

God as Leader

By Terri Stovall

Pre-Session Assignment

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read Psalm 23 and this week's memory verse, Isaiah 40:11. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: Based on these two passages, how would you describe the Shepherd?

Assignment Two

Read Psalm 23:4-5. Notice the pronoun shift to "you." Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: In these verses, what does a shepherd do? How do these things allow us not to fear?

Assignment Three

Read Psalm 23:6. Prepare to share what the psalmist expected to receive. Read John 10:10. Prepare to share how we see the promise of this verse in our daily lives.

Scripture to Memorize

"He will tend his flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs in his arms; He will carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." Isaiah 40:11

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will know and understand God as the leader who shepherds.

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She is the coauthor of *Women Leading Women: The Biblical Model for the Church* and a contributing author of *The Teaching Ministry of the Church* and *The Christian Homemaker's Handbook*. Her passion is to equip and enable women to reach women and families for Christ. She and her husband Jay currently live in Arlington, Texas, and enjoy motorcycling as well as traveling the country riding roller coasters.

It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Think about the leaders you know at school, work, church or in your community. What makes a good leader? What makes you trust a leader enough to follow that person?

God as Leader

Read Psalm 23 out loud.

Studying the Passage

We often hear Psalm 23 read at funerals or other times of crisis. It is a psalm of comfort, but it is so much more than that. In these six short verses, we see how God leads as a shepherd.

Verse 1. The LORD is my shepherd. David compares God to a shepherd. This term communicates love, nurture and intimacy. This is where leadership begins—recognizing God is our shepherd and we are His sheep who follow Him daily. David, who wrote this psalm and was himself a shepherd, describes God's care and leadership of His flock with seven different descriptions of God. We can call this God's leadership style.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on the comparison of the shepherd's description found in Isaiah 40:11 and in Psalm 23.

Studying the Passage

Verse 1. I shall not want. God is our provider. He leads like a shepherd, providing everything His flock needs. *Jehovah Jireh* is the Hebrew name for God meaning, "the Lord will provide." We see this again in verse 5 when the psalmist writes, "My cup overflows." God doesn't provide the bare minimum; He provides more than we can ever imagine. God leads as a shepherd by providing for His sheep.

Verse 2. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters. God leads His flock to places of peace. "Green pastures" do not reference just food, but a place of cool and refreshing rest. Likewise, the "still waters" give a contrast to rushing, roaring rivers. Sheep can be made to lie down, to eat and to drink only when they feel safe and are free from fear. God leads as a shepherd by leading His sheep to places of peace.

Discussion Question

As humans, what do places of peace look like? Do we allow distractions to interfere with God's peace? What are they?

Studying the Passage

Verse 3. He restores my soul. God leads and cares for His flock by healing and restoring the lamb that has fallen. In his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Phillip Keller explains that a lamb that has fallen over on its back cannot get up by itself and will die without help. The shepherd must delicately and gradually set the lamb back on its feet and tend to any wounds, enabling it to walk again. God leads as a shepherd by restoring His sheep.

Verse 3. He leads me in paths of righteousness. God leads as a shepherd by continually being present and attentive to where His sheep are going. Sheep do not do well by themselves.

Left on their own, sheep will aimlessly wander, over-eat and cease to thrive. When God leads us in “paths of righteousness,” He is leading us in the direction that is right and pleasing to the shepherd. God leads as a shepherd by guiding His sheep in the direction He wants them to walk.

Verse 4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. God leads as a shepherd by always being near, protecting His sheep when they have to walk through difficult places. Often shepherds would have to move their flocks through valleys that presented many risks and dangers.

The flock’s utter dependence and trust of the shepherd allowed the sheep to walk through without fear. We see this again in verse 5 when the psalmist declares that the shepherd prepares “a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Even when the enemy is near, God, our shepherd and leader, is also near. We have nothing to fear, “for You are with me.” God leads as a shepherd by always being present and attentive.

Discussion Question

When we walk through hard and difficult times, how can we trust that God is always with us? How does God protect us?

Verse 4. Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. God leads as shepherd by striking a balance of defending, protecting, guiding and correcting. Shepherds were equipped with a rod and a staff. A rod was a two to four foot club used to defend sheep from predators and robbers. The staff was longer and had a hook on one end. It was always in the shepherd’s hand as he would use it to direct sheep gently back to the flock, to hold a sheep for shearing or to rescue it from a dangerous predicament.

The sheep trusted the shepherd completely. They knew the shepherd would protect them from outside perils but would also guide them so they would not become lost. God leads as shepherd by protecting and correcting.

Assignment Two

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week may now share the things a shepherd does in Psalm 23. They also can share an answer to the question: How do these things allow us not to fear?

Verse 6. Surely goodness and mercy will follow me. God leads as a shepherd by giving His sheep hope for a lifetime. In this verse, *mercy* is the Hebrew word *Chesed*, meaning “the unfailing love of the Lord.” Not only is God’s goodness comforting, but God’s absolute, unwavering and constant love assures that God’s flock, His children, will “dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week may now share answers to these questions: What does the psalmist expect to receive based on verse 6? How do we see the promise of John 10:10 in our daily lives?

Discussion Question

Considering God’s leadership style and based on all we have learned in this lesson, what characteristics make a leader a good leader?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

Being a disciple means we follow after God on a daily basis. God leads us with the love and nurture of a shepherd.

In Psalm 23, we find seven ways God leads as shepherd.

1. God leads as a shepherd by providing for His sheep (v1). Not only does God provide, but He provides in a way that is overflowing and abundant.
2. God leads as a shepherd by leading His sheep to places of peace (v2). When we are secure, safe and restful, we can live in peace and without fear.
3. God leads as a shepherd by restoring His sheep (v3). Sheep get themselves in predicaments where they have stumbled, fallen and become hurt. The shepherd restores the sheep, tending to them and enabling them to walk again.
4. God leads as a shepherd by guiding His sheep in the direction He wants them to walk (v3). Sheep do not do well on their own, and neither do we. God, as shepherd, keeps constant watch over His sheep, guiding in the paths of righteousness.
5. God leads as a shepherd by always being present and attentive (v4). Sometimes we will walk through hard, dark and painful places. Sometimes enemies will surround us, but God's presence allays all fears, allowing us to keep walking.
6. God leads as shepherd by protecting and correcting (v5). God uses both a rod to protect and a staff to correct. We can take comfort in knowing that He is on guard against outside perils but also on guard to correct His sheep gently, protecting them from their own wanderings.
7. God leads as a shepherd by giving hope (v6). God's goodness and unfailing love offer a hope and an assurance that once a part of His flock, always a part of His flock.

Follow up Question

How would you describe God as a leader in your life?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.