

Psalm 23

L-6: Paths of Righteousness

A. Outline of lesson:

1. The 'old sheep nature', [1 John 1:9](#)
2. JC lived the spiritual life first, preparing the path, He is the precedence, [Heb 4:15](#), [2 Pet 1:3](#), [1 Cor 10:13](#)
3. The alternative – following the sheep nature, [Isa 53:6a](#)
4. Paths of Righteousness = God's plan
 - a. Eat – to think God's thoughts, [Isa 55:8-9](#)
 - b. Drink = influence of HS, [Gal 5:16](#)
 - 1) Beware of OSN, temptation
 - 2) Confess when sin
 - c. Follow = Obey, [Jn 14:23](#), [Prov 4:11](#)
5. The shepherd's reputation, [Ezek 34:14-15](#)
6. The Word of God – more valuable than God's Name, [Ps 138:2](#)

B. Bible verse: [Psalm 23:3b](#) “He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.”

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...”

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

D. The Lesson:

Sheep are stubborn animals and have bad habits by nature. They like to eat from the same place until there is nothing left. When sheep do this, the grass can't grow back next year for they have killed the roots. Sheep also like to follow their own way and make their own paths through the fields. They will tread down these same paths until they become deeply rutted, causing the water to drain off the land rather than soak deep into the soil. The sheep will pollute their own feeding grounds. When this happens the sheep eat from their own dung, causing themselves to become infested with parasites and bacteria. The sheep's basic nature likes to do this, even though it is obviously very bad for him. The sheep however, doesn't think that its 'old sheep nature' is a problem; he thinks he can make good decisions for himself. A good shepherd must overrule his sheep. He must be the authority and make the decisions for them. If left to their own ways, the sheep will destroy themselves with their 'old sheep natures'. The shepherd who allows his sheep to do what their 'old sheep natures' want will have a sickly flock, poor grazing lands, and a bad reputation. He does not love his sheep and is not a good 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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The shepherd who cares about his sheep makes some important decisions for them – he leads them in the ‘right paths’. Now, before a shepherd leads his flock to a new place, he must go there himself. The shepherd checks everything out first. He makes sure this is the way he wants his sheep to go. He finds out if there are indeed good grazing lands in this area. Are there calm waters? The shepherd must know. How hard is the path? How long is it? Is it filled with dangerous cliffs? Are there predator animals about? The shepherd learns all these things before he takes his flock down any particular path. He alone decides which paths are right for his sheep and which ones to avoid. He travels the route, alone, by himself, examining every detail to make sure things are just the way he wants them. After all this preparation, the shepherd makes a plan. He determines which path they will follow and when, how long they will stay in each new pasture, where the safest places are for bedding down at night, and where to find the still waters and greenest grasses. Then, with the plan perfectly in mind, the shepherd begins to lead his sheep down the ‘right’ paths to the places he has prepared.

Something important must be noticed – a shepherd can’t lead a sheep if he is ‘cast’. The cast sheep has rolled over and is now stuck on his back. He is completely helpless; he cannot get back on his feet. A sheep in this condition is unable to follow the shepherd anywhere. The shepherd is the only one who can ‘restore’ the sheep. The shepherd must find the cast down sheep and lift him up back on his feet. It is only after the sheep is standing again that he can follow, especially down paths of righteousness. The cast sheep is a perfect picture of what happens when a believer in Jesus Christ sins – he is stuck on his back and can do nothing about it. When the human-sheep admits his sin to God, the Good Shepherd comes and ‘restores’ him. This means that He puts the sheep back on his feet, forgives him, and purifies him from all wrongdoing. Once the sheep is walking again, the next step is ‘to follow’ the shepherd’s lead – down paths of righteousness. This is why “He restores my soul,” comes before “He leads me.” Leading is what happens after being restored. A sheep who desires to follow must be alert to the sin problem – to the ‘being cast down’ problem, for this makes it impossible to be led by the shepherd.

“If we confess [admit, name] our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all wrongdoing [unrighteousness].” 1 John 1:9

The shepherd can now ‘lead’ the sheep because he has been ‘restored’ and is back on his feet. For human sheep who belong to the Good Shepherd (because they have believed in Jesus Christ and His saving work on the cross) this means that they are ready to be led – they want to follow the Good Shepherd in the spiritual life He has pre-planned for them.

Our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, has done something very special for us, His sheep. He has walked through all the paths of life, down every single one, and has determined which ones are good for us and which ones we should avoid. When Jesus became a man and lived among us, He ‘tested’ and ‘explored’ every path. He went before us, testing God’s plan – to see if it would work. During His life on earth He faced every hard test, every difficult problem, every bad time, every temptation, every heartache (Heb 4:15). In each case, He tested out God’s plan. He purposely used the waters of the Holy Spirit to see if they would really ‘refresh’ Him and give Him spiritual energy – and they did! He deliberately chose not to use His God-part to solve

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problems. Instead, He ate from God's Word to see if it would give Him the answers He needed – and it did (Matt 4:4)! Day after day, the great enemy (Satan) attacked, over and over, in every way possible, but our Good Shepherd proved that He had the power to defeat the predator every single time! The power our Shepherd used was the same 'water' and 'grass' He has given us – the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of God's Word in our thinking. Our Good Shepherd knows which paths work! He knows which paths are the right ones – the paths of righteousness. He can lead us down the 'right paths' because He has personally walked through each and every hard time, and He KNOWS that this plan works! No one will ever walk a path harder than our Shepherd walked. God the Father gave our Good Shepherd the hardest 'plan' in all human history. And, He discovered something – if God's plan could solve all His problems, even the worst thing imaginable – the cross, then, it can easily work for us! Now, the Shepherd says, "Follow Me! I know the plan. I know the way. I know which paths are right. Let Me show you how to 'eat' and 'drink' and 'follow'.

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." Heb 4:15

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;" John 10:27

Now, our Shepherd says, "I am giving you a present. I am giving My plan to you. You get to live the same spiritual life I did. It works! I know! We can walk it together, you and Me." Then, with staff in hand, our Good Shepherd opens the gates of the sheepfold and says, "Follow Me! We are going to walk together down the paths of righteousness." You can trust Him, because He knows where He is going; He has already explored all the trails of life. The paths of righteousness will take you to fresh green pastures. They will lead you to new pastures that are not polluted or dried up. He will never take you down a trail that is too hard, or too much for you. For He has promised never to give you a 'test' that is more than you can handle.

"because His [Jesus Christ's] divine power has bestowed on us all things with reference to life, even the spiritual life through the full knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and virtue." 2 Peter 1:3 [BP]

"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it." 1 Corinthians 10:13

*Our Shepherd's spiritual plan had three main parts, which He is now giving to us – **drink** the water of the Holy Spirit, **eat** the grass of God's Word, and **follow** the Shepherd down the right paths. **Drinking** the water of the Holy Spirit means that you have named your sins. You confess each time you become cast and you are now in fellowship with your Shepherd. **Eating** the grass means that you want to learn God's Word. You concentrate in Bible class. You don't let yourself become distracted and you do not distract others. You chew up the spiritual food, believe it by swallowing it, and let it digest into your soul. Then, you **follow**. This means that you obey what you have learned. The grass is actually the instructions from the Bible. The water is the power of the Holy Spirit to obey. And, following is you deciding to obey what the words say. This is the*

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spiritual plan God has pre-determined for you. These are the paths of righteousness down which the Good Shepherd wants to lead you.

However, human-sheep tend to be very stubborn, just like animal sheep. The ‘sheep nature’ wants what it wants, and is determined to get its own way. The ‘sheep nature’ lies to the sheep and tells him that those dried up grasses are really tasty and good for him. Then, the sheep believes what his sheep nature says and eats. The same is true with the polluted bathroom waters that it wants to drink. He will follow the other sheep down horrible ruined ruts instead of the shepherd, thinking he knows better than the shepherd. He ‘eats’ and ‘drinks’ lies and blindly follows other stupid sheep. Soon the sheep becomes sick with diseases and doesn’t know why. He becomes cast, but is too stubborn to call out to his shepherd, thinking he can turn himself up. Eventually, the buzzards circle overhead, waiting to feast on his carcass. He is not following his shepherd in paths of righteousness; he is not following anywhere. He is cast and waiting to die.

“All we like sheep have gone astray [wandering], each of us has turned to his own way,” Isaiah 53:6a

‘Paths of righteousness’ is the name of God’s plan for us. It is our spiritual life. The spiritual life God has planned for His human-sheep has three basic parts:

1. **Eat good grass everyday** – *this means God wants your thinking to feast on the words of the Bible everyday – to study them and learn them. You will need a pastor. A pastor is an old English name for someone who takes care of sheep. To ‘pasture the sheep’ means to take them to good grazing grounds and feed them. For older sheep (adults) this is the leader of a church, one who teaches what God’s Word means. For younger sheep (children) this means listening to your mom and dad, or a children’s church teacher, or reading the lessons they have prepared for you. Human-sheep really do need to ‘eat’ the words of the Bible everyday. This is how a person’s thinking is trained to think like God thinks, Isa 55:8-9.*
2. **Drink lots of water** – *this represents the power of God the Holy Spirit influencing your thinking. The Holy Spirit helps your thoughts to ¹learn and understand God’s Word, ²remember it during the day, ³influence your thinking, ⁴warn you about bad decisions, ⁵point out when you are ‘cast’, and ⁶give you the ability (power) to obey. Obeying is exactly the opposite of our human-sheep old sin natures. Without the power of the Holy Spirit helping us, we could not obey what God wants. A sheep who doesn’t obey is a miserable sheep. So, the ‘water’ of the Holy Spirit combined with the ‘grass’ of the Bible is how we become happy! Gal 5:16*
 - a. **Avoid your ‘sheep nature’** – *pay attention to your sin nature. Listen to the Holy Spirit’s influence in your thinking when He warns you to not demand your own way. Be careful, for your sin nature is tricky and sneaky. It will try to make you think that getting your own way is not a sin. The Holy Spirit will point out possible sins to you. These things are called temptations, but they are not sins until you decide to do them.*
 - b. **Name your sins when you are cast** – *a sheep cannot eat or drink unless he is standing. Therefore, it is very important to name your sins as quickly as you discover them – so you can eat grass covered with water. It is especially important to remember this during Bible class. You need to pay special*

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attention to keeping yourself in fellowship while learning God's Word. Sin puts you out of fellowship. Confessing your sins puts you back in. So, if you happen to sin during Bible class, either at home or at church, stop and quickly and silently name your sin of not concentrating or being distracted. God will do what He has promised and immediately forgive you and purify you from all wrongdoing. This lifts you back to your feet and you are ready to eat and drink some more.

3. **Follow the right path** – this means the sheep actually obeys his shepherd. In God's plan following the right path means thinking what Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, thought while He was alive and walking the path of His life. If you think His thoughts, you will obey His words. Now you are walking in His footsteps – down His paths of righteousness. *John 14:23*

The Shepherd's plan for the sheep all works together. You cannot think words you haven't learned; therefore, you must eat grass. Grass doesn't digest without drinking water; and so, you need the power of the Holy Spirit helping you learn and remember. You cannot walk if you are cast on your back; therefore, it is necessary to confess your sins. And, you will not have the energy to follow if you have failed to do any of the previous three things. The power to obey is in learning God's Word, remaining filled with the Spirit, and confessing your sins when necessary. The sheep who does these things can truthfully say, "He leads me in paths of righteousness."

*"I have directed you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in upright paths."
Proverbs 4:11*

A sheep who follows the shepherd's plan has the best life imaginable. He is loved. He is well cared for. He is protected from danger, both from himself and predators. Even more, the sheep actually understands that he is special to his shepherd. This is the happy sheep. This is the contented sheep. This is the sheep that, if he could talk, would tell everyone how wonderful his shepherd is. He would say, "I am healthy – because I have the best shepherd! I am well fed and clean and get to drink fresh sparkling water because of my special shepherd! I am so excited each time my shepherd opens the gate to a new pasture or a new path because I know that he always leads me the right way! You can't go wrong with my shepherd. Every sheep should have a shepherd like mine!" What a good reputation this shepherd has! His name is respected because other people watch and notice how well he manages his sheep. The same thing happens with our Good Shepherd. His name and reputation depends on how well He takes care of us, His human-sheep. He will never leave us wanting – because of the reputation of His Name. He will never leave His sheep hungry, without good grass to eat – because of the reputation of His Name. He will never take us to filthy waters or let us become infested with parasites – because of the reputation of His Name. He will never lead us down the paths of destruction – because of His Name's sake! Our Good Shepherd has put His NAME on the line. He has promised 'by His Name' to do all these things for us. Just as surely as GOD is GOD – He will take care of you!

"I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down on good grazing ground and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,' declares the Lord God." Ezekiel 34:14-15

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*How important is God's name and reputation to Him? Very! His entire essence depends on it. God continues to be God because of the reputation of His name. However, in spite of this, there is something more important to God than His reputation – His Word – the Bible. God considers the Words of the Bible to be the most valuable thing in existence, including Himself. Now, that's saying something! And, He has given His most valuable possession to us – **The Word!** This possession comes in two forms – the Living Word, who is Jesus Christ Himself, and the Written Word, which is the Bible. When God says that He leads us in the right way for His name's sake, it means that the instructions on how to live are contained in the one thing that is valued as much as God's reputation – His Word. This is an absolute guarantee that His plan for you works!*

"I will bow down toward Your holy temple and give thanks to Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word according to [above] all Your name." Psalm 138:2

"He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake." Psalm 23:3b

Craft: Make a 'path of righteousness' on the hillside in the "23rd Psalm Play-box"

Coloring Picture: Shepherd leads down the right path

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...