

back getting dragged, it's hard to know whether we're being killed or saved.

Sometimes you don't know whether God is delivering you or doing you in. But He has put you in a place where there's room for only one God—and it isn't you.

HE GIVES YOU BACK YOUR SOUL

All this is because God has a purpose.

And what's His goal? What is God's reason for the crises He creates in our lives that force us to lie down?

David tells us: "He restores my soul." God wants to give you back your soul.

Your soul is who you are, your personhood, your identity. I'm not you, and you're not me, not because our body structures are different but because we have different souls. The soul is the "you." And when you become confused about who you are, and you lose your sense of well-being, your sense of purpose, your sense of direction, your sense of hope—then your soul needs restoring.

That process takes time. It's like making your cell phone lie down in the recharger after you've used it and talked on it all day. You make it lie down so it can get new energy, new strength. If you don't, it may not work for you tomorrow.

And the restoration process often must begin with pain. Antique furniture is restored only after the sanding process is finished, and so it is with us. The sanding process is painful, but oh, the restoration looks magnificent!

It's like making a wrinkled shirt lie down on the ironing board, then you apply the hot iron and steam to that shirt, and the heat takes out the wrinkles. It takes heat to get out the stuff that doesn't belong there. Only then does the shirt look good and you're ready to wear it. God wants you to look good on Him, but He must make you lie down so He can apply the fire to your life and smooth out the wrinkles.

WE ALL NEED IT

There's not a Christian you know who hasn't needed a restored soul. There's not a person in your church who hasn't run dry spiritually at times, and been wrung out, and felt that it's not worth it, that it's too tough. Every believer you know has at some point been ready to throw in the towel.

David doesn't say that if the Lord is your Shepherd, you'll never need a restored soul. Rather, he shows us that if the Lord is your Shepherd, He'll restore your soul when you need it, even if He has to make you lie down, even if He has to create a scenario to force you to recognize your depend-

ence upon Him, and He is then free to renew you spiritually. The Lord can do that, the Lord wants to do that, and the Lord will do that for His sheep.

He puts you in a rest mode—still waters, green pastures. It may take trials to get you there. It may take struggles to get you there. It may take successes to get you there. But whatever it takes, it becomes clear that you can't get there on your own.

In that position He restores or gives you back a renewed sense of hope, a renewed sense of purpose, a renewed sense of being. He gives you back your life.

AFRAID TO LIE DOWN

One of the ways I paid my way through my first year of seminary was by being a lifeguard and water safety instructor. I taught people how to swim, and I developed a pretty good routine for doing it.

Nonswimmers are often afraid of the water, so you have to get them acclimated to it—you splash a little water on them, then you get them to put their head down in the water. Then comes the big one: They lay out on the water and float.

Getting splashed was only a little irritating for them at worst, and putting their head in the water wasn't really so

difficult as long as they could feel their feet firmly planted on the bottom of the pool. But lying flat on the water, with nothing else beneath them, and with no control—now that was often a problem. They were thinking, *What if I go under?*

So I stretched out my arms in the water beneath them, and I assured them, “You’ll be in my arms; I’ll hold you up.” Then they could feel secure to lie down on the insecurity of water.

A lot of us are scared to lie down; we wonder how we’ll ever make it if we’re no longer in control. God is telling us we won’t learn how to swim in this life until we’re no longer in control, until we understand that it’s His arms, and not our ability, that holds us up. He tells us, “I am your ability. I am your sufficiency. I am your surplus. I am your Shepherd, and I’ll meet your needs even when you’re drained of life.”

FOR SOMETHING NEW

When God lets everything collapse on you, it’s because He’s getting ready to do something new with you. When God allows things to be destroyed around you, it’s because He’s preparing to build something. When He implodes your life, it’s because He’s ready for a new structure to go up. He

wants you to rise up with a new soul, a new insight, a new you. He wants to spiritually rejuvenate you.

We're like a baby with a soiled diaper, and the mother who cleans the mess and changes the diaper is like the Lord, our Shepherd. As messy as we are, that doesn't turn Him away, because the Shepherd loves his sheep. God in His grace will make you lie down, pull out His wipes of grace, clean you up, powder you down, then lotion you up...and then it will be time to play again, because that's what grace does. Grace gives people back their souls, clean and fresh.

Maybe you're in the checkout line at this moment—you're almost ready to check out on God, to check out on the church, to check out on your faith. You're tired of trying, too discouraged to keep going. But before you give it all up, understand what David is saying.

God has you in this place because He's making you lie down. He has you flat on your back so you can tell Him, "I need you as I've never needed You before." God has caused you to lie down in green pastures, and led you by still waters, because there's a delivery coming on. And the delivery will restore your soul.

So don't check out just yet. Relinquish your self-sufficiency, your self-dependence. Say to Him, "Here I am, Lord." And get ready to see what your good Shepherd will do for you....