

Psalm 23 Series (Session 2)

by Joseph Carroll

Psalm 23 is the highest, widest, most glorious experience in which God can lead a born-again believer this side of heaven, and it requires a deep dependence on God and a willingness to surrender to his plan.

Duration: 40:51

Scripture: Psalm 23:1

Topics: "Christian Life", "Intimacy with Christ", "Faith and Dependence on God"

Description

Joseph Carroll emphasizes that Psalm 23 represents the ultimate experience of being led by God for a believer, guiding them to a deeper relationship with the Lord. He explains that the psalm's present tense verbs signify that God is actively working in our lives now, urging believers to become Christ-conscious rather than self-conscious. Carroll illustrates this through the life of Hudson Taylor, who exemplified faith and dependence on God while pioneering missions in China. The sermon highlights the importance of surrendering to God, waiting on Him, and recognizing our need for the Shepherd in every aspect of life. Ultimately, it calls for believers to seek intimacy with Christ, which leads to true satisfaction and fulfillment.

Transcript

It has been said that Psalm 23 is the highest, widest, most glorious experience in which it is possible for God to lead a born-again believer this side of heaven. Now that's quite a statement, and it was made by a great scholar. Let me read it again.

Psalm 23 is the highest, widest, most glorious experience into which it is possible for God to lead a born-again believer this side of heaven. Why? One of the reasons being this, that it leads us to our Lord and leaves us with our Lord. It's one of the great secrets of counselling.

The only competent counsellor is a man who can lead the enquirer to the Lord, who is the answer to the need, and then leave him with the Lord. Not with some technique, not with a book, not with a counsellor, but with the Lord. And this is one of the great secrets of the 23rd Psalm, because it leads us to the Lord, and we then find that every verb in the psalm is in the present tense.

It's very important. It is something the shepherd is doing for me now. He is doing it, if I will let him.

So that if I am to experience the blessings which are in the psalm, I must become Christ-conscious. Now that's one thing the enemy doesn't want you to become. He wants you to become self-conscious,

problem-conscious, other people-conscious, anything but Christ-conscious, doctrine-conscious, controversy-conscious, you name it.

You name it. Anything but Christ-conscious. And so the psalm, if we understand it right, is bringing us to a shepherd, and leaving us with the shepherd, so that we become conscious of the shepherd.

Hudson Taylor was the father of modern faith missions. He was the pioneer. It was to Hudson Taylor in a day when denominational missions had lost their power and lost their thrust that he spoke to Hudson Taylor.

And he spoke to him very clearly and told him that he was to commence a mission, the China Inland Mission, and there was one condition that he had to meet. He was on the sands of Brighton in England. Hudson Taylor was walking along those sands one Sunday afternoon, deeply troubled in his heart.

And then the Lord spoke to him. He spoke to him about the evangelization of inland China. And this was the one condition he had to meet.

He said, I am going to evangelize inland China. I am going to do it. Now why would he say, I am going to do it? Because only he can do anything.

Only God can do the work of God. He said, I'm going to do it. The Lord Jesus Christ said, I will build my church.

I will build it. We say of certain people, he is a church builder. That is not so.

Jesus Christ is the builder. I will build my church. It would be ludicrous if I brought a hammer and a chisel and a saw onto this platform and I began to congratulate them for erecting this auditorium.

It's the same thing. This was the condition. You walk with me and I will evangelize inland China through you.

That's all. Nothing more. Just one condition.

You walk with me. That's all you have to do. And I'll do it through you.

I'm going to use you. You will be my instrument. But only as you walk with me.

Now what does the 23rd Psalm introduce us to? A walk with our Lord. That's what it's all about. Now Hudson Taylor didn't get there in his early experience as a missionary.

Indeed, he went out to China with a denominational mission, saw the hopelessness of it, all these vast multitudes. Millions, millions, millions everywhere. And then he saw something of the great need of inland China.

The foreigners were not permitted into inland China in those days, but he could see if this was happening on the coast, what could be happening inland. And he was so oppressed and so disturbed that he came to the point of a nervous breakdown and he decided he would return to England. He made his way to the coast and boarded a small vessel to sail to Shanghai and then go home to England.

And the vessel pulled out late one afternoon from the port. The sun was setting. And here is this young Englishman, battered, shattered in his own heart.

The thing was impossible, it's hopeless. And he sat down on a little deck chair and he opened a hymn book, just flipped open a hymn book and he read that hymn we sang this morning. And the Spirit of God spoke to him.

He said, that's just not what you are doing. And it saved him from a breakdown. There in the quietness, pulling out of the harbor, setting sun.

Jesus, I'm resting. The Spirit of God said, you're not. And if you're not resting, you are not trusting.

And if you're not trusting, God is not working. You are working. And that can only mean one thing, total exhaustion and utter failure.

When are we going to learn that? When are we going to learn that we are instruments, which must be available to the one who is building, so that he can build in his way, in his time. You walk with me, I'll evangelize inland China through you. As I was preparing this morning, it was all Hudson Taylor, so we're going to get a lot of Hudson Taylor.

Because he's the pioneer. So in England, he announced that he was going to form the China Inland Mission. And it was to be a faith mission.

They would not make appeals for funds. They would trust the Lord, not only for funds, but they would trust the Lord for missionaries. And he named a certain number of missionaries, 70 odd missionaries, I believe, that he was trusting the Lord for, to send out to inland China.

Now, the first people who opposed him were evangelicals. They said, you're crazy. Those close to the Lord, so-called.

There was an uproar. Who's going to provide for them? God will provide for them. Yes, we know God will provide for them, but how? Well, I don't know, that's not my business.

What? You're crazy. He was maligned. But he stood still, and he stood steady, because he had a word from the Lord, and he wasn't going to go back on his guidance.

It was the same with William Carey, when he said he was going out to India. One of the leading evangelicals of his time was one of those who opposed him most strongly. Who do you think Carey was? He's a cobbler.

He's no scholar. Oh, no scholar, it's true, from a secular viewpoint, but a fantastic linguist, ultimately. God knew what was in that man, even though the leaders didn't.

God knew what was in him. And he didn't go back on his guidance either, nor should you. So Hudson Taylor committed himself to these 70-odd missionaries.

He said, they're going out to inland China. They said, what do you mean going out to inland China? You know that we're at war with China. No foreigner is allowed into inland China.

So you're going to get these poor, deluded souls, and you're going to put them on a ship, and send them without any support to China, to inland China, and we're at war. You are crazy. So the Lord provided these 70-odd, and they sailed on a little vessel called the Lammermuir, and it took several months for the vessel to reach Shanghai.

And England was still at war with China. So here are these 70-odd missionaries on a ship. They're going to China, to go to inland China, and they're still at war.

But when that little vessel passed Shanghai, an armistice was signed. And one of the conditions of the armistice was, foreigners would be permitted to enter inland China. So what do you have? You have firstly an act of faith, followed by an attitude of faith.

And then the attainment of faith. Always you've got Psalm 37.5. Always. Always.

But when you commit yourself by an act of faith, all hell will break on your head. Yes, it will. And the devil will do his utmost to turn you from it.

All hell will break on your head. And hell will use a lot of people you never thought hell could use. The first six months we began a work of faith here in Greenville with the most difficult, most demon-inspired opposition that I'd ever experienced in my life, including Japan and the Orient.

Nothing compared with Greenville. Why? Because we took a stand of faith. This is what it's going to be.

We're going to trust God. All hell was loose. But you maintain the attitude of faith.

Don't move. And God will do it. But it will be a conflict.

And it can be very fierce. And very mean. So you have the act, followed by the attitude, followed by the attainment.

Always. But the Lord himself must speak to you, and he must tell you what he's going to do, not what you want to do for him. There's a vast difference there.

It took me a number of years before I realized that God didn't need my advice. Isn't that strange? You know, I've had scores and scores of good ideas, and the Lord has never accepted one of them. Isn't that interesting? Well, why should he? Why should he? If you study the attributes of God, you'll understand there's no way he can accept my advice, because the whole thing's planned already.

All I have to do is fit into his plan. He doesn't need my advice. Then I finally woke up.

Stop trying to help God. He doesn't need your help. What he demands is your submission.

That's all. That's what he demands. So we have the act and we have the attitude, we have the attainment.

We had it last night. Crisis, or if you like, crisis and process. You reach a crisis, right? You determine you're going to yield to the Lord, you're going to be his servant, you're going to serve him, and you make that surrender.

What happens? Invariably, all hell breaks loose on you. Everything goes wrong. But you maintain your attitude of surrender, and then God meets you.

He'll test you to see whether or not it's real. Same as he tested Bartimaeus. Why didn't he respond to Bartimaeus the first time he sang out? No, he didn't.

But when he kept crying, and he said, call him. I'm going to meet his need. Not the first time.

Paul cried to the Lord three times for healing. It wasn't until the third time that he spoke to him about his condition. And his answer was no.

I'm not going to do what you ask. But I'm going to speak to you about it. It was three times before God spoke to him about it.

How real are we? How intense are we? How definite are we? And how determined are we to stand in the attitude of faith? So this reveals to us the tremendous importance of the psalm. It's the psalm of faith. But there's a little secret here.

I quoted yesterday a portion of Hebrews 11, 6. Without faith it is impossible to please him. Now this is usually the part of the verse that is emphasized. If somebody quotes the verse, they would say, without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is.

And that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. And we sort of trail away on the end. But listen to what the word says at the end.

He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. That's very important. Who does God reward? The person who seeks the blessing? No.

The person who seeks him. Now that's what the psalm is all about. Being occupied with a person and seeking a person, following a person, trusting a person, seeking him.

Not knowledge about him, but the person himself. Now that's a very important truth. He rewards, who does he reward? Them that diligently seek him.

Now we know basically, in Christianity, if you seek for yourself, you receive nothing. If you give all, you receive everything. It's a law of recompense.

In other words, give, and it shall be given unto you, pressed down, shaken together, running over, a law of recompense. The more you give, the more you get. The more you keep, the more you lose.

So you lay down a life, you accept the sentence of death upon your life in this world. And what is the amazing thing that happens? You experience more abundant life. He that loveth his life shall what? Lose it.

He who lives for his own life in this world, who loves his life in this world, who wants satisfaction from his life in this world, he loses it. He hates his life in this world, he keeps it, unto life eternal. In other words, the principle is what? Give, and you shall receive.

Keep, and you'll lose. So where death truly takes place, life springs forth, death in order to life. But as soon as the principle of death stops, the manifestation of life stops.

So, what is the Spirit of God always trying to do? Bring us to the end of ourselves, that he might bring us to Christ. Always. What happened when you were saved? Well, invariably before you were saved, you are doing good works, you are trying to improve your life, you're going to church, you're tithing maybe, you're trying to do things.

But then the Spirit of God shows you that's not God's way, and you come with nothing in your hands, nothing in my hands, I bring simply to thy cross, I cling, nothing to offer, nothing to plead, hopeless,

helpless, lost, guilty sinner, and you're saved. But that must continue right through. You're just as helpless as you ever were, just as needy, just as needy.

When Hudson Taylor was acclaimed by that same evangelical world that maligned him as the great spiritual leader of his day, he was on his way to a large missionary meeting in the city of Edinburgh, and one of the great theologians of that time, Elder Cumming, was riding in the horse carriage with him, and he began to praise Hudson Taylor for all that had been accomplished through him. And Hudson Taylor turned to him and he said, listen, when God was looking for a man little enough and weak enough to use, he found me, and he did it, and he meant it. He's looking for somebody, what kind of man? A man little enough and weak enough to use.

A man who would have to trust him, and that's exactly what he did. So what does the devil do? Well, he builds up man. He builds him up.

Look at that fantastic intellect you have. Well, I can't help it, I was born with it. It's hereditary.

I had nothing to do with my mighty intellect. Look at that amazing ability you have to speak. Yes, well, another thing, I was born with it.

And your amazing experiences, look at your travels, people you've met. Yes, I know, unusual. And all the time the devil's puffing a man up, you see.

All the time the spirit wants to bring him down. So he's usable. You'd think he was doing God's work for him.

Some people come to me at times and they say, you know, if only the Lord could get hold of that young man, what he could do for the Lord. Haven't you heard that? What he could do for the Lord. How interesting.

Well, if you reverse it, you've got it. He's not going to do anything for the Lord. The Lord may be pleased to take him and humble him so that he can do what he wants to do through him.

That's different. That's different. That's why not many mighty, not many noble are called.

God chooses weak things, God chooses nothings, God chooses nobodies. Why? Because he doesn't have to get past that pride and that self-sufficiency with the nothings and the nobodies. In other words, all he wants to do is to bring us to the place where I say and mean it, well Lord, after all, I am a sheep.

And I'm going to be a sheep right to the end. I may be an educated sheep, I may be a PhD sheep, or any sort of sheep, but I'm still a sheep. I'll always be a sheep.

Now that's all he wants to do. He wants to bring you to that place during these days when you realise that you are a sheep. What he's saying about you is true.

Now the more you realise that and the more you see the need of a sheep, the more you're going to trust the shepherd. And the more you trust the shepherd, the more God will be glorified through your life. David was a man after God's own heart.

It's hard for some people to understand. They say, well David was a murderer, David was an adulterer. Yes he was.

But he was still a man after God's own heart. Well what is a man after God's own heart like? Well what was the heart of Jesus like? He said, I am meek and lowly of heart. The only self-descriptive words he ever used.

I am meek and lowly of heart. David was a man after God's own heart, the adulterer that he was, because he was meek and lowly of heart. That's what God's after all the time.

He's after Christlikeness, he wants to make you like his son. Meekness, lowliness, dependence upon another, that's what he's after. So David says, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want this great act of faith.

Alright? As soon as you say that, you're going to be confronted with very great needs. Now, who are you going to let meet the need? Are you going to try to meet it, or are you going to let the Lord meet it and do what he tells you to do, rather than what you think he wants you to do? That's the issue. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

For the first time there comes satisfaction, because green pastures are satisfying pastures. He maketh me to lie down, not merely in pastures, but abundant pastures, green pastures. Then he leadeth me beside the still or the quiet waters.

Now, we live in turbulent times. Very turbulent. Anything but restful.

But God is still the same. He is a God of peace. He's not a God of confusion and turmoil.

He is a God of peace. So he makes us to lie down in green pastures to lead us by the still waters. Why? Why does he want to? Why does he make us lie down in the green pastures? Well, in order that he might lead us by the still waters.

But firstly, he's going to satisfy us with himself. Now, there's a great secret here. And it's a secret which very few people are able to fully understand and fully appropriate.

And it's this. It's very simple, really. Again, you must not be occupied with blessings or with things, but with the blesser.

You must not be occupied with problems or perplexities or difficulties, but with the one who wants to bear the burdens. Why is it that very few Christians know what it is to cast every care upon him? Because they're not conscious of his presence. If they were conscious of his presence, they would be the immediate casting of all care upon him.

All care upon him. And God would be glorified. I was in India some years ago, giving a series of meetings at Ludhiana Medical Center.

Now, Ludhiana, in the Punjab, is one of the two great medical centers in India. I'd spoken at a conference for missionaries in Korea the year before, and Dr. Kenneth Scott, a very godly man, was present at that conference in Korea, and he was invited to become the president of Ludhiana. He accepted.

And when he went to Ludhiana, he invited me to come to Ludhiana for this week of meetings. First meeting I had in the chapel, beautiful chapel there in India. There was a most unusual man present.

He was a man, I suppose, in his late 60s, early 70s. A Dr. Rambo. And after the meeting, at the entrance to the chapel, this dear man met me at all, very stately man, and he greeted me.

Then he dropped down on his knees, and he began to pray. Thank the Lord for the message. Thank the Lord for sending his servant.

But what's he doing down here? Here he was, it was dusty, and he's kneeling down there praying, praying his heart out. Well, it's fine. I didn't know that he always did this.

It didn't matter who he met anywhere. He was from Philadelphia. If he were in Philadelphia, and he was going to pray, he'd kneel down on the pavement and start praying.

Dr. Rambo. When the late Vice President of the United States visited Ludhiana, he did the same thing, and the Vice President nearly collapsed. But what he was doing was, the Lord had shown Rambo earlier that he must humble himself, and he must be a totally dependent servant of his in India.

Needless to say, he's a brilliant, he's an ophthalmologist, a brilliant surgeon. The people in that part of the world almost worship him. Well, a friend of mine who was studying at Duke University, who's also an ophthalmologist at the moment, was very disturbed by the professor of the department who took every opportunity possible to criticize Christianity.

He had no time for Christianity. He had no time for the Bible. He had no time for Christ.

All that nonsense. He was the big professional man. He was the big professor.

He knew it all. Then one day, he said to the students, we have a most unusual case that demands surgery, and very few men in the world can perform this surgery. He said, but we are grateful that one of the men who can perform it is in the town, and tomorrow we're going to see him perform this surgery.

Well, who do you think it was? It was Rambo. So all the students are gathered together to watch this great man perform the surgery. In comes Rambo, drops to his knees, and starts pouring out his heart to God.

Well, the professor, he didn't know what to do. He never again criticized Christianity. Here's a man that's humble enough to be used, you see.

He's a great surgeon. He is. One of the greatest in the world.

You know where he is today? Back in the dust and the dirt and the flies of the Punjab. That's where he is. He said, I want you to meet my team.

They were one of the most unlikely looking team I've ever seen in my life. They looked like a bunch of ruffians to me. That was his team.

He had this old jalopy, this old truck he used to careen around the mountains in with his team, these four Indians. Humble man. Usable man.

Great man. He'll have a great reward. Judgment seat of Christ.

Lowly enough to be used. I wonder if we are. Only the lowly man, the humble man, the helpless man, is going to trust.

He's the only man that's going to do it. But he's conscious of his need. So he makes me to lie down in green pastures and he leads me beside still waters.

He teaches me to wait upon him. Now in that 37th psalm, which we've already quoted from, it's a great psalm concerning waiting upon the Lord. What does it say? Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for him.

Now if there's anything we don't want to do, it's wait. This is the instant generation. Instant tea, instant coffee, instant, instant, instant, instant.

Anything to do but wait. That's the day in which we live. Rest in the Lord.

Wait patiently for him. Wait patiently. Wait for his time.

Wait for his word. Then obey it. He works for them, the two, that wait for him.

Again, Isaiah. Blessed are all they that wait for him. Just a moment, Lord.

I'm not doing anything. Yes, you are. You're doing the will of God, which is waiting for him.

Waiting upon him and waiting for him. The Lord is good. Lamentations 3.25. The Lord is good unto them that wait.

That wait. That wait. And that brings us, of course, to our quiet time.

The quiet time. You, of course, had your quiet time this morning. But was it a quiet time? Was it a time of waiting upon the Lord? When I was quite a young Christian, I was introduced to the quiet time.

People said, Now, you've got to have a quiet time. This is essential. And they more or less tried to convince me that if I didn't have a quiet time, I would utterly fail for the rest of the day.

Well, the quiet time they introduced me to was prayer and the Word. That I had to study a certain passage of Scripture and I had my prayer list, things and people to pray for. That was the quiet time.

Well, it was years before I realized it was not a quiet time and my motive was wrong. It was anything but a quiet time. Because I began to add to my reading and I began to add to my list and I was hurrying to catch up.

So this is my quiet time. Then I realized it's not a quiet time at all. It's a study time and it's a prayer time with a given objective.

And it was sometimes a rather turbulent time. I'm reading quickly to get through my assignment in my quiet time. And the Lord spoke to me about it.

What is your motive? Well, it was something for me. Joe Carroll is going to flop today if he doesn't have a quiet time. Me.

Me. And my motive changed. My quiet time had to be something for him.

Something for him. There is a ministry to the Lord. Now, let's come back to our principle.

Seek nothing, you'll get everything. What are we going to learn? Live for others and you'll find satisfaction. Live for yourself, you'll find distraction.

So my motive was what? A ministry to the Lord. Now, in Acts 13 we find as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost spoke. Holy Ghost spoke to them.

You have these godly people waiting upon the Lord. They want a word from the Lord. So what are they doing? They are worshipping the Lord.

That's all they were doing. Praising Him. They were ministering to the Lord.

And He spoke to them. So I saw the quiet time is not for my sake, it's for His sake. If I minister to Him, He's going to speak to me.

And He did. He hadn't spoken to me through my quiet time, if I was honest about it, for years. I was accruing a lot of knowledge about doctrine and the Scriptures, but not a lot of knowledge about Him.

And there is a difference. There is a time to study the Word, there is a time to study doctrine, but I don't believe that's the quiet time at all. That's another time.

That quiet time is for Him, the cultivation of love for Him, the occupation with Him, for His sake, not yours. And it completely changed my life. Hudson Taylor.

If there's any man who could have written a classic on indigenous principles, or a classic on what we call church planting, it was Hudson Taylor. But he never wrote such a book. The only little book he's ever given us is *Union and Communion*, which is a commentary on the Song of Solomon.

How interesting. But you're the great father of modern missions, you know all about this church planting, you've succeeded, you've done it all. Yes.

He says, and this is the secret to it, the cultivation of your love for a person, that's the key to it. And so he gives us this little booklet, very small, *Union and Communion*. Beautiful, simple little exposition of the Song of Solomon.

Which what? Leads you into intimacy with the one who loves you and wants you to love him. And out of that intimacy, and in the experience of that intimacy, he speaks. He leads you.

To whom do you speak? To whom do you share? With whom do you share the secrets of your heart? The one who loves you and the one with whom you are intimate. This person and this person only. So what is the quiet time? What is the objective? The cultivation of my love for my Lord.

And that means I give myself to him for his sake, because that's, after all, what love is. Giving yourself to another for their sake, seeking nothing in return. And what happens? Well, he speaks.

As they minister to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, separate me Paul and Barnabas. When does he speak? Beside the still waters. The still waters.

The quiet time should be what? A time set aside for his sake, for his satisfaction, for his pleasure. To be occupied with him, praising him, taken up with him, seeking nothing in return. And then he speaks.

Shall we pray? Father, we ask thee to save us from ourselves. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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