Through the Valley

PSALM 23:4 (BSB) · TEACHER GUIDE · DIGDEEPER.AI

THE BIG IDEA · SAY IT AT LEAST FIVE TIMES

In the darkest valley, the Shepherd is with me.

Open with it, bring it back after every section, close with it. By the end they should be able to finish the sentence for you.

- Before this passage (day 5): Mark 6:35-44, A Table in the Wilderness. Its big idea: The Shepherd makes his flock lie down, then feeds them full.
- After this passage (day 7): Mark 6:45-52, Take Courage! It Is I. Its big idea: No fear, because he is with me: “It is I.”

Open

Recall last time (Mark 6:35-44): the Shepherd set a table in the wilderness, and all were satisfied. Ask: When you were scared as a child, what helped? Read Psalm 23:4. Big idea: In the darkest valley, the Shepherd is with me. Ask one person what stuck from last time.

Run Sheet

1. Walking Through (Psalm 23:4a, about 13 min)

The one thing: The psalm is honest that dark valleys come and has to be walked through.

Ask: Why do you think the psalm says “through” rather than promising no valley at all?

2. You Are with Me (Psalm 23:4b, about 17 min)

The one thing: At the center of the psalm, the Shepherd is close enough to speak to.

Ask: What difference does it make to speak to God rather than about him when you are afraid?

Close (never cut it)

Read Psalm 23:4 aloud slowly, and leave a full minute of quiet. The promise of this verse is presence, so let the room rest in it rather than adding more words.

PROTECT THE ENDING

If the last section starts late, read v4b and go straight to the quiet close.

KIDS SIDE ANSWERS

Story order: 2, 5, 4, 1, 3 (top to bottom) · Feelings: Sheep in the dark valley worried, Sheep next to the shepherd happy, David in the valley worried, David knowing God is with him happy · Code: YOU ARE WITH ME

Act it out: Dim the lights. One child is the shepherd, holding a stick, and walks slowly beside the other children (the sheep) from one side of the room to the other. Then turn the lights back on and say the verse together.

1. Walking Through

PSALM 23:4A · ABOUT 13 MIN · SECTION 1 OF 2

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- The psalm does not skip the dark valley.
- “Walk through” means the journey keeps going.
- Fear is named honestly.

“Even though I WALK through the valley of the shadow of death.”

“I will fear no EVIL.”

Discuss: Why do you think the psalm says “through” rather than promising no valley at all?

The psalm is honest that dark valleys come and has to be walked through.

MUST COVER

- v4a: “valley” is a ravine or gorge; “shadow of death” is the Hebrew word for the deepest darkness.
- v4a: “I will fear no evil”: evil is named, and fear is answered rather than denied.

IF THERE'S TIME

- The same Hebrew word for deep darkness appears in Amos 5:8: God “turns darkness into dawn.”

Illustration idea: A child crossing a dark room to a parent's voice: still dark, but no longer alone.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: Because valleys are part of life.
- Listen for: Because God doesn't always take things away.

If it drifts: If someone begins to explain why suffering happens, gently bring it back: the psalm does not explain the valley; it names who is in it.

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

The valley is real, and in the darkest valley the Shepherd is with me.

Short on time? Drop the Amos note. Keep v4a and “through.”

Bridge → Then the psalm gives the reason fear will not rule.

2. You Are with Me

PSALM 23:4B · ABOUT 17 MIN · SECTION 2 OF 2

THEIR PAGE, WORD FOR WORD (ANSWERS FILLED IN)

- The psalm turns from “He” to “You.”
- The Shepherd's presence is the reason not to fear.
- The rod defends; the staff supports.

“For YOU are with me.”

“Your rod and Your staff, they COMFORT me.”

Discuss: What difference does it make to speak to God rather than about him when you are afraid?

At the center of the psalm, the Shepherd is close enough to speak to.

MUST COVER

- v4b: for the first time the sheep says “You” and speaks straight to the Shepherd.
- v4b: rod (a club for defense) and staff (to lean on) bring comfort.

IF THERE'S TIME

- Counted one standard way, “for You are with me” stands at the exact middle of the psalm: 26 Hebrew words before it and 26 after.

Illustration idea: A hiker on a narrow trail who reaches back for a guide's hand without looking.

RUNNING THE DISCUSSION

- Listen for: It feels more personal.
- Listen for: You can tell him exactly how you feel.

If it drifts: If someone shares a loss, stop and let it be heard. Then read v4 again slowly; don't rush past it.

TRY SAYING SOMETHING LIKE

In the darkest valley, the Shepherd is with me.

Short on time? Drop the word-count note. Keep “You are with me.”

Bridge → So let the verse be read once more, slowly.

With One Friend, Over Coffee

ABOUT 30 MINUTES · FOR A FRIEND WHO IS CURIOUS, OR NOT SURE

1. Start gently. Ask: Have you ever walked through a season that felt like a dark valley?
2. Read it. Read Psalm 23:4 together, slowly.
3. Honest. The psalm admits the valley is real and doesn't pretend otherwise.
4. Presence. At the darkest point it says, “You are with me.”
5. Leave the question. Ask: What would it mean to have someone with you in your valley? Leave it with them.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY HEAR

“Why does God let us go through valleys at all?”

The psalm doesn't answer that. It names who walks through them with us.

“What if I don't feel God with me?”

David says it as a fact, not a feeling. Many believers have said it through tears.

“What are the rod and staff?”

A shepherd's club for defending the sheep, and a long stick to lean on and guide them.

“Is this only for funerals?”

No. It is for any dark season: fear, illness, waiting, grief.

Evergreen Principles

Four standards every week. The rest rotate: each lesson brings the few that fit its passage best.

EVERY LESSON

1. Pray before you prepare

Teaching the Bible is spiritual work first (John 15:5).

If you're new: Pray for your class by name during the week.

If you've taught for years: Pray for the one person you find hardest to reach.

2. Study the text first

Understand the passage yourself before any help.

If you're new: Read it in two translations; write your own questions first.

If you've taught for years: Don’t lean on old notes. What did you miss last time?

3. Teach one big idea

People remember one sentence, not four points.

If you're new: Write it in 12 words or fewer before anything else.

If you've taught for years: Test every story against it. If it doesn’t serve it, cut it.

4. Point to Christ

All of Scripture points to him (Luke 24:27).

If you're new: Ask: what does this show about Jesus?

If you've taught for years: Show grace as the reason for obedience, not just the rule.

FOR THIS LESSON

1. Plan for the skeptic and the grieving

This verse is read at funerals; people in the room may be carrying losses.

If you're new: Expect tears and leave space.

If you've taught for years: Prepare one gentle sentence and resist explaining grief away.

2. Let silence do its work

The verse is about presence, not explanation.

If you're new: Build a full minute of quiet into the close.

If you've taught for years: Let silence follow the reading of v4b.

3. Admit what is hard

The psalm does not deny the valley.

If you're new: Say plainly that valleys are real.

If you've taught for years: Name the hard questions the psalm leaves unanswered.

BEFORE CLASS

- ☐ Read the passage three times
- ☐ Big idea in one sentence
- ☐ Opening and close chosen
- ☐ Know what you’ll cut
- ☐ Handouts, pens, extra Bibles
- ☐ Prayed for the class by name

Openings, Closings & Hard Moments

Pick one opening and one close; rotate so class doesn't get predictable.

OPENINGS

- ask a real-life question: When you were scared as a child, what helped?

- start in the text: Read v4 and ask: what word in this verse surprises you?
- use an object: Hold up a walking stick and ask what it is for on a steep path.

CLOSINGS

- allow quiet reflection: Read v4 slowly and give the room a full minute of quiet.
- restate the big idea: In the darkest valley, the Shepherd is with you.
- send them out with a verse: Send them out with: “I will fear no evil, for You are with me.”

WHEN CLASS GETS HARD

- Someone is newly bereaved, and this verse was read at the funeral.: Stop, acknowledge it, and thank them. Don't explain. Read v4 again slowly and let the words do the comforting.
- Someone says God felt absent in their darkest time.: Take it seriously; many psalms say the same. Point to David's choice to speak to God in the valley, and to Jesus, who promised to be with his people always.
- Silence after a question: Wait. Then rephrase simpler, or ask them to talk to a neighbor first.
- One person dominates: “Thanks. Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet.” Talk privately if it continues.
- A question you can’t answer: Say so, write it down, bring an answer next week.
- A tangent takes over: “Great question. Let’s catch it after class so we can finish the passage.”

READ THIS WEEK

- Psalm 46
- Isaiah 41:10
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/psalms/23-4/lesson

Through the Valley

PSALM 23:4 (BSB) · THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD · DIGDEEPER.AI

Key verse: “I will fear no evil, for You are with me” Psalm 23:4

THE BIG IDEA

In the darkest valley, the Shepherd is with me.

1. WALKING THROUGH · PSALM 23:4A

- The psalm does not skip the dark valley.
- “Walk through” means the journey keeps going.
- Fear is named honestly.

“Even though I _____ through the valley of the shadow of death.”

“I will fear no _____.”

Discuss: Why do you think the psalm says “through” rather than promising no valley at all?

2. YOU ARE WITH ME · PSALM 23:4B

- The psalm turns from “He” to “You.”
- The Shepherd's presence is the reason not to fear.
- The rod defends; the staff supports.

“For _____ are with me.”

“Your rod and Your staff, they _____ me.”

Discuss: What difference does it make to speak to God rather than about him when you are afraid?

Read this week: Psalm 46 · Isaiah 41:10 · 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

For Kids: Through the Valley

PSALM 23:4 · NAME: _____

Big idea: God is with me even in the dark.

1. PUT THE STORY IN ORDER! NUMBER THE BOXES.

☐ They come to a dark valley.

☐ His rod and staff keep them safe.

☐ The shepherd walks right beside them.

☐ The shepherd leads the sheep onward.

☐ The sheep feel scared.

2. HOW DID THEY FEEL? CIRCLE ONE.

Sheep in the dark valley: happy · sad · worried

Sheep next to the shepherd: happy · sad · worried

David in the valley: happy · sad · worried

David knowing God is with him: happy · sad · worried

3. WORD SEARCH

R V A L L E Y O K
R B R S U U K V V
C O M F O R T O K
S K E V I L C R S
T B N V H K Y P V
A R D C H F E A R
F O W I T H F D R
F D C N G U N R V
S H A D O W F F N

VALLEY · SHADOW · FEAR · EVIL · ROD · STAFF · COMFORT · WITH

4. SECRET CODE

1=A 2=E 3=H 4=I 5=M 6=O 7=R 8=T 9=U 10=W 11=Y

___	___	___		___	___	___		___	___	___	___		___	___
11	**6**	**9**		**1**	**7**	**2**		**10**	**4**	**8**	**3**		**5**	**2**

5. DRAW IT!

Draw a shepherd walking beside his sheep through a dark valley, holding a rod and a staff.

6. MEMORY VERSE

“I will fear no evil, for You are with me” Psalm 23:4 Say it to a grown-up: ☐ ☐ ☐

When I am scared, God _____. _____