



LESSON PLAN

Scripture Texts:

Psalms 23

John 10:11-18, 27-30

Session Theme:

Comfort

a. Welcome to Class

Teachers should arrive in the classroom well in advance of class. Welcome students as they enter, and inquire about their week. Pass out name tags and record attendance on a classroom chart.

b. Icebreaker: “The Lord is my *?*”

Tell kids that you are going to give them several hints about today’s lesson, but that you will be doing it in pictures. The only verbal hint is that the Bible lesson you are studying comes from the book of Psalms.

Draw the following symbols on the board: A shepherd’s staff, a sheep, a tuft of grass, a river, a valley, a table, and a house. Invite kids to guess what each one is and to say it out loud.

Now that you have seen the different symbols, can anyone guess which psalm in the Bible mentions all of these things? It’s Psalm 23, which tells about the comfort of the Good Shepherd. Let’s begin our lesson and learn more about this beautiful passage in Scripture!

c. Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, you are the source of true comfort and help in this world. When we or our loved ones face hard things, be with us. Teach us to depend on you in faith. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

d. SEED Video or Song (Optional)

The teacher may introduce the lesson by playing the video clip from the SEED website. This time may also include an opening song or two, using a commercial Sunday School music CD.

Song suggestions for this lesson:

- “Lord I Lift Your Name on High” (Bible camp song)
- “The King of Love My Shepherd Is” (hymn)

e. Brief Bible Background

Read together the introduction to the lessons for the day, and briefly summarize the context and setting:

- Today’s Lesson is from the Old Testament
- Scripture Section: Writings

Throughout the Old Testament are books of poetry, proverbs, and songs. Most of these writings are not attached to a particular time or place, but reflect the good and bad times we all experience.

f. Communicate the Bible Story

Always keep in mind that the main purpose of Sunday School is to put people in contact with Bible stories. Use a version that is appropriate to the age level.

Upper Elementary: Read the Bible Story and Rhyme

Youth/Adults: Read the Scripture text from the Bible

For Upper and Lower Elementary, use the Storyteller questions to help the students think about the events of the story.

g. Complete the Worksheet(s)

Continue with the handout sheets appropriate to the age level of the students in class:

Upper Elementary: Worksheet and Drama

Youth: Bible Study (Maps, Timelines, Questions)

Adult: Bible Study Sheet (Introduction and Discussion)

h. Craft and Activity Time

If there is time after covering the Bible story, the class may move to craft and activity time, described on the following page. (Do not let the activity time supersede the actual time spent on the Scripture lesson.)

i. Summarize and Review

Before ending class, briefly summarize the day’s lesson one last time. If you have not already done so, introduce the Theme Word for the week, providing the definition, and asking how the lesson connects to that theme.

Youth/Adult: Discuss “Reflection for the Week Ahead”

j. Closing Prayer

Close the session in prayer before dismissal:

Upper Elementary: Practice a prayer from memory (e.g., the Lord’s Prayer, Luther’s Morning Prayer, etc.)

Youth/Adult: Use the ADTRC Prayer format



Bible Study Leader's Guide

The following is a discussion and answer guide for the Youth and Adult Bible Study sheets. For all leaders, it can serve to provide some background on the Bible lesson.

Discuss: Psalm 23

1. In Psalm 23, the Lord God is compared to a shepherd. If that is the case, who are the sheep? What does a shepherd do for the sheep?

The Lord protects us and cares for us, just as a shepherd watches over his sheep. A shepherd will search for any lost lamb; each one is precious to him. Jesus does the same for us!

2. Shepherds lead their sheep to good pastureland, even if they have to travel a distance to get there. In our lives of faith, how does God lead us “in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake”? What means does he use?

When we are lost and afraid, we can pray to Jesus, and he will help us find our way again. He has our best interests in mind, and we can trust that even if the way is difficult, he will lead us where we need to go.

To say that God *leads us in paths of righteousness* means that he determines the right course and sets the direction we are meant to travel. We are not the ones in charge. Faith means that we follow his will, not our own.

3. For what reason does the psalmist “fear no evil,” even when he walks through the “valley of the shadow of death” (or “the darkest valley”)?

The traditional translation of this phrase is “the valley of the shadow of death”; the more literal translation is “darkest valley.” Either way, it is meant to describe the feeling of danger, sadness, grief, and depression. Walking under a shadow is a metaphor for emotional distress.

Nevertheless, the psalmist does not fear because he knows that the Lord is by his side. He also knows that the Good Shepherd won’t leave him there in that dark valley, but will guide him through it and out into the sunshine again.

4. What are a rod and staff? What are they used for? How can those two things be comforting to the sheep?

A shepherd uses a rod and staff to keep predators away, and also to guide the sheep and keep them moving in the right direction. The hook end of a shepherd’s crook can be used to pull sheep out of danger. When we feel confused, lost, or afraid, it’s comforting to know that the Lord is in control and will guide and protect us.

5. In what sense would you say that the Lord “prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies”? What does that mean?

This is a way of saying that even when there are those who are working against us, God is working for us and providing for our needs in the most trying of times. Not only that, but all this takes place in the sight of our enemies. They will know that God is on our side.

The psalm give us the promise that God is more powerful than anything, or anyone, we face in life. Even when it seems as if everything is against us, we can lean on him and he will meet our needs. We often feel him most present at the very time when life is the hardest.

6. Read what Jesus said in John 10:11-18 and 27-30. As our Good Shepherd, how does Jesus say he is unlike the hired hand? What is he willing to do for his sheep?

As the Good Shepherd, Jesus loves the sheep so much that he will lay down his life to protect and save them. The hired hand, who’s only in it for the money, will cut and run when things get dangerous. Jesus proves his love for us by giving his life on the cross so that we would be redeemed.

7. Shepherds spend much of their time bringing and keeping the sheep together. Why? How is this like how God brings believers together as the Church?

One of the key jobs of a Shepherd is to keep the flock together, so that they move as one. They also have strength in numbers. Jesus does the same for us in the Church. We are not meant to live our faith alone, but are called to be a part of a community/congregation. In this way, we rely on one another and support each other in moving forward together.

8. As disciples of Jesus, what is the basis of our relationship with him? What sure and certain promises does he make to us?

As Jesus said, his sheep “hear his voice.” He knows them and they follow him. We are saved by faith in the Word of God. God knows us by name — better than we know ourselves (Luke 12:7). His promise is that nothing can snatch us away from his grasp. We belong to him.

9. In what practical ways in your life does Jesus continually remind you of his promises?

Through Word and Sacrament, God speaks his promise to us again and again. Through our fellow believers, he reminds us of the love he has for us and supports us in our life together.

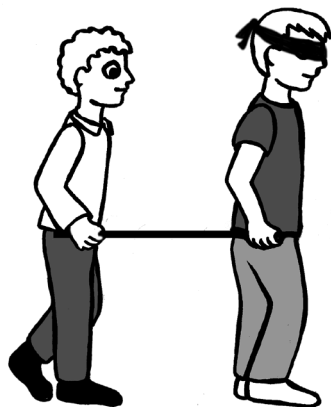
Classroom Craft and Activity Page

Listed below are in-class activities and craft projects related to the theme for the day. Choose one of the following based on the age and capabilities of the students. (Never let the activity or craft time take precedence over the biblical story.)

Activity 1: Guide the Sheep Activity

Materials Needed:

- Large area to play a game
- Long wooden stick, cane, or broomstick (without broom brush)
- Blindfold
- Timer
- Chairs
- Masking tape



Instructions:

Before playing this game: Using a long piece of masking tape, make a starting line at one end of the room. Set up chairs or other items as an obstacle course.

The object of this game will be for one person (the “Shepherd”) to lead a blindfolded partner (the “Sheep”) around the obstacle course and back across the finish line again. You may use a timer to add a competitive element.

To play: Divide the kids into pairs. Explain that one person in the pair will be the “Shepherd” and the other will be the “Sheep.” Show them how they are to do the obstacle course (walking around chairs a certain way, etc). Kids will do the obstacle course one pair at a time in the following way:

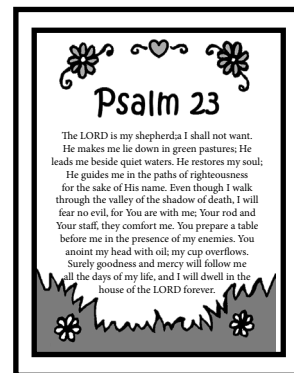
- Blindfold the “Sheep” in the first pair.
- Give the “Shepherd” the wooden stick or dowel.
- Have the Shepherd stand about a foot behind the sheep, holding one end of the dowel, which will be like a “staff.” The Sheep will hold the other end of the dowel.
- To “guide” the Sheep, the Shepherd will gently move the stick in the direction he or she wants to go. This will clue the blindfolded Sheep in where to walk.
- Pairs will take turns doing the entire obstacle course and returning again. To do this competitively, use a timer and see which pair can do this fastest!

A good shepherd helps and guides the sheep. This not only keeps them out of trouble, but is a source of comfort as well. How does Jesus, our Good Shepherd, do this for us?

Activity 2: Psalm 23 Memory Craft

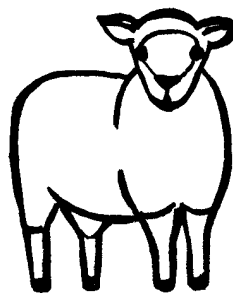
Materials Needed:

- Copies of Psalm 23
- Copy paper
- Pencil
- Thin black markers or pens
- Thin colored markers
- Colored piece of card stock
- Stapler



Instructions:

Psalm 23 is such a beautiful and popular psalm. Help kids memorize it by having them write the entire psalm on a sheet of paper. Then, make it into a decorative wall print that they can hang up at home.



To begin, give each person a printed copy of Psalm 23 (or have them turn to that psalm in the Bible), a piece of white copy paper and a pencil.

Invite kids to copy the entire psalm on their white piece of paper, using their best printing. When done, they can add decorations or little pictures along the edges of the paper.

Next, give everyone a thin black marker (or a black pen) and some thin, colored markers. Invite kids to trace over the words in black marker and the designs in colored markers. If there are stray pencil marks still visible, they can erase those before going on to the next step. When everyone is finished, let them choose a piece of colored card stock for a background. Center the copy paper on the card stock and staple this in place.

Encourage kids to read the psalm every night before they go to sleep. Tell them that if anyone can say it from memory during class over the next few weeks, there will be a reward for that. (Think in advance what little prize you might want to give.)

Psalm 23 is one of the most famous and beloved of all the psalms. It reminds us how God cares for us in every way. What are some ways he comforts you?

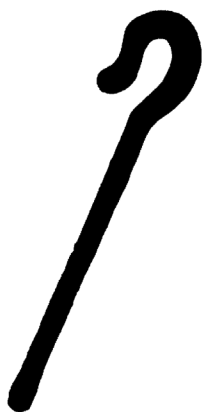
Worksheet Answer Key

Shown below are the answers and solution to the children's worksheet for this week's lesson:

The Good Shepherd:

A good shepherd:

- a) Psalm 23:1-4
— provides, leads, guides the sheep
- b) Ezekiel 34:17-22
— judges between sheep
- c) Matthew 18:10-14
— seeks and rescues the lost sheep
- d) John 10:11-15
— lays down his life for the sheep
- e) John 10:27-30
— speaks to his sheep, gives them life



“J” = Jesus is our Good Shepherd!

From Martin Luther's Small Catechism

The First Article — Concerning Creation

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

What does this mean?

I believe that God has created me and all that exists, that he has given me and still preserves my body and soul, my eyes and ears, my reason and all my senses, together with food and clothing, home and family, and all my property.

Every day he provides abundantly for all the needs of my life. He protects me from all danger and guards and keeps me from every evil.

He does this purely out of fatherly and divine goodness and mercy, though I do not deserve it. Therefore I ought to thank, praise, serve, and obey him. This is most certainly true!

Vocabulary Word for the Week:

Teachers may want to introduce the theme word for the week to help expand students' biblical vocabulary:

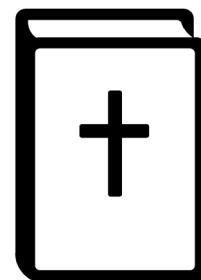
Comfort

to give strength, hope, love
to someone who is hurting or feeling bad

God comforts us by the assurance of love that he gives us in his Word. We can turn to the Bible whenever we feel lost and alone.

Reflection for the Week Ahead

The Book of Psalms is a collection of songs, prayers, and poetry written by God's people in ancient days. In these psalms, the writers express many different emotions, including happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. In many of these prayers, believers ask for God's help.



Psalm 23 is the one of the most well known and beloved psalms in the whole book of Psalms. We often hear this psalm at funerals because it is so comforting.

Read the psalm together this week and reflect on each line of words. Try to commit the whole psalm, which is just six verses, to heart. When we can recite Scripture it becomes a part of us and God can recall it to our minds and help us handle difficulties.

Talk together about what it means that God is our shepherd. How has God led you beside still waters?

How does God's love and mercy restore you to wholeness and give you peace?

What verses in this psalm touch your heart the most? Why?

The Practice of Prayer

Write a prayer thanking God for being our Shepherd who guides us and keeps us from danger. Ask God to be with you always and to help you see how “your cup overflows.”

Practice using the ADTRC Prayer Form: Address, Description, Thanks, Request, Conclusion.