

He Restores My Soul

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Preacher: Luke R

[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church West, William. Thank you.

Thank you. Amen. Thanks. I have one to Luke, who's going to leave.

Okay. I wasn't here last week, but I've been hearing that we've been talking lots about Psalm 23.

Who was here last week? Yeah, great.

Okay. What did Annalie talk about? The first line. Brilliant. That's what I thought. What is the first line? Who knows it? I shall not want.

Yeah. I was listening to, I'll mention this later, but I was listening to John Piper speak about it. John Piper's an American kind of author and pastor. And, you know, there's different translations of the Bible.

[1 : 21] So he was talking about the one, you will probably know where, the Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. And he found that word want quite confusing as a young Christian, because he thought, does that mean, you know, I can have everything?

And then, you know, he realised that want's got these two meanings, hasn't it? You know, probably an old fashioned meaning somewhat that you don't go wanting. It means you lack nothing. So the NIV says, the Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing, which is what we were saying earlier.

Today, we're going to be looking really at verses two and three. So I think we've got them here.

Regan can put them up for us. Verse two and three. It says, he makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. So we, can we just pray and invite God just to speak to us this afternoon?

Lord, we thank you that you are our shepherd. Lord, we thank you that you are the shepherd that we need, that you are a perfect shepherd.

[2 : 26] Lord God, and that we can trust you in every way. We can trust you to guide us and to lead us through our lives. So we just pray that you would be doing that even today, God, that you'd be guiding us, to listen and to hear you and to be changed by you.

In Jesus' name, amen. Great. So we're going to be thinking about these verses today. And it is a really well-known psalm, isn't it? Probably lots of people who wouldn't call themselves a Christian might have heard this, maybe at a wedding or different ways.

I wonder if it was at the royal weddings, that kind of thing. Probably it's a really famous one. And I think it's become so famous and so popular amongst Christians and perhaps even non-Christians because I think it's so personal.

Out of many of the psalms, it's such a personal psalm. And it's a real description of what it is to personally experience God, you know, to really know him, to experience him.

And as a Christian, at the core of our faith, we obviously have our beliefs, don't we? Our key things that we believe about God or that we understand about him, what he's like, his character. But that has to go along with a personal experience of God.

[3 : 40] It can't just be knowledge of who he is. It also has to be that meeting with him, that experience of him in our lives. And the author, King David, he uses words like I and my and me.

It's very much a personal. It's not a we psalm. There are others which are about we, you know, a corporate thing that we do. And as a church, we would often say things together. Our Father in heaven. You know, it's great to do that.

But it's also really important to have that personal relationship with God. We can't just rely on each other's faith, but we have that personal relationship with God. And that's really important, especially if you've been perhaps brought up in a Christian home.

And maybe you never took that step to actually make it your own faith, to have your own relationship with God. And I think David in this psalm is encouraging us to seek God personally, to know him.

And I think all of us, again, whether you are a Christian or not, I think all of us have a longing for the kind of experience described in this psalm. You know, it talks about being truly refreshed, to be truly renewed, to be restored.

[4 : 48] And I think if you look around the world today, certainly in this country, and you look at what sorts of things are popular and trending and all that kind of stuff, a lot of it's about being restored and renewed and refreshed, isn't it?

People looking in all sorts of ways to find that. And as a Christian, I believe we can find all of that in God, in our shepherd. You might have heard of a guy called St. Augustine.

I think he was around in about 400 AD, so many hundreds of years ago. And he had this, well, it's a quotation. We think it says anyway. I've changed that a little bit into more modern language because he uses a lot of vowels, that kind of thing.

But he says this about God. He says, I think C.S. Lewis described it like a vacuum, like a hole in us. It's a God-shaped hole. You know, all of us, whether we understand that or not, whether we really know it or not, we have that yearning, that longing to have an experience of God. And we're restless until we find that in God.

[5 : 55] And maybe you found that in your life to be true, that the only true rest and refreshment you get is in God. And maybe you're searching for that. Maybe today will help you on that journey.

So, as we've said already, the psalm, it's a really personal sort of reflective psalm. So, today, rather than me saying lots of stuff about theology, I'm going to just be personal too about my life and how I feel this psalm has affected me and how I've seen it work out in my life.

And maybe it'll help you reflect on your life too. I'm going to call this message Seasons and Surprises. Seasons and Surprises. And we'll find out why in a minute.

So, first of all, let's think about seasons of life. I don't know about you, but in my experience, life doesn't always go in a simple, straight path.

You know, life is a bit like, sometimes a bit like climbing up a mountain, you know, a tall mountain. And there are lots of times on a hike up a mountain where you can stop and you can enjoy it and you can look out on the amazing view and it's brilliant.

[7 : 00] And then there are a lot of times where it's just painful, hard, uphill struggle. And life could be like that, you know. In your life, you will have had seasons where it feels peaceful.

You know, a season of peace. But there will have been times, I'm sure, of turmoil. There may have been seasons where you feel real hope for the future. But there's probably been times where you feel anxiety about the future.

There will have been seasons of joy. But inevitably, there's also times where we feel in despair. This is life, isn't it? This is what we call life.

And it is a journey and there are many seasons to life. And in our psalm today, I think we get a sense of the different seasons of life. Sometimes we feel as though we are really, truly at rest.

You know, that picture of being in the green pasture. There's still waters. But other times, we feel like we're walking through the valley. You know how it talks about the dark valley? Life has both of those, doesn't it?

[8 : 03] Those two things. And they don't just happen once, usually. They come back, backwards and forwards. Lots of different seasons. Next week, I think we're going to be thinking more about the dark valley.

So today, we're going to focus. I got the easier job of focusing on the green pastures. Now, a simple reading of the psalm tells us that life has got its ups and its downs. And for me, I've experienced these at different seasons in my life.

You know, the psalm says, He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. He refreshes my soul. My personal experience of times like that, that we've just heard, are that they are very precious.

They're not always the norm. They are very precious times and they're very life-giving times. You know, and they can change your life, those moments that we have with God. And for me, those moments where I felt truly at rest and refreshed by God is often when I've heard from God afresh.

You know, when I've really received something afresh from God and heard his voice. And often that is just through, it could be reading the Bible. It could be hearing the Bible spoken, you know. [9 : 15] Or it could be listening to someone explain the Bible. You know, often I need help. I don't know about you, but sometimes the Bible is not always that easy to understand. So hearing someone explain it to me can be really important for me.

And you know, when I've really heard God's voice, that renews my spirit. Yeah? I'm sure that would be the same for lots of you. You know, and what I mean by that is you can listen to the Bible being spoken.

You can read it, but you can quite easily not hear God's voice for various reasons. Maybe you're tired. Maybe you're not really listening. Maybe the person who's explaining it is not doing a great job of it.

That happens sometimes, doesn't it? Maybe we're just not ready to receive. But when you really hear God's voice, it changes you, doesn't it? It renews you. And that is not something I think is unique to me.

It's not something that's new. In another one of the Psalms, Psalm 19, verse 7, we hear this short little verse. It says, The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.

[10 : 19] The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. God's word, the Bible, is perfect. Now, that could mean lots of things. We've not got time to go into today.

But one of the things I think the Bible, the word of God, is perfect at is that it is perfectly and exactly what I need to hear. So at different points in my life, God's word has spoken to me and it's been exactly what I needed to hear.

It's exactly what I needed to be truly refreshed. Whereas I could pick up loads of other books or magazines or look on social media and they are not exactly what I need to hear.

They're not perfect. But God's word is perfect and it revives and refreshes the soul. Sometimes, I mentioned earlier, it could be someone that actually explains the Bible to us that can be that really helpful sort of stepping stone to understanding it.

So it could be a friend, maybe someone at home group or someone on like a Sunday sermon like this. And as I mentioned, I was listening to John Piper speak about this verse. And, you know, it's amazing.

[11 : 26] They've got recordings. And this one was back to 1980. So I don't know how old he was back then, but pretty young, I guess. Probably like me or something. Not saying I'm that young, but, you know, he's pretty old.

He's pretty old. So that's like 45 years ago. But you know what? I was listening to it yesterday and it spoke to me like today. It doesn't matter if it was 45 years ago.

Probably doesn't matter if it was 100 years ago. God's word is unchanging. And he was just explaining it, you know, in simple ways. He was just explaining it. And it refreshed me. And it was like food to me, you know, food to my soul.

It's what I needed. So God's word, I think, is a great source of refreshment. And I suppose you can receive God's word in lots of different ways.

Maybe you listen to it on your headphones. Whatever way. I don't think there's a special way of doing that. And I think however you want to do that is great. The main thing is we're getting into his word and we're feeding on it.

[12 : 23] So we're not just reading it because we have to, to get through the chapters. But actually we're feeding on his word. We're letting it come in to refresh us. You know, it's important that we do that. You know, I've got this water here.

And there are times when you just drink because you have to. You have to keep hydrated. There's other times you drink and you just, it nourishes you. You feel it.

You experience it. And I think what we want and what I want for my life is to have those times where I really am enjoying and being fed by God's word and spending time listening to him.

Other times of refreshment in my life have stemmed often from people praying for me. So probably similar for lots of you. You know, when people pray for you, if something really special happens and they might pray for you and you might not know about it.

So they might be in their house and you might be doing your thing and they might pray for you. And that's fantastic. What I'm thinking about are those moments where you are together with even just one or two or maybe as a big group and you are praying for one another.

[13 : 24] And often in that moment, people might want to share something they feel God has spoken to help you. You know, we'd call it a prophetic word, but something they feel God's spoken to them that they want to share with you.

And for me, those sorts of words have been so important and so refreshing, so helpful, so encouraging. I've got a book here that I used to write and I don't write in it so much now. I'm thinking I probably need to. But whenever someone would pray for me or share something and say, you know what, Luke, I think God wants to say this to you. I would try and write it down as often as I could.

And I've forgotten a lot of what was in here. So I was reading it this morning, actually, and it just reminded me, wow, God speaks. God really speaks. And God has spoken to me through my life as a Christian.

And, you know, it's often different people are saying things, but somehow they have a common message. I wonder why that might be that God is speaking to me through the words of other people.

[14 : 23] I was looking at some this morning and they are from about 15 years ago. And I thought I'd just share a couple of things. This is back in the year 2008.

I won't ask you how old you were in the year 2008. It doesn't sound that long ago, does it? But it's about, well, it's quite a few years ago now. And two different people spoke to me. You know, I was just praying with them and they spoke to me.

One of them is a lady who we used to go to church with in Edinburgh. And one of them was a young guy, sort of same age as me, from another church where I grew up.

And I must have been, oh, I was at university at this point. Yeah. So this lady spoke to me. She said this to me as she was praying. She said she was praying and she saw in her mind a picture of a knife.

It's a bit scary, isn't it? A knife. But the knife was being sharpened on a stone that's spinning. I don't actually know if that's how knives get sharpened. But I'm guessing it's, I'm looking at Craig, you'd know that, yeah.

[15 : 24] And she was saying that she felt God had a time coming up for me over the next few months where I was going to be sharpened for him. I know that sounds a bit strange.

But, you know, sometimes we need to be sharpened for God. He's got things for us. We need to be aware of what God's doing. We need to be ready. And that's what she felt God was doing in me.

She said, Luke, you need to be sharp. And she also said that when that happens, sparks fly. So if you've ever seen it on TV with the knife getting sharpened, you'll see sparks, won't you?

And she said for me that that meant that this time might not be that comfortable. It might not be that easy because the sparks will be flying. But it's a good thing because God's at work in my life.

That was in May 2008. The next month, I was in a completely different place. The two people didn't know each other at all. And someone was praying for me. And they said this. I just see a picture of a sword being made.

[16 : 22] And there's molten metal being poured into moulds. And then it's getting bashed about to shape and to sharpen it. And God is moulding you. And he might put you through some trials to really shape you and sharpen you.

And that was two weeks apart. And I just, to be honest, I'd forgotten. Because it was a long time ago. I'd forgotten that had happened. But rereading that just reminds me that God really does speak.

If we have ears to listen, he really does want to speak to us. And he wants to change our lives. Now, the reason I say that is because often I found those moments incredibly refreshing.

I might have been going through a bit of a dry spell or a bit of disappointment or whatever. Those moments can be the catalyst for change. They can be such refreshing moments.

And just like being refreshed from here in the Bible, you know, receiving prophetic words is not new advice that I'm giving us here.

[17 : 22] It's not unique to me. The Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 14, The one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, their encouraging and their comfort.

Do you know, I have known that to be so true in my life. And it's formed different seasons of real refreshment in God. So I would encourage all of us, you know, we've talked about getting into the word of God.

I wonder we might even have time today where we can just pray and ask God to speak to us, you know, and to pray for one another. And if it can't be done today, there'll be times over the next few weeks, you can just ask someone, would you pray for me?

And when you're praying for someone, be bold. You know, just, you might just have a thought, oh, a picture of a knife. That's weird, isn't it? But sometimes as you share that, the words come and it starts to mean something, doesn't it?

God speaks through you. So let's be doing that. Now, these seasons of refreshment, you know, the green pastures and the still waters, sometimes we often just wish they would last forever, don't we? [18:30] We do. They are wonderful seasons and they can be really life-changing. And equally, in troubled times, we often hope the season would pass as quickly as possible. You know, it would be the opposite.

But this leads me to the second thing I wanted to say. So we've talked about seasons. The second one was surprises. You see, I am often surprised. I am not really in charge of my life.

You might have heard of this famous poem, *Invictus*. And the lion says, I am the master of my fate. I'm the captain of my soul. You know, as Christians, even though we know that's not true, we can often find ourselves living like that or choosing to live like that or thinking that way that we are in charge when actually the opposite is true.

We are not in charge of our lives. We can find ourselves following that kind of way of the world, the pattern of the world. However, time and time again, God has surprised me.

I shouldn't be surprised, but I always get surprised that actually it's him who is in control of my life. Praise God. You know, life has got its ups and downs.

[19:40] And what we see in the psalm that we've read is that these seasons of life, they're not random. They're not accidental. So you're not in charge of your life and I'm not in charge of mine.

God is in charge. He is the shepherd and he is in loving control of your life. The author, David, he could have thought he was in charge.

He was a king. He was a man of power. He had authority. He had influence. But in this psalm, he doesn't emphasize his kingship, his influence.

He emphasizes the shepherd's kingship. You know, the shepherd's leading. He says about God, he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters.

He guides me along the right paths. I've been a Christian for over 20 years, but I am often surprised and I am still learning that the Lord, my shepherd, is leading me through seasons of life.

[20:42] It is not random. It is not accidental. And I think that's really important. And I forget it. So when I'm going through a particularly difficult season of my life, I think, oh, you know, this is just it, isn't it?

What am I going to do? But actually, it's not an accident. It's not random. In the same way, if I'm going through a season of refreshing, it's because it's what I need. It's what God is doing in my life because he knows I need it.

It's a really great comfort. It means that God knows what you need. God knows when you need to be refreshed. He really does. And if you need refreshing, he will make you lie down in green pastures.

Kind of a weird phrase, isn't it? I don't totally know what it means to make you lie down. I imagine that's what a shepherd does. He probably has to be quite forceful with the sheep sometimes. No, you will stay here in this green pasture.

This is where the good place is for you right now. And God can be like that with us. He can be forceful. And that's good because he knows what we need. It means when you need refreshment, God knows and he will lead you beside the water to drink.

[21:53] It also means that you can expect to be surprised when life changes, when the season changes. God is moving you on to something new, something different. And it's often something you don't expect.

It's certainly something that you probably didn't plan for yourself. But God knows and he's leading you on to a new season. If you're facing a time of challenge, even right now, if you're facing something that's really difficult, remember it is a season.

It won't last forever. And God will move you on to a new season. You might be surprised one day when it changes. It's a bit like when you've got a pain somewhere, you know, your knee or something.

And each day you're like, oh, it's painful. Usually you don't notice when the pain's gone. You just go, oh, yeah, that was really painful. It's like that. God moves you on to something new, a new season in your life.

And I'm often surprised by the timing of that and the things that God does to bring me refreshment. You know, we've heard about listening to God's voice through his word, through other people.

[22 : 56] Another source of refreshment for me has just been people caring for me, you know, and people offering to listen or talk to me. Not necessarily with any sort of agenda and not sharing a particular scripture or a particular word from God.

It's just they're just listening and they're just chatting. I remember in the last couple of years, I can't quite remember when, but I was finding life just quite draining. Has anyone been there before? Yeah, it wasn't like there were any big emergencies, but sometimes life is just a bit draining. And it was a school holiday. So we went to visit my mom and dad. They live in Durham. They've been Christians for a long time.

And do you know what? They didn't do anything special. They just listened to us. They just chatted to us. And the main thing is they just encouraged me and Shah, just as we were sharing about life. And I came out of that two or three days feeling so light, like my burdens had just been lifted. I felt so refreshed. And it's almost like it's a magic bullet.

[23 : 57] You know, if you could get that as a medicine, it would sell, wouldn't it? But it's something that is part of fellowship, isn't it? It's part of being part of a family of God. And I know they were my biological family, but I think it can be true for any of us.

That actually, as we listen to each other, as we think about each other, as we pray for each other, burdens are lifted. You know, that lightness comes. And it can be so refreshing.

I hadn't planned for that to happen. I didn't expect it. I just thought we'd go for a couple of nice days. But God knew what I needed. And God refreshed me. So, Psalm 23, it reminds me of the seasons of life.

And it reminds me of surprises, that God is actually in charge. He is leading, not me. And it reminds me that he is a loving shepherd.

And he wants us to experience real, true refreshment in him. So I wonder, we've got a few minutes, actually. It'd be great to just pray. Do you know what we'll do?

[25 : 04] I think if we could just maybe close our eyes. And I will just pray for us. And I think what would be great is just to have, to wait on God. And what I mean by waiting on God is to just, to be listening to him.

To be open to him. Thank you, Lord. Thank you that you're with us, God. Thank you, Lord.

Lord, we picture you today as this wonderful shepherd who knows exactly what we need. Lord, we thank you.

We thank you, Lord. Thank you that you are compassionate. That you are loving. That you are kind. Thank you that you are in charge.

Lord, we just want to give you our lives today. Lord, would you, would you be our king?

[26 : 04] Would you be the one that we look to? God, we thank you that we can trust you completely. That you are wholly dependable and faithful.

Everything about you is good and true. Thank you, Lord. Lord, but we also know that we really need you.

We need your refreshing touch in our lives. We need you to speak to us, Lord. Come, Lord.

I wonder if you just feel that you need God to refresh you today.

I wonder if you'd just be brave and just put your hand up. I'd love us to pray for one another. So if that's you, why don't you just put your hand up just now?

[27 : 04] And we can gather around and we can pray for one another. Because God, I think, wants to refresh us. Just give us another minute.

Just if it's you, just put your hand up and we'll spend some time praying for each other. Well, I wonder if we could...

I'm sure people don't really mind me saying... I know you put your hand up. So it'd be great if a couple of people want to pray. And I wonder if there's anyone else.

If it's you, just pop your hands right up and we'll see you. Yeah, at the back as well. So if you've not got anyone to pray for, why don't you turn and just pray in wee groups as well. And we've got five minutes.

Just have time to listen to God and to pray that for people. If that sounds good. Yeah, great. Okay, well, why don't we do that? Let's pray. Thank you. Thank you.