

You Prepare a Table Before Me

(Psalm 23:5a)

Introduction

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.

- Our Good Shepherd provides food and rest for our souls. He has given us His word, the Bible, so that we can grow in our faith and find spiritual rest in the knowledge of His love and care for us.
- He quenches our inner thirst as we spend quiet time with Him reading His Word, praying, and worshipping Him.
- When our relationship with our Good Shepherd is broken, He tenderly and lovingly picks us up and restores us to a right relationship with Him.
- He guides us along the right paths in life so that our lives will bring honor to His name.
- When we walk through the dark valleys in our lives, we don't need to be afraid because our Good Shepherd is close by. He never stops leading and protecting us!
- 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, as well as, dangerous predators such as cougar, wolf, or even snakes. And, the stream beds might be clogged up with winter debris like old leaves and fallen branches.

One of the most important jobs the shepherd has is to prepare these choice mountain meadow lands *before* the sheep get there. There's a lot of work to do, just like if you were planning to feed 100 people. He will have to make several hikes up to the mountain top to get the place ready for the flock.

First the shepherd goes up in early Spring, even before all the snow has melted, to scatter grass seed so the meadows are green and lush when they get there. While he's there, the shepherd will check the meadows very carefully for poisonous plants. There's a beautiful little lily that grows wild in these alpine meadows that are very dangerous. A sheep can die very quickly if it eats these lovely flowers. So, the shepherd must pull them up.

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 to flow so that we can enjoy the abundant life.

John 10:10

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.

Our enemy, the devil, only wants to steal our joy. He wants to kill us and destroy God's plan. Jesus wants to give us an abundant and everlasting life with Him in heaven and He came to prepare the way for us to get there.

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

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 22:28-30

*"You have stayed with me in my time of trial. (29) 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.

Have you ever been to a wedding? After the marriage ceremony, the bride and groom are usually honored at a fancy dinner party. There's usually music and dancing and, of course, the wedding cake.

When we get to heaven, like a bride, we will be seated at a large banquet table with Jesus, who will be seated with us. Christians call this the *marriage supper of the Lamb*:

Revelation 19:6-9

Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder: "Praise the LORD! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. (7) Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to Him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and His bride has prepared herself. (8) She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear." For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God's holy people. (9) And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb." And he added, "These are true words that come from God."

Everyone who ever trusted in what Jesus did for us on the cross will be there:

Luke 13:29

And people will come from all over the world--from east and west, north and south--to take their places in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus, like a Good Shepherd, has already prepared everything for us. Before He created the world, His plan all along was to come down from heaven and live among us so that He could go to the cross to

take the punishment for our sins. He has gone before us to prepare a place for us! By dying on the cross, He made a way for us to be forgiven of our sins so that we could live with Him in heaven forever.

Just like a shepherd gets rid of the poisonous plants, Jesus ripped out the poisonous roots of sin by dying on the cross.

Just like the shepherd drives away the predators, Jesus destroyed the work of our enemy, the devil, who prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Just like the shepherd cleans out the watering holes, Jesus fills us with the living water, the Holy Spirit, who leads us and guides us, provides for us and protects us, and gives us the power we need to live our lives in a way that pleases God.

It's important to remember that there's no place the sheep will go that the shepherd hasn't gone to first to prepare the place for them. In the same way, there is no place or situation we will ever face that Jesus isn't already there preparing the way for us. He cares so much about us that as our Good Shepherd, 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 living 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. When David's sheep boasts that his shepherd, "*makes me lie down in green pastures*," what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (Our Good Shepherd provides food and rest for our souls. He has given us His word, the Bible, so that we can grow in our faith and find spiritual rest.)
2. When David's sheep boasts that his shepherd, "*leads me beside quiet waters*," what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (He quenches our inner thirst by filling us with living water, which is a picture of the Holy Spirit.)
3. When David's sheep boasts that his shepherd, "*restores my soul*," what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (When our relationship with our Good Shepherd is broken because of our sin, He will tenderly and lovingly pick us up and restore us to right standing with Him.)
4. When David's sheep boasts that his shepherd, "*guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake*," what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (He guides us along the right paths in life so that our lives will bring honor to His name.)
5. When David's sheep boasts, "*even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil*," what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (Even when we walk through the dark valleys in our lives, there is no need to be afraid because our Good Shepherd is close by. He never stops leading and protecting us.)
6. When David's sheep boasts, "*your rod and your staff, they comfort me*," what picture does this paint of our Good Shepherd? (Our God will always take care of any trouble or pain we may

experience. He's constantly leading, guiding, protecting, and providing for us.)

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

7. Why do shepherd's take their sheep up to the mountain meadows during the summer? (There are lush green meadows for them.)
8. Why does a good shepherd go up to the mountain meadows *before* he takes his sheep up there? (He must prepare the meadows for the sheep.)
9. What does the shepherd do to prepare the mountain meadows for his sheep? (He spreads grass seed, pulls up the poisonous plants, drives away the predators, and cleans out the watering holes.)
10. In what ways has our Good Shepherd, Jesus, prepared the way for us to have an abundant life? (He died on the cross and paid for our sins, and offers us forgiveness and everlasting life.)
11. What was the invitation Jesus extended to his disciples at the last supper? (To eat and drink at His table in heaven.)
12. What promise did Jesus make to His disciples at the last supper? (He said, "I am going to prepare a place for you and when everything is ready, I will come and get you to be with Me forever in heaven.")
13. How did Jesus destroy our enemy the devil? (By dying on the cross and offering us forgiveness and everlasting life.)
14. Who is the Bride of Christ? (All of us who are true believers.)
15. If we are the Bride of Christ what does that make Jesus? (Our groom!)
16. How did Jesus rip out the poisonous roots of sin? (By dying on the cross.)

