

## Psalm 23

### L-9: The Rod and the Staff

#### A. Outline of lesson:

1. The rod
  - a. Authority, Num 17:8; Col 3:20
  - b. Discipline, 1 Cor 4:21; Prov 13:24, 23:13-14, 3:11-12
  - c. Evaluation, Ps 139:23-24
  - d. Protection, Ps 121:7-8
2. The staff
  - a. Fellowship, 1 Cor 1:9
  - b. Guidance, John 16:13, 14:26
  - c. Forgiveness, 1 John 1:9

#### B. Bible verse: [Psalm 23:4c](#) “Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

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 ...”

#### 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

#### D. The Lesson:

*When the shepherd is on his summer journey with the sheep he has very few things with him. He has a sling and a pouch with a few smooth round stones for ammunition. He has a waterskin, which is a leather bag with a small opening tied tightly with a leather thong, carried on his back by a strap. He has some food packed, probably hard bread and cheese. He sleeps on the ground using his mantle as a blanket. A mantle is like a cape that wraps around his shoulders. These things are either tied around his waist or strapped to his back. In his hands he carries a rod and a staff.*

*The ‘rod’ is a carefully selected stick. Each shepherd will carve a rod for himself, usually while he is a shepherd boy. The boy finds a young hardwood tree and cuts it down. He removes all the branches. The base of the trunk becomes the rounded ball-shaped end of his rod and the narrower part of the tree trunk will be carved into a grip that becomes the handle. The 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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*boy is very particular about which tree he picks and precisely how he shapes his rod. The handle will be made to fit his own hand exactly. He carves it to be a little over two feet long, with the club-like head on the end. It is very important that the weight of the rod be carefully balanced for this will be one of his most important tools in shepherding sheep. He practices throwing his rod, aiming and hitting his target from many yards away. He practices until he can throw it with great speed and accuracy. He needs to become an expert shot for this will be his primary weapon of defense.*

*The shepherd uses his rod in four different ways. The rod is the shepherd's sign of authority. The sheep learn that the one who has the rod is the boss. He is in charge. The rod is the extension of the shepherd's right arm. It shows power and strength. The Bible tells of a time when a rod was actually used to show the people who was in charge. The Children of Israel were like sheep without a shepherd, living in slavery. They were slaves to an evil 'predator enemy', the Pharaoh of Egypt. God sent Moses, a man trained for forty years in the desert as a shepherd, to lead them out of Egypt. A few months later, God chose Aaron, Moses' brother, to be the high priest for the new nation. The high priest was like a pastor and taught the people about their Lord and how to worship and obey Him. Aaron's symbol of authority was a rod. It was a shepherd's rod. The people of Israel were very stubborn sheep, and they didn't like being told what to do, and so they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. They wanted a different 'shepherd' and a different high priest. To solve this 'rebellion against authority' problem, God did a little object lesson for them. He had the leader of each tribe (there were 12 big families, called tribes) bring a rod to the front of the Tent of Meeting (the Tabernacle). Each leader was to carve his name on his rod so everyone could tell which one belonged to whom. Aaron was to bring his also. Then Moses placed the 13 rods before the Lord all night. In the morning one rod started growing. Whoever's name was on the 'growing' rod was the person God chose to be the authority, the high priest of Israel. First thing in the morning, all the people gathered together to see whose rod had come alive again. There in the pile of rods, one was growing leaves and blossoms. It even had ripe almonds that had grown overnight. When Moses went to pick up the 'rod that budded' he looked and there carved in the side of the wood was Aaron's name. God proved with Aaron's rod that he had the authority to be the high priest of Israel. The shepherd's rod is the symbol of authority, similar to the scepter of a king (Rev 2:27).*

*“Now on the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds.” Numbers 17:8*

*We, human-sheep, have the same problem with authority – we don't like it. We want to do whatever we want. It is in our human nature – our old sin nature – to rebel against authority. Just like the Children of Israel, we don't like begin told what to do. However, God's plan is exactly the opposite – God's plan is respect for and obedience to authority. This is the meaning of the Rod of Authority. Authority keeps our sin natures under control. A 'sheep' who follows his sin nature is a rebellious, miserable, and unhappy sheep. The rod of authority is designed to reverse that problem. Authority solves the problem of rebellion. God's wonderful grace gives us little lambs a 'rod of authority' in at the very beginning of life - parents. He wants us to learn, from the very beginning, to obey at all times. An obedient lamb is pleasing to the shepherd.*

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*“Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.” Colossians 3:20*

*The rod is used mostly to discipline the sheep. When a sheep begins to wander off the path, the shepherd will hurl his rod through the air. He has excellent aim and suddenly the sheep will be struck on the backside with the shepherd’s rod. This stings quite a bit, but causes no injury to the sheep. It does however startle him and get his attention. Once hit by the rod, the wayward animal hurries back to the flock. The shepherd keeps a close eye on his sheep. If one is approaching poisonous weeds and is about to eat – swoosh! – the rod goes flying, whistling through the air. A good shepherd is quick to discipline his sheep – it keeps them from bringing danger upon themselves. A shepherd who does not care would not keep such a watchful eye on his flock. A stubborn sheep may get smacked several times with the rod before he learns to obey his shepherd. The reason the shepherd disciplines his sheep is to get him back in line, back on the paths of righteousness. The shepherd is motivated to do this because of his great love for his sheep, each one specifically. This is especially important with the yearlings. They are not baby lambs anymore and want to go out on their own and explore; they wander into predator territory. That rod hurling through the air smacking them suddenly on the hind end is for the purpose of instruction and training and discipline. The sheep that learns to obey only needs to feel the rod a few times. However, most sheep are stubborn; they want their own way. In every flock there those who receive the rod a lot. This is the rod of discipline.*

*“What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a [disciplinary] rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?” 1 Corinthians 4:21*

*The Bible tells us that we, human-sheep, need discipline. Discipline is designed to show us when we are wrong. We think the wrong things, and so we do the wrong things. We have arrogant attitudes and so we sin. We are like the yearling sheep – we think we are so smart. We are sure we know best and we demand our own way. In reality, we are quite stupid – like the young sheep. We say to ourselves, “This is a good way to go,” and then we wander right into predator territory. Oh, how thankful we should be when suddenly, WHACK! The shepherd’s rod hits us hard. Being hit with discipline stops you in your tracks. It keeps you from walking into the lair of the enemy. Satan’s most effective attack against us is our own arrogance. It is very hard for human-sheep to even notice the enemy predator called ‘arrogance’ because arrogance is always what ‘we want’. This is why we don’t see the danger. Our Good Shepherd, however, knows all about this most vicious enemy. He deeply loves us and will not allow His sheep to be attacked in this way, especially since it comes from inside us. Every time we are arrogant, He will discipline us – to deliver us from our enemy – our own sin natures. A sheep that is not disciplined with the rod is quickly destroyed and eaten.*

*“He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently.” Proverbs 13:24*

*“Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you strike him with the rod, he will not die. You shall strike him with the rod and rescue his soul from Sheol [death].” Proverbs 23:13-14*

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*“My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord loves He reproveth, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.” Proverbs 3:11-12*

*The rod is also used to examine the sheep. This is called ‘passing under the rod’. As the sheep leave the fold they pass through a doorway. The shepherd stands at the door and puts his rod across the opening, blocking the way. This is when he checks each sheep for disease, injury, or other problems, such as bugs. He takes his rod and uses it to part the thick wool allowing him to look closely at the sheep’s skin underneath. In examining his skin, the shepherd can determine the health of the sheep. He then rubs his hands all over the sheep, looking for embedded thorns or stickers, or parasites, or deep cuts. It is very intimate and personal, done one sheep at a time. As each one passes inspection, the rod is lifted and the sheep leaves the sheepfold, passing under the rod. This is also when the shepherd counts his sheep and calls each one by name.*

*“I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant [the promise];” Ezekiel 20:37*

*Our Good Shepherd examines us every day. Not a day goes by when He doesn’t call us by name and have us ‘pass under the rod’. This is good for us. If we have hidden bad attitudes – He will show them to us, for a bad attitude will make us a cast sheep. If we have the ‘disease’ of believing a lie, He will teach us the Truth from His Word – our green grass. If we are trying to live on our own energy, He will take us to the ‘waters’ and have us drink, for we can do nothing without the help of the Holy Spirit. He examines us closely. The sheep who wants to please his Shepherd looks forward to this time. If there is an ‘evil way’ in his thinking, he knows God will show him what’s wrong and how to change his thinking – so that he can learn to think like the Shepherd.*

*“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful [evil] way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.” Psalm 139:23-24*

*The rod is finally one of the shepherd’s primary defense weapons. He uses it to protect himself and his sheep. A skilled shepherd can throw his rod almost instantly upon seeing a predator stalking a sheep. He is so accurate he can kill the animal from many yards. A coyote would never see it coming. As the shepherd walks ahead of his sheep, he uses his rod to beat the bushes, scaring out the snakes. One such shepherd was moving a big boulder out of the way, and there beneath it was a cobra, coiled and ready to strike. In an instant, the head of the snake was smashed with that rod. The shepherd had moved the rock and prepared the way for his sheep with the rod never leaving his hand. What a comfort to the sheep, having a shepherd who is highly skilled with his rod.*

*Our Shepherd uses His rod of authority to protect us from danger. Because we belong to Him, and are the sheep of His pasture, NOTHING can attack that He doesn’t allow. Sometimes, our Lord allows the attack – so we will learn to trust Him and ‘fear no evil’. But, absolutely nothing takes Him by surprise. And, there is not an enemy that is strong enough or big enough to defeat our Shepherd – He is the Almighty God!*

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*“The Lord will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul. The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever.”  
Psalm 121:7-8*

*The staff is a different sheep-herding tool. It is specifically designed for shepherding sheep. No other type of herdsman uses a staff other than a shepherd. Its primary use is to deliver the sheep from danger. A staff is longer than a rod, and it usually has a hook on one end, for pulling sheep from dangerous situations. The staff shows the shepherd’s compassion and concern for his sheep. It is only used to HELP them. The staff shows the shepherd’s patience and kindness. It is comforting to the sheep.*

*The ‘staff’ is used to bring sheep and shepherd together. Often, when the ewes are having their babies, the new little lambs will become separated from their mommies. Now, it is not good for the shepherd to pick up the newborn lambs with his hands, because the mother ewe might reject the baby, smelling human scent. So, the shepherd will ever so gently slide the staff, hook laying sideways, under the lamb and lift it over to its mother. The shepherd carefully keeps track of which baby belongs to which mother ewe. Sometimes, there are older sheep that are a little afraid of the shepherd and will stay on the fringes of the flock, never coming close. The shepherd, knowing that these sheep need to feel his love and care, will place his staff around their neck and draw them to himself, giving them the intimate attention they need. The staff is a picture of ‘fellowship’ – close intimate friendship between the shepherd and the sheep. Just as the baby lambs need to be close to their mommies, so we need to be close to our Shepherd. ‘Fellowship’ is the word that describes this closeness. Fellowship happens when we begin thinking like He thinks – when we learn what His thoughts and words are. Thinking the same thoughts as Jesus Christ is how we have fellowship with Him, even though we can’t see Him in person. His thoughts are very close – as close as our own soul. This is fellowship with the Shepherd, and is pictured by the shepherd’s staff. God wants to have fellowship with us.*

*“God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 Corinthians 1:9*

*The shepherd uses his staff to guide the sheep. When walking along he will place the tip of his staff gently against the sheep’s side and apply a little pressure. This tells the sheep which way to go. Often, a shepherd will pick out a special favorite sheep and walk along for quite a while with the tip of his staff lying against the side of the sheep. To the sheep this is such a wonderful feeling; it is a little like walking hand in hand with the shepherd. The sheep enjoys this special attention and knows he is loved. Our Shepherd’s staff guides us also – with gentle reminders from the Holy Spirit of what we have been taught to think. While you are walking down the paths of righteousness, the Holy Spirit brings to your memory the things you have learned – the grass you have eaten, laden with dew. It is like having the Lord’s staff pressing gently on your memory – “Remember that lesson? That is what I want you to think and do right now, under these circumstances.” If you pay attention, you will ‘feel’ the Shepherd’s staff guiding your footsteps in the right direction, each day.*

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*“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth;... and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.” John 16:13, 14:26*

*The shepherd uses his staff for one more thing – to rescue the sheep from their own bad decisions. Sheep get themselves into the most ridiculous dilemmas. A sheep who is greedy for one more mouthful of green grass will climb down into a ravine trying to get to those few blades of grass. Often, his footing will slip and over he goes. This is when the shepherd reaches out with his staff and lifts him back onto solid ground. Then, the sheep will turn around and do the same thing again. Sometimes a sheep, thinking that he needs a little more to eat, will wiggle his way into a briar of wild roses. The thorns are so thick and sharp that he becomes completely entangled in the brambles. He is stuck and cannot get out. Most of the problems a human-sheep has are because he makes bad decisions. His ‘sheep nature’ wants what it wants and when he tries to get what he wants – he sins and gets himself in all kinds of trouble. Being stuck on the ledge of a cliff or tangled in a thorny bush is the same thing as being a cast sheep. He is in desperate need of his Shepherd – stuck and hurting. Once again, the Shepherd comes to his rescue, just as He goes looking for the missing sheep who is cast. The Shepherd combs the mountain side, calling to him, His sheep. The sheep, on the other hand, can only bleat for help. This is ‘how’ a sheep confesses his sin – he bleats for help. The Shepherd reaches down with His staff and hooks the crook under his neck or front shoulders, and lifts him to safety – He restores him to the path. This time, the Shepherd’s staff pictures God’s forgiveness. God is always faithful to forgive, always. God wants us to name our sins to Him – to confess them – so we will be able to identify exactly what we did to cause the problem. Confessing your sin changes your thinking from arrogance to humility and thankfulness for your Shepherd. He is faithful to forgive. He always brings His staff – and He always uses it to rescue us when we sin – every time!*

*“If we confess our sins, **He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [wrongdoing].” 1 John 1:9***

*His rod and His staff are both FAITHFUL – that means that God will always use His rod – to be our authority, to discipline, to examine, and to protect. God will also continually use His staff – for fellowship with us, to guide us in the paths of righteousness, and to rescue us from the problems we cause by our own sin. This is COMFORTING – the Good Shepherd’s rod and staff comfort us!*

*“Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” Psalm 23:4c*

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Craft: Make a rod and a staff from pipe-cleaners

Coloring Picture: Shepherd protects sheep on a dangerous precipice

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.

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#### 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 ...*