

The Valley of Death

(We Are Never Alone)

(Psalm 23:4a)

Introduction

We've been learning the 23rd Psalm. So far, we've looked at the first three 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. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.*"

We have learned that this song isn't just talking about how a shepherd cares for his flock of sheep; it's talking about how Jesus cares for 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. We also 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. And last time we learned that He guides us along the right paths in life so that our lives will bring honor to His name.

Today we will learn that even when we walk through the dark valleys in our lives, there is no need to be afraid because our Good Shepherd is close by. He never stops leading and protecting us!

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You that you are such a good and caring Shepherd. Help us to trust in you with our whole heart. We want to be good and obedient sheep that willingly follow our Shepherd. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in Me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

Lesson

[Materials: Create a "mountain range" using several brown or green colored bed sheets (really any color will do, but the brown or green helps the imagination); small and large boxes; a long, flat board; several books; blue gel toothpaste; bottle of water; high powered light; small sheep figures; small mountain lion figure (or your best try at one!). Lay the board down on the floor. Place the books underneath one end to give the board an incline. Place one of the sheets over this set-up. This will be your "valley." Stack the boxes up on either side of the valley, with some boxes at the end of the incline in the "valley." These will be your surrounding mountains. Place the sheets over these "mountains" to cover them for effect. With the toothpaste, squirt a "pool" out on the "mountain" at the top of the "valley" incline. Squirt a long stretch out (the "stream") from the pool down the valley to the lowest part.]

Have any of you ever been through some really tough times in your lives? [Teacher, allow the children to share their experiences. Maybe a loved one just passed away, a parent has left the home, or they are moving to a new school.] You know, in every one of those stories, you were being taken down into the depths of a spiritual *valley*.

How many of you have ever heard of a "mountaintop" experience? What do you supposed I mean by that? Those are the times when everything is going great, there are no problems—everything is smooth sailing.

Typically, shepherds lead their sheep from their winter ranges down in the lowlands and drive them up into the mountain meadows where it is much cooler during the summer months. The journey can take a long time because the sheep are constantly stopping to eat the grass along the way. The shepherd never drives the sheep too fast or

hard—he lets them go at their own pace. But all the while, he is trying to guide them up to the mountain tops.

Why do you think shepherds take their sheep up to the mountaintops through the valleys?

First, It's the Easy Way

Can you imagine trying to drive a flock of sheep straight up the side of a mountain? They'd never make it! [Take the sheep figure and demonstrate trying to drive this sheep up the side of the mountain.]

That would be way too hard! They go up through the valleys because that is the gentlest slope and easiest route to take. [Take sheep figure and demonstrate the walk through the valley.]

Second, There's Water in the Valley

Can anyone guess another reason the shepherds use the valleys?

Well, picture this: you've been walking all day, it's the middle of summer, and the hot sun is beating down on you. What do you want most? A drink of water! [Pull out a bottle of water and take a loud slurp.] Ahhhh! That hit the spot!

Water flows through the valleys! If they were marching up the mountainside, water would be hard to come by. But there is always plenty of water available for hot, tired sheep in the valley. [Squirt a bead of blue jell toothpaste coming down through the valley.] What a blessing a cool stream becomes on a hot day!

The valleys aren't perfect, though; there are some dangers for the sheep in the valley. Can anyone guess what the dangers might be?

Danger: Storms

There is always the danger of sudden storms that might come and sweep down through the valleys. These storms can cause flash-floods

which can drown the sheep. A good shepherd must constantly be watching the weather and preparing a way to herd his flock into a cave or a ravine in case a sudden storm should arise.

Danger: Shadows

[Turn off the lights. Turn on a high powered light behind one your "mountain" peaks to cast a nice shadow across your valley.]

What do you notice about our valley here? It is dark in the valley! Look at these dark shadows! Except when the sun is directly overhead, there will always be long, dark shadows in the valley. These are perfect hiding places for predators. A good shepherd must keep watch to be sure that something isn't waiting to jump out of the shadows to attack them. [Stick the mountain lion figure somewhere in the shadows on the mountainside.]

Faithful Shepherd

As the shepherd leads his flock up to the mountains for the summer, he has to keep a keen eye on his sheep to protect them as they walk through the valleys. He knows there are all sorts of dangers lurking in the shadows. The shepherd does whatever it takes to keep his sheep safe.

The Shepherd has no desire to lead his sheep into a valley and leave them there on their own. No, he wants to take the sheep *through* the deep valley shadows on to the mountaintops. [Again, use the sheep figure to show the sheep going through the valley to the mountaintops.]

And, it's while going through the valleys that the sheep learn to trust their shepherd. They learn to follow him closely. He's taking them to the mountaintop where the best grass is waiting for them.

Our lives are just like this. We really like those mountaintop times when everything is great and there is no trouble. But we all know from experience that we aren't always on the mountaintops, are we? Many

times, we find ourselves in the valleys. Those valley times can be hard times. Some of you shared with us as we started this lesson, about your walks with Jesus through some deep valleys. Jesus knows that the best way to get you to the top is to take you through the valley. That is, through that tough situation.

It is in the valley that our Shepherd, Jesus, is closest to us, keeping His eyes on us and caring for us. He knows we're scared, He knows we don't know the way. That's why He stays with us, guiding us through and keeping us safe. He knows the valley is the best route for us, though it might seem dark, scary, and tough to us.

Just like there is water [hold up the water bottle] in the valley for the hot, tired sheep, there are blessings in the valley for us. It is in the valley that we find the victory, as the blessings flow down to us. Here we learn to trust Jesus as our Shepherd. It is here in the valley we see how helpless we are and how much we need Him. It's in those valley times that we learn just how loving and powerful our Shepherd is.

He will protect you from any danger trying to hurt you as He slowly walks with you through the valley to the mountaintops! [Show the trek through the "valley" up to the mountaintops.]

Bible Story Center

Let's open our Bibles to 1 Kings 19 and read a Bible story about a man who was on the mountaintop but was led by Jesus up through a dark valley back to a new mountaintop!

Background

Elijah was a prophet of God during the reign of wicked King Ahab. Ahab had turned the children of Israel away from worshipping God to

the worship of Baal. So, Elijah challenged Ahab to a contest to see whose god was the most powerful. Do you remember the story?

Elijah wanted to prove to evil Ahab that only the Lord is God. So he told the false prophets of Baal to set up an altar with a sacrifice on it. And he did the same. Then he told the false prophets to call upon Baal to light the fire. They danced furiously all night long, but Baal never sent down fire.

Then Elijah quietly asked God to send down fire from heaven to burn up his sacrifice and He did! Elijah had just had a powerful "mountaintop" experience. He had just proven to the 450 false prophets of Baal that God was the only true and living God.

After that, Elijah rounded up all the false prophets of Baal he could get his hands on and he killed every one of them.

There had been a drought and a famine in the land for years. Elijah prophesied that the drought was about to be over and then it rained in buckets! Talk about a mountaintop experience! Everything he said or did came to pass.

But, then word got back to Jezebel, Ahab's wicked wife, that Elijah had all the false prophets killed. She was furious and swore that she was going to kill Elijah.

1 Kings 19:1-2

When Ahab got home, he told Jezebel everything Elijah had done, including the way he had killed all the prophets of Baal. (2) So Jezebel sent this message to Elijah: "May the gods strike me and even kill me if by this time tomorrow I have not killed you just as you killed them."

Now, you would think that having just watched God perform this mighty miracle of sending fire down from heaven and burning up the sacrifice would give Elijah great confidence in the power of the Lord, wouldn't you? But you see, even great men of God can get fearful.

Elijah was scared. He quickly came down off his mountaintop experience with God. He got so scared that Jezebel was going to kill him that he literally started out walking into a deep, dark valley.

1 Kings 19:3-4

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life. He went to Beersheba, a town in Judah, and he left his servant there. (4) Then he went on alone into the wilderness, traveling all day. He sat down under a solitary broom tree and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said. "Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died."

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life! He was so scared that he called out to the Lord to take his life. Elijah was in the *valley of the shadow of death*. He feared for his life. Then he got tired so he sat under a tree and fell asleep.

1 Kings 19:5-6

Then he lay down and slept under the broom tree. But as he was sleeping, an angel touched him and told him, "Get up and eat!" (6) He looked around and there beside his head was some bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water! So he ate and drank and lay down again.

Wow! While he was asleep, an angel came, woke him up, and told him to eat. What a blessing! In the midst of this dark, scary valley, God was helping Elijah get through; He miraculously sent him some food to eat. After he ate, he fell asleep again.

1 Kings 19:7

Then the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you."

God send ministering angels a second time to give him more bread and water to eat. The Great Watchful Shepherd kept His eye on Elijah and was caring for him as He led Elijah on to the next mountaintop.

1 Kings 19:8

So he got up and ate and drank, and the food gave him enough strength to travel forty days and forty nights to Mount Sinai, the mountain of God.

Wow! The food that God provided to him must have been really nourishing because it kept him going all the way to Mount Sinai. This is the same mountain where Moses met with God and got the Ten Commandments. So Elijah was able to walk from Mount Carmel all the way down to Mount Sinai in 40 days! He must have practically ran the whole way! This was a very long journey, but the Lord was with him all the way.

While Elijah went through his valley experience, he learned to trust God for his provision and for his protection.

God had protected Elijah from Jezebel, kept him safe from deadly animals, and provided Him with food and water on his long trip through to Mount Sinai.

While on this new mountaintop, Elijah had a special meeting with God Who told him what he now had to do for the rest of his life.

Had Elijah stayed on the first mountaintop, he never would have learned to trust God all the way or learned what he was supposed to do for the rest of his life!

God, our Good Shepherd, led Elijah through the valley up to the mountaintop. Thank God for His presence with us through the valleys!

Sometimes things can be pretty scary or tough in our lives and we don't want to have to go through these situations. But remember the verse we are learning this week:

Psalm 23:4a

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.

Have any of you ever gone through something that was really tough at the time but now that you look back on it, you see it was for the best? That's how it is when our Good Shepherd leads us through the valleys in our lives. Our Shepherd will lead us through the valleys in our lives. He will work out the situation for our good.

Romans 8:28

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.

Remember that shadows never hurt anyone. They may look scary, but the truth is that they are just shadows. It might seem difficult to us at the time, but the easiest way to the mountain top is through the valley. It is in the valley that we are closest to our Shepherd.

We have nothing to fear because our Good Shepherd never stops leading and protecting us!

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that you never leave us or forsake us. Thank You that You are always with us even when we are in the darkest valleys of our lives. Help us to draw near to You and trust that You will work out every situation in our lives for our good and for Your name's sake. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

The LORD is With Me

Make a path on the floor and place many items on the floor in the path. Pair children up. Blindfold one child in the pair so she/he can't

see. The other child must guide the blindfolded child through the path by holding her/his hand and by guiding the blindfolded child with her/his voice. Allow children to switch places.

Just like you trusted your partner to lead you through this valley, we can trust Jesus to lead us when He takes us through a valley!

Valley of Victory

Divide children into groups. Give each group a scripture to read. Ask each team to report back to the class what was going on in their valley.

Scripture	Result
Genesis 14:17-19	blessing in the valley
Numbers 13:23-24	blessing in the valley
Joshua 10:11-14	victory in the valley
Joshua 11:7-8	victory in the valley
Joshua 11:16-17	victory in the valley
Judges 7:12, 25	victory in the valley
1 Samuel 17:19, 45-52	victory in the valley
2 Samuel 5:22-25	victory in the valley
2 Chronicles 14:10-12	victory in the valley
2 Chronicles 20:24-26	victory in the valley
2 Chronicles 25:11	victory in the valley
Isaiah 40:4	blessing in the valley
Joel 3:18	blessing in the valley

Amos 1:5	victory in the valley
Revelation 19:11-21	Final victory in the Valley of Meggido

The Lord was giving either a blessing or a victory in each of these valleys. And He will do the same for you in your valleys!

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

1. Why do the shepherds take their sheep to the mountain top for the summer? (It's cooler up there and that's where the grass grows best.)
2. Why do the shepherds take their sheep to the mountain tops through the valleys? (It's an easier route and there's water in the valley.)
3. Have you ever been in the depths of a spiritual *valley*?
4. Have you ever had a "mountaintop" experience?
5. What is best way to get to the mountaintops? (Through the valleys; the slope is not so steep and there is plenty of water.)
6. What are two of the dangers in the valleys for the sheep? (Flash floods and shadows.)
7. Why do we learn to trust our Good Shepherd when we are in the valleys in our lives? (We have to trust in Him and we learn that He is faithful to care for us.)
8. What is the name of the prophet who started on the mountaintop? (Elijah)

9. Where did God lead Elijah when he heard Jezebel was after him? (Out into the wilderness)
10. What did you learn about the shadows in the valley? (Dangers lurk in the shadows, but God was watching over the situation and providing for our needs.)
11. Why is there no need to be afraid when we walk through the dark valleys in our lives? (Our Good Shepherd is always close by; He never stops leading and protecting us.)
12. Have you ever gone through something that was really tough at the time but now that you look back on it, you see it was for the best?

[For more lessons for children, visit <https://www.freechildrensministrylessons.com>.]