

Psalm 23

Lesson 4

He Leads Me Beside Still Waters

Leader Guide

A Bible Study to Accompany
“A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23”
by Phillip Keller

Leader Guide Bible Studies

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Lesson 4, Psalm 23, A Psalm of David He Leads Me Beside Still Waters

For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. *Revelation 7:17*

Prayers

Luther's Morning Prayer

Thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Psalm 23, A Psalm of David. The LORD Is My Shepherd

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.

Discussion

All of us have a spiritual thirst. The world's complex history of religions shows that all peoples have a need to worship, know how their lives relate to their Creator, and seek their Creator's blessing. Jesus proclaimed he was the way to the Father (John 14:6) and would give streams of living water to all who believed (John 7:38); by that, he meant the Holy Spirit. In this lesson, we will reflect on our need for the Holy Spirit to refresh us daily through prayer and scripture reading.

1. As a shepherd, Pastor Keller would delight in seeing his sheep graze in the early morning sun while the grass was still wet with dew and then retire to the shade and ruminate as the afternoon sun grew hot. Even in semi-arid environments, sheep can obtain enough life-giving water from the morning dew to sustain them. To Pastor Keller, this seemed a perfect illustration of our need for morning prayer and reflection. Jesus prayed in all circumstances, but he also had a regular pattern of prayer. Read the following verses and summarize Jesus' pattern of prayer.

1) ^{Mk 1:35} Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

^{Mk 1:36} Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

^{Mk 1:38} Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

^{Mk 1:39} So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

2) ^{Lk 21:37} Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, ³⁸ and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple.

3) ^{Mk 6:30} The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ^{Mk 6:31} Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

^{Mk 6:32} So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

2. Just as we rely on Christ working in us through the Holy Spirit, Jesus relied on his Father to show him what to do. Read John 5:19-20 and discuss how the Father showed Jesus what to do in his ministry.

^{Jn 5:19} Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ^{Jn 5:20} For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these.

3. Jesus beckoned the people to come to him and receive streams of living water on the last day of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles, a day rich in Messianic symbolism. The Apostle John writes in chapter 7:37-39, ³⁷ On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in

a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

^{Jn 7:39} By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

God gave the Jews the Feast of Tabernacles to celebrate their deliverance from bondage in Egypt and their wandering in the desert wilderness when God dwelled among them in a tent (a tabernacle). It was to be a joyful festival during which they went to Jerusalem and lived in tents for seven days. Rabbi Isaac Heckman, a Messianic Jew, shares the oral and written traditions of the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles in Jesus' day. The last day of the Feast was "Hoshana Rabba," meaning, "Please save us, Great Salvation!" One of the prayers recited during the Feast was to remove the partition separating them from God. The partition separating them from God was represented by the walls of their tents, the barriers of their heart, and the curtain in the Temple (the Temple Veil) separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place (God's dwelling place). Before the prayer, a group of priests carried a jar of wine (the Blood of the Covenant) and filled a jar of water (the Water of Salvation) from the Gihon Spring at the Pool of Siloam (Pool of Peace). Priests with the jars of water and wine were followed by priests carrying 25-foot-long willow branches cut from the nearby spring. The priests waved the willows through the air to make a "whooshing" sound, symbolizing God's Spirit returning to the Temple. As the priests proceeded to the temple, large oil-burning lamps were raised in the courtyards to symbolize God's Shakina glory in Israel as the light of the world. As the priests reached the Altar of Sacrifice, the water and wine were poured out over the altar, mixing with the blood of the sacrifices. The willow branches were placed over the altar as a covering, similar to the canopy used in Jewish weddings (a chuppah), signifying the marriage of the people to God.

How did Jesus fulfill the imagery of the Feast of Tabernacles?

- a. The Tabernacles: **Jesus was God in the flesh who dwelt among them. Jesus' body of flesh was his symbolic tabernacle.**
- b. Hoshana Rabba, the Great Salvation: **Jesus is the salvation of the world**
- c. The prayer to remove the partition: **The Temple Veil was torn in two at Jesus' death, signifying that there was no longer a barrier of sin separating man from God.**
- d. The jar of the Water of Salvation: **We all must be washed in the water of salvation and reborn by the Holy Spirit through baptism and faith in Jesus.**
- e. The jar of wine, the Blood of the Covenant: **Wine signifies blood. Jesus established a New Covenant between God and man by shedding his blood sacrifice.**

- f. The Altar of Sacrifice: **Jesus' altar was the cross, where he was God's sacrifice for the sins of all mankind.**
 - g. The water and wine poured over the altar: **At Jesus's death, water and blood flowed from the spear thrust into his side on the cross.**
 - h. The willow branches waved by the priests: **The rushing wind through the waving willows signifies the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is received through baptism and faith in Jesus.**
 - i. The willow branches over the altar: **The willow branches over the altar signify the marriage between God and his people. Jesus is the bridegroom; all who believe in him are his bride.**
 - j. Oil burning lamps in the courtyards: **Jesus proclaimed he was the light of the world; whoever followed him would never walk in darkness (John 8:12).**
4. What promise was Jesus making to give streams of living water to all who are thirsty and believe in him?

The streams of living water are the Holy Spirit – God's Spirit and the Spirit of Christ. The spirit of God abides in anyone who has accepted Christ as their Savior. Believers receive the Holy Spirit at their baptism, but He is at work in their hearts to bring them to faith long before their baptism. Luther instructed his parishioners to remember their baptism in faith daily. Our spiritual thirst can only be quenched by receiving the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus.

5. Many water sources in arid climates are pools and deep wells dug by the shepherd. Not only was digging the deep well backbreaking work but so was drawing water for the entire flock.

God's work was to bring us to Christ so that we might find peace in our souls and enter his rest. We might have been drawn to Christ through trials, blessings, or by the encouragement, prayers, and instruction of others. How have you seen God's guidance in bringing you to his rest?

6. In "A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23," Pastor Keller told the story of the shepherd moving his flock to a magnificent mountain stream fed by melting snow and surrounded by mountains with cool summer pastures. But along the way, some of the sheep succumbed to their thirst and stopped to drink from the muddy pools along the path, polluted by parasites and disease spread by other passing flocks and herds. We also have restless and thirsty souls searching for any water source to quench our thirst. The world offers any number of sources

to assuage our thirsty souls. What are some things people turn to as a substitute for spiritual life with Christ?

- a. Negative substitutes for seeking Christ (muddy pools)?

Negative detrimental substitutes for seeking Christ include ambition, wealth, power and influence, or even more negative extra-marital sex, drugs, alcohol, and pornography.

- b. Positive substitutes for seeking Christ?

We might seek substitutes for Christ through positive or negative outlets, but all fall short of finding spiritual peace, self-image, identity, and purpose. Some positive endeavors art, music, literature, charity, service, travel, sports, hobbies, education and knowledge, or health and fitness. Other positive but incomplete endeavors to define ourselves apart from Christ might be our home, possessions, power or recognition in our jobs, our accomplishments, or our marriage and children.

7. Not all the Psalms with images of quiet streams of water are idyllic. Some are laments, like Psalm 42, written during deep despair. The Spirit comforts through many means, the scriptures, prayer, visions and dreams, music, the ministry of others, or with quiet unspoken reassurance. Read Psalm 42:1-6 and discuss how the Holy Spirit has comforted you during despair and loss.

Ps 42:1 As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

Ps 42:2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Ps 42:3 My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

Ps 42:4 These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

Ps 42:5 Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and ^{Ps 42:6} my God.

8. Quiz time! "Who reads the Bible Regularly' in the United States?" Regular Bible reading is at least four times a week or more. The following questions on the habits of prayer and scripture reading are responses from 40,000 Christians in a survey by the Pew Research Group.

1. What Percentage of Christians who read the Bible regularly, at least four times a week?
 - a. Less than 10%
 - b. 10-20% **(15-20% of Christians read the Bible at least 4 times a week)**
 - c. 20-30%
 - d. 30-50% **(35% of Christians read something in the Bible once a week)**

- e. More than 50%
2. Who reads the Bible more frequently?
 - a. Evangelical Christians
 - b. Mormons **77%**
 - c. Jehovah Witnesses **88%**
 3. What age group reads the Bible more frequently?
 - a. 18-29, 17%
 - b. **30-49 33%**
 - c. 50-64 29%
 - d. 65+ 21%
 4. Who reads the Bible more frequently?
 - a. Men 42%
 - b. Women **58%**
 5. Who reads the Bible more frequently?
 - a. **High School or less 43%**
 - b. Some College 33%
 - c. College Grad 15%
 - d. Post Grad 9%
 6. Who reads the Bible more frequently?
 - a. Parents 31%
 - b. **Non-parents 69%**
 7. Which activity is most effective in curbing destructive behaviors (Drunkenness, extra-marital sex, porn, gambling, destructive thoughts)
 - a. Regular church attendance
 - b. Prayer
 - c. Bible reading several times a week
 - d. **Bible reading four or more times a week**
 8. What age group is regular Bible reading most effective for curbing destructive behaviors?
 - a. **Teens 80%**
 - b. Adults 50%
 9. If you find time for regular Bible reading, share with the group how you find the time and how it impacts your day.

Closing, The Lord's Prayer, Matthew 6:9-13.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.