

Your Rod and Your Staff, They Comfort Me

The Word and the Spirit

(Psalm 23:4b)

Introduction

We've been learning the 23rd Psalm. So far, we've looked at the first three 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. He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."*

We've learned that because the Lord is our shepherd, we have all that we need.

- Our Good Shepherd provides 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 in the knowledge of His love and care for us.
- He quenches our inner thirst as we spend quiet time with Him reading His Word, praying, and worshipping Him.
- When our relationship with our Good Shepherd is broken, He tenderly and lovingly picks us up and restores us to a right relationship with Him.
- He guides us along the right paths in life so that our lives will bring honor to His name.
- When we walk through the dark valleys in our lives, we don't need to be afraid because our Good Shepherd is close by. He never stops leading and protecting us!

Today we will learn about the Shepherd's tools, his rod and his staff.

Opening Prayer

Father, as we study the Bible this morning, I pray that You would help us to increase in our love for Your Word and our ability to use it for every situation that comes into our lives. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

...for You, O LORD, help and comfort me. (Psalm 86:17b)

Lesson

We've been learning lots of interesting things about sheep and shepherds, haven't we?

In Biblical times, a shepherd carried very little with him. First of all because he spent his nights out on the range with the sheep, he had to take all of his camping and cooking equipment. And obviously he had to bring food and first aid supplies. But, he also carried two tools with him: a rod and staff. These brought comfort, security, protection and correction to the sheep.

Rod

First, a shepherd carried a rod which was simply a wooden stick or a club similar to a baseball bat. He would carve his rod from the tender wood of a young tree. He was careful to design his rod so that it would be just the right size and weight for him and fit exactly to the shape of his hand.

The shepherd used his rod mainly to protect his sheep from predators. He would practice throwing his rod until he became very accurate at hitting targets in the distance. Then he could throw it at wild animals to scare them off. Or, he would throw it to distract his sheep from eating poisonous weeds or he could throw it beyond a sheep that was wandering off from the flock. That way he could startle the sheep into scampering back into the fold.

The shepherd not only used his rod to protect his sheep, but he also used it to correct or discipline them. How many of you have been disciplined by a wooden spoon? Well, the shepherd used his rod to spank his sheep when they would start to wander off.

How many of you have ever tried to train a dog? One way to teach a puppy not to jump up on you is to roll up a newspaper. If you swat him every time he jumps up, soon he will learn to respect that newspaper. He'll see that rolled up newspaper and know he's going to get swatted if he jumps up. The shepherd used his rod to train his sheep just like that.

The rod is a symbol of the shepherd's power and authority, much like that wooden spoon. Often a Mom only has to go get the spoon and the little child changes his behavior.

A policeman's uniform and badge are like that, too. [Teacher, show a picture of a uniformed policeman.]

If you were in a store and just about to put something in your pocket without paying for it and you suddenly saw a policeman, what would you do?

The policeman is a symbol of power and authority, just like that rolled up newspaper is to the puppy and the wooden spoon is to the child. Well, that's what the rod is to the sheep. They see that rod and they know, either they are going to get spanked with if they do something wrong, like wander off, or their enemy (a wolf) will get beaten off with it. Sheep learn to respect their shepherd's rod. It not only disciplines them, but it keeps them safe from their enemies.

Staff

The other tool the shepherd carried was his staff, a long slender stick with a crooked end. He made this out of wood, too, shaping it to his specifications.

The shepherd used his staff to guide his sheep. Because the staff was long, the sheep could keep their eyes on it. That way they would know where the shepherd was at all times and they would know which way to go.

The shepherd also used his staff to rescue the sheep from dangers. For example, he might need to pull a lamb back up on its feet if it got cast down. Or, might use it to rescue a sheep that got its long woolly hair tangled in a bush.

He practiced and became skilled with using it just like he did his rod.

The shepherd could also use the staff to lean on when he grew tired while he watched the flock.

A good shepherd could not live without his rod or his staff.

Our Rod and Staff

God gives us a spiritual rod and a spiritual staff. Our "rod" is the Word of God which teaches us how to live a God-honoring life. And, our "staff" is the Holy Spirit, Who is our comforter and the One who leads us into all truth.

In the same way that the sheep learn to rely on the shepherd's rod to protect and correct them, we must learn to rely on the God's Word to correct and protect us, as well.

And just as sheep learn to rely on their shepherd's staff for guidance and comfort, we must learn to rely on the Holy Spirit for comfort and direction in life.

Just like the shepherd practiced using his tools until he became very skilled with them, we should practice using the Word of God and relying on the Holy Spirit. Just like the shepherd couldn't do his job without his rod and his staff; we should be so use to the Word and the Spirit that we cannot live without them.

What do you think I mean by practicing using the Word of God?

We need to learn how to use the Word of God accurately. As we get better at using God's Word, we'll learn how to use it as a weapon against our spiritual enemy. God's Word can help us combat the devil.

We also need to practice relying upon the Holy Spirit.

God gave us the Holy Spirit to comfort us and to be our Guide in life to lead us to His truth and to empower us.

We should also learn to lean upon the Holy Spirit, just like the shepherd leans upon his staff. When you lean on something you trust it to hold up your body weight. In the same way, you can learn to trust the Holy Spirit to hold you up in a spiritual sense as you go through life. And as you put your trust in Him He will lead you along the paths of righteousness so that your life will bring glory to God. If you wander off the path, the Holy Spirit will lead you back to God.

Just like the shepherd carries the rod and the staff with him, when we go out each day, we need to carry the Word and the Spirit with us—don't leave home without them.

Bible Lesson

Jesus gave us an example of how to use God's Word when we are tempted.

After being baptized, the Holy Spirit immediately led Jesus into the wilderness to face the Devil for forty days of temptation. Satan wanted to make Jesus sin. But, Jesus stood firm against Satan by quoting the Word of God.

Matthew 4:1

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil.

The Devil knew that if he could get Jesus to sin, He (Jesus) would no longer be the perfect sacrifice. The devil wanted to destroy Jesus before Jesus could destroy the works of the devil. If this had happened, we would have been under the rule of Satan.

The Devil wanted the Lord Jesus to disobey God the Father, but it was impossible for the Jesus to sin. Why? Because He is God—God the Son.

Matthew 4:2

For forty days and forty nights He fasted and became very hungry.

The Devil began tempting Jesus to sin after He had fasted and was very hungry. Who knows what "fasting" is? Fasting is when you give up eating food so that you can spend more time with God.

Matthew 4:3

During that time the devil came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

Satan knew that Jesus was really hungry, so the first thing he did was dare Jesus to turn some stones into bread. [Lay stones in front of you.] But Jesus knew it was wrong to listen to the Devil.

God the Father wanted Jesus to be tempted by the Devil so that He could really know what it is like when we suffer and are tempted (Hebrews 2:17). And, because Jesus is our example, we know that it is possible for the Holy Spirit to give us the power to choose the right and godly thing to do, just like He gave Jesus power to resist Satan.

God's plan was that His Son, during His time as a man, be totally dependent on the Father (Hebrews 10:5-7). Satan was trying to get Jesus to act independently of His Father by getting Jesus to satisfy His own hunger apart from God the Father's help.

Did you know that the Devil will tempt you, too? Satan hates God and he hates God's children. He tempts us by trying to cause us to sin.

Can you think of some ways the Devil has tempted you? [Teacher, allow the children to respond.] It is not sin to be tempted, but it is sin to give in to the wrong things Satan wants us to do. But the good news is that you can use God's Word to help you resist temptations. Resisting Satan means to say "No" to sin and make godly choices. God will give you the strength to say "No" to Satan.

Satan was trying to cause Jesus to disobey His Father by tempting Him to turn the stones into bread.

So, how did Jesus fight the devil? Did He wrestle him? Did He put him in a headlock? No. Jesus used God's Word to tell Satan "No."

Matthew 4:4

But Jesus told Him, "No! The Scriptures say, 'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

God's Word tells you what is right and wrong. Jesus believed God's Word and quoted it to Satan.

Then Satan took Jesus to the highest point of the temple and tempted Him to prove He was God the Son by throwing Himself down.

Matthew 4:5-6

Then the devil took Him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, (6) and said, "If You are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, 'He will order His angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'"

Satan was trying to get Jesus to misuse His power to impress the people. But Jesus used God's word again, like a shepherd throws his rod at wolf.

Matthew 4:7

Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'"

Next Satan took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him a vision of the world. Satan promised to give it to Jesus if He would worship Satan. Jesus again used His rod—the Word of God.

Matthew 4:8-9

Next the devil took Him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. (9) "I will give it all to You," he said, "if You will kneel down and worship me."

Jesus resisted Satan. In a powerful voice, full of command, Jesus said,

Matthew 4:10

"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say, 'You must worship the LORD your God and serve only Him.'"

This was the third time Jesus had said "No" to Satan. Each time He used the Word of God just like a shepherd uses a rod to scare off a wolf. God's Word has the power to keep you from sin.

Matthew 4:11

Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

Praise God! Jesus did not sin. Satan left. God sent angels to help and strengthen Jesus after His struggle against evil.

Jesus used God's Word to defeat Satan! Now if Jesus, who is God the Son, used the Word of God to fight against Satan, how much more do you think we need to use His Word? His Word is like a shepherd's rod. It is our mighty weapon against our enemy.

Satan is real and he is out to cause us to sin. God's Word has an answer for every test or problem you have. That is why we should learn as much as we can about the Bible.

And notice this: Satan did not leave Jesus alone after the first time Jesus used the Word to defeat Him. Satan came against Jesus two

more times in this incident. What does this tell you about fighting the devil? Does the devil give up easily?

The Gospel of Luke gives us a little more insight on this:

Luke 4:13

*When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left Him **until the next opportunity came.***

BEWARE OF YOUR ENEMY! Your enemy the devil will not give up. He wants to make you sin, just like he wanted to make Jesus sin. You will have to use your rod to win the fight against him over and over again throughout your whole life. You can't relax. That's why it is so important for you to practice using the Word of God.

But what did winning this battle against Satan do for Jesus?

Luke 4:14

*Then Jesus returned to Galilee, **filled with the Holy Spirit's power.** Reports about Him spread quickly through the whole region.*

It says that Jesus was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

God has also given us the Holy Spirit to comfort and strengthen us. Just like the shepherd can lean on his staff, we can rely on the Holy Spirit. He's there for us. We can count on Him to lead us along the paths of righteousness.

The Good Shepherd knows how to comfort you. You can find comfort in the power and authority of the Word and through the gentleness and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Remember what David prayed, "*Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*" What a relief to know that the rod and staff will always take care of any trouble or pain we may experience!

The rod and staff are tools that we need to keep handy at all times throughout our life. Without them we are unprotected from our enemy!

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that You have not left us unprotected from our enemy. You have given us Your Word and Your Holy Spirit. They bring us comfort, security, and protection. We would be lost without them. Please give us a desire in our hearts to learn and memorize Your Word. We want it to be tucked away inside our hearts for those times when Satan tempts us to sin. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Staff Meeting

Materials: two shepherd's staffs, one for each team, and many items to hook such as stuffed animals, a basket, milk jug, suitcase, book or binder, iron, mug, bottle of pop, article of clothing, a brick, tube or pipe, or any other toys or household items, masking tape

Procedure: Divide class into two teams, the "Rods" and the "Staffs". Give each team a staff. [The staff could be made out of a wire coat hanger. Make certain that one end of the staff has a crook shaped end for grabbing or hooking items.]

Make a line across the floor using masking tape. Randomly place the remaining items on the floor a considerable distance from the masking tape line.

Each team will line up in front of the line. The first child will use the staff to retrieve a *lost sheep*. Then let the next child on the team retrieve an item, and so forth.

Say: One job of a shepherd is to pull sheep back toward the flock if they wandered away or fell down into a ditch. Or, they might have to

use their staff to get a sheep out of a thicket. We are going to see how good you would be if you were a shepherd who needed to pull something back to the flock. Use your staff to gather as many items as possible and get the item to the group.

When I say, “Go” the first person will use the staff to retrieve a lost sheep. Then the next person on the team will get a chance to hook an item and draw it back to the “flock.”

When I say “Stop” we’ll count to see the number of items retrieved by each team. Team with more items is the winner.

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

1. What are the two tools used by a shepherd? (A rod and a staff)
2. What do the rod and staff represent? (Word of God & Holy Spirit.)
3. How did the shepherd use the rod? (For protection and correction.)
4. How did the shepherd use the staff? (To guide and rescue sheep.)
5. How can you use the Word of God like a rod? (To combat the enemy)
6. In what way is the staff like the Holy Spirit? (It brings sheep comfort.)
7. When tempted by the devil, what did Jesus use to fight Satan? (The Word of God.)
8. Tell about a time you used the Word to fight the temptation to sin?
9. Satan did not leave Jesus alone the first time that Jesus used the Word to defeat Him. Satan came against Jesus two more times in

this incident. What does this tell you about fighting the devil? Does the devil give up easily? (We have to watch out. We can’t relax.)

10. When David’s sheep boasts that his shepherd, “*makes me lie down in green pastures,*” what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (Our Good Shepherd provides 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.)
11. When David’s sheep boasts that his shepherd, “*leads me beside quiet waters,*” what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (He quenches our inner thirst by filling us with living water, which is a picture of the Holy Spirit.)
12. When David’s sheep boasts that his shepherd, “*restores my soul,*” what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (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 right standing with Him.)
13. When David’s sheep boasts that his shepherd, “*guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake,*” what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (He guides us along the right paths in life so that our lives will bring honor to His name.)
14. When David’s sheep boasts, “*even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil,*” what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (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.)
15. When David’s sheep boasts, “*your rod and your staff, they comfort me,*” what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (Our God will always take care of any trouble or pain we may experience. He’s constantly leading, guiding, protecting, and providing for us.)