

Surely...
Psalm 23:6

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

Intro: Have you ever been frustrated in traffic only to think afterward that God may have kept you from an accident? For all the ways we know God is good to us, eternity will reveal many more ways we did not see God's preserving goodness.

This verse in the Psalm covers both our lives here on earth and transitions to Heaven. It's kind of like

John 5:24 - *whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me*

- 1 - *has eternal life* – Present tense.
- 2 - *He does not come into judgment* – future tense.
- 3 - *but has passed from death to life* – past tense.

Haddon Robinson – *"In this final sentence, the psalmist moves from his past experiences to his present and future life with God. His past experiences gave birth to his present hope. Because David had seen God's faithfulness through the years, he had hope for the years to come."*

First: A Word about Goodness and Mercy

Philip Keller says this is a bold statement, evidenced by the word, "*Surely*."

- 1 – Goodness is found in abundance – what God gives us.
- 2 – Mercy is discovered in lack – what God withholds from us.

Mercy = *hesed* = *lovingkindness*

This is that single Hebrew word so vast in its meaning that it has no individual English equivalent. Instead, it implies 'covenant loyalty,' and is translated in various ways as *steadfast love, mercy, kindness, or goodness*.

Isaiah 54:10 - *For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you*

It's the kind of thing that makes you want to cry out -

Romans 11:33 - *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

In David's thinking, goodness and mercy are like two sheep dogs caring for the flock.

For 'follow,' David uses the Hebrew military word meaning pursue, as in,

Exodus 14:9 – *The Egyptians pursued them* [Israel]

We need both to balance our lives.

Philippians 4:12-13 - *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Can we do that? Can we live contentedly in plenty and hunger, abundance and need?

Perhaps we may need Romans 8:28 as an undergirding principle to do so.

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

And not simply, "all things" but, "all the days" of my life. It literally means, "days without end," and the rest of the verse tells us, "...I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

But it's not just mercy. It's also -

a) Goodness = *tobh*, the most common word for 'good' in the OT.

This word is used at the end of every creation day, but it is easy to see the goodness of light vs darkness, land vs sea etc. We do need both of those. But....

In Scripture his goodness appears most clearly in his dealings with people. He is not only good in general, but as he is good to us (Psalm 68:10; 73:1; 119:65; 145:9).

Maybe I need a redefinition of 'good,' and to see it from Heaven's perspective and not that of earth.

(I can live with my sorrow of losing Jon but have a more difficult time watching Teana sorrow. What is 'good' in that?)

But God does not define 'good' from a child's perspective.

Haddon Robinson – "Thus the Good Shepherd orders the events of our lives so that ultimately we will become what he wants us to be."

And for me, this is where the remainder of the verse comes into play.

Second: A Word about Forever

and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Faith has to see (that is the substance of faith, isn't it?)

Hb 11:1 - *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Sometimes, I have to walk down that list of people to regain my Christian worldview. In the Christian world, the present only makes sense in light of the future.

ILL – It's like a balancing scale and we have to give more weight to the future because it is more glorious and longer.

ILL – In every book of The Chronicles of Narnia, except the last, Aslan saves Narnia. Old Narnia dies to give way to the new.

ILL – Understanding the 'West' and the setting sun, which always gives way to the new day.

2 Peter 3:11-13 - *Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

How does a verse like that impact our success? Our sorrow?

Let's not forget that sheep are not intuitive creatures, with little sense of direction and easily lost, not only harming themselves but destroying good pastureland in the process.

In the interim, I'm comforted by a verse like

Psalm 27:4 - One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

What does it mean, "to inquire in his temple?"

John Gill - "...to seek the face of the Lord, to consult him in matters of difficulty and moment; to search after the knowledge of divine things, and to ask for blessings of grace."

That conversation has certainly begun here, on earth, but I don't suspect it will end here, although, it may be that, seeing '*the beauty of the Lord*' answers all my questions.

Until that time, I'm comforted by the "why" of Jesus (Matt 27:46), knowing that he knew why but the crisis of the moment still pressed the question from him.

One last thought.

Revelation 14:13 - And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"

What about my life? Do goodness and mercy follow me?

Twenty-five months after leaving Egypt, and 22 months after arriving at Sinai, as Israel left,

Numbers 10:29-32 - And Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out for the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us, and we will do good to you, for the LORD has promised good to Israel." ³⁰ But he said to him, "I will not go. I will depart to my own land and to my kindred." ³¹ And he said, "Please do not leave us, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us. ³² And if you do go with us, whatever good the LORD will do to us, the same will we do to you.

Conclusion:

G. Campbell Morgan handed over the reins of Westminster Chapel to Martyn Lloyd-Jones in 1943. Before that, he was once called to the home of a mother dying in childbirth. Even though her baby was well, the mother lamented, "I don't want to leave my baby here. I want to take the baby with me." The attending doctor replied, "*But mother, the gate is only wide enough for one.*" To which Morgan took the doctor aside and said, "*Oh no. The gate is wide enough for two, but only two; she and her Savior who has promised to never leave or forsake her.*"

Deuteronomy 31:8 - *It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed* (Hb 13:8).

Here's how David sees it.

*Surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives.
But just as surely, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Both must be held in balance for life's tensions to be met well.

And, I suspect, we must never forget that we love him, because he first loved us (1 Jn 4:19).