

Psalm 23

L-10: The Prepared Table

A. Outline of lesson:

1. The shepherd prepares the tablelands
 - a. grass, water
 - b. poisonous plants
 - c. enemy predators, 1 Peter 5:8
2. Manna, Ps 78:9, Deut 8:3, Num 21:5
3. The food on the table
 - a. +V - tastes good Ex 16:31, Ps 119:97
 - b. -V - tastes bad, Num 21:5
 - c. 'eating' God's words, Jer 15:16
4. The water on the table = HS, 1 Cor 2:10
5. Your place at the table
6. The Shepherd prepares the food
 - a. preparing = testing the words
 - b. Satan's test - rocks to bread, Matt 4:3-4
 - c. defeated the enemy with words, 2 Cor 2:16b
7. The cost to the shepherd, Isa 53:11; Heb 12:2

B. Bible verse: [Psalm 23:5a](#) "You prepare a table before me, in the presence of my enemies."

The 'memory requirement' for a sticker this week is: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and Your staff they comfort me. ..."

C. Review:

1. Need for a shepherd? Becoming His sheep
2. Contentment, LG, the desires of your heart.
3. Lie down and rest = no fear, no infestation, no fighting, no hunger.
4. Grass and water together – BD + HS
5. Restoring a cast sheep
6. The spiritual life is called 'paths of righteousness'
7. Death-shadowed valley – soul and spirit go to heaven
8. Confidence removes fear
9. The rod represents authority, discipline, examination, protection. The staff represents fellowship, guidance, forgiveness

D. The Lesson:

To the sheep, the high mountain tablelands have the most delicious meadows for grazing. This is the best part of the summer's journey – feasting at 'the table' prepared for them by the shepherd. Much earlier in the spring, the shepherd made several trips into the high hills to prepare the fields for his sheep. This is quite a job and cost him much time, effort, expense, and

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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self-sacrifice. The streams that feed these pastures must be cleared of leaves and debris each year. In autumn, the falling leaves clog the clear streams turning the grazing lands into swamps filled with parasites, like mosquitoes. Then, the winter storms cause great branches to mangle the pathways to the watering places. One of the things the shepherd does in the early spring is to clean out the 'calm and quiet waters' that his sheep will need come summer. Often, he must rebuild dams, creating smooth pools for drinking. This is a lot of work and requires much muscle and energy. The shepherd must also watch for the wild flowers, because some are poisonous to sheep. One such flower, called the calla is very dangerous. The calla plant blooms in several colors. The blue and yellow ones are not a danger, but if a sheep even nibbles on a white calla, it will paralyze him and he will die. In early spring, when the flowers are just beginning to bloom, the shepherd, on his hands and knees, will comb the fields meticulously pulling up the white calla plants, removing the poisonous flower from the 'table' he is preparing for his beloved sheep. It takes days and days to remove all these pretty but deadly flowers. The sheep will also need salts and minerals during the hot days of summer, so he hauls up big salt blocks and decides just where to put them, for the sheep to have easy access. And, he determines where he will have his sheep bed down at night, picking the areas with the deepest, softest grasses.

While he is doing all this, the shepherd is looking for signs of predators – wolves, cougars, coyotes, and bears. These predators are often watching overhead in the hanging cliffs, waiting for a sheep to stray and become an easy meal. Or, they will make a sneak attack causing the herd to stampede. The weaker ones become vulnerable to their sharp teeth and claws. Cougars are particularly dangerous. They come in at night and swiftly wreak havoc among the sheep. Sometimes they kill a ewe outright and sometimes they 'play' with the poor terrified animal, ripping and tearing her wool and skin from her body. Scared to death, the sheep tries to get away, usually stumbling and breaking her leg. The cougar is so stealthy that it can usually stalk and capture its prey before the shepherd even knows it is there. Some sheep are so horrified, they can't even bleat for help; their fear silences them. The only truly safe place for the sheep is right by the shepherd's side. The sheep that straggle behind and wander off are the ones who are devoured by the enemy. All these things are going through the shepherd's thoughts as he prepares the tablelands for his sheep.

“Be self-controlled, be on the alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, stalking someone to devour.” 1 Peter 5:8

In the Bible, God tells us of a time when a huge flock of human-sheep were out in the wild wilderness without food or water. These people were like sheep who forgot Who their Good Shepherd was, for they began to panic and bleat, filled with worry and complaints. But God, the Faithful Shepherd, prepared 'a table in the wilderness' for them – enough for two million people!

“Then they spoke against God; they said, ‘Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?’” Psalm 78:9

Each morning when they woke up, there on the grassy plains of the 'tableland' God served breakfast – really! It was just like a shepherd preparing the thick grasses for his sheep. The people simply needed to go out and 'graze' – gather in the flaky bread spread out for them on

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the grass like a picnic. This flaky bread was the best breakfast you could imagine; it was food prepared for them by God, Himself. When they saw it for the first time, they didn't know what kind of food it was, for they had never seen or tasted anything like it before. "Manna?" they asked, which means "What is it?" Moses, their leader, answered, "This is Bread from Heaven, which our Lord has prepared for us." And, do you know? That manna represented the same thing as the green grass the sheep of the 23rd Psalm eat – it represented the very words of God – the Bible. The human-sheep eating manna and the animal sheep eating grass is a picture of what our Good Shepherd wants for us – to 'eat from God's Word' every day – so our soul's can be filled and satisfied with Truth. The sad news is – those people kept eating the manna, but they never learned to eat from God's Word. They fed their bodies, but never fed their souls. They never figured out that manna was a picture of the words of the Bible, for even after being told day after day what it meant, they kept calling it manna – what is it?

"He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know [understand], nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord." Deuteronomy 8:3

What is this 'table' Jesus Christ has prepared for us? It has three main parts – food to eat, water to drink, and a place to sit. Let's take a close look at the food Jesus Christ has put on our 'table' for us to eat. Just like both the manna for the people and the grass for the sheep compares to God's Word, the 'food' on our table is 'spiritual food' which means it is food for our thoughts. The actual 'food' is the thoughts and words that Jesus Christ thought and said. We 'eat' the words when we learn and believe them. Learning is the hearing part. It is like putting a spoonful of 'words' into your mouth. If you like the words, meaning your volition is positive, they taste very good – like sweet wafers of honey, which is how the Bible describes the taste of manna. But, if you have a negative attitude to the words that God teaches, they will 'taste' horrible to you. Do you know that the people who ate from God's table in the wilderness came to hate God's food? They also hated His Words.

"The house of Israel named it manna [what is it?], and it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey..... The people spoke against God and Moses, 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no [regular human] food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food [God's manna]." Exodus 16:31; Numbers 21:5

*"How sweet are Your words to my taste; yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth"
Psalm 119:97*

After Jesus arose from the dead and ascended into heaven, His apostles – led by the Holy Spirit – wrote down Jesus' thoughts. This is the 'bread' on our table and we can feast upon it every day. The words of the New Testament are the very thoughts of Jesus Christ! When we 'eat' His words and put them into our thinking – we begin to think like Him. 'Chewing' His words is enjoying the 'taste of truth'. Swallowing them is believing that they are truly God's Word. And, just as when you digest food its energy is spread throughout your body, so as you think about God's words inside your own soul, it gives spiritual energy to your entire life! You become

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healthy and happy in your thinking. This is why our Shepherd went to so much effort to prepare a table for us.

“Your words were found and I ate them, and Your words became for me a joy [happiness] and the delight of my heart [my thinking]; for I have been called by Your name [I belong to You], O Lord God of hosts.” Jeremiah 15:16

On the table is something to drink – the refreshing water of the Holy Spirit. Just as sheep cannot digest grass without water, so you cannot ‘eat’ God’s Word and understand it without the Holy Spirit making it clear to you. God’s Word is spiritual food and the human mind doesn’t understand spiritual things, unless God’s Spirit ‘understands it’ for you. Trying to eat God’s Words without the ‘understanding’ of the Holy Spirit is like a sheep eating a stomach full of grass with no water – he gets a horrible stomachache. The Holy Spirit makes the words understandable to you when you are ‘in fellowship’ with Him – when He has restored you from being a cast sheep and when you have the touch of the Shepherd’s staff on your side.

“For God has revealed them to us through the Spirit...” 1 Cor 2:10

At the table is a ‘place’ set for you. The Shepherd has a chair with your name on it. He wants you to come and sit. The ‘dining room’ is called church. The ‘chair’ is wherever you choose to sit. The ‘waiter’ is the pastor. And the ‘food’ he is serving to you is the teaching of the Word of God. ‘Going to church’ means you are spiritually going to dinner. God wants you to come hungry and feast. This means He wants you to come with positive volition and listen to every word that is taught. After the meal is over, God wants you to ‘digest’ that food – remember it and use in every moment until it is time for dinner again.

In order for Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, to prepare this spiritual food for us – His thoughts and words – He had to think them and say them first. He had to ‘prepare the food’! This means He thought, practiced, and lived every word before it was written down for us in the Bible. He had to find out if these words actually worked. He had to see if thinking these words would solve His problems. He had to find out if they truly were ‘bread for His soul’. God tells us of a time when Jesus actually had to use the ‘Words from the Bible’ as ‘real food’. The story happens after Jesus has spent forty days in the wilderness – just like the people for whom God prepared the ‘table’. But, different from their story, Jesus, His own Son, receives no manna from heaven. He goes hungry the entire time, not eating one single bite. Then, when He is at His weakest and hungriest point, the evil predator cougar attacks. Just like a cougar, Satan ‘sneaks’ up on his prey and tries to trick Him into sinning. Satan, the enemy cat, teases him (like the cougar that plays with the sheep before killing it) saying, “Since You are the Son of God, command these stones be turned into bread [manna].” Now, listen to the difficulty. Jesus is extremely hungry and wants to eat. But, God the Father had made a rule – You may not use Your God-part to help Your human-part. The test is this – are the words of the Bible – the spiritual bread that feeds the soul – powerful enough to keep you from sinning, if you decide to obey them? If Jesus fails the test, then God’s Words don’t work – and He cannot prepare this same food for us. The enemy is circling around Him, sure he has his prey trapped. As soon as the first rock becomes a crumb, he will pounce and devour Him. However, our Good Shepherd ‘prepares the food – in the presence of His enemy’. Instead of doing a selfish miracle, Jesus uses spiritual

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food – WORDS! He says to Satan, “Man shall not live by bread [manna] alone, but by every WORD that comes from the mouth of God!” Wow! It is as if the shepherd’s rod has gone hurling through the air and knocks the devil off his feet. He goes limping away, tail between his legs – for a while.

“And the tempter came and said to Him, ‘Since You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.’ But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”’ Matthew 4:3-4

The words Jesus said to Satan that day were words He quoted from the Old Testament, from the very story about the manna being a picture of God’s spiritual food for us. Did Satan, Jesus’ evil enemy, keep attacking? Everyday of His life – up to the very day of the cross. And, with each attack, Jesus used the words that are now recorded in the New Testament – for us – as our spiritual food.

“... we have the mind [thinking] of Christ.” 1 Corinthians 2:16b

Our Good Shepherd paid a very high price to prepare our ‘table’ for us. The enemy surrounded Him constantly and continually attacked without mercy, Ps 22:12-13. Jesus’ last day was the most costly of all. This was the day when the ‘prepared table’ was completed. On this day, Jesus had to use EVERY WORD of God’s Word that existed. Would it be enough? Would God’s Words be strong enough to solve the problem of the cross? Would He really be able to pay for the sins of the world? The enemy prowled around in circles just beneath Him, trying to talk Him into coming down and not paying for the sins of the world. But, Jesus used His spiritual food and the power of the Holy Spirit to defeat the enemy by staying up there. In fact, the words of God in His thinking are what carried Him through (not His omnipotence) and gave Him the ability to do it. And, God’s Words were so strong – Jesus continued to be happy the entire time! Now, that’s preparing food and water!

“ ... By His knowledge [of God’s Word] the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities [sins].” Isaiah 53:11b

“ ... Jesus, ..., who for the joy [happiness] set before Him endured the cross, disregarding the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

This is the table prepared for us, **a table of True Words** found in the Bible. There are no poisonous ‘words’ in the Bible – for our Good shepherd has tested them – each one is absolute truth. Satan wants you to eat from his poisonous pretty flowers – the white callas. They may look nice and smell pretty, but lies always paralyze and kill. God’s table has no white callas – it has no lies. The spiritual food of God’s Word is True. Eat them with the water of the Holy Spirit – so you can understand what they mean and how to use them. It cost our Good Shepherd everything to prepare this table for us, yet it was His greatest happiness to do so. His life – His thinking – His words are now the power of happiness given to you. The enemy can circle, but can never defeat the table of feasting that God has prepared for you!

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“You prepare a table before me, in the presence of my enemies.” Psalm 23:5a

Craft: Make a special feeding bowl of earth-toned modeling clay

Coloring Picture: Shepherd feeds sheep from a special bowl

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 and all the children can work together to answer the questions on the back.

Psalm 23: literal translation from the original Hebrew

A song of David

The Lord is the One shepherding me

I cannot and do not lack for anything.

He causes me to lie down in pastures of choice grass

He leads me to waters of refreshment

He restores my soul

He guides me in paths of righteousness because of His Person

Also [in addition] when I walk through a death-shadowed valley

*I cannot [do not] fear evil [disaster, distress, harm, whatever is your manner of death]
because You – with me!*

Your rod [discipline], Your staff [deliverance], then comfort me.

You have prepared a table in front of me for my benefit in the sight [presence] of my enemies