

THE WONDERFULLY PERSISTENT LOVE OF GOD (Psalm 23:6)

Psalm 23----- **A Psalm of David.** ¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. ² He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. ³ He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. ⁴ **Yea, though I walk** through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You *are* with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. ⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. ⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

John and Denise Knight were happily **anticipating the birth of their first child**, a son. They had already decided to name him Paul. But when Paul was born, there was a big problem: Paul was born without eyes. John and Denise would later discover that their son had other serious issues, including severe autism and a growth hormone deficiency.

Two months after Paul's birth, as John was looking at **his son hooked up to tubes** and sensors and surrounded by medical professionals, he quietly told God, "**God, you are strong, that's true, and you are wicked. You are mean. Do it to me—not to this boy. What did he ever do to you?**" Shortly after that prayer, John and Denise quit going to church.

But one couple from the church refused to give up on them. Karl and Geri never pressured John and Denise about spiritual issues. **Instead, they would often stop by** and leave simple gifts, like a loaf of fresh bread or a basket of soap and shampoo. John said that it was like Karl and Geri were saying, "I notice you. I see you. I know you're hurting and I love you."

Eventually John and Denise accepted a dinner invitation from Karl and Geri. During dinner John told Karl, "**You can believe whatever you want. I don't care. I have evidence that God is cruel.**" Karl softly replied, "**I love you, John. I have regard for you, and I love your boy.**"

Karl and Geri's four children also displayed unconditional love for their son. John described it this way:

They'd throw [my son] up in the air and make him laugh and do funny bird sounds and—and that was confounding, because most people, most adults couldn't do that. And so I would have this extraordinary expression of love and affection at the dinner table here, and I would turn to my left—and there would be at least one of these children playing with my boy like he was a real boy. I wasn't even sure he was a real boy at times.

Based on this family's quiet, persistent love, John and Denise finally returned to the Lord and to their local church. And when they returned Karl and Geri stayed by their side, making sure their son made it into the nursery. John would later say the following, **"They persisted. That was a big deal that they persisted with us."**

John and Denise Knight and the writer of our Scripture text this morning, King David, all have something in common. They are people who endured extremely painful, gut-wrenching circumstances in their lives—and yet—they are also people who were shown such amazing love and concern that it took their breath away!

And this morning, I would like to talk to you about that kind of love and I hope that by the time we are finished, it will take your breath away as well.

Title: The Wonderfully Persistent Love of God

(Prayer)

In our everyday conversations, when we use words like, “No doubt!” we are expressing the certainty of a matter. We are saying that we are in complete agreement with what someone has said to us:

*This cheese has been in this refrigerator way too long! **No doubt!***

Or, you could say: **Without a doubt! Definitely!**

Psalms 23, the text we read earlier, contains King David’s words about the awesome care and provision he has received from the loving hands of God, in good times and bad.

It’s no wonder he begins the last verse of this song of praise with the word **“surely.”**

*“My Shepherd has taken such good care of me since I started following Him...**SURELY** (Without a doubt! Definitely!) goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life!”*

Forty years after God freed his people from slavery in Egypt, he reminded them of his persistent love and care for them when He said:

For forty years I led you through the wilderness, yet your clothes and sandals did not wear out. (Deut 29:5)

Our first lesson this morning about the wonderfully persistent love God has for us is this:

1. God’s love and care for us in the past assures us of His love and care in the future!

Now how does David picture God’s love for us? He calls it God’s “goodness and mercy”:

“Surely (without a doubt!) goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...” This phrase **g & m** in modern English would probably be something like “wonderfully faithful love” or “wonderfully loyal love.”

Listen to how the Hebrew word for “mercy” (*hesed*) is defined by a Bible scholar who studied this word carefully through the entire Old Testament:

G. R. Clark concludes that **תִּוְּן** “is not merely an attitude or an emotion; it is an emotion that leads to an activity beneficial to the recipient.” He explains that an act of **תִּוְּן** is “a beneficent action performed, in the context of a deep and enduring commitment between

two persons or parties, by one who is able to render assistance to the needy party who in the circumstances is unable to help him or herself.”¹

Scholar Bruce Waltke called *hesed* “God’s help for the helpless.”

In Psalm 136 alone, the people of Israel used this very word 26X when they sang: “For His **mercy** endures forever”:

Psalm 136:1-5-----

- ¹ Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is good!*
For His **mercy** endures forever.
- ² Oh, give thanks to the God of gods!
For His **mercy** endures forever.
- ³ Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords!
For His **mercy** endures forever:
- ⁴ To Him who alone does great wonders,
For His **mercy** endures forever;
- ⁵ To Him who by wisdom made the heavens,
For His **mercy** endures forever...

So, first of all,

1. God’s love and care for us in the past assures us of His love and care in the future!

But there is another lesson here. And what an encouraging lesson it is!

2. God’s wonderfully persistent love will chase after us all the days of our life!

Now, you may say, “*How did you come up with that Bob?*” Well, it is found in the meaning of the word, “follow.” That English word is not strong enough. The translators should have used the word “pursue” or “chase.”

This Hebrew word is used over and over in the OT about being in pursuit of someone or something.

A NET Bible footnote says this:

One might expect the psalmist’s enemies...to chase him, but ironically God’s “goodness and faithfulness”...pursue him instead. The word “pursue” is...[a] word picture of God... “chasing down” the one whom he loves.²

Now, if you have any doubt that God pursues His people with an amazing and faithful love, all you have to do is to remember how He treated His people after the Exodus from Egypt. Notice how horribly His people treated God and then note His response to them:

¹ Biblical Studies Press, *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, 2006).

² Ibid.

Psalm 78:10–20-----¹⁰ They [the nation of Israel] did not keep their covenant with God, and they refused to obey his law. ¹¹ They forgot what he had done, the amazing things he had shown them. ¹² He did amazing things in the sight of their ancestors, in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan. ¹³ **He divided the** sea and led them across it; he made the water stand in a heap. ¹⁴ He led them with a cloud by day, and with the light of a fire all night long. ¹⁵ He broke open rocks in the wilderness, and gave them enough water to fill the depths of the sea. ¹⁶ **He caused streams** to flow from the rock, and made the water flow like rivers. ¹⁷ Yet they continued to sin against him, and rebelled against the sovereign One in the desert. ¹⁸ They willfully challenged God by asking for food to satisfy their appetite. ¹⁹ **They insulted God, saying,** “Is God really able to give us food in the wilderness? ²⁰ Yes, he struck a rock and water flowed out, streams gushed forth. But can he also give us food? Will he provide meat for his people?”

Psalm 78:37–43-----³⁷ They were not really committed to him, and they were unfaithful to his covenant. ³⁸ Yet he is compassionate. He forgives sin and does not destroy. He often holds back his anger, and does not stir up his fury. ³⁹ **He remembered that** they were made of flesh, and were like a wind that blows past and does not return. ⁴⁰ How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness, and insulted him in the desert! ⁴¹ They again challenged God, and offended the Holy One of Israel. ⁴² **They did not** remember what he had done, how he delivered them from the enemy, ⁴³ when he performed his awesome deeds in Egypt...

The wonderfully persistent love of God! And He shares that same love with us! Not only did this persistent love...

---Chase after you and I to be saved, and
 ---Chase after caring for us since then, but it will
 ---**Continue** to chase after us until the day we see Him—
“all the days” of our lives!

That’s lesson #2. But there is one more here, and it is found in the very last statement of the Psalm, where we see David’s RESPONSE to this wonderfully persistent love of God:

“And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever...”
 (= the tabernacle—the place where God lived among His people)

Since the wonderfully persistent love of God will pursue David all the days of his life, David’s response is this: *“Lord, I will pursue **You** the rest of my life!”*

And this brings us to lesson #3:

3. Our response to the wonderfully persistent love and care of God should be a heartfelt and lasting desire to be close to Him!

...a desire to please Him...a desire to walk in harmony with Him and in harmony with what He desires. After all God has done for you, do you desire to be with and please Him?

In 2009, the movie *Slumdog Millionaire* won eight Academy Awards and was loved by moviegoers around the world. The movie’s poverty, violence, and crime provide a backdrop for the tender story of **Jamal**, a young man from the slums of Mumbai, India, and his unwavering love for **Latika**, a beautiful girl he met in the same slum. In the movie, Jamal and Latika are tragically separated from one another for years, and after

they see each other briefly, she's taken from him again by evil men. Yet, because of his love for her, he never stops trying to find her, never stops pursuing her.

Against highly unlikely odds, in the last scene of the film the impossible happens—**Jamal and Latika are finally reunited.**

And as Jamal pulls back the long yellow scarf wrapped around her face, **he sees a large scar inflicted** by her captors that disfigures her face.

As she looks down in shame, Jamal, his eyes full of tears...

holds up her face and kisses—**not her lips—but her scar.**

[Go to black]

Application:

- Maybe you're having trouble trusting God in the present because you have forgotten about how good He has been to you in the past.
- Or maybe you feel like God doesn't really care about you and have not understood that He is actually PURSUING you in love and concern!
- Another takeaway here has to do with your response to all He has done for you. Can you say that you have responded with gratitude and a desire to honor God with your life, or is there some kind of wall between you and God?

Today would be a great day to draw near to God in repentance and a renewed love for the God who loves you!

Invitation

In a sermon shortly after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostle Peter said:

Acts 4:11-12-----Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures, where it says, 'The stone that you builders rejected has now become the cornerstone.' ¹² There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved."