

“Surely Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow Me”

- ☉ **My Shepherd’s loving pursuit**
- ☉ **My legacy of blessing**

In the name of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, dear sheep:

Throughout this Hymn of Praise to Divine Diligence, the Holy Spirit has emphasized one key truth: The whole life of a sheep is bound up in the skill and loving care of the Good Shepherd. Here is the climax in the first half of the sixth verse: **“Surely Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow Me *all the days of my life.*”**

☉ **My Shepherd’s loving pursuit**

But what are **“Goodness”** and **“Mercy”**? Just nice words for a sermon? **“Surely...,”** David says, **“Surely Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow Me...”** So certain is the Christian faith, that we are **“sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”** (Hebrews 11:1) **“All the days of my life”** is the unshakable reality of **My Shepherd’s loving pursuit**. Our U.S. Declaration of Independence, calls “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” “inalienable rights” from our Creator. But here in Psalm 23, our Creator turns that around and says His greatest blessings will pursue me **“all the days of my life.”**

“Goodness” is God’s nature. He delights in being good as my Shepherd in “sound, sympathetic, intelligent ownership” (127) even when I can’t see it, even when I rebel against it. As a natural born sinner, and like every descendant of Adam, I rebel against God’s commands, listen to the wrong people, then make excuses by blaming others and ultimately God. So why is my Shepherd pursuing me with **“Goodness”**?

Only one reason: **“Mercy.”** My Shepherd’s *unfailing love* holds strong and true even when I get the perverted, stupid idea that I’m okay on my own. I wander off; He follows me. I fall; He picks me up. I mess up my life; He cleans it. I bleat like a lost sheep; He searches and finds me, quiets and comforts me in the warm light of His gracious presence. How good and merciful **My Shepherd’s loving pursuit**.

Always? Even when the refrigerator and bank account are empty? When friends prove fickle and faithless? When my job is lost and health fails for me or a loved passing away in pain? How can the Apostle James (1:2-4) say this? **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”** How can boast in **My Shepherd’s loving pursuit** when “the dream castles of my ambitions and hopes crumble into ruins”? (128)

With the Lord’s Apostle Paul, **“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** (Galatians 6:14) His blood He paid to wash away my sins. His cross is the proof that cannot be argued away. His empty tomb guarantees His promise: **“Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”** (Matthew 28:20) My doubts and fears fade in the overpowering **mercy** of **My Shepherd’s loving pursuit**. His Holy Supper assures me of the deep determination of His **goodness** to comfort, guide and bless. You can understand this best looking back on your life to see how He turned tragedy to triumph and heartache to happiness. **“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”** (1 John 3:16 NIV84) That’s the only question: me and my love.

¹ Keller, Philip. *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*. (pages in parentheses) Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1970. Available NPH: 1-800-662-6022. Also at Amazon / Audible Books. Eleventh in Summer Sermon Series by Pastor Mark A. Cordes.

👁 My legacy of blessing

We're always looking at the Shepherd, but Philip Keller also points to the ground behind the sheep. Remember, sheep can be most destructive to land if left to themselves and not managed properly. But they can also turn ruined and derelict ranches into beautiful, park-like properties of great worth. This may seem too earthy for some, but the manure of sheep is the best balanced of any domestic stock. Cattle will leave weeds behind. Loads of fertilizer from rabbits and chickens can burn. But sheep scattered over a pasture enriches the soil. They like to rest on high ground, so sheep are constantly re-depositing the rich fertility of the valleys onto wind-blown hills. What other animal can eat more weeds? Canadian thistle could quickly overpower a pasture, but sheep devour Canadian thistles' tender tips like candy. No wonder the ancients called sheep "the golden-hoofed ones." Properly managed, sheep can leave behind a **legacy of blessing**.

So what is your **legacy**? Another way to ask is, how deep is your **goodness**? How real is your **mercy**? Do you criticize the prejudice of others and miss the racism in your own heart? Do you only help those who can help you back? Only give to those who gifted you? Do you have a will? Did you remember God's work in your will? Each of us must ask, what **legacy** follows me? Happiness or heartache? Wisdom or foolishness? Understanding and kindness? Can I go back to places where I've been? Or have I left behind so much hurt that I dare never return? Is **My legacy** uplift and encouragement?

When God called father Abraham, He promised: "**You will be a blessing**" (Genesis 12:2). No "if's," "and's," or "but's." Abraham would give his descendants the greatest gift, faith's fertilizer in God's holy Word. Then they would grow and blossom in God's love. He would teach them how the LORD God blessed all nations of the earth through Abraham's greatest descendant Jesus Christ. Abraham left a **legacy** of faith, hope and love in the coming Savior which we still enjoy and spread today.

"How beautiful on the mountains are the feet [the golden hooves] of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation." (Isaiah 52:7) As we follow the God of Abraham we naturally leave behind a **legacy of blessing** in the Good News about Jesus the Savior of all.

My Shepherd's **Goodness and Mercy** remove the weeds of bitterness and resentment and restore my marriage. I forgive my neighbor and my spouse, my children and their friends, as they also forgive me. From a derelict ranch of sin, my house becomes a beautiful park, a **legacy of blessing** as I learn at the cross to forgive and forget. Christ's love covers over a multitude of sins. There's a **legacy of blessing** in the valleys and on the hills of my life as I follow my Good Shepherd through the mountain meadows of His Word, grazing in peaceful contentment while the morning dew is still heavy on the grass. Getting my children and myself to Sunday School is not a chore because my Shepherd is here. I want to be with His flock. Priceless blessings in powerful words: "**We will not hide them from our children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.**" (Psalm 78:4) Others may leave their children only moth-eaten money, termite-ridden homes, aging automobiles. In Christ **My legacy of blessing** "**can never perish, spoil or fade.**" (1 Peter 1:4) It is "**kept in heaven**" for me and my children in the powerful person of Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd.

Remember this about Jesus: "**He went about doing good**" (Acts 10:38 ESV), always with **mercy**. He really only wants the same reward as a shepherd like Philip Keller desired. To see His flock flourishing and the land benefitting in beauty behind them – that's all our Good Shepherd wants. Jesus, the Lover of my soul, is delighted when His sheep and lambs flourish in their faith – as surely as lovers delight in each other's delight. God wants to pour out His blessings in Christ for His own personal pleasure of seeing His entire flock grazing contentedly in the pastures of His Word. So what priority will you give to Sunday School & Bible class this Fall and beginning next Sunday? My Shepherd longs for love, my love. And "**we love because he first loved us.**" (1 John 4:19) "**Surely Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow Me all the days of my life.**" Then He is satisfied. Amen.