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The Shepherd and His Sheep

Psalm 23



TOPIC:

“The Shepherd and His Sheep”

Psalm 23

VERSE DISCOVERY: Psalm 23 (KJV, Public Domain)

Prepare

- Prepare yourself to be knowledgeable about the shepherd/sheep relationship. Research the many ways of the farmer/shepherd and the care they have for their sheep. What happens if one gets lost? What happens if one falls on their back? What is the best way to lead a sheep, feed them, and care for them?
- Present either digital or printed pictures to support any facts or answers to any of the questions you may have found. Students will then have a clearer understanding of not only what a farmer/shepherd does for the sheep and the nature of the sheep themselves, but it makes for an easy transition into the lesson.
- Alternatively, or in conjunction with, bring into the class wool yarn, wool laundry balls, a blanket, jacket, etc. made of wool. Ask students about its materials, what and how it is made, and wait for answers.

If you are familiar with the art of crocheting, knitting, or weaving, a live demonstration may be a nice addition to the lesson, especially if the hands of your students are interested in participating and learning.

Explore – Full Lesson Available on pages 6-13

Psalm 23

Unless one is raised on a farm or exposed to similar situations, most modern students will not understand the dedication and devotion it takes to raise livestock. Farmers/shepherds rarely get a day off because they have to be in constant attendance for the care of their animals (unless they could find a suitable caregiver to be a step-in in their stead), and this goes for sheep as well.

Ask your students if they have ever visited a farm before. What were some of the things they observed? What animals did they see? What about the animals' habitats, how did they live (ex. in a coop, a pen, etc.)? How were they being fed and cared for? Does the farmer have to do special things for each of the animals (ex. shoeing a horse, shearing sheep, etc.)?



In all of this, we see that it takes a lot of hard work to take care of animals. The farmers must really love their animals to do so much for them. In today's lesson, David recognized God's love and care for him by identifying God as a Shepherd (similar to a farmer) and himself as a sheep, and in Psalm 23 he lists several beautiful ways God takes care of us.

In verse 1, he wrote, "**The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.**" (Display a picture of a shepherd or use a cane, staff, or something similar as a demonstration).

Ask if anybody can tell what it means to be in want? We're not talking about wanting something like a new bike, but to be in want in terms of there is something lacking, especially when dealing with the basics of life. With God as his Shepherd, David knew he had everything he needed. In his relationship with God, he saw God as the One who provided for and took excellent care of His sheep.

Then, David said, "**He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters**" (v. 2; show pictures highlighting green pastures and still waters). How many have been to a lake or pond? To an ocean or beach? What are the differences in the water (one is usually quite still while the other moves a lot)? Did you know that sheep are very fearful animals? Things that move suddenly or loud noises would frighten them. But a shepherd is in tune with the places the sheep will best find rest, peace, and refreshment. That's what Jesus does for each of us. He said, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. . ." (John 16:33). He gives us peace in our hearts that we cannot find anywhere else.

Next, David said, "**He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake**" (v. 3; show a picture of different pathways. Make one look treacherous and the other look beautiful, calm, easy, and peaceful). Do you know that sheep sometimes wander off and go on the wrong path (show the treacherous pathway picture)? At that time, the shepherd will lead them back to the right path. The Bible says in the book of Isaiah, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way . . ." (Isaiah 53:6).

Every human on earth has walked down the wrong path and needed to find their way to the right path (Romans 3:23). Jesus, the Shepherd, helps us with that when we choose to follow Him and not go our own way. He leads us in "**paths of righteousness**" (show the beautiful, easy path picture).

In all of the walking and living we do, sometimes things can make us afraid (pull a small blanket over your eyes and peep over the top like you are afraid). Everybody is afraid sometimes, but David felt confident that because God was His Shepherd, he did not have let fear stop him for God was with him. He said, "**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me**" (v. 4). Hebrews also gives us this great promise today: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (13:5) and Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). Isn't that a comforting thought to know that He is always with us?



In the last two verses, we learn more about the shepherd's care for the sheep and God's care for us (show a picture of a banqueting table). Have you ever attended a big banquet? In these places, tables are spread out providing an abundance of food for the guests to feast on. David said of God, "**Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over**" (vs. 5).

Every day, there are many ways God abundantly provides for us. Just using this day alone, for example, how many blessings can you thank God for today (you may have to lead younger ones in coming up with ideas about blessings)?

Wow, God sure does a lot for us in taking care of us! He really is a good Shepherd! No wonder David said, "**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. . .**" (v. 6a) because he could count his blessing too, and what God has already done for him.

David knew God's love for him was real. When he looked back over his life, he knew God, as the wonderful Shepherd, has taken very good care of him, and he could rejoice. He could rejoice in not only what God has already done for him, but he could also rejoice in what God was going to do for him in the future. He said, "**I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever**" (v. 6b; show a picture of the sky or something that may resemble the idea of heaven).

Did you know that when we have Jesus as our good Shepherd (John 10:11), we have this promise of heaven, too. If we follow Him as a faithful sheep, He will lead us to that heavenly place where we will dwell with Him forever. But we must follow His way. (Use this time to explain the way of salvation to your students).

Activities

- This beautiful psalm opens with David proclaiming, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" Psalm 23:1. How do you see God as the Shepherd of your life and how does that inspire you as His sheep? In what areas do you need to rest in the Shepherd's care? Use the **Kid's and Adult Journal Pages** found on site to record your responses.
- Younger students can identify with the concept of this lesson by using the **Draw the Scene** page found on site to draw a picture of Jesus, who is their true Shepherd, in the oval, and writing their name on the sheep.
- **Leading the Sheep Golf Game** – Play like you would golf but instead of holes in the ground, use shoeboxes or other small cardboard boxes with holes cut in the front (resembling a cartoon mouse hole). Boxes can be decorated and marked to show how many points each one is worth (also consider decorating or naming the boxes with examples from the lesson such as: green pastures, still waters, table of abundance, overflowing cup, or the house of the Lord).



To play the game, use wool laundry balls (to represent the sheep) and a plastic golf club, baseball bat, or something similar (to represent the shepherd's staff). Each participant's job is to lead/golf the sheep into one of these desired places. The player with the most points at the end of the game is the winner. But please note, we are all winners when we decide to follow Jesus, our ultimate shepherd. Make this game as simple or as elaborate as you like.

- Younger students can also design a paper bag puppet to look like a shepherd. Use a pipe cleaner to shape into the design of the staff.
- Alternative activities are available on site such as **Wordsearch, Crossword, Memory Verse, and more** for those who want to only work with printed materials.

Review

- Commit to memory the base verse from the lesson: ***"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Psalm 23:1***
- Fill out the review sheet provided (page 14)
- You could also use the **Sheep Golf Game** (above) to help with the lesson review. Simply add questions from the lesson for your students to answer in order to earn more tries to gain extra points.

Life

If you have not already, this week study to memorize all of Psalm 23. When times get tough, it will be there in your heart to help see you through dark days.

TOPIC:

“The Shepherd and His Sheep”

Psalm 23

VERSE DISCOVERY: Psalm 23 (KJV, Public Domain)

Psalm 23 is probably the most famous chapter in the entire Bible. It's one that children learn to recite from an early age. Yet, let's not take it for granted because of its familiarity. Rather, with child-like faith let us grasp the beauty of those blessed words that unfold before us in those six verses as David's description of God and His relationship with His people is made known in this poetically beautiful psalm.

THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD

Psalm 23:1a “The Lord is my shepherd . . .”

As a teenager, David knew exactly what it was to be a shepherd. His profession was to tend to his father's sheep (see 1 Samuel 16:11). Before the anointing oil from Samuel's flask dripped upon his head, his life was spent walking through the valleys and hills of the land, caring for, finding food for, and protecting the sheep that were put under his charge.

Now, no longer a teenager, but a king, David could look back at those experiences he had, his job, and his relationship with the sheep, and compose a beautiful song that celebrates God's ultimate care for us using the same Shepherd/sheep analogy. Words that will inspire the believing heart to see God as everything we could ever need no matter what life throws at us.

With that, David opens this psalm by penning the words, “**The LORD is my shepherd.**” As with David's pre-king occupation, a shepherd's job and life were spent in a selfless manner. The sheep dominated his day-in and day-out thinking. How to provide for them? Where to lead them? Are there any dangers ahead or behind them? The shepherd's life was also pretty much isolated. Leading the sheep often meant time away from home. Perhaps, when Samuel came to see and anoint this future king, that's why David's

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family forgot about the boy in the fields. He was always working and caring for the sheep and maybe he was hardly seen in their presence.

Looking back on those days it wasn't hard for David to see God as the ultimate Shepherd and himself counted as a sheep who is totally dependent on the care and the protection of the Shepherd. The description of God in the role as a shepherd actually predates David's time and is seen in books of the Bible in the time of Genesis (see Genesis 49:24). So, David's thinking along those lines is right up the alley with the patriarch Jacob/Israel when he too saw God in this fashion and referred to Him as such when discussing God's protection over Joseph when he was attacked by those who hated him.

As sheep, if left on their own, they will fall prey to so many elements of this world, be it animals who wanted to eat them, circumstances and weather that may threaten them or the lands where they graze. They are docile animals awaiting the leadership of the shepherd. As such, David too saw his own relationship with the Lord in the same manner. **"LORD"** in all caps stands for Yahweh, the name Israel identified as the holiest of all in reference to the only true God alone. So, there is no mistake about who David says is his true Shepherd. **"My shepherd,"** he says, is God alone (80:1; 100:3; Ezekiel 34:11-12).

I SHALL NOT WANT

Psalm 23:1b-6 ". . . I shall not want. 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. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. 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."

Here, my friends, is where we get to savor the sweetness found in this holy relationship. This is where our desire should be increased for Him as the former shepherd turned king whets our appetites with this description of God's abundant love over us both now and forever.

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This short, but powerful psalm, inspires us to see ourselves physically under the spiritual promises written within. These illustrations that David paints with his words give us these vivid pictures of God’s tender loving care, in action, over His sheep.

“I shall not want,” David speaks, showing us the extension of the Shepherd’s nurturing watchfulness for His flock of sheep. Being a member of the Shepherd’s divine keep, David saw there is nothing lacking in God’s provision for His people or in our relationship with Him. Did not the Apostle Paul state in the book of Philippians, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus,” (4:19). It is by the hand of the Lord that we are sustained and maintained. It is by His loving care we are thoroughly and completely cared for and provided for. The Bible says, “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly,” (Psalm 84:11). Anything we **NEED** (not our wants, as many seem to think) for our Christian journey, God is our unfailing provider. God is for His people – Always! We do not serve a God of lack. He will provide! Whatever you **NEED**, God’s got it! God is attentive to the state of His people, His sheep. He does not leave them wanting for care. He not only provides, but He does so much more . . .

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.” In this reference, David saw in one’s relationship with God, peace that can’t be found anywhere else. The phrases **“lie down”** and **“still waters”** show the sheep being unafraid due to the shepherd’s attentive leading. Sheep are naturally fearful animals, but these references show the sheep are at rest, at peace in His presence.

The Bible gives us many references to the peace that we find in our relationship with God. Some of my favorites are:

- **Isaiah 26:3** “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”
- **John 14:27** “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”
- **John 16:33** “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”
- **Philippians 4:6-7** “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God,

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which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

All of these solidify the type of relationship the sheep have with the shepherd, the type of relationship we experience in Jesus Christ, our ultimate Shepherd (John 10:11). Many are grasping at various things and pursuits to fill their life with peace. This peace and serenity can only be found under the protection of the Shepherd.

“He restoreth my soul.” The need for restoration means one’s energies have been spent. This life can wear people down, especially when they are insistent on going their own way. As the shepherd leads his sheep to refreshing places, God stands ready to replenish the weary and broken soul. Often in life, as Isaiah put it, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way . . .” (Isaiah 53:6), and the soul is in need of being restored.

David knew personally and could speak from experience what it was to wander away from the Shepherd spiritually and to feel the need to be brought back into a correct soul position with God. He prayed in Psalm 51, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit” (v. 12) after he was confronted about his sin involving Bathsheba. Our ultimate restoration of the soul can only be found in Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd.

“He leadeth me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” God will guide the soul that chooses to follow Him to the right path. When we were children, most of us know what it was like to partake in a good game of “Follow the Leader.” Anything the leader does or says is to be matched by the other participants. God gives direction for the purpose of leading His people who will choose to follow Him on the right path that will lead to glory for, “All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies,” (Psalm 25:10).

Finding rest for your soul doesn’t just happen by being in green meadows, but it happens by staying on the true and tried course already laid out for us through God’s Word. Jeremiah 6:16a says, “Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. . . .” Righteousness is the good way. Righteousness is the path walked before by others and it is the path that will lead us to life eternal. Unfortunately, for those whom Jeremiah spoke to, the

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latter part of that verse says, “But they said, We will not walk therein,” (Jeremiah 6:16b). They chose to butt up against the Lord’s leading like stubborn goats instead of following His shepherding as faithful sheep should.

This type of combative attitude will not lead one to glory, nor will it bring glory to His “**name.**” God’s name is to be glorified in our lives (see Psalm 29:1-2; Romans 11:36; 1 Corinthians 10:31; 1 Peter 4:11). His name is honored when we live for Him. Previously, I wrote:

“Too many go through their day without ever considering the fact that, Hey, He is God, and He should be before all others. With that realization in hand, I want my life to reflect that great truth. I want every word, every action, and every thought to magnify the greatness of who He is and all of His glory. When I go about my day, I want people to see Him in me. Do I make mistakes? Oh, yeah! But I have a goal. I aspire to do better and to be better every day. God has been so good and wonderful to me, and I feel that as His child the least I can do is show Him the honor due Him.” (Honor God/Word for Life Says).

David recognized that as a sheep, he depended on the Shepherd to keep his feet walking on the right path. And as such, there is no “**fear**” in this sheep/Shepherd relationship. When the ways get dark and hard to travail; when the path becomes treacherous and enemies hide in crevices to try to attack - God, as the Shepherd, stands in protection mode over His sheep/people.

Once again, David could look back over his own life and see where God had previously delivered him. There was more than one time when David was being pursued by King Saul who hated him and wanted to kill him. Through the course of that running, David, in the time of his afflictions, wrote in Psalm 34, and said, “I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (v. 4). When he was on the run from his own son Absalom, who sought to take his life and his throne, David expressed confidence in God, saying, “I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about,” (Psalm 3:6). He may have been on the run from men at various times, but he was never far from God, he was never far from the Shepherd. His trust is in God who makes him feel safe no matter what is going on around him.

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So, he says, **“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me.”** The attendance of the Shepherd, even in the darkest of places, makes the sheep feel undeniably safe. “The LORD is my light and my salvation,” David proclaims in Psalm 27, “whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (v. 1).

Then, he goes on to say, **“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”** The shepherd’s rod and staff were used as tools of protection from enemies and for the sheep themselves. He could use it to defeat a ravenous creature that set its sights on having sheep for dinner, or he could use the hook of the staff to save the sheep when he himself wandered where he shouldn’t and fell. It has been proven throughout David’s life repeatedly that he could depend on God’s loving care in the same manner.

“Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” When the Shepherd is on guard (which God always is), it doesn’t matter who snarls at the sheep. The Shepherd not only is the comfort of His people, but He goes **“before”** them to protect them and to provide for them. Any good shepherd will not let his sheep wander into places without first checking the landscape ahead of them. He goes and examines the land and areas to not only abundantly provide for them but to also take stock if there is anything there that could cause harm to the sheep.

Please note: Some, when studying this passage, switch the way they view these remaining two verses from the picture of a shepherd to that of a host laying out a banquet table, which could easily be applied to this lesson as well. I will choose to stick along the lines of the shepherd analogy, keeping in line with David’s opening subject of God identified as the Shepherd and with this subject’s theme. Both support the text, and both can be viewed along the veins of God being a wonderful provider who gives extraordinary care to His people.

The phrase, **“Thou anointest my head with oil;”** depending on how you viewed the first part of this verse, its meaning would vary. In the hospitality-based culture of the ancient Hebrews, it was customary to anoint one’s head with oil, amongst other practices. Look at Jesus’ response when He went to Simon’s house and Simon failed to do the duty that was expected:

“And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with

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tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” (Luke 7:44-47).

These were ways to express honor and respect and help refresh one when coming into a house, particularly to a dinner or feast. But if we look at the anointing oil from the standpoint of being used by the shepherd instead of a host, it could be seen as being used for medicinal purposes and in other areas of care for the sheep (ex.as an insect repellent).

Either way you look at it, the “oil” represents care and devotion to the one to whom it is applied, which is what God does for His people.

“**My cup runneth over**” gives the impression of providing in abundance. God loves His people and has no problem supplying what they need. God never waivers in the care of His people and can be seen as a constant source of trust and rest.

“**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life**” expresses the idea of God’s faithful care in this life. God’s mercy, grace, and every loving attribute we can align to His holy name shows His “goodness” is alive and active even in our broken days. If you are reading this, you have experienced God’s goodness today. If you are hearing these words being taught to you, you have been a partaker of the gift He has blessed humanity with. God’s goodness leads one down the path closer to Him if they will but trust and follow it (Psalm 25:8).

God is good (see Psalm 100:5; Nahum 1:7; Matthew 19:17) and God does good (see Psalm 119:64; Genesis 1)! God cannot separate Himself from who He is and what He does!”

And in dealing with the life to come, David said, “**I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever**” which speaks of the assurance he has in God, knowing that as His child, as His sheep, as His people, he could look forward to spending eternity in the presence of God. There is a blessed future for the people of God. Whether you view God as a great and gracious host welcoming one to a banquet supper (compare Revelation 19:7-9) or as the Shepherd leading His people to quiet waters (compare Revelation 7:16-17), both speak of an eternity of being where He is, and the faithful followers of Christ are secured in that coming day because of His care for His sheep.

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“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” Isaiah 40:11

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Please Answer the Review Questions Below

1. **T or F.** Before he was king, David was the leader of his family.
2. **T or F.** Sheep are strong and courageous animals.
3. **T or F.** A shepherd’s job was to take constant care of the sheep.
4. What phrases show the sheep at rest and at peace in His presence?
A. Green Pastures B. Shadow of Death C. Still Waters D. Lie Down
5. What verse in the Bible shows Jesus as our Shepherd? Write it below.

6. **T or F.** Isaiah 53:6 says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way.”
7. **T or F.** The shepherd’s rod and staff were used to gathering fruit from high trees.
8. What two things did David say would follow him all the days of his life?
A. Truth B. Mercy C. Grace D. Goodness
9. **T or F.** God is seen as a shepherd as early as the book of Genesis.
10. What phrase did David write that speaks of an eternity spent in God’s presence, forever?

