

Psalm 23

L-12: Goodness and Mercy

A. Outline of lesson:

1. Fall comes with storms, yet grace pursues. Ezek 34:12
2. Goodness surrounds, Ps 32:10
3. Mercy /love encircles you, Ps 40:11
4. Grace – unearned, undeserved, Ps 26:3
5. Grace turns selfishness into humility, 1 Pet 5:5
6. New viewpoint - on the shepherd, Ps 143:8
7. All things together for good, Rom 8:28, 31-32
8. All the days of my life, Rom 8:38-39, Ps 23:6a

B. Bible verse: [Psalm 23:6a](#) “Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life ...”

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. You have prepared a table before me, in the presence of my enemies You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows”

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
10. Doctrine – our prepared table
11. Holy Spirit’s oil – defense against temptation, promotion. Cup – capacity for blessing

D. The Lesson:

Fall has come to the high mountain pasture lands, and with the turning of the season comes the beginning of the winter storms, the rain and the cold and the sleet. It is time to return to the home pastures down in the lowland valleys. During the long days of summer, the sheep have grazed on the thick wild grasses. They have enjoyed the cool, clear melting snow waters from the streams the shepherd has so carefully prepared for them. They have followed him as he leads

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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them on the narrow paths along the mountain gorges. He has restored them when they became cast. He has lifted them with his staff when they were entangled in a thorn bush over the edge of the cliff. He has stayed up late at night, rod in hand ready to kill any attacking predator. He has soothed his sheep with oil, protecting them from insects and scab. There is nothing left for them 'to want' for he has foreseen their needs and provided for each and every one. He has been tender and affectionate, laying his staff on their side as they walk along. For some, it was their last time through the death-shadowed valley. Yet, even they were calm and comforted – for he was there. Yes, truly this has been the summer of blessing. How strange then, when the wonderful summer is over and it is time to go home – when the storms have begun and it is turning cold and grey, that now the sheep says, "No doubt about it – grace is pursuing me!"

"As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day." Ezekiel 34:12

If you were to look at the poor sheep now, trudging down the muddy paths, through the rocky canyons, wet, tired, and cold, you would think it was a sorry sight. But, this is not what the sheep is thinking. He knows that this is the specific path chosen for him, the good path of righteousness. He has discovered that when he is on the shepherd's path good things happen. It is well known to him that his Shepherd has good in store. Now this 'kind of good' is not simply something nice or generally pleasant. When the Shepherd says 'Good' is after you, He is talking about the highest and best 'good' that can be imagined. It is an 'intrinsic good' meaning that the Shepherd's plan is one of 'built in good', something that is so perfectly planned that it is 'good' all by itself no matter what problems or difficulties come from off the path. The path itself is named 'Good'. And the Shepherd knows the path, He knows the way, in fact our Shepherd IS THE WAY! When a sheep decides to remain on the path, good follows. In fact good pursues – it comes after him to catch up with him and overtake him. Good is his rear guard, protecting him from behind. Good is chasing after him with blessing. But, on the Shepherd's path, Good does more than this – the Good also goes in front of him. Good is out on the point, clearing the way, making it safe. Astonishingly, Good is doing even more than this – it is on his right flank and his left. Good is guarding him from this side and that. The Good Shepherd is The Way and His Plan of Good is in front, behind, and all around. This sheep is completely surrounded by our Lord's plan of Good. No wonder the storms of sleet and hail don't bother him. No wonder even though at the moment he is soaked to the bone, he smiles and says "Absolutely, goodness is after me!"

"... he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him" Psalm 32:10

'Mercy' describes HOW you are encircled with Good. Everything the Shepherd does for you comes from the depths of His love for you, His precious sheep. Even when the sheep, who is drinking from the parasite infested mud holes on the path, feels the Shepherd's rod on his backside, it is the expression of mercy – the love of the Shepherd. Mercy is the Shepherd's thoughtfulness in combing the fields for the white callas, a gracious function of which the sheep is completely unaware. It is the Shepherd's mercy that leads the sheep down the steep paths to the deep clear waters prepared by carving a cave in the rock by the side of the river. Are you, like some sheep, afraid of the dark places? Are you afraid of the Shepherd's mercy? The Shepherd wants to completely remove all fear of death, so in His great mercy He leads you

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THROUGH the death-shadowed valley, many times, so that when the last time comes there is absolutely no fear left in your soul. Even the final trip is all about the Shepherd's mercy, as He personally carries you to your eternal home in heaven, to be with Him forever and ever. Mercy is the Shepherd's staff, as it wraps around the sheep's neck to rescue him, once again, from the briars in which he has entangled himself. And, oh how merciful it is for the sheep to hear the high pitched whirl of the Shepherd's rod resulting in the dying whines of the attacking predator. With tender mercy the Shepherd massages the oil into the sheep's head and face and nose. The touch of His fingers and the soothing oil is the caress of grace. Every thought the Shepherd has, every move the Shepherd makes is His mercy to you. Mercy is the Shepherd's expression of love, His affection, His compassion for you. Are you able to say, like the sheep, "It is true! My Shepherd encircles me with goodness, wrapped in mercy."

"You, O Lord, will not withhold Your compassion from me; Your lovingkindness [mercy] and Your truth will continually preserve me." Psalm 40:11

Goodness and mercy, behind, in front, all around – at all times, with compassion and tenderness and love, never ceasing, never ending? Why? What has the sheep done to deserve such a Shepherd? Love given when nothing is deserved is called GRACE. When it can't be earned – it is grace. When there are no strings attached – it is grace. When you can't 'pay it back' – it is grace. The sheep cannot do anything for the shepherd. He can't protect the shepherd from danger. He can't bring him food or water. He can't prepare a place for him to lie down and rest in the night. He can't even give him his wool, for it already belongs to the shepherd. He is the owner of the sheep. It is not the sheep's obedience that earns the Shepherd's gracious care, for the Shepherd cares for all His sheep, those who obey and those who don't. The sheep cannot 'pay him back' with anything. He has no ability to do so. The good and the mercy and the care – the LOVE is simply too great, too abundant; it is beyond measure and comprehension. In fact, because the sheep himself is unaware of the vast depths of the riches of his Shepherd's love for him, he can barely even be grateful. Yet, the Shepherd gives. This is grace! There is nothing in the sheep worthy of this kind of love – the love of The Shepherd for his sheep. All the sheep can do is look up into His face with eyes full of adoration and say, "Surely, Grace is with me!"

"For Your lovingkindness [grace] is before my eyes, and I have walked in Your truth." Psalm 26:3

The sheep began this long summer's journey with his mind on himself. "How will I move this boulder in the path?" And so, he kept butting it as hard as he could, but that rock didn't move an inch, until the Shepherd moved it for him. "How will I climb over this fallen tree?" Jump and stumble as he might, that tree was still there and in his way, until the Shepherd showed him the way around. "I'm thinking I want those wild rosebuds." So, the sheep becomes enmeshed in the thorns until the staff came and broke him loose. "I'm afraid of the cliffs and the dark and the shrieks in the night." "I want the callas, and get the flies away from me." However, the wisdom of the shepherd is amazing. What the shepherd knows that the sheep doesn't is that pursuing grace is powerful! Even a simple-minded sheep can understand grace. Grace turns a selfish sheep into a humble one. Selfishness is arrogance, and the only thing stronger than arrogance is grace. The shepherd teaches His sheep by demonstrating this grace constantly, day after day. Little by little, as the sheep begins to obey, the selfishness is transformed into humility, and the

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shepherd showers him with more grace. This encourages more obedience, which results in more humility. The long difficult journey is designed to change a stubborn, selfish, arrogant sheep into a humble one. The Shepherd chose the steep and dangerous trails to fill the sheep's thoughts with the wonder of His gracious love for him.

“You sheep, obey your Shepherd; in fact, all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God makes war against the arrogant, but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:5 (Shepherd and sheep analogy is mine)

And so, the Good Shepherd pursues each sheep daily with goodness and mercy. Some respond and learn the humility that He intends. For these few, the soothing oil penetrates their heads and gets into their souls. The Spirit's gracious oil removes the selfishness and replaces it with contentment. This sheep has a new viewpoint on life. It is all about The Shepherd. His thoughts have been transformed. His attention is no longer focused on himself, but on his shepherd. Instead of being 'in want' he is thankful and content with all he has been given – there is nothing else to want! His shepherd has given it all, even his very own life – for him, a worthless sheep. How overwhelmed he is with his shepherd's love for him, his care, his goodness and mercy – his grace. This is why, even in the midst of the autumn rain storms of life, he can say, “This is good! My Shepherd is for me!”

“Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; for I trust in You; teach me the way in which I should walk; for to You I lift up my soul.” Psalm 143:8

The Good Shepherd has worked it all out. He has taken every event of the summer and turned it to goodness and mercy. The hard times, the scary times, the dangerous times – they have all been part of the paths of righteousness. In each trial, it was the Shepherd's solution that kept the sheep safe and secure. The sheep has been comforted with the rod and staff of love. He has grown strong on the thick grass of the green pastures and been refreshed with the cool waters. He has learned to follow and to rest in His promises, guaranteed by His very presence. He has discovered the 'obedience thinking' of humility. This sheep is no longer worried about himself – what he shall eat or what he shall drink, for his Shepherd provides all these things. He has learned to trust. He has absolute confidence in his Shepherd because He has proven Himself faithful. In his small sheep way, he now loves his Shepherd and fills his thoughts with Him. This is why, now, after all the adventures of the long journey, driving on home in the sleet filled storm that the sheep can say, “I know that my Shepherd will make even this storm into a great blessing of good for me. I know! For this is what my Shepherd is all about! What is a storm to the Shepherd who gives His very own life for me?”

“In fact we know that to those who love God, He causes all things to work together for the purpose of good, to those who are the called ones according to the plan. ... Therefore, what shall we say with reference to these things? If God for us [and He is], who against us? He who did not even spare His own Son, but as a substitute for all of us delivered Him over to judgment, how shall He not also in association with Him graciously give to us the all things?” Romans 8:28, 31-32

“The Lord is my Shepherd.” The fact that God offers you a place in His flock is grace. God's plan begins with grace. It is His free gift to you. He wants you as one of His own sheep. He paid

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the price for you on the cross, by taking your sins on Himself. But, you don't actually become one of His sheep until you believe that the cross is true. This is when He brings you into His fold. God's plan continues with grace each day. Every line of the 23rd Psalm describes the different aspects of this grace being given to you – the Word of God, the influence of the Holy Spirit on your thoughts, resting in His wonderful promises, and having paths of righteousness to follow. The obvious conclusion is – God's plan will continue until we get to the greatest grace of all, the dying grace of moving to heaven and looking directly into the eyes of the Shepherd. In the meantime, we can confidently expect that grace will continue to pursue us each and every day that we live – “all the days of my life.” This is the life of the sheep who belongs to the greatest shepherd of all time – the Shepherd of Grace!

*“Therefore, I stand convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers of angels, neither current events, nor future events, nor demonstrations of power, neither heaven nor hell nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God [the Father], which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
Romans 8:38-39*

“No doubt about it, both good [prosperity, benefit, happiness] and grace shall pursue me all the days of my life” Psalm 23:6a

Craft: Catch up day

Coloring Picture: Sheep follows shepherd into the sunset

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

*No doubt about it, both good [prosperity, benefit, happiness] and grace shall pursue me all
the days of my life ...*