

Psalm 23

Lesson 9

You Prepare a Table Before Me

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 9, Psalm 23, A Psalm of David
“You Prepare a Table Before Me...”

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.

Read

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.

Introduction

In “A Shepherd Looks At Psalm 23,” Pastor Keller compares God’s provision to a shepherd preparing high mountain pastures for his sheep. These high table-land pastures, coincidentally called mesas (tables), are remote and difficult to access. To reach their heights, a shepherd leads his flock through the valley of the shadow. A shepherd might begin surveying them in the winter while there is still snow. Before the sheep arrive, he spreads salt and minerals around the mesa, finds places for bedding, removes poisonous weeds, looks for signs of predators, dams springs to create pools for the sheep to drink, determines how much feed the pasture will provide, and estimates how long the sheep can graze in the pastures.

1. Pastor Keller told of the night a cougar attacked his flock and killed many sheep. He never saw the cougar but knew it was present by the death and mayhem it caused in the flock. Pastor Keller likened the cougar's attack to Satan, who is not seen but known by his attacks.

When are you most vulnerable to being attacked spiritually?

I am most vulnerable to attack when I fail to begin my day studying and meditating on the Scripture and remind myself throughout the day that the Holy Spirit lives in me. The Holy Spirit gives me strength through the day through this simple act.

Pride, when I am most certain I am right and unwilling to listen to others

Physically tired and sore. I am in a bad mood and irritable.

2. The sheep killed by the cougar had wandered from the flock, oblivious to danger and led away by their stomach one step at a time. The predator easily picked them off.

How do you best safeguard yourself against spiritual attacks?

Read Ephesians 6:13-18, the Armor of God

Eph 6:13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Eph 6:14 Stand firm then, with the **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of **righteousness** in place,

Eph 6:15 and with your **feet fitted with the readiness** that comes from the gospel of peace.

Eph 6:16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of **faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Eph 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the **word of God**.

Eph 6:18 And **pray** in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

- a. Christ makes every provision for spiritual attacks by being our spiritual armor. The Holy Spirit is our only weapon. In what way is Christ in every aspect of our armor?

Armor:

Truth

Righteousness

Gospel

Faith

Prayer

- b. The Word of God (sword of the Spirit) is our only weapon in spiritual attacks. What Bible stories can you think of as an example of when Scriptures were used as a defense in spiritual attacks?

- 1) Genesis 3 Adam and Eve: ^{Ge 3:2} The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ^{Ge 3:3} but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, [and you must not touch it (Eve added this)], or you will die.' "
- 2) Matthew 4 Jesus in the wilderness:
 - a. Bread, Deuteronomy 8:3: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."
 - b. Prove yourself, throw yourself down, Dt 6:16: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'
 - c. Worldly riches and power, Dt 6:13: "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"
- 3) Jesus and the Pharisees
 - a. Eating with sinners, Mt 9:11, ^{Mt 9:13} "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Hosea 8:6
 - b. Picking grain, eating on the Sabbath, Mt 12:14 David entered the temple and ate the consecrated bread.
 - c. Pharisees demand a sign, Mt 12:38-40, Sign of Jonah
- 4) Acts 2:14 Peter addresses the crowd at Pentecost, Joel 2, Psalms 16
- 5) Acts 7 Stephens address to Saul and the Pharisees

3. Where are you most likely to be attacked if you travel in a strange town (or even in the town you know)?

Likewise, we are most likely to be attacked when we are somewhere we shouldn't be, whether it's with the wrong crowd, watching the wrong TV show, or browsing the wrong website.

4. The writer of Hebrews called the Scriptures a double-edged sword, penetrating even to dividing soul and spirit, judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. How does the work of judging our thoughts and attitudes in the scriptures in our lives keep us from harm and spiritual attacks?

It points out our sins, convicts our hearts, brings us to repentance, and encourages us with knowledge of God's will and spiritual understanding.

5. What would happen if we went to war with only one piece of God's equipment: armor, a sword, or prayer?

We would be quickly defeated. It takes the full armor to protect us – pursue righteousness, flee from temptation, study and meditate on the Scriptures, and pray.

6. In the early spring, a shepherd goes ahead of his flock to prepare the high pastures in the tablelands. He clears the springs of brush and creates quiet pools where the flock can drink. As Pastor Keller was clearing springs, his mind thought of how Christ Jesus went ahead of his disciples (and ahead of him), knowing all their needs and weaknesses, to prepare a way for them.

Read the following verses describing how Jesus “went ahead” of his disciples and discuss the aspect of Christ’s leadership you most closely relate to now.

Heb 2:17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Heb 2:18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Jn 14:1 “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

Jn 14:2 In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. Jn 14:3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

- a. Which aspects of Christ’s leadership and humanity do you most closely relate to:
 - i. His compassion and mercy for people who are broken and sinful
 - ii. His forgiveness
 - iii. His suffering
 - iv. His temptation
 - v. His resurrection
7. The good shepherd labors, protects, and leads his sheep to the high tablelands so that his flock flourishes. Christ’s labor was to sacrifice himself so that we may have life and have it “abundantly” or “exceedingly abundant, beyond measure” (John 10:10). Our “abundant” life “beyond measure” came at a great price. Christ laid aside his heavenly glory to become human; his own Chosen People rejected him; he was ridiculed, flogged, crucified, abandoned by his Father, burdened with the sin of the world, suffered, and died.
- a. Contrast how we could imagine a perfect life to the life beyond measure Jesus died for.

We could easily define a perfect life by health, wealth, material comfort, a nice home, a happy family, and a wonderful spouse. These would all be nice but are probably not what Jesus was referring to.

Jesus told believers not to worry about our material needs but to seek the kingdom of God, and God would provide for our material needs – because they are important. Our

abundant life beyond measure is defined in terms of the Kingdom of God. Through Christ, we receive redemption, sanctification, freedom from condemnation for sin and guilt, peace for our souls, and eternal life. We become God's children, and he is our Father. Through His Holy Spirit, we receive spiritual rebirth, a Guide who is always at work renewing our minds and ready to lavish gifts of love, joy, peace, patience, and kindness so that all our relationships with others are blessings and fruitful.

8. List some of the many blessings of having an abundant life through faith in Christ.

a. John 3:5, An abundant life begins **with being born again.**

Jn 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.

b. And abundant life is receiving **streams of living water, the Holy Spirit.**

Jn 7:38 **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.

c. An abundant life is **living by the Spirit and bearing his fruit.**

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

Gal 5:23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Gal 5:24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature^z with its passions and desires.

Gal 5:25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

d. An abundant life is becoming **a child of God.**

Jn 1:12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God —

e. An abundant life is **being in God's kingdom and living in righteousness, peace, and joy.**

Ro 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit

f. An abundant life is **bearing fruit in Christ's name and living a life of love.**

Jn 15:11 **I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.** Jn 15:12
My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

g. An abundant life is **servicing Christ with righteousness, peace, and joy.**

Ro 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

Ro 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

^{1Pe 1:8} Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

^{1Pe 1:9} for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Mt 13:44 **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.**

h. An abundant life is **belonging to God to declare his praise.**

^{1Pe 2:9} But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

9. Which aspects of an abundant life mean the most to you now? Which would you like to experience in increasing measure?

- a. Being born again
- b. Receiving the Holy Spirit
- c. Living in the Spirit and bearing fruit
- d. Being a child of God
- e. Being in God's kingdom
- f. Serving Christ
- g. Belonging to God and declaring his praise

Closing, The Lord's Prayer

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.