

Life of David: Getting Ready to Go

Psalm 23 & 116

1 Kings 2: Gracefully Heading Toward Home (**Psalms 23 and 116**) As a mere mortal man, David truly was so much like us. But he learned to rise above the downward pull of his flesh and cling to the only One who could satisfy and complete him—Christ.

- **Psalm 23 A Psalm of David.** Psalm 23 may be from David's youth but as most other saints through the ages, he surely must have clung to these truths as his life waned and he prepared to go to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
- **Psalm 116** Psalm 116 quotes Psalm 56 (in Psalm 116:8 we see Psalm 56:13) so David most likely wrote this at the end. What a beautiful pathway for getting ready to go is captured in this Psalm.

Chapter 23

Gracefully Heading Toward Home

(1 Kings 2; Psalms 23 and 116)

... Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me
—Psalm 23:4

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It is hard to fully comprehend how much lasting impact one single human life can accomplish.¹ Just think of David's brief lifetime!

Three thousand years ago David lived and died—yet today millions and millions of people read, quote, memorize, gather comfort and hope, and sing the words he wrote in nearly half the Psalms.

Three thousand years ago David lived and died—yet today billions and billions of people think about, revere, love, and desire the city he founded and built as the capitol of God's people. That city is regularly in most newspapers, TV news reports, or on the web. In fact, the two final wars on this planet² will both be fought over control of David's city, which is also God's city—Jerusalem!

So David's life has accomplished something that still touches most people daily. That is astounding, and just one more reason it's taken an entire book to view David's life through the lens of Scripture. And now we are coming to the conclusion of his life on Earth.

When David came to the end of his long and event-filled life, it was not a worn-out body that caused his death; nor was it the lack of medical care. It was God's appointed time. Consider these words of Job who lived nearly five thousand years ago:

"Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue. ... Since his days are determined, The number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass" (Job 14:1-2, 5).

¹ 061015AM DSS-37; 061022AM DSS-38; 061022PM DSS-39

² See Revelation 16 and 20.

Our lifetime is not set by how carefully we have guarded our health through diet and exercise (yet God commands us to be disciplined and not reckless in our physical lives); nor is our lifetime extended by physicians (though God commends to us proper health care). Our length of days has been determined by God alone.

When King David was aged 70, he knew his appointed time with the Good Shepherd was near: (Emphasis added to verses in this chapter.)

*Now **the days of David drew near that he should die**, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: "**I go the way of all the earth**; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man" (1 Kings 2:1-2).*

As David gracefully headed toward home, he modeled how to end well—spiritually, materially, and physically. We can learn much from this unique God-hearted servant!

DAVID WAS SPIRITUALLY PREPARED FOR DEATH

Because David was saved, redeemed, and spiritually prepared, he was gracefully unafraid of death. Since he had taken time to plan for it, he could initiate talk about his death. Therefore, he was both open and exemplary in his instruction with his son, Solomon (and probably many others) and, by God's Spirit, even to us.

David was certain about the destination of his soul; he knew he was redeemed—bought and paid for by God. As a result, he confidently declared his entire life was held by God's hands: ***Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth*** (Psalm 31:5).

Jesus Himself reflected this certainty as He went to the cross. Calmly, at His final moment, He voiced those same words of David's:

*And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, '**into Your hands I commit My spirit.**' " Having said this, He breathed His last (Luke 23:46).*

Spiritual certainty like David's comes from faith in what Christ's sacrificial death on the cross accomplished. The writer of Hebrews also noted that part of Christ's work at Calvary was to deliver His children from the fear of death:

*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death **He might destroy** him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, **and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage** (Hebrews 2:14-15).*

If you have been born again, Jesus has released you from the fear of death. Christ's work is finished; the power of death is destroyed; the price of sin is paid; and the power of an endless life is yours in Christ!

This exquisite reality reminds me of Fanny Crosby's (1820-1915) wonderful words in "All the Way My Savior Leads Me." That blind poet, hymnist, and saint triumphantly

affirmed her hope in Christ as "*the resurrection and the life*" (John 11:25):

*All the way my Savior leads me;
Oh, the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised
In my Father's house above.*

*When my spirit, clothed immortal,
Wings its flight to realms of day,
This my song thro' endless ages:
Jesus led me all the way;*

*This my song thro' endless ages:
Jesus led me all the way.*

A secured spiritual life, being certain our immortal spirit is safely sealed and kept by God, is the first element of ending well when we head toward our eternal home.

DAVID WAS MATERIALLY PREPARED FOR DEATH

Before his death, David gracefully surrendered the ownership of all his material possessions to God. He chose to avoid the normal things that tie most people down to the Earth:

*"Indeed **I have taken much trouble to prepare** for the house of the LORD one hundred thousand talents of gold and one million talents of silver, and bronze and iron beyond measure, for it is so abundant. I have prepared timber and stone also, and you may add to them" (1 Chronicles 22:14).*

One of the most amazing elements of David's life is how he viewed his immense wealth that exceeded half the monetary gold-valued wealth of the entire world of his day. Some economists say that today's sum total of all monetary wealth (loans, stocks, bonds, deposits, etc.) is in the realm of 250 trillion dollars. By comparison, David would be worth over 125 trillion dollars in the twenty-first century. Now that is wealthy! Yet, no one ever thinks of him as wealthy unless they study that part of his life.

What amazes me is what he did with his wealth. David carefully gathered it, safely stored it, and then consciously gave it away to the Lord. The record of that final gifting to God by way of his son Solomon is very touching in and of itself. But seen in the light of all David experienced and captured in the Psalms we see this pattern: he wanted his stored-up time of his life, measured by his accumulated wealth, to reflect his great love for God.

Wealth is like stored-time from the past. Our present use of wealth saved from the past is a way to give part of those years, now gone, to the Lord. When David took "*much trouble to prepare,*" this amounted to the premeditated murder of any materialistic desires in his heart. So while David was alive, he very carefully directed his wealth into the hands of God.

David had learned what Jesus spoke so forcefully about in His Sermon on the

Mount: money is the monitor of a person's heart. At any time in life, our view of money reflects the condition of our heart. The entire section of Matthew 6:19-24 is all about one area of life—who owns our material possessions—us or God. Jesus said:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; **but lay up** for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** ... No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and mammon** [money]" (Matthew 6:19-21, 24).

The graceful preparation of personal wealth before death has been a challenge to every generation of Christ's church. For example, a wealthy Christian plantation owner once invited John Wesley (1703-1791) to his home. The two rode their horses all day, but only saw a small part of all the man owned. At the end of the day the plantation owner proudly asked, "Well, Mr. Wesley, what do you think?" After a moment of silence, Wesley replied, "I think you're going to have a hard time leaving all this." The plantation owner was attached to the world he was in, but Wesley was attached to the world he was going to.

It is very hard for believers to die when their wealth is not surrendered to Christ's control. Those who lay up treasures on earth spend their lives backing away from their treasures—to them, death is loss. In contrast, the ones who lay up treasures in heaven look forward to eternity; they are moving toward their treasures—to them, death is gain. David died gracefully because he took so much trouble to surrender the control of all his material possessions to God as tools in the Lord's hands.

God's ownership of everything is the reference point for all who serve the Lord. Century by century the greatest of His servants have said nearly the same thing about their wealth. They each battled with materialism and put it to death by conscious obedience to Christ's claims upon their lives and material possessions—whether little or much. Listen to their voices affirming Christ's words and David's:

*And so it is that when a man walks along a road, the lighter he travels.
Let temporal things serve your use, but the eternal be the object of your desire. ~
Thomas A. Kempis (1380-1471)*

*I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all. But whatever I
have placed in God's hands, that I still possess. ~Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

*Whatever good thing you do for Him, if done according to the Word, is laid up for
you as treasure in chests and coffers, to be brought out to be rewarded before
both men and angels, to your eternal comfort. ~ John Bunyan (1628-1688)*

*I value all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity. ~ John Wesley
(1703-1791)*

*I place no value on anything I possess except in relation to the kingdom of God.
~ David Livingstone (1813-1873)*

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. ~ Jim Elliot (1927-1956)

G. Campbell Morgan, a great Bible teacher in Britain a hundred years or so ago, also wrote:

You are to remember with the passion burning within you that you are not the child of today. You are not of the Earth, you are more than dust; you are the child of tomorrow, you are of the eternities, you are the offspring of Deity.

The measurement of your lives cannot be circumscribed by the point where blue sky kisses green earth. All the facts of your life cannot be encompassed in the one small sphere upon which you live. You belong to the infinite.

If you only make your fortune on the Earth—poor, sorry, silly soul—you have made a fortune, and stored it in a place where you cannot hold it. Make your fortune, but store it where it will greet you in the dawning of the new morning.³

God's kingdom and control over all of life was the reference point for David and these saints just mentioned. In Acts 13:36 (David's epitaph), Paul stated that David wanted to fulfill God's purposes, and so he did. David and these heroes of the faith saw all else in light of the kingdom. They were compelled to live as they did not because they treasured *no things*, but because they treasured the *right things*.

David had paid a high price to prepare materials for the advancement of God's Kingdom. In his lifetime he was generous with his wealth. He gave, encouraged, and supported many in his realm. But behind all he did was his long-term strategy to be involved in what God was doing that would extend beyond his lifetime. He distilled down moments of his life into wealth that would be used as he directed in the promotion of God's goals. In other words, he amassed building materials for Solomon to use for the Lord's glory.

If we diligently prepare the materials, others after us may build. God asks all of us to live obediently in this life. But within that obedience come choices, and David's choices blessed the Lord and brought an endless reward. The fact he wrote and sang nearly half the worship Psalms for the Lord is powerful! His entire life was involved with worship and praise, singing and teaching of God's wonders. And so should ours be.

Because David was saved or redeemed, he was prepared for death spiritually. By surrendering the ownership of his life and treasures back to God, he was prepared for death materially. Finally, what made David unafraid was his confidence that death was simply the way out of Earth into the dwelling God had prepared for him.

DAVID WAS PHYSICALLY PREPARED FOR DEATH

David gracefully viewed death as an appointment with his Good Shepherd. To him, death was not an unknown; it was not a mystery—and this confidence began

³ G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: Revell, 1929), pp. 64-65.

when he, as a youth, penned Psalm 23 with its very profound content.

Even at a tender age, David envisioned life as a long walk behind the Good Shepherd as he headed toward spending the night in His Shepherd's home, safe and secure. In other words, for David life meant walking *behind* the Shepherd; the end of life meant being *secured* by the Shepherd; and eternity meant spending it blissfully *with* the Shepherd!

In the fourth verse of Psalm 23 we see the truth lived out by David as he breathed his last: *Yea, 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.***

Our greatest enemy—death—was disarmed before David. He could dine (a wonderful picture of his fellowship with the Lord) even in the presence of death, the end of all we know of this earthly part of life. Psalm 23:5-6 explains why he was so secure, serene, and blessed:

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and **I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.***

David knew he had reservations in heaven. After all, that was where his beloved Lord lived—and a wonderful place had been readied to welcome him. So in glad faith David followed his Guide through life into the valley, through the shadows, and safely home.

Many times I have shared these same words as I've stood at bedsides in hospitals, emergency rooms, and hospices. Although the pains associated with death are not removed, the fear of it IS—by faith and trust in Jesus. For all who know Jesus, death is simply a pre-arranged date in which the Good Shepherd will escort us through the Valley of Death's shadow. The exact moment has already been decided by the One who does "all things well" (Mark 7:37). For ... *it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment ...* (Hebrews 9:27). Neither we nor He shall ever be early or late.

When a loved one dies, whether we make it there in time or not, the Good Shepherd does. He will arrive exactly on schedule, take His beloved child by the hand, and then walk him or her safely home. In light of this, David did not fear death; he spoke openly, with hope and confidence, about his appointment with His Good Shepherd Jesus who was coming to get him soon!

LIKE DAVID— FEAR NO EVIL

Fearing death, as we saw in Hebrews 2:14-15, was something we were all born with. In Romans 7 Paul pointed out that such fear is part of our flesh which we'll struggle with throughout life. But the more we focus on the character and promises of God, as David did, the more peaceful the ride to the end of life will become.

For example, consider this touching letter from the *Autobiography of John Todd*:

In October 1800 John Todd was born in Rutland, Vermont. Soon afterward his parents moved to Killingworth, Connecticut. When John was six years old, both his parents died. A kind-hearted aunt in North Killingworth agreed

to take John and give him a home. He was brought up by her and lived in her home until he left to study for the ministry.

In middle life his aunt became seriously ill and feared she would die. In great distress she wrote John Todd a pitiful letter in which she asked what death would be like. Would it mean the end of everything, or is there beyond death a chance to continue living, loving, and growing? Here is the letter John Todd sent his aunt in reply:

It is now thirty-five years since I as a little boy of six was left quite alone in the world. You sent me word that you would give me a home and be a kind mother to me. I will never forget the day when I made the long journey of ten miles to your house in North Killingworth. I can still remember my disappointment when instead of coming for me yourself, you sent Caesar to fetch me.

I well remember my tears and anxiety as perched high on your horse and clinging tight to Caesar I rode off to my new home. Night fell before we finished the journey, and as it grew dark, I became lonely and afraid. "Do you think she'll go to bed before we get there?" I asked Caesar anxiously. "Oh, no," he said reassuringly. "She'll stay up for you. When we get out of this here woods, you'll see her candle shinin' in the window."

Presently we did ride out into the clearing, and there, sure enough, was your candle. I remember you were waiting at the door, that you put your arms close about me and that you lifted me—a tired and bewildered little boy—down from the horse. You had a fire burning on the hearth, a hot supper waiting on the stove. After supper you took me to my room, heard me say my prayers, and then sat beside me till I fell asleep.

You probably realize why I am recalling all of this to your memory. Someday soon God will send for you to take you to a new home. Don't fear the summons, the strange journey or the dark messenger of death.

God can be trusted to do as much for you as you were kind enough to do for me so many years ago. At the end of the road you will find love and a welcome awaiting and you will be safe in God's care. I shall watch you and pray for you till you are out of sight and then wait for the day when I shall make the journey myself and find my Savior and you waiting at the end of the road to greet me.⁴

Todd's testimony reminded me of a special verse in Psalm 116: ***Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints*** (v. 15)! Have you ever viewed death as your Lord and Savior does?

THE BEST WAY TO DIE (OR LIVE)— LOOKING FORWARD TO HEAVEN

Although none of us knows the exact date of our appointment with Jesus Christ to take us home to heaven, we do know that what lies ahead is far superior to anything we

⁴ From the *Autobiography of John Todd*. **Need complete info.**

could ever envision. For even now He is preparing a beautiful mansion for us so we can be with Him (John 14:2).

What will it be like in heaven? It will be a joyous and satisfying place! The joy of heaven's inhabitants is pictured by the scenes of praise in the book of Revelation, the white-robed conquerors waving palm branches (Revelation 7:9), and the guests at a wedding supper (Revelation 19:1-9). This is buttressed by the imagery of some of Jesus' parables where attaining heaven was compared to attending a banquet (Luke 14:15-24) or entering into the joy of one's Master (Matthew 25:21, 23).

From the perspective of life in this world, heaven is the object of human longing and the goal of human existence. The book of Hebrews even employs the imagery of a quest to express this reality:

*All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that **they are looking for a country of their own** (Hebrews 11:13-14 NIV).*

In addition to being the goal of a quest, heaven is the reward for earthly toil, as in Paul's picture of himself as having "finished the race" and looking forward to "the crown of righteousness" (2 Timothy 4:7-8). We see this imagery again in Peter's vision of "the Chief Shepherd" conferring the unfading "crown of glory" on those who have served God faithfully (1 Peter 5:4). There is also the glorious picture of believers having "come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God" where there are "thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly" (Hebrews 12:22 NIV).

Images of satisfaction emerge from the pictures in Revelation of saints being guided by a divine Shepherd who ... *will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes* (Revelation 7:17 NIV). Furthermore, they have continual access to the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month (Revelation 22:2).

Heaven is also portrayed as a rest after labor: those who die in the Lord ... *will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them*" (Revelation 14:13 NIV). Similarly, there remains "a Sabbath-rest for the people of God," so believers are exhorted to "make every effort to enter that rest" (Hebrews 4:9-11 NIV).

Does this "rest" mean we won't be doing any work in heaven? Contrary to the secular idea that heaven involves saints floating on clouds, polishing their halos, that great preacher, Dr. W. A. Criswell, writes:

Does rest mean nothingness? No! By "rest" we mean deliverance from sin, temptation, weakness, failure, and defeat. We shall rest in God's grace and love and in the joy of our heavenly assignments. The very word *rest* implies the word *labor*, which is in [Revelation 14:13]. We shall work without weariness; we shall still be refreshed after the toil of the day and of the century and even of the forever. ... Service and unfailing rewards are basic themes of Christ's teaching. [See Matthew 24:45-47.]⁵

... There are two possessions we shall carry into the forever, beyond the grave: (1) our character, since we are redeemed by the blood of the Crucified One, and (2) our capacity, since we are endowed by the Lord God Himself. Shall these gifts from the creative hand of God be wantonly wasted, discarded in uselessness and forgetfulness? Shall we be consigned to a forever of idleness and nothingness? No, a thousand times no!⁶

Have you ever wondered how we will know each other when we get to heaven? Dr. Criswell has shared this precious insight:

We shall know each other in heaven by intuitive knowledge, which is a gift of God. Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:30-31).

⁵ W. A. Criswell and Paige Patterson, *Heaven* (USA: Tyndale House, 1994), p. 40.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52

How did Peter, James, and John know them? ... They knew them by intuitive knowledge. ... Intuitive knowledge will introduce us to everybody: "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:11). ... We shall sit down and visit with the saints and have all eternity in which to enjoy their fellowship. ... We shall not know less of each other in heaven; we shall know more.

We shall possess our individual names in heaven. We shall be known as individuals. You will be you; I shall be I; we shall be we. Personality and individuality exist beyond the grave.⁷

O. M. Mitchell, a great astronomer, believed that we will be able to move back and forth between the galaxies and that he would therefore get to continue his studies in the heavens. That is exciting to contemplate! And Dr. Criswell apparently agrees:

... Our home will be a mansion in the new Jerusalem, the City of God. From that home we are going to govern God's entire universe. ... God is going to give us assignments according to how we have been faithful in serving Him here on this earth. I've often thought that when we go through space in that new creation and in our new bodies, we will travel instantaneously. ... What I am able to do in my mind, I will be able to do in my spiritual body. It is going to be an inheritance of the whole universe, and we will enjoy it all.⁸

Will our intellect be challenged in heaven? Dr. Criswell insightfully writes:

Yes. Our vision will be broadened, our appreciation deepened, and our understanding everlastingly expanded. It is going to be wonderful what God is going to make us capable of doing in heaven. We shall understand then, as we do not understand now, what it meant for God the Father to give His only begotten Son.⁹

Seeing heaven and all its splendor will be amazing; hearing the millions of voices, thunders, and chants of the angels will be awesome—but the greatest and richest part will be to see Jesus Christ, and then hear Him confess our name before His Father as His good and faithful servant!

What a wondrous entrance into heaven you and I can look forward to and fix our hopes upon!

THE SON OF DAVID

David came to the hope of a wondrous entrance into heaven by trusting and following the Good Shepherd, whom the New Testament acknowledges as being "*the Son of David*": *The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, **the Son of David**, the Son of Abraham ...* (Matthew 1:1).

The "*Son of David*," later named Jesus (Matthew 1:21), is Christ's introduction in Matthew. The parallels between David's life and the Son of David's—Christ the Lord's

⁷ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

life—are very striking.

Note again that Christ's last words as He died in our place were David's in Psalm 31:5: *And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.'*" *Having said this, He breathed His last* (Luke 23:46).

At the end of his own life David said: *"When the waves of death surrounded me, the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me* (2 Samuel 22:5-6). Those very words are also what Christ Jesus used in the description of His pathway to death: *Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me"* (Matthew 26:38).

But the lessons from Christ's death do not stop there. Many of us miss a wonderful insight the Gospels capture—the last song Jesus is recorded as having sung in preparation for His death.

What did Jesus sing as He faced death? A Psalm song was mentioned in Matthew 26:30: *And when they had **sung a hymn**, they went out to the Mount of Olives.* (See also Mark 14:26.) This translated a Greek word that literally means "hymning." Since this was the Passover Seder, the hymn being sung must have been one of the Hallel (or "praise") Psalms recited at festivals, Psalms 113–118 or 136.¹⁰

Throughout the Last Supper Passover Seder, Jesus would have led the disciples in singing the seven Psalms (113-118 and 136) the Jews of Christ's day called the Hallel, which in Hebrew means "Praise God."

Traditionally, Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the meal, and the rest afterward. At different points of the Passover feast these psalms were sung in sections; at the very end *The Great Hallel*, Psalm 136, was then sung. (That was the hymn Jesus and His disciples sang before they went out to the Mount of Olives.) The fourth of the Hallel Psalms, the middle of the seven (the place of importance in the Hebrew mind when listing seven items), is Psalm 116.

During the evening before Christ's death we thus know that the disciples heard Jesus sing Psalm 116—the one Psalm structurally emphasized. What makes this insight extra special is that Jesus Christ Himself, the eternal King of Kings and Lord of Lords, sang Psalm 116 to His very own disciples—a song filled with such powerful meaning as He faced death. Ending well by fearing no evil is the equivalent of dying gracefully—and no one died more gracefully than Jesus!

The word for "hymning"—what Jesus and His disciples did as they headed out and began walking to Gethsemane—is the same word Paul used for singing from the depths of the jail in Philippi:

*And when they had **sung a hymn**, they went out to the Mount of Olives* (Matthew 26:30).

*But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and **singing hymns** to God, and the prisoners were listening to them* (Acts 16:25).

*"I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will **sing praise** to You"* (Hebrews 2:12).

¹⁰ *The Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Testament Publications, 1996).

Jesus sang as he walked to the cross; Paul and Silas sang as they suffered for the cross; and Hebrews 2:12 says that Christ is present as we sing to celebrate His death for us on the cross.

CHRIST—OUR DELIVERER

(Psalm 116)

Just as David sang of the Good Shepherd walking him through the Valley of Death's shadow in Psalm 23, so the Good Shepherd sang of God's power and grace as He Himself headed to die "the death of deaths" as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

The first truth we learn in Psalm 116 is that the pains of death are **very personal**. Only Jesus couldn't sleep as He faced death; the disciples couldn't stay awake. So we know that Psalm 116 is a very personal Psalm (the first person pronoun is used 37x and the Lord's Name 15x).

The second truth we find in Psalm 116 is that death is a time when we must be **very intentional**. Like David and Christ, we must purposefully choose to do and say what pleases God as we face our home-going. For that reason, the psalmist said "I will" eight times in Psalm 116:1-19:

Psalm 116—Thanksgiving for Deliverance from Death

- ¹ *I love the LORD, because He has heard
My voice and my supplications.*
- ² *Because He has inclined His ear to me,
Therefore **I will** call upon Him as long as I live.*
- ³ *The pains of death surrounded me,
And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me;
I found trouble and sorrow.*
- ⁴ *Then I called upon the name of the LORD:
"O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!"*
- ⁵ *Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
Yes, our God is merciful.*
- ⁶ *The LORD preserves the simple;
I was brought low, and He saved me.*
- ⁷ *Return to your rest, O my soul,
For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.*
- ⁸ *For You have delivered my soul from death,
My eyes from tears,
And my feet from falling.*
- ⁹ ***I will** walk before the LORD
In the land of the living.*
- ¹⁰ *I believed, therefore I spoke,*

- "I am greatly afflicted."
¹¹ I said in my haste,
 "All men are liars."
¹² What shall I render to the LORD
 For all His benefits toward me?
¹³ **I will** take up the cup of salvation,
 And [**will**] **call** upon the name of the LORD.
¹⁴ **I will** pay my vows to the LORD
 Now in the presence of all His people.
¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD
 Is the death of His saints.
¹⁶ O LORD, truly I am Your servant;
 I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant;
 You have loosed my bonds.
¹⁷ **I will** offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving,
 And **will call** upon the name of the LORD.
¹⁸ **I will** pay my vows to the LORD
 Now in the presence of all His people,
¹⁹ In the courts of the LORD's house,
 In the midst of you, O Jerusalem.
 Praise the LORD!

The 116th Psalm also reminds us of Christ's favor which lasts for a lifetime. Note that the past, present, and future are all covered by Christ's grace. In the past he "prayed" (vv. 1, 4); in the present he "loves" (v. 1); and in the future he "will call" (v. 2).

Jesus may have also used Psalm 116:13 in the Last Supper Communion as He said in the words of this Psalm: *I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.* The third cup of the Passover meal may have been this cup.

We can only drink the cup of salvation because Christ already drank the bitter cup for us by taking our sin, our cross, our shame, and rising again. So we bless His Name as we drink the cup of blessing:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16).

So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not **drink the cup** which My Father has given Me?" (John 18:11).

Finally, what other lessons can you and I learn from the Psalm 116 song Jesus sang as He headed toward His death? Since the pains of death are very personal, we can expect to feel lonely at times—as Jesus did. He felt lonely in Gethsemane when only He couldn't sleep, and then, as our sin-bearer on the cross, He had to face divine wrath and the ultimate loneliness—alienation from God—to destroy the works of Satan to set us free (which includes the fear of death).

But because Christ already faced divine wrath for us, we will not have to experience the ultimate loneliness: *For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you*

nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). So, like David, we can find great comfort in this truth! Even though we may *feel* lonely at times, we will never be truly ALONE.

Listed below are some additional insights to encourage you in your own home-going preparation—

You will not feel lonely at death if you:

- Always remember that God hears you (v. 1).
- Pour out all your fears and needs to the Lord (v. 2).
- Remember that troubles and sorrows are neither wrong nor avoidable (v. 3). Every great saint since the Garden of Eden (except two) has died in pain of one form or another. Jesus died most painfully. It is not wrong or sinful to have troubles and sorrows—it is normal, and part of God's plan.
- Seek the Lord's aid when life hurts (v. 4).
- Continually praise God for His mercy and goodness that will follow you all the way home (vv. 5-7).
- Make it a habit to walk with God daily (vv. 8-10). The One who walks through life with you is the same One who will take you through the Valley of Death's shadows. And the shadows of death are all you will have to face because Jesus said that whoever lives and believes in Him will never die!
- Drink from Jesus Christ's cup of salvation (vv. 12-13). Believers never die!
- Seek to obey God in all things (v. 14). Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him; He gives them endless life, even when their body dies.
- Serve the Lord faithfully, because this is what saints are going to be doing forever (vv. 15-16). Like David, desire to end well by being a God-hearted servant!
- Thank and praise the Lord—no matter what—for, as David continually said, God is GOOD (vv. 17-19).

Perhaps you're wondering: Does all this *really* work? The answer resounds through the centuries—yes! This is the very best way to live—and the very best way to die!

LIKE DAVID, WE SHOULD PREPARE FOR OUR HOME-GOING

*These all **died in faith**, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth (Hebrews 11:13).*

Do you remember how the saints at Smyrna experienced martyrdom for Christ's sake (Revelation 2)? Their faithfulness unto death was a sweet-smelling savor to God. Unless Christ returns soon, you and I must face the inevitability of death. Will your

home-going be a "sweet-smelling savor" to the Lord because you've been serving Him faithfully?

By a few simple preparations, you can be a great blessing to your family and friends who stay behind after you've gone home to be with Jesus. If you have never done this, I encourage you to plan out the testimony you'd like to share at your funeral. This is really very simple: take out a sheet of paper and label it "My Home-Going Celebration." Write out a brief description of how you came to Christ, and of your hope in His salvation. Then share some of your favorite verses, songs, and hymns—and even a special word to bless loved ones you're leaving behind. If you do this, like Abel you will "speak" even after you've gone home with the Lord (Hebrews 11:4).

To further prepare, consider these seven godly examples of how to die with grace:

1. **Jacob looked for the Land of Promise to the end of his life.** When he was close to death, Jacob called Joseph to his side and said, *"Now if I have found favor in your sight, ... deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers ..."* (Genesis 47:29-30). When Jacob was a young man, God had promised that his people would someday have a Land of Promise, but Egypt was not that land. Jacob therefore asked to be laid to rest in the actual land God was giving to his descendants. For he had followed his Shepherd all the way, and trusted his Redeemer to save him from his sins (Genesis 48:15-16). Have you thanked the Lord lately for His grace that is greater than all your sins?
2. **Joseph died pointing to the faithfulness of God.** He told his brethren, ... *"I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob"* (Genesis 50:24). In the ancient world, when someone was failing in health and was coming to the end of life, the family would gather around and listen to their last words. Inheritances were then divided up. Joseph died pointing his family to the Lord's promises: "God will surely come to your aid, for He is faithful and will do what He said."
3. **David died exhorting his family to follow God.** When he was about to die, David charged Solomon his son saying: *"I am about to go the way of all the earth," he said. "So be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the LORD your God requires: Walk in his ways, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go"* (1 Kings 2:2-3 NIV). David earned the right to exhort his family spiritually because he had lived a godly life. Lot, however, did not. His family laughed and mocked him, saying that he was scoffing (Genesis 19:14). To make our last moments on earth really count, it is so important to get ready to die by first *living* for Christ.
4. **Stephen died praising God.** While he was being stoned he prayed: ... *"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."* Then he fell on his knees and cried out, *"Lord, do not hold this sin against them."* When he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59-60 NIV). What an incredible testimony of dying faith! Stephen was radiant and worshiping as he was offering his spirit into the presence of the Lord!
5. **Peter died reminding the saints about the Word of God.** He said: *I will*

always remind you of these things, even though you ... are firmly established in the truth you now have. ... It is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside ... (2 Peter 1:12-14 NIV). Jesus had told Peter that someday his hands would be stretched out, and he would be crucified (John 21:18). History tells us that Peter was crucified upside down because he had declared his unworthiness to die like Jesus did.

6. **Paul died finishing the plan laid out for him by God.** When death was near, he said: ... *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord ... will award to me on that day—and ... to all who have longed for his appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:6-8 NIV). Paul faithfully followed the course God laid out for him. When his last days were spent in the maximum security Mamertine Prison in Rome, he did not protest or try to get out. Instead, he placidly sat there and wrote letters, knowing he had faithfully completed what God asked him to do and was prepared to go to heaven.
7. **Christ died pointing the way for another to come to God.** Jesus told one of the criminals being crucified: ... *“... Today you will be with Me in Paradise”* (Luke 23:43). Is Jesus *your* hope? If you died today, would you be with Him in Paradise? Are you spiritually ready?

Have you pondered the direction your own life has taken? Perhaps you might regretfully say, “I wish I could do it over so that I could have pointed my life the right way sooner.” Paul well understood regrets because he had many of his own. However, you can be comforted from what he said about this:

*Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, **forgetting those things which are behind** and **reaching forward** to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13-14).*

Forget what is behind and start living afresh for the Lord *now: For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ ... (Philippians 3:20).*

Like Paul, finish the course Christ has laid out for you! And you will experience a great calm by following God’s will daily. This is the very best approach to be ready to head home—whether at the Rapture or by a personal escort from your Good Shepherd.

LIKE DAVID, MAKE A CHOICE TO END WELL

A few years back I ordered a small computer memory upgrade over the Internet and received an e-mail asking me to track it. I had never done this sort of thing, so I hit the proper key and got this message: “Your package was put in a truck in Philadelphia and headed for the airport at 7:31.” I thought: *Oh, that’s great!*

I checked later in the day, and this time it said: "Your package has now arrived at the Philadelphia airport." I tracked that package's whereabouts each day until finally, as I checked it for the last time, the doorbell rang and the delivery man was actually dropping it at the door.

I then thought to myself: *We think nothing of tracking packages, but God says:*

*"I have sealed you with My Spirit;
I have written My Name upon your heart;
I have addressed your soul with the very address of heaven.*

When the time comes for you to go home—I am sending My Son to come and pick you up and bring you safely home.

Also, I'm tracking everything you've done on earth, and the part that is eternal is going to follow you—it's going to arrive with you in heaven."

When you come face to face with Jesus, what will you bring with you to lovingly offer the Lamb of God? What are you sending ahead to heaven? Are you getting ready to meet Jesus, your Good Shepherd? Are you trusting Him to deliver you from all evil?

When life winds down, strength gets exhausted, and the end is in sight for you, will you look back on life like Solomon did in Ecclesiastes—in bitterness, seeing all as vanity, and ending in emptiness? Or will you look back on life like David—in hopefulness, having had a lifelong growth in experiencing God, and ending well by fearing no evil?

The choice is completely yours: each day you are writing the script that will be your life's eternal summary. The very best way to live is by loving, following, trusting the Good Shepherd—ending well by looking forward to heaven! May the Lord's grace enable you to wholeheartedly sing the following words with great joy!

My Jesus, I Love Thee

We love Him because He first loved us. —1 John 4:19

*My Jesus, I love Thee, I know Thou art mine;
For Thee all the follies of sin I resign;
My gracious Redeemer, my Savior art Thou;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

*I love Thee because Thou hast first loved me,
And purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree;
I love Thee for wearing the thorns on Thy brow;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

*I'll love Thee in life, I will love Thee in death,
And praise Thee as long as Thou lendest me breath;
And say, when the death dew lies cold on my brow;
If ever I loved Thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.*

—William R. Featherston (1846-1873)