

PSALM 23
CITY LIFE CHURCH

Last year, a man by the name of...

Chamath Palihapitiya, who joined Facebook in 2007 and became its vice president for user growth, said he feels “tremendous guilt” about the company he helped make. “I think we have created tools that are ripping apart the social fabric of how society works,” he told an audience at Stanford Graduate School of Business

Palihapitiya’s criticisms were aimed not only at Facebook, but the wider online ecosystem. “The short-term, dopamine-driven feedback loops we’ve created are destroying how society works,” he said, referring to online interactions driven by “hearts, likes, thumbs-up.” “No civil discourse, no cooperation; misinformation, mistruth. And it’s not an American problem — this is not about Russians ads. This is a global problem.”

In November, early investor Sean Parker said he has become a “conscientious objector” to social media, and that Facebook and others had succeeded by “exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology.”

A former product manager at the company, Antonio Garcia-Martinez, has said Facebook lies about its ability to influence individuals based on the data it collects on them, and wrote a book, about his work at the firm.

We post bc we want people to heart, like, thumbs up things we post. When we peruse Instagram and spot a perfectly plated dish that looks delicious...all of a sudden we are hungry. We see friends going off to an exciting vacation, and all of a sudden we feel like want a vacation. We are constantly bombarded with advertising, social media, and commercials. We can’t help but have all these manufactured wants?

Pointing all this out is not about demonizing social media, but it is more about knowing why we want some of the things we think we want. Psalm 23 flies in the face of what is happening in society today.

The LORD is my Shepherd, I shall not want. These 2 declarative statements will frame and help the rest of the passage fall into place.

The passage starts out with “The LORD is”...David could have used Elohim or Adonai. Purely from a contextual perspective, either of those would have worked. However, he chooses to uses YHWH. It is the most personal and holy name of God. It is the name that was revealed to Moses. YHWH comes from the Hebrew word “to be” and is tied to the idea of life itself. The idea of “to be” is tied to the idea of life itself. Consequently, it means that YHWH is the source of life.

“I shall not want”. When I read this, it seems like an incomplete thought. I shall not want...what? Ancient Hebrew writers would do this. An example of it is in...
Isaiah 1:3 - An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master's manger, But Israel does not know, My people do not understand.

The implication here is that Israel does not know anything! Israel does not understand anything!

Similarly, David is saying, "I shall not want"...anything. We tend to think..."If I call the shots. If I can maximize the things I like and minimize the things I don't, THEN, I shall not want b/c I will have everything I want." This is also not a Buddhist idea of emptying oneself until there is no want. Instead, it is the idea, that you are so full of God that you have no want. David specifically states that he does not want because YHWH is his shepherd. Not b/c he is the King! It is completely counter to what our world says. The rest of this Psalm describes what it means for David to not want anything.

Moving into verse 2. "He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters" Makes me (in English) has a connotation of ordering around through a command or forcing someone to do something not wanted. However, when you look at it in Hebrew, the word for "he makes me" is closer in meaning to "causes me to". It is more like...

Genesis 2:21 "So the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man"

Psalm 23 is full of references to Exodus, and it will give us insight into what David was thinking about and what the people of that time would be thinking when listening to this Psalm. The first reference to Exodus is the word naveh...or pastures. It is an allusion to...

Exodus 15:13. In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed; In Your strength You have guided them to Your holy habitation.

The pasture being referenced was the promised land flowing with milk and honey. Verse 2 said another way, would be understood like "He causes me to lie down in the promised land you gave to our forefathers." David is living out the promise that God gave to Abraham a multitude of generations ago!

David is thinking, "Our people didn't want to go. They were complaining that they were going to die in the wilderness and said they would rather be enslaved to the Egyptians....BUT...God caused them to lie down in the promised land and David is getting to reap God's blessings as he writes this Psalm!

Verse 3 is equally amazing. "He restores my soul, He guides me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake". A lot of times we see that word "restores" and we think of to repair or renew. Makes sense!

However, in Psalm 23 it means to "turn back" or "return to". It is very similar to the NT idea of repenting. The idea of turning back is not just a way of escaping. It also means there is a turning to something else.

Here is Exodus imagery popping up. David is saying to turn back to the path of righteousness. He is probably thinking about the cloud that led the Israelites during the day and the fire that led them by night for His name sake, fame, glory.

Said another way, this verse could read, "He turns my soul back and guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

When reviewing these first 3 verses. God causes us to, leads us to, turns us back to, and guides us. All of these words point to something that God has done and will continue to do. We have all experienced some of the ways God has led us to experience Himself through the good things and experiences.

Some of those things for me were unwittingly meeting my best friend and now wife for the first time back in Sept '05. We officially met at the Souper Salad over by the Galaxy Theaters where Highland Mall used to be.

I will also always remember the day I became a father, and Evan was born. You know, things like getting yelled at in the delivery room bc I wasn't doing something quite right so she could push a baby out of her body. Then this little 6.5 pound package appears in the doctor's arms, and my eyes and heart welled up with joy. These point to a relational richness only God can provide. The richness of walking with God and reflecting on His goodness to his people are part of what makes David say, "I shall not want".

However as we know, as the Israelites knew during the Exodus, and David knew, there were also dark times on the journey. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." I don't really understand Shadow of death, but perhaps it's better understood as deep darkness.

We have all known deep darkness. If you have not, its simply b/c you have not lived long enough yet. To be human is to experience joy, happiness, and the lightness of life as well as darkness, fear, sorrow, and pain.

It was Tuesday, May 17, 2005. It was a very normal day, and I had a busy day at work. Its funny how just a few sentences can change your life. Just after lunch a quarter till 3, I got an email from my sister.

daddy just called me. he said he tried to contact you. mommy died.

I looked at my phone since I had it silenced at work and saw that I missed 8 calls. The amount of chaos and hurt it inflicted on my life and loved ones was absolutely immeasurable. If i am honest, there are still days when i walk through the valley of deep darkness. There are days of what ifs. There are days of regret. There are days I am still heartbroken.

We never got to celebrate selling my first business. She never got to meet Kristine. She never saw me become a husband and father. She never met Evan or got to see his first steps. My first big promotion at work.

In the broken days of life David says, "I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me." How can David say this? It is b/c God brought him here. Remember...

He causes me to lie down in green pastures
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He turns back my soul
He guides me in the paths of righteousness

That is why he can say "I fear no evil, for You are with me". The rod was used in ancient times to fend off attacking animals, and the staff or crook was used to guide the sheep into the right path.

I was tempted to think that no one understands my pain, and that I should just bury that pain deep where no one...not even I could find it. I was tempted to think that somehow I was an incomplete person without a mom. God's rod for me was to remind me through His word and through His people that I was not alone, and that God was with me.

His staff guided me into the presence of other believers to share in pain together. I got desperate, so I just started talking about the pain of losing my mom. I found there were others in the church that had the same experience, and that I was not alone. I found bonds with people I never thought I would talk to.

This is a bit of a tangent, but it takes a couple of ingredients for us to walk with people in pain. Courage and openness. The person in pain must be courageously open with their life. You don't have to share in front of the world, but if there are people you know and trust, you should talk to them.

On the receiving end, there must also be courage and openness. You don't have to have any answers for them...just an openness to let them talk. The courageous part of it is when they give you permission to ask about the pain...you should. Some of the best advice I ever got was from a counselor who started poking, asking, and treading lightly by asking questions about my mom. He said if we do not ask about the person that passed, we are acting as if they never lived, and that is more painful.

Now David looks to the future. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows." Let's unpack what it means to prepare a table.

Psalm 78:19-20 Then they spoke against God; They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock so that waters gushed out, And streams were overflowing; Can He give bread also? Will He provide meat for His people?"

The question being asked is if God can provide in adversity. Prior to the banquet, the traditional anointing ceremony of preparation had taken place, and the banquet cup is overflowing. David is saying his life is overflowing with blessings and thanksgiving b/c of who was going through it with him...not b/c of other wants. The joy, happiness, and the lightness of life as well as darkness, fear, sorrow, and pain all make the cup overflow b/c the banquet was a celebration of God's provision.

So far, David has alluded to the Exodus and gave us a picture of what has been happening in the present. In the last verse, he starts talking about getting prepared for a banquet, and now verse 6 points solidly into the future. "Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life". When looking across languages, there are words that do not translate well. Lovingkindness is one of those words.

The closest idea I know is calling a war veteran a patriot. I have a very shallow understanding of that word. However, when a war veteran thinks about being a patriot, they think of the lives of friends that sacrificed themselves. They think of the personal sacrifices they made. They think of the soldiers that have gone before them throughout the history of this nation, and how they are linked to the men and women that served through time so we and others can be free.

Similarly, the word lovingkindness is a loaded word with historical ramifications. In David's time, people would think about the Exodus and God bringing them out of Egypt. Due to an incredibly strong oral historical tradition, stories would have been passed down from generation to generation linking them to their past and telling of God's faithful love since the beginning of time to bring them where they are today...a nation. In short, it is the everlasting covenant love of God stretching out to them from the past and moving them into the future.

In English, the word "follow" is a bit passive for this passage. In the context of lovingkindness, it is the idea of pursuing or chasing after. That means the covenant love of God is chasing us

down as we lie down in green pastures, are by quiet waters, walk in paths of righteousness, and even when we walk through the valley of deep darkness.

So now when we read that verse, it is saying, "Indeed, goodness and lovingkindness will chase after me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

YHWH is my shepherd, I shall not want anything.
He causes me to lie down in the promised land;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He turns my soul back and guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the deepest darkness, I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; The cup of my life overflows.
Indeed, goodness and lovingkindness will chase me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Now that we have a bit of a deeper understanding of Psalm 23, what does that mean for us? First of all, we need to understand that is God's purpose is to exist and to share who He is with us. Then, as the church, does it not stand to reason that we should also focus on being the essence of Christ to this world and sharing who we are in Christ with each other.

The temptation will be to put the cart before the horse, grit our teeth, and resist the all the wants we have swirling around us. Instead, we must understand that the sufficiency of our relationship with God will relieve us of our wants. As we walk with God and He grants us triumph and peace, share it. This is the easier part.

However, perhaps more importantly, as God takes us through the darkness...walk with each other as He walks with us. This is obviously harder to do, but it is necessary. Then we will be able to experience the cup of our life overflowing...knowing that God walked with us through it all. The person going through the experience will know Him better and the people sharing in it will also know Him better.

Admittedly, I am one of the worst offenders. I know I need to work on being more courageous and sharing more of who I am so others can know the depths of how God is working on my life and changing me. Let's all do this together. I invite you to do the same.