



The Psalms (Part 5) – Led by Him

Matt Chandler – June 16, 2019

Good morning. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We'll be, by the providence of God, in Psalm 23 today. Who knew four or five months ago when JT English, Josh Patterson, and Trevor Joy were outlining the summer psalms that Psalm 23 would land on *this* and that I would be able to step in and preach it?

I want to welcome back our campuses. I know many of you have been off the stream for a long time. My name is Matt Chandler. I'm the pastor here at The Village. As you guys are working toward autonomy, it's good for us to be together this morning. I want to, as you would probably guess, spend a few moments addressing what many of you are aware of: a *New York Times* article concerning us and our subsequent email to our members. I'm going to need to read more than I'm going to need to just talk.

The entire situation for all involved has been heartbreaking. We are hopeful that the past and present pain eventually give way to healing for the family and for our church family. I want to take a few minutes to address two important items as we see it. One is the case itself, and one is the question of care. What I want to do, because I think these things matter... They matter so you might feel safe here. They matter so you might understand the dynamics at play. They matter so we might become a better community of faith.

So, what I want to do is walk you through the facts of the case, and then I want us to talk a little bit about care, and then from there we're going to get into Psalm 23 and breathe a sigh of relief that there's a leader who will never fail us and one who will never abandon us, and then we'll close out our time together.

Here is a timeline of events around the case. In 2012, The Village Church attended a children's camp at Mt. Lebanon Baptist Encampment. There were several other non-TVC churches who intended this same camp during the same week. At this camp in 2012 there was an alleged sexual assault that

took place. The family first informed us about this assault from their daughter in February of 2018, six years after the incident. No person had been identified as a suspect at that time.

We immediately double-reported this incident. The Bragg family reported it. The Village Church reported it. It is documented. When we decided to remove Matt Tonne from staff in May of 2018, for reasons of alcohol abuse, we had not been informed that he was the accused. This also is well documented. As part of the detective's investigation, we gathered rosters of who was at the camp, who was in specific rooms, volunteers and staff present, etcetera.

We collected as much information as possible to assist with the investigation and to help the detective of the case contact those who needed to be contacted. Following the lead of the family and the police detective heading up the investigation, we communicated about the incident to our church body in September of 2018. It is important to note that at this point we were free to share about the incident, but we were not free to share the name of the accused.

We were told by the detective that sharing Matt Tonne's name at this point could potentially jeopardize the investigation. So, in September of 2018, we gathered with all of the parents we could contact who had children who were at that camp, along with Detective Hernandez, to share about this incident. The Bragg family was in attendance at this meeting, and Detective Hernandez shared with the group that this was an open investigation and he would not discuss any details about the accused or persons of interest.

We then shared with the entire church a few days later at all of our weekend services. We also shared this information on the front page of our website and on our social media channels. We chose to communicate this as widely as possible in an effort to aid the investigation, specifically to see if there was anyone who may come forward with information helpful to investigators and to see if any other victims would come forward.

This is every parent's worst nightmare. This is every organization's worst nightmare. At no point did we try to hide or obscure the facts. I am not interested in defending any name here but to see justice and healing done. I am certainly not interested in defending an institution that 200 years from now nobody will care about.

Continuing to follow the lead of the family and the detective, we provided an update in January of 2019, publicly sharing Matt Tonne's name as the accused. The detective asked us not to share this

information publicly until an arrest warrant was issued directly. We once again posted this update on our website and social media channels, encouraging anyone with information that might assist in the case to come forward.

This was reported in both local and national news outlets at the time. It's important to note that the media did not break this story; *we* broke this story. The media did not out Matt Tonne. The media did not out this case. We at both terms, both in the case and in the accused, were the one to make that information public. Throughout all of this, the family reviewed and gave final approval of all public communication, because we wanted to be sensitive to their feelings and to address any concerns they may have had.

So, those are the facts of the case. I've used the word, when I've talked about the case, of we are passive in this role. What I meant by *passive* is not that we're sitting on our hands but, rather, that we can't do anything to drive the case forward. We cannot push the case into trial. We cannot maneuver in such a way that we can actively be a part of the case. The case is in the hands of lawyers and the justice system. So when I talk about passivity, I'm not saying we're sitting on our hands. I'm saying we have done all we can do and all that we've been instructed to do and now are praying and hopeful.

This brings me to the question of care. We are a church that remains committed to caring for hurting people. This has been true about The Village Church for 20 years. Our little tagline "It's okay to not be okay" was not born out of nothing; it was born out of a desire for us to be fully human in all our frailty and find the grace and mercy of God. Because this is true, we are committed to constantly learning and growing in this area. I am not unaware of the shortcomings and weaknesses of our church, but we remain steadfast in our resolve to posture ourselves as learners and to be transparent when we fall short or fail.

I said on Tuesday at the Southern Baptist Convention's annual meeting that I was in a place of introspection. From a bird's-eye view, we believed we were caring well for the family. From the moment the incident was reported, there was care from one of our central elders at their home campus of Southlake. There was ongoing communication with one of our lead pastors, as well as staff and many members of the Southlake Campus involved with the Braggs. There were multiple elders and staff members involved, as well as many families who believed they were trying to come alongside the Bragg family.

This week, we have sought out and listened to outside voices who have been helpful clarifying ways we could have done better, the truth is, and they have acknowledged that there are certain challenges in caring well for people in complex situations, but they've given us some points to consider. First, looking back, it would have been helpful if there was a single point person rather than the multiple front we were operating in. This multiple-front approach appears to have caused some gaps in the Braggs' care.

Looking back, it would also have served them well if there was a documented plan of care we both agreed upon at the beginning that would have been adequate to set expectations on both sides. Those would both have been moves that... We can already see we need to do that better. We need to think more clearly about these things. We're grateful for the outside feedback we've been given as we've sought to understand. I am, personally, and we are as a church in a place of ongoing listening. As I said, we want to continue to grow as a church.

If you knew the Braggs, if you've been around this situation and you saw areas that we fell short, areas where you think we can grow, spaces we can step into to be better at caring for hurting people, we are all ears to listen. You can email care@thevillagechurch.net. We want to excel at this. Not be good at this...to excel at this. We can't do that on our own. We'll need other eyes. We are praying for an opportunity to meet with the family and listen to them, and we are grieved that they felt unheard and unhelped. Again, we are hopeful that the past and present pain will give way to healing for all who are involved.

Now, two things I want to talk about here as we round up this statement and move to Psalm 23. For me, personally, there have been these two really heavy points. The first is the Bragg family. They are a hurting family who have experienced our worst nightmare. They are our family. They are of us. Our enemies aren't the *New York Times*, not this reporter, not the Bragg family. We *have* an Enemy, according to the Bible, and it's not flesh and blood. So I am hurting deeply for the Bragg family. What a heartbreaking mess.

The other point where I can just feel myself wanting to fling myself on the mercy of Jesus is so many of you here are survivors in your own right. You have come from some of the most horrific backgrounds. You've experienced some of the most horrific pains, and this can be re-traumatizing. To have all of this brought up again can start a descent back into darkness.

As I've thought and as I've prayed, I've just so longed for that not to happen for you. So I wanted to lay out some general care if you're in this space. First, if this is you and this whole thing has started a downward spiral, when you're ready, when you're able, I want to encourage you to reach out to a safe friend or family member. Second, when you're ready, begin attending counseling with someone who specializes in abuse and in trauma.

The third thing I would tell you is to attend a support group where you feel comfortable. If you need to see a psychiatrist for medication to support your recovery process in conjunction with these other spaces, then please do that. It is not wrong or sinful to take medicine for a crushed spirit. Christ will heal in time, and he has given us common grace in the space between.

Lastly, I would say if you don't know where to go and don't know what to do, please contact our care department at care@thevillagechurch.net. It wasn't long ago we hired Summer Vinson. She has a background in trauma. She has been helping us over the last six months kind of get her feet underneath her so we can be better in these areas.

Let me reiterate three things, and then I want to pray for us. First, we have a family, one of us. They've been at Restores with us. They have been 11 years a member here, and they're hurting badly. We want to be prayerful, we want to be mindful, we want to be generous, we want to be compassionate toward this family.

Secondly, we have a family of faith here at The Village Church that is hopeful of being a safe place for the wounded, for the broken, for the exhausted, and for the weary. From the elders through our membership, we deeply desire to see men and women healed here, be strengthened by his grace, and walk in holistic restoration.

Again, for many of you, I know this is re-traumatizing, so I want you to look at me. When you're ready, fight against the slide back into darkness. Reach out to a safe person. Reach out to a friend. Loop in family members. If you need to take medicine for a season, take medicine. If you don't know what to do, please reach out to care@thevillagechurch.net. We are an imperfect place, but our heart will be to love you. What a mess. Let me pray.

Father, I thank you for these brothers and sisters. I thank you for your grace and mercy. I thank you that you are at work. I don't pretend to understand that work, but I know what the Enemy means for evil you'll flip on its head. I just want to right now pray for the Bragg family. I just want to pray

peace and healing on that family. I pray over that sweet girl. I pray over, I can only imagine, the anger, rage, sadness, and powerlessness you must feel as a mama or daddy. Supernaturally step into that space.

We pray for justice. You care about justice. I pray where there is guilt you bring that guilt to light and that that guilt be rightly punished by the laws of this land. I pray for us as a church. I pray that you show us where there are gaps. Show us where we might grow. Show us how we might become all the more the people you would have us be. I pray for my brothers and sisters in this room for whom this has tilled some soil in a way where grief and loss and anger are being churned to the surface. I just pray peace and grace for them, healing and hope for them, a reminder of your goodness and grace. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

There is no other passage of Scripture I am aware of that is as well known, as often quoted, and as consistently leaned on by weary, exhausted people like the Twenty-third Psalm. God accomplishes this comfort for our souls not by talking a lot about *us* but by talking a lot about himself. So I want us to look at the Twenty-third Psalm together today. The Twenty-third Psalm is actually quite a bit about leadership and a leader who won't fail us, but there are some other pieces too.

Let me give you my outline. There is a leader who can be trusted. I then want to talk about where he is leading us, and then I want to talk about *why* he is leading us, and then we'll commend ourselves to God on high. Let's just start by reading the Twenty-third Psalm. Let me read it over us.

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 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. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

It might sound strange to you, but this passage in a very real way has to do with leadership, and the leadership, namely, of the one Leader who will never fail us or fall short of our expectations. If you look at even how this passage is wired... When we think about how God is talked about in the Bible... We talk about the "name of God."

If you think about God as Creator or God as King or God as Lord, they emphasize his transcendence. They emphasize his might and his majesty. That should create in us that feeling we feel when we stand in front of the Grand Canyon: one of awe and holy fear. But the psalmist here, King David... This psalm didn't explode out of nothingness.

We're talking about a man who had seen the highest of highs and the lowest of lows who's now saying, "The Lord is my Shepherd. Yes, he is Creator. Yes, he is King. Yes, he is the Lord of all, and yet he is guiding me. He is leading me. He is for me. He is providing for me." He says he is the kind of leader who should make us go, "Who else would we want to lead us?"

"The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." Or better translated: "What else could I want?" Jesus himself would say there's a kind of leadership that's a bit sketchy, and there's a kind that can be submitted to. I'll read that to you. This is John 10, starting in verse 11:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 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 don't know if you're drawing the parallels between these two passages, but surely you can feel, as you look out on the world, like "Who can I possibly trust?" Let's just talk briefly. If you're looking at the political climate, regardless of what side of the aisle you're on, it looks a little bit messy, doesn't it? Like, "Who can I trust here? Who's telling the truth? What's actually going on?"

No matter where you look in the world right now, there seems to be a bit of a crisis on who is trustworthy and who is not. About whom can we say, "I'm following that person no matter what happens; things will go well"? Jesus is arguing, and I think David is pointing to the fact that a life surrendered to Jesus Christ puts us under the leadership, under the authority of the one who will be for us and not against us. In fact, on repeat the Bible talks about Jesus in this way.

In Psalm 84, the psalmist says, "No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly." And 2 Corinthians 12: "My grace is sufficient for you." And Romans 8: "All things work together for the good of those who are in Christ Jesus." There is no government official, no popular fad, no pastor, no organization that can lead like Jesus.

Here's the question: Where is he leading us to? Since Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the one who's leading, guiding, providing, where is it that he's leading us to? Well, let's dive into the text. He's leading us toward rest and restoration. That's verses 2-3. In fact, one of the things I like about it is there are plurals in this. He leads us into green pastures (plural) and still waters (plural), which means it's not a singular event but an event on a cycle.

If you've tried to follow Jesus for any period of time, you know this to be true. We go and we're in green pastures and we feel seen and loved and known and the presence of God seems near to us, and then I love what's coming next, because he's going to talk about the valley of the shadow of death. The Bible is not mincing words that life can be hard. But then what does he do? He leads us back to another green pasture and back to another stream of still water.

The invitation, the leadership of Jesus, the shepherding of Jesus brings us into rest and into restoration, but it also brings us through difficult times. It doesn't cut past the valley. There is no gondola to glory. One of the things I'm always trying to point out to you... I will not be the kind of pastor who is not honest with you about the brokenness of the world we're in. It is not kind to teach people if they just love Jesus, everything goes their way. That's not what the Bible says *anywhere* unless you cherry-pick verses.

This just said, "**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil...**" Why? How? Look at it. Some of my favorite words in the Bible. Why? "**...for you are with me...**" Now go back to John 10. What Jesus said in John 10 is when it comes to the wolves coming, when it comes to the dark night of the soul, others will leave, others will abandon. It's not safe enough for them, so they're getting out of there, but Jesus is going, "I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to kill the wolf, even as it tries to kill me, for your good."

This is what Jesus does in the laying down of his life. In the valley of the shadow of death, you will see who loves you and who does not love you, who is for you and who is not for you. In this passage here and in Jesus pointing back to it, he says, "You're mine. I'm not going anywhere. The hired hands might run, but I'm going nowhere. Politicians might fail you, pastors might fall short, other institutions might fail you; I'm not going anywhere. You have been bought with a price: my blood."

He's leading us through difficult times, and then...look at verse 5...he's leading us into joy. It shouldn't be lost on you that we went from "**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" into "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies..." Here's what he's doing: he's leading us into joy.

The leadership of Jesus leads us not into a really thin kind of happiness based on circumstance but deep-rooted joy that he's for us and not against us, a deep-rooted joy that he was with us through the valley and he *wasn't* with us through the valley going, "If you would have just done *this* or done *that* or done *this*, we wouldn't be here," but he's with us with his rod, with his staff, comforting, leading, guiding, "We're going to get through this," not abandoning us.

Then we come up out of that valley into a banqueting table with the oil of gladness being poured all over us. The reason it's prepared in the face of our enemies is because we battle not against flesh and blood. Imagine if our very real Enemy has set his face to destroy us. So, difficulty comes, and situations arise in our lives where we question the goodness of God. Anybody been there? Anybody question the goodness of God in a difficult season? This is a safe place. Yeah, my hand is up.

I'm saying I have been in a place where I'm wondering about how God's glory and how God's goodness can somehow manifest in this. "How can he be using this? There has to be another way." Yet when the people of God are navigated through the valley of the shadow of death by the presence of Jesus via the Holy Spirit and they respond with gladness, how frustrating to the schemes of the Enemy.

The Enemy is like, "I'm going to destroy this faith. I'm going to squelch out this life. I'm going to choke the vibrancy out of this saint with *this* scheme, with *this* plan, with this [whatever]," and we respond with, "Isn't he good? What a terrible thing, but he was with me all along." In fact, just to encourage one another, how many of you here have just been through it and found him near, just been through it and found him close? This is preparing a banquet before our enemies.

When the people of God walk in gladness in difficult seasons... Not *happiness*. I'm not using that word. I've said for 20 years I think happiness is a frail emotion. It can be taken from you in a second. But joy is transcendent. Joy isn't determined by circumstances. Joy is rooted in the finished work of Jesus Christ for the saint, which means he is not against me; he's for me. He's accomplishing something even if I'm disoriented by it or don't understand it.

Through difficult times into joy. He's also leading us into confidence. Goodness and mercy are following us. Most people I talk to, if we could ever get to a real level of conversation, feel like eventually they're going to be outed as fakes and phonies. A lot of people feel like if we were truly fully known or if God ever truly got full hold of us, certainly he's coming with judgment, certainly he's coming with some pain for us, certainly there's some punishment on the way.

Yet David is saying, "Hey, those footprints you hear behind you? That's goodness and mercy." There *is* something chasing you. There *is* something in pursuit of you. Christian, it's not wrath; it's goodness. It's mercy. I'll say this as plainly as I know how. To surrender to the leadership of Jesus is to surrender to goodness and mercy. To rebel against the leadership of Jesus is to rebel against goodness and mercy. Our confidence in the future is not in ourselves; it's in the fact that goodness and mercy is following us and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

So, where is he leading us? Rest and restoration, through difficult times, into joy, and into confidence. Now, *why* is he leading us? I think the second part of verse 3 is the gravitational pull of Psalm 23. I think if you get the second half of verse 3, then you can be really confident that everything else the psalm has said is true, and if you miss that, then you *won't* be able to believe in that confidence and you surely won't be able to believe that what's chasing you down is goodness and mercy. Let's look at that together.

He leads us in paths of righteousness for the sake of his name. Just straight conversation today. You and I could not find the path of righteousness with any map, app, and satellite in the universe. You and I perpetually think we're on the path of righteousness only to discover we're actually on the path to self-righteousness or think we're on the path of righteousness only to find out we're on the path to licentiousness.

Watch this. How many of you at least 50 times in your Christian life have said, "I'm not going to do that anymore; I'm going to do *this* instead"? Look! Are you serious? This is us. This is God's big plan. So, since we can't find the path of righteousness to save our lives, praise God we have one who will lead us *to* the path of righteousness, and not because *we're* good but because *he* is good.

If your version of Christianity is that you have to find the path of righteousness, you have to be good, then of course you're going to be running from God and won't think those footsteps are goodness and mercy; you'll think they're wrath and judgment. But it's an understanding that he leads us into paths of righteousness (back to John 10) by laying down his life for the sheep.

Jesus brings peace into the equation with God. He does it in two ways, and they're both really important. First, he brings peace between us and God. Massively important. But he doesn't stop there. He also brings peace between us and...catch this...us. Let me unpack this. In Colossians 1, starting in verse 19, it says, "**For in him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through [Jesus] to reconcile to [God] all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.**"

So our unrighteousness, our inability to stay on the path of righteousness... Peace is brought between us and God by the blood of Jesus. So now, since righteousness was brought to you, peace was brought to you, you can believe those footsteps are goodness and mercy and not wrath and judgment. But it's not just *this* that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has accomplished. He also has brought peace *to us within us*. Let me read this verse. First John 3:20: "**...for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.**"

I mean, isn't that an unbelievable verse? Think about how much time you spend wondering whether or not you would be accepted if someone were to know everything about you. Think about all those "Am I good enough?" questions that stir around in you. "Am I a good enough mom? Am I a good enough dad? Am I a good enough spouse. Am I a good enough worker? Am I a good enough person?" Yet here in *this* the Bible says, "No, no, no. God who knows *everything*."

Here's what that means. There are things wrong with me right now, ways I am operating, that I am completely unaware that I'm operating in those. There are ways I'm out of step with what God has for me, and I can't even see them. As much as I'm going, "God, show me. God, show me. God, show me," he has to do some things before I can see it. God knows even those. And what's his response? His response is to clear my conscience by saying, "If it was ever going to be *your* righteousness, this was a lost cause. So repent but know I knew what I was buying."

When I say that little phrase, "Jesus knew what he was buying on the cross"...you're not surprising him...I'm not making that stuff up. I got that from the Bible. The God who knows everything cleanses your conscience with...what? The righteousness of Jesus. So, why can David say, "The Lord is my shepherd. What else could I want?" Why can we be confident that this is the way he's leading us? How can we be confident that this is actually our future? Because Jesus has made peace between us and God, and he has made peace between us and us.

I don't know how you're wired. No one judges me as hard as I judge me. In fact, most often when I hear criticism about myself I'm moderately pleased. I'm like, "*That's it? Really?* I mean, I'm certainly guilty of that, but if you..." All I usually hear is, "You don't know me that well yet." They're like, "Yeah, I just really struggle with you, *this, this, and this.*" I'm like, "*That's what's putting you off?* You should probably stay at a distance, then, brother or sister, because it only gets uglier from here."

No one is as hard on me as I am on me. That's probably true for most people in this room. That's probably a universal human experience. I had a friend tell me one time... Other people were speaking life into him, and he was like, "Man, if I could only see myself the way other people see me." That's nearly impossible. So this Holy Spirit whispers to our spirit, "You've been made righteous. Breathe. Rest. Walk in the restoration the Spirit of God has brought about in Jesus Christ."

Now, I have been vocal about my concern around our geography. Here's what I mean by that. I don't mean that Dallas is an unattractive place, although that could possibly be true. I mean more that because you and I are in the Bible Belt, per se, because you and I are in a place where a lot of people know a lot about Jesus, we can get stuck in a very dangerous game of being able to talk about Jesus and know facts about Jesus and all of that but not necessarily love Jesus.

There's this odd thing that can happen where we can even talk about him as though we were super close and be really far from him. C.S. Lewis said this in *The Great Divorce*: "Every poet and musician and artist, but for Grace, is drawn away from the love of the thing he tells to love of the telling till, down in Deep Hell, they cannot be interested in God at all but only in what they say about Him." I think this is Lewis from last century looking upon the horizon and saying that if we're not careful, Jesus becomes a punch line and doctrine becomes talking points where our hearts are far from him.

The Twenty-third Psalm is meant to orient our spirits, orient our minds, orient our hearts around not just some bumper-sticker theology but the goodness of God in his leading us, in his care for us, in his love for us, in his sacrifice for us, and in the invitation to come into, according to John 10:10, life and life to the full. I can't promise you much, but I can promise you that Jesus won't fail you, and he is the Great Shepherd. He is the Good Shepherd. He *will* give rest. He *will* bring about restoration. He *will* lead us into the fullness of life, and may the grace of God be bestowed upon us. Let's pray.

Father, I lift your name. I thank you for the life of King David. I thank you for his high highs and his crazy low lows and how in all of those things these words come to us by your Holy Spirit, that for such a time as this the Twenty-third Psalm rests on us to remind us to lift up our eyes, to let us gaze

yet again in the beauty of what it means to be sons and daughters of God. Where all else fails, you will not. Where all else falls short, you cannot.

So, I ask, would you minister to your people today? Again, I lift up the Bragg family. Again, I lift up our church. Again, I lift up the many in this room who this season is extremely difficult for, and I just pray you meet us all and you heal and you restore and you do the things only you can do that sermons don't do, songs don't do, charismatic personalities don't do, your Spirit does. We just lay before you our souls, our lives, our church, our neighborhoods, our friends, and we just ask that you'd be mighty, you'd be exalted, and you'd be lifted high. It's for your beautiful name, amen.

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