

5/17 Sunday School Lesson

This week's Bible lesson is "A Shepherd Loves." Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd as He promises to lead and guide His sheep. Jesus willingly laid down His life for His sheep, even those who often ignore the voice of the Shepherd. His flock includes "other sheep" (John 10:16), Gentiles not descended from Abraham. David's familiar Twenty-third Psalm describes the work of our Good Shepherd. Discuss, "When do we often hear Psalm 23 spoken?"

OPENING PRAYER: Gracious heavenly Father, thank You for bringing us together today to study Your Word. Guide our discussion so that we may learn more about You. In Your name we pray. Amen.

ASK: Have you ever seen a real sheep? What are they like?

SAY: During Bible times, being a shepherd was a common profession.

READ: As a family read together from a Bible or the narrative below from John 10:1-18 and Psalm 23

Long ago, David wrote beautiful Psalm 23, where he compared himself to a sheep. For many years, he had been a shepherd keeping watch over the sheep of his father, Jesse. He realized God watches over us like a shepherd. So he started writing, "The Lord is my Shepherd" (Psalm 23:1). In the tenth chapter of John, **Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd."**

To understand what Jesus was saying, we need to know a little bit about sheep. Sheep are not strong animals. They are not extra fast, and they don't have a lot of ways to defend themselves. If a wolf attacks a herd of unprotected sheep, it has an easy time grabbing one. Also, sheep easily wander off from one another in search of food to eat. It is easy for them to get lost and hurt. So a shepherd has a very important job. **He has to watch his sheep carefully and always be ready to keep them safe,** remembering that many wild animals are hunting after them.

When Jesus said, "I am the Good Shepherd," He was reminding us of how much we need Him. Like sheep and lambs, we can't see the wolves that are hiding in the tall grass, sneaking up to grab us. The devil, the sinful people around us, and our own sinful desires put us in great danger. But Jesus knows they are there. He is keeping watch over them-and using His word and His gifts to protect us from them.

That is the greatest thing about Jesus, our Good Shepherd. **Each of us was trapped, and the devil had us in great danger. But Jesus didn't leave us.** He went to the cross to suffer and die to save us. But He didn't stay dead-a dead shepherd can't help the sheep anymore. **No, Jesus rose again, so He will always be our good shepherd, protecting us and leading us to heaven.**

There are many scary things in this world, but we don't have to be afraid, because Jesus is protecting us and guiding us through life. Jesus wants to protect everyone from every harm and danger and lead them home to heaven.

DO SOMETHING

Use one or both of the following activities to talk about the Bible narrative after you've read it.

FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE YOUNGER

After you read the Bible narrative, make a mind map in a place that all students can see (on a white board or a large sheet of paper). Start by putting a circle with the words "Jesus, our Good Shepherd" in the middle. Then ask students to tell you words that describe Jesus as our Good Shepherd. Put those words in circles around the middle circle with lines connecting to it. If you're not sure what a mind map looks like, search online for examples. The complexity of your mind map will vary depending on the ages and experiences of your students.

FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE OLDER

Have students make their own mind maps on large paper similar to the one described for younger students and when they are finished, have them present them and discuss as a family why they chose those words they did to describe Jesus as our Good Shepherd.

KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

The context of this story in the Book of John is that Jesus was talking to the Pharisees. He was telling the Pharisees that they were the robbers and thieves from whom He had to protect His people, the sheep.

The relationship between sheep and shepherd is very important. The trust the sheep have for their shepherd is essential. In Bible times, a sheep pen didn't have a door or a gate that would close, so the shepherd would lay across the opening at night. The shepherd provided the only way to get into the safety of the pen, and the shepherd protected the sheep from the dangers outside the pen. The shepherd also protected the sheep from wandering out of the pen and becoming lost. Jesus protects us and leads us. He is the door in and out of heaven.

Often pastors are referred to as "undershepherds" of their flock or congregation. They, too, guide and protect their people from false teachings.

CHRIST CONNECTION: Christ is the Good Shepherd, who loved us so much that He laid down His life for us so that we might have eternal life.

Questions to think about and discuss as a family:

1. How are we like sheep?
2. How does Jesus care for and protect us like a shepherd protects his sheep?
3. From whom or what do we need protection today?
4. Who are the people in our lives who are our earthly shepherds today?

MEMORY WORK: (Jesus says,) “I am the good shepherd.” John 10:11

CLOSING PRAYER: Dear Jesus, thank You for being our Good Shepherd and for loving and caring for us so much. Help us to follow Your voice. Guide us today and always. In Your name we pray. Amen.

Activities to together as a family during the week:

Shepherd the Sheep

Set out cotton balls, egg cartons, and spoons. Have children pretend to bring the sheep (cotton balls) into their pens (egg cups) for the night. Have them count the sheep in each pen. Ask, **How does our Good Shepherd, Jesus, care for us?**

Hide and Sheep

Hide a paper or toy sheep somewhere in your house. Ask children to be good shepherds and look for the sheep. When they find it, hide it again. (Option: Hide a number of sheep to find.) At the end of the activity, talk about how Jesus, our Good Shepherd, cares for us.

Sheep Snack

Serve cups of water with popcorn and mini marshmallows on green napkins. Let children pretend the snacks are sheep, moving them around and saying baa-aa. Say, **Sheep need someone to take care of them. Who loves you and cares for you?** Accept answers (e.g., Mom and Dad; Jesus, our Good Shepherd).