

Follow Our Shepherd

Quarter 8 • Lesson 3

Focus on Spiritual Formation

- 1. Connecting:** Play a following game.
- 2. Teaching:** Listen to what happens when you follow God through difficult situations (Psalm 23:1–4; Psalm 27:1).
- 3. Responding:** Play a game about God helping with fears.

SUPPLIES

- Bible
- Shepherd's rod and staff tear-out page from the end of this lesson
- Optional Supplies:*
 - Materials to make a rod or staff: small tree branch, cane, or small pole
 - Student Pages
 - Memory Verse Poster
 - Scissors
 - Crayons

Before class, make a rod or staff using a small tree branch, a cane, or a small pole. A rod is completely straight. A staff is curved at the top. If you are unable to find these materials, you may use the tear-out page at the end of this lesson.

Teacher Devotion

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid.
You are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff comfort me.*
Psalm 23:4

There are times in life when it is difficult to see God because of the darkness. This verse assures you that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is with you even through the darkest valley. Just as a shepherd of sheep uses a staff to guide the sheep, Jesus leads and guides His sheep through the dark valleys. The shepherd does not leave the sheep in the valley. Instead, they walk through the valley together.

When you experience something that is so terrible or so unspeakable that you begin to lose hope, know that Jesus is there with you. It is in these times when you cannot see anything and cannot see the light on the other side that Jesus holds you and sustains you. Let Jesus into these dark times. Remember to call out to Him, especially when you feel weak and afraid. He is there to listen and respond to your cry. Trust Him in your darkest hours!

Family Connection: Encourage families to talk about how they know God is with them in difficult times. Ask the families to continue to read Psalm 23 with their children every night before the children go to sleep.

LESSON TIME

1. Connecting: Play a following game.

Welcome the children as they enter the teaching space. Ask them to form a line across the back of the space.

Let's play a following game. I will stand at the front of your line. I will lead you from this end of our space to the other. Here is the fun part. As you follow me, you will also do what I do. If I march, you will march. If I hop, you will hop.

Slowly lead the children from 1 end of the space to another, looping back and forth instead of taking a direct route. Move in different ways as you lead them. Suggested movements include: marching, skipping, hopping, dancing, tiptoeing, and sliding your feet. Once all of the children have reached the other end of the space, ask them to sit down where they are and face you.

As you followed me, you did what I did. I did not leave you because I was your guide. Think back to our last class.

- **Who wants to guide you on the right path?**

God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) does.

As you move through life following what God wants, He stays with you. Today you will learn how God stays with you through even the most difficult situations as you follow Him. Let's review what we have learned so far about God as your Shepherd.

2. Teaching: Listen to what happens when you follow God through difficult situations (Psalm 23:1–4; Psalm 27:1).

As you teach this lesson, show the students the pictures of the rod and staff from the page at the end of this lesson every time you mention them. If you created your own rod or staff, show them this as well.

Read these verses directly from your Bible.

The LORD is my shepherd. He gives me everything I need.

He lets me lie down in fields of green grass.

He leads me beside quiet waters.

*He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths
for the honor of his name.*

Psalm 23:1–3

King David wrote Psalm 23. Before he was a king, he was a shepherd who took care of sheep. David had to fight off a lion and bear to protect the sheep. There are times when a shepherd must lead the flock of sheep through dangerous places. If the sheep stay close to the shepherd, they do not need to be afraid.

Teacher Tip: Children experience many different types of fears. Some may seem minor or unimportant to an adult, but they are very real to children. If the children share their fears during this lesson, encourage others to listen and not to make judgments about these fears.

Just as shepherd leads his sheep safely through dark valleys, we can trust God to lead us when we go through the dark times in our lives. Let's listen to the beginning of Psalm 23, verse 4.

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid. You are with me.*

Psalm 23:4a

Encourage the children to repeat "You are with me" 3 times.

David was walking through a dark valley, but he was not afraid because God was with him. David knew the Lord was his Shepherd in the dark.

- **Do you ever feel afraid when it is dark?**

Allow all of the children to respond at the same time.

This verse says even if you are walking through the darkest valley, you do not need to be afraid. David faced danger when the lion and the bear tried to get his sheep. David knew God was with him, so he said, "I will not be afraid!"

A dark valley is something scary in our lives. Sometimes a dark valley is the grief we feel when we lose someone we love. Sometimes a dark valley is when we are sad. A dark valley means something that is difficult to walk through. When I read this verse again, repeat this part: "You are with me."

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid. You are with me.*

Psalm 23:4a

Say the last part of the verse again with the children, "You are with me."

If you face danger like David faced danger, you can say, "I will not be afraid. You are with me."

- **If you are in the dark and feeling afraid, what might you do to feel less afraid?**

I could turn a light on. I could pray and ask God to protect me.

The Bible tells us the Lord is a light in the darkness. You do not need to be afraid because the Lord is your light in dark times. The Lord is your place of safety. Listen to what the Bible says:

*The LORD is my light, and he saves me. Why should I fear anyone?
The LORD is my place of safety. Why should I be afraid?*
Psalm 27:1

Fear is a strong emotion that everyone feels at times. Fear can be so strong it makes you cry. When you feel afraid, you can say out loud or in your thoughts, "The Lord is my light." You can pray to God to send His light into your life. You can also remember that God is with you.

Teacher Tip: Some children may face very real dangers. If a child suffers from abuse, neglect, or other traumatic experiences, help to comfort that child. Also, if there are resources and people in your community that can help the children, help them to connect with these.

Close your eyes. Think of a dark place. Maybe it is an alley in your neighbourhood that becomes very dark at night or a room in your house that does not have any windows. Now pretend you have a flashlight or candle to help you walk through that dark place. Go through that place with the light. Then open your eyes.

Allow 2–3 children to respond to each of the following questions.

- How does the light help you get through the dark place?
- Can there be darkness where there is light? Why not?

Now, think of this dark place as something difficult you have to experience. Maybe someone in your family has died, or maybe you have a friend who is angry at you for something. There are many difficult things we must go through in life. These are the dark places that can make us afraid.

Show the children the rod and staff pictures from the tear-out page as you read the following information.

When a sheep is threatened by an animal that wants to hurt it, the shepherd uses his rod to protect the sheep from these animals. If a sheep is moving in the wrong direction, the shepherd will apply gentle pressure with his staff to help the sheep avoid the danger of being separated from the flock. As you listen to this verse, think about how God uses His rod and staff to protect and comfort you in dark times.

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid.
You are with me. Your shepherd's rod and staff comfort me.*
Psalm 23:4

Allow 2–3 children to respond to each of the following questions.

- **What might sheep do if they feel comforted and protected?**

They might lie down. They might make a happy sound. They might listen to the shepherd.

- **Show me what you do when you feel comforted and protected.**

There are many different ways children may respond. Children may lie or sit down. They might smile. They might come sit near you.

The sheep know the shepherd is there to help them, so they follow him and stay close to him. This is especially true when things are dark and difficult. In the same way the sheep are comforted by their shepherd's rod and staff, God will guide and protect you when you stay close to Him. Know that He is with you!

Repeat this simple prayer with me:

God is with me. The Lord is my light.
Thank you, Lord, for being my light in dark times.
Please protect me when I am scared.
In Jesus' name, amen.

When God is with you, there is nothing to fear. God will comfort you when you are walking through dark times. God is your Shepherd with a rod and staff to protect you and guide you. Let's say the first part of Psalm 23 together.

Pause after each statement so the children can repeat the words.

*The LORD is my shepherd.
He gives me everything I need.
He lets me lie down in fields of green grass.
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He gives me new strength.
He guides me in the right paths for the honor of his name.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid.
You are with me.
Your shepherd's rod and staff comfort me.
Psalm 23:1–4*

3. Responding: Play a game about God helping with fears.

Help the children form a line on 1 side of the teaching space. Ask them to stand side by side in the line.

Now that we know God will lead us through difficult times, let's do something fun to see how this works. When you follow your Shepherd, God, you do not need to be afraid of danger.

Close your eyes. Think of something you are afraid of. This could be the dark, an animal, an action, or a person.

Pause for 15 seconds for the children to think of a fear.

Keep your eyes closed. Take 3 steps forward.

Ask the children to open their eyes.

Raise your hand if you were afraid you would bump into something as you were walking. Put your hands down. Raise your hand if you were not afraid.

- **What did it feel like to walk with your eyes closed?**

Allow 2–3 children to respond.

When your eyes were closed, it was dark, right? You were also thinking about something you were afraid of, so it might have been scary for you to walk in darkness.

- **When we are afraid, what can we do to feel comforted and know that God is with us?**

Allow 2–3 children to respond.

We can call out to God by praying. We can be comforted knowing that He is with us through dark times. Let's play a game to help us discover how prayer and trusting God to be with us can help during scary or difficult times.

Ask the children to return to their original line across 1 side of the space. The children will continue moving forward throughout this activity, so be sure there are no obstacles for them to bump into or trip over. Stand on the opposite side of the space.

For our game, I will ask you to move toward me with your eyes open and closed. When I tell you to close your eyes, you will say a simple prayer as you move. Then I will ask you to open your eyes and move. Listen for my directions to know how you will move forward. There are 2 important rules: you may not run, and you must close your eyes when I ask you to. The first person to reach me wins the game!

Every 3–5 steps, have the children close their eyes and pray as they move. After about 10 seconds, ask them to open their eyes. Have the children move forward using 1 or more of the following:

Marching
Skipping
Galloping
Walking

When the first child reaches you, announce the winner and ask the rest of the class to sit together on your side of the space.

When you experience something difficult and scary in your life, know that you can talk to God. Know that He is with you.

Optional: If you are using Student Pages, give the children crayons. Ask them to draw on their sheep. Then give them scissors and allow them to cut or tear out the rod and staff. Ask them to place the rod on 1 sheep and the staff on the other

Our memory verse reminds us that God provides many things for us, including comfort. If you are using the Memory Verse Poster, show it to the students.

It says:

The LORD is my shepherd. He gives me everything I need.
Psalm 23:1

The Lord is my shepherd—Hold your hands in front of you, and then clap as you raise them up over your head.

He gives me everything I need—Clap as you move your hands down in front of you again.

End class by praying this blessing from Psalm 27:1 over the children.

Blessing: May you trust that Jesus is a light to your path. May you come to know God as a place of safety. May you be without fear because God is with you.

Lead the children in singing this quarter's song, if possible.

"My Lighthouse" by Rend Collective: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HA8VtUPgqTc>