

The Lord Cares for Me

A self-study with stories and thoughts
on Psalm 23



Multi-Language Publications

Bringing the Word to the World

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Chapter 3

The LORD lifts me up

The LORD is my shepherd ... He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths for the honor of his name (Psalm 23:1,3).

The story of DeShawn

DeShawn got tough already when he was a boy. He grew up in a tough neighborhood in Chicago. Too many young men in the neighborhood had no job. Too many young men in the neighborhood had guns. The way you fit in was to become part of somebody's group, one of the gangs, and you protected each other.

DeShawn committed his first crime when he was twelve years old. He stole a purse from an old woman who lived in the neighborhood. He grabbed her as she was walking back to her apartment from the corner store. She had no way to defend herself against his strength or his speed. He ripped the purse strap right off her arm and ran away. He bought himself a new pair of basketball shoes with the money he pulled from her purse.

As DeShawn got older, he got into bigger crimes. He became a seller for a local marijuana dealer. He broke into a liquor store one night. He took as much cash as he could find and as much booze as he could carry. He was trying to impress the older boys in the neighborhood who were even tougher than he was. He was also scaring his mother terribly by his attitude and behavior.

DeShawn's mother, LaDonna, worried about him more and more. DeShawn's father had left soon after the boy was born, and so DeShawn had never had a strong male role model in his life. The tough teens of the neighborhood had been his models—and they were models of bad behavior. By the time he was fourteen,

DeShawn had dropped out of school and just hung out in the neighborhood. He was on the street with his gang or on the playground basketball courts more than he was ever at home.

One day, LaDonna was talking to a friend, a woman named Shanice, about her problems with DeShawn. Shanice said, “Let me introduce you to Terrell. Maybe he can help.”

Terrell was a man who commanded respect. He had played basketball for the University of Michigan, and after college came back to his old neighborhood in Chicago. He ran a downtown gym, which provided him a good income. And he gave back to the neighborhood by letting local youth use the basketball court in his gym in the late night hours—if they obeyed his rules. They had to be respectful and polite—not just when they were in his gym, but always. He had a habit of making the rounds and checking up on them around the neighborhood. And they had to stay in school; no drop-outs allowed.

Terrell would play ball with the boys, and coach them on their skills. And if they worked hard at

school and got okay grades, he would help them fill out college applications and apply for scholarships. Several of the boys who went through Terrell's gym had gone to college on basketball scholarships. Terrell called his gym "The Home of Eagles." On one wall of the basketball court he had these words painted in large letters: "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31). To be one of Terrell's "eagles" was something special. And thanks to Shanice, DeShawn got a personal visit from Terrell. Terrell invited DeShawn to play ball at his gym.

DeShawn started going to school again. (That was one of Terrell's rules: If you don't go to school, you can't come into the gym.) Terrell started to lean on DeShawn to change his behavior. He caught him with weed in his backpack and made DeShawn flush it down the toilet. "If I ever catch you with this again, ever hear you're selling this stuff again, you're out of this gym forever. You hear me?" Terrell scolded.

When he found DeShawn fighting in the locker room with one of the other boys, Terrell dragged them both back into the gym and

made them run sprints back and forth until they could hardly walk anymore. “Don’t you mess with me,” Terrell said. “I’m trying to turn you into actual men. Quit acting like stupid animals.”

Terrell did Bible studies with the boys and got them to pray with him. Terrell was a Christian man, and he wanted these young men to know the God who made them, the Lord who saved them. He wanted their lives to give glory to God and be useful to people. He taught them about Jesus, who died like a criminal to take away the sins of all people on earth, even our most criminal sins. He told them how Jesus rose to life again after he was dead, as a promise that we too would rise up again after our lives on earth end.

DeShawn grew close to Terrell, trusted him more and more. He told Terrell there were things on his mind that bothered him a lot. “If you’ve got sins weighing you down, DeShawn, you need to confess them.” DeShawn confessed about how he had mugged the old lady and stole her purse, and how he had broken in and robbed the liquor store. These were things he now felt awful about.

“DeShawn, Jesus forgives your sins,” Terrell said. “That is why he came and bled and died—for sinners like me and you. And he wants to put you on the right path.”

Terrell thought for a moment, then asked, “Do you know where that lady lives?”

“Yeah, she’s in an apartment building not far from me and my mom.”

“We’re going to go to her. You’re going to make it right with her ... and with the owner of the liquor store. And if either of them wants to press charges against you – even now a couple years later – you are going to stand up like a man and accept whatever punishment comes. Do you understand?”

DeShawn nodded. He was scared ... but he was also relieved. His heart felt like it had been cleaned out with a hose and could beat loud and strong again.

Terrell went with DeShawn to talk to the lady in his neighborhood and to the owner of the liquor store.

When Terrell asked the lady if she wanted to press charges, she said no. “But I could use someone to help me with errands,” she said. DeShawn was all smiles and said he’d be glad to help. He became like a grandson to the old woman.

When Terrell asked the liquor store owner if he wanted to press charges, he thought for a minute. “I don’t know,” he said. “I respect that this young man is coming to me to confess his crime, but he did a lot of damage.”

“Sir, if you’d let me,” DeShawn said, “I will work for you until I’ve paid back double for everything I broke or took.” There was honesty in DeShawn’s eyes, and the store owner was impressed.

“Yeah, okay,” the store owner said. And DeShawn came to work for him ... and kept working for him even after he’d paid off his debt.

DeShawn stayed in school and got to play on the basketball team for two years. College scouts were impressed by his play, and with Terrell’s help he got a college scholarship lined up for a school in Indiana.

DeShawn came running into Terrell's gym when he got his letter from the college about the scholarship. "Guess what the best part is!" DeShawn said, and could not stop jumping up and down.

"What's the best part, DeShawn?"

"The team at Southern Indiana – they're the Eagles! I get to be an Eagle!"



Terrell hugged him. "You have indeed become an eagle, young man. The Lord has lifted you up. Remember that always: 'Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles' (Isaiah 40:31). God is the one giving you strength now.

Stay on the right path, stay true to his name. You're not a criminal young man anymore, DeShawn. You're a Christian man. You live with the name of Christ in your heart and you show him to others by what you do."

When the fall of that year came, Terrell helped LaDonna pack up DeShawn's things and drive him to school in Indiana. They left right after church on a Sunday.

The lesson: The LORD lifts us up

David's psalm, Psalm 23, described what God did for him. David said, "The LORD lifts me up. He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths for the honor of his name."

In each of our lives, the Lord is constantly working to lift us up and turn our lives in the right direction. The right direction is when we are living in a way that honors God. We can't live lives like that by our own power. On our own we are sinners who tend to sink further into our own sins – into harmful attitudes and bad behaviors. Some of us sink even to the lowest of crimes.

But when God gets hold of us, he lifts us up. In one of his other psalms, David said it this way: "The LORD ... lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a

new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God” (Psalm 40:2-3). It’s like we were stuck in slimy muck of our own sinful lives, and God has pulled us up out of that, cleaned us up, and gives us solid ground to stand on. When we see what God has done for us, we just want to jump and sing for joy. And we want to live our lives in a way that is honorable, a way that honors God. And he guides us in right paths for the honor of his name.

Thank God for people in your life who have been like Terrell was to DeShawn – people that God has used to reach out to you and lift you up, set you on a right path. And look around you; see what opportunities you can see. Now that you are walking in right paths for the honor of Jesus’ name, you can be someone like Terrell, someone who provides help and Christian witness to others. Or even someone like LaDonna’s friend Shanice. If you can’t help someone entirely by yourself, maybe you can connect them to someone who can help – someone like your pastor or another Christian friend.

Without God, our lives have no strength. Oh, we can fake like we are strong, the way that

DeShawn tried to act tough as a teenager in his neighborhood. But that's not real strength. That's just bullying and sinfulness. Real strength comes from God, through Jesus and the forgiveness and life that he gives us. Another one of the psalms in the Bible says, "I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation" (Psalm 118:13-14).

Thank God that he has become your salvation, forgiving you for all your sins and crimes, through Jesus.

Honor God now with the life that you live – lean on him for your strength. For you are someone who now carries the name of Jesus Christ. You are a Christian.

The LORD has lifted you up. He has given you new strength. He guides you in the right paths for the honor of his name.

Chapter Three Test

1. Terrell's gym had a verse from the Bible book of Isaiah painted on one wall. The verse read: "Those who hope in the LORD will renew their _____. They will soar on wings like _____."
2. Terrell was a Christian man, and he wanted the young men who came to his gym to know the God who _____ and who _____ them. He wanted their lives to give _____ to God and be useful to people.
3. Terrell taught others about _____, who died like a criminal to take away the _____ of all people on earth. He also told them how _____ rose to _____ again after he was dead, as a promise that we will live again after our lives on earth end.
4. When DeShawn told Terrell about two of the crimes that still bothered his conscience, Terrell told him, "Jesus _____ your sins." He also made sure DeShawn was ready to make things _____ with the people he had hurt.

5. Terrell told DeShawn, “You’re a Christian man. You live with the _____ of _____ in your heart and you show him to others by what you do.”
6. In Psalm 23, David said, “The _____ lifts me up. He gives me new _____. He guides me in the _____ paths for the honor of his _____.”
7. We can’t live good lives by our own _____. On our own we are _____ who tend to sink further into our own _____.
8. In Psalm 40, David said, “The LORD lifted me out of the slimy _____, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a _____ and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a _____ _____ in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.”
9. You will want to thank God for _____ in your life that God has used to reach out to you and _____ you up, setting you on a _____ path.

10. Now that you are walking in _____
paths for the honor of Jesus' _____, you
can be someone who provides help and
_____ witness to others.

(Check your answers on page 123)