

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?