

A close-up photograph of a person's hands firmly gripping a weathered wooden staff. The person is wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, emphasizing the texture of the wood and the skin. The overall mood is one of determination and strength.

**NEVER
ALONE**

NEVER ALONE

The PEACE and PLENTY of our Good Shepherd

DEAR PARENTS:

We hope and pray that this devo is a helpful tool to connect your family in and through the Scriptures this week. Please be encouraged that, as it says in Isaiah 55:11, God's Word will not return empty!

As you move through these next few days, feel free to cater it to your family. No Bible study tool is perfect for everyone, but we hope this one can flex to meet your needs. If the only thing that happens this week is that you teach your kids how to look up Scripture references (check out the Sword Drill sections!), then that's worth celebrating!

Each day includes different sections for your family to connect with God's Word through discussion, Scripture reading, or activities. It will help you to read ahead in order to know what is coming so you can be ready to make any adjustments to the questions or activities based on your family's needs.

In this particular study, David celebrates knowing the characteristics, the power, and the unconditional love of God, His Shepherd. In many ways, God has given you your own flock in your children, so you have the opportunity to help them know you. Possibly the greatest thing that may come out of this study is your children watching you approach the Bible with humility and vulnerability and seeing the Word of God have a lasting impact on your life. Don't be afraid to be known by your children!

Also, consider talking with other families about their approach to this study. You may discover a chance to grow in your spiritual leadership of your family, and find the Lord using what He is teaching you in the lives of those families around you.

The reminder for us all from Psalm 23 is that we are lovingly known and sovereignly taken care of by our Shepherd as He guides and provides, leads and feeds, protects and directs. This brings us the "cup of contentment" as an overflow of His peace, plenty and presence. We are **never alone**.

Know that we are praying for you and your family, and are excited about the changes that will take place in your lives by the power of the Holy Spirit and meditation on His Word! Feel free to talk to your camp director if you have any needs or questions this week.

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.

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.

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.

Psalm 23

THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS
WHOSE GOODNESS FAILETH NEVER
I NOTHING LACK IF I AM HIS
AND HE IS MINE FOREVER

NEVER FAILING, RULER OF MY HEART
EVERLASTING, LOVER OF MY SOUL
ON THE MOUNTAIN HIGH OR IN THE VALLEY LOW
THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS

MONDAY

TODAY'S VERSE: "THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD; I SHALL NOT WANT."

- David grew up as a shepherd and knew exactly what it took to watch over sheep.
- In Psalm 23, he compares his relationship with God to a sheep and a shepherd, inviting us to imagine a sheep explaining how great it is to be in the Good Shepherd's care.
- With this in mind, read through all of Psalm 23 together (p. 3).

WHO IS YOUR SHEPHERD?

- ❓ **ASK: When you picture a shepherd with his sheep, what do you see him doing? [Most people just imagine him standing there, mindlessly staring out over his flock]**

DID YOU KNOW?

Without a shepherd, sheep will stray, eat poisonous plants, drink dirty water, get stuck on their back, and be devoured by wild animals. Basically, sheep are not smart and will die on their own. The truth is, being a shepherd takes constant work and care and alertness!

- ❓ **ASK: Why do you think God compares us to sheep?**
- ❓ **ASK: What qualities of God make Him worthy to follow as a shepherd?**

- In today's verse, David is confidently saying, "Look at who my Shepherd is! It's the Lord! Who better could care for me?!"
- We too can have confidence because our Shepherd is powerful, wise and good; He's on the job 24 hours a day, bearing us up (Ps 68:19).

SWORD DRILL! HAVE SOMEONE LOOK UP AND READ PSALM 28:8-9 (ALSO WRITTEN BY DAVID).

- Did you know that Jesus referred to Himself as the Good Shepherd? Listen to His words...

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

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep." (Jn 10:14-15)

WHAT SHOULD EWE DO?

🔍 **ASK: Why do you think we need a Shepherd who "lays down his life" for us?**

- Isaiah 53:6 gives us the answer: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
- The wonderful, amazing news is that even though we are stubborn, rebellious sheep that wander and go our own way (1 Pet 2:25), Jesus offers to take the punishment for our sin and give us rest and "abundant life" (Jn 10:10).
- In the Old Testament, people would offer a sacrifice for their sins. A shepherd, for example, would offer up a sheep for himself. But this was pointing to God's ultimate solution to our sin problem one day when **the Good Shepherd sacrificed Himself for the sheep (us)**.
- You might be tempted to ask what you have to do to earn this forgiveness, but that's the incredible thing... Jesus paid for all of your sins! **Your job is to follow the Shepherd by faith.**

WORD DRILL! HAVE SOMEONE READ JOHN 10:27-28 TO FURTHER LEARN WHAT JESUS DOES.

- Did you notice how David says, "**The LORD is my shepherd**"? In other words, he's not anonymous, lost in the flock... God knows him individually and intimately. Isn't it wonderful that the Creator of the universe would invite us to be **His** sheep – the object of His attention and affection? What an awesome gift and privilege to be known personally and lovingly!

FOR YOUNGER KIDS

What are some things that children are unable to do or accomplish on their own and **must** have their parents do for them? (reaching something that is too high, tying shoes, driving somewhere, etc.) How is this similar to what we learned today about our Good Shepherd?

PEACE AND PLENTY

- David knew the Lord was his protector and provider, which is why he confidently said, **“I shall not want,”** and then spent the rest of the psalm describing how he is completely satisfied, content, and at peace under his Master’s care and guidance.
- We all long to have what the Good Shepherd offers - feeling safe and loved, finding peace and contentment, knowing joy and satisfaction - but we often look for it in the wrong things.

❓ ASK: What are some ways that we try to find security and satisfaction on our own?

- All of the possessions, popularity, power and pleasures of the world will always leave us empty, searching for more, and separated from our only source of true peace and plenty... Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, who calls us by name, makes us His own, and delights in caring for us.
- Have you chosen to give up living for yourself to follow the Good Shepherd?

CLOSE YOUR TIME TOGETHER IN PRAYER, THANKING THE LORD FOR THE FREE GIFT OF SALVATION HE OFFERS, AND THE PROTECTION AND PROVISION ONLY HE CAN PROVIDE AS OUR GOOD SHEPHERD.

WHERE STREAMS OF LIVING WATER FLOW
MY RANSOMED SOUL HE LEADETH
AND WHERE THE VERDANT PASTURES GROW
WITH FOOD CELESTIAL FEEDETH

LOST AND FOOLISH OFT I STRAYED
BUT YET IN LOVE HE SOUGHT ME
AND ON HIS SHOULDER GENTLY LAID
AND HOME REJOICING BROUGHT ME

NEVER FAILING, RULER OF MY HEART
EVERLASTING, LOVER OF MY SOUL
ON THE MOUNTAIN HIGH OR IN THE VALLEY LOW
THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS

TUESDAY

TODAY'S VERSE: "HE MAKES ME LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES. HE LEADS ME BESIDE STILL WATERS. HE RESTORES MY SOUL. HE LEADS ME IN PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME'S SAKE."

- Read through today's verse together.

🔗 ASK: What are some things David says here that the Lord does for him?

- Notice that David is still talking about his Shepherd (almost like one sheep bragging to another sheep on the other side of the fence).
- Even though sheep can't voice their needs, the shepherd knows what is best for them. Jesus explained that God our Provider is aware of our needs even before we ask him (Mt 6:7-8).

DID YOU KNOW?

It's difficult to get sheep to lie down and rest unless they are free from fear, hunger, irritations (flies & parasites), and tension with other sheep. Only the shepherd can provide relief from these anxieties so they can be content and quiet. The presence and provision of their master and protector puts them at ease like nothing else.

WHAT DOES YOUR SHEPHERD DO?

- **Green pastures** for sheep don't just happen by chance. They are the result of clearing rough and rocky land, tearing out brush and roots and stumps, and careful soil preparation. Likewise, God has prepared us with everything we need to live godly lives (2 Pet 1:3-4) and the spiritual food He provides will truly satisfy us (Ps 63:5).
- Being led to **still waters** (literally "waters of rest") is key for two reasons. First, because a sheep may fall in while bending to drink from running water, a shepherd will often draw water from a well. Second, if not led to clean water, thirsty sheep may drink from dirty potholes. Similarly, our souls naturally thirst for the rest and contentment only God can fulfill (Mt 11:28-29), but we often try to quench this with dangerous and unfulfilling things.

SWORD DRILL! TWO PEOPLE LOOK UP AND READ JEREMIAH 2:13 AND JOHN 7:37-38 TO LEARN ABOUT THE LIVING WATERS GOD PROMISES TO PROVIDE.

❓ ASK: Having our souls restored when we feel downcast (Ps 42:5) actually has a parallel in the world of shepherding. Does anyone know what a sheep is called when it gets stuck on its back? (the answer is, a “cast” sheep or a “cast down” sheep)

- A “cast” sheep is a sorry sight – lying on its back, feet in the air, flailing frantically and unsuccessfully to stand up. Sometimes it bleats a little for help, but usually, it just lies there floundering and frightened. If a shepherd doesn’t get there soon, the sheep may even die. When he finds a cast sheep, a shepherd gently turns it over and patiently restores it to its feet to walk again. Maybe David was picturing this when he said, **“He restores my soul.”** In Psalm 56:13 he wrote, *“You have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life.”* Our compassionate Shepherd constantly looks to restore the downcast for their good and His glory (Ps 79:9)
- Finally, David mentions being **led along righteous paths**. As creatures of habit, sheep left to themselves will wear out trails until they become ruts and graze the same hills until they turn barren, and so a wise shepherd keeps his flock moving onto new feeding grounds. Just as sheep habitually and foolishly erode trails into gullies, we cling to the same habits that can ruin us. *“There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death”* (Pr 14:12). Walking in obedience on His paths lets others see our good deeds and glorifies God (Mt 5:16).

WHAT SHOULD EWE DO?

❓ ASK: Why should God’s children be the most content people in the world?

- David’s description of God in Psalm 145 sounds a lot like what we’ve learned today...

14 The LORD upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

15 The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.

16 You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.

17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works.

18 The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.

19 He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them.

- Our Good Shepherd invites us to trust Him and let ourselves be guided into truth by His Spirit to discover the delight of His presence. Our souls won't be satisfied with a substitute!
- The question is, will you allow yourself to be led in "paths of righteousness," or will you turn to your own way, even though it may take you into trouble? Will you be a stubborn, proud, self-sufficient sheep that pursues old paths and polluted ground, or will you put your life in the Master's hands to find His rest each day? Simple obedience means you do what He asks you to do, go where He invites you to go, and say what He tells you to say.

FOR YOUNGER KIDS

Parents, take a moment to tell your kids some ways that God has provided food and water for your family (both metaphorically and literally).

PEACE AND PLENTY

- 🔍 **ASK: In order to do all of this providing and guiding, how close does the shepherd have to be to his flock? (right there with them)**

SWORD DRILL! SOMEONE READ WHAT ISAIAH 40:11 REMINDS US ABOUT OUR GOOD SHEPHERD.

- In the Christian life, there is nothing like knowing that you are **NEVER ALONE**, no substitute for the awareness that Christ your Shepherd is near because His presence scatters all fear. You can either live in a sense of anxiety and dread, or in a sense of quiet rest. Which will it be?
- 🔍 **ASK: Everybody share – what keeps you from enjoying the green pastures and quiet waters that God leads you to each day? What steals your rest so you won't lie down?**
- In Psalm 4:8, David wrote, *"In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety."*

In the presence of the Good Shepherd, there is “fullness of joy” (Ps 16:11) because He has supplied green pastures and refreshing waters for those who care to move onto them and find peace and plenty. *“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you”* (Isa 26:3).

FOR YOUNGER KIDS

Some people need certain things in order to rest easy. Share with one another how you best prepare for sleep. How can you make sure that talking to the Good Shepherd is a part of your bedtime routine as individuals and as a family?

**HAVE SOMEONE CLOSE YOUR TIME TOGETHER IN PRAYER,
THANKING YOUR GOOD SHEPHERD FOR HIS PRESENCE AND
THE COMFORTING TRUTH THAT WE ARE NEVER ALONE.**

WEDNESDAY

HOW'RE EWE DOING?

INSTEAD OF A SIT-DOWN-DEVO, HERE'S A FUN WAY TO REVIEW AND DISCUSS WHAT YOU'VE BEEN LEARNING THIS WEEK!

As a family, go collect blindfolds and a shepherd's staff provided by your Pine Cove staff. Once you have these, designate one child as the "shepherd," while the other children put on blindfolds (parents can too, but it might be safest to always have one adult watching what's going on!).

For the first round, have the shepherd guide the "sheep" to a water source, using only their voice. Then switch and have another child lead the family to another area of camp using only their shepherd's staff to gently guide/herd to the left and right (no speaking allowed).

Give everyone a chance to be the shepherd, and then end your time discussing the different ways the Good Shepherd leads and guides us as His sheep (further discussion questions are given below)

- What characteristics of God make Him worthy to be our Shepherd?
- How can we be devoted to Him as dependent sheep?
- In what ways has God provided for us as a family, and as individuals?
- How does following the Good Shepherd take a willingness to listen and trust His Word?
- When have you felt alone? How can a greater understanding of God as our Good Shepherd help us know that we are **NEVER ALONE?**

IN DEATH'S DARK VEIL I FEAR NO ILL
WITH THEE, DEAR LORD, BESIDE ME
THY ROD AND STAFF MY COMFORT STILL
THY CROSS BEFORE TO GUIDE ME

NEVER FAILING, RULER OF MY HEART
EVERLASTING, LOVER OF MY SOUL
ON THE MOUNTAIN HIGH OR IN THE VALLEY LOW
THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS

THURSDAY

TODAY'S VERSE: "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. YOU PREPARE A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES; YOU ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP OVERFLOWS."

- Read through today's verse together.

🔗 **ASK: Did anyone notice that David has shifted who he is talking to?** (he's no longer just talking about his Shepherd, but talking to his shepherd)?

DID YOU KNOW?

A wise shepherd is constantly on the alert, scanning his flock for missing sheep, looking for signs of predators, and even watching the sky for vultures. Because sheep are not super smart animals, when one startled sheep runs in a fright, a dozen others will bolt with it in blind fear, not waiting to see what's wrong. The truth is, because sheep are helpless, timid, feeble creatures, incapable of defending themselves, their instinct is to run. But the presence of the shepherd - including his protecting rod and guiding staff - throws a different light on things.

WHAT DOES YOUR SHEPHERD DO?

- David wrote this Psalm within the picture of wild mountains, deep valleys, and high tablelands, knowing firsthand all the difficulties and dangers that sheep face - raging rivers, rock slides, poisonous plants, predators raiding the flock, and powerful storms.
- To get to the lush tablelands of pasture it is often necessary to lead sheep through valleys because it is the most well-watered route. But notice David didn't say, "I *stop* in the valley" or "I *die* there," but rather "I walk *through*."

SWORD DRILL! SOMEONE LOOK UP AND READ PSALM 107:14.

- David was confident going *through* the valley of deep darkness because he was **NEVER ALONE** - his Shepherd was always right there.

❓ **ASK: Give some examples of “valleys” we go through in life and how you usually react or cope with them.**

- These valleys are *unavoidable* (Jn 16:33), *unpredictable* (Jas 4:14), *impartial* (Mt 5:45), *temporal* (1 Pet 1:6), and yet *essential* to grow our faith (Jas 1:2-4). Often it’s not until we walk with Jesus through some deep troubles that we discover He is our refreshment in the midst of our struggles.
- In our valleys, we can calmly say, *“I will fear no evil”* because our Shepherd is with us, has already faced temptations like us, and knows suffering and sorrow. He understands us and has been through this territory before us to prepare a table in plain view of our enemies.

❓ **ASK: Why do you think David includes a shepherd’s rod and staff as a source of comfort?**

- **The rod** is a shepherd’s main weapon of defense and is a symbol of his strength in any serious situation. And more than anything, a **staff** identifies a shepherd (no other job carries a staff). It was used to draw sheep together, to lift a newborn lamb, to draw in individual sheep, and to guide. David was picturing how God’s ferocious protection and loving guidance worked together to bring him continuous comfort. *“He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber”* (Ps 121:3).

SWORD DRILL! HAVE SOMEONE LOOK UP AND READ WHAT DAVID WROTE IN PSALM 27:1-3.

FOR YOUNGER KIDS

The staff is used to guide sheep in a specific path that the shepherd knows is best. Parents, in what ways have you seen God’s guidance at work in your lives? What staff do you employ in your family that best guides your children?

WHAT SHOULD EWE DO?

- Even when they have plenty of pasture, some sheep still choose inferior parts of the land, while others will look for holes in the fence to feed on the other side. Likewise, despite having a wonderful Shepherd, we are often still dissatisfied, feeling that somehow the grass beyond the fence must be a little greener. In our stubborn rebellion, we are “prone to wander,” often preferring to feed on the barren ground of the world around us.

🔍 ASK: David has been emphasizing the Lord's provision (both physical and spiritual) and His protection in the midst of shadows and enemies, declaring that all of this brings him peace and comfort. Take turns naming examples of God's provision and protection in your life.

- God's provision is so amazing: all we need for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3), wisdom for the asking (Jas 1:5), daily forgiveness (1 Jn 1:9), and His very presence for all time (Mt 28:20)!
- Sadly we often don't see it this way, especially when troubles or disappointments come along. We tend to feel forgotten by our Shepherd, as though He had fallen down on the job.
- But David mentions yet another provision when he says, "*You anoint my head with oil.*" Because the irritations of flies and skin infections keep sheep restless and distracted, shepherds apply a mixture of oil and other soothing ingredients all over a sheep's head and nose. Likewise, we need the soothing application of the "Comforter," the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:16), to our daily situations. More than just being *with us*, He is *in us*, leading, correcting, empowering, and comforting us through all the irritations we face.

SWORD DRILL! SOMEONE READ WHAT ISAIAH 40:11 REMINDS US ABOUT OUR GOOD SHEPHERD.

- Overall, we are very similar to sheep. We are incapable of defending ourselves against Satan's schemes (Eph 6:11) and, despite all our Shepherd supplies, we often foolishly stray, even when we know it's destructive.
- Because sheep that wander are usually picked off by predators, the safest place to be is right next to the Shepherd.

SWORD DRILL! HAVE SOMEONE READ PSALM 118:6-8.

- We need the common sense to stay close to the Lord, spending time with Him and reading His Word each day.

PEACE AND PLENTY

🔍 ASK: What does it mean to be content? What is the secret to being content?

- Even in the midst of enemies, David knew God's presence, protection, peace, and provision, to which he could respond in confident amazement: "*My cup overflows*" (refreshingly full to overflowing). Knowing and trusting all these blessings of God – the fountain of living waters (Jer 2:13) – brings us to a place of great satisfaction in the Divine Shepherd's care.

- **With the peace of God to guard us (Phil 4:7) and the God of peace to guide us (Phil 4:9), we ought to be known as the most contented people on earth.** So do others see the “cup of contentment” in your life? Parents, could your children say that you have a rested, restored soul? Can you say with David, *“My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food”* (Ps 63:5)? A quiet, restful attitude should be the mark of those who call Christ their Master. Can you confidently brag on your Good Shepherd because of the peace and plenty He provides?

SWORD DRILL! WHY DOES HEBREWS 13:5 REMINDS US TO “BE CONTENT WITH WHAT YOU HAVE”?

- It has been said that peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of God. The contentment of our lives should show what a blessing it is to be His.

CLOSE YOUR TIME TOGETHER IN PRAYER, THANKING YOUR GOOD SHEPHERD FOR HIS CONSTANT PROTECTION, PEACE, AND PROVISION.

AND SO THROUGH ALL THE LENGTH OF DAYS
THY GOODNESS FAILETH NEVER
GOOD SHEPHERD, MAY I SING YOUR PRAISE
WITHIN YOUR HOUSE FOREVER

NEVER FAILING, RULER OF MY HEART
EVERLASTING, LOVER OF MY SOUL
ON THE MOUNTAIN HIGH OR IN THE VALLEY LOW
THE KING OF LOVE MY SHEPHERD IS

FRIDAY

TODAY'S VERSE: "SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, AND I SHALL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER."

- Read through today's verse together, noting that David is back to talking about his Shepherd.

🔍 ASK: What have you learned about God's care as your Shepherd this week?

- Picture a flock being brought safely back to the fields and shelter of the shepherd's home, all due to his alertness, skill, and guidance. His never-tiring diligence and awareness has guaranteed abundant grasslands, still waters, new paths into fresh fields, safe pasture on high tablelands, freedom from fear, antidotes for flies and disease, and a security that only comes from his ongoing presence. In short, the sheep have lacked nothing.

⚔️ SWORD DRILL! READ HOW DAVID DESCRIBED GOD'S PROVISION IN PSALM 34:8-10.

DID YOU KNOW?

"Mercy" is a significant word in the Old Testament that is also translated as "compassion" or "steadfast love." It is God's loyal, covenant, unfailing, unconditional love for us. As Lamentations 3:22-23 promises, *"The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*

WHAT DOES YOUR SHEPHERD DO?

- All through Psalm 23 David has been declaring God's attentiveness, protection, and loving management, and now he ends with a confident affirmation of his Master's expert care: *"Surely [or Only] goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."*
- Saying that only goodness and mercy will follow us isn't a promise to never face hard times, but a declaration that God is so committed to making us like Jesus that He allows and works all things for our good and His glory (Rm 8:28-29).

SWORD DRILL! SOMEONE READ ROMANS 8:31-32 TO SEE HOW MUCH GOD IS FOR US.

- But do you truly believe that, no matter what, you are being followed by God's steadfast love? When your world seems to be falling apart, can you honestly declare, "Surely – yes surely! – goodness and mercy are always following me"?
- Like David, we should be proud to tell others how good our Shepherd is, quick to recall all the ways He brings us through hard experiences, eager to share how glad we are to be His child. He is always with us, never asleep or indifferent, and has our best interests in mind, no matter what valleys we face.

WHAT SHOULD EWE DO?

🔗 ASK: How do you picture heaven? What will be so wonderful about it?

- The greatest joy we can experience for all eternity is living in the presence of our Savior.
- This is David's final, joyful exclamation – ***"I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever"***

SWORD DRILL! HOW DOES DAVID EXPRESS THE DESIRE OF HIS HEART IN PSALM 27:4?

- The Bible ends with this incredibly beautiful description of heaven: *"No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever"* (Rev 22:3-5).
- This is why the Bible says things like *"set your mind on things that are above"* (Col 3:2) or *"seek first the kingdom of God"* (Mt 6:33), or *"fix your eyes on Jesus"* (Heb 12:2) – it's what truly matters!
- But living each day mindful of your future home greatly affects you now. As you live aware of God's presence and by His Word, life becomes a satisfying and exciting adventure because you know He is alert to every circumstance you face. He watches over you with care and concern because you belong to Him. What an assurance! I SHALL dwell in the presence and care of the Lord forever!

PEACE AND PLENTY

❓ **ASK: Who knows what miracle is recorded in all four Gospels, besides the resurrection?** (Jesus' miraculous feeding of the five thousand)

- Listen to **Mark 6:34-44** and keep track of the ways Jesus acts like a shepherd ...

When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

❓ **ASK: What are some ways you saw the Good Shepherd in action in this story?** (He had compassion on them, they were like sheep without a shepherd, He had them sit down on the grass, He fed them until they were satisfied)

❓ **ASK: What was the disciples' first reaction to the crisis of food?** (they looked to themselves and their resources instead of to God and His gracious provision; they were leaning on their own understanding and what they could provide)

- Here's what we see, even in this one account of Jesus: A compassionate shepherd who has His people sit down peacefully on the grass as He powerfully and supernaturally meets all their needs so that they are literally full to overflowing (there were plenty of leftovers).
- The reminder for us all from Psalm 23 is that we are lovingly known and sovereignly taken care of by our Shepherd as He guides and provides, leads and feeds, protects and directs. This brings us the "cup of contentment" as an overflow of His peace, plenty and presence.

FOR YOUNGER KIDS

Did you know that younger sheep will often follow older sheep, even if they leave the care of their shepherd? In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul told believers to “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” He didn’t claim to be the Good Shepherd, but only that following him would mean they too would be walking in the care of the Good Shepherd. Parents, could you invite your children to follow you like that? (not that you are perfect, but genuinely seeking Jesus). If so, tell them to keep their eyes on you and expect to be led by the Good Shepherd.

**HAVE SOMEONE CLOSE YOUR TIME TOGETHER IN PRAYER,
THANKING GOD THAT YOU ARE IN THE CARE OF THE GOOD
SHEPHERD.**

APPENDIX: HOW TO LEAD YOUR CHILD TO CHRIST

SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER AHEAD OF TIME:

- ❓ Realize that God is more concerned about your child's eternal destiny and happiness than you are. "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise...He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).
- ❓ Pray specifically beforehand that God will give you insights and wisdom in dealing with each child on his or her maturity level.
- ❓ Don't use terms like "take Jesus into your heart," "dying and going to hell," and "accepting Christ as your personal Savior." Children are either too literal ("How does Jesus breathe in my heart?") or the words are too clichéd and trite for their understanding.
- ❓ Deal with each child alone, and don't be in a hurry. Make sure he or she understands. Discuss. Take your time.

A FEW CAUTIONS

- ❓ When drawing children to Himself, Jesus said for others to "allow" them to come to Him (see Mark 10:14). Only with adults did He use the term "compel" (see Luke 14:23). Do not compel children.
- ❓ Remember that unless the Holy Spirit is speaking to the child, there will be no genuine heart experience or regeneration. Parents, don't get caught up in the idea that Jesus will return the day before you were going to speak to your child about salvation and that it will be too late. Look at God's character - He is love! He is not dangling your child's soul over hell. Wait on God's timing.
- ❓ Pray with faith, believing. Be concerned, but don't push.

THE PLAN

- ❓ God loves you. Recite John 3:16 with your child's name in place of "the world."
- ❓ Show the child his or her need of a Savior.
 - » Deal with sin carefully. There is one thing that cannot enter heaven - sin.
 - » Be sure your child knows what sin is. Ask him to name some (things common to children - lying, sassing, disobeying, etc.). Sin is doing or thinking anything wrong according to God's Word. It is breaking God's Law.
 - » Ask the question "Have you sinned?" If the answer is no, do not continue. Urge him to come and talk to you again when he does know that he has sinned. Dismiss him. You may want to have prayer first, however, thanking God "for this young child who is willing to do what is right." Make it easy for him to talk to you again, but do not continue. Do not say, "Oh, yes, you have too sinned!" and then name some. With children, wait for God's conviction.
 - » If the answer is yes, continue. He may even give a personal illustration of some sin he has done recently or one that has bothered him.
 - » Tell him what God says about sin: We've all sinned ("There is no one righteous, not even one," Rom 3:10). And because of that sin, we can't get to God ("For the wages of sin is death..." Rom 6:23). So He had to come to us ("...but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord," Rom 6:23).
 - » Relate God's gift of salvation to Christmas gifts - we don't earn them or pay for them; we just accept them and are thankful for them.
- ❓ Bring the child to a definite decision.
 - » Christ must be received if salvation is to be possessed.
 - » Remember, do not force a decision.
 - » Ask the child to pray aloud in her own words. Give her some things she could say if she seems unsure. Now be prepared for a blessing! (It is best to avoid having the child repeat a memorized prayer after you. Let her think, and make it personal.)*
 - » After salvation has occurred, pray for her out loud. This is a good way to pronounce a blessing on her.
- ❓ Lead your child into assurance.

Show him that he will have to keep his relationship open with God through repentance and forgiveness just like with his family or friends), but that God will always love him (“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,” Heb 13:5).

*If you wish to guide your child through the prayer, here is some suggested language:

“Dear God, I know that I am a sinner [have child name specific sins he or she acknowledged earlier, such as lying, stealing, disobeying, etc.]. I know that Jesus died on the cross to pay for all my sins. I ask you to forgive me of my sins. I believe that Jesus died for me and rose from the dead, and I accept Him as my Savior. Thank You for loving me. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”



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