
STRESS BUSTERS

Session 1 *The Secret to Fulfillment*

40 DAYS WITH THE SHEPHERD

INTRODUCTIONS

If your group has new people, have everyone introduce themselves by answering the following:

- What is your name?
- If you have children, share their names and ages.
- What is something you do to reduce stress in your life?

SMALL GROUP EXPECTATIONS

It is helpful to know what the group expectations are. This can ensure that the group experience is positive for everyone and avoid hurt feelings caused by unmet or misunderstood expectations. Turn to the back page and review the small group guidelines. There is no need to make a commitment now, just review them. Then, go on through the study and get a taste for what the small group experience will be like. After finishing the study, review the guidelines again and see if you want to make this commitment.

OPENING

In Psalm 23, David used shepherding as an analogy to describe his relationship and experience with God. What kind of analogy would you use to describe your experience with God? For example: "God is like the ocean because..." or "My relationship with God is like parenting because..."

BIBLE STUDY

Read Psalm 23

1. Identify all the things David said he gained (or that he would not be in want of) because he chose to follow the Lord as his Shepherd.
2. Which one of these things would help the most in reducing your stress?

3. In Psalm 23, David also teaches us how he built his relationship with God. Read Psalm 23 again but this time read it as a description of a spiritual journey. What steps on the journey can you identify from Psalm 23?

Read Job 38:1-21 and Psalm 95:1-7

4. What does it mean to call God “Lord?” What do we gain when we know that our Shepherd is Lord? Why is declaring God as your Lord a necessary first step? How will this help you on your journey?

Read John 10:1-5

5. What is the relationship between sheep and their shepherd? What does this teach us about what it means to call Jesus “my Shepherd?”

Thought to Ponder:

What you follow is what is lord of your life. If you don't follow Jesus as your Shepherd, who or what are you following in order to find fulfillment?

APPLICATION

1. What practical things can you do to make the Shepherd your Lord?
2. The “StressBusters” daily devotional book encourages you to try practicing a Bible Study method called the “4 C's.” Use the “4 C's” now as a way to identify the lessons you have learned from this study. Share your answer to any two of the “4 C's.”

Celebrate: What can I praise God for from this study?

Confess: Does this study convict me of something I need to confess?

Commit: What commitment does this study challenge me to make?

Communicate: What did I learn that I can share with others?

3. (To be done silently) Are there any areas in your life where you struggle to follow Jesus as your Shepherd? It could be integrity issues, relationship issues, finances, addictions, a lack of compassion, difficulty serving Christ and others, sexual purity, or many others. Identify where you struggle. In a moment you will have the opportunity to surrender yourself to Jesus in these areas through silent prayer.

4. Have you ever committed yourself to following Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If not, you can do so right now by praying this prayer:

"Jesus Christ, I don't understand it all and I don't know what's in store for me, but I'm tired of trying to control everything. I want you to be in control of my life. I want You to be my Shepherd. I want You to be my Lord. I want to know You in a personal way. I want to listen to You. I want You to lead me in the life plan that You made me for. I confess my sin (be as specific as you can) and renounce it as wrong. I believe that you died to forgive my sin and rose again to offer me new life. I now invite you into my life and commit myself to following you. Thank you for your forgiveness and new life. Amen"

If you have just prayed this prayer of salvation, welcome to the flock! Please tell your group, or at least your group leader, about the decision you have made. They will become your biggest supporters in helping you grow in this new, life-giving relationship with Jesus.

PRAYER

Use the practices of praise and thankfulness to reinforce that, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not be in want."

Praise focuses on who God is. Praise is saying, "God I am excited that you are (pick a characteristic of God you are excited about). Praise is a simple but powerful way to remember that the Lord is great and mighty.

Thankfulness focuses on what God has done by thanking Him for specific things He has done. Thankfulness reminds you that with God you will never be in want of the things that truly fill your life.

When praise becomes a normal part of your prayers, your trust in God will grow to the point that you willingly make Him your Shepherd. When thankfulness is a regular part of prayer, you will find yourself being filled with God's life and, like David, never be in want.

In this prayer time practice praise and thankfulness. Take a moment to identify:

- a characteristic of God that is most meaningful to you at this moment.
- something God has done for you in the last few days that you can give thanks for.
- an area of your life that you need to surrender to Jesus as your Lord and then commit yourself to following Jesus as your Shepherd.

Start the prayer time with people saying a short praise. It can be something as simple as, "Lord, I praise you as being (put in a characteristic of God that is meaningful to you)."

After everyone has had an opportunity to offer praise, **offer thanks** for specific things you've experienced God do for you.

Next, in silent prayer, commit yourself to Jesus as your Lord and Shepherd. If there is an area of life where you are not following God, confess it by praying, "Lord I have been doing _____ . It is wrong and I renounce it and ask your forgiveness. I want you to be in control of my life. I want you to be my Shepherd." Then, ask God for help and strength to follow Him.

**Be sure to continue doing your daily devotions in the book
"StressBusters: 40 Days with the Shepherd."**

Small Group

Guidelines & Agreement

It's a good idea for every group to put words to their shared values, expectations, and commitments. Such guidelines will help you avoid unspoken agendas and unmet expectations. We recommend you discuss your guidelines during Session One in order to lay the foundation for a healthy group experience. Feel free to modify anything that does not work for your group. If the idea of a written agreement is unfamiliar to your group, we encourage you to give it a try.

WE AGREE TO THE FOLLOWING VALUES:

Prayer	To pray daily
Group Attendance	To give priority to the group meeting (call if I am absent or late)
Safe Environment	To create a safe place where people can be heard and feel loved (no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes)
Be Confidential	To keep anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group
Spiritual Health	To give group members permission to help me live a healthy, balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God
Welcome Newcomers	To invite our friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers
Building Relationships	To get to know the other members of the group and pray for them regularly
Other	<hr/> <hr/>