

Surely Goodness and Mercy

The Author and Composer: John W. Peterson (1921–2006)



*"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." - Psalm 23:6*

🎵 "Surely Goodness and Mercy" Lyrics

Chorus

Surely goodness and mercy shall **follow me**, All the days, all the days of my life; **Surely goodness and mercy** shall follow me, All the days, all the days of my life. And I shall **dwell in the house of the Lord forever**, And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Stanzas

1. I will **fear no evil**, for **Thou art with me**, And Thy **rod** and Thy **staff**, they **comfort** me;
Thou preparest a table in the **presence of those** Who **trouble me**; And my cup
runneth over with blessings Thou Dost bestow.
2. He makes me to **lie down in green pastures**, He leads me **beside the still waters**;
He restores my soul, my soul, and **doth lead me** In the **paths of righteousness**, For
His great name's sake, **His great name's sake**.

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Background and Authorship

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- **Born:** Hibbing, Minnesota, USA.
- **Life:** John W. Peterson was one of the most prolific and popular American composers of sacred music in the 20th century. He was not just a lyricist, but a skilled composer who often wrote both the words and music to his hymns. His work defined the sound of evangelical music during the mid-to-late 20th century.
- **Career:** Peterson served in the Air Force during World War II, where he began writing music. He later attended Moody Bible Institute and served as the music director for various churches and Christian organizations. He founded Singspiration, a prominent Christian music publishing company, and authored over 1,000 songs, many of which became standard hymns and choral pieces (e.g., "It Took a Miracle," "Heaven Came Down").
- **Contribution to the Hymn:** "Surely Goodness and Mercy" was written in **1958**. Peterson masterfully took the final and most famous verses of Psalm 23 and adapted them into a simple, melodic, and memorable hymn, ensuring that the comfort of the Psalm could be easily sung and internalized.

The Hymn's History

- **Source Material:** The hymn is a near-direct quotation and slight expansion of **Psalm 23:5-6**.
- **Popularity:** Due to Peterson's standing in the Christian music world, the hymn quickly gained immense popularity. It became a staple in churches, funeral services, and Christian gatherings because its message offers deep comfort, assurance, and hope, directly translating the timeless, universal message of the shepherd Psalm into a congregational song.

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Scriptural Significance (KJV)

The hymn's strength lies in its faithful quotation of the last two verses of the most beloved passage in the Bible, **Psalm 23** (KJV), which is the passage upon which the entire hymn is based.

- **Theme: God's Provision and Protection (Stanza 1)** The image of the rod and staff for comfort and the prepared table in the presence of enemies comes from:

"Thou **preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies**: thou anointest my head with oil; my **cup runneth over**. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will **dwell in the house of the Lord for ever**." — **Psalm 23:5-6** (KJV)
(Note: Peterson rearranges the order to fit the music.)

- **Theme: Guidance and Restoration (Stanza 2)** This stanza pulls from the beginning of the Psalm, painting the picture of the Lord as the Shepherd:

"He **maketh me to lie down in green pastures**: he leadeth me **beside the still waters**. He **restoreth my soul**: he leadeth me in the **paths of righteousness for his name's sake**." — **Psalm 23:2-3** (KJV)

- **Theme: Eternal Dwelling (Chorus)** The core assurance that "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever" is taken verbatim from the promise of the Psalm:

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and **I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever**." — **Psalm 23:6** (KJV)

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✨ Uplifting Lore and History

The lore surrounding John W. Peterson and this hymn is one of **comfort found in simplicity** and **powerful, lasting musical influence**.

- **Music of Hope:** Peterson's work, including "Surely Goodness and Mercy," provided the soundtrack for many of Billy Graham's crusades and other major evangelical outreach efforts. His music was designed to be instantly accessible and emotionally uplifting, ensuring that the theological truths could be grasped by the masses. The consistent success of his hymns is a testament to his ability to write with **clarity and heartfelt sincerity**.
- **A Personal Source of Strength:** Like many of his songs, Peterson wrote this hymn not just for the public, but out of his own deep reliance on Scripture. The 23rd Psalm is famously a source of strength during times of loss, fear, and transition. By setting the final verses to a memorable tune, Peterson essentially created a musical prayer that people could rely on when they needed the assurance of God's constant, pursuing love (the idea that goodness and mercy "follow" the believer).
- **The Shepherd's Pursuit:** The hymn beautifully emphasizes the uplifting meaning of the KJV word "**follow**" in the line, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me." In the original Hebrew and in the context of the Psalm, the word means to **pursue** or **chase after**—like the Shepherd ensuring that not only is the path set, but that His blessings are actively running after the sheep. This hymn turns the passive act of receiving comfort into the active assurance of God's constant, vigorous pursuit of the believer.