

# He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake

Our Steps Are Ordered  
(Psalm 23:3b)

## Introduction

We've been learning the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. So far, we've looked at the first two and ½ verses: "*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul.*"

We have learned that this song isn't just talking about how a shepherd cares for his flock of sheep, but it's talking about how Jesus takes care of us.

The first thing our Good Shepherd provides for us is food and rest for our souls. He has given us His word, the Bible, so that we can grow in our faith and find spiritual rest. Then we learned that He quenches our inner thirst by filling us with living water, which is a picture of the Holy Spirit. And last week we learned that when our relationship with our Good Shepherd is broken because of our sin, He will tenderly and lovingly pick us up and restore us to a right standing with Him.

Today we will learn that He guides us along the right paths in life so that our lives will bring honor to His name.

## Opening Prayer

Father, thank You for being such a Good Shepherd Who always cares for us. Give us a heart to always want to follow You to the *green pastures* and the good safe *watering holes* where we can grow in our faith and trust in You. Thank You that when we do find ourselves cast down, that you pick us up and restore us to right standing before You. We are so prone to wander, so we ask You, Lord, to give us hearts to follow Your ways in all we think, in all we say, and in all we do, so that our lives will bring glory to Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## Memory Verse

*But for those who are righteous, the way is not steep and rough. You are a God who does what is right, and You smooth out the path ahead of them. LORD, we show our trust in You by obeying Your laws; our heart's desire is to glorify Your name. (Isaiah 26:7-8)*

## Lesson

Some people think that there are many ways to get to heaven.

John 14:6

*Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Me.*

There is no other way to get into Heaven; you must follow the Good Shepherd. He said He is the gateway into the sheepfold.

But Jesus says that the gateway into the kingdom of God is hard to find and many false teachers will try to misdirect you.

Matthew 7:14-15

*But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it. (15) Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves.*

There are many people out there in the world that will lead you in the wrong direction. That is why we need a shepherd to lead us. And our Shepherd is Jesus.

John 10:27-28

*My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. (28) I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from Me,*

The Good Shepherd knows the best way to go. He leads his flock along paths that are safe to travel. He takes them to the richest pastures and to the best places to drink.

But sometimes a sheep will wander away from the flock. Usually, it's because they aren't paying attention; they aren't keeping their eye on the shepherd. They go off on their own to eat outside of the pasture. When a sheep wanders away from the protection of the shepherd it can be very dangerous for it.

God's children sometimes behave that way, too. We can wander off the path that God wants us to follow. We (sheep) can be blinded to what can be harmful to us.

Isaiah 53:6

*All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on Him the sins of us all.*

We are all born with a "want to" to follow our own way rather than God's way. We stubbornly decide NOT to follow God. When we, like sheep, stray away and leave God's path of righteousness, we can find ourselves in deep trouble.

**Ask:** What are some wrong paths that people follow? [Teacher, entertain ideas like lying, cheating, stealing, or being unkind to other kids. Older children might mention drugs, sex, drinking, etc.]

When we choose to go our own way and sin against Him, we cannot blame God for the mess our lives get in.

The good news is that our Good Shepherd is always watching over us and He knows when we have wandered off the right path. And, if we are willing, He will gently and lovingly guide us back to His way.

### **He Guides Us**

**Ask:** How does He lead us in the paths of righteousness?

All we need to do is ask Him. He wants to speak to us as we read His word. And Holy Spirit wants to guide our thoughts and words and actions. So, just ask Him to show you the right way.

Psalm 25:4

*Show me the right path, O LORD; point out the road for me to follow.*

He is just waiting to tell us how to live so that we will be happy and successful and so that other people may come to know His goodness and mercy.

Our Shepherd knows the way to the "green pastures" and "quite waters." We reach these places only by following him obediently.

### **Examples from the Bible**

Let's see how God led some people in the Bible along the right paths.

Noah

**Ask:** What do you know about Noah from the Bible?

Genesis 6:9

*This is the account of Noah and his family. Noah was a righteous man, the only blameless person living on earth at the time, and he walked in close fellowship with God.*

The whole earth was filled with wicked people, except for Noah. So, God told Noah He was planning to wipe out all of mankind.

Genesis 6:13

*So God said to Noah, "I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth!"*

**Ask:** What did God ask Noah to do? (Build a large boat to save his family from the flood.)

Genesis 6:22

*So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.*

Noah could have said that he thought God was crazy and refused to obey Him. But, he didn't.

Hebrews 11:7

*It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith.*

Noah listened to God and obeyed. He chose to be part of God's plan.

**Ask:** What might have happened if Noah refused to obey God?

He and his family would have died in the flood and it would have wiped out the whole human race.

Abraham

**Ask:** What do you know about Abraham from the Bible?

Genesis 12:1-3

*The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. (2) I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. (3) I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."*

**Ask:** What did God ask Abram to do?

God asked Abram to leave his home, his family and his friends and travel to a place he didn't know. Abram could have said, "No!" to God, but he didn't. Abram went as the Lord had told him to do.

Hebrews 11:8

*It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going.*

Abraham listened to God and obeyed. He chose to be part of God's plan to establish the people of Israel, God's chosen people. Abraham became the father of all Jews.

**Ask:** What might have happened if Abraham refused to obey God?

He would not have become the father of all the Jews. God would have had to choose another family to bring Jesus into the world.

Moses

**Ask:** What do you know about Moses from the Bible?

Exodus 3:1-4

*One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. (2) There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up. (3) "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it." (4) When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied.*

Moses was out in the fields minding his own business shepherding his father-in-law's sheep when all of a sudden God called to him from a burning bush. And Moses said to God, "Here I am."

**Ask:** What did God ask Moses to do?

Exodus 3:10-11

*Now go, for I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt." (11) But Moses protested to God, "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh? Who am I to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt?"*

Moses started to argue with God about sending him to do this job. But finally, he decided to obey. Let's see what happened...

Exodus 12:50-51

*So all the people of Israel followed all the LORD's commands to Moses and Aaron. (51) On that very day the LORD brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt like an army.*

**Ask:** What might have happened if Moses hadn't obeyed God?

Moses would not have had the blessing of rescuing God's chosen people from Egypt. Because Moses listened to God and obeyed, the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt and were led to the Promised Land—the land God promised to give them.

### **Personal Application**

God wants to lead you along the right paths in life, too. But does He always speak to us in dramatic ways, like in a burning bush? No!

He usually speaks to us in a quiet way as we are reading His word and talking to Him in prayer. But you must be still and learn to listen for His voice. For example,

- He might give you the idea that He wants you to say, "I'm sorry" to someone you have hurt.
- Or, He may want you to go up to someone and tell them about what a good shepherd He is.
- Or, maybe there's someone you know who is sick and needs someone to bring in their mail or run an errand.

He is always speaking to us and telling us what He wants us to do. But we must learn to listen to Him with our spiritual ears.

If you listen and obey, God will always lead you in paths which are right in His eyes and which will honor His name. When we allow Him to guide us, God will be pleased and we will be contented little sheep.

### **For His Name's Sake**

Notice verse 3 in Psalm 23, it says,

Psalms 23:3b

*He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

He always leads us in the ways that will bring His name honor and glory.

When we go against the Shepherd's leading, we dishonor His name or His character. We are God's representatives here on earth. Other people notice everything we do. If we act as Jesus acted, then we give His name glory and honor. But if we do not act like Jesus, others will look at our behavior and say to themselves, "What good is Jesus doing for them?" We must not let our behavior slander His name.

Remember this next time you are tempted to go your own way rather than the Shepherd's way. We want other people to praise the name of God because of our good behavior.

The Lord God is our life's guide, our provider, and our protector. God, the Good Shepherd, leads and guides us throughout life. When we trust Him with our whole heart, we will not want for anything.

If we follow his leading, we will rest in *green pastures*, know the calm of *still waters* and have our *souls restored*.

Proverbs 3:5-6

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. (6) Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take.*

### **Closing Prayer**

Father, thank You for being our Good Shepherd. Thank You for being our guide through life. Show me the path to take and keep me safe.

And when troubles come, comfort me. In Jesus' name, we pray.  
Amen.

## Learning Activities

### Game Center

#### *Path it On*

Children will have fun realizing the course of their path of righteousness.

**Material:** Many Dominos for each child or for groups of children, candies

Divide Dominos evenly among the children or groups of children. Ask the children to work individually or in groups to create a line or path of standing Dominos. Give them time to be creative and encourage them to use their own ideas. When all have finished draw the class' attention to each Domino line up. As you go to each line, place some candy at the end of each child's Domino line. Ask the child(ren) responsible for the Domino line to tip the first Domino and watch the other Dominos fall down in order toward the candy. Children will enjoy watching each path of Dominos fall. As children eat the candy say: When we stay on the paths of righteousness with God as our Shepherd, we will be led to "sweet" rewards. Remember the word says paths. That is more than one. He will lead us in many places if we allow Him. Repeat making another Domino path to emphasize paths, plural.

#### *Like Sheep Among Wolves*

Divide the class into two teams: the "sheep" and the "wolves."

Select one child to be the "Shepherd" and give him/her a nerf baseball bat as a "staff."

Have the sheep stand against one wall and the wolves against the other wall. Each respective wall is "safe." Both the wolves and the sheep are safe only when touching their home base wall.

Place a row of food items in the middle of the room (i.e., treats to eat after the game such as candy bars or suckers.)

Object of the game: The sheep get all of the available treats within the time limit (5 minutes).

(Note: Adjust the time depending on how many students you have in the class.)

The sheep run to the middle of the room, pick up one food item at a time, and bring it back to their home base wall. (They can only get one food item at a time.)

Wolves prevent the sheep from getting the food by tagging them. When a wolf tags a sheep, that child must lie down right where they are tagged.

The Shepherd protects his sheep by tapping the wolf with his staff. When the Shepherd taps a wolf with his staff, that wolf is out of the game and must sit down right where they are tapped.

When the time is up, the team with the most players still in the game is the winner—sheep or wolves.

When finished say, "Just like the shepherd protected the sheep, so Jesus cares for, protects, and saves us from anything that would harm us and lead us away from Him."

Or, use the following review questions in a time of discussion or a game of your choice:

1. Why do sheep sometimes wander away from the flock? (They aren't paying attention; they aren't keeping their eye on the shepherd. They go off to eat outside of the pasture.)

2. Why do people sometimes wander off the right path in life? (We don't spend time with the Lord reading His word or talking to Him in prayer so we stop trusting Him.)
3. Name some wrong paths some people follow. (Lying, cheating, stealing, or being unkind to other kids. Older children might mention drugs, sex, drinking, etc.)
4. What does our Good Shepherd do for us when we wander off the right path? (If we are willing, He will gently and lovingly guide us back to His way.)
5. How does God lead us in the paths of righteousness? (He leads us through His word, through prayer, and the power of the Holy Spirit.)
6. Why does the Lord want to lead us in the paths of righteousness? (For His name's sake. He wants our life to bring His name honor and glory, not disgrace.)
7. Why does it dishonor God's name when we don't follow the Shepherd? (When we sin, our behavior slanders His name.)
8. What might have happened if Noah refused to obey God? (He and his family would have died in the flood and it would have wiped out the whole human race.)
9. What might have happened if Abraham refused to obey God? (He would not have become the father of all the Jews. God would have had to choose another family to bring Jesus into the world.)
10. How did God speak to Moses? (Through a burning bush.)
11. Does God always speak to us in dramatic ways like He did with Moses? (No! We have to learn to listen for His voice. He usually speaks to us in a still, small voice.)
12. What might have happened if Moses hadn't obeyed God? (Moses would not have had the blessing of rescuing God's chosen people from Egypt. Because he listened to God and obeyed, the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt and were led to the Promised Land—the land God promised to give them.)

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