

## He Restores My Soul

Sterling UMC  
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Psalm 23:3

If you take a trip to the west coast, you will find those beautiful giant sequoia and redwood trees. In most of the parks the naturalists can show you a cross section of a great tree they have cut, and point out that the rings of the tree reveal the developmental history, year by year. You might see a ring that represents a year when there was a terrible drought. There may be a couple of rings from years when there was too much rain. Then you might find where the tree was struck by lightning. There are some rings that show normal years of growth, but you may also see a ring that shows where a forest fire almost destroyed the tree. You may also find another that indicates the result of savage blight or disease. All of this lies embedded in the heart of the tree, representing the autobiography of its growth.

And that's the way it is with us. Just beneath the protective bark, the concealing, protective mask, are the recorded rings of our lives.

There are scars of ancient, painful hurts, repressed memories, tragic stains that can eat away at the very fabric of our lives. And if we allow them, negative emotions like guilt, grief, and grudges, like an infestation of termites, these destructive thoughts and emotions can eat away at us from the inside out. We look healthy and whole on the outside but if you push a little bit, you push right through that façade and everything begins to crumble.

Where do we turn for the healing that our souls so desperately crave? Once again we turn to the Lord, who is our Good Shepherd.

Psalm 23:3 gives us the good news, "He restores my soul." In the face of these negative and destructive emotions that's what we need. We all have hidden hurts from our past. We carry wounds, battle scars, emotional garbage. God wants to take away your emotional garbage. He wants to restore your soul.

How does He do that? He does that when I allow Him to make three changes in my life:

### 1. LET THE GOOD SHEPHERD REMOVE MY GUILT

Nothing destroys a soul faster than guilt. Psalm 38:4,6 (NIV) "My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear... I am bowed down and brought low; all day long I go about mourning." We all have plenty reasons to feel guilty. We are all imperfect. We all make mistakes. By nature we carry guilt in our lives. But when we allow it consume our lives it becomes very destructive.

How do you get rid of guilt? How do you deal with the guilt in your life? There are a lot of options:

You can deny it, pretend it doesn't exist. You can minimize it. "It was no big deal, not that big of a sin." You can rationalize your guilt -- "Everybody does it." You can blame other people. The problem is none of these things work. There is only one solution to your guilt. You've got to give it to God. He's the only one who can remove it.

Romans 3:23-24 (LB), "All of us have sinned... yet God declares us 'not guilty' IF we trust in Jesus Christ, who in mercy freely takes away our sins." The most basic truth of Christianity is Jesus Christ has already paid for all of your sins. Everything you've ever done wrong has already been paid for; all of the sins, mistakes, regrets have already been paid for. You just need to ask God to forgive you and accept what Jesus Christ did for you on the Cross. Just accept it. That's how your guilt will be removed. No other way. No psychologist can remove your guilt; they don't have the power to forgive you. But the Lord who is our Good Shepherd does have the power to forgive you. Friends I don't know what you've done but it doesn't matter because your forgiveness is not based on how bad you've been, but how good God is. What matters is not what you've done, but what Jesus Christ has already done for you.

Are you struggling with guilt today? Listen to this. Colossians 2:13-14 (NLT), "God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross."

ALL your sins. FORGIVEN. CANCELED. TAKEN AWAY. When God forgives, He forgives completely. He takes your sins, throws them in the deepest part of the sea.

If God forgets confessed sin, shouldn't you? Why keep beating yourself up over something God isn't beating you up over? Jesus paid the penalty so you wouldn't have to. Jesus was nailed to the cross so you can stop nailing yourself to the cross. Let God remove your guilt.

## 2. LET THE GOOD SHEPHERD RELIEVE MY GRIEF

Not all of the things in life that damage us are things I bring upon myself. Sometimes I have grief because of things that happen to me. Sometimes I have grief over seeing other people hurt. The fact is you will be hurt in life, you will experience loneliness in life. This is not heaven, this is earth. It's imperfect down here. Some days you're going to be lonely. Some days your heart will be broken. Some days you're going to feel despair. Some days you're going to feel all alone. Some days you'll experience sorrow, loss, grief.

If you identify with those emotions I want to say to you today I'm sorry you hurt and I want you to know God knows what you're going through. God hurts with you and He cares about your hurt. The people in this church want to be your family in this crisis. We saw that so beautifully illustrated yesterday. But only Jesus Christ can fill that emptiness in your heart.

David, the author of Psalm 23, was very acquainted with grief. He understood how much it damages our soul when we hurt. Psalm 31:9 (NCV), "Lord, have mercy, because I am in misery. My eyes are weak from so much crying, and my whole being is tired from grief." What do you do when you feel like that, when your heart is breaking, when grief overwhelms you in life? Throw a giant pity party? Play the "if only" game? Withdraw into a shell, hide in a cave, isolate yourself from humanity and say, "I'll never let another anyone else hurt me!" Do you just pull back and resign from life and be miserable the rest of your life? No. There is another option. You can let Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd restore your soul.

Some of you are experiencing some grief right now. God is not finished with your life. He's not through with you. This is not the end. It hurts. But it does not have to devastate you if you'll open your life up to Christ and let Him heal your emotions. Ask God, "Remove my guilt and relieve my grief." If you're still alive, God is not through with you. And the rest of your life can be the best of your life. Listen to this promise. Isaiah 61:3 (LB), "To all who mourn... he will give: beauty for ashes; joy instead of mourning; praise instead of heaviness." You don't have to remain a prisoner of your pain. It's a choice.

### 3. LET THE GOOD SHEPHERD REPLACE MY GRUDGES

Grudges come from what other people do to me. I feel guilty for what I've done to others, but I feel grudges about what others have done to me. You're going to get hurt in life; that's a fact of life. Life isn't fair. People will hurt you. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally. Either way, it still hurts. How you handle the resentments of life determine whether you are a bitter person or a better person. The difference between bitter and better is the letter "I". I make the choice. I can choose whether the circumstance will devastate me or direct me on to a new path; whether it will make me bitter or better.

What do I do with all the hurts that have piled up, all the emotional garbage that I still resent, and when those people come to mind it just tightens my stomach up? What do I do?

Job 5:2 (GN), "To worry yourself to death with resentment would be a foolish, senseless thing to do." Why? Resentment never hurts the other person. It only hurts you. The other person might be totally oblivious that you're even thinking about them. They've gone on with their life. Some of you are continuing to allow people from your past to hurt you *now!* And that's stupid! Your past is past. They cannot hurt you anymore unless you keep rehearsing it in your mind. Every time you rehearse that resentment they'll hurt you again. They may even be dead and they're still hurting you from the grave. That is dumb! You don't hurt them by resenting. Holding onto a hurt, only hurts you.

What do you do with your grudges, the resentments of people that have hurt you? Romans 12:19 (LB), "Dear friends, never avenge yourselves. Leave that to God, for He

has said He will repay those who deserve it." Because of sin in this world, life is unfair. Sometimes innocent people suffer. And sometimes guilty and evil people prosper. Justice is not always served in this world. But God has said one day He is going to settle the score. One day He's going to call it into account, right the wrongs, settle the issues that were left unsettled here -- the crimes, the injustice, the prejudice, the racism, the sexism, the rapes, murders, hurts, abuse.

One day God is going to settle the score. In the meantime, the Bible says, don't avenge yourself. It will eat you up. What do you do instead?

Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIV), "Get rid of all bitterness rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you." One day God is going to settle the score. In the meantime He says, get rid of all bitterness, forgive each other as God forgave you. If you've been forgiven, God expects you to be forgiving. You will never have to forgive another person more than God has already forgiven you.

So let me ask you this morning, what is it you still feel guilty about? When I start talking about guilt it pops into your mind and still haunts you and bugs you? How about your grief? Are you letting that grief incapacitate you, keeping you in a self imposed prison? How about your grudges? Are you still allowing people in your past to continue to hurt you in the present? Give God your grief, guilt, grudges. Jesus Christ wants to make you whole. Our Savior, the Good Shepherd will restore your soul if you'll let Him.

In Psalm 42:5 (KJV) David prays, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul....Hope thou in God." Do you have a cast down soul? David is using a term every shepherd would understand when he talks about being cast down. It is a position sheep get themselves in and they can't get out of. Sheep are built in such a way, that if they fall over on their side and then on over on their back with their legs sticking straight up in the air, they cannot get out of that position themselves. They are helpless to get back up on their feet again. That position is called a cast down sheep. When this happens a sheep kicks and flails in the air. It bleats, cries out. It knows it is open to attack. Any animal could come and attack it and it is helpless. It's a very serious condition. When sheep lay on their back, gas begins to collect in their stomach. It hardens the stomach, cuts off the air passage and they suffocate in a matter of hours. Not only that, their legs go numb in that position. On a hot day a sheep in a cast down position can die in just a matter of hours. They can't do anything about it. They need a shepherd who restores their soul.

When a shepherd restores a cast down sheep, it doesn't just happen immediately. It takes time. The first thing the shepherd does is lovingly massage the four legs to get some circulation back up in the four legs. Then he begins to talk in a reassuring tone to the sheep, "You're going to make it." Then he gently turns the sheep over, puts his hand under the sheep's belly and lifts it up because it cannot stand up on its own because of its wobbly feet. He will lift up the sheep and hold it there while the sheep begins to get some equilibrium. The blood begins to flow in the legs again and it begins to get some

stability. When the shepherd realizes and can feel that the sheep can stand on its own feet then that shepherd will lovingly and gently let the sheep go.

What a picture of what God wants to do for you! When you're on your back and flailing around and the grief, guilt, or grudges are overwhelming you and you think you're going to die in that position, the Lord is your Shepherd. He lovingly comes with reassuring words and tender hands, picks up His little lamb, sets him up straight until he can get on his own feet again and carries it until it's got that stability back. Jesus Christ wants to restore your soul. If you've been cast down for any reason, He's the only one who can help you get back up on your feet again. We can restore a lot of things -- cars, paintings, sound recordings, buildings -- but only God can restore a soul.

Jesus Christ wants to heal your soul. How does He do it? "Put your heart right, reach out to God... then face the world again, firm and courageous. Then all your troubles will fade from your memory, like floods that are past and remembered no more." Job 11:13-16. Jesus will restore your soul. Let Him be your Shepherd and your Savior.