Psalm 23: A Shepherd's Psalm
Games Workshop
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Adapted for Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Olympia, WA,
by Beth Tobin 2017.

Summary of Lesson Activities:
Children will learn about Psalm 23 with special emphasis on following right paths
by playing several games. Includes two games each for Grades K-1 and two games
for Grades 2-5.

Resources for the Workshop
• A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23, by Phillip Keller, Zondervan Publishing, Grand
Rapids, 1970.
• Poster of Psalm 23 for each room.

Important Note for Games Workshop Leaders:
The purpose of the games workshop is two-fold: to develop Bible skills and to
reinforce that knowledge by having fun with games. The games are not frills and
fluff! Playing games helps to cement the knowledge and reinforce the skills you
introduce during the Bible lesson.

Children learn best when actively involved, so please do not skimp on the games
portion of the lesson! Follow the time guidelines to help you stay on track.

Remember – in the Rotation model, children study ONE lesson or story for multiple
weeks, so it is not necessary to cover every detail in each session.

Leader Preparation and Room Set Up:
• Read Background Information, Teaching Tips and Lesson.
• Gather necessary supplies.
• Play the Rotation Music CD as the children arrive, play games and during
  journaling - Optional
Supplies List:
- Text of Psalm 23,
- Paper sack
- Music CD - Optional
- Supplies needed for each game listed below.

Psalm 23 Verse Match

As children arrive, play the matching game to encourage the children to commit the psalm to memory.

Advanced preparation:
- Cut the attached lines of text from Psalm 23 into strips, one sentence per strip.
- Put the strips into the paper sack.

Directions:
1. As children arrive, have them draw strips from the sack.
2. Have them work together to put the psalm in order.
3. Refer to the Psalm 23 poster in the room.
4. As the weeks go by and the children get better at remembering the psalm, cut each strip in half and progressively smaller sections
5. Repeat this activity each week until they have the psalm committed to memory.

Variations:
1. Read the psalm back to them with some inaccuracies and let them correct you. (Don’t do this until the end of the rotation and only if the children seem to have memorized the psalm.
2. Have them tell the psalm in their own words.
3. Cover up key words on the Psalm 23 poster in the room and have the children fill in the blanks... “The Lord is my _______. “I shall not ____.” “He makes me lie down in ______ pastures.” Etc.
Presentation

Opening-Welcome and Introductions

Welcome the children and introduce yourself. Make sure you are wearing your name tag and that the children have picked up their name tags. Always begin each class with introductions.

Tell the children that today they will learn about one of the most well-known and loved psalms in the Bible: Psalm 23.

Opening Prayer

Dear God, Thank you for this day and for all the people who are here today. Be with us today as we study and play together. Help us to learn more about you. AMEN.

Dig-Main Content and Reflection:

Introduce the Story

Long, long ago, before Jesus was born, there was a shepherd named David. David became a famous king in Israel one day, but first he was just a simple shepherd. He took care of his father’s sheep. What do you know about sheep? About shepherds?

David loved to play his harp and make up poems and songs to sing to the sheep. Many of his poems are found in the Bible. They are called psalms. Psalms means song or poem.

David spent a lot of time with the sheep. It was hard work to care for sheep and David was a good shepherd. He took good care of them. David also loved God. David wrote a psalm to tell us that God is just like a good shepherd. This is called Psalm 23. Let’s find it in our Bibles now.

Bible Study: Grades K-1
Where would we find a psalm that was written many years before Jesus was born? (Old Testament)
Have the children turn to page **278 in The Picture Bible.** Read "The Chosen One" from page 278 to the top of page 280 (stop after the first frame). This reviews David being chosen by God to be the new king and briefly mentions his work as shepherd and creating psalms. Next pass out the handout of Psalm 23. Read as the children follow along.

**Discussion:**
- What is a psalm? (a song or poem written to express emotion to God)
- Who wrote Psalm 23? (David)
- Who did David say is his Shepherd in the Psalm? (God)
- What was David's job before he became King? (shepherd)
- Where in the Bible would we find Psalms? (Old Testament – about in the middle of the Bible)

**Bible Study: Grades 2-5**

**Bibles:**
NIV Adventure Bible

Where would we find a psalm that was written many years before Jesus was born? (Old Testament)

Have children locate **Psalms** in their Bibles. (A quick trick to find Psalms is to open the Bible to about the middle – they should find the Psalms or be very close). Psalms is an Old Testament book of Poetry.

Help the children find Psalm 23. Read (or ask for a volunteer to read) as the children follow along in their Bibles. (Note that the translation we are asking them to memorize is slightly different. This is because Psalm 23 is so well-known. The version we are memorizing is more familiar to most people.)

**Have children with their own Bibles use pencil to underline. “Psalm 23:1”**

**Read and discuss the following Bible notes:**

**Words to Treasure:** page 618
Life in Bible Times: What God is Like, page 618

Let’s Live It: God is My Shepherd, page 619

Memory Verse
Help the children locate the memory verse in their Bibles. Children (2-7 graders) with their own Bibles should underline the verse using pencil. Please do not mark in the classroom Bibles. Encourage children to take home a verse card (available at the sign in desk and tape in their yearly Memory Verse booklets. The Memory Verse booklet gives them a convenient place to store the year’s verses and to review them regularly. Note: For GDLC, Memory Verse cards are available at Sunday School Closing time.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want...." Psalm 23

Discussion
• What makes a shepherd good? (he takes care of his sheep, loves them, protects them, feeds them, etc.)
• How is God like a shepherd? (cares for us, loves us, guides us, is always with us)
• Our focus today is going to be on the line in the psalm, “He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.”
• What are “right paths” for the sheep? (paths that lead them to green pasture, fresh water)

Use the Background Information to talk with the children about sheep. Sheep are creatures of habit. Left to their own devices, sheep will use the same path over and over again until it has been turned into muddy ruts with deep holes. They will also eat from the same spot of grass until the grass is completely gone. They even dig up the roots! Left alone, sheep would ruin their pasture and probably fall and hurt themselves on the paths they take! Fortunately, a good shepherd leads the sheep on the right path – a path that takes them to different spots to graze.

Right paths for sheep are paths that lead them away from danger and to good, green pastures and quiet still waters.
• Do the sheep always follow? Do we?
• What are some of the “right paths” we should take?
• What are some paths that might not be so right?
• How do we know what the right path is? (listen to parents, trusted adults, God’s Word, prayer)

Let’s play a game that will help us find and take the right path.

Games

Choose one or more of the games below to play with the children. Note the recommended age groups for each game.

Say: Today we are going to talk about how God guides us like a shepherd. This line in the psalm says, “He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.” Shepherds have to lead their sheep or else the sheep get lost. Sheep like to do the same things over and over again. If the shepherd didn’t lead them, they would use the same paths until they wore them down into giant holes! Then the sheep might fall and get hurt or even die. A good shepherd guides his sheep to take different paths so that they don’t get hurt.

God guides us like a shepherd to take right paths, too. God wants us to do what is right so we won’t get hurt. How do we know what is the right thing to do? (listen to our parents and teachers, learn about what God wants from church and Sunday school)

What happens when we take the wrong path – do the wrong thing? (sometimes we get hurt, we hurt others, we get in trouble)

Let’s play some games to help us learn about following the right path.
Walking in Right Paths (Grades K-1)
(Adapted from Psalm 23 Sample lesson, Danielle’s Place, www.daniellesplace.com)

Supplies:
2X4 board about 8-10 feet long
Sign with “God” written on it

Advanced Preparations:
Set the 2X4 on the floor in an open area.
Tape the sign to the wall opposite the 2X4.

Directions:
Say: Let’s play a game about staying on the right path.
1 Line the children up behind the end of the board.
2 Explain that sometimes it is hard to know the right thing to do. Listening to God’s word helps us know what to do.
3 Have the children take turns walking across the board while keeping their eyes straight ahead on the sign marked “God.”
4 Next have the children cover their eyes (or use a blindfold) and walk the board again. As they are walking, call out suggestions – to them, “Go to the left,” “more to the right,” “go faster,” “go slower,” etc.

Reflect:
1 When was it easier for you to stay on the right path?
2 What was it like when your eyes weren’t on God?
3 What was it like when other people were telling you to do different things? Sometimes other people can confuse you. They may not always want you to do the right thing. Some things that people might say are: “It’s ok. Everyone else is doing it.” “It’s ok. Nobody will see you do this.” “It’s ok. You won’t get caught.” “It’s ok. It’s not a very big lie.”

You can decide the right thing to do by thinking about what God wants you to do. Your parents and teachers and other trusted adults can help you do the right thing, too. When you are unsure about what to do, first STOP and think. Think about what God says in the Bible. Think about what Jesus did and said. Think about what your parents have told you. Pray for God to help you make good decisions. Remember, God will always lead you in the right path!
Follow the Shepherd (Grades K-1)

Supplies:
Shepherd’s crook

Directions:
1. Hold the shepherd's crook and line the children up behind you.
2. Say: I am the shepherd and you are the sheep. I am going to lead you in the right path, so you must follow me and do exactly what I do.
3. Walk around the room doing a variety of different things and have the children repeat what you do.
4. Some suggestions: march, crouch down, skip, stop and kneel down, pretend to drink from the “still waters,” pretend to be scared as you go through the darkest valley, jump up and down three times, take tiny steps, take giant steps, pretend to eat good food, rub your tummies, pretend to lie down in green pastures, scratch your head, touch your knees, crawl, etc.
5. If desired, let the children take turns being the shepherd and having the others follow them.

Reflect:

What was it like to follow the shepherd?

Is it always easy to do the right thing?

What helps you do the right thing even when it’s hard?

I wonder how the shepherd feels when the sheep follow him and stay on the right path?

I wonder how God feels when we stay on the right path?
Listening to the Shepherd (Grades 2-6)

(Adapted from an idea from Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian Church, www.rotation.org)

Supplies:
- Blindfolds, one for each child
- Two long pieces of yarn to create a “right path”
- Music
- CD player

Directions:
1. Divide the class into two groups – the sheep and the distracters.
2. Have the adult class shepherd take the “sheep” outside the room and explain what they will do.
3. Sheep’s role is to find the right path when they get inside.
4. Blindfold the sheep.
5. While the sheep are in the hallway, place two pieces of yarn parallel to each other to create a “path” from the doorway to one side of the room.
6. Assign one of the children in the room to be the voice of God. Place this person at the end of the yarn path. The “voice of God” should call quietly to the sheep, saying things like, “Here I am,” “Come to me,” “Listen to me,” “Follow this path,” etc. The voice of God tries to get the sheep to follow the “right path.”
7. All the other children will be the “distracters.”
8. Have the distracters spread out to different parts of the room (play in an open area free from too many obstacles).
9. The distracters should all talk at once trying to get the sheep to come to them and get off the “right path.” They should say things like, “Come this way,” “It’s much more fun over here,” “Come on! Hurry up!” “Buy me!” “On Sale, On Sale!”
10. Play the music on the CD player to add to the distractions.
11. When you give a signal, the distracters will stop talking one by one until finally only the voice of God is heard.
12. How many sheep found the “right path” to which God was directing them?
13. Remove the “sheep’s” blindfolds and gather in a circle on the floor.
Reflect:
• How did you know what was the right path?
• How easy was it to hear God’s voice?
• What distracted you? (other voices, music)
• What kinds of things distract us every day from hearing God’s voice?

Say: You can always know the right thing to do by thinking about what God wants you to do. Your parents and teachers and other trusted adults can help you do the right thing, too. Sometimes it’s not always easy to know what to do. Thinking about what God says in the Bible, thinking about what Jesus taught and remembering what trusted adults (like parents and teachers) tell us will help you make good decisions. When you face a difficult choice, you can pray and ask God to help you and guide you. God will always lead us in the right path!

Switch groups allowing the “distracters” to be the sheep and the sheep to be the distracters. Change the yarn path so that it is different this time.

Repeat the activity.

Reflect:
• What was it like for you to try to stay on the right path?
• Was it easier to hear God’s voice, now that you knew what to listen for?
• What are some wrong paths people sometimes take? (lying, cheating, stealing, gossiping, being unkind to others)
• What kinds of things distract us from making good decisions or tempt us to get off the right path? (all our friends are doing it, watching TV ads that make us want more things, not wanting to do work or chores, not wanting to be different from others)
• How can you listen more closely to God’s voice and pay less attention to the voices that distract you from the right path?
• Why does God want us to stay on the right path?
• If we get off the right path, can we get back on?

You can decide the right thing to do by thinking about what God wants you to do. Your parents and teachers and other trusted adults can help you do the right thing, too. When you are unsure about what to do, first STOP and think. Think about what God says in the Bible. Think about what Jesus did and said. Think about what your parents have told you. Pray for God to help you make good decisions. Remember, God will always lead us in the right path!
Choices (Grades 2-6)

Supplies:
- Situation slips – see attached (you can make up your own or use a book about making good decisions. Some examples are: *Games Children Should Play* by Mary K. Cihak and Barbara Jackson Heron, Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980 or *Sticky Situations* by Betsy Schmitt, Tyndale Publishing, 1997)

Advanced Preparations:
1. Cut the situation slips apart.
2. Place strips into a sack or basket.

Directions:
1. Have children draw out a situation slip and read it to the group.
2. Discuss the possible actions that could be taken.
3. What does the group think the “right” path would be?
4. How do you decide what to do?
5. What might happen if you made that choice?
6. Repeat with other situation slips.

Reflect:

It’s not always easy to make the right choice. But the more right choices we make, the better we become at making them. Many times, if we make a right choice, we can set an example for others and they will decide to do the right thing, too. But whether or not others follow along with us, it is important for us to choose to do the right thing. God promises in Psalm 23 to be our shepherd and guide, and to help us choose the right path.
Reflection and Journal Time

The last ten minutes should be reserved for Journal Reflection Time. This is an opportunity for processing and reflection about what children have learned.

Journal Questions:

Grades K-1: Draw a picture of the sheep following a right path.
Grades 2-5: Draw a picture about a choice you have made to do the right thing.

Closing:

Gather the children together. Review with them one word or concept that they learned in today’s lesson. (choices, right path, God’s love, God’s guidance, Shepherd). Encourage the children to come back next week for another workshop, and to invite a friend, especially friends who do not belong to a church. Remind them to bring their Bibles. Ask for prayer requests and pray together.

Clean-up
Have the children help put away all supplies.

Situation Slips

Copy and cut apart for Choices Game.

You have invited a friend to your house to play and spend the night. Another friend calls and wants you to go to the movies. What will you do?

You are visiting at a friend’s house. You are having a great time, but it’s time to go home. You would really like to stay. Your friend wants you to stay. What do you do?

You and your best friend are playing together. Another person comes along and wants to join you. What do you say?
You are playing in a championship soccer game. Your teammate is chasing the ball to keep it from going out of bounds. The ref thinks the ball is still in bounds, but you know it was really out. What do you do?

You are spending the night with two friends. One of the friends wants you to leave and go swimming, just the two of you, leaving the other friend out. What will you say? What will you do?

You are spending the night with several friends. They decide to rent an R-rated movie. You are not allowed to watch them. What do you say? What do you do?

Your best friend didn’t have time to finish his homework last night. He wants to copy yours. He’s never done this before. What do you say? What do you do?

You were so tired last night that you didn’t finish your homework. You ended up watching TV and playing computer games instead. The next day your teacher asked you why you didn’t have your homework. What do you say?

Several of your friends are sitting together at lunch. You sit down and realize they are saying unkind things about another girl in your class who is not there. What do you say? What do you do?

You are supposed to practice piano before watching TV. Usually your parents remind you, but this evening they didn’t. They have gone out to dinner with friends. Your favorite TV show is about to come on. What do you do?