
Forward

This book contains lessons from the 23rd Psalm that bring to life the imagery of a shepherd watching over his flock, tenderly caring for the needs of those innocent and trusting creatures. From the opening line to its very last word, the Twenty-Third Psalm, David's song of praise and prayer of affirmation, brings reassurance and confidence to all who reach out for it in times of need.

Because most children today do not have a clear idea of what shepherds do, they may not be able to fully grasp the deep meaning that can be found in the imagery of the 23rd Psalm. Thus, I have relied upon the wonderful text, *A Shepherd looks at Psalm 23*, published by Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1970, to provide much of the background research for this curriculum. It is strongly recommended that this book be purchased and read by the teacher and assistants in preparation for each week's lesson.

Getting to the heart of a shepherd's task and how it correlates to our Lord, and Chief Shepherd, can help your students come to appreciate their Savior, Jesus Christ, as the Good Shepherd of their lives.

I have designed these lessons to enable you to teach the Bible expositionally. The idea is to have the kids read the passages in their own Bibles and the teacher explain the scriptures and give good practical applications that are age-appropriate. My goal is to ensure that children learn that God's Word is exciting and meaningful and that teachers teach sound doctrine!

Even though I've scripted the lessons, I don't expect teachers to read my lesson materials verbatim to the children as they teach. My lessons are meant to provide the details you need to get background information and some suggestions for child-oriented personal application. Once you know and understand the Bible lessons for yourself, you'll be ready to teach your class.

The two-column layout of this book is designed so that you can copy and cut the pages in half to fit into your Bible. When the children

observe that you are teaching right out of the Bible, rather than from a curriculum book, it validates God's Word and gives your teaching more authority.

You will discover that there is not always a Craft or Game idea suggested in each lesson. When I've had a good idea that really seems to support the lesson objectives, I've included it. But I have another handbook called *Tips and Tricks — Making Children's Bible Lessons Come to Life* that gives lots of suggestions for activities that will help reinforce your lesson and teach the memory verse. (This is available from my website:

<https://www.freechildrensministrylessons.com/>)

Use the Teaching Schedule to help you organize your teaching rotation.

I pray that you will use these lessons for God's glory by teaching the Bible as an entire plan by a systematic and connected study of the Word.

Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. (Mark 10:14)

Sheila Scroggins

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Table of Contents

Lesson 1: The Lord is My Shepherd	1
Lesson 2: I Shall Not Want	9
Lesson 3: He Makes Me Lie Down	15
Lesson 4: He Leads Me.....	23
Lesson 5: He Restores My Soul	29
Lesson 6: He Guides Me	35
Lesson 7: The Valley of Death.....	43
Lesson 8: Your Rod and Your Staff	49
Lesson 9: You Prepare a Table before Me	55
Lesson 10: Anointing My Head With Oil.....	59
Lesson 11: Goodness and Mercy	65
Lesson 12: The House of the Lord.....	71

Teaching Schedule

Date	Teacher	Lesson	Memory Verse
		The Lord is My Shepherd	<i>What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? (Psalm 8:4 NLT)</i>
		I Shall Not Want	<i>And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from His glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19)</i>
		He Makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures	<i>"I will make a covenant of peace with My people and drive away the dangerous animals from the land. Then they will be able to camp safely in the wildest places and sleep in the woods without fear. (Ezekiel 34:25)</i>
		He Leads Me Beside Quiet Waters	<i>O God, You are my God; I earnestly search for You. My soul thirsts for You; my whole body longs for You in this parched and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)</i>
		He Restores My Soul	<i>Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. (Galatians 6:1)</i>
		He Guides Me in the Paths of Righteousness for His Name's Sake	<i>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)</i>
		Even Though I Walk Through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I Fear no Evil, for You Are With Me.	<i>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)</i>
		Your Rod and Your Staff, They Comfort Me	<i>...for You, O LORD, help and comfort me. (Psalm 86:17b)</i>
		You Prepare a Table Before Me in the Presence of My Enemies	<i>Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. (Matthew 25:34)</i>
		You Have Anointed My Head with Oil; My Cup Overflows	<i>And say to the people of Israel, 'This holy anointing oil is reserved for Me from generation to generation. (Exodus 30:31)</i>
		Surely Goodness and Lovingkindness will Follow Me All the Days of My Life	<i>I will tell of the LORD's unfailing love. I will praise the LORD for all He has done. I will rejoice in His great goodness to Israel, which He has granted according to His mercy and love. (Isaiah 63:7)</i>
		And I Will Dwell In the House of the Lord Forever	<i>The one thing I ask of the Lord—the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in his Temple. (Psalm 27:4)</i>

The Lord is My Shepherd

(Psalm 23:1a)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, bring a box filled with the following items: food items, jug of water, first aid kit, directional compass, binoculars, shield, receipt, hat with a label reading “manager,” and a blanket. On the box write, “*Property of the shepherd,*” but cover the words “*the shepherd*” with a piece of paper so those words cannot be seen.]

Many people use different tools in their jobs. For example, what types of tools do teachers at school use? (Pencils, pens, erases, books, and so forth.) I have several things in this box that someone would use on a certain type of job. As I pull out each one, I'll give you a clue and you try to guess who would use these things in their job.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Clue</i>
Food items	This person makes sure food is always provided. Any guesses?
Bottle of water	This person makes sure there is always water to drink. Any guesses?
First aid kit	This person makes sure care is provided.
Compass or map	This person leads and guides those in their care.
Binoculars	This person watches over those in their care.
Shield	This person protects those in their care.
Receipt	This person owns those in their care.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Clue</i>
Hat	This person manages those in their care.
Blanket	This person comforts those in their care

[If a child guesses correctly during this, then ask them *how* a shepherd would use each of the remaining items.]

Can anyone guess what type of person provides food, water, care, guidance, protection and watching over, ownership, management, and comfort to those in their care? [Pull the cover off “*the shepherd*” on the box.] It is the job of a shepherd to do all of these things for the sheep in their care. Wow! That’s a lot of hard work. But you know, shepherds do their jobs because they love their sheep.

The Bible tells us that “*The LORD is my shepherd.*” What do you think that means? Today we begin a new series of lessons on the 23rd Psalm and we’re going to find out what our Shepherd, Jesus, has to say about this.

Opening Prayer

Father, teach us today what it means that You are the shepherd of our souls. We want to know you better and love you more. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

What are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? (Psalm 8:4 NLT)

Lesson

[Teacher, before you start the lesson, gather these materials:

- Action figure
- Cards with these verses printed on them: 1 Peter 5:7, 1 Peter 5:8, and Hebrews 13:5
- Bible
- Fake ear
- Recording of various student's parent's voices
- Receipt
- Paper with many names written out (use names of children in your class for some)
- Bowl of grapes or marbles
- Box with contents from Pre-Session Warm Up

The Pharisees were the leaders of the Jewish religion. They spent their lives studying the scriptures and were full of pride. It made them angry when Jesus taught people about the Kingdom of God. They figured that they were the experts about the things of God. And, who was Jesus, anyway? He hadn't even been to school! So, they tried to trick Jesus by asking him lots of questions. They thought they could catch him in saying something that was wrong. [Teacher, see note about the passage in Ezekiel 34 at the end of this lesson.]

One day Jesus performed a mighty miracle – He gave a blind man the ability to see! As usual, this miracle caused a big stir with the Pharisees. They began to ask Jesus some questions but instead of answering their questions directly, Jesus started talking about shepherds and sheep.

John 10:1-5

"I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber!

*(2) But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. (3) The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and **the sheep recognize his voice** and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (4) After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and **they follow him** because they know his voice. (5) They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."*

When Jesus lived on earth, many people took care of sheep. His listeners knew exactly what he was talking about. They all knew that some shepherds took very good care of their sheep. Their animals ate well and slept in safety. And, they also knew that some shepherds, especially those that were hired to watch someone else's sheep, were often careless. When danger came, shepherds who did not own the sheep, would often run away and leave the sheep unprotected.

A good shepherd, on the other hand, was willing to do anything to save his sheep — even if he had to give up his own life.

Sheep know if their shepherd is a good shepherd or not. Jesus described how sheep listen for the shepherd's voice and know it from anyone else's voice. [Pull out the fake ear and talk about listening for the voice.]

Jesus said that the sheep recognize the voice of their shepherd. And if they have a good shepherd, they will hear their shepherd's voice and trust it. In that way the shepherd can lead the sheep out by name because they will follow his voice. Jesus said that sheep will never follow a stranger; they will run away because they don't know the stranger's voice.

I want to play a recording for you all and I want you to tell me if you recognize the voice. [Play the recording you made.] Do you know that voice? Just as you could easily recognize that the voice, so it is with sheep. They recognize their own shepherd's voice! And, they know when it's not the shepherd!

But the Pharisees didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. So, Jesus tries to explain it to them.

John 10:6-10

*Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, (7) so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, **I am the gate** for the sheep. (8) All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. (9) Yes, **I am the gate**. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. (10) The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.*

Jesus compared Himself to the gateway into a sheep pen. Jesus was speaking in figurative language—in *word pictures*. *Word Pictures* paint ideas in your mind that help you to understand things more clearly. This made a lot of sense to Jesus' listeners.

A sheepfold is an area to keep the sheep. [Hold up the bowl with the grapes. Pour the grapes out and scatter them across the table.] This won't work. All of our grapes are scattered all over the table. I'd better put them together in one place. [Pick up the grapes, putting them in the bowl.] Like this bowl with the grapes, the sheepfold is used to keep the sheep from wandering off.

Jesus' listeners knew that a sheepfold had only one opening. There was no gate across that entrance. The shepherd himself would lie in the opening — he became the gate. Then no one could go in or out of the pen unless they went by him. The sheep were safe as long as the shepherd was at the opening.

Jesus wanted His listeners to understand the spiritual meaning of what He was saying. Jesus was using a word picture to tell people that He is the only One who can grant us entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Once you are in His kingdom, you can rest safely, knowing that Jesus is your protector.

Jesus then made a very bold declaration.

John 10:11-13

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. (12) A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. (13) The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.

When Jesus said, "*I am the Good Shepherd*," He wasn't talking about being a shepherd of sheep! Jesus was saying that just as a shepherd cares for sheep, He cares for us! [Teacher, hold up each item from the box from the Pre-Session Warm Up.]

Food items	He makes sure that we, as His "sheep," have spiritual food to help us grow in godliness.
Bottle of water	have spiritual water so that we aren't thirsty for righteousness.
First aid kit	are cared for both physically and spiritually.
Compass or map	are guided correctly and led in our lives to be more like Jesus.
Binoculars & Shield	are watched over and protected both physically and spiritually.
Receipt	are owned by Him.
Hat	when we ask Him into our hearts, He manages us and maintains us so that we are living our lives for Him and not selfishly for ourselves.
Blanket	are comforted when we are in need of comfort.

As our Good Shepherd, Jesus makes sure that we are well cared for. Sheep can't take care of themselves. Did you know that if a sheep falls down on its back, it can't get upright again without help? They need a shepherd to set them right. Isn't it wonderful to have such a Good Shepherd!

John 10:14-16

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, (15) just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. (16) I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

Jesus also goes on to say that the Good Shepherd risks and lays down His life for His sheep. [Hold up the Action Figure.] Jesus tells us that someone who has been hired to watch over sheep, but doesn't love them or own them, won't care to stick around and fight off the wolves that come to kill and eat the sheep. But, as the Good Shepherd, Jesus does love us and owns us [hold up the receipt] so He was willing to risk His life for us. In fact, the wolves of sin were eating the flock so much, that Jesus gave His life to save us, stopping the wolves! Now that's some caring! [Throw the Action Figure and receipt in the box.]

In fact, our job as a "sheep" in His flock is very simple: [Take out verse card for 1 Peter 5:7 and have one of the children read it.]

1 Peter 5:7

Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.

Our job is to let go of all our cares and concerns and give them to the Good Shepherd, Jesus. He will take care of you! [Throw the verse card back into the box.]

The Lord loves His "sheep." As our Good Shepherd, Jesus makes a promise that He will provide us with everything we need. As a

shepherd protects his sheep from lions and bears, Jesus protects us from our enemy, the Devil, who is seeking to devour us.

[Take out verse card for 1 Peter 5:8 and have one of the children read it.]

1 Peter 5:8

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

Since Jesus, your Good Shepherd, gave His life on the cross to pay for your sin, you can surely trust Him to stay with you throughout your life, supplying all your needs. [Throw the verse card back into the box.]

[Take out verse card for Hebrews 13:5 and have one of the children read it.]

Hebrews 13:5b

For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you."

Wow! As big and awesome a God as He is, He knows you by name and cares for you as if you were His only one. Jesus, our Good Shepherd, knows us all personally, by name. [Hold up the page with names written on it.] What a neat thing this is. He knows us each so well—better than we know ourselves!

Jesus also says that as His sheep, we can know and recognize His voice as our Shepherd. How is that possible? [Hold up the Bible.] We become familiar with His voice as we read His Word. And as we become familiar with it, we'll follow Him as a sheep follows its shepherd!

Finally, Jesus tells us that all His sheep will be brought together as one flock (John 10:16). The Pharisees, who were listening to Jesus, thought that the Jews were the only ones in the whole world that were going to go to heaven. But Jesus came to die for the sins of the world

(John 3:16). God had chosen the Jewish people to be His messengers of the Good News. But they had missed the point. Jesus wants everyone be to a sheep in His sheepfold.

Sheep in a shepherd's flock receive a mark or a tag on their ear, identifying them as members of that flock. Jesus doesn't want to put a mark or a tag in your ear, but He does want to put His mark on your heart. All the wonderful benefits of the shepherd, the Good Shepherd, can only be yours if you become a part of His flock.

Once you become one of Jesus' sheep, you can truly say, "*The Lord is MY shepherd!*"

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for being our Good Shepherd and for laying Your life down for us. We can rest safely, knowing that You are protecting us from anything that could harm us or lead us away from You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Psalm 23 Keepsake Wall Hanging

Provide various craft materials so that your students can make a decorative plaque of the 23rd Psalm. This will help them to keep this famous poem in their hearts forever. Encourage them to memorize the whole psalm over the course of this lesson series. Perhaps, award them with a special gift to commemorate their achievement.

Game Center

Who's That?

Select one child to stand in the middle of the room. Put a blindfold on the child so he/she cannot see. Direct the other children to quietly walk to another place in the room. One by one, have the children say the name of the child in the middle of the room. After each child says the name, the child in the middle of the room must guess who said his/her name. The goal is for the child in the middle of the room to guess each person solely by hearing his/her voice. Allow each child to have a turn in the middle of the room as time permits.

When finished say, "*Just like you knew each person by only hearing their voice, sheep know the shepherd's voice and will not follow another person's voice. We, as Jesus' sheep, must know His voice, and only listen to and follow Him.*"

Like Sheep Among Wolves

Place a row of food items in the middle of the room. Separate the children into two groups. One group is the *sheep*. The other group is the *wolves*. Have the *sheep* stand against one wall and the *wolves* against the other wall. Each respective wall is "safe." Select one child to be the *shepherd* and give him/her a nerf ball. Say: In order to live, the *sheep* must get the food items from the middle of the room and return them to their home base. *Wolves*, you want to catch the *sheep*, but the *shepherd* is guarding them. *Shepherd*, you are to protect your *sheep* from the *wolves* by throwing the ball at them. If the *shepherd* hits a *wolf* with the ball, that *wolf* is out of the game and must sit down. *Sheep*, if you are tapped by a *wolf*, you are out of the game and must sit down. Both the *wolves* and the *sheep* are safe when touching their home base wall. Once you leave the wall, however, you may be caught.

Play the game as time permits. Select different children to be the *shepherd*, *sheep*, and *wolves*.

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. What types of jobs does a shepherd do for the sheep? (Provides food, water, care, guidance, protection and watching over, ownership, management, and comfort to those in their care.)
2. How is Jesus like a Good Shepherd? (He was willing to even lay down His life for us so that we could be found spiritually.)
3. When Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" what does that tell you about God? (He protects us from our enemy — the Devil, watches over us, and provides for our spiritual needs.)
4. How did Jesus prove that He was a good shepherd? (He gave His life on the cross to pay for our sin.)
5. Why did Jesus compare Himself to the door of a sheep pen? How is He like a gate? (He is the only One who can grant us entrance into the kingdom of heaven.)

Note to teacher: read Ezekiel 34 regarding God's Woe to the bad Shepherd. When Jesus was telling this story, He was hoping that the Pharisees, who would have been quite familiar with the following passage from Ezekiel, would understand that God wanted them to be good shepherds over their flocks of people:

Ezekiel 34

Then this message came to me from the LORD:

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign LORD: What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep? You drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty. So My sheep have been scattered without a shepherd, and they are easy prey for any wild animal. They have wandered through all the mountains and all the hills, across the face of the earth, yet no one has gone to search for them.

"Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As surely as I live, says the Sovereign LORD, you abandoned My flock and left them to be attacked by every wild animal. And though you were My shepherds, you didn't search for My sheep when they were lost. You took care of yourselves and left the sheep to starve. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD. This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I now consider these shepherds My enemies, and I will hold them responsible for what has happened to My flock. I will take away their right to feed the flock, and I will stop them from feeding themselves. I will rescue My flock from their mouths; the sheep will no longer be their prey.

"For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I Myself will search and find My sheep. I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find My sheep and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. I will bring them back home to their own land of Israel from among the peoples and nations. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers and in all the places where people live. Yes, I will give them good pastureland on the high hills of Israel. There they will lie down in pleasant places and feed in the lush pastures of the hills. I Myself will tend My sheep and give them a place to lie down in peace, says the Sovereign LORD. I will search for My lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bandage the injured and strengthen the weak. But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them, yes—feed them justice!

"And as for you, My flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to His people: I will judge between one animal of the flock and another, separating the sheep from the goats. Isn't it enough for you to keep the best of the pastures for yourselves? Must you also trample down the rest? Isn't it enough for you to drink clear water for yourselves? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? Why must My flock eat what you have trampled down and drink water you have fouled?"

"Therefore, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will surely judge between the fat sheep and the scrawny sheep. For you fat sheep pushed and butted and crowded My sick and hungry flock until you scattered them to distant lands. So I will rescue My flock, and they will no longer be abused. I will judge between one animal of the flock and another. And I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David. He will feed them and be a shepherd to them. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be a prince among My people. I, the LORD, have spoken!"

"I will make a covenant of peace with My people and drive away the dangerous animals from the land. Then they will be able to camp safely in the wildest places and sleep in the woods without fear. I will bless My people and their homes around My holy hill. And in the proper season I will send the showers they need. There will be showers of blessing. The orchards and fields of My people will yield bumper crops, and everyone will live in safety. When I have broken their chains of slavery and rescued them from those who enslaved them, then they will know that I am the LORD. They will no longer be prey for other nations, and wild animals will no longer devour them. They will live in safety, and no one will frighten them.

"And I will make their land famous for its crops, so My people will never again suffer from famines or the insults of foreign nations. In this way, they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them. And they will know that they, the people of Israel, are My people, says the Sovereign LORD. You are My flock, the sheep of My pasture. You are My people, and I am your God. I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken!"

Psalm 23

A Psalm of David

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;*

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You have anointed my head with oil;

My cup overflows.

*Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of
my life,*

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

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my life,*

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

I Shall Not Want

God Provides All We Need

(Psalm 23:1b)

Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, bring in a box of dog care items such as a small blanket, pet basket or cage or dog bed, leash, water bowl, food dish, collar, pet toy, flea powder or pet shampoo, dog food, dog bone or biscuits.]

I have several things in this box that someone would use in caring for a pet. As I show you each one, tell me how that item would provide care for a dog or cat.

<i>Item</i>	<i>Provision</i>
Blanket	Provides comfort , warmth.
Basket	Provides a place to sleep in security
Lease/collar	Leash offers safety & guidance , tags on the collar offer identification
Water bowl	Gives refreshment, quenches thirst and cool down
Food dish	Provides nutrition, satisfies hunger
Flea powder or shampoo	Provides cleanliness and healing , relives irritation.
Pet toy	Provides fun , exercise

In the same way that you and I know how to care for our pets, God cares for us. You can be happy knowing that because the Lord is in control of your life, all of your needs will be met.

Opening Prayer

Father, there are so many things that we want in life. But it's comforting to know that You, our Good Shepherd, will meet every one of our needs. Please help us to love You more today as we think about how good You are and how well You care for us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

*And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from His glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:19)*

Lesson

We have been learning Psalm 23. So far, we have only looked at the first verse. Last week we learned that, "*The LORD is my shepherd*" and this week we will learn that because the Lord is my shepherd, "*I shall not want.*"

David wrote Psalm 23 over 3,000 years ago. Before he was a king, David was a shepherd. This is the same David who fought Goliath.

David wrote Psalm 23 as if he is a sheep talking. This sheep is bragging to his other *sheep* friends about how great and loving his shepherd is. He is saying, my shepherd is so good, that "*I have all that I need.*"

The Bible often refers to God's people as sheep. Even though sheep are cute and cuddly looking, this is not really a compliment. Sheep can be quite dumb. If they get onto their backs with their legs up in the air, they can't even turn themselves over and get back up. They will lie there until they die if their shepherd doesn't come to set them upright.

But, a smart sheep knows the voice of his shepherd and follows him. The Bible says that Jesus is the Good Shepherd of those that follow Him. He knows His sheep and the sheep know Him!

A good shepherd cares for his sheep and is always watching the sheep. He notices everything about his flock so he will know if the sheep are in need of anything. And he will even risk his life to protect them.

In the same way, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, cares for us and is always watching over us. There is nothing about our lives that escapes His notice. He knows when we have needs. And because He knows what our greatest need is, He was even willing to give up His life to protect us from eternal death.

In Psalm 23, David describes his sense of well-being under God's care. He is a contented sheep. He trusts that his Shepherd will supply him with everything he needs.

God has always provided for His people's need. Remember when the children of Israel had left Egypt and were traveling across the desert with Moses to the Promised Land? Even though they were a stubborn and ungrateful lot of people, God met their every need.

Before they left Egypt, God miraculously provided for them by causing the Egyptians to give them all their precious jewels. The Egyptians were so glad to see the Israelites go that they sent them out with gifts.

Exodus 3:21-22

And I will cause the Egyptians to look favorably on you. They will give you gifts when you go so you will not leave empty-handed. (22) Every Israelite woman will ask for articles of silver and gold and fine clothing from her Egyptian neighbors and from the foreign women in their houses. You will dress your sons and daughters with these, stripping the Egyptians of their wealth."

Why would God see to it that the people had articles of silver and gold and fine clothing when he knew that they were heading out for a long trek across the desert? God knew that the people were going to need these things later to build the tabernacle.

In what other ways did God provide for the Israelite's needs out in the desert?

The Israelites had to cross the wilderness to get to the Promised Land. It was very big and totally barren. It was mostly sand and stone. They had been so anxious to leave Egypt they hadn't prepared themselves for just how big and barren it would be out there. After three days in the wilderness without water they began to worry and complain. But, God provided water for them:

Exodus 17:3

But tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?"

Moses goes to the Lord in prayer...

Exodus 17:4

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!"

And the Lord answers Moses...

Exodus 17:5-6

The LORD said to Moses, "Walk out in front of the people. Take your staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile, and call some of the elders of Israel to join you. (6) I will stand before you on the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out. Then the people will be able to drink." So Moses struck the rock as he was told, and water gushed out as the elders looked on.

The striking of this rock to provide life-giving water was to be a picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ would come to do many years later. The Bible refers to Jesus as a rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). The water is a picture of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said,

John 7:37-39

On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! (38) Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" (39) (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

So not only did God provide life-giving water to the Israelites out in the desert, He provides Living Water to anyone who believes in Him.

God also provided food from heaven for the children of Israel to eat:

See also Numbers 11:7-9

The manna looked like small coriander seeds, and it was pale yellow like gum resin. (8) The people would go out and gather it from the ground. They made flour by grinding it with hand mills or pounding it in mortars. Then they boiled it in a pot and made it into flat cakes. These cakes tasted like pastries baked with olive oil. (9) The manna came down on the camp with the dew during the night.

The manna was the Lord's provision for the whole time it took them to get to the Promised Land.

In teaching his disciples, Jesus told them that just like the Father gave the Israelites manna from heaven during their 40-year journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land, the Father gives Jesus to people during their journey through life towards heaven.

John 6:32-35

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. (33) The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (34) "Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day." (35) Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Jesus was comparing Himself with bread, a common, everyday thing that everybody can understand. [Teacher, before class cut a slit in the bottom of a round loaf of French bread and pull out a little of the bread. Tuck a pocket-sized New Testament in the loaf. During the pre-session activity, have the children come and break bread with you. They will be amazed to find the Bible inside the loaf and will make the connection between the Word of God and the bread. Ask them what similarities they see in the qualities of bread and Jesus.]

Bread is the basic food of life (the staff of life). You and I cannot live very long without eating, can we? Bread brings you nourishment and makes you grow. In the same way that food is the only source of life here on earth, Jesus is the only source of eternal life.

As our bodies feel hunger for food, so our souls feel hunger for forgiveness and peace. Only Jesus can satisfy the hunger of your soul. Just as bread will not do you any good unless you take it into your body, Jesus will not save you until you receive Him as your Savior from sin. Once you do, the Lord will continue to "feed" you spiritually through His Word.

God knew the people needed food and water; He planned to provide for their needs because He wanted them to learn that they could trust Him to provide everything they need. He wanted them to be contented sheep.

And, God wants us to be content in just knowing that He will provide all our needs, too. He wants us to be like this sheep in Psalm 23 who said, "*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.*"

What does the word, *contentment*, mean to you? (To be completely satisfied or happy.)

Are you content, like the sheep in Psalm 23? Does it satisfy you just knowing that the Lord is your Shepherd and that you shall never *want* for anything? What would it take for you to be totally and completely content? Jesus is our protector and our provider; He has promised to never leave us for forsake us. He is always watching over us.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for Your great provision in our lives. We trust that You will meet every need that we have in the future. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

I've Got My Eye on Ewe

Jesus as our Good Shepherd not only gives us things that can be bought but He gives us things that money cannot buy. When we receive Him as our Savior He makes a covenant or promise to us to fill all our needs. Especially needs that no one else can satisfy.

Materials needed: Two sets of large index cards. One set of cards with the following words written on them: healing, protection, safety, security, love, friendship, counsel, help, guidance, and companionship. Another set of index cards with the following verses written on them: [Do not write the word on the index card. This is for your reference.]

<i>Provision Cards</i>	<i>Promise Cards</i>
Healing	Matthew 15:30 And a great multitude came to Him, bringing with them the lame, the maimed, the blind, the dumb, and many others, and they put them down at His feet and He healed them.

Protection	Luke 10:19 ...and nothing shall in any way harm you. Or Psalm 91:10-11 No evil shall come to you for He will put His angels in charge over you.
Safety	Proverbs 18:10 The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into and they are safe.
Security	Luke 12: 32 Do not be gripped with fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.
Love	John 16:27 for the Father Himself loves you dearly because you love Me and believe that I came from God.
Friendship	James 2:23 Abraham believed God and he was called God's friend.
Counsel	Psalm 120:1 And I cried unto the Lord and He heard me...
Help	Isaiah 41:14 I will help thee says the Lord...
Guidance	Exodus 15:13 In Your mercy and loving-kindness You have guided them in Your strength...
Companionship	Joshua 1:5 As with Moses I will be with you, I will not leave you or forsake you.

The "Provision" cards describe some things that a good shepherd provides for the sheep. Show each word card one at a time to the

children as they read each it aloud. Then lay them face down on the floor.

The cards in my hand are all verses from the Bible that give us a promise that God will be a Good Shepherd to us. Let's take turns and see if we can match the scripture to each of God's promise of provision in our lives.

Read the first "Scripture" card. Let a child turn over one of the "Provision" cards that are on the floor. If the "Provision" does not match, turn the card back over and choose another child to pick another "Provision" card until we find one that matches the promise.

Continue until all scriptures are matched with the descriptions of a good shepherd. At the end, once again read the qualities of a good shepherd and remind the children that because Jesus is The Good Shepherd, we shall not want.

Note: An alternative for the older children may be to ask them to look up the verses and allow them to write the verses on the cards. Proceed with the above format.

Whadda' Ya Want?

Write the following actions on index cards: thirst, hunger, cold, hot, wet, tired, an annoying bug, scared of dark, dirty, sticky, bothered by the sun, boredom, itching, poor, falling (losing balance), and drowning.

Let each child select an action card to act out (pantomime). Have the children guess what the need is and make suggestions for meeting that need. (Such as providing a glass of water, snack, mittens and hat, ice or swimming suit, umbrella, pillow, fly swatter, flashlight, soap and washcloth, wet wipe, sunglasses, game, cream, money, cane or rope, life jacket.)

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

1. How is God like a shepherd? (He provides healing, protection, friendship, etc.)
2. How are we like sheep? (We need a Shepherd to guide us.)
3. Do you think a shepherd has an easy job? (No, they have to fight off bears and wolves, they have to sleep outside with the animals, and they have to keep watch over the sheep at all times.)
4. Why is the sheep in Psalm 23 contented? (He trusts that his Shepherd will supply all his needs.)
5. How did God provide for the needs of the children of Israel while they were in the desert? (He caused the Egyptians to give them all their precious jewels. He also sent manna and provided water from a rock.)
6. What are some of the things a good shepherd provides for his sheep? (Heals, protects, loves, helps,

He Makes Me Lie Down in Green Pastures

Our Shepherd Provides Rest

(Psalm 23:2a)

Pre-Session Warm Up

We've been learning the 23rd Psalm. The past two weeks we've looked at the first verse: *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.* Today we will look at the first half of verse 2: *"He makes me lie down in green pastures."*

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. God wants us to rest in the knowledge of His love for us. If we trust that He'll take care of us, we can rest from worry and fear.

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You for being our Good Shepherd. Thank You we are not in want of anything and that we can rest from all of our fears and worries, just knowing that we are loved by You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

"I will make a covenant of peace with My people and drive away the dangerous animals from the land. Then they will be able to camp safely in the wildest places and sleep in the woods without fear. (Ezekiel 34:25)

Lesson

[Teacher, before class put the following items in a box: 4 large cards that say: Fear, Friction, Pests (Bugs), and Hunger. Two sandpaper blocks (Friction), jar of plastic bugs (Pests), cooking oil, jar of honey, box of cookies (hunger), 3 rocks with the following written on them: "unbelief," "bitterness," and "pride".]

One of the greatest pleasures a shepherd receives from his flock is when he can see them contentedly resting. You see, sheep can't and won't rest if things around them aren't quite right. A sheep won't lie down unless four basic requirements are met:

- 1) freedom from fear
- 2) freedom from friction with others in the flock
- 3) freedom from torment by pests
- 4) freedom from hunger

When a shepherd sees his flock resting, he knows he's done his job. For thousands of years, shepherds have worked hard to remove these fears to allow their flocks to rest easy, so the food they've eaten can digest, making them thrive so they will be fat and fluffy.

Humans are a lot like sheep in this way. Nothing gives our Shepherd such joy as seeing us able to rest in His care, free from worries so that we might be able to feed upon His Word. Let's look at the things that will keep us from resting in our green pastures under His watch.

Fears

What are some things that cause you to have fear and worry? Storms may scare us. Hearing our parents argue concerns us. Knowing that your parents don't have enough money to pay for medical expenses, food, or the rent, can make us worry.

How many of you have been scared or worried by a "what-if?" Have you have ever had thoughts like these?

- "Oh, what if I don't do well on my test?"
- "What if I embarrass myself in front of all the other kids?"
- "What if they laugh at me?"

When I worry about how things are going to work out, I can't relax. I'm very tense and very worried. I can't sleep at night and I get bad headaches.

You know, when I let fear get the best of me, it's very hard for me to see the answer to my fears is Jesus—just waiting to help me and calm me down. But, when I do turn to Jesus and call out to Him as the Shepherd, He comes and removes the fears, giving me peace. He lets you know that He has it under His control.

Friction

Does anyone know what friction is? Friction is what you get when things aren't smooth. [Rub the blocks together.] Friction is what you get when there's a conflict.

Have you ever been to the zoo or seen on a nature program how the animals seem to have a system? You know, the big ones get the best of everything...the best shade, the best food, the best place to lie down...and the smaller ones get whatever is left?

Have you ever seen when one of the smaller animals is in the big animal's spot, or eating his food? The big animal comes up ready to stomp the other one until he moves! How easy do you think it is for the animals to rest after all that confrontation...all that friction?

That's a lot of friction, huh? [Rub the blocks together again.]

Not only do animals have conflict to deal with, sometimes it's very easy for there to be a lot of friction in our relationships with other people, too. There are times when things just don't go smoothly.

Have you ever had to go to school where there's a bully? Or, have you ever played a game with someone who is really aggressive and just has to be the winner? It's hard to have fun with people like that, isn't it? There is just so much tension. [Rub the blocks together again.]

During all of this friction, it is hard to remember that God wants us to live in harmony with all people. He wants us to be peacemakers. But as we remember His goodness, we will feel safe and loved and accepted by Him and all our worries will disappear. He wants us to love on other people the way He loves us and that is what will make

that friction disappears. Then we will be able to rest in the knowledge of His love and care for us. What a wonderful Shepherd!

Pests

Another thing that plagues the sheep and keeps them from resting is all the bugs and pests that bother them. Little gnats love to hover near their eyes and nostrils; and, sheep can't swat them away.

Can you imagine being trying to lie down to rest if you were covered by little bugs that are trying to bite you? Ticks, flies, mites and all these pests are all over you! [Pour out the jar of fake bugs.] That would keep me up!

How many of you have been bitten all over by mosquitoes? It's really bothersome, isn't it? Swatting, hearing their buzzing, and the bites! Oh, the bites! Those pests are really annoying! You can't rest!

Just like mosquitoes, we often have pesky problems that just "bug" us. Do you ever have things that annoy you and give you trouble? It's impossible to rest with pesky problems on your mind.

You know what the shepherd does for the sheep to keep these pests away from bothering them? They dip their sheep in bug repellent to protect them and soothe them. They call it *Sheep Dip* and it helps to keep the bugs away from the sheep. It's like when we put Mosquito repellent on – it keeps those pesky mosquitoes away!

In the same way, your Shepherd, Jesus, sees and knows these pesky problems you have running through your mind – those situations you just don't know what to do with. He sees all of this and how much it bothers you, and how it keeps you from the wonderful rest He wants for you. In His care, He carefully applies the pest repellent of the Holy Spirit to you.

Shepherds in Bible times would use oil as a repellent. Now, the oil they used wasn't some thin, runny kind of stuff like your mom cooks

with. [Pull out the cooking oil.] It was a thick, oozy, covering oil, like honey. [Pull out the honey.]

In the Bible, oil is often used as a symbol for the Holy Spirit. When the Good Shepherd, Jesus, applies the wonderfully thick covering of the oil of the Holy Spirit to our hearts, all those problems and situations seem to go away. The knowledge that Jesus has the situation under control is a great calmer, allowing us to rest in His care.

Hunger

Finally, sheep won't lay down to rest if they are hungry. They will constantly be up on their feet searching for something to tame their growling stomachs.

We're just like sheep. If we're hungry, we've only got one thing on our minds – getting food! [Pull out the box of cookies.]

Good shepherds lead their flock to “green pastures” of good grass where they can to eat their fill. They take care to prepare the area by pulling out the poisonous plants and rocks so there are no hidden dangers.

It is the same way in our lives: Jesus goes through our lives and removes things that might keep our hearts from receiving His Word. [Pull out the three rocks.]

Jesus goes through our hearts and removes the

- **Rocks of unbelief** so we can trust that He is who He says He is.
- **Rocks of bitterness** we have toward others that keep us from receiving His best.
- **Rocks of pride** that keep our hearts hard.

[Toss the rocks into a garbage can.]

When the Good Shepherd gets done, we can rest in peace. **Peace** is the quietness that Jesus gives you deep in your heart even when you're in the middle of a trial. Peace is being calm, relaxed or unruffled no matter what happens. When you put your trust in God to help you with a problem, you will have peace in your heart.

Once the shepherd can work at these four things – *fear*, *friction*, *pests*, and *hunger* (pull out sandpaper blocks, the jar of Bugs, and the box of cookies as you say each one) – the sheep can lay peacefully in the shepherd's care. However, for the sheep, if they are experiencing any of those four things, just to know the shepherd is there, just to see the shepherd and know He's handling the situation is enough to allow them to lay peacefully in His care. The shepherd is doing His job.

Jesus is our Good Shepherd; He takes wonderful care of us. As you trust in Him, you can have peace and joy in your life. You can rest from all fear and worry.

Bible Story Center

Let's read about a time that Jesus gave his disciples rest.

Jesus and His disciples had just finished collecting all the extra food left over from a miraculous feeding He did for thousands of people.

The miracle of feeding of the 5,000 happened on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and all the people were caught up in the excitement. Afterwards, Jesus strongly urged his disciples to go across the lake to a quiet place where they could rest.

Matthew 14:22

Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that His disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while He sent the people home.

He told His disciples to get in the boat and row to the other side of the lake while He dismissed all the people.

Matthew 14:23

After sending them home, He went up into the hills by Himself to pray. Night fell while He was there alone

Jesus went up on the mountain to pray. But, when the disciples were about four miles out to sea, a fierce storm arose.

Matthew 14:24

Meanwhile, the disciples were in trouble far away from land, for a strong wind had risen, and they were fighting heavy waves.

The Sea of Galilee is actually a very large lake. It is surrounded by hills and storms blow into the lake almost without warning. Many of Jesus' disciples were fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Some of them had probably experienced getting caught in a storm. Because a small fishing boat could easily sink in the wild waves, no one wanted to be out on the Sea of Galilee during a storm. And, as they were crossing the Sea of Galilee a sudden storm came up.

The storm was so violent, that in spite of their experience, these skilled fishermen were in danger of going under in their small boat.

Matthew 14:25

About three o'clock in the morning Jesus came toward them, walking on the water.

Although praying on a mountain several miles away, Jesus saw the disciples struggling against the storm and He knew their fear.

How amazing that Jesus could walk on water! Can you imagine Him coming toward the boat on top of the waves as they rolled and tossed in the fierce wind? Jesus is God and has power to do anything. He could even walk on top of a raging, stormy sea. He even has power to forgive your sins!

Matthew 14:26

When the disciples saw Him walking on the water, they were terrified. In their fear, they cried out, "It's a ghost!"

The disciples were by now so tired and so scared, they thought they saw a ghost, and began to scream.

Matthew 14:27

But Jesus spoke to them at once. "Don't be afraid," He said. "Take courage. I am here! "

But Jesus walked over to them and spoke peace to their hearts, calming their fears. The Good Shepherd's presence was calming His sheep. The waves were still raging, but the disciples had peace in their hearts because Jesus was there.

Then Peter did an interesting thing...

Matthew 14:28

Then Peter called to Him, "Lord, if it's really You, tell me to come to You, walking on the water."

Peter reacted to Jesus in total faith; he saw Jesus walking on the water and asked Jesus to let him walk on the water, too.

Matthew 14:29

"Yes, come," Jesus said. So Peter went over the side of the boat and walked on the water toward Jesus.

Jesus told him to come. As Peter got out of the boat, he began to walk on the storming sea.

Matthew 14:30

But when he saw the strong wind and the waves, he was terrified and began to sink. "Save me, Lord!" he shouted.

When Peter looked away from the Shepherd and focused on the waves crashing all about him, he became afraid and began to sink. If Peter had kept looking to the Lord Jesus for help, the crashing waves would not have started to pull him under!

There's an important lesson here for us. When you find yourself facing trouble, talk to the Lord Jesus about it. Ask God to help you think about Him instead of the problem.

When Peter took his eyes off of the Lord, he began to sink. And he cried out to the Lord for help. He said, "*Lord, save me!*"

Matthew 14:31

Jesus immediately reached out and grabbed him. "You have so little faith," Jesus said. "Why did you doubt Me?"

Jesus grabbed Peter and took him to the boat.

Jesus didn't make the storm stop; He simply reached out and caught hold of Peter and calmed his fears. God may not make your problem go away, either. There may be things He wants you to learn from your difficulty. But He promises to be with you and to help you go through the problem. He can help you not to be worried. The Lord heard Peter's cry for help and saved him from drowning.

Matthew 14:32-33

When they climbed back into the boat, the wind stopped. (33) Then the disciples worshiped Him. "You really are the Son of God!" they exclaimed.

Once he looked to Jesus, Peter found himself safe again in the boat and then the wind stopped.

The Bible says we can expect to have troubles in our lives (John 16:33). At times those problems may seem to crash all around you, like waves in a storm. If you keep your mind focused on the difficulty, you become discouraged and want to give up. It's not easy to keep going through the hard times in your life. If Jesus could calm the

waves of a raging storm, what do you think He can do with the problems that are not allowing you to rest in your life?

Summary

We talked about four things today that sheep need to allow them to rest. They need freedom from **fear**, freedom from **fiction**, freedom from **pests**, and freedom from **hunger**. If the sheep could provide the things they need, would they need a shepherd? No! In the same way, we need our Good Shepherd to take away our fears, remove frictions in our relationships, get rid of the pesky problems in our lives, and prepare our hearts so that we can feed upon His Word. Just as a good shepherd makes his sheep lie down in green pastures, God wants you to rest in the knowledge of His love and His care. The long, lush green pastures that nourish us is His word. As we feed upon God's Word, as we read it and chew it over in our minds and meditate upon it, we grow spiritually in our love for our Good Shepherd so that we can say, like David said, *Because the Lord is MY Shepherd, I have everything I need. I don't have to fear, I have no reason for conflict, and no pesky problems. I am free to gorge my inner self on His Word. I can feed my soul with the knowledge of God's love and care for me.*

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that we have peace with You because of what Jesus did for us. We are no longer enemies, but now I can call you Abba Father, my Good Shepherd. Thank you for providing spiritual rest. That gives us great joy deep down in our hearts. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Comfort in the Word

Children will look up scriptures showing how God gave freedom from *fear, friction, pests, and hunger*.

Give each child or group of children one scripture and allow them time to determine and discuss what God delivered the people from. Direct the children to summarize the scripture to the rest of the class and discuss how God provides freedom.

Scripture	What God Delivered them From
Judges 6:33-40	(Gideon lays a fleece before God) Fear
1 Kings 17:1-7	(Elijah Fed by Ravens) Hunger
2 Kings 4:38-41	(Death in the Pot) Fear
2 Kings 4:42-44	(Feeding of a Hundred) Hunger
2 Kings 5:1-14	(Naaman Healed of Leprosy) Problematic Situation (Pest)

2 Kings 6:1-7	(An Ax head Floats) Problematic Situation (Pest)
John 8:1-11	(Jesus Forgives an Adulterous) Friction

Stuff It!

Before class set up large fans, several large green garbage bags and many balloons. Blow the balloons up with air before class and label some of them with slogans like, *Rebellious, Unruly, Stubborn, Lazy, Fearful, or Unwilling*.

Tell the children that it their job as the *shepherd* to gather the sheep (the balloons) and have them lie down in green pastures (the garbage bags). Start the fans and angle them so that the balloons are blown around the room and up in the air.

As an alternative, you can have them work in pairs and whichever team bags the most *sheep* wins! In addition, you can appoint one or two *wolfs* to attack the herd.

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

1. What is one of the greatest pleasures a shepherd gets from his flock? (Seeing them contentedly resting.)
2. What four things keep sheep from resting? (Friction with others in the flock, fear, pests, and hunger.)
3. What are the some of the fears you face? (Worry about the "What-If's")

4. What kind of friction do you experience in your home or at school? (There's a bully, someone has to always be the winner.)
5. What would help you feel and know the comfort of the Lord? (Remembering His goodness.)
6. What are some pesky problems you have that keep you from experiencing true rest in Jesus?
7. Matthew 5:6 says, "*God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied.*" What are three things that keep us from being hungry for justice, that is, completely satisfied with God? (Unbelief, bitterness, and pride.)
8. Explain how *unbelief* keeps you from hungering for Jesus? (not trusting that He will always be there for us)
9. Explain how *bitterness* keeps you from hungering for Jesus? (being angry with God for a disappointment in our life)
10. Explain how *pride* keeps you from hungering for Jesus? (thinking more of yourself than of God)
11. What was Jesus doing while the disciples were going out on the sea? (He went up on a mountain to pray.)
12. Why weren't the disciples getting very far in their rowing? (Storm)
13. What would it be like to be out in a bad storm in a rowboat? Would you be scared?
14. Who came walking out on the water? (Jesus)
15. What did the disciples think He was? (A ghost)
16. Did the Shepherd calm all their fears? (Yes)
17. If Jesus could calm the waves of a raging storm, what do you think He can do with the problems that are not allowing you to rest in your life?

He Leads Me Beside Quiet Waters

(He Quenches My Inner Thirst)

(Psalm 23:2b)

Pre-Session Warm Up

We've been learning the 23rd Psalm. So far, we've looked at the first one and ½ verses: "*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures...*"

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 for us. If we trust that He'll take care of us, we can rest from worry and fear.

Today we will find out the next thing our Good Shepherd does for us is *He leads us beside quiet waters*.

Have you ever been really thirsty? After you have eaten lots of chips or other salty snacks, doesn't your tongue sort of dry up? When you're really thirsty, what do you like to drink? A nice glass of cool water is what really quiches *my* thirst. Your body needs water to survive! You will die if you go more than three days without water. You can go a lot longer without food, maybe even up to 40 days, but you need to drink lots of water every day.

I have been talking about *physical* thirst. But, we also have another kind of thirst—a *spiritual* thirst—that only our Good Shepherd can quench.

Opening Prayer

Father, You have given us a natural hunger and thirst for the things of Heaven. Show us where we can go to satisfy every need and desire that we have for You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

O God, You are my God; I earnestly search for You. My soul thirsts for You; my whole body longs for You in this parched and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)

Lesson

[Teacher, prepare a "tasting" table with these items:

- 12 different types of water in clear glasses including: carbonated water, mineral water, lemon water, spring water, tap water, distilled water, flavored water, dish water, water colored with yellow food coloring, iced tea water, salt water, sugar water.
- Number the glasses of water, 1-12
- Index cards labeled with the above water types. Place these cards face down under the glass of water
- Paper and pencil for each child
- Several small Dixie cups for each child

On another table, display things that stand for the **World's Wisdom**, like a crystal ball, a horoscope from a newspaper, food, alcohol, a movie, a Hollywood magazine, or money, symbolizing material wealth. Cover these items with a towel until you talk about them.]

What do you think it means to be *spiritually* thirsty?

We are born with a thirst for the things of God. We want to know who made us and where we come from and where are we going after we die.

Just looking at this beautiful world that we live in makes us want to know the Creator! Aren't you in awe of His wonderful creation? When you see a humming bird or a wood pecker or the clouds forming in the sky, doesn't that awaken in you a desire to know the Creator of the universe?

Well, when we get physically thirsty, we can drink a glass of water to satisfy that thirst. But when we get thirsty for spiritual things where do we turn to quench our spiritual thirst?

Well, some people look in all the wrong places trying to satisfy their spiritual thirst. [Uncover the "*World's Wisdom*" items on the second table.]

Some people try to quench their spiritual thirst by turning to the things that the world has to offer. But none of these things can quench the thirst that God created in us for Himself. They may seem to satisfy us for a while, but in the end, they do not lead us to God.

As we have been learning Psalm 23, we have used a lot of word pictures like, "*the Lord is my Shepherd.*" How is God like a Shepherd? [Let the children respond.] Well if God is our shepherd, then we must be His sheep. How do you think people are like sheep?

Did you know that sheep need help in every way to keep alive? Last week we learned that sheep won't eat if they are not at rest. So, it is the shepherd's job to lead the sheep to a safe place where they feel relaxed and secure enough to eat.

Well, sheep not only need to eat to stay healthy, they need plenty of water, too. When sheep become thirsty, they will drink anything to satisfy their thirst, whether it is healthy or unhealthy. They have no discernment about what is good for them; they need a shepherd to lead them to the good watering holes.

Let's play a game to see how well you, as *sheep*, would make the right decision between drinking waters. Let's say that you have been walking in the wilderness for many miles. It is hot. Your feet are sore.

Your body is tired. Your throat is dry and you need a drink. Now you need to choose some water but you don't have a shepherd to help you.

Look at the table set before you. See the glasses of water? They are numbered 1 to 12. [Distribute paper and pencils.] Write down the glass number that you would drink from if you were given a choice. For example, you might write "3, 11, and 7" on your card. You can choose more than one. [Give children time to write down glass numbers in order that they might drink. Then discuss their choices. Let all the children share their responses and explain why they made their choices. After the discussion, give each child an opportunity to come forward and taste their water choices. They will discover that what looks good is not necessarily good tasting at all.]

Sheep do not know how to make choices like you just made. Some of *you* were even fooled by the color of the water, thinking clear water was safe water. It is the same with sheep. When sheep are thirsty they will drink anything just to satisfy their thirst. If they are not led to clean water, they would even choose diseased, polluted, or dirty water just to try and stop their thirst.

The devil tricks people into drinking the wrong water, too. Just like sheep, people do not know what can be dangerous for them to drink when they are trying to quench their *spiritual* thirst. [Teacher, refer to the items on the *World's Wisdom* display table.]

Bible Story Center

One day Jesus and His friends were walking a long distance. They had been walking all day and they were tired and hungry and thirsty.

They came to a well of cool water. In those days, people didn't have water in their homes. Women got the water they needed for cooking, cleaning and bathing from a well, a deep hole in the ground. They would tie a rope to a bucket, lower it down into the water, and pull up the water. Then they would pour the water into big jars and carry it back to their homes on top of their heads. This is the way they got

water for their animals, too. In many third-world countries it is still done this way. It must be hard work to carry a heavy jar on your head!

So, Jesus stopped by the well to rest while His friends went into a nearby town to buy food. While Jesus was resting, a woman came to the well to get water. Jesus said, "*Hi! I'm thirsty. Could you give me a drink of water?*"

The woman was surprised when Jesus talked to her. She did not know who Jesus was. And men never talked to women in public places back in those days. By speaking to her, Jesus showed her that He cared about her. God loves all people, everywhere.

John 4:9

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are You asking me for a drink?"

Little did this woman know Who she was talking to!

John 4:10

*Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask Me, and I would give you **living water**."*

Jesus was saying, "*If you only knew that you were talking to the creator of the universe, you would ask Me for water...*" But the woman didn't understand what Jesus was talking about.

John 4:11-12

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? (12) And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

She noticed that Jesus didn't have a rope or a bucket; she wondered where He would get this special water.

John 4:13-14

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. (14) But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

When you're physically thirsty, nothing tastes so good as a huge drink of cool water! Of course, that water can only satisfy you for a while then you need another drink. But Jesus said He could give you a drink of water that would last forever!

He wasn't talking about water that comes out of the faucet. Jesus was saying that all who believe in Him will have everlasting life.

When you believe in Jesus you are filled with the Living Water—everlasting life. Only this kind of *water* will truly satisfy our spirit.

To *believe in Jesus* means that you know that Jesus' death on the cross satisfied God's anger against sin. Jesus' death on the cross paid for your sins. As soon as you come to Him and ask Him to forgive your sins, He can because he has already paid for them in full. He said, "*It is finished.*"

In Psalm 23:2b it says, "*He leads me beside quiet waters.*" What does it mean that He *leads* us?

Jesus knows where the good places are for us to go to get our spiritual thirst quenched. And He knows that we, like sheep, need a shepherd to show us the way. So, before He went back up to heaven, He told His disciples that He would send them a Helper.

John 16:13a

When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth.

God, the Holy Spirit, leads us to the Living Water - **the water of everlasting life**. And that is Jesus, Himself! He is the way, the truth, and the life. The Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus by putting a desire in our hearts for more of Jesus. Where do you think the good places are

for us to get our spiritual thirst quenched? We quench that thirst for more of Jesus by reading His word, praying to Him, and spending time praising and worshipping Him.

But what is this about the “*quiet waters?*”

Sheep can drink the most and get the best water when it is still. If the water is rushing, over rocks, they could lose their balance and drown. Water that is moving scares them and they will not drink. A good shepherd always leads the sheep besides peaceful streams.

One place sheep can find nice calm water is right where they are grazing. A lush, green meadow usually has little streams of water meandering through it. Usually the sheep graze first thing in the morning and the water they find right in the meadow can be enough to keep them satisfied for the entire day.

In the same way, we need a peaceful environment to sit quietly with the Lord. You know how hard it is to concentrate if you have other family members talking all around you or the TV is blaring. It's important for you to find a quiet place to be alone with the Lord so that you can pray and read His word; a private place where you can sing and praise Him and talk to Him out loud.

Your private meadow streams might be right in your bedroom before anyone in the household wakes up.

It is important to get in the habit of spiritually drinking of God's word early in the morning. This way we can fill our hearts up with the knowledge of God's love and care for us before we even venture out into our day.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that when we placed our trust in what You did for us on the cross that you filled us with the Living Water of everlasting life with You. Thank you for giving us Your Word. You constantly satisfy our every need and desire. By just sitting and reading Your

Word, we can quench our spiritual thirst. You fill us to overflowing with the knowledge of Your love and care for us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Early to Rise

(Children will learn the significance of seeking the Lord early.)

Divide the children into pairs and assign the following scriptures to each team. Have them report back to the class, **What** was done in their scripture, what **Time** of day the action happened, what **Benefit** or result there was. [Teacher, write *What*, *Time*, and *Benefit* on the board.]

- Psalm 5:1-3 & 12
- Exodus 34:2 & 5
- Psalm 59:16-17
- Psalm 92:1-2
- Psalm 30:1-5
- 2 Chronicles 20:20-22

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

1. What does it mean to be led?
2. How are we like sheep?
3. Who leads us?

4. How does the Holy Spirit lead us?
5. Have you ever been thirsty for the spiritual things of God? Explain. Was your thirst quenched?
6. What does the Bible promise to those who thirst after righteousness? (See Matthew 5:6, they will be satisfied.)
7. What are some of the wrong places to go to quench your spiritual thirst? (The World's Wisdom.)
8. What do sheep sometimes do when they get really thirsty? (They will drink anything even if it's not healthy)
9. What was Jesus referring to when He offered the woman at the well, living water? (Everlasting life)
10. How do you get Living Water? (By believing in what Jesus did for you on the cross and making Him your Lord and Savior.)
11. What is the best time of day to seek the Lord? (Morning)

He Restores My Soul

Forgiveness and Restoration

(Psalm 23:3a)

Pre-Session Warm Up

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

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. Then we learned that He quenches our inner thirst as we spend quiet time with Him reading His Word, praying, and worshipping Him.

Today we will learn that when our relationship with our Good Shepherd is broken, He will pick us up and restore us.

Opening Prayer

Father, thank You for being such a Good Shepherd. Thank You that You love us so much that You provide all that we need. You make sure that we have plenty of rest and good spiritual food to nourish us spiritually. And You led us to the Holy Spirit so that we could get that special Living Water, eternal life with You in Heaven. Thank You for Your love and Your care. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself. (Galatians 6:1)

Lesson

[Teacher, gather the following before class:

- Strips of paper that are labeled: are labeled: *mud, manure, bugs, stickers, twigs, burs, and ticks.*
- More strips of paper labeled: *worldly attitudes, worldly thoughts, and worldly actions.*
- Several Play-dough sheep to use as object lessons.
- A backpack and a bunch of bricks.]

Sheep really need help in every way to keep alive! As we have been studying Psalm 23 we have learned that sheep won't eat if they are not at rest. So, it is the shepherd's job to lead the sheep to a safe place where they feel relaxed and secure enough to eat.

We also learned that when sheep become thirsty, they will get so restless and uncomfortable that they will drink anything, whether it is healthy or unhealthy. Not only that, they won't drink water that is moving; it scares them. If the water is rushing over rocks, they could lose their balance and drown. So, a good shepherd's job is to make sure his sheep get plenty of rest and food and water.

Sheep really do need a shepherd, don't they? They are so helpless on their own.

There is another situation a sheep is helpless to get himself out of, and that's if he gets "cast" down. A *cast* sheep is a sheep that has somehow rolled onto its back and can't get up. [Roll a Play-dough sheep on its back.]

They flail their legs wildly, trying to stand up but can't. They will quickly die from being in this position either naturally or because they have no defense against a predator that attacks. It is the shepherd's job to come to the rescue the sheep and get it up on its feet again.

As people, we can easily become cast down, too. What do you think it means to be cast down? Have you ever been cast down? (Teacher,

discuss reasons why we can be sad, dejected, discouraged, or depressed.) But in the context of Psalm 23, we are not talking about just being sad; we are talking about being broken hearted over our sin against our holy God. There is a Beatitude in Matthew 5:4 that says, “*God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*” The mourning this is talking about is that deep sorrow and regret for doing something that displeases our Lord. This is what I mean by being cast down spiritually.

What does our sin do to our relationship with God? It tears it apart [tear a piece of paper in half]; we are separated from God. And in the same way a sheep that is cast down has no defense against an attacking predator; when we fall down spiritually, we become good targets for the devil, who is looking to destroy us while we are cast down.

1 Peter 5:8

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

Just as it is the shepherd’s job to pick the sheep up that is cast, it is Jesus’ job as our Good Shepherd to pick us up and restore us, too. We need our Shepherd to restore our soul.

There are three main reasons why sheep become cast.

Too Comfortable

First, sheep look for the softest, most rounded hollow to lie down in. They are looking for a place of maximum comfort. But they get so comfortable they can roll over on their backs and get stuck.

The same goes for us as people! We naturally look for ways to stay in our comfort zones, too. We like to be where no demands are put on us. For example, it might be pretty uncomfortable to tell people at school about how Jesus is the Lord of your life. It might not be so easy to say, “*No*” when all your friends are asking you to do

something you know you shouldn’t do. And so, to stay in our comfort zone, where we can just hang out and no one notices us, we don’t stand up for what we know is right and true. But it is at this point we are most likely to roll over on our backs like a sheep.

If we stay in our comfort zone too long and don’t make a stand for Jesus, we too will become cast down and we will need our Shepherd to restore us.

Too much wool

Another reason why sheep become cast is because they just have too much wool. The wool can become long and caked with mud or other debris like manure, ticks, bugs, or burs. The longer the wool gets on the sheep, the more stuff it can collect and this begins to weigh the sheep down. [Teacher, ask a volunteer to stand up beside you. Start to stick strips of paper on him or her that are labeled: *mud, manure, ticks, bugs, burs, and stickers.*]

How do you think a sheep is going to feel in the middle of summer with such a long, heavy, wool coat? Do you think they’ll be enjoying the summer heat? Pretty soon, if the fleece gets too heavy, the sheep will be cast down, unable to help itself.

It is the same for us people! Wool in this word picture depicts the part of us that is in contact with the world. Just as the mud, manure, sticks, twigs, burs, ticks, and bugs stick to the wool of the sheep, the ideas, attitudes, and actions of the world begin to stick to us and weigh us down, too. [Teacher, stick strips of paper on your volunteer that are labeled: *worldly attitudes, worldly thoughts, and worldly actions.*]

Soon, we find ourselves talking, acting, and thinking like the world, instead of how Jesus desires. Pretty soon, we’re so weighed down by this – all this worldly heaviness – we become cast down, just like the sheep. We become weighed down and unable to get up on our feet.

It is the job of the shepherd to bring the shears to the fleece and cut the heavy coat off the sheep to prevent them from being cast. So, too,

does Jesus oftentimes come with the power of the Holy Spirit to cut all these pieces of the world out of us with His correction – letting us know we need to stay close with Jesus our Shepherd. [Teacher, start pulling off the strips of paper.]

Once the Holy Spirit has “sheared” us of these worldly influences, we can again be restored and stand strong in Jesus.

Too Fat

The third reason sheep become cast is because they simply become too fat to help themselves up at all. Fat sheep are not useful to the shepherd. Flabby, weak sheep can be very difficult to manage, as they are unhealthy and unproductive.

It is the same with people. [Teacher, ask another volunteer to come put on an empty backpack. As you talk about self-assuredness, put bricks into the pack, making it very heavy.]

However, we’re not talking of fat in terms of body weight – the fat we’re describing here is pride. When people feel that their possessions or position makes them better than everyone else they become full of themselves. [Ask your students to name worldly possessions that weigh down kids their age, such as a games, clothes, new bikes, etc. As they name the items, place another brick in the pack!]

When we take our eyes and our hearts off of Jesus, it’s easy to become so self-confident we have no reason to trust in God. Then we like sheep will go our own way because we don’t think we need our Shepherd.

Revelation 3:17.

You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

This verse in Revelation describes some “spiritually fat” people who are cast down because of all the weight they’ve carried around. When a shepherd begins to see his sheep becoming too fat, he will put them on a diet to help them lose the weight and become healthy and safe.

If our Shepherd sees that we are becoming too puffed up in pride, He will help us “lose” that weight. When we become too confident in ourselves, the Lord will find a way to humble us.

Hebrews 12:1

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us.

What is the “*sin that so easily trips us up*”? It is pride. Pride is the root of all of our sins. To the level that we are filled with self-confidence we have no confidence in God. And the reverse is true, as well. Our desire should be to want more of Him and less of ME.

Hebrews 12:6-7

For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.” (7) As you endure this divine discipline, remember that God is treating you as his own children. Who ever heard of a child who is never disciplined by its father?

This verse talks about how the Holy Shepherd loves us so much that He won’t let us continue to live our lives in a way that is dishonors Him. He doesn’t want us to stay in a cast-down position. Just like your earthly parents, He cares about us enough to discipline us.

Many people think that when we become cast down – that is, when we become too comfortable in the world, or have become too “wooly” or weighted down with worldliness, or we have become “fat” with confidence in ourselves, that the Lord gets mad and just wants to squash us! [Turn all of the Play-Dough sheep on their sides or backs. Squash one Play-Dough sheep flat.]

This couldn't be further from the truth! A good shepherd loves his sheep. He knows each one by name. He finds the one that is cast down and restores it to its feet. A good shepherd is overjoyed that he found it and saved it! [Pick up the remaining Play-Dough sheep and restore them to their feet.]

Jesus finds us in our cast condition and picks us up gently and does whatever He has to do to restore us with His wonderful care!

Bible Story Center

Let's hear a story about how Jesus gently restored a man who, just like a sheep, became cast down.

This was right after they had arrested Jesus the night before they crucified Him.

Luke 22:54-57

So they arrested him and led him to the high priest's home. And Peter followed at a distance. (55) The guards lit a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat around it, and Peter joined them there. (56) A servant girl noticed him in the firelight and began staring at him. Finally she said, "This man was one of Jesus' followers!" (57) But Peter denied it. "Woman," he said, "I don't even know him!"

Jesus had just been arrested and Peter and John were following behind Him. Jesus was led into the high priest's courtyard but Peter waited outside where he was warming himself by a fire. A girl asked Peter if he was one of Jesus' disciples, but Peter denied that he was – he lied and told the girl, "I am not."

He lied; he denied that he knew Jesus. Here, Peter becomes cast down. Why? He wanted to stay in his comfort zone. He wanted to blend into the background. He didn't want to speak out for Jesus. He lied to keep from being seen as Jesus' true follower because he was afraid he would get arrested, too. But it gets worse...

Luke 22:58

After a while someone else looked at him and said, "You must be one of them!" "No, man, I'm not!" Peter retorted.

Then another person asked him if he was one of the disciples and Peter denied that he even knew Jesus a second time. Peter was still too comfortable being anonymous and now, just like a sheep, he is cast on his back, unable to get up. [Turn a Play-dough sheep over on its back.]

Luke 22:59-62

About an hour later someone else insisted, "This must be one of them, because he is a Galilean, too." (60) But Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. (61) At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Suddenly, the Lord's words flashed through Peter's mind: "Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me." (62) And Peter left the courtyard, weeping bitterly.

Again, a third person asked Peter if he had seen him with Jesus. And, a third time Peter denied that he was with Jesus! He lied about knowing Jesus three times.

Just like a sheep wanting to find that place of maximum comfort, Peter let fear and intimidation affect him. He was afraid if people knew that he was a follower of Jesus, they would stone him to death. He was on his back unable to get up or help himself! He needed to have his soul restored from his cast position.

Like a good shepherd, Jesus looks for sheep that are cast down so that He might restore them.

Later, after Jesus had risen from the dead, Jesus and Peter were eating together.

John 21:15-17

After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.” “Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him. (16) Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.” “Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said. (17) A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.

Jesus knew that Peter had denied Him and He knew that Peter’s soul needed to be restored. Jesus could have been very rough with Peter...He could have yelled at him and punished him. [Smash the Play-dough sheep. Be dramatic.] Look at what is left of Peter. He has been smashed! A shepherd will never kick a sheep that is cast down. He wants to restore them.

Jesus, as the Good Shepherd, knew he had to be very gentle when restoring Peter. He asked Peter three times if he loved Him. Peter answered Jesus by saying that he did love Him.

Jesus gently restored Peter. He did it first by asking Peter if he loved Him and then by telling Peter to be a shepherd to the people by saying, “*Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, and feed my sheep.*” By using gentleness to restore Peter’s soul, Jesus helped Peter to become one of the greatest apostles.

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, will always be careful to restore us gently so we can be back safely under His care.

It is the Shepherd’s job (and His joy!) to gently restore cast sheep. Jesus will find you and pick you up when you’re at your lowest point and restore you back into His flock.

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,

Jesus says that His sheep will always be restored if they let Him do it; that no one or nothing will remove the sheep from His care. He loves us that much, that even when we are cast down and unable to pick ourselves up He will pick us up and restore us, so we can say, “*He restores my soul.*”

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that you are always ready to forgive us and to restore us to our righteous standing before You. I pray that we will be quick to forgive others as You forgive us. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Psalm 23 Relay Race

Materials: Two beach towels, enough Dixie cups for each person, and two pitchers.

Procedure: Divide the class into two teams. At “GO” the first person from each team runs to *Station #1* and lies down on the “green grass” (a beach towel). Then he runs to *Station #2* (the drinking fountain) and fills up a Dixie cup with water. Then he carefully goes back to his team, pours the water into a pitcher, and tags the next person in line. The team with the most water in their pitcher wins.

[Teacher, you can adapt this game as you add verses to the study. For example, have them follow the Path of Righteousness, and so forth.]

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

1. What does it mean that the Shepherd “*makes us lie down in green pastures*”? (The Lord wants us to rest in the knowledge of His love and care for us.)
2. What does it mean that the Shepherd “*leads us beside quiet waters*”? (The Lord wants us to quench our spiritual or inner thirst for spiritual things by reading His word and getting to know Him.)
3. What does it mean that our Shepherd “*restores our soul*”? (When we sin our Shepherd forgives us and reconciles our relationship with Him.)
4. What keeps a sheep from eating? (If they are nervous or if the water is too swift)
5. What keeps you from feasting upon God’s word? (Selfishness, disbelief.)
6. Why is it important for a sheep to have a good shepherd that leads them to the good watering holes? (Because they will drink anything, even unhealthy water.)
7. Why is it bad for a sheep to be cast down? (It rolls over on its back and they can’t get up without help.)
8. In what way can you become spiritually “*cast down*”? (When we do things that displease God.)
9. What are three things that can cause a sheep to get cast down? (Too comfortable, too woolly, and too fat.)
10. In what way can you and I be “*too comfortable*”? How can that cause us to be cast down spiritually? (When we want to stay in our comfort zones so much that we deny the Lord; we don’t make a stand for what we know is right and true.)
11. In what way can you and I be “*too woolly*”? How can that cause us to be cast down spiritually? (When we get too worldly in our thinking and in our speech and actions.)
12. In what way can you and I be “*too fat*”? How can that cause us to be cast down spiritually? (When we get too self-confident and have no further need to trust God for anything.)
13. Who, just like sheep, became cast in this Bible story? (Peter)
14. What did Peter do to become cast down? (He denied the Lord.)
15. How were Peter’s actions just like when a sheep’s gets too comfortable? (He wanted to stay in his comfort zone.)
16. Who is the one who restores the cast sheep? (Shepherd)
17. Who restored Peter? (Our Good Shepherd, Jesus)
18. Was Jesus angry with Peter? (No!)
19. How did Jesus, the Good Shepherd, restore Peter?
20. Have you ever been cast down?

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 23rd 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.)

The Valley of Death

(We Are Never Alone)

(Psalm 23:4a)

Pre-Session Warm Up

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'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 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. We also learned that 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. 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. Have you ever been in the depths of a spiritual *valley*?
2. Have you ever had a “mountaintop” experience?
3. What is best way to get to the mountaintops? (Through the valleys; the slope is not so steep and there is plenty of water.)
4. What are two of the dangers in the valleys for the sheep? (Flash floods and shadows.)
5. 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.)
6. What is the name of the prophet who started on the mountaintop? (Elijah)
7. Where did God lead him when he heard Jezebel was after him? (Out into the wilderness)
8. What did Elijah find out about the shadows in the valley? (God was watching over him and providing for his needs.)
9. Who was always there guiding, protecting, and giving him food? (God.)
10. 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?

Your Rod and Your Staff, They Comfort Me

The Word and the Spirit

(Psalm 23:4b)

Pre-Session Warm Up

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.

- He gives us peace and joy in our lives so that we might 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.

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 you 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 either 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 and staff to protect and correct them, we can learn to rely on the Word of God to bring us protection, correction, comfort and security.

First of all, the Word strengthens us spiritually because by reading the Word we come to know God's love for us. God's Word also brings us comfort because that is where we can learn about His promises to us.

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 staves, 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. How did the shepherd use the rod? (For protection and correction.)
3. How did the shepherd use the staff? (For comfort.)
4. How can you use the Word of God like a rod? (To combat the enemy)
5. How has the Holy Spirit been a staff to you, to comfort you?
6. In the desert, what did Jesus use to fight Satan? (The Word of God.)
7. How can you use the Word to fight the enemy? Tell of a time that you did.
8. 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?

You Prepare a Table Before Me

(Psalm 23:5a)

Pre-Session Warm Up

We've been learning the 23rd Psalm. So far we've looked at the first four 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. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."*

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

- He gives us peace and joy in our lives so that we might 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!
- He has given us the tools we need for life. 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 and gives us the power we need to live a sanctified life—set apart for God's use.

Today we will learn about one of the most important jobs a shepherd has—a good shepherd goes before his flock to prepare a place for them.

Opening Prayer

Father, show us Your love and Your care in new ways today as we consider that no matter what we're going through in our lives, You have gone there first and have checked it all out for us. You are going ahead of us and preparing the way for us. What a comfort! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. (Matthew 25:34)

Lesson

If you were expecting 100 people over to your house for a dinner, what would you need to do to get ready? [Teacher, entertain ideas.]

Well, first you would have to figure out who you wanted to invite. Then you would need to figure out what you were going to feed them and then you would have to make a list. Then, of course, you would have to clean your house. Then you would need to decide how you were going to decorate the table and when to start the cooking. Wow, there would be tons to do to prepare for your guests, wouldn't there.

We learned a couple of weeks ago how every spring, shepherds lead their flocks up through the valleys to the high mountaintops where it is cool. These summer grazing ranges in the high mountains are known as "tablelands". In Spanish, the word for such a place is "mesa," which means "table."

These mesas, or mountaintop meadows, are great for grazing because that is where the best grass is found.

Get the picture? Sheep grazing in a luxurious pasture on a high mountain plain—sounds like a picture post card, doesn't it? But, wait! There could be some things that aren't good for sheep, such as poisonous plants, roots, and berries, as well as, dangerous predators such as coyote, cougar, wolf, or even snakes.

So, one of the most important jobs the shepherd has is to prepare these choice mountain meadow lands *before* the sheep get there. Before the sheep arrive, there is a lot of work to do to get the place ready for the flock. Just like if you were planning to feed 100 people.

The shepherd needs to get rid of the poisonous things so the sheep won't eat them. Next, he needs to drive away as many of the predators as he can that are lurking around, like rattle snakes. And, he also needs to clean out the watering holes so the sheep will be able to drink.

All of this preparation takes place long before the sheep get there. It's a lot of hard work and it can take a lot of time. But because the shepherd loves his sheep and wants to see them enjoy the tablelands, the shepherd is willing to sacrifice himself so that his sheep will have a "mountaintop" experience.

In the same way that a shepherd prepares the meadows for the sheep in the presence of the sheep's enemies (the poisonous plants, poor grass, predators, and the lack of water), Jesus, our Good Shepherd, has prepared a place for us in the presence of our enemy, the devil.

Jesus, Who is God, stepped out of Heaven and became a man. He came to rip out the poisonous roots of sin, to destroy the work of our deadly predator, Satan, and dig holes for His living water so that we could enjoy the abundant life.

John 10:10b

My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

As a shepherd goes before his sheep to prepare the meadow, Jesus has prepared the way for us to have an abundant life!

How has He eliminated our most dangerous predator, Satan? By dying on the cross for us and offering us forgiveness and everlasting life.

Though life with Jesus has "valley" times when we are fearful and struggle with sin, we also enjoy the abundant "mountaintop" times, too. Jesus is the same Good Shepherd through it all. We may still be stung by the poison of sin or be surprised by predators on the mountaintop—but, we can trust that our Shepherd will keep us safe.

Bible Lesson

As the time for Jesus to die on the cross was drawing near, He spoke some very important words to His disciples while eating their last supper together.

Luke 22:29-30

*And just as My Father has granted Me a Kingdom, I now grant you the right (30) to eat and drink at My **table** in My Kingdom. And you will sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Jesus was telling His disciples about the "table" He was preparing for them to eat from in the heavenly kingdom and the thrones they would sit on when they got there.

Wow! Jesus told His disciples that He was going on ahead of them to prepare a place for them! And these promises are for us, too.

John 14:1-3 [still at the Last Supper]

"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. (2) There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? (3) When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

He left His disciples here on earth so they could tell others about Him and what He had come to earth to do—to die on the cross to take the punishment we all deserve for all the naughty things we do.

But He didn't leave us all by ourselves, He sent the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us and to give us strength and power to live a God-honoring life while we wait for our turn to go to heaven.

John 14:25-26

I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. (26) But when the Father sends the Advocate as My representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you.

Jesus told His disciples these things right before He went back up to Heaven. He didn't want them to feel abandoned after He left. He wanted to assure them that they would not be left alone. The Holy Spirit is with us at all times. He is invisible, but He is very real. He is the one that teaches us everything and reminds us of everything that we have learned about Jesus. The Holy Spirit also convicts us of our sins.

John 16:5-8

“But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. (6) Instead, you grieve because of what I've told you. (7) But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don't, the Advocate won't come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. (8) And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.

After He left them, Jesus' disciples still had to contend with the enemy, the devil, who wanted to destroy the disciples. Satan thought if he could get Jesus' followers to stop telling others about Jesus, he could put an end to Christianity before it even got started! Satan, the enemy of God, wanted to harm the disciples and stop them from doing any good for Jesus, just as he does today.

But Jesus, like a Good Shepherd, had already gone before His sheep to prepare the land to eliminate the predator and the poison of sin.

Matthew 25:34 (the verse for this lesson)

Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.

Jesus had planned since before He created the world that He would go to the cross for us so that we might be able to come to heaven with Him. When Jesus explained these things to His disciples, it strengthened them. It gave them courage and confidence.

Thank God Jesus has prepared the way for us to be forgiven of our sins and to live eternally with Him. He has gone before us to prepare a place for us!

There's no place the sheep will go that the shepherd hasn't gone to first and checked it out for them. In the same way, there is no place or situation we will ever face that Jesus hasn't been to and checked it out for us. Jesus cares so much about us as our Shepherd that He goes before us in every area of our life to prepare the situation before we get there.

What a comfort! No matter what you're going through, Jesus has gone before you to root out the evil, to destroy the predators and make water available. Whether we are in the valley or on the mountaintop (the tableland), we know that “*He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies!*”

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that you have gone before us in every situation that we will ever face. You have prepared the way for us. If we would but trust You, You will lead us along the right paths in life and we will arrive safely wherever our lives lead us. Thank you for being such a good and caring Shepherd. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Piece of Cake

Materials:

Put the following items in a large bag or box:

- one box of cake or muffin mix (or a no-bake cookie recipe)
- ingredients needed in the mix, and other ingredients not needed, like ketchup, mustard, pancake syrup, juice, flour, sugar, and so forth
- many kitchen utensils, including ones you will not need! For example, bring many cups and measuring spoons of various sizes as well as forks, spatulas, and so forth; many different sizes of bowls some obviously too small to mix the cake batter in, and various sizes of baking dishes.

Give the cake mix or recipe to the children and tell them that they must prepare the snack. Show them the instructions. Dramatically dump all the utensils and possible ingredients out on the floor so they make a huge mess. *Say:* Just like the shepherd must work hard to get rid of the bad things for the sheep, you must get rid of the bad utensils and ingredients and choose the good ones to make a snack.

Allow children to work together to make the batter. Give as little help as possible and let the children struggle to find the appropriate materials. When needed, give a little guidance. Once the batter is made and poured in the pan, bake the cake, if an oven is available. Have a pre-baked cake ready to use for the snack if there is no oven or if there is not enough time.

Say: Wow! You worked hard to prepare the snack. In the same way, Jesus prepared the way for you to have an abundant life! He worked hard to get rid of the things that you didn't need. When finished, share the snack!

Game Center

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

1. What did Jesus tell the disciples He was going to do for them at the beginning of the story? (He was going on ahead of them to prepare a place for them)
2. Why did Jesus tell them this? (He didn't want them to feel abandoned after He left.)
3. Who did Jesus say He was going to send in His place? (The Holy Spirit.)
4. What did Jesus say that the Holy Spirit would do for them? (He will convict the world of its sin, and of God's righteousness, and of the coming judgment.)
5. How did Jesus act as the Shepherd in this story? (Jesus has gone before us to root out the evil, to destroy the predators and make water available.)

Anointed My Head with Oil

(Psalm 23:5b)

Pre-Session Warm Up

We've been learning the 23rd Psalm. So far, we've looked at the first four and 1/2 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. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies."*

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

- He gives us peace and joy in our lives so that we might 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!
- He has given us the tools we need for life. 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 and gives us the power we need to live a sanctified life—set apart for God's use.

- He has gone before us to prepare a place for us! He has prepared the way for us to be forgiven of our sins so that we can live eternally with Him.

Today we will learn that God anoints us with the Holy Spirit—we have been set apart for His use. And He fills us with His blessings—giving us more than we need so that it overflows out of our lives and spreads into the lives of others.

Opening Prayer

Father, You are such a good shepherd. Thank You for providing everything we need. Thank You for giving us spiritual rest and for quenching our inner thirst for You. Thank You for restoring us to right standing when we sin against You. Lord continue to reveal Yourself to us through this beautiful Psalm of David. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

And say to the people of Israel, "This holy anointing oil is reserved for Me from generation to generation." (Exodus 30:31)

Lesson

[Materials needed: vegetable oil, cooking spray, motor oil, lubricating oil such as WD 40 or 3 in 1 oil, olive oil, Vaseline petroleum jelly, cooking pan, leather shoes and/or leather purse, a toy car, a tool such as an adjustable wrench, a cake mix that requires oil, toy duck or real duck feather, Avon's 'Skin so Soft' or other cosmetic cream protection.]

[Teacher, display various types of oils.]

All of these are different types of oil and each one has a different purpose. What do you think each one of these is for? [Teacher, demonstrate or talk about each type of oil.]

- **Mink oil** – used for softening and waterproofing leather such as a shoe or purse. [Rub some onto a leather shoe.]
- **Cooking spray** - used to keep food from sticking to the pan. [Spray some into a frying pan.]
- **Lubricating oil** – keeps metal parts working freely and smoothly. I put some in my sewing machine before I use it. The oil keeps parts from wearing out. [Apply some oil to the wheels of a toy car.]
- **Vegetable oil** – this oil is used as an ingredient to keep a cake moist and give it texture and flavor. If you didn't put the oil in the cake would crumble when it was sliced. [Display a cake mix.]
- **Vaseline** – petroleum jelly is used to protect your skin from drying out and you can use it to water proof things because it's so thick.
- **Motor oil** – this oil is used to lubricate the parts of an engine. Without oil an engine would shut down and be ruined.
- **Duck feather oil** – did you ever wonder why a duck could spend all day in the water and once they came out of the water their feathers were almost completely dry? God created a special kind of oil especially for the duck's feathers that keeps water from soaking in and weighing the duck down.
- **Olive oil** – this oil is used in cooking and also for anointing.

In Bible times olive oil was used for medical purposes—they used it to clean cuts and wounds. The Bible tells us to anoint people who are sick and to pray for them.

To *anoint* means to *set apart objects or people for God's use*. In Bible times when someone invited a guest to their house they would anoint them with oil. They would put olive oil on their forehead to show them that they cared about them and thought they were very important.

David, who wrote Psalm 23, was a shepherd. So, when he wrote this Psalm, he was thinking of another use for the olive oil that we haven't

discussed yet. In the summer, many different flies and other bugs would terrorize a flock of sheep. They would get into a sheep's nose or ears or eyes where they could get moisture.

The nose fly can be so annoying they can harass sheep literally to death. They deposit their eggs in the damp mucous membranes of the sheep's nose. The eggs hatch to form worms, which make their way into the sheep's head. The sheep would be so bothered by the flies that they would not eat or rest properly. To relieve this irritation, sheep will beat their heads against rocks and trees.

At the first sign of these pesky flies, a good shepherd will apply a special ointment to the heads of his sheep so that their peaceful grazing can continue. The most effective remedy was a mixture of olive oil, sulfur and spices. This mixture was generously rubbed or smeared over the entire head of each sheep. The sheep felt instantly better! They were put at ease and could graze and rest comfortably again. During the summer, a shepherd would do this for his sheep over and over again.

Have you ever been on a picnic when the bees and flies or mosquitoes were so annoying that you spent more time swatting at them than having fun? The bugs may have even ruined your picnic.

Life is full of pesky things beyond our control that can really "bug us." By allowing the Good Shepherd to anoint us, the presence of God's Spirit calms these irritations.

As we have been studying the 23rd Psalm, we have learned several different word pictures for the Holy Spirit. First, we learned that when the Shepherd leads us besides still waters, that the water represented the Holy Spirit – the Living Water of eternal life. Then two weeks ago we learned that the shepherd's staff represents the Holy Spirit, Who is our comforter and the One who leads us into all truth.

In this lesson we will see that the Holy Spirit is also represented in the Bible as oil. Just as the oil brought relief to the sheep, the Holy Spirit

comforts and protects us from things that might harm us or cause irritation in our life.

Bible Lesson

There are many examples of anointing in the Bible.

After Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt through the Red Sea, he brought them to the foot of Mt. Sinai where God gave them the Ten Commandments. At that time God also gave them instructions for building the Tabernacle, the place they were to worship Him.

God gave them many instructions about how He wanted them to worship Him. And He even gave them specific instructions on what to wear.

Exodus 28:40-41

*"For Aaron's sons, make tunics, sashes, and special head coverings that are glorious and beautiful. (41) Clothe your brother, Aaron, and his sons with these garments, and then **anoint** and ordain them. Consecrate them so they can serve as My priests.*

When Moses anointed Aaron and his sons, it was a way to show everyone that they were special people, set aside to serve God.

Exodus 29:4-9

*"This is the ceremony you must follow when you consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests: Take a young bull and two rams with no defects. (2) Then, using choice wheat flour and no yeast, make loaves of bread, thin cakes mixed with olive oil, and wafers spread with oil. (3) Place them all in a single basket, and present them at the entrance of the Tabernacle, along with the young bull and the two rams. (4) "Present Aaron and his sons at the entrance of the Tabernacle, and wash them with water. (5) Dress Aaron in his priestly garments—the tunic, the robe worn with the ephod, the ephod itself, and the chestpiece. Then wrap the decorative sash of the ephod around him. (6) Place the turban on his head, and fasten the sacred medallion to the turban. (7) Then **anoint** him*

by pouring the anointing oil over his head. (8) Next present his sons, and dress them in their tunics. (9) Wrap the sashes around the waists of Aaron and his sons, and put their special head coverings on them. Then the right to the priesthood will be theirs by law forever. In this way, you will ordain Aaron and his sons.

Another example of anointing was many years later...

The children of Israel had been in the Promised Land for a long time and Samuel, the last Judge, had been ruling over them.

1 Samuel 8:1-3

As Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel. (2) Joel and Abijah, his oldest sons, held court in Beersheba. (3) But they were not like their father, for they were greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice.

Samuel's sons were dishonest. They were greedy and accepted bribes and they did not uphold God's perfect law. So the elders went to Samuel to ask him for a king.

1 Samuel 8:4-5

Finally, all the elders of Israel met at Ramah to discuss the matter with Samuel. (5) "Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."

They knew that they didn't want Samuel's corrupt sons to rule over them. They thought they wanted a change.

Samuel tried to talk them out of wanting a king. He told them it won't be good for them at all.

1 Samuel 8:11

"This is how a king will reign over you," Samuel said. "The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots.

Samuel went on to say that if they appoint a man to be king over them, he will tax them, use the money to keep a trained army and make their sons serve as soldiers. Then he will build himself a fancy house and take their sons and daughters for his slaves.

Samuel explained that it was going to be very hard on them to have a man rule over them as a king. But the people refused to listen.

1 Samuel 8:19-20

But the people refused to listen to Samuel's warning. "Even so, we still want a king," they said. (20) "We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will judge us and lead us into battle."

Have you ever made a wrong choice because you wanted to be like everyone else? Never let others pull you away from what God says is right. Because the children of Israel wanted to be like the unbelieving nations around them, they were heading for spiritual disaster.

One day God spoke to Samuel and told him that a man by the name of Saul would be coming and that he was to anoint him as the king over the people.

1 Samuel 9:15-17

*Now the LORD had told Samuel the previous day, (16) "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. **Anoint** him to be the leader of my people, Israel. He will rescue them from the Philistines, for I have looked down on my people in mercy and have heard their cry." (17) When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said, "That's the man I told you about! He will rule my people."*

The next day, Samuel told Saul that God had chosen him to be the king over all Israel. As Samuel spoke, he took the vial of oil and poured it over Saul's head to anoint him. Samuel kissed Saul and told him he was anointed to be King over Israel. [Teacher, take the doll and cover the head with oil demonstrating the anointing.]

Now we know that Saul did not turn out to be a very good king. So, God chose someone else to be the king.

1 Samuel 16:1

Now the LORD said to Samuel, "You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel, so fill your flask with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be My king."

God told Samuel to stop feeling so sad about the way things worked out for Saul; He had someone else in mind. And that made Samuel worried about how Saul would react to this.

1 Samuel 16:2-3

*But Samuel asked, "How can I do that? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me." "Take a heifer with you," the LORD replied, "and say that you have come to make a sacrifice to the LORD. (3) Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you which of his sons to **anoint** for Me."*

God told Samuel to invite Jesse and his sons to a time of worship. Then He would show Samuel what to do from there. So, Samuel packed up and went to Bethlehem. He found Jesse and invited him and his seven sons to worship God with him.

One by one Jesse brought his sons before Samuel. Finally, they brought David to him and he knew that this was the one that God had chosen to be the next king over Israel.

1 Samuel 16:13

*So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and **anointed** David with the oil.*



And the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.

Because oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, anointing someone with oil is a way to show them blessing and honor. It's as if to say, "*May the Holy Spirit bring you comfort and protection from things that might harm you or cause irritation in life.*"

When David was writing Psalm 23, he was reflecting on how wonderfully God protects us and cares for us. He said, "*You honor me by **anointing** my head with oil...*" (Psalm 23:5b)

He was thinking about when he, as a shepherd taking care of his flock would anoint the heads and faces of his sheep with oil and how that instantly relieved them from those pesky flies. That would help them begin to graze and rest comfortably again. And, he was comparing that to how the Holy Spirit brings peace and joy into our lives.

In the same way that the oil protected the sheep from those pesky flies, the Holy Spirit can protect our minds from harm. When ungodly thoughts come into our mind, like when we want to butt heads with people, we need our minds renewed. We need to protect our thoughts and keep them on Godly things by asking for the anointing of the Holy Spirit so that our thoughts are not diseased, pestered, or damaged by something impure and unholy.

What are some "unholy" things that could damage or disease our thoughts? (Telling lies, watching "R" rated movies, following a bad example, like doing drugs.) What can you do to keep your thoughts pure?

Ephesians 4:23 says, "*...let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes.*" We need to allow the Holy Spirit to clean our thoughts.

My Cups Overflows

When David said, "*My cup overflows with blessings,*" he was speaking of God's abundant provision. David was reflecting upon how our Good Shepherd meets our every need. He gives us peace and joy, He quenches our inner thirst, He guides us along the right paths in life, and He comforts and protects us. He fills us with His blessings. He not only gives us what we need, but he gives us *more* than we need. [Teacher, fill a cup to overflowing as an object lesson.]

God gives us more than we need because He loves us. He fills us with His love, peace, and happiness—so much happiness that it starts running over and spreading out and reaching others.

Let's think of things that God has done for us or things He has given us. How does your cup overflow with blessings? [Teacher, allow children time to brainstorm and recall blessings in the Bible or blessings they can expect to receive from the Good Shepherd. Some examples would be: healing, everlasting life, prosperity, long life, protection, leading (by still waters and in paths of righteousness), knowledge, finding us when we are lost, never leaving us or forsaking us, supplying all our needs, having no lack for we shall not want, never fearing, security, help in time of need, power over the enemy, etc.]

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You so much for all the blessings that You pour into our lives. Thank You for our wonderful families and our good beds that we get to sleep in and running water and food to eat. You have blessed us so much that we want to pour our lives into other people. Show us who you want us to bless. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

“My Cup Runneth Over” Relay

Divide your children up into two teams. Give each team a large spoon. Place a bowl of marbles, packing peanuts, jelly beans, or anything else you might have in the front of the line in between both teams. Place a cup for each team at the opposite end of the room. On the word "go" the first two children in line should scoop up some marbles onto their spoon, race down to the other end of the room and drop the marbles into their team's cup. The team who fills up their cup first and it overflows wins.

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

1. How is oil a useful material?
2. How was oil useful to a shepherd?
3. What did oil do for the sheep?
4. What was Samuel to do with the oil for Saul?
5. What did it mean for Saul to be “anointed” with oil? [Teacher, please emphasize being set apart for service, protected, and equipped for a special work for God.]
6. What did the oil represent to Saul and still represents to us?

God's Goodness and Mercy

(Psalm 23:6a)

Pre-Session Warm Up

We've been learning the 23rd Psalm. So far we've looked at the first five 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. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows."*

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

- He gives us peace and joy in our lives so that we might 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!
- He has given us the tools we need for life. 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 and gives us the power we need to live a sanctified life—set apart for God's use.

- He has gone before us to prepare a place for us! He has prepared the way for us to be forgiven of our sins so that we can live eternally with Him.
- He anoints us with the Holy Spirit—we have been set apart for His use. And He fills our lives with His blessings—giving us more than we need so that it overflows out of our lives and spreads into the lives of others.

Today we will learn that when we follow our Good Shepherd and allow Him to take care of us, we will have a never-ending supply of goodness and mercy from our wonderful Shepherd.

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

I will tell of the LORD's unfailing love. I will praise the LORD for all He has done. I will rejoice in His great goodness to Israel, which He has granted according to His mercy and love. (Isaiah 63:7)

Lesson

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. There David served Saul faithfully. Saul loved to have David play his harp and sing his beautiful praise songs to him. David loved Saul 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.

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

One time when he was searching for David, Saul 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.

Wow! 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 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."

Even though King Saul was glad David had not killed him, it wasn't long before Saul was chasing David again! David knew that Saul's feeling towards him had not really changed.

Saul took 3,000 soldiers and went looking for David. Saul and his big army camped for the night; Saul slept in the middle of the soldiers with his sword and a water jug next to his head.

1 Samuel 26:7

So David and Abishai went right into Saul's camp and found him asleep, with his spear stuck in the ground beside his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying asleep around him.

Here again, David had the perfect opportunity to get Saul. What would you do if you were David?

1 Samuel 26:8

"God has surely handed your enemy over to you this time!" Abishai whispered to David. "Let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won't need to strike twice!"

Abishai begged David to let him kill Saul. He said he could do him in with one blow! But, David would not allow any harm come to Saul.

So, David and Abishai quietly made their way down to Saul's camp, tiptoeing between the sleeping soldiers to get to Saul.

Let's read what they did next...

1 Samuel 26:12

So David took the spear and jug of water that were near Saul's head. Then he and Abishai got away without anyone seeing them or even waking up, because the LORD had put Saul's men into a deep sleep.

Wow! David sneaked into the middle of the camp where Saul was sleeping and took his spear and his water jug!

David could have taken Saul's life, but he didn't.

When David was safely away, he woke up Saul and all his men by shouting, *"Who's guarding the king of Israel? Where are the water jug and the spear that were beside his head?"*

Once again, Saul realized that David spared his life; that David didn't try to get even with him.

Even though Saul was mean to David, David showed God's love to Saul. He 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.

This verse is telling us that if we make God our Shepherd and follow him, goodness and mercy will follow us.

The word David used for "follow" here in this verse means to *chase after* or to *hunt down* with the intention of killing.

Have you ever had the sense that someone was following you?

David knew what it was like to look over his shoulder and see Saul hunting him down in order to kill him. But yet, David, who was a man who had a heart for God, also saw two other things when he looked over his shoulder – the *goodness* and *mercy* of God.

Goodness is a God-like character. It is being kind and honest; it's treating someone in the right way—the way God would.

Mercy is being compassionate; it's showing unfailing love; it's forgiving someone even though he or she deserves to be punished.

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

David knew that as a shepherd leads the way to greener pastures, sheepdogs are constantly following them and circling them to keep them from straying. God is kind of like a faithful sheep dog at times. He lovingly chases after us, "herding" us, keeping us on the path of righteousness.

Even though Saul was chasing David to kill him, he knew that because God was his rear guard, no harm would come to him. (A *Rear Guard* is a division of the military forces that brings up and protects the main body of the army regiment from surprise attack, especially in a retreat.)

David could endure Saul's pursuit of him because he knew that God, like a faithful sheep dog, was his rear guard. *"Surely God's goodness and unfailing love will follow me all the days of my life..."*

David was overwhelmed with gratitude to God for showering him with so much love and care all of his life. He loved God and didn't want to do anything to displease Him. That's why he didn't want to hurt Saul.

You see, when you follow the Good Shepherd, you will have a never ending supply of God's goodness and mercy.

How has God shown you goodness and mercy? [Lead a discussion.]

God guides and protects us and shows us how to live a good life. He shows us mercy and forgiveness when we mess up. He is a God of second chances. He will always love us no matter what.

Since God has shown us mercy, we need to follow His example and show His kind of love to others even when they don't deserve it.

When you live your life following the Good Shepherd and obeying him, a wonderful thing happens to you: you will become more and more like Jesus! Then wherever you go, you too will show the love of God by doing good things for others, spreading goodness and mercy to those you meet. And guess what will happen? Others will follow your example and they will treat people with goodness and mercy.

God wants you pass it on! Jesus gets pure joy out of seeing us 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.

If you have very little children, just give each child a set of footprints, have them all line up in a row and demonstrate how to walk across the room with "*Goodness*" and "*Mercy*" following them. They should all do it at the same time if you have room.

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.)

In the Presence of God

(Psalm 23:6b)

Pre-Session Warm Up

We've been learning the 23rd Psalm. So far we've looked at the first five 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. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life."*

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

- He gives us peace and joy in our lives so that we might 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!
- He has given us the tools we need for life. 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 and gives us the power we need to live a sanctified life—set apart for God's use.

- He has gone before us to prepare a place for us! He has prepared the way for us to be forgiven of our sins so that we can live eternally with Him.
- He anoints us with the Holy Spirit—we have been set apart for His use. And He fills our lives with His blessings—giving us more than we need so that it overflows out of our lives and spreads into the lives of others.
- When we follow our Good Shepherd and allow Him to take care of us, we will have a never-ending supply of goodness and mercy from our wonderful Shepherd.

Wow! With a shepherd as good as all this, no wonder David ends this song with such passion! He is in awe of his wonderful Shepherd! He's truly a satisfied sheep! He's wondering why anyone would ever want to wander away from the Lord's sheep fold. Our Good Shepherd is the one true source of full contentment in life.

Today as we close this lesson series we will meditate on what it means to live in the presence of the Lord forever!

Opening Prayer

Father, sow into our hearts this same kind of passion for Jesus that David had. Captivate our hearts with the knowledge of Your great love and care for us. Help us to really experience You, in all Your fullness and goodness, for Your name's sake. Amen.

Memory Verse

The one thing I ask of the Lord—the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in his Temple. (Psalm 27:4)

Lesson

As David comes to the last line of this beautiful song, he triumphantly shouts...

Psalm 23:6b

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

David had truly experienced the fullness of God! And he was looking forward to spending all of eternity in the presence of the Almighty!

In another psalm, David wrote...

Psalm 27:4 (This week's memory verse)

The one thing I ask of the Lord—the thing I seek most—is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, delighting in the Lord's perfections and meditating in his Temple.

You and I can share in David's excitement. We can enjoy that same intimate relationship with our Lord as David had.

God has promised us a place in heaven for all eternity. But, in order to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, we must be sure that we are one of Jesus' sheep. If you are not sure, you can be. All you have to do is ask Jesus to be your Shepherd.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

God promises that whoever trusts and follows him will live with Him for all eternity...

Romans 10:13

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

But, David is not only speaking of living in Heaven for all eternity after he dies. He's also talking about life in the here and now.

He's saying, "*Through the rest of my days, I will live in the presence of the Lord.*"

Experiencing God, like David did, transforms everything in our lives – everything that we think, everything that we say, and everything that we do.

Living the Christian life is not a list of *do's* and *don'ts*. It is not about hoping you won't get caught in a sin. It's about trusting that He will care for us and provide for us, like a Good Shepherd. It's about knowing our Shepherd's voice, and joyfully and obediently following Him.

Bible Lesson

After Jesus ascended back up into Heaven, His followers were so excited about the Lord; they couldn't wait to tell everybody about Jesus! They told people all about the wonderful miracles that He had done while still on earth—He had caused the lame to walk, the blind to see and the deaf to hear. He cleansed the lepers and He even raised the dead.

Matthew 4:23-24

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And He healed every kind of disease and illness. (24) News about Him spread as far as Syria, and people soon began bringing to Him all who were sick. And whatever their sickness or disease, or if they were demon possessed or epileptic or paralyzed—He healed them all.

It was obvious from these marvelous acts alone that Jesus was God! But He also had spoken the words of eternal life to people. He told people about the kingdom of God.

Matthew 7:28-29

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, (29) for He taught with real authority—quite unlike their teachers of religious law.

His followers were enthralled with Jesus. They knew that He was the Messiah, the promised One – the Lamb of God who shed His blood to take away the penalty of their sins. They were teaching people that God didn't expect them to keep all the rules and regulations that the Jewish leaders demanded they keep. They told them that Jesus paid the penalty for their sins so that now they could have peace with God.

This made the religious rulers angry. They tried to stop the spread of Christianity before too many people heard the good news about Jesus. The Pharisees warned the people not to talk about Jesus. But that didn't stop them!

Even though His followers knew that if they began to tell people about the risen Savior, they would surely be persecuted — whipped, beaten, spit upon, and certainly sent to prison. But they weren't afraid.

And many of the early Christians were persecuted and some were even put to death.

One time, the town officials accused Paul and Silas of teaching against the law. Then the crowd attacked Paul and Silas.

Acts 16:22-24

A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas, and the city officials ordered them stripped and beaten with wooden rods. (23) They were severely beaten, and then they were thrown into prison. The jailer was ordered to make sure they didn't escape. (24) So the jailer put them into the inner dungeon and clamped their feet in the stocks.

With their backs bleeding and their feet clamped painfully into heavy wooden frames, they were surrounded by darkness. How easy it would have been for them to grumble and complain! But they didn't.

God's Word says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice.*" (Philippians 4:4) To rejoice in the Lord is to be joyful or happy as you think about Him, even if you are going through hard times, like Paul and Silas were. They were locked up in prison. But they didn't complain or grumble. They were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and rejoiced in the Lord!

Acts 16:25

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening.

They thought they were about to be put to death, yet they continued to praise the Lord. They didn't know a miracle was about to happen!

Acts 16:26-27

Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! (27) The jailer woke up to see the prison doors wide open. He assumed the prisoners had escaped, so he drew his sword to kill himself.

Jailers in those days were put to death if their prisoners escaped. So, when he thought that Paul and Silas had escaped, the jailer tried to kill himself. But Paul stopped him.

Acts 16:28

But Paul shouted to him, "Stop! Don't kill yourself! We are all here!"

When the jailer saw that the prisoners hadn't run away, he realized immediately that God had done a miracle. It was God who caused the earth to shake; it was God who opened the prison gates; it was God who loosed the prisoner's chains.

Acts 16:29-30

The jailer called for lights and ran to the dungeon and fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. (30) Then he brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

The jailer had heard Paul and Silas rejoicing in the Lord; now he wanted to know God in the same way, too. So, Paul told him what he had to do.

Acts 16:31

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with everyone in your household."

Paul and Silas didn't give the jailer a list of rules to follow in order to get saved! Paul simply told the jailer the good news about what Jesus did for us. And, like these early Christians, we should be so grateful for what Jesus has done for us that we can't stop talking about His goodness.

We all deserve to be punished for the naughty things we do. If we believe that Jesus willingly died for us and gave His life's blood to pay for our sins, someday we will have eternal life with God in heaven. Paul and Silas told the jailer that he and anyone else in his family, who wanted to, could believe on Jesus to save them from sin. That's the good news we need to tell everyone today, too.

Acts 16:32-33

And they shared the word of the Lord with him and with all who lived in his household. (33) Even at that hour of the night, the jailer cared for them and washed their wounds. Then he and everyone in his household were immediately baptized.

The jailer washed their wounds. And God turned Paul and Silas' pain to joy and victory as the jailer and his family believed in the Lord.

Paul and Silas weren't waiting for heaven to live the victorious Christian life. They were living it every day, even in the midst of trials.

The persecutors tried to dishearten and discourage the followers of Jesus. But instead they were cheerful. They were praying and singing songs to God. They were probably singing some of the Psalms that David wrote. And as a result, even more people came to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

God wants us to live every day in the presence of God. He wants us to know that He is with us every minute. He wants us to experience Him in every situation. He's sharing in the joy of our victories and He cheering for us when we need encouragement. Even when we walk through the valley of death there's no reason to fear, just knowing that God is with us.

David said, "*I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*" "*Through the rest of my days, I will live in the presence of the Lord.*"

Living in the knowledge of God takes practice. Get in the habit of talking to God all day long. Start before you get out of bed in the morning. You can talk to Him while you're taking a shower or while you're on your way to school. God loves you and longs for your friendship. Fill your hearts and minds with thoughts of God. Remember all the wonderful ways that He has cared for you. Soon you will want to burst into song, like David, singing the song of the contented sheep...

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. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23)

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You that You promise to never desert us or give up on us. Help us to practice living in Your presence every day of our life. We pray that many will come to know You as they observe us living in full assurance of Your provision in our life. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

"Sheep & Goats"

Jesus said that at the end of the age, He will come down and separate the Sheep from the Goats.

Matthew 25:31-34

"But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. (32) All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. (33) He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. (34) "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.

So, those that are true sheep of the Lord will enter into heaven, but the others will be sent into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The "goats" will go away into eternal punishment, but the "sheep" will go into eternal life.

Set Up: Establish a large playing area. On one side of the playing area establish a "sheep fold" for the sheep. On the other side of the playing area establish a "pen" for the goats.

Appoint one child to be a "shepherd" and another child to be a "goat herdsman".

How to Play: The children begin at the center of the playing area with the "shepherd" and the "herdsman" standing to the sides. At "Go", teacher yells, "*Divide the sheep and goats!*" At which point the "*shepherd*" and the "*herdsman*" attempt to tag the "*sheep*" and "*goats*" by sticking them with a color-coded piece of tape. If a shepherd tags a "*sheep*," that child goes to the sheep fold. If the herdsman tags a "*goat*", that child goes to the goat pen as designated before the game began.

Once all the children are in their respective "*pens*", count to see which team has the most children.

Let the children take turns being the "*shepherd*" and the "*herdsman*".

After the Game: Ask the players, "When the end of the age comes, what do you want to be, a *sheep* or a *goat*? Obviously, we all want to be *sheep*. How can we be sure we are one of God's sheep? Ask Jesus to be your Good Shepherd."

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

1. What do you think David meant when he said, "*I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever*"? What does that mean to you?
2. In order to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, what must you be sure of? (That you are one of the Lord's sheep)
3. How do you become one of the Lords' sheep? (By asking Him to be your Lord and Savior.)
4. Why did the Jewish religious rulers persecute Jesus' followers? (Jesus' followers were teaching people that they didn't have to

keep all the rules and regulations that the Pharisees demanded. They told people that Jesus paid the penalty for their sins so they could now have peace with God.)

5. Why weren't the followers of Jesus afraid of the Jewish religious rules? (They trusted that God would protect them like a Good Shepherd.)
6. What did Paul and Silas do while they were in prison with their backs bleeding and their feet clamped painfully to the wall? (They rejoiced in the Lord!)
7. What would you do if you got sent to prison for no good reason?
8. What sudden surprise happened to Paul and Silas? (There was a great earthquake, the jail doors opened, and their handcuffs dropped off.)
9. Why did the jailer almost kill himself? (He thought that Paul and Silas escaped and he knew the punishment for letting a prisoner escape was certain death.)
10. When the jailer realized that God had done a mighty miracle what did he ask Paul and Silas? ("*What must I do to be saved?*")
11. What did Paul tell the jailer to do to be saved? (Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.)
12. What does it mean to believe on Jesus? (To trust that when He was crucified on the cross, He took the full punishment for your sins.)
13. What part of Psalm 23 is your favorite?