Preschool–Grade 6

The Lord Is My Shepherd (Psalm 23)

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: God cares for me personally. The LORD is MY shepherd: He provides, leads, restores and stays with me in every season of life, and Jesus, the good shepherd, gave His life for His sheep.
Bible passage: Psalm 23 and John 10:11–14. Students read them out loud themselves.
Memory verse: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want." *Psalm 23:1 (KJV)* and "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." *John 10:11 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.
Before class: read Psalm 23, 1 Samuel 16:11–13, 1 Samuel 17:34–37 and John 10:1–18. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses.

1. Opening game: What Does a Sheep Need? (5–10 minutes)

Split into two teams. Each team gets 2 minutes to list everything a sheep needs to stay alive and safe. Read the lists out loud and give a point for each answer the other team didn't think of. Then circle the answers that show up in Psalm 23 as you read it today (food, water, rest, someone to lead, protection). Ask: *Can a sheep get all of this by itself?* Say: "David knew sheep. He was the one who kept his father's sheep (1 Samuel 16:11). Today we read his song about the LORD as his shepherd."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Tell the beginning: David was the youngest son of Jesse, and he kept the sheep (1 Samuel 16:11). He protected the flock from a lion and a bear, and he said the LORD delivered him (1 Samuel 17:34–37). Psalm 23 is a psalm of David.
Read out loud: Psalm 23:1–3. Old words in this passage:

- **I shall not want** (23:1): I will not lack anything I need; **maketh me to lie down** (23:2): gives me rest
- **pastures** (23:2): grassy fields; **still waters** (23:2): calm waters; **leadeth** (23:2): leads
- **restoreth my soul** (23:3): makes me new and strong again inside, brings me back
- **paths of righteousness** (23:3): right ways to live; **for his name's sake** (23:3): for the honor of His name

Read out loud: Psalm 23:4–6. Old words in this passage:

- **yea** (23:4): yes; **the valley of the shadow of death** (23:4): the darkest, most dangerous place
- **thou art with me** (23:4): You are with me; **rod** (23:4): a short, strong stick to protect; **staff** (23:4): a long stick to guide
- **preparest a table** (23:5): get a meal ready; **in the presence of mine enemies** (23:5): in front of those against me
- **anointest my head with oil** (23:5): pour oil on my head, the welcome and honor given to a guest (Luke 7:46)
- **runneth over** (23:5): spills over; **surely** (23:6): for sure; **mercy** (23:6): kindness we don't deserve; **dwell** (23:6): live

Read out loud: John 10:11–14. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd." Point out: Psalm 23 says "The LORD is my shepherd," and here Jesus says "I am the good shepherd." Jesus is the LORD, God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). The shepherd of Psalm 23 came as a man and gave His life for the sheep. Old words: **giveth** (10:11): gives; **an hireling** (10:12): a hired worker, not the owner; **fleeth** (10:12): runs away; **mine** (10:14): my own.

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3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. Psalm 23 starts with "my" shepherd, not "a" shepherd. What is the difference?
2. "I shall not want" (23:1). Is that the same as "I will get everything I want"? What is the difference between a need and a want?
3. In verses 1–3 David talks about God ("He"), but in verse 4 he starts talking to God ("thou art with me"). Why do you think he changed in the dark valley?
4. The psalm doesn't promise there will be no dark valleys, and it says the enemies are still there (23:4–5). What does it promise instead?
5. The hireling runs away when the wolf comes, but the good shepherd gives his life (John 10:11–12). How did Jesus show He is the good shepherd?
6. Which line of Psalm 23 do you need most right now? (Students can keep their answer private.)

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Old words: in Psalm 23:1, **I shall not want** means "I will not lack anything I need." In John 10:11, **giveth his life** means "gives up his life."
Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Psalm 23:1 this week. Challenge: learn all of Psalm 23 (six verses) by next month.

5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "The good shepherd didn't just lead His sheep. He gave His life for them. God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: '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) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-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 utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). His sheep hear His voice, and they follow Him (John 10:27)."
Pray with the students, 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.

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6. Activity: Psalm 23 in My Own Words (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these steps on the board:

1. Write Psalm 23 one verse at a time. Under each verse, write it again in your own words, the way you would say it today.
2. Next to verse 4, write about a "dark valley" you or someone you love has gone through. Then write, "thou art with me."
3. Next to verse 6, write one example of God's goodness and mercy following you this week.
   If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one verse in their own words.

This week: read Psalm 23 every morning. Pick one line each day and think about it all day long.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, You are my shepherd, and I shall not want. Lead me in the paths of righteousness, and stay with me in every dark valley. Thank You for being the good shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. Help me hear Your voice and follow You. In Jesus' name, amen."

For the teacher: "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4) may touch real grief in your class. Don't push anyone to share. If a student opens up, listen, pray with them, and let their parents know. The psalm doesn't promise a life without hard times. It promises "thou art with me" (23:4) and ends with "I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (23:6).
If a student asks when David wrote it: the Bible calls it a psalm of David, but it doesn't say when in his life he wrote it.

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