

The Good Shepherd

(John 10:1-18, 27)

Introduction

When Jesus lived on earth, many of His countrymen kept sheep. Those who looked after the sheep were called *shepherds*.

Ask: What do you know about shepherds? [Let the children respond.]

Being a shepherd is a lot of hard work. Sheep do not just take care of themselves. They need a shepherd to provide food, water, care, guidance, protection, and comfort to them.

Some shepherds took very good care of their sheep because they owned them. Their animals ate well; they grazed and slept in safety.

Other shepherds were nothing but hired hands who did not take good care of their sheep because they did not own them. When danger came, those shepherds would run away and leave the sheep unprotected.

The Bible tells us Jesus calls Himself the “Good Shepherd”, and He speaks of us who have made Him our Lord as His “sheep”.

As our Good Shepherd, Jesus makes a promise that He will provide us with everything we need (Psalm 23). As a shepherd protects his sheep from wolves, Jesus protects us from our enemy, the Devil, who is seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). The Lord loves His “sheep.”

Opening Prayer

Father, teach us today what it means that You are the shepherd of our souls. We want to learn to recognize Your voice so that we can follow You and obey Your commands. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Lesson

Let’s talk about sheep and how we are like them. [As you discuss the characteristics of sheep, write these talking points on the white board.]

Sheep are dirty and can’t get clean on their own

Sheep aren’t the cleanest of animals. They are smelly and dirty. Every time they lay down, they get grass and burs and dirt caught up in their wool. Then, there are types of bugs that like to live in their wool, especially around their eyes. They can’t clean themselves; if someone doesn’t get rid of these bugs, sheep can go blind.

Sheep need a shepherd to keep them clean.

Ask: In what way are we dirty and can’t clean ourselves?

We, too, are full of dirty sin. We need Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). And, we can be assured that we can come to Him over and over again and He will keep on cleaning us!

Sheep are dumb and don’t think for themselves

Sheep don’t think for themselves. They just dumbly follow other sheep without thinking where they are going. They will even follow another sheep right over the edge of a cliff without another thought.

Sheep need a shepherd to help them make right choices.

Ask: In what way can people be like sheep, and not think for themselves?

We, too, can make wrong choices instead of trusting and following Jesus.

Some people follow the crowd without even thinking! What others say or do might seem right or fun, but sometimes people are so eager to fit in with the crowd, and be liked by others, that they do or say things without even thinking about it.

Whenever you make a decision about something to say, or do, or believe, ask Jesus to help you decide if it’s right!

Sheep are directionless and can easily get lost

Sheep are directionally challenged. If they wander from the flock, they can easily get lost unless the shepherd comes to find them. **Sheep need a shepherd to lead them and guide them.**

Ask: In what ways do we tend to wander away from the flock?

We, too, can easily get lost. When we stop going to church and spending time with other Christians, it's hard for us to live like Jesus wants us to.

Ask: What does our Good Shepherd do with us when we start to wander away from Him? He comes after us and carries us back to the fold. And, as we continue to put our trust in Him, He will direct our paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6) And He will keep us from getting separated from the flock.

Sheep are defenseless

If the shepherd doesn't come after the lost sheep, he can be easily attacked by lions or bears or wolves. And, sheep have no way to defend themselves or run away.

Sheep need a shepherd to defend them from predators.

When we are separated from the flock; that is, when we stop coming to Sunday school and keeping company with other believers, we can be easily attacked by the enemy of our souls. There is nothing we can do to protect ourselves. Without our Good Shepherd we will die. The wolves, or temptations and sin, come in and threaten to kill us.

But, praise God, Jesus, our Good Shepherd, defeated our enemy when He went to the cross (Col 2:15). He paid for our sins with His life so that we may have eternal life with God.

Sheep need a good shepherd

Did you know that if a sheep falls down and ends up on its back, cast down, it can't get up again on its own? It will just lay there, flailing its

little legs, until either someone helps them up, or they die. **Sheep need a shepherd to set them right and keep watch over them.**

When we get into a place in life where we feel like we are flat on our backs, either through our own sins or through tough times, we can't save ourselves. We are totally dependent on Jesus, our Good Shepherd, to save us, to lead us, and to keep us clean.

Jesus lays down his life for the sheep

Turn with me to the book of John, chapter 10.

John 10:11

*"I am **the good shepherd**. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.*

When Jesus said, "*I am the Good Shepherd*," He wasn't talking about herding sheep! Jesus was saying that just as a shepherd cares for his sheep, He cares for us!

Verse 11 says, "*The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*." In fact, this is so important that Jesus tells us 5 times in this passage that He laid down His life for His sheep. (Look ahead at verse 17-18.)

John 10:17-18

"The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. (18) No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."

Notice that Jesus was in complete control of both His death and His resurrection! His life wasn't taken from Him; He purposely gave up His life for the sake of the sheep.

A good shepherd is willing to do anything to save his sheep from danger — even if he has to give up his own life. Since Jesus, your Good Shepherd, gave His life on the cross to pay for your sin, you can surely trust Him to stay with you throughout your life, protecting you

and supplying all your needs. He died so we would not have to; He died so that we can live eternally with Him in heaven.

John 10:12-13

*A hired hand will run when he sees a **wolf** coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so, the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. (13) The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep.*

In verse 12-13, Jesus goes on to say that someone who has just been hired to watch over the sheep, won't take good care of the sheep. When he sees danger coming, he doesn't stick around to fight off the wolves that come to kill and eat the sheep. He abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flocks and scatters them. The hired hand is not committed to the flock. The sheep do not belong to him. He has no personal interest in the flock. They are only working for the money.

But Jesus, our Good Shepherd, does own us. He loves us so much, He paid for us with His blood on the cross. He gave His life to save us from the wolves! As a shepherd protects his sheep from wolves, Jesus protects us from our enemy, the Devil, who is seeking to devour us. (See verse for today.)

Ask: Who or what are the wolves in our life? (Temptations to sin.)

Jesus knows his sheep

John 10:14-15

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, (15) just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep.

Verse 14 says, the Good Shepherd knows His own sheep, and they know Him. Look back at verse 3-5:

John 10:3-5

The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. (4) After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. (5) They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."

At nighttime, many different shepherds would herd their sheep into a sheep pen to bed them down in safety. In the morning, each shepherd would call his sheep by name and they would come to their shepherd who would lead them out to pasture for the day.

Wow! As big and awesome a God as He is, our Good Shepherd, knows us all personally by name as if you were His only one. What a wonderful thing this is. He knows us each so well, He knows how many hairs are on your head!

Look ahead at verse 27:

John 10:27

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Even in the pitch black of night, they will hear their shepherd's voice and come to him.

Jesus says that as His sheep, we can know and recognize His voice as our Shepherd. How is that possible? [Hold up the Bible.] We become familiar with His voice as we read His Word. And as we become familiar with it, we'll follow Him as a sheep follows its shepherd!

Jesus has other sheep

John 10:16

I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

Finally, in verse 16, Jesus tells us that He has other sheep that will be brought together as one flock. The Pharisees, who were listening to Jesus, thought that the Jews were the only ones in the whole world that were going to go to heaven. But Jesus came to die for the sins of the whole world (John 3:16). God had chosen the Jewish people to be His messengers of the Good News. But they had missed the point. Jesus wants everyone be to a sheep in His sheepfold.

One more thing about sheep. Each shepherd has his own distinctive earmark which he cuts into an ear of each of his sheep. That way, even at a distance it is easy to tell which sheep belong to him.

Jesus doesn't want to put an earmark on your ear, but He does want to put His mark on your heart. All the wonderful benefits of the Good Shepherd, can only be yours if you become part of His flock.

Once you become one of Jesus' sheep, you can truly say, "*The Lord is MY shepherd!*"

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for being our Good Shepherd and for laying Your life down for us. We can rest safely, knowing that You are protecting us from anything that could harm us or lead us away from You. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Learning Activities

Game Center

"Sheep Hear My Voice" Game

- Pair everyone up.
- Blindfold one person from each pair. These are the "sheep". Have them stand in the middle of the room.
- Scatter up the others and have them stand at the edge of the room. These are the "shepherds".

- Ask all the sheep to spin around 3 times on the spot in the middle of the room.
- On "Go", the shepherd is to stay put at the edge of the room and call out to their respective sheep by name and say, "*I am the Good Shepherd, come to me*". Once their sheep hears their voice, the shepherd is to give his sheep instructions on how to find him.
- The first pair of shepherd and sheep to reunite wins.
- Switch roles and repeat.

Or, use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. When Jesus said, "*I am the good shepherd*" what does that tell you about God? (He protects us from our enemy — the Devil; He watches over us, and provides for our spiritual needs.)
2. What types of jobs does a shepherd do for the sheep? (Provides food, water, care, guidance, protection and watching over, ownership, management, and comfort to those in their care.)
3. How is Jesus like a Good Shepherd? (He was willing to even lay down His life for us so that we could be found spiritually.)
4. In what way do you get dirty and can't clean yourself? (Sin makes us spiritually "dirty." We need our Good Shepherd to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9.)
5. In what way do people, like sheep, not think for themselves? (We can dumbly follow the crowd and make wrong choices without thinking about what we are doing.)
6. What causes people to wander away from God's sheepfold? (We can get distracted by the things of this world and stop following Jesus.)
7. What can happen to us if we wander away from God's fold? (We can be easily attacked by the enemy of our souls.)

8. How can we keep ourselves from wandering away from our Good Shepherd? (Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5-6)
9. What does it mean that a sheep is cast down? (He has fallen on his back and can't get up.)
10. Why is a shepherd who owns the sheep a better shepherd than one that is simply hired to look after them? (A hired hand will not protect the sheep with his own life.)
11. In what way did our Good Shepherd purchase us? (He laid down His life for ours. He gave His life on the cross to pay for our sins.)
12. When Jesus said He had other sheep in verse 16, who was He referring to? (The Gentiles.)
13. Why is it important to learn to recognize the Good Shepherd's voice? (So that we can follow Him and stay where we can be fed and cared for.)
14. How can you get familiar with the Good Shepherd's voice? (Read His word and talk to Him regularly.)

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