

Faithful Friends

Sunday school lesson: Comfort



Faithful Friends Kentucky

Today's HOPE (main point): God is our shepherd who comforts us.

Our theme for this month is COMFORT. And since we spent so much time last month talking about David, I think it's fitting to look to the writings of David for our lesson today.

Much of the book of Psalms was written by David. They are beautiful expressions of his heart and his honesty before God. They are full of emotion- fear, doubt, anxiety, sadness, joy, and hope - and can help us know how to pray when we are feeling similar emotions.

So in thinking about the psalms and the theme of comfort, any ideas on what Psalm I want us to look at today? (*Psalm 23*)

Many of you can probably recite the 23rd Psalm. And while it's wonderful to have scripture committed to memory, sometimes we just spit the words out without thinking about their meaning.

So let's start by saying the 23rd Psalm together. You can read along with us if you need to. I'm going to use the King James Version because that's the way I memorized it, and I suspect that many of you learned it that way too.



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.

Now remember, what was David's occupation before he became King of Israel? (*He was a shepherd.*)

So David wrote this from the perspective of someone who had been a shepherd, who understood the job, it's tools, and it's responsibilities. He knows exactly what a shepherd does. And He says God is our shepherd.

Let's go back and find all the things we see God doing here. The Psalm starts with comparing the Lord to our shepherd, and then goes on to tell several things the Shepherd does for us. (*Find them together...may need to guide residents.*)

Let's list them all: makes, leads, restores, comforts, prepares, anoints.

In the 23rd Psalm, we see God doing all the action. I think David is painting a picture for us here. Sheep are totally dependent on the shepherd for food, water, leadership, and guidance as they move from place to place, just as we are dependent upon God for all that we need.



And let's zoom in on how we see God comforting here. Now, actually, it says God's rod and staff comfort us. Since I'm not a shepherd, I had to look up the difference between a rod and a staff. Do any of you know the difference? *(take answers)*

The staff was a long, slender stick, often hooked at the tip, used primarily to direct the flock. Sheep are notorious wanderers, and once away from the shepherd's watchful eye, they get into all sorts of trouble. The shepherd used his staff to keep his sheep out of danger and close to himself. If a sheep became trapped in a precarious position, the shepherd would loop the curved end of the staff around the neck of the sheep and retrieve it back to safety.

The rod was a sturdy wooden stick used as a weapon to fight off wild animals who might have hoped to make an easy meal out of an otherwise defenseless flock of sheep. The shepherd also used the rod to help him keep count of the sheep within the flock (as alluded to in Leviticus 27:32..."Every tithe of the herd and flock—every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod—will be holy to the Lord.")

Young David recounted an incident to King Saul in which he probably used his shepherd's rod: "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it" (1 Samuel 17:34–35).



So knowing the difference between the rod and staff and what they were used for by the shepherd, why do you think David wrote that God's rod and staff comfort us? *(take answers; discuss)*

The rod is a symbol of God's protection and His strength. The staff symbolizes God's guidance and His lovingkindness.

Can you think of any other profession that uses a staff? Only shepherds use a staff. When we see it, we immediately think of a shepherd. In fact, it's uniquely designed to be used for the care and management of sheep—and only sheep. It will not do for cattle, horses or hogs. It is designed, shaped and adapted especially to the needs of sheep.

Now let's look back at verse 4. The King James version says, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death." But the New International Version says, "Even though I walk through the darkest valley." In the first part of the psalm, God is leading us beside still waters and causing us to lie down in green pastures. Yet here, it's almost like maybe we have wandered off into a dark valley.

Sometimes God will allow us to find ourselves in a dark valley so we can learn to rely on Him more.

What are some dark valleys that you have walked through? *(discuss)*

And where is God when we're in the dark valley? *(look back to verse 4...He's with us, He never leaves us)*

Isn't it comforting to know that we have a Shepherd who will never leave us, who will guide us back to the green pastures of rest and peace, who is powerful and strong to fight off and defeat our enemy, Satan?

In John 10: 14-15, Jesus tells us that He is the good shepherd.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Our Shepherd loves us so much, He gave His life for us. What a wonderful comfort our Shepherd is!

Let's pray. I will read the prayer and then if you agree, you can join me in reading it again.

Prayer: God, thank you for using the picture of the sheep and shepherds to help us understand you more, and thank you for being our Shepherd who leads, guides, defends, and comforts us. Help us to trust you more so we won't go astray off your path.





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How Great Thou Art

1. Oh Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made;
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder:
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

Chorus: Then sings my soul, my savior God to Thee:
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my savior God to Thee:
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

2. And when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in;
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin.

Chorus

3. When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart;
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God how great Thou art!

Chorus

The Old Rugged Cross

1. On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross
Where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross
And exchange it someday for a crown.

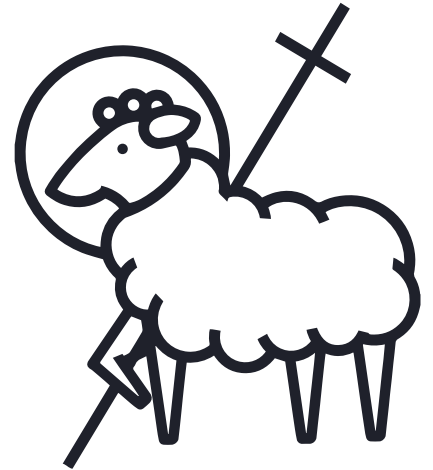


2. To the old rugged cross I will ever be true,
Its shame and reproach gladly bear;
Then he'll call me someday
To my home far away
Where his glories forever I'll share.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross
And exchange it someday for a crown

Just as I Am

1. Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidd'st me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.



2. Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

3. Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us

1. Savior, like a shepherd lead us,
Much we need thy tender care;
In thy pleasant pastures feed us,
For our use thy folds prepare.



Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.

2. Early let us seek thy favor,
Early let us do thy will;
Blessed Lord and only Savior,
With thy love our bosoms fill.

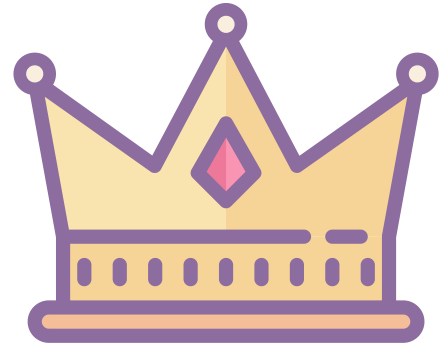
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast loved us, love us still.

John 10: 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

When the Saints Go Marching In

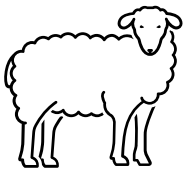
1. Oh, when the saints go marching in,
Oh, when the saints go marching in,
Oh Lord, I want to be in that number
When the saints go marching in.

2. Oh, when they crown him Lord of all,
Oh, when they crown him Lord of all,
Oh Lord, I want to be in that number
When they crown him Lord of all.



3. Oh, when they gather around the throne,
Oh, when they gather 'round the throne,
Oh Lord, I want to be in that number
When they gather 'round the throne.

4. Oh, when the saints go marching in,
Oh, when the saints go marching in,
Oh Lord, I want to be in that number
When the saints go marching in.



Psalm 23

Y S H E P H E R D F A D L N T B U T A F
 N F B T W E M F R G V X G B X B Z F P Z
 Q S R E T A W Q O A O E L L I T S W N S
 V Y S M S Y F O L S B H G P V A K U H H
 O V W L F V Z X Q X I K Y R H G G Y T E
 E E V F Z T R A Y V E K J C E Z B K H D
 X Y K C D Q R G H I M P U U C E C Z L G
 A T E K G G V O G G Y T N J W I N E C V
 I J F L V D X O F M G C G S G J E Q M M
 H C L S L N G D J M W G D G P J N T F A
 Y M K Z H A L N X N O M Y T Y D V Y V S
 V E U S O X V E C Q F C P M Q R C R E D
 P R E Z D P R S F E N F Q V D I M R H G
 D C S C L A L S J F W G A M H H U D H L
 X Y G V V M E X Y J Y N K T L T B K D D
 U F E N Z F B L B B U U W E S A R K G G
 T G D X A B G W E F C C X A P L F S F P
 M C W A N Y H K S V L R P F W P N O Q W
 J W R D N Q I Z E U O F W O F N G E M G
 E Q T U V O Y W Y D C V X N X A F A W G

SHEPHERD
 GREEN
 VALLEY
 COMFORT
 MERCY

LORD
 WATERS
 ROD
 LEADS

PASTURES
 STILL
 STAFF
 GOODNESS

Words of Comfort

FOR EACH DAY OF THE WEEK



Monday: Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. --Isaiah 41:10

Tuesday: The LORD is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? --Psalm 27:1

Wednesday: God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. --Psalm 46:1

Thursday: For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone. --Lamentations 3:31-33

Friday: The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. --Psalm 34:17

Saturday: I can do all this through him who gives me strength. --Philippians 4:13

