

Sunday School Lesson: Psalm 23, part 4

Today's HOPE (main point): I can find comfort in God's promise to be with me all the days of my life.

This is our last lesson in our study of Psalm 23. We've taken the psalm that a lot of us already knew and broken it down in order to really take the time to look at what each verse means. We never want the familiar parts of scripture to just be words we recite. We want our hearts to feel them and we want to truly understand what God is trying to teach us about Himself.

Let's start today by saying Psalm 23 all together.

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.

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

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.

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

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.



We've talked about all the verses except the last two, so today we are going to start with verse 5. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

If someone prepares a table for a meal, they have to do some work before people come to the table, right? It reminds me of Thanksgiving. I usually host Thanksgiving at my house. I usually start cooking on the day before Thanksgiving, and I always set the table the night before. And I enjoy preparing the table. I want it to be beautiful, but I also want it to be comfortable and to have everything my guests will need to enjoy the feast.

How does this relate to sheep and a shepherd? Well, in the summers, sheep are often taken to a high, flat, plateau on which to graze. These plateaus are sometimes called "mesas" which is the Spanish word for tables. Early in the spring, a good shepherd will go ahead into the plateaus to look the area over and prepare the tableland for them. He takes along a supply of salt and minerals to distribute over the land and he checks for poisonous weeds or other dangerous plants, plucking them up and making the land safe for the sheep.

Our Good Shepherd, Jesus, has gone ahead of us in every situation, anticipating every danger we may encounter, and praying that our faith will be strong. We see this clearly in Luke 22: 31-32: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." When Jesus Himself, the God of the universe, prays that your faith will not fail, it will not fail!

And Jesus didn't just pray for Peter, He prayed for all believers who would come after Peter and His disciples.

John 17:20-23 says, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Isn't it comforting to know that Jesus prays for us?!

Another thing shepherds must do in preparing to take the sheep to the summer tablelands is to keep an eye out for predators. Often, crafty enemies like cougars or coyotes are up above, waiting on the rimrocks, hoping for a chance to swoop down and make a swift surprise attack on the sheep. And the sheep that don't stay near the flock, the ones who hang back or wander off, these are the ones who are easy target for the predators. The safest place to be is near the shepherd.

Who is our enemy? (*Satan*)

In fact, scripture even refers to Satan as a lion. 1 Peter 5:8 says, Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

So how can we stay close to our Shepherd? (*read our Bibles, pray, meditate on scripture*)

Let's go on to the next part of verse 5. "Thou anointest my head with oil." What could that possible mean in regards to sheep?



Well, it turns out that in the summertime, sheep are pestered by all sorts of flying parasites...deer flies, black flies, mosquitoes, gnats, and most troubling of all, the nose fly. These flies buzz around the sheep's head, trying to lay eggs on the sheep's nose. If they are successful, the eggs hatch into small wormy larvae and they work their way up into the sheep's head where they burrow into the flesh and cause intense inflammation and irritation. Yikes! Sounds miserable!

This drives the sheep crazy, as you can imagine. In an attempt to get some relief from this irritation, sheep will deliberately beat their heads against trees or rocks or posts. They will rub their heads in the dirt and thrash around. In extreme cases, a sheep may kill itself in a frenzied attempt to relieve the irritation from the flies.

Now, based on this verse, what do you think shepherds do to help protect sheep from these flies? (*They put oil on their heads!*)

Every shepherd has his own preferred concoction, but it's a mixture of things like linseed oil, sulfur and tar, which is smeared over the sheep's nose and head as a protection against the flies. Isn't that fascinating? As soon as the oil is applied, the sheep relaxes and starts to feed again.

What are some things that are annoying to you? So annoying that you feel like you want to bang your head against the wall like the sheep? (*take answers...*)

Things that drive us crazy also often cause us to act less than Christ-like. So what can we learn from the sheep and shepherds? Well, in the Bible, oil is often used as a symbol for the Holy Spirit, and anointing someone with oil in Old Testament was usually an indication that God was choosing to pour out His Spirit on that person.

When people or circumstances start to bug us, we need to ask God to help us have the mind and attitude of Christ. We need to ask for the Spirit's help! Jesus even encourages us to ask. Luke 11:11-13 says, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? 12 Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? 13 If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

We can say, "God, I can't cope with these problems that are driving me crazy! Please apply the oil of Your Spirit in my life so I can think and act more like You."

And guess what? If we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us up with grace and patience and forgiveness, we will spill out onto others--our cup will run over!

And now, the last verse..."Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

With Jesus as our Good Shepherd, this is a perfect way to sum up Psalm 23. However, I wonder how many of us actually feel this way about Christ? How many of us are convinced that no matter what happens in our life we are being followed by goodness and mercy?

It's easy to say that when things are going great for us. But what about when life gets hard? When people hurt us or abandon us? When our bodies break down?

There's something interesting about the Hebrew word for mercy that's used here. In Hebrew, the word means "covenant loyalty" or covenant faithfulness and love."



When we studied David and Jonathan and their friendship, we talked about covenant and what that means. Can anyone tell me what a covenant is? *(in the Bible, it's even more than a promise or contract...it's life-long, til death oath/promise)*

That's how I can know that even when life is hard, my Good Shepherd will never leave me. He promises us that He'll be with us, following us and leading us with goodness and mercy and love. And He's going to lead us all the way home to live with Him forever!

Isaiah 52:12 says, But you will not leave in haste or go in flight; for the Lord will go before you, the God of Israel will be your rear guard.

Psalms 139:5 tells us, You have encircled me behind and in front, And placed Your hand upon me.

Our theme for the month has been COMFORT, and I know looking at our Good Shepherd in Psalm 23 has really taught me a lot about comfort, because it's taught me a lot about God! The more we know our Good Shepherd and stay close to Him, the more we can find comfort in life, no matter what happens.

If you have questions about our lesson today, or if you aren't sure if you've made Jesus your Savior and Good Shepherd, be sure to talk to me after our class today.

Let's pray this together: God, I thank you for inspiring David to write the 23rd Psalm. Thank you for teaching us more about Yourself through this psalm. You are truly our kind and loving good shepherd. Help us to follow you more, trust you more, and love you more. Amen.



Faithful Friends

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John 17:20-23 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— 23 I in them and you in me —so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

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Psalms 139:5 You have encircled me behind and in front,
And placed Your hand upon me.

Prayer: God, I thank you for inspiring David to write the 23rd Psalm. Thank you for teaching us more about Yourself through this psalm. You are truly our kind and loving good shepherd. Help us to follow you more, trust you more, and love you more.

Amen.

Great is Thy Faithfulness



1. Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided:
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

2. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow:
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided:
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Where He Leads Me

I can hear my Savior calling,
I can hear my Savior calling,
I can hear my Savior calling,
"Take thy cross and follow, follow me."

Refrain:

Where he leads me I will follow,
where he leads me I will follow,
where he leads me I will follow;
I'll go with him, with him all the way.



2. I'll go with him through the judgment,
I'll go with him through the judgment,
I'll go with him through the judgment,
I'll go with him, with him all the way.
(Refrain)

3. He will give me grace and glory,
He will give me grace and glory,
He will give me grace and glory,
and go with me, with me all the way.
(Refrain)

Higher Ground

1. I'm pressing on the upward way,
New heights I'm gaining every day;
Still praying as I'm upward bound,
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

Chorus: Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on Heaven's table land,
A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

2. My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Though some may dwell where those abound,
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground.

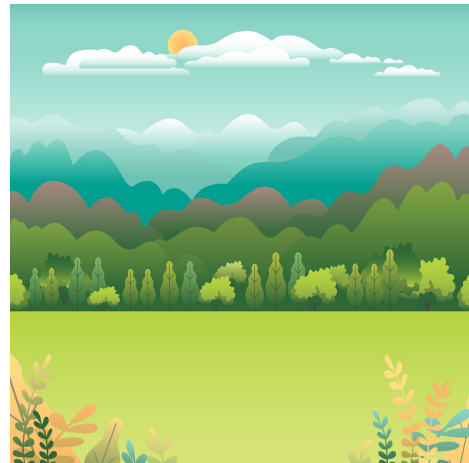
Chorus

3. I want to live above the world,
Though Satan's darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.

Chorus

4. I want to scale the utmost height
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I'll pray till Heav'n I've found,
"Lord, plant my feet on higher ground."

Chorus



Softly and Tenderly

1. Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See, on the portals he's waiting and watching,
Watching for you and for me.
Come home, come home,
You who are weary, come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!

2. O for the wonderful love he has promised,
Promised for you and for me;
Though we have sinned he has mercy and pardon,
Pardon for you and for me.
Come home, come home,
You who are weary, come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!

Just a Closer Walk with Thee

1. Just a closer walk with thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

2. I am weak but thou art strong;
Jesus, keep me from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long
As I walk, let me walk close to thee.

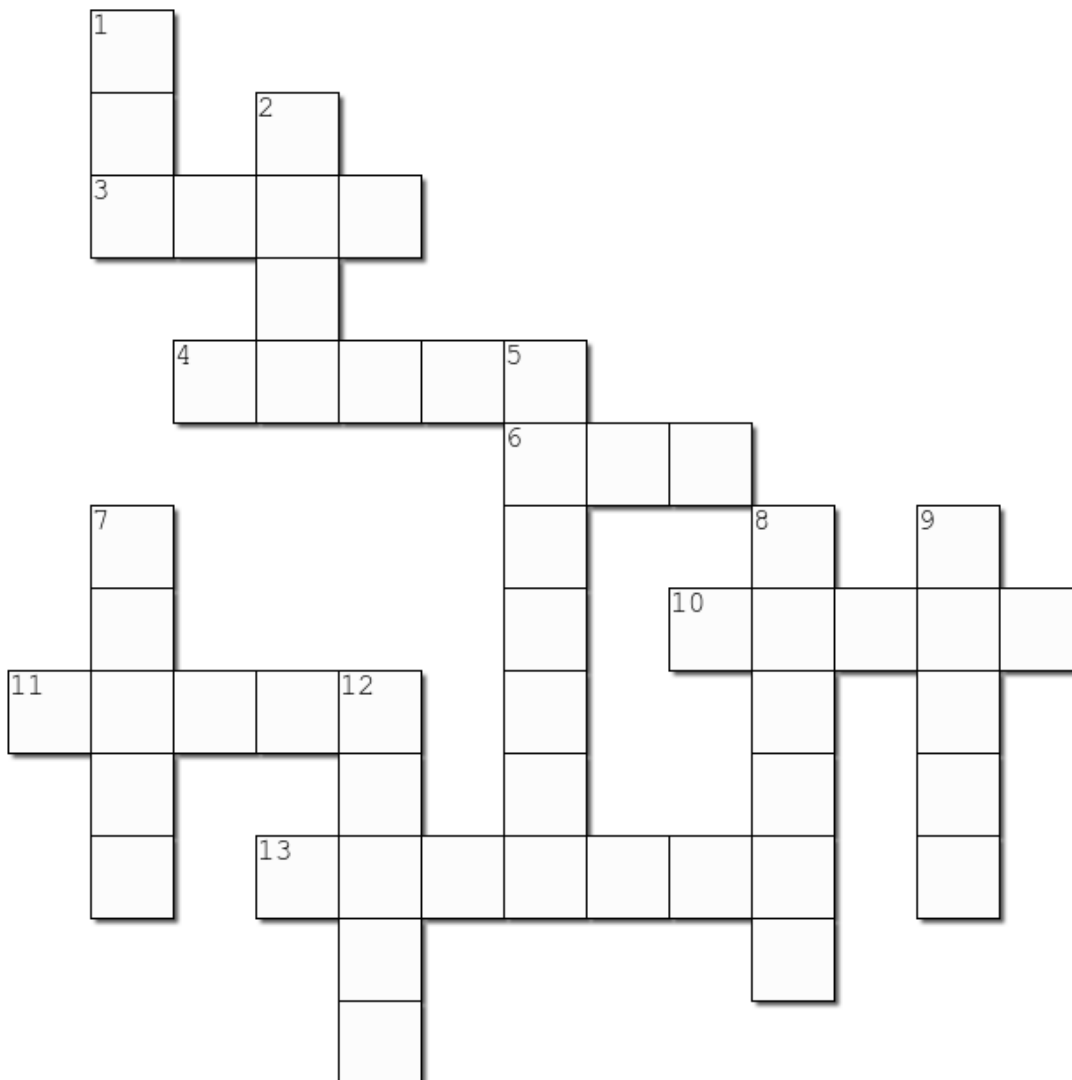


3. Through this world of toil and snares,
If I falter, Lord, who cares?
Who with me my burden shares?
None but thee, dear Lord, none but thee.

4. Just a closer walk with thee,
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,
Daily walking close to thee,
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

Psalm 23

Use words from Psalm 23 to solve the puzzle. Answers are in the boxes to help!



Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

staff rod sheep pasture Satan dwell valley path oil water lead

Jesus protect

Across

- 3. the opposite of follow
- 4. lambs, ewes, animals with fleece
- 6. stick shepherds use to fight off attackers
- 10. the enemy of Christians; the devil
- 11. our Good Shepherd
- 13. an area of grassy land for animals to graze

Down

- 1. God anoints our heads with this; shepherds use this to protect sheep from flies
- 2. a trail, a worn passage way in the grass
- 5. to keep safe from harm
- 7. to live in, to stay in
- 8. a low place between two mountains
- 9. we need this to live; it satisfies our thirst
- 12. hooked tool shepherds use to pull sheep back to safety

Words of Comfort
FOR THE WEEK AHEAD



Monday: For You created my innermost parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, because I am awesomely and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. Psalm 139:13-14

Tuesday: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Wednesday: Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. 2 Corinthians 13:11

Thursday: Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. 2 Corinthians 2:16-17

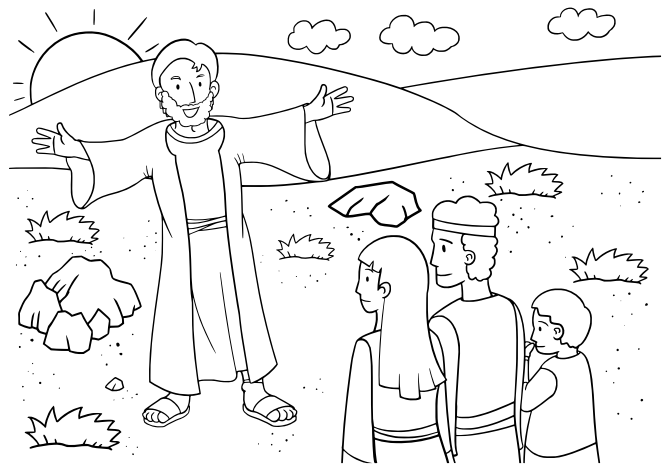
Friday: "And now, Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in You.
Psalm 39:7

Saturday: Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His faithfulness to a thousand generations for those who love Him and keep His commandments. Deuteronomy 7:9



Trust and Obey

1. When we walk with the Lord
In the light of his Word,
What a glory he sheds on our way!
While we do his good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey,
for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
but to trust and obey.



2. Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at his feet,
Or we'll walk by his side in the way;
What he says we will do,
Where he sends we will go;
Never fear, only trust and obey.
Trust and obey,
for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
but to trust and obey.

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

1. What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

2. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

