

---

---

# Ten Joys

## Psalm 23

A sermon preached for the Nazareth Companions on April 12, 2022 by Revd Dr Sam Wells

---

---

In the Nazareth Community we talk about the Seven Ss. Tonight I want to tell you about the Ten Joys. The twenty-third psalm gives us ten joys and I'm going to explore them all with you.

Number One: 'He makes me lie down in green pastures.' This psalm wasn't written in England. This is a parched climate. Think about what it feels like to lie back in a meadow and stretch wide your arms and legs and breathe in the air and stare deep into the far blue beyond and take in forever. Hear God whispering to you: 'I want you to have an abundant life. I want you to have plenty. I want you to have enough and to spare.'

Number Two: 'He leads me beside still waters.' God takes us to a place where the water's flowing fast enough to be fresh but not so fast we can't drink it. God says, 'I want you to have cold water flowing down on your tongue and in your mouth and over your cheeks and through your hair and down your neck and everywhere.'

Number Three: 'He restores my soul.' Here's God's third joy: 'You'll get worn out, you'll get worn down, you'll have nothing left, but I will bring you back to life.' Think about seeing an old friend after a long absence and realising they're the person above all who makes you laugh till you're hollowed out inside, and in the laughter recognising 'Life is good when I'm with you.' God is that person. God whispers, 'I want to restore your soul.'

Number Four: 'He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.' God is whispering to you, 'I want to help you find the good ways, to navigate the troubled times and walk through the storms.'

Number Five: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me.' Here we face the reality of our fear of death. And God whispers the most important word in the whole Bible. With. 'You are *with* me:' it's at the centre of this psalm, it's at the centre of God's joy, it's at the centre of the Bible, it's at the centre of our faith. It's at the centre of God.

Number Six: 'Your rod and your staff – they comfort me.' Think about that word 'comfort' for a moment. I wonder what comforts you when you're really in trouble. I think of times of physical pain or profound grief or hurt or shock or disappointment and what a rod and staff mean to me is a person who's not afraid, who doesn't change the subject, or run away to do a useful job, or make up stories to pretend it's ok, or say really it's not so bad, or tell me about how something worse or more interesting happened to them. What comforts *me* is someone whose strength says 'However bad or painful or miserable this is, it's not going to scare me away. We're going to stare this tragedy down together.' That's what a comforter does. That's what God does.

Number Seven: 'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.' There's no pretending that you and I don't have enemies. But there's no suggestion that my enemies are God's enemies. There's no suggestion, in fact, that God has enemies at all. Think about that for a moment: *God has no enemies*. How does God deal with *our* enemies? By setting a table before them and before us. That's what it says. 'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.' I once had a Hungarian professor who complained, 'I can't stand it that people in this country invite you to dinner and never tell you who you'll be sitting next to – it could be someone you've just slammed in a book review and it can be so embarrassing.' That's what God does. God invites you to dinner but never tells you who you'll be sitting next to. It's so embarrassing. It's what makes God laugh.

Number Eight: 'You anoint my head with oil.' Again, when you think of enemies and the shadow of death in Holy Week, you can't help but think of the woman extravagantly anointing Jesus' head with oil and triggering Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Maybe this is where she got the idea. This is one of the most physical and exotic verses in the whole Bible. This is what God has in store for us. Are you ready to enjoy being enjoyed by God?

Number Nine: 'My cup overflows.' God's promise to us is that we'll have way too much, not just of the regular things like grass and bread, but of the wonderful, luxurious things like wine. This is a fully fledged banquet, with flowing drinks for the guests and plenty of additional pleasures like a joyous massage from the host. This is some party.

And finally, most mysterious and wondrous of all, Number Ten: 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' This is the greatest promise of all: it's not that goodness and mercy are hard to find and you'll spend your whole life looking for them – it's that they're on a perpetual mission to find you, and

they'll be *pursuing you every day of your life*. You can't finally escape God's relentless tenderness, try as you might.

One last question. Does everyone who encounters you soon realise that God is fundamentally about joy? Read Psalm 23 to yourself, today, tomorrow, every day. These are the promises God makes to you. These are the joys God wants for you.

And what response does God want *from* you? Believe them. Share them. Enjoy them.