

GOD'S ANTIDOTE TO FEARING THE FUTURE
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Before we start, let me tell you a story of myself. Many years ago, before I was a Christian I ran into a quote from Benjamin Disraeli that said "Little things affect little minds". At that time I was affected by many little things and that quote meant a lot to me. "Little things affect little minds" ...as smart as I am, I joked to myself "**well, I just need to get into bigger problems and I'll be fine**".

Today I've come to realize how right I was because every time I've had big problems, like when the company I worked for 12 years closed, when I learned that a close relative was dying to cancer and the following year another one and then my mother in law... like when I moved to La Paz and had no income for months, then more recently when my father died less than 3 weeks after we knew he had cancer, etc. those big problems can't affect my little mind, because I'm certain of one thing...I cannot solve them myself, I pray for direction, wisdom and understanding and obviously, I suffer and grief but I'm powerless, they are not in my hands but the Lord's, I'm just a bystander.

Brothers and sisters do not let little things affect you, regardless of the size of your minds. Solve the things you can, let the Lord solve the ones you cannot.

Anyway, everything I've said so far is from what my little mind has learned in 45 years of living in the habitable world and Mexico City.

Now let's see what the infinitely wiser Word of the Lord has for us today:

We're going to look at God's antidote to Fearing the Future. A lot of people spend their lives worrying about tomorrow. They can't enjoy today because they're worrying about tomorrow. Why? Because we don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. Sounds familiar?

Psalm 23:6

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

David's life was not free of troubles, enemies, mistakes, sins, etc., and yet, as he concludes this Psalm, he is not worried. No anxiety, fear of the future, worry about tomorrow. He's confident -- "**surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.**" Where do you get that kind of confidence?

If you're a believer, there are three reasons why you don't need to fear the future:

1. Because God is watching over you.
2. Because God's grace is working in you.
3. Because heaven is waiting for you.

Let's go through each of these points:

I. GOD IS WATCHING OVER ME

"Surely goodness will follow me all the days of my life." Because God is good I can expect His protection and provision. I can expect that no matter what happens to me, God will bring good out of it somehow. It will always either be for my own good, for the good of other people, or for the good of His kingdom. God is a good God.

Psalm 145:20 "The Lord preserves all who love Him,..." God cares about the details of your life. Like a father, He will provide for you in the future. We don't know what the future holds but we do know God is in control and God loves you and wants to help you. He says, I will be like a Father and will watch over you.

"Surely goodness will follow..." What does he mean by that? Obviously David had disappointments in life. Not everything good happened to him. He's not saying, Surely, only good things are going to happen to me. That's not true. Bad things happen to good people. He's saying only goodness will follow. God will insure that good will come out -- it will follow whatever happens to David and us...

The great promise that God has given to believers: **Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God..."** in other words, **"all that happens to us is working for our good! IF we love God and are fitting into his plans."** This is not a promise for everybody. All things do not work together for good for everybody in the world. Things work together for bad for people who are not trying to go the way God wants them to go, who are not following his path. But if you're a believer, the Bible says all things are working together for good -- not all things are good -- but working together for good. That's what it means **"goodness will follow me"**. There is no difficulty, dilemma, defeat, disaster in the life of a Christian that ultimately God won't bring good out of.

Often it's difficult to see God's goodness when you're going through a tragedy. There are times when you don't feel like God is good. You don't feel His mercy. Sometimes you feel like God's goodness is hidden. Even Jesus, on the cross, said, **"My God, my God, Why?"** It's only later, looking back, that we see God's goodness and how He was working for good.

Paul was put falsely in prison in Rome. Was that good? No. He was kept as a prisoner in Rome. While he was there, he wrote some books that we now call the New Testament. Goodness followed after his imprisonment. Today we're benefiting from Paul's problem, pain, and difficulty. Goodness follows.

God says, I will watch over you. How does God watch over believers? **Ps. 91:11, "For He shall give His angels charge over you, To keep you in all your ways"** in other words **"God orders his angels to protect you wherever you go."** God uses angels to watch over you. Angels are real. They are invisible helpers. The Bible says one of the reasons God has created them is to watch over and protect believers. You don't talk to them or see them, but they are there working on your behalf all the time.

There is a lot of interest in angels today. The book *Angels Among Us* written by Ron Rhoades, for example, is a book with passages from the Bible on what God says about angels. The Bible does talk a lot about angels, who they are and what they do. I'd like to talk a little about the ministry of angels in guarding Christians. But first I want to lay a foundation with three brief points:

First, human beings do not become angels at death. That is something you see in movies but you won't find it in the Bible. ***Ps. 8:4-5. "What is man that you are mindful of him, And the son of man that you visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor"***

Secondly, angels are spirit beings. They don't have physical bodies; they are invisible and most of the time we do not perceive their activities among us, that means angels are protecting you when you're not even aware of it.

Thirdly, we don't just have one angel watching over us we have many angels watching over us. ***Ps. 91:11 "For He shall give His angels..."*** plural.

What are some of the ways angels protect us today? How do angels guard us?

First, angels guard us against harm and injury. We see this illustrated in ***Daniel 6:22***. Daniel was in the lions' den and the lions were very hungry. But ***"My God sent His angel and shut the lion's mouths so that they have not hurt me..."*** the angel kept those lions away from Daniel. The angel protected Daniel from harm. Scriptures say angels have the same ministry in your life.

Secondly, angels guard us by restraining evil. We see this illustrated in ***2 Kings 6:15-17***. We find Elijah and his servant surrounded by a hostile army that is getting ready to move in on them. Elijah is not worried a bit. He knows that God's angels are there but the servant is petrified. Elijah prays to God, "Lord, open his eyes that he can see." At that moment this servant saw angels surround them, hundreds of them. No longer was he worried. He came to understand the truth of ***Ps. 91*** "God commands His angels to guard over you in all your ways."

Number three, angels guard us in the midst of dangerous circumstances. This is illustrated in ***Acts 27: 23-24***, where Paul is on a ship with a bunch of other men. This ship encounters a tremendous hurricane. It looks as if the ship is going to sink and everybody is going to die. An angel appears to Paul and says, "Don't worry. You're not going to die and nobody on this ship is going to die. You're going to be safe." Angels can protect us in dangerous circumstances.

Finally, angels guard us against despair, discouragement. This can be well illustrated with the true story of a lady who was going to have a Down Syndrome baby. She went to her Pastor, who told her that God was going to bless her with this Down Syndrome baby help her through this situation. After she left, the Pastor wrote a postcard to her. He reaffirmed that God was going to bless her with this

Down Syndrome baby and take care of her. The postcard got delivered to the wrong address. The lady that received the postcard decided to hand deliver it to the correct address. The lady with the postcard said, "Your pastor wrote you a postcard about your Down Syndrome baby. I want you to know that I have a Down Syndrome baby too and I want to help you through this if you'll let me." I believe that an angel re-routed the mail. I think angels can do that. We can also look at Biblical examples where angels did specific things to bring encouragement to people. There are all kinds of other ways that angels bring encouragement to us. Just because we have a guardian angel doesn't mean that we're exempt from bad things happening to us. Sometimes bad things do happen. David had angels guarding him and bad things happened to him. The apostle Paul had angels guarding him, but bad things happened to him. One thing you can count on: God will always be with you through adversity. He doesn't exempt you from adversity but walks with you through the adversity. Not only that, God can bring good out of evil. That's exciting.

II. GRACE IS WORKING IN ME

Not only goodness will follow you but "**...mercy will follow me all the days of my life.**"

Isaiah 60:10 says something like: "I will have mercy on you through my grace." What is grace? Grace is **God's Riches At Christ's Expense. GRACE.** It's all God's able to do for us because of Christ. **Grace is the fact that God gives you what you need, not what you deserve.** What is mercy? **Mercy is grace in action.** Why do we need mercy? Because we're imperfect. We stumble and fall, blow it, make mistakes. In the future you're going to sin! So in the future, you need not only God's goodness, you need His mercy. You need His forgiveness, pardon, healing.

When you really understand God's grace and mercy, that if you've given your life to Jesus Christ, Jesus has taken on the cross the penalty for everything you've ever done wrong or will do wrong. He paid for it, you don't. So when a bad thing happens, you don't have to think God's getting even with you. God doesn't "get even" for things that have already been paid for on the cross. That's grace, mercy. When you understand God's grace and mercy then you have no need to fear the future.

Ps. 103 "I will... not forget the glorious things God does for me. He forgives all my sins. He heals me. He ransoms me from hell. He surrounds me with loving-kindness... He fills my life with good things ... He is merciful and tender toward those who don't deserve it; He is slow to get angry... He has not punished us as we deserve for our sins for His mercy is as great as the height of the heavens. ... He is like a father to us, tender and sympathetic to those who reverence him." When you understand mercy, that God is not only being good to you, but He's being merciful to you in handling your mistakes, your sins, your faults, then you don't have any reason to fear the future.

Mercy means that when I'm going through a tough time, a valley, a difficulty -- even one that I've brought on myself -- God is there to help me out. "...we can come before God's throne where we can receive mercy and grace to help us when we

need it." God has a 24 hour drop in service where we can go to God asking for help. In His mercy, He can help because of what Jesus has done.

Mercy, like **goodness**, follows us in life. Picture a parent following a little child around picking up after them.

God is constantly picking up your messes. Things that you blow, things that you make a mistake, things you get out of order, God is behind you, picking it all up, putting it back together, working it all out, taking care of the messes. That's mercy.

"Mercy will follow all the days of my life" -- not some of the days, but all the days. God doesn't turn His goodness and His mercy on and off. He doesn't treat you nice one day and the next day treat you badly. All the days of my life, I'll have God's goodness and God's mercy.

You're going to experience many different kinds of days in life. Happy, sad, sick, depressing, lonely, difficult -- that's why we fear the future -- we don't know what's going to happen. But you will never face a day without God's goodness and mercy with you if you've given your life to Jesus Christ. He will be with you all the time. Some days you won't feel it, some days you won't see God's mercy and grace and it may be hard to determine. But surely, certainly, without a doubt God's goodness and mercy are going to be there even in the tough times in the future.

Those of you who are married, one day one of you will die. The other will have to face life without your mate. But surely, goodness and mercy will be with you. God will be with you. God's goodness will take care of the good days, God's mercy takes care of the bad days -- all of the seasons of life.

How can you be sure? Because God does not lie. He cannot tell an untruth or be inconsistent. He never changes.

He never breaks a promise. If He says, **"surely goodness and mercy will be with you all the days of your life"**, they will! We get so worried about the future because we start "what if"-ing -- "just suppose..." There is no supposing in the Bible. It says *surely!* **Christians go to the future not with a question mark but with an exclamation point.** Stop supposing and start reposing. Relax, trust. God will be with you no matter what happens. He will help you out. God's goodness will provide and protect. God's mercy will pardon and forgive. God's goodness will supply. God's mercy will sooth. God's goodness will help you. God's mercy will heal you.

Goodness is the fact that God gives us good things in life that we don't deserve.

Mercy is that God holds back the condemnation that we do deserve. You need them both in life.

Psalm 23 is about shepherding -- **"The Lord is my shepherd"**. You lead sheep, but you drive cattle. The difference is that sheep are led from the front. The shepherd is in front of the flock. He leads and they follow.

Cows are driven from behind to keep them moving. If you were to see a shepherd leading a flock of sheep, you'll see a shepherd at the front and one or two sheep dogs at the rear, keeping them in line. **Goodness and mercy are like divine sheep dogs in life.** They are following behind, nipping at your tail, keeping you in

line, keeping you safe so you won't get lost. Once you're in the flock you don't get out of it because those sheep dogs keep you in it. Goodness and mercy keep you in the flock. When you have goodness and mercy in your life you don't have need to fear anything. **Goodness and mercy ought to be enough to get us into the future.**

III. HEAVEN IS WAITING FOR ME

"... and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That's one of the most important connections we see in the Bible. It connects yesterday and today with tomorrow. God says, "I've got this great life planned for you and surely goodness and mercy will follow you through it, **BUT** that's not the end! I've got something else at the end!"

He builds it to a crescendo. David ends this Psalm by saying **"We're going to heaven!"** **Jesus saves the best until last. With God it just keeps getting better and better. The best is yet to come.**

2 Cor. 5:1 "We know that our body will be destroyed. But when that happens, God will have a house for us. It will not be a house made by human hands; instead, it will be a home in heaven that will last forever." How long is forever going to last? **Forever!** Someday your body is going to die, but you aren't. You're going to live forever in one of two places -- heaven or hell. They are both real places. You will spend eternity in heaven or hell. We were made to last forever.

Why are Christians the most confident people about the future? "We look forward with confidence to our heavenly bodies. And we are not afraid, but are quite content to die, for then we will be at home with the Lord." **2 Cor. 5:6,8.**

Death, for Christians, is a transfer, a promotion. It's on to better things. No more problems. You're not ready to live until you're ready to die. You don't know how to live until you're ready to die. If we have accepted Christ we're going to go to heaven. What is heaven going to be like?

Rev 21:3-4 **"...the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away".**

That's a truly all inclusive package, when do we leave?

You're going to be rewarded for your faithfulness to God and your obedience to Jesus Christ. We're going to be reunited with loved ones who know the Lord. Some people think when you get to heaven, you'll be given this white sheet and set around all day on a cloud, strumming a harp. As we said before, we're not going to be angels in heaven. God's going to give you stuff to do that you like to do. We're going to be released from pain, from sorrow, from suffering, from depression, from fear. "He will wipe away all tears from our eyes, and there shall be no more death,

nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. All of that has gone forever." Doesn't that make you a little homesick for heaven?

Who is heaven made for? It's not made for everybody. It's made for people who say, "God, I want to be a child of God. I want to follow You." I Peter 1:4-6 "God has reserved for his children the priceless gift of eternal life; it is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And God, in his mighty power, will make sure that you get there safely ..." It's not up to me to make sure I get there safely. Once I've committed my life to Christ, He makes sure I get there safely to receive it because I'm trusting Him. **So be truly glad!** There is wonderful joy ahead. Even though the going is rough down here, one day we're going to be with the Lord. Heaven was made for Christians, believers, for those who love Jesus. If you didn't love Jesus, why would you want to go be with Him for eternity?

Earth is the warm up act. This isn't the big deal. You're going to spend 60, 70, 80 maybe 90 years here on earth. But you'll spend thousands, millions of years in eternity -- heaven or hell. This is just preparation for the big event.

"You are only visitors here...your real home is in heaven..." So act like it! Don't act as if everything that matters is what is here and now. We spend all of our lives acquiring, accumulating, getting. We spend our lives as if making money is the most important thing in life and you have to get a whole lot. One day you're going to die and you won't have it any more. You're missing the point. Getting things is not the goal of life. Getting prepared for heaven is. How do you do it? By building character. Growing in Christ. That's what you're taking with you. You're not taking any of your money, your cars, stereos, homes, you don't really own anything. **Live in light of eternity.**

Does everybody go to heaven? Absolutely not! If God let everybody into Heaven, it wouldn't be heaven. It'd be hell. He lets those into heaven who want to be with Him because they loved Him during their time here on earth.

John 10 "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand."

How do I know I'm going to heaven? **Two things: Jesus says, "My sheep listen to me and they follow me." Are you doing that? Are you listening** to what God says? Are you **following Jesus Christ?** Is He your Shepherd and your Savior? If you say, Yes, I'm listening to God and I'm trying to let Him lead my life, letting Jesus Christ be my Savior; I know I'd never get to heaven on my own and I'm trusting Him. Then you can say with absolute confidence, **Surely I know I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

What if I sin after I commit my life to Christ? You **are** going to sin after you become a Christian but when you give your life to Christ, when you put your hand in His

hand, God holds onto it. He grasps it. There are times in life when you're going to want to let go of that hand. You're going to want a relationship that you know is wrong, read material that you know is bad, do things that God says not to do.

You're going to want to let go of God's hand. But **He's never going to let go of yours**. He says you are in His hand and no **man can snatch you away from Him**.

I will not perish -- not because of me. I don't have to keep myself safe; God's goodness and God's mercy keep me safe. It's not up to me. **I just do the trusting, He does the keeping**. And He won't let go of me.

When you face the future, what do you see? You worry? You wonder? You doubt or you have God's antidote to Fearing the Future?

Remember:

1. God is watching over you.
2. God's grace is working in you.
3. Heaven is waiting for you.

Summarizing, in Psalm 23 we have seen how much God loves you. We've seen how much God cares for you, how He says "I want to be your shepherd." What's the bottom line, what have we learned? If I summed it up in one sentence it's this: **Jesus is all you need**. The good shepherd provides protection, provision, peace, providence, companionship (His presence), and paradise. That wraps it all up!

God bless you all.

Let's pray