

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.)

