Everything We Really Need

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[0:00] Well, I'd like us to turn just for a wee while back to Psalm 23, and we can read again the words of verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Our title this morning is Everything We Really Need. And that title comes from these words just at the end of verse 1, I shall not want. And that's the language of having no need, of being in a state where you're not lacking anything.
It's just this beautiful picture of completeness and satisfaction. And so as David started to write this psalm, he thought about God as his shepherd. And that just brings this beautiful sense of completeness and wholeness to his life.
And in many ways, that title sums up the psalm. Now, for David, with God as his shepherd, he has everything he really needs. But what I hope we're going to see today is that the title doesn't just sum up the psalm.
It actually sums up the whole gospel. And that's so crucial for all of us to recognize. If you're here today and you're not yet a Christian or not sure where you stand in terms of faith, and sometimes you may be wondering, well, what difference is this actually going to make to my life?
[1:16] What difference does it make if we start following Jesus? Well, this is the answer.
Following Jesus gives us everything we really need. And if you are a Christian, if you're following Jesus, but you're so aware that sometimes life is hard and sometimes things happen and turn out in a way that we wish was different, then we are being reminded that in Jesus we still have everything we really need.

Or to put it another way, wherever we are in our lives, so often we can feel as though something is missing. And sometimes the things that we think are going to satisfy us don't.
And sometimes things that we chase, thinking this will be a dream come true. Sometimes that dream comes true and it's not actually as much of a dream as we thought it was.
Very often we can go through life feeling as though something is missing. And one of the amazing things about following Jesus is that when we follow him, that feeling goes away.
And so as we think about all of that today, what I want us to see is that you've got these wonderful words at the start of Psalm 23, but the rest of the Psalm is actually explaining why the Christian can say, I shall not want.
[2:38] In other words, verses 2 to 6, unpack verse 1. And that means that there's a sense in which we could actually put the word because at the end of verse 1.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want because. And then the rest of the Psalm gives us lots of reasons. And I want us to unpack these together today and we're just going to go through verses 2 to 6 one by one.
So first of all, I shall not want because. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.
That's just a beautiful picture of the work of a good shepherd. He leads his flock to beautiful pasture. And I want us just to unpack the words that David uses a little bit more.
But this is a great example of something you see lots of times in the Psalms. It's a thing called parallelism, where the same thing gets said twice in slightly different ways. And so you've got two repeated statements.
[3:41] He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. And that's a technique called parallelism. And you'll see that in the Psalms all over the place. And it's just lifting our minds to think of that image in order to help us learn more about God.

And so you've got this beautiful imagery before us. The green pastures. We can imagine that in our minds. A beautiful meadow. Now, important to recognize is that the word green, it's not really

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focusing on the color.
It's a word that focuses more on the freshness of the grass. So this is new grass. This is springtime grass. Fresh grass.
And so the green, it's not so much the color, it's the fact that it's fresh and tender and new. And still waters, literally the word here is the word resting place.
That word still is the word for resting place. And so it's literally, he leads me beside the resting place waters. And that's important to recognize because the focus is actually not so much that the waters are still.
[4:49] It's that David is still. It's a place of rest and refreshment for him. And that's where he's made to lie down.

Again, that's just this picture of stillness, of stopping, of resting. And the word leads that you've got there is a beautiful word. It means to lead with care.
And through it all, you've got this beautiful link between he and me. He and me. And the big point there is that God is the one who's active here.
And so it's not a picture of a flock wandering by themselves, trying to find their own way. God is the one who's leading. In other words, the emphasis is all on what the shepherd is doing.
He's leading. He's guiding. He's the one taking the flock to where they need to be. And it's just a beautiful picture of a shepherd making sure that his flock has everything that they need.
[5:50] Now, there's two very simple but massively important points that arise from this. First of all, I want us to recognize that this, all of this, what's described in verse 2, all of this is definitely what God wants.

And the reason I say that is because that is so easy to misunderstand. So often we can look at church and we can look at faith and we can look at following Jesus as just kind of giving you one more thing that you have to do, one more expectation, one more pressure.
And we can instinctively see it all as a burden. But following Jesus, doing this, it's like, you know, you've got to do it. And people who aren't yet Christians are often, that applies to us as Christians, it applies to us if we're not yet a Christian.
And people who aren't yet Christians are often put off by this, the idea that, you know, following Jesus is, yes, I know it's important, but it's going to be a burden and I'm not convinced it's going to be worth it. And even as Christians, we know it's worth it, but we still often think of church and of praying and of reading the Bible as a burden.
And all of this comes from the mindset that thinks that God is viewing us as horses or as oxen instead of sheep.
[7:09] Now, what do I mean by that? Well, a horse or an ox is there to work. It's there to pull and pull and pull and work and work and work.

Sheep never pull a plow. Sheep aren't raised to work in that sense. They're actually, you have a flock of sheep to build them up, to nourish them, to feed them.
And we can often think that God views us as a horse, that we just need to work. That's not how he views us. He views us as a flock that he wants to feed and to nurture.
And it's so important to press this truth in our hearts. God does not want to drain you and exhaust you and burden you. Instead, he wants the people who are already drained and exhausted and burdened to come to him and find rest and refreshment.
And so this is definitely what God wants. The second thing that we have to highlight, the second crucial point that I see from this is just to say, surely, surely this is what you want as well.
[8:23] Surely this is what you want because so many of us are just exhausted. And I don't want anyone to put their hand up physically.

I want you to put the hand up in your heart. Are you exhausted today? Are you exhausted with work? Are you exhausted with emails? Are you exhausted with pressure of what other people think of you?
Are you exhausted with decisions that you have to make that are going to affect your life or affect the life of your family? Are you exhausted with just the day-to-day routine of life, work, home, children, maybe looking after relatives?
Are you exhausted with pain? Some of you live with physical pain every single day. It's exhausting. Are you exhausted with having to put on a brave face when inside you're just struggling?

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Are you exhausted with having to deal with difficult people at work or in other contexts? Maybe you're exhausted with everything that's happened here in the past couple of weeks.
[9:30] If that's true, God is not saying to you, toughen up. God is saying, lie down and rest.

And one of the crucial things to recognize is that when you look at verse 2, I want you to think, how do you think the shepherd is feeling as his flock rests and finds refreshment?
Imagine the flock, beautiful green grass, fresh grass, beautiful water, a resting place. How do you think the shepherd's feeling? Is he impatient, thinking, oh, we need to get going again?
Is he thinking, come on, get going? Of course he's not. He's delighted. Because he's taken his flock to where he wants them to be.
How do you think God feels when you rest in him? Impatient? Frustrated? Of course not. Of course not. He's absolutely delighted.
[10:35] Because God is not calling you to church and he's not calling you to follow him so that you will be drained. He's calling you to be refreshed. And that is surely what we really need.

Moving on to verse 3. I shall not want because he restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. In lots of ways, this verse is describing the outcome of verse 2. So the provision that the shepherd makes brings restoration. But what I want us to see is that there's another aspect to verse 2 that's really important to recognize. That language of restoration is indicating that there's something wrong that needs to be fixed.
And that language of paths of righteousness is indicating that there are other paths that are a bad idea and we need to avoid them.
In other words, verse 3 is pointing us to the fact that there's things in our hearts and things in our lives that need to change. And so here we see a crucial balance between verse 2 and verse 3.
[11:49] Verse 2 is telling us that the gospel brings relief. It does that in amazing ways and we badly need it. But verse 3 is telling us that the gospel also brings transformation. And we badly need that as well.

That word for restore is from the Hebrew word return. And here it's used in a way that means to bring back. And so it's the language of a new direction.
It's the language of being turned around. That word soul is a very, very cool Hebrew word because it refers to your whole person, to everything that you are.
Sometimes we can think of our soul as kind of like the spiritual bit that we give attention to at church on a Sunday as though it's this kind of little part of our lives. But that's not what soul means at all. Soul is just you. It's just who you are. Your personality, your desires, your thoughts, your whole self. And so that Hebrew word for soul is talking about everything that we really are.
[12:51] So when it says that, you know, when David says he restores my soul, he's not just saying he restores my kind of spiritual bit alongside every part of my life. No, David's just saying he restores me and he restores us too.

And all of that's reminding us and recognizing that we need restoring. And a good way to prove that is to look at your own heart and to ask two questions.
One, does your heart have bruises? And all of us do. Maybe to different degrees, maybe from different contexts. Some bruises from childhood, some bruises from school, some bruises, maybe a bruise from falling in love that didn't work out.
Or maybe it was just a bruise from work last week. And all of these bruises have come from the fact that sin has made this world a harsh and hostile wilderness.
So we ask the question, does your heart have bruises? The answer is yes. They need to be restored. But there's another question we have to ask. Not just does your heart have bruises, but has your heart caused bruises?
[13:59] And when I look at my own heart, I know the answer is yes. I wish the answer was no. But I know the answer is yes. And that's the devastating effect of sin.

Sin has left us hurting and hurting. Sin has left us hurting and hurting. I'm using those two words to mean two different things. Hurting in that we get bruised, so we hurt.
But hurting in that we also cause bruises in others, in the things that we say and do. And in it all, we're sinning against God. And that's because sin has left us wandering down and sometimes racing down paths that are wrong.
And instead, we need to be led in a different direction, to be led in paths of righteousness. It's interesting to see that the word lead, leads, he leads, he leads, appears twice, but it's actually two

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different words in Hebrew.
That word, in verse 2, means to lead with care, whereas the word, in verse 3, is more about giving direction and guidance to somebody.
[15:09] And those two things sit side by side. Verse 2, in many ways, is describing a leading that is right and pleasant. And there's so many ways in which the gospel does that.

It leads us in a way that's helpful and good and beneficial and refreshing. Verse 3 is describing a leading that is right but probably hard.
And that's different. And it's reminding us that the paths of righteousness are the right path, not always the easy path.
But the key thing we need to recognize is that all of this is what we desperately need. And so yes, we badly need the refreshment of verse 2.
But part of the reason why we're drained and exhausted is because our lives are going in the wrong direction. We're following the wrong paths. We're chasing the wrong dreams. And so often, we chase something, whether it's a job or a salary or a relationship or something that we can buy and we're driven forward by the idea that this will be the last thing that we need.
[16:17] I have had dozens of last things that I need in my life. And of course, the minute you think about that, you realize it's a nonsense. And so often, we are emptying ourselves, chasing the things that will never actually take away our emptiness.

and the gospel is calling us to a different way. And the key thing to recognize is that the path that God is calling us onto might not be the easiest path.
It might not be the most appealing path. It might not be the path that we really immediately want, but it is always the path that we need. And the massive danger for us is that sin is enticing us down paths that feel good, but they lead to destruction.
And I saw this really powerfully in an article I read this week. This week, a documentary came out about Matthew Perry. So Matthew Perry played Chandler in Friends. Lots of you, anyone who grew up in the 90s, Friends was like the most important TV event of the week.
Friends and Baywatch, but that's a bit embarrassing, but anyway. Gladiators, also. A-Team, fantastic. Anyway, I'm getting sidetracked. Friends has been a massive comeback.
[17:44] Loads of people watch Friends now as well. Still massively, massively popular. Matthew Perry was one of the stars. Many of you will know that Matthew Perry struggled with addiction for his whole adult life.

And he died of an overdose in 2023, aged 54. 54. And I read an article today where it quoted him that he said the first time he drank, first time he got drunk, he said this.
This was aged 14, I think. He said, for the first time in my life, nothing bothered me. The world made sense. It wasn't bent and crazy. I was complete, at peace.
I thought, this is what I've been missing. This must be how normal people feel all the time. aged 14, he stepped onto a path that felt great.
And it destroyed him. And the crucial thing, the crucial thing in it all is that we are always facing, as Christians, we're facing the daily choice of who we're going to follow, who we're going to listen to.
[18:55] And if you're not yet a Christian, you face the massive choice of whether or not you're going to follow Jesus and trust in him. And the chances are the path that takes you away from Jesus this week is right now going to look nicer, feel easier, and taste better.

But it's a path that leads to destruction. And the key point is that that is not what you need. It is not what you need. Instead, what we need is what Jesus offers us.
And what he offers us is the balance of verse 2 and verse 3. With Jesus' care, you find amazing refreshment as described in verse 2. And with Jesus' guidance, we are led in a new path, sometimes a path that involves going a different direction from the people around us.
But it's the path that leads to eternal life. And that is what we really need. Verse 4, There's just two things I want to highlight here.
The first is that in life, the shadow of death is always there. And so you see that in the words that start of verse 4. Even though. And so the thing you have got to recognize is that it's not even if, it's not saying, oh well even if, you know, there's the bad shadow of death.
[20:24] It's even though. And that's recognizing that sin doesn't mean that there's kind of dark valleys out there that we might fall into. Sin means that there is a dark valley of death lying in front of every one of us.

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And we have got no choice but to go through it. The shadow of death is always there. It might feel like it's a long, long way away. It might feel for some of you that it's far closer than you want it to be. And we know that sometimes it arrives far sooner than any of us ever thought it would. It's a looming, intimidating, horrible shadow. But the second key thing that you have to recognize in this verse is that if you're trusting in Jesus, the shadow of death is there but it's just a shadow.
I think I've used this illustration before but it's one of my favorite. I remember hearing about a father whose wife had died. This was in America and a father whose wife had died and he was going to the funeral with his children.
And so his children were in the car, they were driving along and his wife had passed away and they were, both the mum and the dad were Christians. And they were stopped at traffic lights and there was a big truck, big American truck beside them in the traffic lights.
[21:58] And it was a sunny day and so the sun was shining down on the truck and in front of the car the guy could see the shadow of the truck on the road and he said to his children, what would you prefer?

To be hit by that truck or to be hit by its shadow? And they said, well it's shadow. And he said, he said, it's the shadow of death that's hit mum because she's safe with Jesus now.
And that's the amazing truth of the gospel. If you're trusting in Jesus, death can only hit you with its shadow. Why? Why? Because the truck hit Jesus instead on the cross.
One other thing I want you to notice in this verse is that there's a shift because in verse 2 it's he, he, he, he and when you come to verse 4 it's you.
And I think there's something beautiful there that now in the face of danger and fear and death the language changes from he to you. And that's reminding us that so often in our experience of the gospel the more vulnerable we feel the more personal it becomes.
[23:22] And so on a normal week perhaps, you know, all of us might say, you know, I need God. You know, I know I need God in my life. That's a good thing to say. But on a really tough week and when things happen in our lives that we dread and when bad news comes we find ourselves turning to God and we say, I really need you.

Lord, I really need you. And that's an even better thing to say. And God responds to that with the wonderful protection of his rod and staff and the comfort that they bring.
That's just reminding us that God is a shepherd who will always protect us. Moving on, super quickly, to verse 5. I shall not want because you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil. My cup overflows. Here, the imagery of the psalm moves from a shepherd and his flock to a banquet. But the threat of danger is still there.
The banquet, the table, is prepared in the presence of enemies. And it's important to remember that in Scripture when you see the word enemies, it's not a person you don't like. It's not a person you've fallen out with. It's a person who wants to harm you.
[24:36] That's what the language of enemies is. David knew that experience in his life again and again and again, confronted with enemies who wanted to harm him. All of that in the Old Testament functions as a shadow of the ultimate enemy, the greatest enemy of all, the enemy of sin and death that we all face.

And in the face of that enemy, God does three things. He prepares a table. That speaks of provision, but even more importantly, it speaks of friendship. God places us at his table not just to feed us, but because he's made us his friends.
It says, you anoint my head with oil. That's the language of consecration, of being set apart. In other words, it's telling you that you're special. And then at the end of the verse, you have this beautiful description that God fills your cup until it overflows.
Now, cup is speaking about wine. In the Bible, wine is the language of blessing, of joy, and of celebration. And that is reminding us that in the gospel, God wants that joy and blessing and celebration to overflow in your life.
And again, it's so, so, so important to recognize this. God does not want to drain you. He does not want to squeeze you. He does not want to bleed you dry. It's the opposite. His goal is for the blessings of the gospel to be poured into your life so that they are overflowing.
[26:05] That's the way the gospel is meant to work. That we come to church every week, we are reminded of the incredible, overflowing, gracious blessings of God that are being poured into us.

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And then we step out into our lives, our homes, our work, and what's the goodness that God's pouring into our lives is to overflow into the lives of others. That's the pattern of what following Jesus should look like.
And it's reminding us that you must not have dripping tap theology. What do I mean by that? Well, sometimes we think of theology and of God's kindness to us as like a dripping tap.
So that, oh, maybe if I don't stuff up this week, and maybe if I do things right, maybe if things go properly, God, you know, God will actually, He might drip a smile on me. Or if I, you know, get better habits in my life and sort things out, you know, God might drip kindness into my life.
That He might drip good things from time to time, reluctantly, but eventually He'll drip. So often we think like that. So often we think that good things come from God in kind of tiny, occasional ways like drips into your life.
[27:20] That is totally wrong theology. theology. You must not have dripping tap theology. Instead, you need to have firehose theology.

And the image there is just, I wish I could do it, but just of a firehose. Like, look outside. Look at this morning. You woke up this morning and it's stunning.
And we live in a stunning place. And look at us here today. Look at the opportunity to be together. Look at the friendships and the love that we share. Look at how we can lift up our voices.
Listen to the music that accompanies us. Look at the freedoms, the privileges, the blessings, the joys. It's just firehose theology. And that's true in terms of the day-to-day blessings we enjoy.
It's even more true in terms of the forgiveness that Jesus offers us. Jesus does not drip forgiveness into your life. He firehoses forgiveness into your life and washes away every mistake you've made, every sin you've committed, and He just, the firehose washes it away and instead the firehose fills your life with assurance of how much He loves you, that He will never leave you, that you are His forever.
[28:36] You've got to have firehose theology. In the gospel, our cup overflows. That's why we can say I shall not want.

And then, last of all, and very briefly, I shall not want because surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. There's some more very cool words in this final verse.
That word follow is a very cool word, but the translation follow in English probably isn't strong enough because it's actually the word for chase. It's a word that means pursue.
And I want you to notice the connection between verse 2 and 3 and verse 6. So in verse 2 and 3 we're being led and in verse 6 we're being pursued. And the amazing thing is that we're being pursued by two of the best words in the whole Bible.
We're being pursued by goodness and mercy. Goodness, God is chasing you with goodness. In other words, He's not hounding you with badness. He's pursuing you with the goal of pouring that abundant goodness into your life.
[29:46] And that word mercy, that's a word that we've mentioned lots of times over the years. It's the Hebrew word chesed and it's often translated steadfast love.

The Hebrew word is chesed. Oh, my pen's not working properly. E-H-E-S-E-D H with a ch sound. And that is, I think that's the coolest word in the whole Old Testament.
Because it speaks of God's relentless loyalty to His people. It describes a love that goes to the very core of His being and that prompts Him to action.
And it's a love that is rooted in His unbreakable covenant commitment to His people. I've said this before but I like to say this again, that this is one of the words that Hebrew scholars find most difficult to translate because there is not an English word big enough to capture what that word means.
And that love is chasing you. So if you're a Christian, that goodness and love is pursuing you.
[30:58] That means that wherever you go in life and whatever happens in your life, these two things are right behind you. you cannot outrun them and you will never be without them.

New job, bad diagnosis, hospital bed, goodness and steadfast love are chasing you right there. And if you are not a Christian yet or not sure, that goodness and mercy, that goodness and steadfast love, it's chasing after you as well.
the whole reason you're here is because God's pursuing you. And I want to ask, can you feel that?

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Can you sense that? Do you know that God is pursuing you? He is seeking you and he's calling you. And all of this is because being with Jesus is where we most belong.
And that's what the very end of the psalm captures. Our dwelling place is with him and I want you to press that into your hearts. That with Jesus, that is where you belong.
[32:00] Your past, your questions, your doubts, your uncertainties, none of that matters. With Jesus, that is where you belong. Surely, that is everything that you really need.

And so Psalm 23 reminds us that the gospel gives us everything that we really need. I just want to close by saying two things about the word really. That word really can mean two things.
It can mean truly, which is really what I've been emphasizing throughout this psalm. These are the things that we truly need, but really can mean something else as well. It can mean urgently.
These are the things you really need. Amen. Let's pray.

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