

## Psalm 23

### L-7: The Death-Shadowed Valley

#### A. Outline of lesson:

1. The summer journey, Jn 10:4
  - a. Not too hard, 1 Cor 10:13
  - b. Do not fear, Isa 41:10
2. Death-shadowed valley
  - a. Precious time to God, Ps 116:15
  - b. Dying Grace, Phil 1:21
  - c. Soul and spirit don't 'die', just move, John 11:25
  - d. New body – really see God, Job 19:25-26

#### B. Bible verse: [Psalm 23:4a](#) “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death”

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 ...”

#### 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’

#### D. The Lesson:

*It is the beginning of summer and the journey has begun. The sheep are entering the long trek to the high mountain country. Every year, during the hot months the shepherd takes his flocks up into the cool mountains. It is a long journey, but it is the right way to go. These are the ‘paths of righteousness’ that the shepherd has planned for his sheep to follow. Much earlier in the spring, the shepherd made this trip by himself. He scouted the terrain, determining the paths that follow the cool mountain streams and the lush high grazing lands. He knows the way and is leading his flock to the places he has planned. This is the adventure of the sheep’s life. A sheep’s life is divided into two parts. During winter the shepherd generally keeps his flock in the ‘home’ range. He makes sure he has plenty of hay stored and well water to drink. But, in the summer months, the sheep take an adventurous journey – up onto the highlands. As with all great adventures, it is filled with unknown dangers, heights of delight, great anticipation, and gentle calm relaxing days. This is the sheep’s life. This is the daily path each sheep walks as he follows his 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 Gods 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 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm (Spiritual Dynamics 232-251) and [A Shepherd Looks as Psalm 23](#) by Phillip Keller

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*"When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice." John 10:4*

*The destination of the long trip is a wonderful high mountain valley, nestled between tall rocky cliffs. Up there the air is fresh and cool; the water is cold and refreshing snow melting down over the rocks. The grasses that grow in such mountain glades are thick and luscious and full of nutrients. These are the kinds of days that the shepherd wants his sheep to enjoy. As the shepherd opens the last gate of the 'home' pastures the sheep often leap for joy at the prospect of the new exciting journey. For the new lambs, this is their very first trip up the mountain slopes. What fun it will be! And so the journey begins – following the shepherd up the paths of righteousness. The first few days are gentle days. The shepherd leisurely leads them along, stopping often to let his sheep graze on the grasses or rest in the shade after drinking from the calm waters. As the days go by the path becomes steeper. The little lambs wonder why the trip is becoming so hard. As of yet they don't understand that it is an uphill walk to the high mountain valleys. Their appetite increases and they become thirstier for cool water. The shepherd planned each day to be a little more difficult than the previous. This is how they get to the places the shepherd has chosen for them. And, along the way, they eat more and more grass, and drink more and more water. They grow bigger and become stronger. Step after step they follow right behind the footsteps of their shepherd. There are rest times each day, times when the sheep can relax in the green pastures. The little lambs discover their energy is renewed; the shepherd's path really isn't that hard after all.*

*"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*

*A week or two into the hike, the shepherd leads them up some steeper paths, winding between high rock walls on one side and steep ravines on the other. He watches his sheep, especially the new lambs, to make sure they have sure footing. He walks along the outside edge, protecting the little ones who might trip and tumble over the edge. Every so often he sees a little lamb just too tired to continue on. He gently lifts the lamb to his shoulders and carries him for a while, giving him a rest. The baby lamb looks up at the towering cliffs overhead and becomes frightened. Then, he remembers that he is safely wrapped around the shoulders of his shepherd and he is no longer afraid. The trail twists and turns around big rocks and boulders as they climb higher and higher. These narrow passes are filled with scary shadows. The older ewes and rams have traveled the shadowed gorges before; they know how to trust their shepherd and so are not afraid. The babies are easily scared of the dark shadows, not knowing what is ahead. But, the shepherd is watching over each and every one, whether it be an old ewe or a young lamb.*

*"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand." Isaiah 41:10*

*As they travel higher and higher there are nice little valleys along the way. Each night the shepherd beds his sheep down in one of these valleys, next to a rocky wall on one side. This gives*

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*a little protection from sudden summer storms that often occur. It also provides his flock some safety from the cougars and bears that roam these mountains.*

*It is not far now, the wonderful high mountain plateau that the shepherd has chosen for his flock for the summer. The trail to this plateau takes the sheep through narrow valley gorges in the mountains, deeply shadowed even during the day. The sun may only shine in these valleys for a few hours each day, just around noon. But, when they reach the plateau, what a lovely time they will have, enjoying the thick green grass and the clear snow watered streams, all along following the shepherd to the magnificent grazing lands he has chosen for them. For some, this will be their last journey to the high mountain valleys. They have followed their shepherd many times up into the heights. They are no longer afraid of the dark shadows they must pass through. The shepherd knows some will not be returning with him. He knows this is their last summer journey. For these sheep, they have followed their shepherd in the right paths all their lives. They trust him. They are no longer afraid. During the summer months as each one reaches his last day, the shepherd will spend more and more time with him, his beloved sheep. Some will be older ewes, others rams. And, some will be younger, a few lambs. The shepherd leads them here. When the day comes, the shepherd will hold the sheep's face in his hands, talk softly to him, remind him of all the wonderful times they had together. Then, he sits back, in the shade of yet another high rocky cliff wall, and caresses his sheep until he takes his last breath and dies. This is the death-shadowed valley of David's song. Part of living is dying. The shepherd knows that every sheep will one day die. Some will live a long time, and some will die rather young, but either way, every sheep will die. Of course, when most animal sheep die, their bodies become food for humans. But, a few special sheep have the wonderful blessing of dying high in the summer mountains.*

*“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.” Psalm 116:15*

*Our Good Shepherd has a very special ‘dying plan’ for His human-sheep, those who have believed in Jesus Christ as their savior. It is called **dying grace**. It is very similar to the summer trip of animal sheep climbing up into the mountains. The Good Shepherd takes His sheep up the path of spiritual righteousness all during his life. Then, when the last ‘summer’ comes, the Shepherd takes that sheep on his last journey. By this time, the sheep who has practiced following his shepherd, is no longer afraid of the dangers along the path. The high cliffs no longer scare him, because he has confidence in his Shepherd. The steep gorges that fall away from the path are not frightening, for he knows he will not fall; he is keeping his eyes on his Shepherd. There are dark shadows up ahead as the sun hides behind the mountain peaks, but this causes no fear because within sight is The Shepherd. The Shepherd never fails to provide thick green grass, and oh, how nice are the cool waters from the melting snows. Somewhere along this path this sheep will receive the greatest blessing he has ever received in his entire life – the Grace Gift of a wonderful death!*

*“For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain [profit, advantage].” Philippians 1:21*

*To understand this gift you need to know what actually happens to a person who has believed in Christ at the moment called ‘death’. A Christian has three parts. Two are invisible and*

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*immaterial; one is visible and physical. The visible part is the human body. The invisible parts are the human soul and the human spirit. The human body is the 'house' for the soul and the spirit. But, human babies begin life with only two parts – a body and a soul. Their 'spirit-parts' are dead. This is called 'spiritual death'. When the person believes that Jesus paid for his sins on the cross and accepts His free gift of salvation, he is 'born again'. This means that a new part is born – the spirit-part. Now, he has three parts, a body, a soul, and a spirit. The only kind of person who can have a 'spiritual life' is one who has a spirit. And, the only kind of person who has a spirit is one who has put his trust in Jesus Christ and His work on the cross as a substitute for him. The real person is not his 'house' (the body); the real person is the soul and spirit that live inside the house. At some point in a person's life, God decides it is time to come home to heaven. At that very moment, the one God chooses, the real person (soul and spirit) leave their old house (the body) and are instantly in heaven. Really, the person does not 'die'; he just moves – from one house to another. Death is when the soul and the spirit separate from the body and move to heaven, where God has a brand new body waiting. It is a wonderful moment – the very best moment in your entire 'life'. It is the end of life here on earth and at the same time the beginning of your life in heaven. Awaiting you is a great celebration. Even more exciting, this is the moment when you will actually see Jesus Christ, your Good Shepherd, with your brand new eyes of your brand new body. It is a wonderful gift of grace.*

Depending upon the age of the children in the class, you may differentiate between the interim body and the resurrection body. If there is not prior knowledge of the basic timeline of human history and dispensations, specifically the Rapture, it may be better to save this subject for another time.

*“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies,” John 11:25*

*The valley of the shadow of death looks scary to the person who doesn't know the Shepherd. But, for the human-sheep who has followed the paths of righteousness, it is the most exciting time of his life. This is why, in David's song, right after “the valley of the shadow of death” he writes, “I will not be afraid.” It is like taking that last summer trip, high up into the mountains, just you and your Shepherd, Jesus Christ. There are steep ravines along the way, but you are not scared at all, for Jesus is right there walking along your side. There are high rocky walls overhead as the path winds around the edges of the mountain. Hiding in the rough rugged outcroppings are predator animals, but you are not nervous or fearful, for your Shepherd is with you. The Shepherd gives you many lovely 'last days' as you feast on the precious words of His 'green grass'. The spiritual waters of the Holy Spirit calm you and refresh you. It may be a long hard journey or it may be quick. Other sheep may be frightened and sad, but you look at them and smile, “Don't be afraid for me. My Shepherd is right here by my side. He is taking me to the highest ground.” The path is covered with dark shadows, even though it is still day, but the Shepherd is right there with you and He can see clearly.*

*Soon the moment is close, and you are so excited. You are about to move to your new home. The body you have right now 'sees' your Beloved Shepherd with spiritual eyes only. You are about to look directly into His face. You can hardly wait. No wonder David describes the valley of the shadow of death as a place of no fear. The Shepherd takes you over to a soft little green pasture. He leans up against the rock face of the mountain. The shadow is deep in darkness, but you don't care. He is holding you in His arms and you are gazing into His face. You see Him*

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*with your love for Him. The moment comes, the one special moment He has chosen for you. He closes your eyes, and right then – the moment has arrived! You open your eyes and there, right there, leaning on the rock face of heaven, is your Shepherd. You see Him with your new real heavenly eyes. You really see Him. You are looking into the face of Jesus, your Savior, your Good Shepherd. Oh what a day! And, just as He said, the day of the valley of the shadow of death truly was the best day of your life – your new eternal life, which has only just begun!*

*"As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives... Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God;" Job 19:25-26*

*"When I walk through a death-shadowed valley ... " Psalm 23:4a*

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Craft: Make the steep mountains with a valley in between, in the "23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm Play-box"

Coloring Picture: Sheep in dangerous valley

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 for the answers to 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*

*When I walk through a death-shadowed valley ...*