

Psalm 23:6 – Goodness and Steadfast Love Always

David finishes his psalm with more confident statements of God's goodness to him. We're invited to trust God whatever is happening, and to look to a hope that goes beyond even David's vision and far beyond this life.

Questions for group discussion

We don't intend for you to get through all these questions but to choose some that you think will particularly help your group.

Understanding "Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me all the days of the life..."

- Can you think of times in your own life when you have experienced this especially obviously?
- Luke suggested that Romans 8 can help us believe this verse in the midst of life's complexities. Look at the following verses and share how you think they do this: 1, 10-11, 14-17, 18, 22-25, 26, 28-30, 31-32, 35-39.
- "I the Lord do not change" (Malachi 3:6), "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:3). Why is this aspect of God's nature so important for us to know when we read statements like Psalm 23:6, Exodus 34:6-7, Romans 8, etc.?
- How can we flee the temptation of cynicism when we read promises like this?

Understanding "I shall return to dwell in the house of the Lord for length of days."

- Look at the references Luke used from other psalms and see why David was so excited to go the tabernacle: 26:8, 27:4, 36:8, 61:4, 84:3, 84:10, 92:13-14, 93:5. Which of these things are you particularly aware of or thankful for?
- How can we use those psalm references to deepen our understanding of the new creation?
- Read Matthew 6:19-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:19. Christian hope is supposed to be future-focused: what tempts you to put your hope more in the here-and-now?
- What could help you to be more concerned with the life to come than this one?

How would you explain your faith in God when times are difficult to someone who wasn't a Christian?

Summary of message

1. David's travels

We know a lot about David's life through the Old Testament histories, and about his relationship with God through the psalms he wrote. We don't know when he composed Psalm 23 but the conclusion he came to for his whole life was that, "Only goodness and steadfast love shall pursue me all the days of the life..." ("Pursue" is more accurate and forceful than "follow", Exodus 14:8, 1 Samuel 23:25.)

Does David really mean every day? He was writing poetry but he can't have meant something like "more days than not". It can be really helpful for us to look back on our lives to see the story God has written, even when we didn't know it, and therefore grow in confidence for what He has for us now and next (see Genesis 50:20) but David is doing something more than that: he's looking at God. He makes references to the definitive revelation of Israel's God in Exodus 34:6-7 by using the covenant name for God and the central characteristic in that revelation, "steadfast love".

What God said about Himself to Moses is who He always is. Merciful: not treating people as they deserve. Gracious: treating them as they don't deserve. Patient and slow to anger. He abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness: He never runs out or even runs low of those things, it requires no concentration and

costs Him no effort to be this way, and there's no limit on who could receive this, because He eternally is like that. He can forgive any kind of wrong. He is always just.

We suspect that God is changeable, like us and our circumstances. But you could see God at any time of any day in any era of history and He would be exactly like He says He is to Moses (Malachi 3:6), as Jesus showed us He is (John 1:18, Hebrews 13:8).

David had desperately dark days, so did the prophets in the Old Testament and apostles in the New (2 Corinthians 1:8). So how should we consider our own lives when we hear David say goodness and steadfast love chase after him all the time? Do we pretend that everything is good, or do we get confused and doubt God's word when things are bad, do we expect to see a resolution that explains it all, or do we get cynical? Or is there something more faithful?

There is a hard-won faith that doesn't ignore the wrong things, or be overwhelmed by them. It doesn't short-circuit the processing required to get to a place of trust but it doesn't stop short of it either. It could say something like this: "I've seen the goodness and steadfast love of God in Christ. And if He was like that then, and even unto death on a cross, then I believe He's like that now. I don't understand all of what's going on, some of it I may never understand. Sometimes I groan with the pain of it all and don't know what to say or pray. Giving up seems easier. But this I know, God's Spirit is with me, Jesus did die for me, God has chosen me to be His child and saved me and is growing me and will bring me to be with Him in glory... and I cannot be separated from His love in Christ Jesus." (See Romans 8 for a lot of this.)

2. David's rest

"The house of the Lord" was a phrase used to refer to the place where God made His presence uniquely known on earth in the Old Testament. It was firstly a tent (the tabernacle) and later a temple.

David gives us many reasons for his delight in being able to come to this place (Psalm 26:8, 27:4, 36:8, 61:4, 84:3, 84:10, 92:13-14, 93:5). The phrase here might be better translated, "I shall return to dwell in the house of the Lord for length of days": David is saying, 'Whatever else I have to do, and wherever else I go, and whomever else goes with me, I can always return here, and here is where He is, and so here is the best.'

Jesus described Himself as greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6) because He is what the tent and temple pointed to. He is the presence of God on earth, and when He ascended to Heaven, He sent His Spirit to fill all of His people. And now we wait for the fulfilment of God's plan, when Jesus will return to unite all things in Heaven and Earth in Himself, and there will be no separation between God and His people any more.

God's people will experience all that the psalmists said about the tent and temple, and that the gospels tell us about Jesus, and that the Bible promises about the Spirit in us. There will be no sin within us or around us to spoil it in anyway, no doubts or disagreements, no tears or wars or griefs anymore. Just astonished experiences of Him again and again! It will be a place of deep rest, and of fulfilling work, a city bustling with purpose and humming with community, revealing the full possibilities of people made in the image of God. Creation will be renewed and laid out to be explored for its astonishing variety and magnificence, all of which points to God who will be at the centre of it all receiving unending thanks and praise, songs of joy and wonder, shouts and dances and gifts of every kind of achievement. This is the Christian hope, so those who believe in Jesus can end this psalm by saying, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Put your hope here, and nowhere else (1 Corinthians 15): Christian hope isn't based on the present so much as the past – Jesus living and dying and rising for us – and the future, when He will return to make all things new. And because of those two incredible truths, we can live by faith today, trusting in His goodness and sharing it with others.