

In A Time of Crisis, Reach the Next Generation With Faith At Home

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This time of the coronavirus pandemic provides an opportunity to spend more time at home with our family. This is a great time for spiritual training in the home, such as family prayer time, Bible reading, Bible story time, family blessings, Bible memory and faith talks with our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. Modern technology can be used to reach family members, also.

One thing that can be done is to memorize Psalm 23 and to teach the meaning of the psalm as well as application. It is America's best loved psalm!

Psalm 23 is a hymn or song composed by King David, probably at the time when his son, Absalom, rebelled, II Samuel 13-19. King David knew a lot about being a shepherd, because he had been responsible for the care of his father's sheep when he was a young lad.

The Person of the Shepherd

Psalm 23:1a—The LORD is my Shepherd.

The Shepherd is the LORD. The LORD is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as the People of Israel. He is our LORD Jesus, the Messiah, Who is the 'Good Shepherd', John 10:11, 14; the 'Great Shepherd', Hebrews 13:20; and the 'Chief Shepherd', I Peter 5:4. Jesus is the 'Gentle Shepherd'.

Isaiah 40:11—

*He will feed His flock like a shepherd;
He will gather the lambs with His arm,
And carry them in His bosom,
And gently lead those who are with young.*

This shepherd wants a personal relationship with you as He takes you within His care. He wants you to say, "Jesus, You are my Shepherd!" Our LORD calls believers 'My Sheep' because He laid down His life for them, cf., John 10:11, 18. Since Jesus is LORD, we listen to Him and follow Him.

John 10:27-29—My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28 And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.

The Provision of the Shepherd

Psalm 23:1b-3—

- 1b I shall not want.*
- 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.*
- 3 He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.*

The Hebrew text actually says, "The LORD is shepherding me." Because the LORD is shepherding each sheep and lamb, they possess no needs or wants. Sheep will not lie down when they are hungry, nor will they drink from fast-flowing streams. What Jesus provides for the sheep is perfect — 'green pastures' and 'still waters' (physical blessings).

Psalm 100:3 —

*Know that the LORD, He is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.*

Jesus causes the spiritual blessings to come to the believers who are portrayed as sheep. These spiritual blessings are the restoration, the renewal and the revival of the believer's soul. The Hebrew verb 'to restore' is connected to the noun 'repentance'. Revival begins with repentance.

The sheep follow the Shepherd. This is their obedience. The Shepherd guides them on the straight paths of righteousness for the glory of His Name.

Isaiah 49:9c-11 —

- 9c *They shall feed along the roads,
And their pastures shall be on all desolate heights.*
- 10 *They shall neither hunger nor thirst,
Neither heat nor sun shall strike them;
For He who has mercy on them will lead them,
Even by the springs of water He will guide them.*
- 11 *I will make each of My mountains a road,
And My highways shall be elevated.*

The 'paths of righteousness' can still be seen in Judah and Samaria as well-worn ruts on the mountain sides. The Shepherd cares for the sheep, because He loves them and wants to fulfill His own good promise to be a faithful Shepherd.

The Protection of the Shepherd

Psalm 23:4 —

- Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

Observe the change in pronouns from 'He' to 'You'. Here David is not speaking about the Shepherd, but speaking to the Shepherd! At this point, the Shepherd is not leading the sheep; He is with the sheep. The 'valley of the shadow of death' represents any difficult experience of life that makes a believer afraid and that includes death. Sheep have poor eyesight and are easily frightened in new circumstances, especially where it's dark. The 'valley of the shadow of death' was a dry streambed in the Judean Wilderness which would occasionally experience flash flooding when heavy rains occurred in the high mountains surrounding Jerusalem. The Shepherd would hear the sound of the gushing waters and would quickly get the sheep to higher ground. Note that death is only a shadow. Our Shepherd has destroyed the fear and power of death.

Psalm 56:3, 13 —

- 3 *Whenever I am afraid,
I will trust in You. ...*
- 13 *For You have delivered my soul from death.
Have You not kept my feet from falling,
That I may walk before God
In the light of the living?*

The sheep are comforted because of the Shepherd's rod and staff. The rod was a heavy club that the Shepherd used against attacking wild animals— lions, bears, wolves and snakes. The staff was the Shepherd's crook, which He used to assist the individual sheep to keep on the straight pathway.

Psalm 28:9 —

*Save Your people,
And bless Your inheritance;
Shepherd them also,
And bear them up forever.*

During difficult days, the closer you stay to the Shepherd, the safer you are. His peace and comfort will fill your hearts.

Hebrews 13:20-21–20—*Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

The Preparation of the Shepherd

Psalm 23:5—

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.*

The Hebrew actually says, "You arranged in order before my faces a banquet table." The Hebrew word for 'faces' which is translated literally— always occurs in the plural. The believer has both a physical face and the spiritual face. Loved ones, who have died in the LORD, will recognize you by your spiritual face in the House of the LORD.

The Shepherd even wants to reveal to our enemies how blessed we are at the LORD's table. The Hebrew word for 'table' means 'something spread out'. The flat places in the Hill Country were called 'tables'. At times, the Shepherd stopped the flock at these 'tables' and allowed them to eat and rest as they headed to the fold, i.e., a stone or thorn-bush wall that surrounded them with one opening.

Psalm 78:19-20 —

19 *Yes, they [the Israelites] spoke against God:
They said, "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?*
20 *Behold, He struck the rock,
So that the waters gushed out,
And the streams overflowed.
Can He give bread also?
Can He provide meat for His people?"*

At the sheepfold, the Shepherd would examine the sheep as they entered the doorway to the enclosure. For the bruised, injured or sick, He applied soothing olive oil and for the thirsty, He had his large two-handled cup filled with water. The Shepherd would also apply the oil to the heads and horns of the sheep to help keep flies and other insects away. The sheep knew that they were safe and they could sleep without fear as the Shepherd slept in the doorway of the sheepfold. Jesus is the door to the sheepfold—

John 10:9 — *I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.*

For us as believers, the oil represents the Holy Spirit and His anointing in our lives.

1 John 2:20 — *But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things.*

The cup represents the love of the Holy Spirit being poured out from our hearts.

Romans 5:5b — *... because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*

The Jews have a tradition to always overfill/overflow a glass with water to demonstrate the blessings of the LORD.

The Pursuit of the Shepherd

Psalm 23:6a —

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;*

The Hebrew word for 'surely' means 'only'. The LORD's goodness is important for salvation— for it leads to repentance.

Romans 2:4 — *Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*

God's mercy is His Covenant love and loyalty. It is the LORD helping those who can't help themselves. God's mercy is also connected to salvation and the forgiveness of sins.

Psalms 51:1 —

*Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your lovingkindness;
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.*

1 Peter 1:3-5—*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

The pursuit of the Shepherd can be seen in the Parable of the Lost Sheep, Matthew 18:11-14; Luke 15:4-7. The Hebrew verb translated 'follow' means 'to pursue'.

As an elderly king fleeing from Absalom, David looked back over his long life and saw how the LORD's goodness and mercy pursued him in spite of his sins and failures. Then David looked ahead and knew that he would be in Heaven— the Father's House — forever.

The Promise of the Shepherd

Psalm 23:6b—

And I will dwell in the house of the LORD Forever.

The things that perplex and disturb us today will all be understood when we get to Heaven. We will look back over our life and only see the LORD's goodness and mercy. Because of this, we will worship the LORD.

Psalm 95:6-7 —

6 *Oh come, let us worship and bow down;*

Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

7 *For He is our God,*

And we are the people of His pasture,

And the sheep of His hand.

The Father's House is the New Jerusalem— the new sheepfold which Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is building for His sheep.

John 14:1-3-1—*"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

Revelation 21:3-4-3—*And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

As the sheep, we are blessed to be in the care of the Good Shepherd. He provides for us, protects us, prepares for us, pursues us, and keeps His promises. And in any situation and in any troubles, we can be confident that the Good Shepherd will constantly keep us in His care. During difficult days, the Shepherd affirms— I will never leave you nor forsake you, Hebrews 13:15c.