Preschool–Grade 6

The Lord Is My Shepherd (Psalm 23)

Sunday School Lesson for 3rd to 5th Grade, 45–60 minutes

Main point: God cares for me. The LORD is my shepherd: He leads me, gives me what I need and stays with me, even in hard times.
Bible passage: Psalm 23. Read it before class, with 1 Samuel 16:11, 1 Samuel 17:34–37 and John 10:11–14.
Memory verse: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." *Psalm 23:1 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each child (or one for every two children), paper and a pencil for each child, a yardstick or broom handle for a "staff," a whiteboard or large paper, a marker, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: write the memory verse on the board. Clear a space in the room for the opening game.

1. Opening game: The Shepherd's Voice (5–10 minutes)

One child is the sheep and closes their eyes (or wears a blindfold) on one side of the room. Pick one child to be the shepherd and two or three others to be "strangers." All of them stand on the other side and call the sheep at the same time: "Come here, sheep!" The sheep listens for the shepherd's voice and walks slowly toward it. Switch roles a few times. Ask: *How did you know which voice to follow?* Say: "Jesus said, 'the sheep follow him: for they know his voice' (John 10:4). Today we'll study the most famous shepherd song in the Bible."

2. Bible story: The Shepherd Song (15 minutes)

Kids open their Bibles to Psalm 23. Start with the writer. **Look up 1 Samuel 16:11.** David was the youngest son of Jesse, and he **kept** (took care of) the sheep. **Look up 1 Samuel 17:34–35.** When a lion and a bear took a lamb, David went after it and saved it from its mouth. **Look up 1 Samuel 17:37.** David knew it was the LORD who **delivered** (saved) him. This shepherd wrote a **psalm**, a song to God, about the LORD as his shepherd. Now go verse by verse. A child reads each verse out loud, then you explain the old words.

Look up Psalm 23:1. I shall not want means "I will not be without anything I need." God is enough.
Look up Psalm 23:2. Maketh me to lie down means He gives me rest. **Pastures** are grassy fields. **Still waters** are calm waters, safe for sheep to drink. **Leadeth** means leads.
Look up Psalm 23:3. Restoreth my soul means He makes me new and strong again inside, and brings me back when I wander. **Paths of righteousness** are the right ways to live. **For his name's sake** means so that everyone sees how good God is.

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Look up Psalm 23:4. Yea means yes. A **valley** is a low place between hills, and **the shadow of death** means a very dark, dangerous place, the hardest times of life. **I will fear no evil** means "I won't be afraid of anything bad." **Thou art with me** means "You are with me." A shepherd's **rod** was a short, strong stick to protect the sheep, and his **staff** was a long walking stick to guide them. David himself carried a staff (1 Samuel 17:40). They **comfort** me: they help me feel safe.
Look up Psalm 23:5. Thou preparest a table before me means God gets a meal ready for me. **In the presence of mine enemies** means right in front of people who are against me; they can't stop God's care. **Thou anointest my head with oil:** pouring oil on a guest's head was a way to welcome and honor him (Luke 7:46). **My cup runneth over** means my cup is so full it spills: God gives more than enough.
Look up Psalm 23:6. Surely means "for sure." **Goodness** is God's good gifts, and **mercy** is His kindness when we don't deserve it. They **follow me** every day. **Dwell** means live, so David knew he would live with God for ever.

The good shepherd. Look up John 10:11. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." The LORD who is our shepherd in Psalm 23 came to earth as a man, Jesus (1 Timothy 3:16), and He gave His life for His sheep. **Look up John 10:14.** He knows His sheep, and His sheep know Him.

3. Questions to ask (10 minutes)

Thinking questions (no single right answer; let kids talk)

1. David was a shepherd before he wrote this psalm (1 Samuel 16:11). How do you think that helped him write it?
2. Which picture in Psalm 23 do you like best: the green pastures, the still waters, the path, the valley, the table, the cup or the house? Why?
3. Psalm 23:4 doesn't say God takes away every dark valley. It says, "thou art with me." Why does that matter?
4. What are some "dark valleys" kids go through (moving, being sick, a hard time at home)? How could Psalm 23 help?
5. Jesus said the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep (John 10:11). How did Jesus do that for us?

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Recall questions

1. What did David protect his sheep from? *(A lion and a bear, 1 Samuel 17:34–35)*
2. Where does the shepherd lead the sheep in Psalm 23:2? *(Beside the still waters)*
3. What two things shall follow me all the days of my life? *(Goodness and mercy, Psalm 23:6)*

4. Memory verse: Erase a Word (5 minutes)

Explain the words: **the LORD** is God, **shepherd** is someone who takes care of sheep, and **I shall not want** means "I will have everything I need." Read the verse on the board together. Erase one word and read it again. Keep erasing one word at a time until the board is empty and the class can say it alone. Challenge: who can learn all six verses of Psalm 23 by next week?

5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "The LORD is our shepherd. Our greatest need is to be saved from sin. God loves you. The Bible says: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means all of us have done wrong, and none of us is as good as God. Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, which means God came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). He is the good shepherd who gave His life for the sheep (John 10:11). Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). How do we obey the gospel? 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means to turn away from sin; our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are **buried with Jesus in baptism**, all the way under the water, in Jesus' name. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we come up to live a new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives the words (Acts 2:4). The Bible calls this being born again (John 3:5)."
Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.
This week: read Psalm 23 every night before you go to sleep. Try to say it from memory by next week.

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6. Activity: Bible Look-Up Race (10–15 minutes)

Kids work in pairs with one Bible. Read a reference and a question. The first pair to find the verse and read the answer out loud wins the point.

1. 1 Samuel 16:11: What was the youngest son of Jesse doing? *(He was keeping the sheep)*
2. 1 Samuel 17:34: Which two animals came and took a lamb? *(A lion and a bear)*
3. 1 Samuel 17:40: What did David take in his hand? *(His staff)*
4. Psalm 23:4: What two things comfort me? *(Thy rod and thy staff)*
5. Psalm 23:5: What runneth over? *(My cup)*
6. Psalm 100:3: Whose sheep are we? *(We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture)*
7. John 10:11: What does the good shepherd do for the sheep? *(He giveth his life for the sheep)*
8. John 10:27: What do Jesus' sheep do? *(They hear His voice, and they follow Him)*

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for being our shepherd. Thank You for leading us, for giving us what we need and for being with us in every dark valley. Help us hear Your voice and follow You. Thank You for being the good shepherd who gave His life for us in Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

For the teacher: "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4) can bring up real fears, like a sick grandparent or a death in the family. If a child shares one, listen, and answer gently: the psalm promises "thou art with me," and it ends, "I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (23:6). Let the child's parents know so they can talk more at home.
Told gently on purpose: 1 Samuel 17:35 says how David fought the lion and the bear. This lesson only says he saved the lamb. Read the verse yourself before class.

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