



Well Being  
Department

# A *Flourishing* LIFE

Wellbeing in the midst of spiritual ministry

Jesus said 'I came to give life  
with joy and abundance.'

(John 10:10 - *The Voice*)

# INTRODUCTION

In most dictionaries 'to flourish' is defined in terms of healthy growth and development. In my own thinking I find it helpful to use the concept of *Shalom* in its fullest meaning, which encompasses health and healing (Isaiah 57:19), reconciliation (Genesis 26:29), contentment (Psalm 4:8) and good relationships in which God is present with his people.

In the online article *Educating for Shalom*, Dr. Cornelius Plantinga writes:

*'The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfilment, and delight is what the Old Testament prophets called shalom. It means far more than mere peace of mind or cease-fire among enemies... In the Bible shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a rich state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Saviour opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom he delights.'*

This sounds amazing. While I have not always experienced such flourishing within my officership journey, I can testify that God's resources have always been enough for me. When I have accessed them, *Shalom* has been my strength.

The Well Being Department has given thought to what flourishing means in the context of Salvation Army officership. Our framework for wellbeing has grown out of our conversations with and our understanding of people. It reminds us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. We know that God cares deeply for every aspect of our lives – even down to the number of hairs on our heads (Luke 12:7).

When Jesus spoke about life with abundance it was in the context of himself as the Good Shepherd (John 10). His listeners would have all been very familiar with the psalm of David who claimed that because the Lord was his Shepherd he lacked nothing. I am grateful to Major David Taylor who has explored Psalm 23 so that we can consider what it means for us in terms of our own flourishing today. I am also grateful to the officers who have been willing to share some of their stories, describing what has been important to them in their flourishing.

It is our prayer that as you read about the Shepherd's provision you will be reminded that you are of limitless value to God, whatever situation you are in today.

**Major Judith Payne**  
**Director for Well Being**



A photograph of a shepherd in a green valley, standing with a flock of sheep and a dog. The shepherd is wearing a hat and a vest, and is looking towards the sheep. The valley is lush and green, with trees and rolling hills in the background.

# Psalm 23

## THE LIFE WITH GOD, SUFFICIENT FOR ALL OUR NEEDS

**'The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing' (v1)**

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Psalm 23 is a stunning picture of life lived abundantly in God's presence; through God's restoration, within God's guidance, under God's favour and for all eternity, with God. God walks beside us, surges ahead of us, stands over us, never abandons us and altogether surrounds us with loving concern and attention. With God, everything that we need is within our reach. We lack nothing.

Our experience of life in today's world is painfully at odds with this idyllic picture of contentment and sufficiency. In sharp contrast a longing for something lasting, durable and meaningful leads to unsatisfied restlessness, anxiety and fear. If only we could hear and understand what Jesus the Good Shepherd means when he says, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives' (John 14:27).

The wellbeing benefits of the Shepherd's pastoral care and leadership in the lives of God's children has a prominent place in Scripture. Ultimately Jesus Christ declares himself the fulfilment on earth of all godly leadership and wisdom: 'I have come that [we] may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (John 10:10-11).

To read the 23rd Psalm and reflect upon the abundance that God offers, is to discover what it means to lack nothing in at least five key aspects of God's unfailing sufficiency in our lives, and under the Good Shepherd's protection. These will be explored throughout the rest of the booklet.

# GOD'S RESTORATION

**'He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul' (v2,3)**

Life is a gift, it's God's creation and designed to be lived with him. To accept this is a trusting step of faith. It involves putting our confidence in the gift of God's vision for our restored lives. Faith is not a human mental process of sheer willpower exercised against all reason.

Faith is the surrender of our own prideful purposes and insistence on selfishly taking the rudder of our own lives. In learning to trust the vision of life as God reveals it to us, we increasingly let go of our own self-centred ego. To cling selfishly to our own vision means fruitlessly and anxiously wrestling against God's greater vision for our lives. God's vision is one of restoration within God's mercy, forgiveness, grace and love.

As we intentionally take hold of God's loving and graceful vision, our self-directed lives begin a journey of restoration into the fullness and fruitfulness of life lived with God. If the pastures are green and the waters still and refreshing, then we are being delivered from the barrenness of living within our own limited resources and ideas, which ultimately weary and exhaust us. If life is lived trustfully in the Shepherd's provision, rather than in our own fruitless striving, then the Spirit increasingly draws us into the love experienced by the Father and the Son, where God deeply loves, values, refreshes, restores and renews us in his image. To ignore this gift, is to take our chances with our own inferior visions of what life might be, and risk the disappointment and dissatisfaction that follows.



*'One of the fundamental changes that takes place as we move from the faith of desperation to the faith of sufficiency is that we take our minds off ourselves and place them on God.'*

**Dallas Willard**



# STORY

'I started swimming outdoors in 2017 and never stopped. As the seasons change, my body adjusts and does everything necessary to keep me safe. It reminds me I'm fearfully and wonderfully made, and restores me physically and in mind and spirit.'

**Major Karen Sandford**

'...it's been important for me to immerse myself in God... it's important that we can control the things we can, when there is so much that we can't control in life.'

**Major Catherine Wyles**

## PAUSE FOR THOUGHT...

Find a quiet moment to reconnect with God's vision for your life and your vision of God's love for you and the world. Open yourself to receive his love and peace and power. Bring to him your concerns and ask for what you need with a thankful heart.

# GOD'S GUIDANCE

## 'He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake' (v3)

God's vision for our fully restored and abundant life presents us with new direction that we could not have found through our own human resources. 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways' (Isaiah 55:8). Knowing our frailty and our restlessness, Jesus invites us to present our lives within a new graceful order of life: 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me' (Matthew 11:28-29).

Life with God is a journey of revelation and discovery beyond our human wisdom or even the well-meaning wisdom of our friends

and family, let alone wider society. It is vital that we trust the insights that God gives us through our personal daily life of prayer, contemplation and study of the Scriptures in which we discern God's leading. We find ourselves constantly surprised and amazed by God's perfect ways in contrast to our inferior human striving.

Yet God's guidance was never intended to be a solitary experience. It is vital that we also seek out healthy, strong and mutually accountable Christian community, in which God is able to speak to us through the insights and spiritual gifts that he gives us for each other. To live independently

is to squander God's willingness to guide us together through interdependent lives with God and each other. Of course, it is possible for the community to be collectively misguided, as history has shown, but on every such occasion the community will have certainly neglected the gifts of the Spirit in their midst, such as prophecy, discernment and wisdom, and will have resorted to human wisdom alone.



*'The effectiveness of Christian ministry is not dependent upon our own efforts. It is not by the sweat of our brow or by the might of our labours that we produce results; it is by allowing Christ to work in us and through us.'*

**Tony Horsfall and Debbie Hawker**



## STORY

'Finding a *confidant*, someone who I can confide in and trust, who accepts me for who I am, has been paramount in my quest for a healthy, balanced lifestyle.'

**Major Stephen Naylor**

'I surround myself with a core of phone friends and colleagues to laugh and pray with, to say it how it is, regain perspective and process tricky ministry issues that may overwhelm.'

**Captain Sarah Johnson**



## PAUSE FOR THOUGHT...

Recall an example of how God's way in your life has ultimately proved to be far better than you could have ever imagined.

# GOD'S PRESENCE

**'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me' (v4)**



*The soul craves rest. Our wills sometimes rejoice in striving, our bodies were made to (at least sometimes) know the exhilaration of tremendous challenge, our minds get stretched even when tired. But the soul craves rest. The soul knows only borrowed strength. The soul was meant to rest in God the way a tree rests in soil.*

**John Ortberg**





To actively trust in a relationship with God in which we are daily restored and guided along the right paths is to live in God's present moment. Our constant temptation is to live either wistfully and retrospectively in the past or impatiently and anxiously in the future. Of course, both past and future have their rightful place. Our trust today is based on those past moments of encounter and learning that we have experienced on our journey, as well as in the hopeful and expectant vision that we have learned to place in God for the future. But we have much to learn about the presence and provision of God in the present moment, in which God is with us.

To be centred on and mindful of God in the present moment is to be still and calm, even in the midst of extraordinary activity or even danger. The psalmist reminds us that 'God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear' but will 'be still, and know that I am God' (Psalm 46: 1,2,10). Brother Lawrence encourages us

to practise the presence of God as a spiritual discipline that returns our anxious and preoccupied minds to the constant reality that God is with us. From such an experience of God's presence flows the life-transforming perspective that we need fear no evil, for 'There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear' (1 John 4:18). For Dallas Willard, Psalm 23 is a picture of the Kingdom of God as a perfectly safe place to be.

If the presence of God is one of safety and freedom from anxiety, then we can better understand the words of Jesus when he says, 'Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear' (Matthew 6:25), and 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me' (John 14:1). God's promised presence assures us that in our simple daily trust in God's provision, we can be relieved of the stress and anxiety that may cripple our lives.

## STORY

'Gardening gets me out in the fresh air and connects me with nature and there is something hugely rewarding about eating food I've grown myself... Kneading bread is also a great way to deal with stress!'

**Major Sarah King**

'In my early officership I was on the brink of burnout, having gained weight and suffering from stress... Ten marathons and several triathlons later, I recognise the essential need of physical wellbeing, as it is intrinsically linked to the emotional, spiritual and psychological.'

**Major Jonny Smith**

## PAUSE FOR THOUGHT...

Take a moment to think about your current worries and consider what difference, if any, your anxiety will make. Try to discern what God's word is for you in this moment.

# GOD'S FAVOUR

**'You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows' (v5)**

If we are able to trust God to be graciously and lovingly present with us in every moment, actively restoring and guiding us into life in all its fullness, then we can take great comfort from the reality that God's children live under God's favour. God is a perfect father who wants us to trustfully enjoy good gifts and all the provision that we sufficiently require for each new day. He teaches us to pray, 'Give us today our daily bread' (Matthew 6:11). In the presence of our enemies, who of course we are called to love, we may be nourished and know the richness of a provision in which we lack nothing.

To live under God's favour should not be twisted into the crudeness of an indulgent 'prosperity gospel' in which we succumb to the world's standards of acquisitiveness and greed. Nor should we misunderstand favour as God's 'favouritism' in which we feel superior to others, become complacent and

self-sufficient and ultimately stumble and fall. We are not immune from the risks and consequences of living in a fallen world, but God is with us. As we faithfully follow and trust God's leading, we discover that in his economy we are favoured with all that we need.

To enjoy God's favour is to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Jesus is clear that his presence fulfils the prophecy of Isaiah: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor...' (Luke 4:18,19). To live under God's favour is to live hopefully and joyfully today within God's vision of an abundant life and in simple trust of God's provision.

# STORY

'I have been grateful for and benefited from the many different types of support provided throughout my officership... Most importantly, I remind myself that I am loved by God, just as I am, and just as he has made me, and that is enough.'

**Major Judith Daniels**

'The concept of 'retreats' has been important in deepening my relationship with my Saviour. Yes, the TV or social media can be turned off, but for me, nothing substitutes taking an intentional rest to simply "be" in a place where he speaks over me.'

**Major Lynley Oliver**



## PAUSE FOR THOUGHT...

Conduct a short inventory or stocktaking of your life. In what ways can you bear witness to the reality that your 'cup overflows'?



*'Going into retreat is like a boat entering into a lock in order to reach new heights. When I don't enter the lock at regular intervals my life will keep sinking to the level of the culture around me and the level of my own unexamined inner world. However when I enter the lock, that is retreat, I find that almost imperceptibly I am buoyed to new levels.... there is simply no substitute for this, nothing that I could do for myself even approaches what God does for me in retreat.'*

**Ruth Hayley Barton**

# GOD'S ETERNITY HERE AND NOW

**'Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever' (v6)**

To live daily, moment by moment in God's presence, under God's favour, within God's guidance and through God's restoration, is to enjoy a life with God that extends into all eternity. Heaven is not a reality that we escape earth to enjoy, nor is it only in the future. Jesus taught us to pray, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10). Paul reminded the Philippians that 'we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives' (Philippians 3:20 *NLT*).

The word translated 'love' in the last verse of Psalm 23 is the profound Hebrew word *hesed*

which speaks of the unconditional grace and mercy of God that will not let us go. To live in a trusting relationship with God, through all our weakness and failure, is to live in the confidence that 'he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus' (Philippians 1:6).

Whilst the Kingdom of Heaven is a future reality of which we can be fully confident and assured, it is also extraordinarily a present reality of which we must be mindful, for Jesus says, 'the kingdom of heaven has come near' (Matthew 4:17). We are disciples of Jesus. He is the present reality of the Kingdom.

In his presence, eternal life is with us. If we take this seriously and experience it as a present promise and reality, life with God puts everything else into perspective.

Nothing takes priority or has the power in itself to overwhelm us or separate us from God. In Paul's words, 'we have the mind of Christ' (1 Corinthians 2:16) in which everything else finds its place as a lesser reality to God's eternal presence and purpose. Most importantly, we lack nothing.



*'...the surest way to realise the full potential of your God-designed self is to live in eternity while you are in time, conscious of the loving gaze of your all-sufficient Shepherd, in whose care nothing of the good you do is lost.'*

**Dallas Willard**



## STORY

'The hour of silence is something that I have grown to cherish. Most days I try to have a period where I spend time in silence. No noise. No distractions, just time for God and me to connect and to refresh my soul. It's time that I can't miss, so it has become a priority in my day-to-day living.'

**Major Emma Knights**

## PAUSE FOR THOUGHT...

Paul reminds the Corinthians that the materials they are building with will be tested with fire (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). What in your life will ultimately stand this test and what will be simply burned up and consumed?

# CONCLUSION

Our experience of contemporary life is increasingly complex, self-involving and lacking transcendence. Many reject an overarching story for their lives, and construct them around a patchwork of preferred options centred on personal choice, not transcendent reality. In stark contrast to this, Psalm 23 offers us a remarkably different vision of reality that involves our abundant life with the Good Shepherd. It is a vision that God invites us to willingly trust and actively pursue, for our wellbeing and flourishing.

Jesus clearly offers a life of flourishing and this is marked by the fruits of joy and abundance. We have considered how this works itself out in our lives using Psalm 23.

Whilst we are responsible as individuals for our own wellbeing before God, we also find ourselves in a covenant relationship with The Salvation Army. This covenant influences the way grace is mediated: for example, The Salvation Army holds responsibility for mediating abundance, provision, love and care, not in isolation from God but with him and at his direction.

## STORY

'As a single officer with nobody to make me take time out, it is not always easy to look after my own wellbeing. Putting days off in the diary, sticking to them and not feeling guilty has been a discipline that was hard to establish but has been most beneficial spiritually, physically, emotionally and psychologically. Getting out and going for long walks in the fresh air has helped me to connect better with God, clear my mind, refocus and get physical exercise. By doing so I have also been much more productive in my work and by taking time out been re-energised.'

**Major Mark Waghorn**





## RESOURCES

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Visit the Well Being Department page on OurHub for a list of relevant books and retreat centres, plus information concerning future events and other supportive resources -

<https://ourhub.salvationarmy.org.uk/Well-Being>

‘You direct me on the path that leads to a beautiful life. As I walk with You,  
the pleasures are never-ending, and I know true joy and contentment.’

(Psalm 16:11 - *The Voice*)



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