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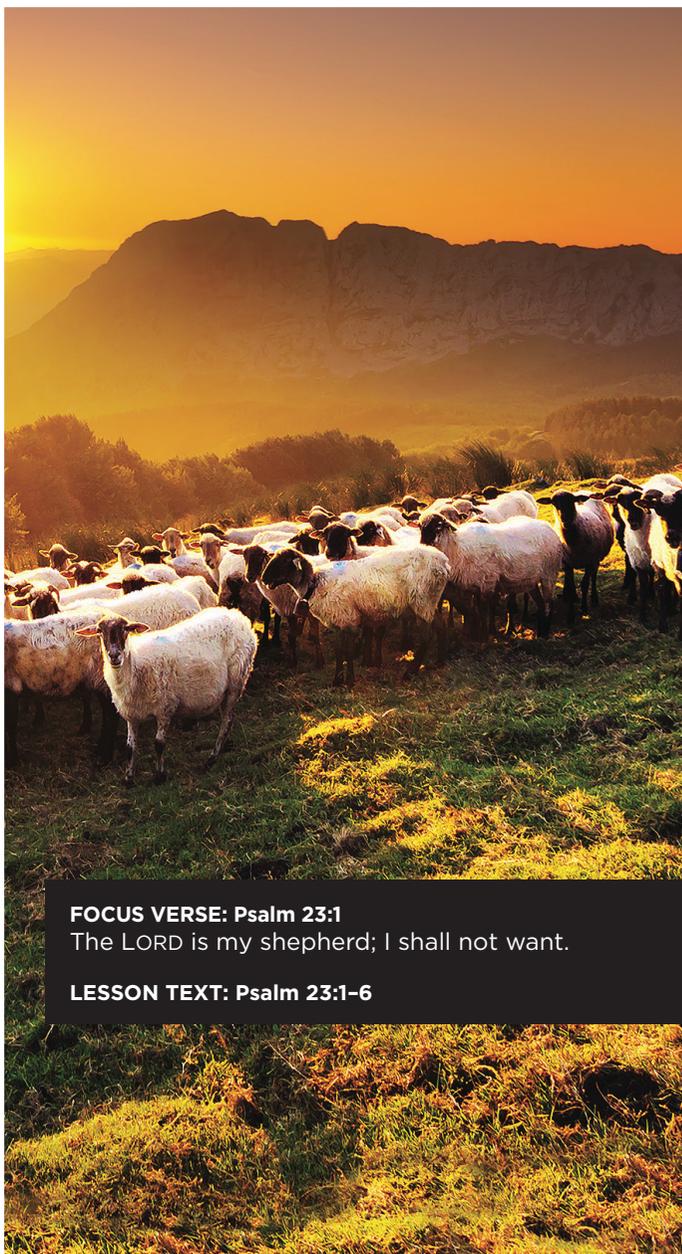
OUR SHEPHERD

LESSON BIG IDEA

I will follow the Lord and enjoy His protection and provision.

TRUTH ABOUT GOD

The Lord is my Shepherd.



FOCUS VERSE: Psalm 23:1

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

LESSON TEXT: Psalm 23:1-6

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW

Lesson Text: Psalm 23:1-6

The words of Psalm 23 give great comfort to believers who experience painful and difficult circumstances in life. As it is placed in the psalter, following Psalm 22 with its content focused on the death of the Messiah and preceding Psalm 24 with its “King of Glory” content, Psalm 23 can be read as a reference to the Messiah’s hope as he walked “through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). Believers today can certainly avail themselves of that same hope, for the LORD was our shepherd, supplying all that we need (Psalm 23:1).

For the sake of His name (for His reputation), the LORD restores our soul. Also for the sake of His reputation, the LORD leads us in paths of righteousness, or right paths (Psalm 23:3). Even in the midst of extreme hardship, threat, and suffering, we need not fear, for the LORD comforts us.

Having passed through the valley of the shadow of death and having experienced the restoration of our soul (life), we will testify that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives (verse 6). The word translated follow (radaph) means pursue or chase. Goodness and mercy will not be passive in relation to the believer; our lives will be characterized by the presence of these virtues.

Scripture frequently characterizes Jesus as a shepherd. (See Isaiah 40:11, Matthew 18:11-14, John 10:11, and I Peter 5:4.) In John’s vision, he declared that the Lamb in the midst of the throne will feed the great multitude no man can number and will lead them to “living fountains of waters” (Revelation 7:9, 17). Our shepherd leads us now beside still waters (Psalm 23:2), and He will give us rest in the age to come.

GOODNESS AND MERCY WILL NOT BE
PASSIVE IN RELATION TO THE BELIEVER.

DAY 1

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 1 2 3 4 5

Psalm 23:1-2

¹ The LORD *is* my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters.

Biblical Insight

The word translated want in verse 1 refers to lack. One lacks nothing with the LORD as one's shepherd. Continuing the metaphor of the shepherd-sheep relationship, this reference means the shepherd provides appropriate and healthy food, like green pastures. To say that the sheep is made to "lie down" means that he has eaten his fill, since sheep stand to eat. Sheep are frightened by rapidly running waters and will not drink from them; thus, the shepherd leads him beside still waters (Psalm 23:2).

Daily Devotion

In his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller told a story about a time he was in the field with his sheep. A friend came from the city to visit him and brought along her tiny Pekingese pup. Her pup only weighed about twelve pounds; the sheep weighed around one hundred fifty pounds. But when the Pekingese pup sprang from the car, the sheep stampeded across the field.

Sheep will not rest when they feel endangered. They will not repose when they are hungry. Even a fifteen pound pup can cause them to bolt from their bed of green grass and lead a low-speed chase across the field. David understood this trait about sheep because he spent many days of his life watching them. He also understood this principle about God because He had spent much time resting in Him. Our God causes us to rest. When we are with our Shepherd, we need not fear hunger or danger. Thanks to Psalm 23:1, David's story can be ours: the Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this to your life today?*

DAY 2

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 6 □ 7 □ 8 □ 9 □ | Luke 8 □

Psalm 23:3

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Biblical Insight

For the sake of His name (for His reputation), the Lord restores the Messiah's soul (compare to Psalm 22:20, 29 [the Hebrew *nephesh*, *soul* or *life* appears in both verses as well as here in Psalm 23:3]). Also for the sake of His reputation, the LORD leads the Messiah in paths of righteousness, or right paths (Psalm 23:3). The idea that the LORD does this for the sake of His reputation is tied with His promise to David that He would raise up the Messiah as David's descendant to sit on David's throne. (See II Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 132:10-11; Acts 2:30-32; Revelation 22:16.) Had the soul (*nephesh*, or *life*) of the Messiah not been restored, it would have meant that the LORD had not kept His promise to David and it would have reflected negatively on His character.

Daily Devotion

It's nearly impossible to get lost on a bike path, but he did it. One Saturday morning, LJ was riding a fifty-mile missions ride. The first thirty miles were great. He felt good. He was pumping the pedals, listening to music. After those thirty, he felt like he could go seventy. But it was time to stop for a break. He fueled up with bananas and granola. The guide gave him directions to get back on the bike path and meet up with the rest of the group.

He huffed and puffed to the fifty-mile marker. There should have been a picnic aplenty, but there was no one. Just a sign marking the end of the trail and green grass on both sides. That's when he realized he took the wrong trail after the break and ended up thirty miles away from the group. Lesson learned: don't fall behind the group.

As we follow Jesus, He leads us. We don't know where to go, but He does. All we need to do is follow the One who leads us, and we'll have what and whom we need.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this to your life today?*

DAY 3

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 10 □ 11 □ 12 □ 13 □ 14 □ | Luke 9 □

Psalm 23:4

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Biblical Insight

The Messiah's experience on the Cross is described as "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4). Even in the midst of this experience, the Messiah would fear no evil for the LORD was with Him, comforting Him with His rod and staff. In the shepherd-sheep relationship, the rod and staff represent the shepherd's presence, protection, and guidance.

Daily Devotion

For the first three verses of Psalm 23, the sheep talk about the shepherd. When they are sunning themselves on lush, green pastures and sipping at still waters, they talk about their shepherd: "My shepherd is good. You should meet my shepherd. My shepherd's the best shepherd." They buy their shepherd the "World's Best Shepherd" coffee mug. But in verse 4, everything changes.

Put yourself in the sheep's wool. The once-gentle breeze grows into an uncontrollable gale. And we find ourselves miles away from green pastures and still waters as we march through the heartless heart of the valley. And the sheep's speech changes. When we walk through the valley of the shadow of death under the howls of the wolves and the sting of the rain, we fix our eyes on the one leading us, and we talk—not about our shepherd but to Him.

It is possible nothing brings us closer to God than the valley. If you are walking through the valley, talk to the Shepherd. You may find He is closer in the valley than you thought.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this to your life today?*

DAY 4

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 15 □ 16 □ 17 □ 18 □ 19 □ | Luke 10 □

Psalm 23:5

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Biblical Insight

In the presence of His enemies—a reference to His experience on the cross (Psalm 22:7–8, 11–13, 16–18, 20–21)—the LORD prepares a table for the Messiah, anoints His head with oil, and causes His cup to run over (Psalm 23:5). The table is a symbol of provision and blessing, as is the overflowing cup (see Psalm 16:5). The statement “Thou anointest my head with oil” refers to the Messiah as the Anointed One, although a different Hebrew word (*dashan*) is translated *anoint* than is ordinarily used in connection with royal anointing. The same word is translated *prosperous* (NKJV) or *fat* (KJV) in Psalm 22:29, perhaps providing a verbal link between the two psalms. *Dashan* does have to do with generous anointing with oil, so in this context it is appropriate to apply it to the Messiah.

Daily Devotion

There are some strange places to eat. The Modern Toilet in Taiwan features bowls shaped like toilet bowls. Fortezza in Italy allows you to eat your one square meal a day served by actual inmates and accompanied with plastic cutlery. Or you can enjoy steak and ribs with twenty-one other people at a table suspended by a crane—nothing between you and the ground except a lot of faith in a crane and a few cables.

But this one is the strangest of all, even stranger than the Modern Toilet. David testified that our Shepherd prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. Typically, we enjoy our meals with family and friends. We would never think of spreading out a picnic blanket to enjoy our turkey and swiss on the front lines of the battle, but thanks to our Shepherd, we can.

Even if your enemy is snarling at you, *bon appetit*. Eat up right in front of him. Our Shepherd is with us, and our enemy cannot hurt us.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this to your life today?*

DAY 5

Bible Reading Plan

Judges 20 □ 21 □ | Luke 11 □

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 for ever.

Biblical Insight

To translate the Hebrew *yashab* as *dwell* is to follow the Septuagint, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate. The Hebrew text reads “I will return to the house of the LORD,” which looks forward to the return of the Messiah, the anointed one, to the Temple. This messianic image is seen elsewhere in the Old Testament. (See Zechariah 9:8-9; Malachi 3:1.) In the most immediate context, this imagery prepares the reader for Psalm 24, wherein the King of Glory, the Messiah, enters the “everlasting doors” into His holy place on the hill of the LORD. (See Psalm 24:3, 7, 9.)

The Messiah will dwell in the house of the LORD forever, further signifying that Psalm 23 does not have its ultimate fulfillment in David.

Daily Devotion

Buffet protocol and etiquette can be complicated. Sometimes servers pick up plates and glasses before guests are finished. If you have ever come back from washing your hands or answering a phone call to find an empty table, you know the feeling of, What just happened?

Some buffets worked out a card system. If you are leaving, simply place the card face down to read, “All done.” If you are staying, place the card face up to read, “Still enjoying.” That simple card tells the server to leave your plate alone because you are coming back.

The last verse of the twenty-third psalm is the card that tells the world that the God of the house of God is coming back. David prophesied that the Lord would return to His house and He would dwell there forever. There will be a day when Jesus comes back to Earth to set up His kingdom. And what a day that will be. We must prepare ourselves for that time.

Reflection and Prayer

» *What can you do to apply this to your life today?*

Lesson Title: Our Shepherd

Scripture Focus: Psalm 23:1

The Lesson in Context

There is one important distinction between the metaphor of the physical shepherd and our heavenly Shepherd. In the livestock industry, shepherds do not give their animals any choice of whether to stay with the flock. Those sheep have no choice in the matter; they must do whatever the shepherd says. However, God, as our loving and Good Shepherd, recognizes we are humans and not farm animals. He has given each of us free will to humbly submit to His status as the Good Shepherd. He will not force us to stay with the herd. He will continually pursue us, but He will never forcefully coerce us. Instead, He cries out to us, beckoning us to join His flock. He is always ready with a loving embrace.

Those who are already in the flock can participate in God's mission to find and restore the lost sheep of this world. Probably all of us know some lost sheep, wandering about with no shepherd, no guidance, and no direction. When we encounter these persons, let us be bold to testify of the provision and protection we have found in Christ. Let us allow our anointing and blessings to shine through us for all the world to see. Let us use the goodness and mercy God has given us to bless others. Let us guide this hurting world to the Shepherd who is faithfully guiding us.

Group Discussion

1. What are some ways God shows you He cares for you daily?
2. Oftentimes we think of God's blessings in terms of what He has given to us, but what about what God has kept us from? What are some of the things we may not have experienced because of God's protection?
3. What are some things God has provided for you in the past? How do these testimonies give you confidence in His ability to provide for you in the future?
4. Can you count all of God's blessings in your life? Have you ever tried? Perhaps a good exercise in the coming days would be to sit down and write out as many of God's blessings as you can recall.
5. What are some of the ways we can constantly, purposefully, and intentionally "dwell" in God's presence? In between church services, how can we experience God on a daily basis?

My Prayer for the Upcoming Week

How do you want to be different because of what you have experienced today?
