

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

Our Steps Are Ordered  
(Psalm 23:3b)

### Pre-Session Warm Up

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've learned that because the Lord is our shepherd, we have all that we need. First of all, He lets us rest in green meadows. We found out that this verse is not talking about letting us take nice long naps out on our front lawns! It's talking about the wonderful care Jesus takes to give us peace and joy in our lives so that we might rest in the knowledge of His love and care for us. We also learned that He quenches our inner thirst as we spend quiet time with Him reading His Word, praying, and worshipping Him. And then we learned that when our relationship with our Good Shepherd is broken, He will tenderly and lovingly pick us up and restore us to a right relationship 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

[Teacher, gather the following before class:

- Plastic table cloth to put down on the floor as a "pathway"
- Blindfold
- Rubber snakes or bugs or other small rubbery toys
- A rubber glove filled with water
- Wet (cooked) spaghetti noodles
- Wet washcloths
- Anything else that might feel slimy or icky
- Chair to be the narrow gate into the "green" pasture
- Green beach towel to be the "green" pasture at the path's end.

Before class, put the "pathway" down in the classroom, but hide all the other items until you need them.]

We have been discussing Jesus as our Good Shepherd and ourselves as sheep. Today one of you will get the opportunity to experience the dangers of being a sheep without a shepherd. Do I have a volunteer?

The Bible often says that we are like sheep.

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.*

That means that we wander off the path that God has directed for us. On this path we (sheep) can be blinded to what can be harmful to us.

[Teacher, blindfold the “sheep” volunteer.] *Sheep*, we’re going to watch you take care of yourself. Get down on all fours. Use your hands to stay on the “path”. Keep going until you think you have arrived at the “green pasture” at the end of the trail. Go now.

[Teacher, staying a few feet in front of the “sheep,” quietly drop things in the path for the “sheep” to crawl through, such as wet noodles, etc.]

### **Bible Story Center**

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 7.

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.*

Some people think that there are many ways to heaven. But Jesus says that the gateway into the kingdom of God is hard to find and many of Satan’s henchmen will try to misdirect you.

How hard was it for our sheep to find the narrow gate with the blindfold on? That is why we need a shepherd to lead us. And our Shepherd is Jesus.

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 come by way of the Good Shepherd who *is* the gateway into the sheepfold.

If you are a true follower of Jesus you will know the right way to live your life in a manner that is pleasing to God.

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. It’s hard to understand why a sheep that is well-cared for would want to leave its shepherd, but they do from time to time. 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 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 way and leave God’s path of righteousness, we can find ourselves in deep trouble.

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 we create for ourselves.

The good news is that our Good Shepherd is always watching over us and He knows when we are cast down and will gently and lovingly restore us.

Let's read a Bible story that shows how God lead a man on the paths of righteousness.

After Jesus ascended back up into heaven, His disciples started spreading the good news about what Jesus had done for mankind. This made many of leaders of the Jews angry.

Jesus' followers in Jerusalem suffered dreadful persecution for telling others about Jesus. One of the chief persecutors was a man named Saul. How he hated the Christians!

Wherever Saul went he uttered murderous threats against the followers of Jesus. From house to house he went, dragging out the believers and having them thrown into jail and put to death without good cause.

Hundreds of Christians fled from the city, but Saul was determined to track them down. When he heard that some of them had traveled 150 miles away to Damascus, he set off with troops to drag them back in chains. He was determined to wipe out Jesus' followers there, too. But God had other plans for him!

Acts 9:1-2

*Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. (2) He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.*

Saul went to the high priest for letters that would grant him authority to arrest believers in Damascus and have them taken back to Jerusalem to be put in prison.

Saul was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews. He knew the teachings of the Old Testament well. But, he did not believe that Jesus was God or that He had risen from the dead. He punished Jesus' followers because he thought they were teaching things against what he understood the Bible to teach. He thought he was pleasing God by trying to eliminate Christians! He was passionate for pleasing God, but he didn't know the truth about God.

As Saul traveled along the road to Damascus, something incredible happened.

Acts 9:3-4

*As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. (4) He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting Me?"*

Saul and his men had nearly reached Damascus when suddenly, at about midday, Saul was suddenly blinded by flash of light in the sky and the Lord spoke to him and he fell to the ground.

Acts 9:5-6

*"Who are You, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! (6) Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."*

In this dramatic moment, Saul believed that Jesus is the Christ, the One God had promised in the scriptures to send to save everyone from their sins. God wanted Saul to see that Jesus had truly risen from the dead and met him on the road in this spectacular way!

Even though Saul had persecuted and even ordered Christians to be put to death, because of God's great love for Saul, God showed him that Jesus really is alive! God wants to do that for every human being that ever lived.

## Acts 9:7-9

*The men with Saul stood speechless, for they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one! (8) Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus. (9) He remained there blind for three days and did not eat or drink.*

Saul's soldiers probably saw him stagger to his feet. They had to lead him like a blind man to Damascus. After three days, God sent help.

## Acts 9:10-12

*Now there was a believer in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, calling, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord!" he replied. (11) The Lord said, "Go over to Straight Street, to the house of Judas. When you get there, ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying to Me right now. (12) I have shown him a vision of a man named Ananias coming in and laying hands on him so he can see again."*

Wow! All the believers had heard of this man, Saul, who was marching to Damascus to arrest all the Christians.

What do you think was going through Ananias' mind at this point? [Teacher, let the children respond.] First, he was probably awe struck by having a vision of the Lord speaking to him; it's not every day we have an actual conversation with the Creator of the universe! But, he probably was also afraid to face Saul. Ananias was probably terrified.

## Acts 9:13-16

*"But Lord," exclaimed Ananias, "I've heard many people talk about the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem! (14) And he is authorized by the leading priests to arrest everyone who calls upon your name." (15) But the Lord said, "Go, for Saul is my chosen instrument to take my message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel. (16) And I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake."*

What would you have done if you had been Ananias? It must have been hard, but Ananias was obedient to the Lord and went to Saul. We must obey and follow God's leading, even when he leads us to difficult people and places.

## Acts 9:17-19

*So Ananias went and found Saul. He laid his hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." (18) Instantly something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he got up and was baptized. (19) Afterward he ate some food and regained his strength. Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days.*

That day, Saul's body received a healing and his mind received a healing as well. As the blinders fell from his eyes, Saul was able to see both physically and spiritually. As a sign of his conversion, Saul was baptized and began his new life as God's chosen apostle.

God had sent Ananias to encourage Saul and give him exciting news. Ananias told this new believer about the special plans that God had for his life. God has special plans for your life, too. God promises to lead us and guide us every day. He will direct our steps if we just ask Him to show us the way and trust that His way is the best for us.

Saul, now a believer, is full of the Holy Spirit and begins to boldly preach the good news about Jesus, how He came and died for our sins, was resurrected, and ascended into heaven.

## Acts 9:20-22

*And immediately he began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is indeed the Son of God!" (21) All who heard him were amazed. "Isn't this the same man who caused such devastation among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem?" they asked. "And didn't he come here to arrest them and take them in chains to the leading priests?" (22) Saul's preaching became more and more powerful, and the Jews in Damascus couldn't refute his proofs that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.*

What a strange twist of fate for Saul, who set out to destroy Christianity, to suddenly become the most well-known of all God's apostles.

What do you think might have happened if Saul did not follow the Lord's leading?

Saul did more to help spread Christianity throughout the whole world than any other single person. Did you know that most of the New Testament was written by this same man, whose name was changed from Saul to Paul?

Acts 9:31

*The church then had peace throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria, and it became stronger as the believers lived in the fear of the Lord. And with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it also grew in numbers.*

Good things happen when we follow the Lord's way. He will lead us on the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. But, God knows that we like sheep are prone to wander away. That's why God gave us his only Son, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, to die for us, He knew we would need a Savior from our sins.

### **He Guides Us**

How does He lead us in the paths of righteousness? Does God always speak to us in a dramatic way as He spoke to Paul on his way to Damascus?

He leads us through His word, through prayer, and Holy Spirit. He tells 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.

Psalm 25:4

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

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

When we allow Him to guide us, we will be contented little sheep. God always leads us in paths which are right in His eyes and which will honor His name. He has given us His word which contains everything we need to know about how to live a life that is well-pleasing to Him.

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

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

#### Craft Corner

#### 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.

### *Which Way Did He Go?*

Children will look up scriptures to learn the many ways in which the Spirit will speak to direct their path.

Divide the children into pairs and assign the following scriptures to each team. Have them report back to the class:

- What were the people in the story doing when God spoke to them?
- How Did God speak to them?
- What did they do to obey what God spoke to them?
- What was the result of their obedience to God's instruction?

Person	Scripture
Moses	Exodus 3:1-4, 10-11; 4:18-20; 12:50-51
Abraham	Genesis 12:1-4; Hebrews 11:8-10
Peter	Acts 10:9-12; 44-48
Gideon	Judges 6:11-13, 27; 7:19-25
Noah	Genesis 6:9, 13, 22; Hebrews 11:7

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. Name some wrong paths some people follow. (Lying, cheating, stealing, or being unkind to other kids. Older children might mention drugs, sex, drinking, etc.)
3. What does our Good Shepherd do for us when we get cast down? (When our relationship with our Good Shepherd is broken, He will tenderly and lovingly pick us up and restore us to a right relationship with Him.)
4. Who was Saul? (He was a Pharisee, a leader of the Jews, who wanted to wipe out Jesus' followers.)
5. Why did Saul think he was pleasing God by wiping out the followers of Jesus? (He thought he was doing the right thing.)
6. What happened to Saul on his way to Damascus? (He was suddenly blinded by a flash of light and the Lord spoke to him.)
7. What do you think was going through Ananias' mind when the Lord spoke to him in a vision? (He was probably terrified about having to face Saul.)
8. What might have happened if Saul and Ananias didn't follow the Lord's leading?
9. 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.)
10. Why does it dishonor God's name when we don't follow the Shepherd? (When we sin our behavior slanders His name.)

