

## Psalm 23:3 He restores my soul

This brief line contains all Christian hope. Luke explains what the two Hebrew words in it mean and how Jesus fulfilled them as the Great Shepherd of our souls.

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“Soul” in Hebrew (“nephesh”) means our whole life and being (see Genesis 1:20, 24, 2:7) and is translated elsewhere in the Old Testament as “life” or “person” or “self” (e.g. Exodus 4:19, Leviticus 17:11-12). The greatest commandment God gave His people is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul [nephesh] and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5). Jesus reiterated that this is the most important thing we can do, and emphasised how vital – literally – our soul is (Matthew 16:26, Luke 12:16-21). We may spend much of our time and energy focused on our immediate needs, our possessions, our daily business, but Jesus tells us that what happens to our soul is truly a matter of life and death. Although this present life and our present lives are important, they aren’t ultimate.

“Restores” is the Hebrew word “shuv”. Other translations include “restore”, “refresh”, and also “return”, or “repent” (Jeremiah 15:19, Malachi 3:7, and the Greek translation of it is used in Acts 3:19, etc., 2 Corinthians 3:16, and see especially 1 Peter 2:25).

As the prophet Isaiah put it, “All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isaiah 53:6) and we are in the worst possible trouble. Yet God promises to “shuv” His wandering sheep (Ezekiel 34:11-16). Jesus consciously picks up on this promise to explain His actions (Luke 15:4-7, John 10:11a)...

The foolish animal has wandered its own way and is now lost, trapped or wounded or paralysed – and under threat. There is no other hope for it – not in itself or from anyone else. It is entirely relying on the shepherd noticing that it is missing, and caring enough to come after it. The night closes in, making the lawless wilderness even more dangerous for both sheep and shepherd, yet into the darkness He goes. Nothing will stop Him, for He is driven by His own love and joy (John 13:1, Hebrews 12:2). Nowhere is too far, too dangerous, too disgusting. Wherever that sheep has gone, the Good Shepherd will go there, He will find it. And when He does, He will do what shepherds have done for millennia with sheep too tired and scared to walk home: He will lift it onto His shoulders, those same shoulders that carried the cross to Calvary (John 10:11b). He will bring that lost sheep home, singing with joy as He does so.

Welsh version of Psalm 23, from the Sixteenth Century, adapted into [The King of Love My Shepherd Is](#):

Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed,  
but yet in love he sought me;  
and on his shoulder gently laid,  
and home, rejoicing, brought me.

(Two other old and beautiful poetic versions of the psalm are worth looking at: the [1650 Scottish metrical version](#), and [Psalme 23](#) by George Herbert.)

This is full extent of His love for us, His care. And although we restored and transformed in a moment, we are in daily need of care and attention. Wonderfully, He is not a part-time shepherd: that ultimate return and restoration of our soul is the pattern of His care for us in countless other ways as well. And He is full of love for us, He delights to care for us that we might put our trust in no other.

This ongoing restoration of our souls can include...

1. His Word (Psalm 19:7). The words of God have soul-restoring power. You could use [Reading God's Word Together](#) to make a soul-restoring habit of daily Bible reading, including what is basically [a free online library of introductions](#) to every book and explanations of them to help you.

2. Leaders shepherding (Hebrews 13:17), through their care, their example, and the teaching they bring, so that you know and delight in God and goodness, and know and flee from evil.

3. If you want to dig into this even more, I'd recommend *Sacred Pathways*, by Gary Thomas. His argument is that there are many paths, he defines nine, which Christians can walk to bring them closer to Jesus (and have their souls restored, renewed, refreshed!). You can read an introduction to each of the pathways [here](#), watch an introductory video [here](#), or take a survey about the different pathways [here](#).

## Questions for group discussion

Have you ever memorised Scripture? What was it, can you still say it, and how did you find it helpful?

Why is it important that we understand the phrase "he restores my soul" to mean more than God making us feel a bit better today?

Luke spoke about God's delight in rescuing us (e.g. Luke 15:4-7): is that how you imagine Him forgiving you, whether it was for the first time or the thousandth? What difference does it make for us to have a true understanding of God's feelings towards us, even when we stray?

What have you found helpful in getting your soul restored/renewed/refreshed on a more ongoing basis than the once-for-all moment of salvation? Is there anything that you've thought about doing but never got round to? How could you as a group encourage help each other in this?