

Psalm 23

L-1: The Lord is my Shepherd

A. Outline of lesson:

1. Introduction: What is a psalm?
2. Shepherd – sheep analogy
 - a. Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd
 - b. Those who believe in Him are His sheep
3. Why do sheep need a shepherd?
4. What is a good shepherd?
5. Conclusion: How to become one of the Good Shepherd's sheep

B. Bible verse: [Psalm 23:1a](#) “The Lord is my shepherd”

C. The Lesson:

“The Lord is My Shepherd.” This is the first line of a poem written by King David during one of the worst times of his life. David’s favorite son, Absalom, has started a revolution against him and has overthrown the kingdom. King David had to escape for his life. There are only a few men left who are still loyal to him, not enough to win the war. It is night and David and his men are tired. That morning they were at home safely in the palace, but when word came of the advancing enemy army, they had to run for their lives. They left everything, even some of the people of their own families. Now, they are hiding in a cave somewhere east of Jerusalem. They are tired and hungry. It seems there is no hope, for the enemy is innumerable and they are only about thirty men. This is the night that David writes the most famous song he ever wrote – the 23rd

Psalm. A psalm is a poem that was sung, usually accompanied by a lyre. A lyre is a stringed instrument that wasn’t too big, so it could be carried. If David lived in our times, he probably would have played a guitar. Somewhere in the back of this cave, there is a small fire burning. A group of tired and worn men are sitting around the fire, very sad and discouraged. King David picks up his lyre and begins to make up a new song – “The Lord is my Shepherd ...”

The 23rd psalm is all about Jesus Christ – He is the Shepherd. There was a day, a long time ago, when Jesus was teaching the people about who He was, but they were not understanding. He had just healed a blind man, something only the Messiah could do – and yet they still didn’t ‘see’. So, Jesus taught them this same lesson that we are learning today – the story of the Good Shepherd. Perhaps He started His class with a song. Which song do you think He might have sung? I think He would have sung David’s most famous song – the 23rd Psalm. Then, looking straight at the people He said, “I am the Good Shepherd! I am the Lord!” Oh, how surprised the people were to hear this. Are you surprised to learn this also? Do you know that Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd who takes care of His sheep? Not only is Jesus called our Good Shepherd, but God’s Word says that we are just like sheep. In our lesson today we will learn what it is that good shepherd does and why each sheep needs a shepherd.

To the teacher:

Present the gospel and information about salvation as often as the Holy Spirit prompts you. Those who have never believed will have the opportunity and those who have will learn a little bit more about their so great salvation.

Begin every lesson with confession – the naming of sins to God. This insures the filling of the Holy Spirit for the teaching of God’s Word. It may be necessary to repeat this process throughout the lesson so learning will be maximized.

These lessons are consecutive and build on the previous lessons. It will be helpful for you to look over the previous lesson, so you can see their continuity.

One of our objectives is to have the children memorize the entire Psalm, which has only 6 verses. To help encourage this we have a “Psalm 23 chart” with each phrase and a place for a ‘lambie sticker’ when each part is memorized. With each consecutive week, the child needs to say everything so far and the newest part learned in the previous lesson. Then, a sticker can be put in the corresponding box.

Doctrinal materials for this series were taken from R.B.Thieme’s study of the 23rd Psalm (Spiritual Dynamics 232-251) and [A Shepherd Looks as Psalm 23](#) by Phillip Keller

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Let's start with sheep. Of all the animals God made, sheep have the most problems and need the most help. Sheep have at least seven big problems, which they cannot solve. This is why each sheep needs a shepherd.

- 1. A sheep cannot guide himself. He has no sense of direction. He cannot tell which way to go. If there are two paths ahead and one goes through a nice valley and the other goes down a steep dangerous cliff, a sheep can't figure out which one to take. A sheep, unlike a dog or a cat, cannot find his way home. If he wanders over to the pasture next door, he can't remember how to get back. He gets confused when he is just around the corner of the fence. A sheep needs a shepherd beside him all day long, or he might get lost in his own pasture.*
- 2. A sheep cannot clean himself, like a cat. He doesn't know how to splash in the water and take a bath like a bird. He will not jump into a lake like a dog. When a sheep gets dirty, he needs a shepherd to wash him, or he'll just stay that way and not know what to do about it.*
- 3. A sheep is helpless when he is hurt or injured. He can't lick his wounds like most animals. He needs a shepherd to rub some soothing ointment on his sores, or to give him some medicine so it won't hurt so much. Sometimes, if the sheep is badly hurt or breaks a leg, the shepherd will carry the sheep every day on his shoulders until he is well again.*
- 4. A sheep cannot find food or water. If a sheep is standing on a dry patch of dirt, he doesn't know to 'go over there' where the green grass is. He can't smell water like a horse can. A sheep will die of hunger or thirst with water and grass in sight if the shepherd doesn't take him and lead him to the right place.*
- 5. A sheep is easily frightened and becomes scared at every little thing. If a wolf howls in the night, a sheep will become terrified and won't be able to go to sleep. To calm the sheep, the shepherd will play soft, soothing songs on his lyre or he will sing in the night. The sheep hears the voice of his shepherd and trusts that everything is okay. It is the shepherd's voice that relaxes the sheep.*
- 6. Sheep tend to get distracted and wander off. They don't concentrate on following the shepherd. If the flock is traveling to a new pasture, a sheep may stop paying attention and take the wrong path. If he is near a cliff, the sheep may wander right over the edge. Oh what trouble he is in now. The shepherd pays close attention to each sheep and makes sure that he stays on the right path.*
- 7. The sheep's worst problem is that he is defenseless. He cannot protect himself. He has no sharp claws or teeth with which to fight. He cannot hide, for his wool doesn't camouflage like some animals. He cannot run fast, so he can't get away. The only thing a sheep can do when a predator animal attacks is stand there and bleat.*

God, in His Word, says we are just like sheep. The good news is that God has given the sheep a Shepherd. So, what does a good shepherd do?

- 1. First, a good shepherd has a plan for his sheep. He walks the hills and mountains and valleys to find the best pastures. If he plans on keeping his sheep in one large fenced-in range, he plants the kinds of grasses that the sheep likes, ones that provide the best nourishment for his sheep, for he wants his sheep to be healthy. When moving from one pasture to another, a good shepherd watches each sheep and keeps him on the right path.*

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2. *A good shepherd takes care of each sheep individually. One at a time he names each sheep and remembers each sheep's name. Soon, that sheep learns the name his shepherd has given to him. Sometime during the day, the shepherd will call each sheep over to himself and will give him a good 'look-over'. The shepherd will gently wash any dirty parts being sure to not splash the sheep too roughly, for he knows that this would frighten his little sheep.*
3. *Then the shepherd will check his ears and nose and mouth – to make sure he doesn't have any parasites or bugs bothering him. He will check his hoofs to make sure there isn't a sticker hurting his sheep. If there is a cut or a scrape, the shepherd will put some soothing ointment or medicine on the sore. He will hug and stroke the sheep, letting him know that the hurt will soon heal and everything will be okay.*
4. *The shepherd will lead the sheep to good soft green grass, the kind the sheep likes the best. Or, the shepherd will go to great efforts to gather bails of hay and grass and bring it to his sheep. The shepherd will never let his sheep go hungry, nor will he let him eat bad or dried up grass. The shepherd will also make sure his sheep can drink from calm waters. He doesn't want him to slip and fall into the current. He also knows that fast moving water scares his sheep. If he has to, he will make a dam so his sheep can drink safely.*
5. *A good shepherd sings soft soothing songs to his sheep during the dark scary night, so he won't be frightened. Even if a sheep hears a lone wolf off in the distance, he won't be afraid if he can also hear the voice of his shepherd singing nearby. A sheep has confidence in his shepherd.*
6. *A good shepherd doesn't let a sheep wander off. If a sheep starts to become distracted, the shepherd will gently swat him on his rump so he'll get back on the right path. If a sheep falls off a cliff the shepherd will search until he finds him and will then rescue him. He will reach over the edge with his long staff and hook the sheep's neck in the crook. Then, with his strong arms, the shepherd will pull the sheep to safety. If a sheep is very stubborn and refuses to learn to follow his shepherd and if that sheep keeps getting himself in dangerous scrapes, the shepherd may have to break his leg. Then, the shepherd will carry the sheep on his shoulders until the leg heals, all the while teaching the sheep how to depend on him and stay on the right path.*
7. *The most important thing a good shepherd does is protect his sheep. A sheep makes a very tender and easy meal for many wild animals, and they are constantly waiting for the opportunity to attack. The shepherd is on constant alert, watching and protecting his sheep at all times, both day and night. When a predator attacks, the shepherd fights for the sheep, while the sheep stands back and watches. If it is necessary, a good shepherd will even die protecting his sheep. The shepherd is so skilled, that if it really does become a fight to the finish, he will make sure that the enemy dies before he does. In this way, even if he has to give his life, his sheep will still be safe.*

There is nothing better in the world than being a sheep with a Good Shepherd!

The Bible tells us that anyone who 'hears' the Good Shepherd and 'follows' Him becomes one of His sheep. So, how do we 'hear' the Shepherd? We hear when someone tells us about Jesus Christ. We hear about the cross and how all our sins were poured on Him. We hear that He died spiritually in our place, as our substitute. We hear how He paid the penalty for our sins.

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Then, we ‘follow’ Him when we believe that He did this for us. At the very moment we ‘follow’ Him by believing in Him, He gives us a new life – eternal life, and then He guarantees that He will protect us, as one of His own sheep, forever and ever.

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.” John 10:27-28

Once you have become one of Jesus’ sheep – He owns you. He has already given his life for you. This is the story of the cross. He bought you by paying the price for your sins. When a shepherd buys sheep the first thing he does is ‘put his mark’ on them – so everyone will know that they are his sheep and that he owns them. In olden times a shepherd did this by taking a very sharp knife, laying the side of the sheep’s head on a rock and cutting his special shape into the sheep’s earlobe. For the rest of his life the sheep bears the mark of his shepherd. It is a little like a cowboy branding his cattle. When we believe in Christ, our Good Shepherd puts His mark on us also – it is called the ‘sealing of the Holy Spirit.’ A Bible-time ‘seal’ was how a person put his name on something. It is like signing your signature to something valuable. The Bible tells us that when a human-sheep ‘hears’ the Good Shepherd, by listening to the story of Jesus on the cross, and decides to ‘follow’ Him by believing that it is true, then the Holy Spirit puts His ‘seal’ – His name – on us, to show that we now belong to the Good Shepherd forever and ever.

“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth [hearing the Shepherd’s voice], the gospel of your salvation having also believed [following Him], you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise [cuts His mark into your earlobe],” Ephesians 1:13

Activity:

Put an ‘ear-mark’ on each child – with a felt pen draw a cross on one earlobe of each child = belonging to the Good Shepherd, ‘sealed’ by the Holy Spirit.

Craft: Make a shepherd

Coloring Picture: “The Lord is my Shepherd” – the shepherd walks with his sheep

Take-home pamphlet:

This little pamphlet is a short version of this lesson, a picture to color, a puzzle to do, and a question and answer section at the end. It is designed to be given to the children at the end of class. However, if you need to fill time, you can give it out early. A child can read the story aloud and all the children can work together to answer the questions on the back.