

# The Gospel Project® for Adults

## Daily Discipleship Guide ESV, Unit 11, Session 6

© 2019 LifeWay Christian Resources

Permission granted to reproduce and distribute within the license agreement with purchaser.

### The Good Shepherd

Session in a Sentence: The Lord is the Good Shepherd who lovingly cares for His people.

Main Passage: Psalm 23

In the throes of World War II, with the fate of humanity on the line, the great British Prime Minister Winston Churchill stood up and addressed the House of Commons. His task was a difficult one. He needed to provide his people with hope in the face of the seemingly unstoppable German war machine. But at the same time, he needed to be honest; the English people knew what was happening on the continent of Europe. And so, on January 22, 1941, Churchill stood before the gathered government officials and declared:

“Far be it from me to paint a rosy picture of the future. Indeed, I do not think we should be justified in using any but the most sombre tones and colours while our people, our Empire and indeed the whole English-speaking world are passing through a dark and deadly valley. But I should be failing in my duty if, on the other wise, I were not to convey the true impression, that a great nation is getting into its war stride.”<sup>1</sup>

When have you felt like you were walking through a “dark and deadly valley”? Where did you turn for hope?

### Group Time

#### Point 1: The Good Shepherd provides (Ps. 23:1-2).

**1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.**

**2 He makes me lie down in green pastures.**

**He leads me beside still waters.**

In these first two verses of Psalm 23, we discover **three truths** about the Lord’s provision to David, and to us:

**1. The Lord’s provision is powerful.** Of the many different names we have for God, David used the covenant name “the LORD” to open this psalm. This is the name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush: “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex. 3:14). God shared this name with Moses to set Himself apart from the false gods of the Egyptians. The Lord alone is the one true God, the Creator God; He alone is all-powerful.

**2. The Lord’s provision is personal.** David could have chosen a war metaphor to describe the Lord. “Warrior,” “king,” and “sword and shield” all would have been fitting and were used elsewhere of the Lord (see Ex. 15:3; Ps. 24; Deut. 33:29, respectively). Instead, David opted for a personal one—shepherd—and his use of the personal pronoun “my” heightens this. God wasn’t just *a* shepherd, He was *David’s* shepherd.

How should God’s provision being personal affect the way we view our circumstances?

**3. The Lord’s provision is purposeful.** Sheep are known for being helpless, so their shepherd is assigned to lead them and make sure their needs are taken care of. He directs them to places where they can rest in green pastures with plenty to eat and they can find refreshment from the quiet waters of a slow-moving stream. Thus, a purpose of the Lord’s provision is to give you all that you need so you will trust and rest in Him.

Why do we find it difficult to rest in the Lord's provision?

## Point 2: The Good Shepherd guides (Ps. 23:3-4).

**3 He restores my soul.**

**He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

**4 Even 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.**

Countless wrong paths exist in this world, and we have seen people, even ourselves, fall prey to many of them. It is good, then, to be reminded that Christ, the Good Shepherd, leads us along the *right* paths. Two such paths are **the vertical path** (walking humbly with our God) and **the horizontal path** (walking lovingly with each other).

How would you describe some wrong paths in this world?

For David, even in the dark valley, he had nothing to fear. How could he say that? Because the Lord was with him as a shepherd with his **rod** and **staff** in hand.

- The **rod** represented *God's power*. A rod was a club that shepherds carried to fend off wild animals that wanted to harm their sheep. The rod was a symbol of safety. Similarly, as believers in Christ, we are told that our Shepherd walks before us protecting us with His power (Ps. 118:6).
- The **staff** represented *God's grace*. The shepherd's staff was used to pull sheep out of hazardous situations, such as thickets or crevices. So too, for believers, we find ourselves in hazardous situations resulting from our sin, and it is God's grace that pulls us out.

The Lord's rod and staff—His power and grace—comfort the believer even in the darkest of valleys because they are not for our harm but for our good.

## Point 3: The Good Shepherd loves (Ps. 23:5-6).

**5 You prepare a table before me**

**in the presence of my enemies;**

**you anoint my head with oil;**

**my cup overflows.**

**6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me**

**all the days of my life,**

**and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

Israel's culture valued hospitality, and part of being a gracious host was preparing for and feeding a guest. The Lord's preparation in this passage, however, was unique because it came in the midst of trouble. The Lord prepared a table in the presence of the psalmist's enemies. Even while oppressed, David experienced *joy*, symbolized by his head anointed with oil, and *contentment*, seen in his cup overflowing. His enemies may have been waiting outside to harm him, but he was inside enjoying a good, bountiful meal prepared by the Good Shepherd, his loving host.

What images come to mind about a table characterized by joy and contentment? Why are these memories meaningful for you?

In addition to his joy and contentment, David was confident in the Lord's *goodness* and *faithful love*, or *mercy*, in the midst of his troubles. God is good and God is love, and David had experienced God's goodness and love in the past. But David also knew he needed God's love, mercy, and grace day by day. That was precisely what God would pursue him with throughout the

rest of his life.

**God Is Love:** To say that God is love is to say that God is the essence of love, or that \_\_\_\_\_ love both resides and resonates within God Himself—one God in three Persons. The greatest act of love by God toward humans isn't the giving of earthly goods but the giving of Himself in \_\_\_\_\_ so that we might become \_\_\_\_\_ to Him.

#### **Voices from Church History**

“Christ’s love towards us, and not our love towards Christ, is the true ground of expectation, and true foundation of hope ... To look inward to our love towards Christ is painfully unsatisfying: to look outward to Christ’s love towards us is peace.”<sup>2</sup>  
—J. C. Ryle (1816-1900)

## **My Mission**

Because the Good Shepherd has laid down His life for us, we follow Jesus’ guidance, knowing He is always with us, so that we may demonstrate His immeasurable goodness to those around us.

- **What step of faith will you take because the Good Shepherd provides for, guides, and loves His sheep?**
- **What are some ways your group can encourage one another to follow the Shepherd’s guidance in His Word?**
- **How will you lay down your life to share the gospel with someone else this week, following in the example of Jesus, the Good Shepherd?**

#### **Voices from Church History**

“There is a difference between him, who is led by the good Shepherd, and him, who is led captive by the devil at his will; between him, who feeds in the *green pastures*, and him, who feeds on vanity. Oh that men saw this difference as they ought.”<sup>3</sup>  
—William S. Plumer (1802-1880)

## **References**

1. Winston Churchill, quoted in *Winston Churchill: British Prime Minister & Statesman*, by Sue Vander Hook (Edina, MN: ABDO Publishing Company, 2009), 75.
2. John Charles Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018), 263.
3. William S. Plumer, *Studies in the Book of Psalms* (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1866), 319.