Bob: We all know Psalm 23. We’ve heard it read or, maybe, even memorized it; but have you ever stopped to think about the circumstances that prompted David to write that psalm? Here’s Heath Adamson.

Heath: David—the one handpicked by God to become king—is running for his life because King Saul is trying to kill David. David, according to historical narratives, is surrounded by Saul’s soldiers, who want to kill him. David is, according to rabbinical tradition, starving to death. It is in that moment—when David is starving; his life being threatened—when he would have [sung] Psalm 23. He opens up the psalm by singing, “The Lord is my shepherd.”

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, June 28th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I’m Bob Lepine. I don’t know what kinds of circumstances you’re facing today; but whatever they are, I’m guessing Psalm 23 will be able to speak to you in those circumstances. We’ll explore it more today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We’re going to get a chance to hear a conversation today that took place, not long ago. Kim Anthony, who hosts a podcast called Unfavorable Odds—which is a part of the FamilyLife® Podcasting Network—she talked with Heath Adamson. They did a deep dive into Psalm 23.

I can tell you guys—Heath is a pretty interesting guy. He gives leadership to a ministry called Convoy of Hope. They’re working to fight poverty and hunger with families all around the world. His own background/his testimony: he was into witchcraft when he was a teenager; he was doing drugs—I mean, he was way off the reservation. There was a girl at his school who saw him and just felt the Lord say, “You need to pray for him.” She prayed for him; God worked through her prayers, and he married her. It’s an—he tells the story on the podcast.

Dave: Wow.

Ann: Wow!

Bob: We’re not going to hear that; so if our listeners want to tune in and hear the whole story, they can go to FamilyLifeToday.com and find out more about Kim’s podcast with
Heath Adamson. But we’re going to dive into Psalm 23. Again, Kim is dealing with stories of how God walks with us through the valley of the shadow. Psalm 23 is a good place to meditate when you find yourself in the midst of life’s difficult circumstances.

**Dave:** Yes; I’ve taught on it, read it, meditated on it many times. I used to think it was only about walking through valleys that are dark. It’s, actually, applicable to every mountain and valley in your entire life.

Let me read it to you; it’s just so beautifully written by David. Verse 1—it says “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 namesake. 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.”

**Bob:** Boy, it’s clear, as you listen to that, why that’s one of the most beloved portions of Scripture; because there’s such encouragement and comfort there; isn’t there?

**Ann:** I think, as I’ve read that over the years and have been in valleys myself, the one verse that always sticks out to me is: “You are with me,” “You are with me,” “You are with me.” That’s such a good reminder for all of us that, no matter what we’ve gone through/no matter what we’re walking through, God is with us.

**Bob:** Well, wherever you are today, I think you’re going to be encouraged by what you’re going to hear from Kim Anthony’s conversation with Heath Adamson as we listen to a portion of Episode 6 of her podcast, *Unfavorable Odds*.

[Recorded Interview]

**Heath:** Well, I devoted about three years to study Psalm 23. I began to discover the goodness of God exists, not just in the green pasture, but in the valley. I will say this—right in the middle of writing this manuscript, I was forced to wrestle with whether or not I was just going to write a book about a concept or if I was going to really embrace the concept.

**Kim:** Oh.

**Heath:** I was staring at five different publishing contracts, praying about who to go with; because it was a major decision for me, because I’m somewhat of a new author. Once we decided who to go with, Baker Books published the book.

As I was working on the manuscript, we experienced something that shook our family to the core. All of a sudden, my wife Ali—the love of my life/the most important piece of my
existence, to be candid with you—she became very sick. What should have been a routine medical procedure put her in the hospital. She had about a 48-hour window to win or lose, and it was a scary time.

I remember—I’m in the hospital room. It was about one in the morning. Our girls—we had sent them on to be with their Nona. Ali is sleeping; she’s under the influence of pain medicine. She’s not responding much, and I’m just praying. I have my Bible open. I’m reading Psalm 23. Even though I had it memorized, sometimes, you just need to read the words.

Kim: Yes.

Heath: I’m reading the words; and I realize: “Wait a second; it’s true. God prepares His table—according to the psalm—He does not prepare His table for us in the green pastures. He prepares a table for us in the valley of the shadow of death, but it’s only a shadow.”

That’s when I realized the green pasture and the valley of the shadow of death are actually the same place. Even when God feels far away and we feel like we’re dwelling underneath this canopy of a shadow, a shadow is evidence that there is a bright light that exists just beyond. I learned how to draw near to the Light of the World in the valley of the shadow of death. That’s really where the book comes from.

Kim: As you were walking with Ali through the valley of the shadow of death, how did God bring you to that place of realizing that the valley and the pasture could, indeed, be the same thing?—[Emotion in voice]—because when I read that in your book, it was hard for me to grasp that/to accept that—because when I started your book, I was actually sitting by the bedside of a friend—my 46-year-old friend—who was nearing the end of her battle with cancer.

I was in hospice; and I would think to myself, “She’s serves a God; I serve a God—we serve this God, who is able to bring healing/who is able to make this valley go away; but He’s choosing not to do so.” There were times when I wrestled with: “How can the valley also be the pasture?”—that green pasture that we look for.

Heath: Yes; yes. Kim, it sounds trite; and it sounds like, “Oh, that’s something a television preacher says, who hasn’t necessarily experienced a lot of trial or difficulty in his or her life.” It sounds like just another quip or quote that comes from a self-help book or a Christian website, but it’s in the Word of God.

I’ve found that, when you walk through the valley, you can’t always believe everything you think; and you can’t always believe everything you feel. What do I mean? Well, the Bible is clear that the heart is deceitful above all, and the greatest misunderstandings in life are not intellectual. The greatest misunderstandings, I would suggest, are spiritual. We don’t think with our mind. The Bible says, “For as a man”—and I will add “woman”—
"as we think in our heart, so are we." So, when we think with our heart—if our heart is planted in the presence and grace of God, and the truth of God’s Word, then, we can trust how we feel. We can trust what we think, because how we feel and what we think is in alignment where God is.

God feels; if anybody understands how these paradoxes go in life, it's God. Remember the story in John—I think, it’s John 11—when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead?

**Kim:** Yes.

**Heath:** When you read that story, I don’t know about you, but I just—I catch a glimpse of a God who walks up to this tomb, and He says—in the text—"Lazarus, come forth." The Bible says, in the Song of Solomon, that love is stronger than death. I believe that it was the love that was in the voice of Jesus that raised Lazarus from the dead, but what does Jesus do before He raises Lazarus? The Bible says, in John 11:35, that Jesus weeps. That Greek word for wept is to cry vehemently; He is travailing.

Why would Jesus weep, knowing He is about to raise the guy from the dead? It shows me that God is okay with our feelings. He’s a feeling God; He’s a thinking God, and He is okay with that. When we find ourselves in a situation—like you were in hospice—where we’re like: “God, wait a second. Why aren’t You healing my friend?” and your heart is overwhelmed with emotion—I know how I felt in the hospital room; I know how my family feels when we’ve walked through our particular, specific valleys. God is okay with our questions; God is okay with our feelings—there’s nothing wrong with that.

But sometimes, what we think is a spiritual attack is often an invitation by God to sit at His table and feast. We’ve got to remember that, even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, it is only a shadow; and eternity is a long time, and this life is but a vapor. God understands our pain; He understands our questions. We’ve got to remember this life is not all that there is; and in that, we take comfort—in Him, we take comfort.

**Kim:** Absolutely; Heath, you mentioned identity a little earlier. There is a chapter in your book called “Does God Recognize You?” What effect can being in the valley have on our identity?

**Heath:** Oh, boy, I tell you what—we can lose our identity; and we can lose, not only who we are, but we can lose who God is to us, as well.

David starts off the psalm this way—he says what?—“The Lord is my king”?—not what he says. Does he say: “The Lord is the mighty warrior”?—no—“The Lord is the one who killed Goliath”?—that’s not what God/God’s Word tells us. David says, “The Lord is my shepherd.”
Now, remember—David recites the psalm—Psalm 23—when he is going through a situation that does not line up with God’s goodness. David, the one handpicked by God to become king, is running for his life because the earthly king, named King Saul, is trying to kill David.

David is, according to rabbinical tradition, starving to death. David, according to historical narratives, is in a forest—the forest of Hereth—surrounded by Saul’s soldiers, who want to kill him. There is every reason in the book for David to doubt the fact that God handpicked him to become king. It is in that moment—when David is starving, going through a very difficult season; his life being threatened—when he doesn’t say, but he would have [sung] Psalm 23.

He opens up the psalm by singing, “The Lord is my shepherd.” In the midst of a situation that was heartbreaking and devastating, David harked back to what it was like when life and faith was simple; and he says, “The Lord…my shepherd.”

Here’s what we learn about David—when he is walking through the valley of the shadow of death, he reminds himself, first and foremost, of who God is and who he is. He says, “The Lord is my shepherd.” Therefore, David acknowledges that he is merely a sheep in the valley and in the green pasture; because sometimes, the green pasture is more dangerous than the valley. We can lose our identity if our identity becomes more associated with our situation, but our identity should come from our relationship with God. When that happens, it’s amazing how our identity remains secure, regardless of what we think and feel.

**Kim:** Now, you do a great work with the Convoy of Hope. A few years ago, you talk about how you were in this impoverished nation, and you were taken to this prison that was filled with women to minister there. First of all, what were your expectations, walking into that place/that space? Then, what was the reality you found?

**Heath:** Yes; shortly before I joined the Convoy of Hope team, I went on this trip. In many ways, this is one of the experiences that was used to bend my heart towards Convoy of Hope—I discovered later. But yes; I walked into a country—I leave the country unnamed—and my expectations were this: “I’m getting ready to go to a prison in a third-world country.” It happened to be a prison for women. My expectations were—I expected to see poverty. I expected to see some suffering. I also expected to see an opportunity to, maybe, share the love of God with other people.

What I expected was certainly—it certainly paled in comparison to my experience. I remember walking in—it was devastating. I walked into a prison for females. And the rule was, when you were sentenced to prison, you had to pay to be there. If your family members could not bring you food to eat, you had to pay to be there. It was a corrupt prison; and what I found out—as soon as I walked into this prison, after signing in and talking with the warden, a mob of little children—most of them naked, filthy dirty, covered in feces and urine, and everything else—they just ran toward me.
Kim: Wow!

Heath: I remember having the thought: “Where in the world did all these kids come from? What crime did these kids commit?”

Kim: Right.

Heath: I had never seen anything like it. I asked some questions; what I found out was—the women, who had to pay to be in prison to serve their sentence: “How do you pay, if you come from poor families, and nobody can pay for you?” Well, many of them, unfortunately, resulted to a lifestyle of prison prostitution. The children, who ran up to me in the prison, were a product of that lifestyle.

These kids were born within the confines of a prison—didn’t know what life was like outside. All they knew was: “I wake up every day; and one after another, an individual comes in the little cell.” That was their experience; it was horrible. These kids were hungry, malnourished; they were filthy.

When all of these kids came running up to me, I’ll confess to you—and it’s—I’m frankly embarrassed and ashamed of what I was thinking and feeling—but all these children came running up to me. After thinking, “Where did these kids come from?” the second thought I had was: “These kids are filthy. They’ve got to be covered in parasites and diseases,” and they ran up to me. They started grabbing onto me, and I was nervous. I thought: “I may get sick. I may—I certainly don’t want to take home a disease.”

Within probably a few seconds, I quickly realized how ridiculous that was. I quickly realized how: “Here I am, coming to this space to love these people—to give them some gifts/to share the love of Christ in a tangible way—and here I am, doing the very thing that the love of Christ wouldn’t do.” I was concerned about something frivolous. Within a few seconds, I realized how ridiculous I was.

I got down on the ground and let these kids crawl all over me. [Laughter] We had fun; you know? There is nothing like wrestling 50 kids at one time. They are sticking their hands in my nose, and in my ears, and in my mouth. [Laughter] It was the best thing; and at the same time, it was beautiful.

I have to tell you what, Kim—I learned an awful lot about the love of God that day from those kids. I went there to show them God. I think I left there, equally, having been shown God by them. I was a stranger, and they took me in. We were able to give them some presents and share the gospel with them, but I quickly realized that God is a compassionate God. Sometimes, in order to teach us some truths—sometimes, God takes us into unusual circumstances and situations.
I wish I could have brought every one of those kids home. Obviously, I couldn’t; but I will say this: “What they did that day and the love they showed me, I’ll never be the same; but I never looked at God the same either.”

If you think about it, that’s what we are like when we come to God. Isaiah 53 says, “Our righteousness is like filthy rags.” There is nothing—and I mean no disrespect against these children, because they were beautiful—but we have nothing to offer a holy, and high, and exalted God. When we come to God, we are like those kids, who have nothing to offer. They had nothing to offer me. Yet, we’re that way when we come to God; and yet, God says: “You are beautiful. You’re stunning.

Kim: Yes.

Heath: “I love you.” Whether we’re in the green pasture or the valley, God still loves who we are.

[Studio]

Bob: Well, we’ve been listening to a portion of Kim Anthony’s conversation with Heath Adamson. This is from Episode 6 of her podcast, which is called Unfavorable Odds. Again, if you’d like to hear the entire podcast—hear Heath share his testimony, hear what he learned about God from playing Hide and Seek with his kids—and he’s got some pretty good thoughts on the portion of Psalm 23, where David says, “My cup overflows” and where he talks about his head being anointed with oil—all of that is available when you go, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. You can subscribe to Kim’s podcast or just listen to Episode 6 with Heath Adamson.

It would do all of us good, just to spend a little more time reflecting on Psalm 23; don’t you think?

Dave: Yes; I think it’s interesting what he did with it. He drew out something that often is missed is—when you’re in the valley of the shadow of death, you think God is far away; and you’re there because you’ve disappointed Him, and its sort of judgment. And yet, what we find from the truth of the Word of God, in that psalm and other places, is He is right there. You’re not there because of judgment. It’s a broken world; there’s pain—you’re going to be there.

Actually, what I love—he ended with is: “God is speaking to you, in the valley, of your value and how precious you are to Him.”

Ann: I think, often, we miss that part. We were in such a dark place in the valley that we’re not even listening to God. I love that he’s saying, “God’s speaking, so listen.”

Bob: That’s good. Again, I want to encourage listeners to listen to the entire podcast—Kim’s conversation with Heath Adamson. I think it’s about 45/50 minutes long. Kim talks
with Heath about what David means when he says, “My cup overflows,” or “God anoints my head with oil,”—what is all of that about?—and then, Heath talks about what he learned about God from playing Hide and Seek with his kids.

So, again, you can download or subscribe to the *Unfavorable Odds* podcast with Kim Anthony. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com for more information about how to subscribe or how to listen to the entire broadcast. We also have copies of the book Heath Adamson has written called *Grace in the Valley: Awakening to God’s Presence When He Feels Far Away*. You can order the book from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order: 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word, “TODAY.”

I was reminded today of why Psalm 23 is such a beloved psalm and the rich vivid imagery in that psalm. David Robbins, the president of FamilyLife®, is here with us. There’s a lot for our soul in this psalm; isn’t there?

**David:** Yes; because in a broken world, we will walk through these types of valleys; and God prepares the table for us in that dark valley. This conversation just made me start going through a rolodex of God’s faithfulness in dark times in my life.

One that just kind of kept sticking, that I haven’t thought about in a while, was remembering the first ultrasound Meg and I ever looked at. Sure enough, you saw that technician’s face kind of go slowly into a concerned look and, then, there certainly was no heartbeat. She walked out of the room, so that she wouldn’t be the one to communicate it; but the doctor would.

Then, you fast forward a few years; and it was the second ultrasound we’ve ever had. There was a similar look; she left the room. We were like: “What is going on this time? Everything looks okay”; but it led to this whole conversation around: “Something’s showing up that could be this possibility of a disease called Cystic Fibrosis.” Sure enough, our first son was born with Cystic Fibrosis.

Driving away from that doctor’s office that day, knowing the possibility and all the tests we were about to do to see if that was it, I remember being overwhelmed/a little numb, wanting to respond in real faith; but what I knew to draw from felt a little shallow. Then, all of a sudden, like out of the blue, verses I don’t think I ever would have known or ever memorized—these verses started being listed off. I spent the next few weeks—and God was just giving me glimpses of Him, glimpses of what He views time as, glimpses of eternal perspective in ways that I, otherwise, would have *never* known.

Ford is thriving right now; doing well, as a 12-year-old. But I look back at that time—and certainly, having my first child was a joy—I really look back at it and go, “I experienced God in ways, in that valley and unknown, more than I’ve ever experienced Him.”

**Bob:** Yes; He had prepared the table for you there; hadn’t He?
David: Yes.

Bob: Yes; thank you, David.

Let me, again, thank those of you who have made today’s program possible. We have a group of listeners, who, from time to time, will get in touch with us and make donations to support the ongoing work of this ministry. In fact, we’ve got Legacy Partners, who donate monthly so that people in their community and hundreds of thousands of people all around the world can hear FamilyLife Today. They help cover the cost of producing and syndicating this daily radio program. If you are one of our FamilyLife donors, “Thank you for your support.”

If you are a regular listener, and you’d like to help make FamilyLife Today possible for others to hear, that’s what happens when you make an online donation at FamilyLifeToday.com or when you call to donate at 1-800-FL-TODAY. This week, if you’re able to help with a donation, we’d love to send you Scott Sauls book, Irresistible Faith. We talked with Scott earlier this week, and we think you’ll find this a helpful book as you seek to winsomely live out your faith in this culture. The book is our gift to you, again, when you donate, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com or when you call to donate at 1-800-FL-TODAY. Thanks for your partnership with us. We hope to hear from you.

And we hope you have a great weekend. I hope you and your family are able to worship together in your local church this weekend. And I hope you can join us back on Monday. Ron Deal will be here. We will hear a conversation he had, not long ago, with a husband and wife from Atlanta. They’re in a blended marriage, and they talk about some of the challenges they've experienced trying to forge a strong second marriage. I hope you can tune in for that conversation.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. Have a great weekend. We will see you Monday for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

We are so happy to provide these transcripts to you. However, there is a cost to produce them for our website. If you’ve benefited from the broadcast transcripts, would you consider donating today to help defray the costs?

Copyright © 2019 FamilyLife. All rights reserved.

www.FamilyLife.com