

A Shepherd's Psalm

Psalm 23

MEMORY VERSE

PSALM 23:1

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

A small balloon for each child, cotton balls, a toilet paper cardboard roll for each child, scissors, glue stick and a black marker.

Brown clay (the kind that hardens when dry). If you don't have brown clay, substitute with another color. You will need enough for each child to make a small shepherd's staff.

A list of review questions for today's lesson.

ATTENTION GETTER!

Sheep Balloons

You will need a small balloon for each child, cotton balls, a toilet paper cardboard roll for each child, scissors, glue stick and a black marker. To introduce today's lesson each child will make a sheep.

Have the children first cut the cardboard toilet paper roll into four equal pieces. With a black marker, color the outside of all four pieces black. Next, have each child blow up their balloon. With a glue stick, glue the four cardboard pieces as feet. Next draw eyes and a smile near the tie of the balloon. The actual tie can serve as the sheep's nose. After doing that, glue cotton balls around the balloon to give the sheep lots of wool. After making the craft use it as an illustration of how we are like sheep and we will learn in our lesson today that **The Lord is our shepherd.**

LESSON TIME!

Psalm 23 is probably the most famous Psalm out of all 150 of them. It has brought so much comfort to so many people over the centuries. We see that God is our loving shepherd. He cares for our every need. We are going to be studying this beautiful Psalm today. As we study, it causes us think about how the Lord is our shepherd and how this Psalm applies to our own lives. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:1

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

In Psalm 23, David writes about the beautiful relationship he has with God as his shepherd. Here we see his intimate relationship with God. In many of David's other Psalms he refers to God as "Lord," "King," "rock" or "shield." But this Psalm is a very intimate one. David was very close to God and here we get a glimpse into the relationship he had with the Lord.

David knew very much what it was like to be a shepherd. Before he slew Goliath or became king he spent many years tending sheep himself. Let's look at some of the characteristics of a shepherd and his sheep and learn more about our own relationship with the Lord.

A shepherd is everything to his sheep. He is a guide, physician, and protector. We see a lot of shepherds in the Old Testament. A shepherd lived with his sheep out in the open spaces, traveled with them, finding food for them. He knew where the water was and he scared away the wild animals so the sheep would be safe.

The shepherd would find the sheep when they were lost, he carried sick sheep or lambs when they couldn't keep up with the rest of the flock; he was their leader, their protector. The sheep knew his voice, they would respond to him when he called. If a stranger

called out to them or tried to herd them, they would not even move for him or they would become confused and get upset and start bumping into one another.

The shepherd cares about what his flock eats and provides plenty of fresh water. He is like a good dad, who always does what is best for his family. God gives us this picture that we might realize that He is the ultimate shepherd. He is teaching us that we are to fully depend on Him for everything. He will take care of our physical needs and our spiritual needs.

For our physical needs we can thank Him for our parents who feed us and take care of us everyday. For our spiritual needs, Jesus Himself said in John 6 that He is the bread of life and we should spend time with Him for our spiritual food every day. He said, "I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes on me shall never thirst." He said in John 4 that He gives living water and that whoever would drink the water He gives would have eternal life springing up like a well inside of him. Jesus provides everything we need. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:2

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters.

Imagine a beautiful valley with green pastures and still waters, with plenty of trees for shade. What a refreshing and nice place to be. A good shepherd will lead his sheep to places that are safe, provide plenty of food and provide a place of rest. That is what God does for us. He leads us to safe places when we follow Him. He provides for all of our needs and gives us rest.

Living in this world can sometimes wear us out. There are so many bad things in this world, but when we trust in our shepherd He will always give us the rest and peace that our hearts need. God is so good to us. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:3

He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

In verse 3, we can look at “He restores my soul” in a couple of different ways. On the one hand, we can see a straying sheep brought back (see also Isaiah 49:5 and Psalm 60: 1, both of which use the word “restores” as in verse 3). It might picture when we stray away and are brought back through the Lord’s loving grace. This word can also mean, “being brought back to its original form.” In other words, it would picture how the Lord refills us when we need more of His help. When we are “running on empty,” the ministry of the Holy Spirit refills us to overflowing.

The phrase “my soul” means “my life” or “myself.” Sometimes we get so busy or distracted with things in this life that we need our shepherd to bring us back again to the “quiet waters.” It is that place where we can spend time with Him in prayer or in His Word. It is the place where He is waiting to refresh our spirit, where we can seek His peace, forgiveness, direction, or be filled up again with His love. He truly does “restore our souls!” **The Lord is our shepherd.**

Next we see that He will lead us in “paths of righteousness.” That is the best path to be on. Why would we want to go on any of those other darker, rougher paths that the world has to offer? Those paths will always lead to destruction. For His flock, God has a right path, a path that leads to eternal life, a path whose ways belong to Him and His kingdom. Let’s choose to walk on the same path as the Shepherd. It is when we stray off from that path that we can get into trouble. Sheep that would stray were often in danger of being eaten by an enemy. Satan is described in the Bible as a “roaring lion” seeking whom He may devour. Let’s stay on our Shepherd’s path and be safe! **The Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:4

Yea, 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.

Walking in the valley of the shadow of death is a hard thing to picture if you have not had any real trouble in your life before. It can really be anything in our lives that is scary to us. Maybe it is an illness or someone being mean to us. In some countries it is illegal to worship Jesus, and whole families have been persecuted.

But what did David say about those situations? “ I will fear no evil; for You are with me.” What a comfort when we have problems, to know that God is with us and promises to help us. No matter what dark path we have to walk on God will be there with us. God is stronger than anything we have to face. When we believe in Jesus the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of our hearts. One of the promises that Jesus made to us is that He would never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5,6). **The Lord is our shepherd.**

In times of need He is also armed and ready to protect His sheep. A shepherd's rod is for defense; he uses it to protect his sheep from anyone or anything trying to attack. The staff is for control. Sometimes the shepherd would have to discipline the sheep. He had to help them get back onto the right path. If we begin to stray, Hebrews 12 says that God deals with us as sons and will correct us. There will sometimes be chastening, or discipline in our lives, but that is because our Great Shepherd loves us and wants what is best for us. The sheep feel very secure in the shepherd's care. They know that he loves them.

Shepherd's Staff

A shepherd would always have a staff to help him with his sheep. In Psalm 23 it says that God's staff is a comfort to us. Explain to the children that a shepherd uses His staff to guide, direct, discipline,

and correct. How does God guide and direct us? Does God discipline and correct us? How does that show us that He loves us? How is it a comfort to us?

Using brown clay (the kind that hardens when dry), give enough clay to each child for them to make a staff. You can draw the shape of a shepherd's staff on the dry erase/chalk board. If there is room allow the children to write Psalm 23 on their staff and allow it to dry.

PSALM 23:5

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

Verse 5 portrays strength in the presence of enemies. Enemies were never taken lightly in the Old Testament. This could be a picture of a victory celebration; enemies were often made to watch their captors celebrate the victory in their presence. It could also be a picture of the strength of the Lord when we need encouragement (see also Romans 8:31-39 and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10). What enemies do we have in this day and age? How has God given us the victory over them?

When David talks about God anointing His head with oil he is talking about how the shepherd would help those sheep that were wounded or hurting. Anointing with oil was a way to help bring healing to those who were injured. It also represents the Holy Spirit. When we are hurting and need help, the Lord promises to help us. He will come and minister to us in our need.

Then David talks about his cup running over. The Lord not only gives us everything we need but much more beyond that. David is filled with joy to overflowing because of his relationship with the Lord. Our cups should also be overflowing. When we know the

Lord and walk with Him the result is a life of blessing and joy beyond comparison. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

PSALM 23:6

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Because David committed his life to follow the Lord he knew that it would be a life of blessing. Did it mean that David never had any problems in his life? No way! David had a lot of problems in his life. But he knew that God's mercy and goodness were with him every day. No matter what problem he faced God would be there to help him and protect him. We serve the same God that David served and have the same promises.

David knew that he would dwell in the Lord's house forever. David was assured of his eternal life. For those of us who have asked Jesus Christ to come into our hearts and lives we can be assured that we will spend eternity with the Lord. We have no need to fear our future; we can rest in the Lord. What wonderful promises are ours through Jesus Christ.

We have a Great Shepherd, right with us, to love, guide, protect and help us along this path we call life. **The Lord is our shepherd.**

Bible Baseball Review

Use this game to review today's lesson. Before class, think of several questions to ask your students at their level (examples: Who is our shepherd? What does it mean to not want? What are still waters? etc.). Designate first, second, third and home base in your class. Have your students then divide into two teams. Have someone designated as the "pitcher." It could be the teacher. The pitcher will ask a question to each team.

Here is how the play will work. If the batter gives the correct answer, he hops to first base. If the next batter answers the next question correctly, he hops to first base and the player there hops to second base. Difficult questions should have the word “home run” written on them before they are asked.

If a team misses only one question their team is out and the other team is up to bat. The team who answers the most questions wins. Decide before play how many “innings” that you will have. Count up the points for each team and declare a winner.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord because He is our Great Shepherd. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the gospel, give them opportunity.