

God's Goodness and Mercy

(Psalm 23:6a)

Introduction

We've been learning the 23rd Psalm. So far, we've looked at the first five verses.

We have learned that this song David wrote isn't just talking about shepherds taking care of a flock of sheep. No, it's a beautiful picture of how well our Good Shepherd, Jesus, takes care of us.

Remember that this is David's little lamb that is speaking.

He says in Verse 1:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1)

He is bragging to all the poor sheep on the other side of the fence who don't have good shepherds. He's boasting that he is completely satisfied and contented because his shepherd supplies all his needs.

Next, he says in Verse 2:

He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. (Psalm 23:2)

David's little lamb is bragging that his shepherd completely satisfies his hunger and thirst, and this allows him to rest.

This reminds us that we are all born with a spiritual hunger and thirst to know God. We want to know what He looks like, what heaven is like, and most of all we want to know how to get there. Only our Good Shepherd can completely satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst and give us spiritual rest.

He says in Verse 3:

He restores my soul. (Psalm 23:3a)

David's little lamb is explaining how his shepherd tenderly and lovingly picks him up and gets him back on his feet if ever he gets cast down.

This is reassuring to us, too. When our relationship with our Good Shepherd is broken by our sin, He is always willing and able to pick us up and restore us to a right relationship with Him. (1 John 1:9)

In Verse 3, he goes on to say:

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. (Psm 23:3b)

David's little lamb is instructing us that if we faithfully follow the Good Shepherd, He will guide us along the right paths in life so that our lives will bring honor to His name.

He says in Verse 4:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; (Psalm 23:4a)

David's sheep promises that when we walk through the dark valleys in our lives, we don't need to be afraid because our Good Shepherd is close by.

In Verse 4, he goes on to say:

your rod and your staff, they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4b)

David's little lamb is explaining that the Good Shepherd has given us the tools we need for life.

The "**rod**" is a picture of the Word of God which teaches us how to live a God-honoring life. Remember, the shepherd used his rod to herd the sheep to keep them from roaming out of the green pasture. He also used it like a wooden spoon to discipline the sheep when they were naughty.

And, the "**staff**" is a picture of the Holy Spirit, Who is our comforter. Remember how, when in a big herd of sheep, it brought them comfort to keep their eye on the shepherd. They knew that if they always followed him, he would take them to the place where the green grass grows and the quiet water runs.

He says in Verse 5:

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; (Psalm 23:5a)

David's sheep is explaining that a good shepherd goes up to the mountain meadows to prepare them before he takes his flock up there. Remember, the shepherd made several trips up through the valley to the mountain meadows to scatter grass seed, pull out the poisonous weeds, and to destroy the predators like snakes in the grass, foxes, and wolves.

This reminds us of how our Good Shepherd, Jesus, has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us.

In Verse 5, he goes on to say:

you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (Psalm 23:5b)

This is a picture of being anointed with the Holy Spirit and filled with such blessing that it overflowed out of us onto others.

Today we will learn that when we follow our Good Shepherd and allow Him to control our lives, we will leave a trail of goodness and mercy behind us, like a jet leaves a vapor trail in the sky. Where ever we go and whoever we are with will be left with blessings.

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You for being our Good Shepherd. Thank You for taking such good care of us. Help us to learn to be smart sheep that follow and obey you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

Lesson

Ask: Have you ever had one of those dreams where someone is chasing you, but your feet feel like they are stuck in wet cement? Your attacker is gaining ground, but you just can't get your legs to move! Then just as they are upon you, you awaken with a jolt!

David, who wrote Psalm 23, certainly knew what it was like to be chased by an attacker.

After David killed the giant Goliath, King Saul invited him to come and live in the palace. Saul loved to have David play his harp and sing his beautiful praise songs to him. David loved Saul like a father and was a faithful servant to him.

Eventually, David became one of Saul's commanders in the Israeli army. One time when they returned from a victorious battle with the Philistines, the people gave David more praise than they gave Saul. That made Saul so jealous, that he purposed in his heart to kill David.

Ask: What is *jealousy*?

Jealousy is a feeling envy of what another person has or can do. Here, Saul was old enough to be David's father, but he was so envious of David's popularity, that he wanted to kill him!

For many years David lived on the run, hiding from Saul and sleeping in caves. Many times, David dodged Saul's spear. And yet when David had the opportunity to kill Saul, he refused. David spared Saul's life; he was merciful to Saul.

Ask: What is *mercy*?

Mercy is not getting what you deserve. Say you were speeding and a policeman pulled you over. You deserved to get a ticket, but if the policeman just gave you a warning and let you go, he was merciful to you.

When you are merciful you forgive others and show them kindness even if they are wrong. The merciful unselfishly reach out to help others in need. They don't look down on others or condemn them. The merciful don't keep track of wrong things others do.

One time when Saul was searching for David, he went into a cave. Little did he know that it was the very cave where David and his men were hiding. Let's read what happened...

1 Samuel 24:3-4

At the place where the road passes some sheepfolds, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. But as it happened, David and his men were hiding farther back in that very cave! (4) "Now's your opportunity!" David's men whispered to him. "Today the LORD is telling you, 'I will certainly put your enemy into your power, to do with as you wish.'" So David crept forward and cut off a piece of the hem of Saul's robe.

Saul walked right into the very cave that David and his men were in! This was David's chance to get Saul. David's men wanted to attack him right there and then. But even though Saul wanted to kill David; David did NOT want to hurt Saul. Quiet as a shadow, David slipped up to Saul, took out his knife, but instead of killing him, David just cut off a piece of Saul's robe.

Ask: Could you do that? If you had just spent the last few years of your life running and hiding from someone that was out to kill you, what would you do if that very person walked right into your cave?

When someone is being mean to you, it's easy to want to get even and be mean right back, isn't it? But David knew that wouldn't please God. David showed respect for Saul. After all, Saul was the King of Israel.

David was merciful and let Saul leave the cave unharmed.

1 Samuel 24:9-11

Then he shouted to Saul, "Why do you listen to the people who say I am trying to harm you?" (10) This very day you can see with your own eyes it

*isn't true. For the LORD placed you at my **mercy** back there in the cave. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you. For I said, 'I will never harm the king—he is the LORD's anointed one.' (11) Look, my father, at what I have in my hand. It is a piece of the hem of your robe! I cut it off, but I didn't kill you. This proves that I am not trying to harm you and that I have not sinned against you, even though you have been hunting for me to kill me.*

David pleaded with Saul, "You must believe that I do not want to harm you, I could have killed you just now if I had wished. Look!" And, he held up the piece of Saul's robe to show him how close he was. This made Saul feel ashamed.

1 Samuel 24:17-19

And he said to David, "You are a better man than I am, for you have repaid me good for evil. (18) Yes, you have been amazingly kind to me today, for when the LORD put me in a place where you could have killed me, you didn't do it. (19) Who else would let his enemy get away when he had him in his power? May the LORD reward you well for the kindness you have shown me today."

David could have taken Saul's life, but he didn't. Saul realized that David didn't try to get even with him, instead he spared Saul's life. David was merciful to Saul.

This same David is the one that wrote this verse in the 23rd Psalm:

Psalm 23:6a

Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.

Ask: What do you think it means to have *goodness* and *mercy* following you?

[Review verse for today.] This is saying, "God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy." You've heard the saying, "What goes around, comes around." Mercy is contagious.

Since God had shown mercy to David, he wanted to follow His Good Shepherd's example and show kindness and love to Saul even though he didn't deserve it.

Ask: How has God shown you goodness and mercy? [Discuss.]

God wants you pass it on! And God will bless you when you show others His goodness and mercy.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for not punishing me for my sins, even though I deserve it. Thank You for showing me your goodness and mercy. Thank You for dying in my place to give me eternal life with you. Help me to live a life listening to Your voice and obeying You. Help me to show goodness and mercy to everyone I know and meet. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Have the children trace large foot prints onto construction paper and write, "*Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life*" on it. They can decorate the toe nails and/or cut it out to display in their room.

Game Center

"Goodness and Mercy Will Follow Me"

Preparation:

Before class cut out six large foot prints about three times as large as a child's foot. On two of the prints write the word, "*Goodness*," and on two others write the word, "*Mercy*".

Divide the children up into two teams give each team a set of three footprints, one with Goodness, one with Mercy, and one blank.

How To Play:

1. On, "Go", the first child from each team places two of their footprints out in front of them, one in front of the other, facing toward the other end of the room and places one of their feet on each foot print.
2. Then, they set the third footprint in front of them and place their back foot on it.
3. Then, they reach behind them and pick up the back footprint and place it out in front of them and step on it with their back foot.
4. They should keep walking like this until they get to the end of the room.
5. When they get to the end of the room, they pick up all three footprints, race back to the other end of the room and give the footprints to the next child in line.
6. The first team that has all their players reach the other end of the room, wins.

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

1. True or False: Saul and his 3,000 men tried to capture David. (True.)
2. True or False: When David found Saul alone in a cave, David wanted to attack Saul, but his men told him not to. (False.)
3. True or False: Saul stopped trying to kill David after the first time David showed kindness to him (False.)

4. True or False: David was kind to Saul, even though Saul was unkind to him. (True.)
5. How was Saul unkind to David? (He wanted to kill David.)
6. What do you think that David could have done to solve his problem with Saul? (He could have killed him.)
7. What did David do when Saul was unkind to him? (David did not hurt Saul. He did not try to get even with Saul.)
8. Do you think it was hard or easy for David to be kind to Saul?
9. When was a time when someone was mean to you? How did you feel? (Angry. Sad.) What did you do?
10. What does God want us to do when someone makes us sad and angry? (Not pay them back, but instead show God's love.)
11. What are some unkind or mean things people might say on a playground?
12. What are some kind things you can do or say to someone who is mean to you?
13. What can you do when others hurt your feelings? (Talk to an adult. Pray for the person who is unkind.)
14. What are ways you can show God's love to someone who is mean? (Pray for the person. Tell the person that he or she is not being kind. Walk away instead of saying something mean. Ignore what that person says. Don't say mean things back.)

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