

A Shepherd's Psalm

Psalm 23

MEMORY VERSE

PSALM 23:1

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A small balloon for each child, cotton balls, a toilet paper cardboard roll for each child, scissors, glue stick, and a black marker.

Brown clay (the kind that hardens when dry). If you don't have brown clay, substitute with another color. You will need enough for each child to make a small shepherd's staff.

A list of review questions for today's lesson.

ATTENTION GETTER!

Sheep Balloons

Each child will make a sheep. You will need a small balloon for each child, cotton balls, scissors, glue stick, a black marker, and a toilet paper cardboard roll for each child.

Have the children first cut the cardboard toilet paper roll into four equal pieces. With a black marker, color the outside of all four pieces black. Next, have each child blow up their balloon. With a glue stick, glue the four cardboard pieces as feet. Next draw eyes and a smile near the tie of the balloon. The actual tie can serve as the sheep's nose. After doing that, glue cotton balls around the balloon to give the sheep lots of wool. Use this craft to open a discussion of how we are like sheep, and **the Lord is our shepherd.**

LESSON TIME!

Psalm 23 is probably the best-loved and most widely known Psalm of all 150 Psalms. It has brought so much comfort to so many people over the centuries. Psalm 23 reveals the tender care and provision of God for His people as a loving Shepherd would tend His own special sheep. As we look at Psalm 23, let's reflect on God's care for us, for **the Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:1

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In many of David's other Psalms, he refers to God as "Lord," "King," "Rock" or "Shield." In Psalm 23, David captures the intimate and tender relationship he has with God—His shepherd.

David could understand the relationship between a shepherd and his sheep. Before he slew Goliath or became king, David spent many years tending sheep. Let's look at some of the characteristics of a shepherd's relationship to his sheep; then we'll look at our relationship to the Lord, our Shepherd.

A shepherd is everything to his sheep. He is a guide, physician, and protector. In Bible times, many held the occupation of shepherd. A shepherd lived with his sheep out in the countryside, open spaces. He traveled with the sheep, finding food and water for them. When he found good water for the sheep to drink, he scared away the wild animals so the sheep could drink safely.

When a sheep was lost, the shepherd would set his mind to find him. The shepherd carried sick sheep or lambs when they could not keep up with the rest of the flock. The sheep knew their shepherd's voice; they would respond to him when he called. If a stranger called out to them or tried to herd them, they would not

even move for him; or they would become confused and upset and start bumping into one another. The shepherd is like a good dad, who always does what is best for his family.

God gives us this picture that we might realize that He is the ultimate shepherd—the Great Shepherd. He is teaching us that we can fully depend on Him for everything—spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

Spiritually and emotionally, God satisfies our every need. In John 6, Jesus said, “I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes on me shall never thirst.” In John 4, Jesus said He was the Living Water: “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” Physically, God has promised to take care of us. He provides everything we need. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:2

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

Have you ever seen a beautiful valley with green pastures, still waters, and plenty of trees for shade? What a refreshing and peaceful scene! A good shepherd will lead his sheep to places like that, safe resting places with plenty of food and water. Living in this world can sometimes wear us out. We can trust in our shepherd, for He is good. He will lead us to safe places of rest. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:3

He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

The word restore can mean, “being brought back to its original form.” This could picture a lost sheep, found (restored) to the shepherd and the flock. This may also picture God’s work of renewal in our lives. In other words, when we are “running on empty” and need God’s help, the ministry of the Holy Spirit renews us, strengthening us and replenishing us.

Sometimes we get so busy or distracted with things in this life that we need our shepherd to bring us back again to the “quiet waters”—that place of rest where we can spend time with Him in prayer or study of the Word. In this place, as we seek His forgiveness, peace, and direction, God hears us. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

Our shepherd leads us in “paths of righteousness.” He leads His flock on the “right path”—a path that leads to eternal life. Why would we want to go on any of those other darker, rougher paths the world has to offer? The paths the world follows will lead to destruction. May we not stray from God’s “right path.” It is when we stray from that path that we get into trouble. Stray sheep were prey to the enemy. Satan is described in the Bible as a “roaring lion” seeking whom He may devour. Let’s stay on our Shepherd’s path and be safe! **The Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:4

Yea, 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.

Walking in the valley of the shadow of death is a hard thing to picture if you have not had any real trouble in your life before. The valley can represent any time of trouble that affects us—imminent danger, illness, financial crisis, or poor relationships.

What did David say about those situations? “I will fear no evil; for You are with me.” What a comfort it is to know that God is with us in time of trouble and promises to help us. No matter what dark path we have to walk on, God will be there with us and for us; and He is stronger than anything or anyone we have to face! In Hebrews 13:5,6 we read, “...I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” **The Lord is our shepherd.**

A good shepherd is armed and ready to protect his sheep. A shepherd's rod is for defense; he uses it to protect his sheep from anyone or anything trying to attack. The staff is for control. Sometimes, the shepherd would have to discipline the sheep—to help straying sheep get back onto the right path. If we begin to stray, Hebrews 12 says that God deals with us as sons and will correct us. He is not opposed to using chastening (discipline), for He loves us and wants what is best for us. Because we know of His love, we can feel secure in the care of our Great Shepherd.

Shepherd's Staff

A shepherd would always have a staff to help him with his sheep. A shepherd uses His staff to guide, direct, discipline, and correct. How does God guide and direct us? Does God discipline and correct us? How does that show us that He loves us? How is it a comfort to us like it was to David?

Using brown clay (the kind that hardens when dry), give enough clay to each child to make a staff. You can draw the shape of a shepherd's staff on the dry erase/chalk board. If there is room, allow the children to write Psalm 23 on their staff and allow it to dry.

PSALM 23:5

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

This pictures victory over our enemies and, perhaps, strength, provision, and encouragement in the midst of our enemies. (see also Romans 8:31-39 and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). What enemies do you have? How has God worked in your life to give victory?

A shepherd would anoint wounded and hurting sheep with oil in order to promote their healing. It could be David is referring to God's healing in his life. Also, oil in the Bible represents the Holy Spirit. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as "the Comforter" and the "Helper." When we are hurting and need help, the Lord promises to help us. He will come and minister to us in our need.

David expresses his joy. Not only does God meet his needs, but his cup overflows! So, the Lord not only gives us everything we need but much more beyond. When we know the Lord and walk with Him, the result is a life of blessing and joy beyond comparison—an overflowing cup. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:6

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Because David committed his life to follow the Lord, he knew that it would be a life of blessing. Did it mean that David never had any problems in his life? No way! David had a lot of problems in his life; but, he knew that God's mercy and goodness were with him every day. No matter what problem he faced, God would be there to help him and protect him. We serve the same God that David served and have the same promises!

Because David encountered the faithfulness of God, He felt confident he would dwell in the Lord's house forever. We who have asked Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Savior can be assured that we will spend eternity with the Lord. We have no need to fear our future; it will be glorious! We can rest in the Lord. What wonderful promises are ours through Jesus Christ!

As David did, we have a Great Shepherd who is with us and for us. He will guide, protect, and help us along this path we call life. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

Bible Baseball Review

Use this game to review today's lesson. Before class, think of several questions to ask your students at their level (examples: Who is our shepherd? What does it mean to not want? What are still waters? etc.). Designate first, second, third and home base in your class. Divide children into two teams. Have someone designated as the "pitcher." It could be the teacher. The pitcher will ask a question to each team.

If the batter gives the correct answer, he hops to first base. If the next batter answers the next question correctly, he hops to first base, and the player there hops to second base. Difficult questions should have the word "home run" written on them before they are asked.

If a team misses one question, their team is out and the other team is up to bat. The team who answers the most questions wins. Decide before play how many "innings" that you will have. Count up the points for each team and declare a winner.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord because He is our Great Shepherd. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.