



## Unit .11

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### Session .06

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# The Good Shepherd

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#### Scripture



## Ps. 23:1-6

**1** The LORD is my shepherd; I have what I need. **2** He lets me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. **3** He renews my life; He leads me along the right paths for His name's sake. **4** Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff—they comfort

me. **5** You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. **6** Only goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD as long as I live.

## Intro Options



**Main Point:**  
**The Lord is the Good Shepherd who lovingly cares for His people.**

### Option 1

If you have access to a whiteboard or large paper pad, play Pictionary (if you don't have these items, play Charades). Ask for three volunteers, each of whom, one at a time, will try to get the rest of the class to guess a word from the volunteers' drawings. The three words:

Provider

Guide

Love

Have each volunteer draw and get the kids to guess. Afterward, talk about what the students drew or acted out: why did they choose the illustrations they did? Did any particular word bring out kinder images or harsher images? What jobs might entail all three of these words?

A shepherd does all three of these jobs, and we'll see David call the Lord his shepherd because God is these three things for David in today's lesson.

### Option 2

Tell your students: out of the blue, you've inherited a huge sheep ranch (thousands of sheep). You don't know anything about sheep, but it was your long-lost aunt's wish that her sheep be superbly cared for, and she chose you to see to their care. She also left you gobs and gobs of money; the money is yours, but you have to use half of it to care for the sheep, including hiring shepherds.

Write up a classified ad that you'll publish in order to find good shepherds for the sheep. In particular, what top three skills or qualities are you looking for in potential shepherds?

Have students share their ads, including the skills and qualities. Talk about how Psalm 23 talks about God as our shepherd, with three main characteristics of providing, guiding, and loving. Did anybody have any of those qualities on his or her list?

## TEACHING PLAN

David probably wrote this psalm at Mahanaim in the middle of the war against Absalom, his son. Even as he was on the run for his life once more, even as he was in a barren land, even as he was facing his own son in war, David recognized God's kind and ample provisions in his life. In these first two verses, we discover three truths about the Lord's provisions to David and to us.

**Read Psalm 23:1-2.**



Of the many different names we have for God, David used the covenant name, the LORD, to open this psalm. This was the name that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush where He gave His name as “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14). God gave Moses this name to set Him apart from the false gods of the Egyptians. Moses' question had been what he should say when the Israelites asked who had sent him. In essence, God responded by telling Moses, “Tell them that the one and only true God sent you. The one and only Creator God who has always existed, always will exist, and who created everything by His spoken word.”

Here, though, David layers this holy name with God being a shepherd. The Great I AM is also the Great Shepherd. The One who gives life and breath to all humanity, the One who created everything, the One who parted the waters of the Red Sea for His people to cross on dry ground is the One who provides for His sheep. The all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving God provides every need of His people, even the most basic ones. 

▪ **What do you think the metaphor of shepherd communicate about God's character? About our relationship to Him?**

David was familiar with the role of the shepherd, having been one in his youth. He was well-acquainted with a shepherd's responsibilities and expectations. He knew firsthand how difficult sheep were to lead and that their sole chance of survival rested on the effectiveness of their shepherd. He understood that shepherds were with their sheep for up to twenty-four hours a day. David chose this metaphor of a shepherd because it communicates a personal God who cares deeply about His people. Creator God is not a far off, detached monarch; He is an up close and involved Father.

Sheep are known for being helpless. However, their shepherd was assigned to lead them and make sure their needs were taken care of. David knew that sheep are inherently timid and are usually too afraid to lie down—even for their own good. However, in a rare moment of confidence and trust in their shepherd, sheep would lie down. But not only does God provide rest, He also provides refreshment. Remember, David was probably in the wilderness when he wrote this psalm. If so, he envisioned the Lord's provision was like a spring of water in a dry desert. David was convinced that the Lord was providing what he needed for his good.

▪ **Why do we find it difficult to rest in the Lord's provision? What are some ways we can grow in this area?**

# COMMENTARY

## Main Point:

The Lord is the Good Shepherd who lovingly cares for His people.

## Psalm 23

1. David could have chosen a war metaphor. It would have been fitting. The LORD is my warrior, the LORD is my king, or the LORD is my shield. Instead, he opted for a personal one: The LORD is my shepherd. And his use of the personal pronoun “my” heightens this. God wasn’t just a shepherd; He was David’s shepherd.

3. When we try to guide our own lives, we end up like the sheep, flat on our backs and unable to help ourselves. However, the Lord’s guidance is not just reactive to when we go astray, but also proactive. There is a litany of wrong paths available, and we have seen people fall prey to many of them—perhaps even we have. It is good, then, to be reminded that if we follow Christ, the Good Shepherd, he will lead us along the right paths. Here are two:

1) The Vertical Path. The first four of the Ten Commandments describe our vertical relationship with God (Ex. 20:1-11), a path we are to walk along with humility (Mic. 6:7). One of the best ways to do so is to walk daily in His Word. Psalm 119:105 remind us that God’s Word is a lamp to our feet and a light on our path. As we spend time reading the Bible, we will see how we are to live in relationship with God and walk along the path He has given us.

2) The Horizontal Path. Not only are we to walk humbly with our God, we are also to walk introspectively with each other (Ex. 20:12-17). We were not created for isolation; we were created to be in community, reflecting the very nature of our triune God. The church, therefore, is a vital part of a believer’s journey with God and spiritual maturity. We are told to encourage each other (1 Thess. 5:11), love each other (1 John 4:7), forgive each other (Col. 3:13), accept each other (Rom. 15:7), serve each other (Gal. 5:13), not consume each other (Gal. 5:15), speak the truth to each other (Eph. 4:25), and pray for each other (Jas. 5:16).

It’s important that we recognize that while there are two right paths, there are countless wrong paths we can choose to travel along. But we also must remember that our loving Shepherd is never far from us to pull us from these paths and place us on the right paths again. If we walk with God’s Word and with each other, we can be confident that we are following our Good Shepherd.



## 99 Essential Doctrines (p. 72, DDG)

### God is Love

To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that perfect love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The imperfect love that human beings share between one another is a dim reflection, a sign that points to the perfect love that resides within God. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn’t the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in Christ so that we might become reconciled to Him.

## TEACHING PLAN

Most of us have some sort of a Global Positioning System (GPS) app on our phones. Because of this, we have no need to memorize directions or even street names. As long as the GPS app we have is a good one, we will be given step-by-step directions to get wherever we need to go. But it's important to have a good one. If you have ever tried to follow the directions of an app that wasn't so great, or if your phone battery dies or your data is slow, you have no doubt experienced the great stress and frustration of not knowing where you needed to go in time.

The same is true spiritually. We often find it difficult to rely on God's guidance because we don't always see the next turn or the big picture. However, while we do not always know the exact plans God has for us, we can know the motives behind His plans.

**Read Psalm 23:3-4.**



Sheep are known for rolling on their backs and getting stuck. Without the help of a shepherd to turn them right-side up, they would die after only a few hours in that position. It's not accidental that the Bible compares us to sheep because we tend to do the same spiritually. We often find ourselves stuck in precarious situations, and we too need a shepherd—the Shepherd—to come alongside us, turn us right-side up, and guide us to safety.

- **How has the Lord rescued you from getting stuck in life?**
- **How have you seen the Lord guide you away from a wrong path in your life?**

**Read Psalm 23:5-6.**



In these final two verses, the imagery shifts from primarily one of a shepherd relating to his sheep to a friend or host relating to another friend or esteemed guest. Hospitality was quite important in Jewish culture, and part of being a gracious host was to feed a guest, no matter when he or she might arrive in your home.

Like any good host, the Lord prepares for His guests. What is unique about this preparation though is that it comes in the midst of trouble. The Lord prepares a table in the presence of the psalmist's enemies. Even in the midst of a heartbreaking war with his son, David has joy, symbolized by anointing the head with oil. His enemies may have been outside waiting to harm him, and yet he is inside enjoying a good, bountiful meal prepared by the Good Shepherd, his loving host.

- **When have you experienced and felt God's love to you in the midst of trouble?**

Psalm 23 encourages believers to look to Christ as the Good Shepherd who loves us and laid down His life (John 10:7-15). We are to read this psalm and have hope that we will dwell with God forever. But there are still more sheep scattered abroad, and Jesus has sent us out to them, in the midst of wolves and through the darkest of valleys. Just as Jesus laid His life down, so too should we, knowing that Christ our Shepherd is always with us and that His goodness and steadfast love always go before us, even to the end of the age.



# COMMENTARY

**Main Point:**  
The Lord is the Good Shepherd who lovingly cares for His people.

## Psalm 23

4. Sometimes the right paths God leads us on are green, but other times they're dark. The Christian life does not only contain green pastures and quiet waters; it also contains the darkest valleys. It is easy to trust the Lord on the mountaintop, where there is great visibility. It is another thing altogether to trust Him in the dark valleys with very little visibility and imminent danger all around us.

But for David, even there, even in the dark valley, he had nothing to fear. How could he say that? Two reasons:

1) God's power manifested by His rod. A rod was a club that shepherds carried to fend off wild animals that only wanted to harm the sheep. Left to their own devices, sheep without any form of self-defense would be killed by wolves or just about any other animal in a matter of minutes. A shepherd with a rod was a constant reminder of safety. The shepherd could do what the sheep could not: fight off any animal that posed a threat. Similarly, as believers in Christ, we are told that our Shepherd walks before us, protecting us with His power (Ps. 118:6).

2) God's grace manifested by His staff. Not only are we comforted by the Lord's power, we're also comforted by the Lord's grace. The staff was used to pull sheep out of hazardous situations. Often, sheep would get caught in thickets or crevices, and a shepherd would use a staff to pull them out. So too, for believers, we find ourselves in hazardous situations, and God's grace pulls us out.

### Activity

Tell your students to imagine that they've been hired out by the North American Mission Board to make visual aids for their missionaries to use in explaining Psalm 23. These visual aids can't have any words, and their pictures should be simple and cross-cultural; they're as likely to be used in a South American jungle as a nomad's tent.

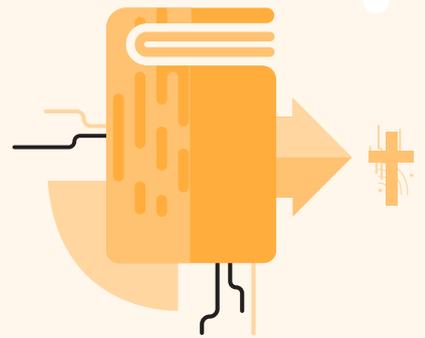
They should produce at least one visual for each of the three main points: 1) the shepherd provides; 2) the shepherd guides; 3) the shepherd loves. Keep in mind some of these cultures may not have sheep! So what symbol or icon can they make for each of these three roles?

Bonus points if the students can make visual aids for the sub-points, too (e.g., the Lord's provision being powerful, the Lord's provision being personal, etc.).

Have them make and share their visual aids. Debrief which ones are especially good and why.

## (p. 74, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who provided salvation for us by laying down His life (John 10:7-15). Because of the Good Shepherd, we may live with the hope that we will dwell with God forever.



# Our Mission

God's Story has always been designed to connect with our story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own. Suggested answers to these questions can be found on the right-hand side of the page for leaders.

## Head



**What are some of God's provisions in your life?**

**What is the greatest provision God has offered and provided?**

## Heart



**Why do you think v. 3 states that God does these things for His namesake?**

**What type of attitude and mindset should this truth foster within us?**

## Hands



**What are some of the biggest takeaways for you from Psalm 23?**

**What are some ways we can demonstrate our gratefulness to the great Shepherd in our lives this week?**

## **Main Point:** **The Lord is the Good Shepherd who lovingly cares for His people.**



### **Head**

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The Lord our Shepherd has promised to provide for every one of our needs according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus. The Psalms are replete with the confidence that the Lord is our portion and that in His presence there is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11). Further, the New Testament frames this confidence as a question: If God did not spare His Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things (Rom. 8:31)? As a Christian, contentment in the Lord begins with a confidence in the Lord's provision. All that we need, He gives. And all that He gives has a purpose. Every last one of the Lord's provisions is to be received with gratitude and joy and to be used to bring glory to the One who provided it to us (1 Cor. 10:31).



### **Heart**

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We should be very thankful that our Lord carries both a rod and a staff. God uses both of these instruments for our good, just as He provides for our every need and guides us to the right path. But lest we think that we are the center of the Lord's universe, we should take a look at the ultimate motivation for His guidance: His name's sake (v. 3). All that God does is for our good and His glory. The sheep doesn't get the credit in any of this; the benefit, yes, but not the credit. The one wielding the rod gets the credit, not the helpless sheep. The one using the staff gets the credit, not the senseless sheep. The one guiding and providing gets the credit, not the helpless sheep. The shepherd always gets the credit—the glory—not the sheep. This truth should keep us from thinking highly of ourselves and getting puffed up with pride. In fact, it is the clearest reminder conceivable that we are not the center of God's affection—God is! He created us for His glory and redeems people for the praise of His glorious grace.



### **Hands**

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For believers, God's goodness and mercy don't just pardon our sin—they protect us from sin. Consider the sheep metaphor again. Many flocks have sheepdogs. The goal of a sheepdog is to follow the flock and keep them in line. When a sheep begins to stray from the flock, the sheepdog barks to get the sheep's attention. Similarly, God's goodness and mercy function like sheepdogs, getting our attention when we begin to stray. God's corrective discipline is rooted in his goodness and mercy. We should be very glad that the Lord loves us enough to pardon our sin and correct our folly.