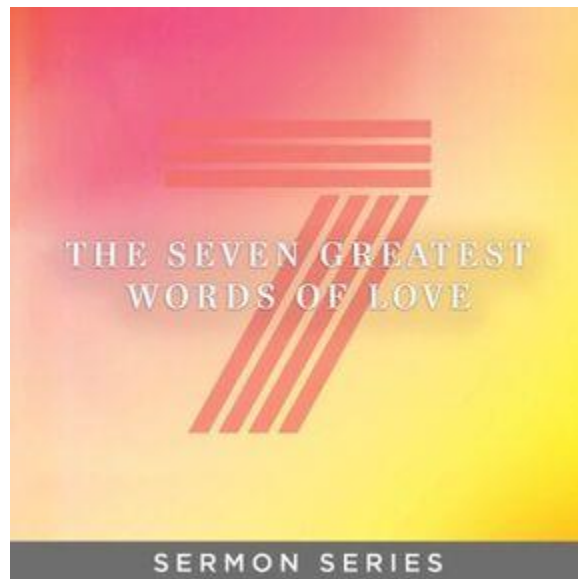


THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

HE DID IT ALL FOR YOU, PART 2
Three Benefits from Jesus' Resurrection –
2 Corinthians 2:9

Written by Pastor Steve Norman
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Words of Encouragement Days 219-224



THE SEVEN GREATEST WORDS OF LOVE

Jesus walked this earth teaching about God's LOVE. But do you know what that kind of love really means? Discover anew the meaning behind the last seven words Jesus spoke during his final hours on the cross. These powerful words of Jesus, full meaning and amazing blessing, are His message to us before His resurrection — words of forgiveness, assurance, love, trust, and so much more.

This Week's Memory Verse:

**“This is what the Scriptures mean when they say,
“No eye has seen, no ear has heard,
no mind has imagined what God has prepared
for those who love Him.”
1 Corinthians 2:9 (NLT)**

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 219

"When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices so that they might go to anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?"

But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Trembling and bewildered, the women went out and fled from the tomb. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid." Mark 16:1-8

THE DEATH OF DEATH

WHILE Jesus was with His disciples, He taught them many things. On multiple occasions, He said, "I will rise on the third day." He said it in Mark 8, again in Mark 9, and yet again in Mark 10. Given that repetition, something curious happened in today's passage. On the third day after Jesus's death, there were no male disciples around; several female disciples did appear, but they brought with them all the expensive spices and perfumes with which a dead body was customarily anointed. No one was expecting a resurrection. If you were Mark writing this gospel, trying to write a credible piece of fiction, and you had written that Jesus repeatedly told His disciples He would rise on the third day, after Jesus' death wouldn't you have had at least one disciple think through what Jesus told them and say to the others, "Hey, it's the third day.

Maybe we ought to go take a look at Jesus's tomb. What can it hurt?" That would only be reasonable. But no one said anything like that. In fact, they did not expect a resurrection at all. It didn't occur to them. The angel in front of the empty tomb had to remind the women: "You will see Him, just as He told you." If Mark made up this story, he wouldn't have written it this way.

Here's the point: The resurrection was as inconceivable for the first disciples, as impossible for them to believe, as it is for many of us today. Granted, their reasons would have been different from ours. The Greeks did not believe in resurrection; in the Greek worldview, the afterlife was liberation of the soul from the body. For them, resurrection would never be part of life after death. As for the Jews, some of them believed in a future general resurrection when the entire world would be renewed, but they had no concept of an individual rising from the dead. The people of Jesus's day were not predisposed to believe in resurrection any more than we are who are living today.

Is it difficult for you to believe Jesus rose from the dead? How does Jesus' resurrection give you hope?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Father, You loved this world so much that You gave Your one and only Son so that I, too, might be called Your child. Lord, help me to live everyday in the gladness and grace of Easter Sunday. Help me to have a heart of thankfulness for Your sacrifice, and to have eyes that look upon Your grace and rejoice in my salvation. Today, I choose to walk in that mighty grace. Give me opportunities to share Your good news with those You bring into my world. All for Your glory do I pray, Lord, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 220

[One of the most beloved passages in the Bible is Psalm 23, which has comforted and encouraged countless people over the centuries and unveils a beautiful picture of how God wants to guide and bless us throughout our lives. For the next five days, our Daily Devotionals will focus on the encouragement found in Psalm 23.]

"A psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Psalm 23:1

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

KNOWING who God is and what He does in our lives is critical for every believer. A.W. Tozer once stated, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." It's true. Our view of God will shape every other aspect of our lives. When we read our Bibles, it's important to know who God is and not just what He can do for us. God is central to Scripture, and the Scriptures reveal His glory.

We who know God are His beloved children. Psalm 23, written by David who knew God, begins with these beautiful words, "The Lord is my Shepherd". All through scripture, we find many names for God, and one of them is Shepherd. As our good Shepherd, God wants to lead and guide us, and He is the good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. Jesus told us this in John 10:11-17, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock,*

one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it up again."

Jesus laid down His life for us, and as a result, we can trust Him and give our lives to Him. We love Him because He loved us first, even while we were still far off, dead in our sins, and enemies of God – He gave heaven's best to draw us close and make us His own. Only a good Shepherd would do such a thing, and there is only One who is good.

As our Shepherd, the Lord tends to us as a good Shepherd would. He searches for us and seeks us out when we have gone astray. He guards us. He guides us. He protects us. He cares for us. He tends to our needs. He gathers us in His arms. He carries us close to His heart. He gently leads us. He speaks softly over us. He guides us to living water and quenches our thirst. He feeds us. He lays down His life to give us abundant life. It is His good pleasure to give us the Kingdom.

REFLECT: What does "The Lord is MY Shepherd means to you personally? Which attributes of a shepherd have you seen Him do in your life? Who could you tell this week about something your Good Shepherd has done for you?

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank you for being my Shepherd. Life is often filled with many concerns and cares, and they weigh me down. While I desire to cast my cares upon You, I find I usually pick them back up again, and they only add more anxiety and stress to my days. As my Good Shepherd, You provide for all my needs so I do not have a need for anything. Help me learn to cast my cares on You as I learn what it means to rest and fully trust in You. Thank You for being One I can trust to take care of my needs. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 221

[One of the most beloved passages in the Bible is Psalm 23, which has comforted and encouraged countless people over the centuries and unveils a beautiful picture of how God wants to guide and bless us throughout our lives. For the next five days, our Daily Devotionals will focus on the encouragement found in Psalm 23.]

***"A psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."
Psalm 23:1***

"Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength." Philippians 4:11-13 (NLT)

BECAUSE OF GOD, I LACK NOTHING

WHEN the Lord is our Shepherd, we can confidently say we have everything we need. David, the author of Psalm 23, said he lacked nothing. That is a profound and powerful thought to consider as a believer in Jesus.

What did David mean when he said he lacked nothing? Weren't there things he wanted? Did he not have big goals and dreams? Sure he did. What he meant was that God had already provided so much in his life -- Blessings. Grace. Beauty. Hope. All the things he really needed deep down, he had been given and had found in his relationship with God. That did not mean He did not still pray and ask for things, or that He did not dream big. He simply trusted that God would give him everything he truly needed.

We need to rediscover the power of Christian contentment. Paul said he had learned to be content in all circumstances, whether he had much or little. Regardless of where he found himself, and he was in some very peculiar, challenging and downright dangerous situations, he had learned that God's grace was sufficient and enough for any circumstance, and

God would always help him with anything he needed. What a powerful thing to be able to say: "Because of God, I lack nothing."

Later on, David said it another way, "those who seek the LORD lack no good thing." Every good thing in our lives has come down as a gift from our good Father in heaven (James 1:17). He knows how to give the righteous good things. He blesses all the earth, even those who don't know Him, but when we truly seek Him, we will find we truly lack nothing.

REFLECT: Was there ever a time you really had a need, had no idea how it would be met, and then God surprised you and met it in a very good way? What other good gifts has God given you? Take your journal and write about one of those good gifts you've received and end by writing a prayer of thanks to God for it! Then find someone and share your story.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, Thank You that no situation I face is too far out of Your control. You will provide, for You are Jehovah-Jireh, the God who provides. Thank You that You own everything and hold everything in Your hands. Thank You that You know my needs even before I ask, even before I come to You. You are aware of all that concerns me, and You have a plan. You hold the provision, and You have the solution. You alone can move mountains to make a way for me. I ask for Your answer, in Your timing, in Your plan to be given for every need that weighs down my heart. Forgive me for doubting You, for worrying, and for trying so hard to work everything out on my own. Help me to trust You more and help me in my time of unbelief. I choose to recognize and to believe that You are able to accomplish far more, to do far greater, than I even thought possible. Thank You in advance for Your miracles, for paving my pathway, and for Your provision. Thank You for the abundance of blessing and goodness You have already stored up for me. I trust You this day and every day, and am so grateful for Your power and joy that fills my life. Thank You for teaching me to be content in all circumstances. I love You Lord and am leaning on You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 222

[One of the most beloved passages in the Bible is Psalm 23, which has comforted and encouraged countless people over the centuries and unveils a beautiful picture of how God wants to guide and bless us throughout our lives. For the next five days, our Daily Devotionals will focus on the encouragement found in Psalm 23.]

"He makes me lie down in green pastures, He leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Psalm 23:2-3

A PLACE OF REST

WHERE does God want to lead us? Look at the words of this Psalm - to green pastures and quiet waters. Where? To a place of rest.

Have you ever thought about where God wants to lead you in your life? Maybe you've prayed about His direction and longed for His wisdom? The good news is God has great things in store for you. God has a purpose for your life, which is to bring Him glory and make a difference in the world. But Psalm 23:2-3 also makes it clear to us that God is intent on leading us to a place of rest. God isn't looking for you to be a cog in a machine. You are not someone He uses for an agenda, but rather You are someone He loves. You are someone He wants to lead to a place of rest and also to experience the joy of being part of His incredible purposes on the earth. We can't find lasting fulfillment in ourselves. We were made for God. He made us so He could love us and we could love Him. He made us so He could give us purpose. And He made a place of rest for us.

When was the last time you let God lead you to "green pastures" and beside "quiet waters"? God wants to lead you there. He wants to lead you to a place of rest. Too often we let our emotions run the show. If we aren't careful, we can allow ourselves to live under the constant oppression of comparison, shame, and guilt. When we find ourselves in that spot, a simple question - "What if you let it all go and give it to God?" - can help us become free from the weight we don't need to carry. Surrender your worries, surrender your fears, surrender your emotions to the Lord, and let Him fill you with a peace that

passes understanding. He can and He will refresh your soul when you come to Him.

God "guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." It is in these right paths that lead us to places of rest and renewal. When we try to walk our own way, or the ways of this world, we build barriers to God's rest, a rest He intends to give us as we walk with Him, for it is in God that we come to know complete peace, contentment, and fulfillment. In Him you can gain perfect trust that everything you need will be given from His loving hand. No more guilt. No more shame. No more worry. No more fear. No more self-reliance. You can keep coming back to these green pastures and quiet waters anytime you need to. They are found in God's arms.

REFLECT: What is one area you are wrestling with today? Fear, guilt, shame, worry, self-reliance, or something else? Now, think for a moment about what God's "green pastures" and "quiet waters" look like to you. Now, take your journal and write about what they look like. Be descriptive and detailed. Then write about the last time you looked to God to find your rest and ask God to help you seek the rest He has for you today.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Dear Lord, Help me remember that You are indeed Lord of my life. As the One who created me and knows me better than I know myself, You have the right to be over all that I think, believe, and do. When I allow my mind to run to places that destroy my peace, remind me that these are unauthorized thoughts. You do not want me to dwell on thoughts and emotions that contribute to unreasonable fears.

I know my mind will remain in perfect peace as I fix my thoughts on You (Isaiah 26:3); so Lord Jesus, let your peace rule in my heart (Colossians 3:15, Philippians 4:7). Remind me of the peace I have in your family (John 14:27), and teach me how to be thankful for those circumstances that cause me to run to you, focus on you, and abide in you (1 Thessalonians 5:18). I never need to live with fearful, anxious thoughts because the truth is, you are in control! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 223

[One of the most beloved passages in the Bible is Psalm 23, which has comforted and encouraged countless people over the centuries and unveils a beautiful picture of how God wants to guide and bless us throughout our lives. For the next five days, our Daily Devotionals will focus on the encouragement found in Psalm 23.]

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will 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 anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." Psalm 23:4-5

A WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY

SOMETIMES in life, we are led through dark places. The Rev. Billy Graham said, "Much of our lives are lived in the valley." Sometimes those valleys get dark and treacherous for life isn't all easy traveling, even with Jesus. Did you know that God doesn't promise you will have an easy path, but He does promise He will be with you every step of the way?

Are you going through a valley right now? Is it dark? Remember God is with you. He can see what you cannot. You can trust Him in the most difficult and disappointing moments of your life. Here's a bit of encouragement for you: You will come through the valley to the other side. Yes, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and the sun will rise again. In the meantime, as you travel through the valley, God's word tells us that His Word is a lamp for our feet, and the light for our path (Psalm 119:105). He will show you where to go each step of the journey – even when it's foggy, rainy, stormy, or dark (Psalm 16:11).

Now for the really good news. You never need to live in fear as you go through the valley. Why no fear? Because God promises to guard and guide you through everything you face (Psalm 91). He will walk with you, even when you aren't sure of His presence. God does not give us a spirit of fear but one of power, love and sound mind (2 Timothy 1:7). He calls us to be strong and courageous, for the Lord our God is with us wherever we go (Joshua 1:9). We don't even need to fear death. Death has lost its sting, because we serve an eternal God who loves us with an

everlasting love (1 Corinthians 15:55). When we are in Christ, death is simply a graduation into His perfect presence. The valley of the shadow of death has nothing on God.

So give your fears to God, and let Him guide you through every season. His Shepherd's "rod and staff will comfort you" because He will prod and pull you wherever you need to go. As long as you have surrendered your ways to Him, you can be sure He will keep you on the right path. His rod and staff are at work in your life - they are of great comfort because they ensure you will always go where you need to go. Even when we sit before our enemies - those people who have sinned against us - we can trust God is with us. God anoints us in these dark moments. In the dark places, our roots grow deeper, and we bear fruit that is greater than if we had not passed through the difficult place, for there is something God is going to grow through dark seasons and confrontations with your enemies. And an anointing will overflow from this place out of your life and onto others.

REFLECT: We all have times when we walk through a valley, and God promises to walk through it with us. If someone who is currently going through a valley came to you for encouragement, what would you tell them? What could you tell them about God's promises? Spend some time today writing those promises and what you know about God in your journal. Then thank Him for walking you through the valley.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, "You have assigned me my portion and my cup; You have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will You let Your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand." (Psalm 16:5-11) In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve

MEETING WITH GOD – Day 224

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"Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."
Psalm 23:6

WHO'S THAT FOLLOWING ME?

TODAY'S verse reminds us that God's goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives. When we are following Jesus, the best is always yet to come!

Goodness is often defined as good, pleasant, agreeable. According to Strong's Concordance, "goodness" in the Hebrew is described as *beautiful, best, better, bountiful, cheerful, at ease, (to be in) favor, fine, glad, good, gracious, joyful, kindly, kindness, loving, merry, most, pleasant, pleasing, precious, prosperity, ready, sweet, welfare, (be) well (-favoured)*. That's a huge list! Mercy is often translated as kindness or lovingkindness or love. Put together, these two friends - goodness and mercy - are very rich friends indeed.

One of the great benefits you receive when you follow Jesus is that you can know for certain goodness and mercy will follow you. Your future will be bright and full of joy, peace and hope. Good things will be coming. Some translations put it this way: God's goodness and mercy "pursue us" or chase us down! This is important to know because life is not always easy, and sometimes even our faith in God will bring with it challenges, but ultimately we know we are much better off because of Jesus. Not only

do we have the Lord as our Shepherd, caring for us in every season of life, but we know at the end of the day that goodness and mercy are right there alongside us.

REFLECT: Where in your life have you experienced God's goodness? His mercy? Write in your journal about a time when you experienced the goodness or mercy of God. God loves to bless us right now to the smallest details, so try to be descriptive and remember all the details. Then thank Him for His goodness and mercy that will follow you today and every day for the rest of your life.

TODAY'S PRAYER

Lord, surely your goodness and mercy follows me. You are good and incredibly good to me! Help me to see the ways You are good to me, and help me to counter the bad I see in my life and around me with an awareness of and rejoicing in Your goodness. You are full of mercy toward me; You do not treat me as my sins deserve. Instead, as I trust in Jesus' death which took my place, I have life, I am welcome by You, and I am made to be at home in Your presence.

Lord, I look forward to being home in Your house forever, spending all my days in Your presence. Lord Jesus, You are preparing that place for me, and You will come back soon to bring me home to be with You (John 14:1-3). Until then, as I spend these days in my earthly home, I thank You for the peace You give, even in these times of unrest. Help me to keep my eyes fixed on You as I go through each day. Remind me of Your goodness and mercy and Your amazing grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Love the way Jesus loves! - Pastor Steve