaps the most influential preacher ever. I can only conclude as I read those words of a 15-year-old young man, that the Lord blessed him because he saw himself as a needy sheep, and his only hope his relationship with the Great Shepherd. I'm almost exactly 20 years older than Spurgeon was when writing those words, and I have to confess I'm convicted and have a longer way to go in those same struggles. I'm a lowly sheep not humbled or lowly enough, but PTL that all the way my Savior leads me, too. Whether you've been saved 3 months, as he was when writing that diary, or a believer for 50 years, the truths of Psalm 23 never fade.

¹ Davis, 84.

² MacMillan, 95-96.

³ Keller, 50-51.

⁴ Sharon Niedzinski, *Heaven has a Blue Carpet: A Sheep Story by a Suburban Housewife*, Thomas Nelson publishers, p. 98-100.

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *Autobiography: The Early Years*, Banner of Truth, pronouns updated by PL.