

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 wooly, 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 wooly*”? 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?