

The GOOD SHEPHERD

A STUDY OF PSALM 23

2026 Parent Devotions

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Credits

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JoEllen Taylor is a Tennessee native who loves to hike, visit national parks, and play outside. She is an avid reader and enjoys multiple genres. 36 years of marriage, three married daughters and sons-in-law, and four grandchildren enrich her life deeply. She can hardly believe the years of ministry alongside her husband can be counted in decades! Discipling students and Next Gen Ministry alongside parents and leaders are a continuing passion. Out of a desire to steward her mind toward the Lord, she is very gradually pursuing a graduate degree from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

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Introduction

Parents,

After weeks of anticipation and preparation, your child is now off to camp for what we hope will be a life-changing time. God has already been at work preparing your child for what He wants to teach them — and you! Although you might have mixed feelings about being away from your child for a few days, God can use this time to draw you both closer to Him.

For some of you, this week of camp is a mainstay on your family calendar. You plan your entire summer around it. For others, this is the first camp experience for your student and your family. Wherever you and your family are on the spectrum, we are thankful that they are at camp and that you are reading this devotion.

While your student is bonding with their youth group, experiencing great worship, being discipled by their leaders, and having fun at camp, we wanted you to have a glimpse into what they're learning this week.

Each day during Quiet Time, students will spend some individual time in God's Word considering these same Scriptures and how God may be speaking to their hearts as they spend time with Him. Each day we will join them in studying Psalm 23, an Old Testament shepherd, and a New Testament verse. We invite you to read or recite Psalm 23 several times each day, praying it over your child and their friends at camp.

So, grab an extra cup of coffee. Lean into these quiet times with Him and allow the Lord to strengthen you this week. We are praying for all of you!

The FUGE Camps Team

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Opening Day: The Good Shepherd

Overview: Sheep are creatures that lack a sense of direction, leaving them defenseless and vulnerable without a shepherd. Unable to care for themselves, they can be quite stubborn. Just as a shepherd protects and guides his sheep, rescuing them when they stray and meeting their needs, we have a Good Shepherd who does the same for us.

Key Verse: Psalm 23:1

Old Testament Shepherd: Moses

New Testament Verse: John 10:11

Begin by praying today for the students and leaders at camp.

You may be familiar with Moses, whose story we encounter in the book of Exodus. Some of the most well-known stories from the Bible are about Moses: the hidden Hebrew baby floating in a basket and pulled from the river by a princess; the boy raised in the Egyptian royal family and confronted with his Israelite heritage; the man leading the freed Israelite slaves through the parted Red Sea; and more.

What we often don't remember is Moses spent forty years of his mid-life as a shepherd working for his father-in-law. As a young man he had grown angry at an Egyptian task master for treating the Israelite slaves cruelly, and he killed him in a confrontation. Moses fled the royal household of the Pharaoh and took up shepherding practically overnight in the wilderness of Midian. Forty years later he found himself in front of a miraculous burning bush and the voice of God speaking to him.

Read Exodus 3:1-10.

One day while Moses was tending the sheep, something strange caught his eye — a bush was on fire, but it wasn't burning up. As he got closer, God called to him from the bush and said:

“Therefore, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh so that you may lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:10).

At first, Moses didn't think he could do it. He told God he wasn't a good speaker, that people wouldn't believe him, and that he wasn't the right person. But God saw something in Moses that Moses didn't see in himself.

The same man who once guided sheep through rocky hills would soon guide *God's people* through the wilderness. God took an ordinary shepherd and turned him into an extraordinary leader.

What are some things you tell yourself (or believe about yourself) that might make you think God can't use you the way He used Moses?



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God is with us wherever we go. His presence will sustain and equip us for the things He calls us to do.

Read Isaiah 53:6.

In what ways are you currently being like a sheep preferring to go its own way rather than listen to the Shepherd's voice?

Reflecting on our own sheep journey helps us view our children with more compassion as we shepherd/parent them. We must be willing to receive guidance from our Good Shepherd in order to teach our children how to distinguish His "voice" and leading as well.

Read Psalm 23:1.

Write your own paraphrase of Psalm 23:1:

Read John 10:11.

Psalm 23 describes beautifully what it's like to receive the care of the Good Shepherd. Ultimately this care is true because John 10:11 is true. He laid down His life for us. On days when we feel overlooked, overwhelmed, or unloved, the Good Shepherd's proven love sustains us.

The next time your student feels overlooked, overwhelmed, or unloved, comfort them in all the ways they know you will. Then consider turning together toward the Good Shepherd, who gives them everything they need. Consider memorizing Psalm 23 together.

Finish today with some prayerful reflection. Write down, or draw, some specific ways Jesus is your Good Shepherd.



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Day 1: The Good Peace

Daily Overview: Shepherds bring peace to their flocks through consistent care, protecting them from predators, and guiding them to safe pastures. A shepherd's calming presence, voice, and touch can also alleviate fear and anxiety among the sheep. In a world of hurry, pressure, and performance, the Good Shepherd offers us peace and rest.

Key Verse: Psalm 23:2

Old Testament Shepherd: Isaac

New Testament Verse: John 14:27

Open this time in prayer, asking God to calm and bless your child as they settle into camp. Ask God to guide you into His Word today.

Over the next few days, we will embrace the theme of shepherding from several different biblical perspectives, all wrapped around Psalm 23.

- We will hear the heart of David — a shepherd boy who became Israel's most famous king. He wrote Psalm 23, the familiar passage we'll look at each day.
- We will learn from the lives of Old Testament shepherds — Isaac, Jacob, Amos, Abraham, and Moses — and how they encountered God.
- We will take moments to behold Jesus, the Good Shepherd. We'll consider ways He takes care of us and takes care of our kids.
- We will gain perspective as parents who shepherd — remembering the why and considering how we are guiding our kids to listen for their Good Shepherd's voice and follow Him. As you move through the week of devotionals, note in the margins when God prompts you toward something you can pray or do to more intentionally guide your children toward Him.
- We can reflect on ourselves, and our children, as sheep in need of the Good Shepherd.

Write out the best definition for the role of a shepherd, including necessary qualities.

How do these qualities and responsibilities relate similarly to those of parents?

Read Genesis 26:15-21.

Not long before Isaac's conflicts over the wells his father had dug, God had reminded him of the covenant He had made with Abraham that included God promising the land to Abraham and his descendants. Surely this was fresh on Isaac's mind as he came across well after well, all filled in with dirt. Abraham's legacy and the agency of God in the area was being ignored. None of this invalidated God's promises, but it must have raised questions and frustration for Isaac.



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What frustrations do you think Isaac likely felt as he opened the wells again only to receive opposition?

Where do you sense similar frustrations in your own life? Do you see your child experiencing cyclical frustrations like this?

Read Genesis 26:22-25 to see how Isaac responded. Rather than fuming because things weren't what he expected, or contending for respect or control, Isaac responded with humility and trusted God to provide. Then when God did, Isaac worshiped Him. God renewed His promises to Isaac and reminded him of His presence.

How do you see God bringing peace to Isaac in the midst of trying circumstances? How do you think God wants to bring peace to you?

Read the words of Jesus in John 14:27. In this verse, Jesus is gifting peace to His disciples, knowing that His crucifixion and resurrection were coming. Write out the verse here a couple of times to help you pause and reflect.

Read Psalm 23:1-2.

What thing do you most long for, offered by the Good Shepherd, Jesus? Nourishment? Rest? Peace? Stillness? Refreshing?

What habits and distractions keep you from experiencing the peace of nourishing green pastures and still waters for your soul? In the space below, write the habit or distraction on the left, and how you think God wants you to respond on the right.

Where is God asking you to trust His provision? Is He asking you to trust Him more with an aspect of your child's life that you are currently overthinking or fearful about? Pray for confidence that God is leading you for your good and His glory, even when the situation appears different and difficult. Ask God to help you rest in knowing He has a wonderful plan for your child.

What is one simple way you can provide a place and time of peace in your regular family routine? (Listen to music; drink a cup of tea or coffee together; create a routine of prayer and blessing at bedtime; include a special plate that rotates randomly at the dinner table indicating whom the family will express thanks for and why; pause at an outdoor view rather than rushing past; spend a few minutes on the porch together watching God's beautiful world . . . the possibilities are endless.) You don't need to tell your kids — just incorporate a simple new thing and see what happens!

Pray for your child to begin to sense God's peace in new ways and develop a lasting appetite for the green pastures and still waters He brings. Take a moment to mark or record anything God has brought to the surface of your heart and mind.



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Day 2: The Good Restoration

Daily Overview: When a sheep wanders off or gets trapped, the shepherd brings them back to the flock. The shepherd also cares for their flock by nursing their injuries and illnesses and properly shearing them. In a world of darkness and evil, we are prone to wander, in need of rescue. The Good Shepherd offers direction and spiritual restoration and renewal for us.

Key Verse: Psalm 23:3

Old Testament Shepherd: Jacob

New Testament Verse: 1 Peter 2:25

Begin today with prayer. Spend a few minutes praising God. Then ask Him to show you clearly what He wants you to see in His Word.

Jacob was Isaac's son and Abraham's grandson. He inherited sweeping and faithful promises from God that would apply to all the descendants. Though he surely grew up hearing about God's character and covenant making, he struggled to walk with God. Many of Jacob's defining moments illustrated the meaning of his name, "heel-grabber."

When Jacob was young, he took advantage of Esau and ended up with his birthright in exchange for a bowl of soup. In Genesis, the eldest son received a birthright which gave him a larger inheritance and leadership role within the family.

When Jacob's father, Isaac, was starting to lose vision, Jacob continued to deceive by dressing up as Esau in order to receive his father's blessing.

After all the trickery, Esau was angry with Jacob and sought to kill him. A fearful Jacob ran away from his mistakes to a man named Laban (his uncle) to escape. While he was living with Laban for about twenty years, Jacob became a very skilled and prosperous shepherd. During this time, Jacob may have been hiding from his brother, but he couldn't hide from God.

Name a time in your life where you tried to run away from your mistakes.

After years in the country, Jacob was told by God to return home. Jacob was still filled with fear and shame after what he had done to his brother.

In Genesis 32:22-32, God met Jacob at night and wrestled with him. This wrestling match was a turning point where Jacob moved from self-reliance (deception) to dependence on God. It was here that Jacob's human flaws (deceit, striving) were met by divine grace, resulting in a broken but blessed new self. God even gave Jacob a brand-new name, Israel, which means "he struggles with God." Israel would go on to be the father of twelve sons — the twelve tribes of Israel!

Restoration is not always easy. It can take time and be a painful process.



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When Jacob was wrestling with God, his hip came out of joint. This gave Jacob a limp. While this could seem like something bad to the world, this limp served as a reminder to Jacob that God did not allow him to sit in shame. God had not given up on Jacob!

Sometimes our experiences leave “scars,” even after healing. But scars can be a beautiful story of God’s faithfulness in our times of trouble. **How could you use your scars to tell a beautiful story of God’s grace for you? Would you consider telling this to your child?**

As your student-age children face more adult-size issues and struggles, they need to know the real stories of God’s faithfulness — and who better to share our faith stories and struggles with than our own families? We can appropriately share our struggles with our older kids, giving glory to God and providing them honest examples as they approach adulthood.

When our kids see us placing a trusting hand in God’s hand and pressing on with Him, limp and all, their faith is encouraged.

Ask God for an opportunity to share with your child the story of how you came to know Christ, or where you are on that journey. Share a way you have learned to trust God through a struggle recently.

Read Psalm 23:3.

How are you allowing God to lead you and your family? Are you trying to do it all on your own or are you seeking God and being open to His leading?

Where do you need renewal in your life? What about together as a family?

Read 1 Peter 2:25 and use it as a framework for prayer. Where have you gone astray and been hiding? Thank God for always being a faithful Shepherd and kind Overseer of your soul.

Take a moment to mark or record anything God has brought to the surface of your heart and mind.



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Day 3: The Good Presence

Daily Overview: The shepherd's presence is critical for the well-being and survival of a flock of sheep. The Good Shepherd is ever with us. His presence brings comfort, not fear. He provides guidance, through both the good and difficult times.

Key Verse: Psalm 23:4

Old Testament Shepherd: Amos

New Testament Verse: James 4:8

Begin today by stopping everything you are doing and try to be still in the presence of our good God for five or ten minutes — no agenda, no takeaways, no to-do list. Just. Be. With.

Sheep are notoriously helpless and unwise. They aren't able to find their way to nourishment and easily become lost. They can't defend themselves from predators or pests. Their own wool can weigh them down so heavily they can't function. Sheep can become cast down — literally fallen over with their legs in the air unable to get up. A sheep in this condition needs help urgently. The shepherd can't help remotely. He or she has to be constantly present to protect and guide them.

Read Amos 7:14-15.

God chose Amos, a shepherd and grower of figs, to be His spokesman to the people. He basically said, "Look, I was minding my own business in the fields when the Lord called me out to bring His message to you. And it's important!" His obedience and faithfulness to do what the Lord asked of him is inspiring.

What experiences from Amos's past as a shepherd and farmer must have prepared him to be a prophet to God's people?

Amos was charged by God to warn the people, Israel's descendants, that God had decided to destroy them because of their persistent rebellion against Him. He had complete assurance that God was with him. It seems Amos wasn't new to abiding in God's presence! He also got to deliver God's impassioned plea for His people, "Seek me and live!" (Amos 5:4).

How might a deeper abiding in God's presence shape the way you interact with your children?

How might a deeper abiding in God's presence shape what you value most for your children?

How does living daily in the presence of God give you courage to speak truth that may not be welcome at first?



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Read Amos 5:14-16 and James 4:8.

How do you see the theme of repentance in these two passages? How are repentance and righteousness connected to embracing God's presence?

Is there something God is asking you to repent of? It's really the most loving thing He can do for us. When we respond by repenting, our understanding of His presence is refreshed and our relationship with Him deepens. Take time to do that now.

Repentance is a tender thing to engage in, especially when we are out of practice. God may ask your student to repent this week at camp of an attitude, a habit, a carelessness or avoidance of something He is asking of them. As you re-engage in life together a few days from now, be sensitive to how God may have moved and choose compassion toward your child.

Read Psalm 23:4.

List several times when knowing God is with you even in a difficult season has given you great comfort, direction, or confidence to continue.

Finish today with a prayer of thanksgiving for God's presence and for His desire to dwell together with us. His love is so deep that He sent His Son for us to make it possible.

Take a moment to mark or record anything God has brought to the surface of your heart and mind.



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Day 4: The Good Life

Daily Overview: Shepherding requires a deep commitment to each sheep and the flock as a whole. This commitment is usually long term. The Good Shepherd is merciful, and He promises abundant life now and His presence forever.

Key Verse: Psalm 23:6

Old Testament Shepherd: Abraham

New Testament Verse: Matthew 28:20

Turn your thoughts toward God and pray, asking Him to show you more today about the truth that He always keeps His promises.

We latch on to the idea of promises early in life. Even in early childhood we grasp the idea that if someone “promises” to take us for ice cream or to do something fun they are supposed to do it. We make promises we can’t keep but have trouble letting others off the hook if they forget or choose not to honor what they said they would do for us. We remember when people don’t keep their promises to us, likely more than we remember to follow through on our own words of promise.

Where shepherds are concerned, the promise to look after the sheep has a long-term relational and wholistic connotation.

Where God is concerned, we almost need a different word entirely than “promise” to describe God’s intention to keep His word. His promises are unbreakable, costly for Him, multifaceted, and eternal. What He says, He will do. His promises are of exponentially more quality than even the best human promise.

One of the earliest shepherds to appear in the Bible is Abraham (father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob [Israel]). God made some incredible promises to Abraham. This was not because Abraham was better in some way, but because of the character and utter consistency of God. The covenant is weighty and the promise sure because of who made it.

Read Genesis 17:1-8, underlining or listing below all the promises God made to Abraham. Circle all the ones focused on God being in relationship with people.

Though God’s promises to Abraham certainly included physical provisions, God’s main point was to provide for Abraham and his descendants to *live in God’s presence*. We see the focus is on relationship again, and we also see it’s pointing to Jesus who made the relationship possible with His blood at the cross.

Abraham had moments of doubt and uncertainty along the way, but he definitely lived the blessed life of a wealthy shepherd with huge flocks. He may have thought God’s promises to him were primarily for him



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during his lifetime — and they were. But the deepest meaning and fruit of God’s blessings to Abraham were for later generations, even continuing today.

These promises matter to every human being, because Abraham’s descendants became a tribe, then a nation, out of which God brought forth Jesus. This was all part of God’s plan to bring the redeemer promised in Genesis 3:14-15. Every family on earth is blessed because Jesus has made a way to relationship with God for everyone who will come to Him in faith and surrender.

What does it mean to be blessed by God?

What would you say are the greatest blessings God has given you? Take a moment to dig down an extra layer beyond the first things that come to mind.

Write out Psalm 23:6 here:

Now write out Matthew 28:20, Jesus’ last words to His followers as He ascended to heaven, right on the heels of giving them the Great Commission.

What promise does God clearly want us to know and remember?

Begin watching over the next weeks and months for other places in the Scripture where God reminds His people that He is with them. Mark it every time so you will begin to remember He is with you. Thank Him for it out loud when you pray at the dinner table. What a timely message for a culture full of deeply lonely people! This promise is good and true because our faithful God is who He says He is.

Read Psalm 23:6 again. Spend a few minutes of prayer time with God allowing Him to reassure your heart with this verse. Pray for each of your children, allowing this verse to shape your prayer.



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Day 5: The Good Keeper

Begin today by praying that all the new work God is doing in students at camp will take root and flourish. Pray that families at home will be receptive to changed lives looking different. Ask God to examine your heart and make you spiritually ready to receive your child back home.

Turn to Psalm 23 again today as you look toward welcoming your child home. **Read it through a couple of times slowly**, remembering what God has shown you this week. Spend some time enjoying His company.

Upon reading and reflecting on Psalm 23, how is God our Good Keeper?

God faithfully provides, protects, and preserves us — guiding us through every season into His lasting presence.

Whether your student wants to talk for hours over pizza tonight or sleep for a long time, create some margin over the next two or three days while their experience is fresh to be available to listen as they begin to process camp.

Take some initiative to plan several individual times with your camper over the next few days and weeks. Invite him or her to pull away and spend time with you. Take a picnic to a nearby lake; go for milkshakes or coffee; or plan a favorite outdoor activity together and stop for burgers on the way home. The point isn't the activities you do — it's to spend some intentional time together with room for hangout time, laughter, thoughtful questions, and listening. Pave the way for vulnerability by sharing some things God is showing you this week and how you feel prompted to respond. Own the uncomfortableness that can come with adjusting as we learn to trust and follow the Good Shepherd together.

In the space below, circle or write two or three attainable goals for bringing Jesus into the everyday air of your home.

Here are a few examples:

- Decide to continue the camp journey by memorizing Psalm 23 together. Come up with creative prizes.
- Bring some intentionality to building a natural daily or weekly habit of praying together as family more than just before meals.
- Set reminders to pray every day at a certain time for your child's heart to be tender and responsive to the Lord.
- _____



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Taking the Long View

Let's touch on a tough but beautiful subject.

You have these devotionals in hand because you have sent at least one of your children to camp. That means you are in the launch phase of parenting. The time remaining to be in full parent prep mode for life is finite. The end of the in-home phase of parenting will bring some pain, but it also brings wave after wave of joy! Facing it helps us value and be most intentional in the months and years until then. When we think of preparing our kids to launch, we think of academics, college, sports opportunities, careers, money management, more serious dating relationships, handling responsibility, and the list goes on.

Above all we want our children to love and respond to the Good Shepherd, Jesus. We want them to hear His voice (and value His leading) louder than any other.

We have an incredible spiritual opportunity to pray and walk with our kids as they learn to follow Jesus like sheep learn their shepherd. Because sheep spend time with their shepherd, they recognize him even from far away. They know when he wants them to move and when he wants them to be content where they are. They know the comfort of his care. They know his voice and trust him. If they are following him, the rest will take care of itself.

We can't give our children salvation, but we can point them to Jesus by inviting Him into our homes through engaging in conversation, praying together, worshiping together, sharing Bible verses, voicing encouragement, teaching repentance, and speaking gratitude. Will you commit to try this in the days ahead?

Close out today by praying this prayer of Moses, one of the Old Testament shepherds we studied this week.

**"Teach us to number our days carefully so that we may develop wisdom in our hearts"
(Psalm 90:12).**