

His Goodness and Love Follow Me

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[0 : 00] This is a sermon from King's Church Westmore. We'll talk along and we'll describe what we think they're chatting about as they're standing there.

It kind of keeps our kids entertained and it keeps us entertained too, to be honest, well, a bit anyway. Do you remember Nick Park did this thing some years ago? These kind of creature comfort videos.

Is anyone else old enough to remember these? Yeah, it turns out they're in the 90s if you want to feel really old. They were 25 years ago that these were current. And I thought I'd treat you with a little clip. We're just going to watch the first 30 seconds, which is just to remind you what they were like.

I'm going to stop there because you're having to guess what they're saying now, aren't you? You can't actually hear them well enough to know what they're saying. But when I look at different animals, I think, you know, cats. They say that dogs have owners and cats have staff.

I imagine cats tend to think, oh, thank goodness you're here to serve me because I am really important. Or our dog, I used to imagine it thinking, where are they? Where are they? Where are they? Are they back yet? Are they back yet? I need food. Are they back yet? Are they back?

[1 : 24] You know, they just have an adoration kind of built-in dogs. I know, Ben, you've got a few, haven't you? They just seem to, most dogs I've met anyway, seem to adore. And their inner life seems to be, oh, I love these owners so much.

Goldfish, there's that kind of idea that they have an eight-second memory. So you've got your kind of, oh, isn't this a lovely goldfish bowl? Oh, I love the way this looks. I don't remember being here before. Isn't this a lovely goldfish bowl? I don't remember being here.

But they've got different kind of things going on, I imagine. And in Psalm 23, we've had the joy of getting to know David, understanding himself and encouraging us to see ourselves as sheep.

And the Lord as the good shepherd. And I think what we'll find in this text and the verse we're looking at today is a bit of the inner workings of, or the inner mind of a sheep.

Because Psalm 23, 6 says, the first part of 6 says, Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.

[2 : 25] Now as a sheep, there are all kinds of things that you need and all kinds of things that can go wrong. And I imagine for a sheep it's a bit like this. Like, oh man, we've been eating this grass for weeks and it's getting a bit bare.

What are we going to do? Oh, there's the good shepherd leading us to a new field where we can find food. Oh man, there's a storm coming. What are we going to do?

I have zero coat on, no protection of my own. In fact, I'm generally pretty useless, it seems, if you read stuff about sheep. Oh look, there's the good shepherd leading us into safety. Oh no, I've got fleas.

What am I going to do? I don't even know if fleas are a thing for sheep, to be honest, but I forgot to check that out. Oh no, I've got fleas. What am I going to do? I'm all itchy. This is true. Oh, here's the good shepherd taking me for a wash and treating me against my diseases.

Although, I'll just scratch my back on this grass here, you know, and oh no, I've done it again. My legs are in the air and I cannot turn myself around.

[3 : 26] What will I do? Here he is again, coming to get me the right way up and make sure I can walk again. And his goodness and his mercy and his love, sorry, follow them all the days about their lives.

And you imagine, from David's perspective, a sheep's inner life can be one of needing stuff and finding he's good to us. Of getting in trouble and finding he meets with us.

And I was once on Orkney and across Orkney they just had these signs across near every field you could walk near of a sheep up on its back with its legs in the air. Basically saying, if you see me like this, I am in trouble.

Please call the shepherd. And it would have a number under it, which I thought was the coolest thing. The idea, A, that they were that stupid or that designed like that and they couldn't actually get themselves up. But B, the shepherd is on call any time.

And he'd literally gone out and put his name all around the fields so that he could be called. So that his goodness and his love could sort out that sheep in trouble.

[4 : 30] Isn't that brilliant? David knew that experience. If you think, if you know anything of the life of David, you'll know that his life was really interesting.

Because in his early life, he's the guy that beats Goliath. And he doesn't just say, I know I can do this because I'm really good at this. He does it because he says, this is the Gordon translation, but you can look it up yourself.

He says, basically he says, the Lord has, sorry, he's been with me as I have thought of all these other animals.

He has been with me. I know he's good. Therefore, I'm going to go beat Goliath. I'll come back to that in a minute because I forgot a little bit I want to talk to you about first. When we talk about goodness and love, there are three key words I want us to know today.

And we've been getting into our Hebrew a little bit. My Hebrew isn't great, so forgive my terrible pronunciation. But I think they reveal something really, really helpful about what David is saying here when he says, surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.

[5 : 39] Here we have them. Why don't we, I'm going to get you to repeat them after me so you can share my terrible translation. The first one is Tov. Can you say that? Tov. Okay, the second one is Hese.

And the third one is Radav. Well done. Now, probably don't say them in public because it's probably not pronounced perfectly. But those are the three words. So, Tov is Gud.

So, when it says his goodness will follow me, it's saying his Tovness will follow me. And Gud is a really interesting Hebrew word because it's the word that's used in the Genesis creation story when each day God sees what he's made and says it's good.

But it's also the word describing him. His goodness and mercy, his Tovness and mercy will follow me. And it doesn't just mean nice. It doesn't just mean perfect.

It means about eight different things. But a couple of them, they're all pointing to the goodness of God. And one of them is beautiful. Surely his beautifulness will follow me all the days of my life.

[6 : 43] Except it's not just beautiful because we think of that as like that's a beautiful picture. It's also about who he is and what he does. Surely his pleasant. Surely his perfect.

Surely his functional. Surely his, it does the job it's supposed to do-ness will follow me all the days of my life. So, when he says surely goodness will follow me, he's saying surely the beautiful, like useful, helpful, pleasing-ness of God will follow me all the days of my life.

And then when he says surely his beautiful, pleasing, useful goodness will follow me, he also says love. But love, again, is one of these really rich words because hesed is a particular type of love.

It's that I'm never leaving you even when you're an absolute idiot kind of love. It's that I'm more committed to you than you can possibly imagine kind of love. It's the one that says I'm committed to you because we're in a relationship and I'm going nowhere.

Sometimes I sing this little song to Ellen which I'm going to save you from hearing which is I'm sticking to you because I'm made out of glue. There's nothing that you can do. I'm sticking with you.

[8 : 00] That's what hesed is. It's like faithful, fight for you, never leave you kind of love. So David is saying these really, or Psalm is saying these really simple words.

But they've got a lot going on. And then this third one, Radhaf. I'm going to look up a couple of verses. You're welcome to join me in that or not. It's totally up to you because I'm going to do them reasonably quickly.

But the first one, you find this word Radhaf in Psalm 34. And you find it in Psalm 34, verse 14. And we're only going to stay there for a moment. But it says, turn from evil and do good.

Seek peace and pursue it. It's the same word. Seek peace and pursue it. It tells us that goodness and mercy isn't this kind of casual follow.

Like it just sort of shuffles along behind you. Like if you turn around, it's kind of there like a cat that doesn't quite know you're not its owner. It's more of the, like, he is coming after you.

[9 : 02] In fact, if you need more evidence for that, you could turn to Exodus. Where you've got the people of Israel. They are about to leave.

And they're about to cross the sea to escape the Egyptians. And in Exodus 14, it says this. Hold on. This isn't some casual follow. This is like an army chasing you. So when it says his goodness, his beauty, and his perfection in all that he does.

And his never let you go, passionate, like, love. It won't just stand by and watch you. David is saying it pursues you.

It hunts you down. It's there and is following you again and again. Now, when we were on holiday, this is a terrible picture of us. Because we were at the edge of a car park, okay?

[10 : 11] And what you can't see, I tried to edit it so it would look better than this. What you can't see is we are facing the most beautiful view of Falmouth Harbour, right? So it's lovely, full of boats and full of beautiful landscape behind it.

But we took this photo because we found this little spot. And we were desperately hungry. The kids desperately wanted their sweets as well as their lunch. And what we saw on the way into this harbour was this poor guy with his lunch in his hand.

And he was walking along. And right above him was this seagull who had perfectly worked out.

They didn't have to do any work, just had to sort of fly and stand there with the wind blowing.

Because it was a really windy day, which you can probably tell from our hair. And it was like pursuing this poor guy. So wherever he walked across the car park, this seagull just hovered over him. And he was like, it was a big guy, but he looked a wee bit scared.

Because we were like, you've got a friend there. He was like, I know, I know. Like, I just don't, I can't get rid of it. But this seagull was pursuing him, raddafing him. Wanted his lunch. Thank goodness it's the beautiful, helpful goodness of God following you.

[11 : 12] Thank goodness it's his, I'm sticking with you like glue, passionate care that's following you. Because if Psalm 23 is to be believed, like, he's after you.

And it's really, really good news. Now I started to say that David knew this. David knew this because of loads of his life experiences. When he went to fight Goliath, it's really clear in the text that he knew God was with him.

I can fight him because of you. That's kind of what he says in the scriptures. Or when he is hiding from Saul, he seeks the Lord to ask him what he should be doing.

Because he knows that when he's hiding in a cave, because someone is trying to murderously kill him, the Lord is with him. His, I'm sticking with you love, is sticking with him.

David also knows, and it's the most awful story, or one of the terrible stories in scripture, that when he sleeps with another man's wife, and he sends that man off to fight in a war so that he will be killed, so David doesn't have to face his own sin, he knows the Lord is with him.

[12 : 25] Now not in the moment of those awful choices that he's made, but you see it in Psalm 51, where he cries out, This guy has just killed another man to cover up his own sin, sin upon sin, and yet he's able to know that the Lord's unfailing love can be towards him.

He says, According to your great compassion, block out my sins, wash away my iniquity, cleanse me from it. David is a man who realises the goodness and the love of God are amazingly powerful and amazingly stick with us.

I wonder how that is for you. I wonder how you find that idea of God's love and his goodness never failing, never leaving you, sticking with you, and pursuing you.

We have a friend of a friend who for a long time has not been able to believe that that could be true. She's put her trust in Jesus, but because of a choice she made in her younger years, she was left with this haunting sense of, but what if he doesn't love me?

How can he when I've done that? And he knows it. I'm so glad that it's not the good sheep that we're talking about in Psalm 23.

[14 : 09] It's the good shepherd. Sheep are so stupid. Sheep, we're so stupid. We make such poor choices. We do things that aren't good for us.

How is it for you knowing that his love pursues you? His loving kindness is after you.

There is a bit of a risk we go the other way, that we think, actually, I've done really well for myself. Actually, everything good in my life is from me. I'm brilliant at this life thing.

I have to say, it doesn't usually take long before we realise that that doesn't hold as logic, because bad things happen. We come to the end of ourselves and we realise, I'm not up to it. But it might be in that category and need to realise, it's his loving kindness that's been securing your future and not your own. Thank you. How can this be true for us?

[15:13] I love this quote from Tim Keller, which is this, The gospel is this, The gospel is this, we are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe.

Yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. The gospel is, it's not the gospel of the good sheep, it's the gospel of the good shepherd, who is so gracious towards us and loves us so faithfully and so perfectly, and he pursues you.

He doesn't ever leave you or give up on you. And we can be included in his covenant love because of this gospel. Because while we're sinful and flawed, Jesus came and died for us.

John 10, 11 says that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He is the good shepherd and he made this possible.

In our own strength, we don't deserve the pursuit of God. But because of Jesus, we get it. It's amazing. Now there are four things I think we can be confident that God has for us because of his beautiful, well-working, practical, faithful, covenant love that pursues us, chases after us, is out to get you in the best possible way.

[16:48] And here they are, I'm going to just share with you kind of briefly on these. And they conveniently all begin with S. So here are some things that can be true of us because of Psalm 23, verse 6a.

That you and I can see the Lord work in all situations. And I've said to you before, I think we should be suspicious people. I think we should be people who go into any situation just a bit suspicious about how the Lord might be at work in that.

And that we can go in thinking, what are you doing? You've led me in. Like those sheep earlier saying, well, oh, the grass has run out. Oh, no, he's taking us to a new place. When you arrive somewhere, it's a good thing, and I think it's a right thing, on the basis of this psalm, to see him and to say, what might you be doing here?

Okay, I've got this job I didn't expect, or I'm in this place I didn't expect, or I'm out with these people I didn't expect. He's able to work in all those situations. Because right behind you, when you go there, is his love and his goodness pursuing you.

I'll tell you a really, this is a slightly silly example, but it's a very real one for me. I have this little book, actually Dave, I think you gave that to me about eight, six years ago or something.

[18:05] I have this little book, right, and it's got, for every day of the year, it's got a sort of devotion, a verse and a kind of bit of chat for every morning and every evening.

I've got to be honest, it looks really well used, because it once got flooded with water in my bag.

Okay, so it looks, you know, people say, a well-worn Bible is a good thing. Well, it's not a Bible, but it looks well-worn, because it's had a bit of a tough time.

But I have found it in the last sort of, probably last year, I found myself reading it more and more. And that's still probably every couple of weeks, I kind of go, right, what's the date today? Let me have a read.

And a few weeks ago, I was having, I was just really annoyed at myself. I had a bit of a prayer time. And I thought, oh Lord, my prayer life actually is pretty rotten at the moment. You know, we have these seasons where it can be great, and then something changes, or we go on holiday, or something else happens.

And I thought, my prayer life's really rotten. I just, I'm really sorry about that. I just, I just wish it, I'd like to work better. And I opened this up, and I haven't got it on the right page here, but essentially, the verse at the top was all about being persistent in prayer.

[19:10] And then I read it, and it was like, basically, you need to be persistent in prayer, because, do you know what? Everything else depends on it. And basically, from the verse he was drawing, your family depends on it, your ability to reach your neighbours, your church depends on it, and by the way, I plan to reach the whole world, so talk to me a bit more.

And honestly, it was like, did the Lord orchestrate that? Did he, when this book was published, specifically know that on this day, I would be praying about my miserable feelings about my prayer life, so that when I'd open it up, he'd be like, see, I'm right here, Gordon, I'm at work.

I think it's probably the other way around, I think it's probably, I talked to him, and by his Holy Spirit, he inspired me to realise how miserable my prayer life was at that week, and therefore, he knew, he inspired me on the right day, so that when I opened it, he'd be like, yeah, but you need to do this. I was like, okay, Lord, I get the message. I've prayed much more, since that moment, but I think his goodness and mercy was pursuing me, and if you don't believe me, well, two weeks later, I came back to the little book again, and I just had some really tragic news, that a friend, a friend has got terminal cancer, and has not many months left to live, and I was feeling, and I'm grieved by it, but was feeling particularly rotten and hopeless, and I thought, Lord, I just feel rotten and hopeless, I thought, I'm going to turn to this book, and I opened it up, and it said this, downcast and troubled Christian, come to me, and realize how big my promises are, it's like, did you write that for me again?

Like, like, honestly, but see, why is that a surprise? His goodness and his mercy, they follow us, right? Like, I'm there doing this as an example, because I'm so surprised, but at the same time, I'm saying to you, the Bible tells us, that his goodness and his love, like, they're chasing after us, what great news that is, that we can't really escape him, but we do have to make ourselves open to him, I think he's tender-hearted, in how he's working, and we can be suspicious people, who see him, and are willing to see him, in all situations, the next thing, and this will be much quicker, is this, that he calls us to see him, in all seasons of life, as sheep move from field to field, I imagine they're a bit terrified of, oh, will there be enough food, and I know for my own life, when we face transitions, and we face change, we can often think, will this be okay?

[21 : 38] Am I going to manage this? Is he good enough in this? Well, his goodness, and loving kindness, they're pursuing you, when the storms come, and the winter comes, and it's cold, and dark, he hasn't given up, when the sun is shining, and we feel good, or actually when it's, when things are scarce, or we are made redundant, or we find our health, changes suddenly, we can turn to him, in all seasons, because his goodness, and his loving kindness, they're pursuing you, no matter the sunshine, or the rain, the scarcity, or the plenty, I've had the privilege, of sharing Psalm 23, a few times, a few key times, but one of the most powerful times, I would say, is in really deep suffering, you know, I've read it to someone, as they passed away, and, and, it has been a delight, to be able to remember, just how good he is, as we talk to them, as they, as someone breathes their, their dying breath, or someone is celebrating, the birth of a child, or new life, or new marriage, or new hope,

I, I would encourage you gently, to keep going with Psalm 23, make sure it's deep in your soul, because there's richness there, for every season, of life, and the third one is, we can share his goodness, where he places us, there is a fun fact, about sheep, I don't know if you know it, but, sheep have a really funny habit, which is they kind of, tend to seek, high ground, because they're little and weak, so if they're worried, about something, they go high, because they get to see, a bit more, and they think, maybe they think, they could defend themselves, I don't know, but they tend to seek, higher ground, says, Philip Keller, who's a pastor, who was a shepherd, and he says, they have this interesting effect, because they go to the low ground, where it's sort of, all luscious and green, and there's goodness, they eat in the goodness, they go to the high ground, where they feel safe, and actually, it's usually dry, on higher ground, because water runs downhill, and then they, well, what do they do, they fertilize, this less fertile land, they basically, put their manure, their poo, onto it, and make it, a good place, they go from, they take the goodness in, and slightly weird imagery here, but they put goodness, into the soil around them, so we like, this psalm rightly says, where goodness, his goodness, and loving kindness, follow you, as in pursue you, there should be, a slightly grim, analogy now,

I'm realizing, but a slightly, a real way, in which where he puts you, goodness, and mercy are found, because you're feeding, on his goodness, you're going there, and you're feeding, the land around you, don't tell that too far, don't be pooing, anywhere weird, but what I mean is, where you are, you can trust, there will be goodness, not because, we're particularly good, not because the sheep, had great plans, the sheep have great plans, to do this, but just because, it's how, they've been built, and you and I, in the same way, we're designed, to receive his goodness, of grace, and love, and we're designed, to share it, with people around us, Philip Keller, different from Tim Keller, but he also says, sheep aren't afraid, to go back, to where they've lived before, because actually, they've had a good impact, on it, I found that, a little challenging, I thought, oh that's quite a, it's quite a bold thing, going back can be really hard, what a great idea, that when we're, trusting him, we will

naturally, kind of share that goodness, with the people, he places us, nearby, if you're anything like me, you're slightly awkward, about evangelism, but I will tell you, that, it's not on the basis, that we're any good at it, it's the Lord, is our shepherd, he leads me, he refreshes my soul, he guides me, along the right path, even though, walk through that valley,
I'll feel no evil, because he is with me, so if the sharing one, is one that you think, share his goodness, with other people, I don't know how I do that, or just be there, and love him, and know that his goodness, and mercy, is pursuing you, and you'll probably find, it happens naturally, the more you love him, the harder it is, to not share that love, with other people, and the final one, I said here is, it's important, that we also, say sorry, and start again, when we need to, sometimes, we've become, we become, I become, over confident, in my own ability, or overlook, his goodness, because it's such, a normal part, of my life, but our job is, to realise, when we're, not realising, just how beautiful, his goodness is, or just how, perfect he is, in his choices, or just how, his loving kindness, is at work, in our lives, and our job, is to say, sorry Lord,
I messed up, you've been so good to me, help me see that goodness, and help me, treasure that goodness, in my heart, so I'm going to pray, for us just now, to bring things, into land, and ask him to, continue to speak to you, through Psalm 23, and help us, turn to him, with whatever we need to, Father, I thank you, that you are, our shepherd, I thank you, that you lead us, I thank you, you refresh us, I thank you, you're with us, thank you, that you are goodness, and your loving kindness, they chase after us, wow, Father, we're sorry, for the times, we've, ignored you, or we've not realised, the good that you're doing, because we've been, worried about, what else is going on, around us, we're sorry, for the times, that we've not, depended on your goodness, and we've depended, on other things, help us, see your goodness, and your loving kindness, present with us, we love you Lord, help us love you more, in Jesus name,
[28 : 10] Amen.